

PRESCHOOLS STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF RELEVANCE OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF IT'S PROGRAMME IN NAIROBI AND NYERI COUNTIES, KENYA.

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Abstract

Physical Education (PE) plays a key role in the holistic development of a child. It is valued for its immense contribution to the physical, mental, social and emotional growth of a child. Thus, the need and support for a Physical Education (PE) programme in early childhood education (ECE). However, concerns have been raised over the implementation of PE in the Kenyan education system. The aim of this study was to examine preschools stakeholders' perceptions of the relevance of PE and establish whether these perceptions had an impact on the implementation of PE. A descriptive survey was used to collect data from 60 head teachers, 99 teachers and 60 parents. Qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis were used. This involved use of questionnaires, interview schedules, observation guide and document analysis guide. Descriptive analysis techniques (frequencies, percentages) and content data analysis were used. The study found that, 99 (100%) teachers, 60 (100%) head teachers and 46 (77%) parents viewed PE as a relevant activity area in the ECE curriculum. Nairobi and Nyeri pre-schools teachers 93 (93.94%) indicated that PE was taught in their pre-schools but observations revealed that, the actual practice on the ground was different. PE lessons were used to teach other activity areas. Based on the findings of the study it is recommended that, PE should be taught like all other activity areas and the Ministry of Education inspectorate unit should ensure that this is adhered to in all pre-schools. All stakeholders should be sensitised on the importance of PE and seminars and workshops should be held regularly for pre-school teachers.

Key words: Stakeholders, Perception, Relevance, Implementation, Physical Education

Introduction

Physical Education is closely tied to the cognitive, socio-emotional and motor development of young children (ACARA, 2016). It provides a wide range of developmentally appropriate activities for all children that facilitate development of physical competence in movement activities (Drewe, 2001). According to Bailey (2006) and Galloway (2007), participation in regular physical activity improves children's muscular strength, flexibility, muscular endurance, body composition and cardiovascular endurance thus improving their physical fitness levels. This is essential as it reduces the risk of children acquiring lifestyle diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases which has become a contemporary issue due to sedentary style of living. Macfadyen and Bailey (2002) further posit that Physical Education teaches self-discipline, improves self-confidence and self-esteem, influences moral development, facilitates socialization and development of social skills such as co-operation, and nurtures leadership skills. According to Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee (2008), physical activity during childhood and adolescence exerts a beneficial effect on several mental health outcomes. It also has positive effect on multiple aspects of brain function and cognitive performance (Hillman, Erickson & Kramer; 2008).

Physical Education is unique to the school curriculum as it is the only programme that provides learners with opportunities to learn motor skills, develop physical fitness and gain understanding about physical activity. According to UNESCO (2015), it is the only subject in the curriculum whose focus combines the body and physical competence with values-based learning and communication. Indeed, participation in PE provides children with an avenue for self-expression

and acquisition of social skills and values such as sharing, fairness, honesty and cooperation. Jenkinson and Benson (2010) point out that schools can provide many opportunities for children to engage in vigorous physical activity and are thus better placed amongst societal institutions to motivate children to live active lifestyles. Research suggests that the best time to introduce PE is during early year learning for children to acquire and refine their motor skills (ACARA, 2012). The inclusion of Physical Education in the school curriculum is in line with the United Nations Charter on Physical Education and Sport which states that PE and sports is a fundamental right for all and forms an essential element of the education system (UNESCO, 1978). The global physical activity guidelines by WHO recommend that children and youth 5-17 years of age should accumulate an average of at least 60 minutes of daily moderate-to-vigorous physical in order to improve or maintain a healthy cardio-respiratory, fitness and body composition profile (WHO, 2010). The need for PE in schools is also supported by the National Association for Sport and Physical Education and American Heart Association (2010).

Despite the essential role that physical activity plays in the life of children, the provision of PE in schools has declined in many countries (Hardman, 2008). In the United Kingdom, physical education is being delivered ineffectively in primary schools (Griggs, 2012). An international survey conducted in some African countries also revealed that the status of PE was low and the subject was in danger of being side-lined. According to Ajisafe (1997), the implementation of PE in African schools has a lot of setback. The challenges in the provision of PE included pressure for good academic performance, inadequate time allocation, inadequate and poor state of learning facilities and equipment, lack of adequately trained teachers and poor attitudes from teachers, learners and parents towards PE (Hardman 2008; DiFiore, 2010). These challenges are experienced in countries such as Ghana (Ammah & Kwaw, 2005) and Nigeria (Salokun, 2005). In Kenya, PE is marginalized because it is not an examinable subject and because of a lack of standards and a strong policy of implementation from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST). PE class time is used as a time to take a break from serious class work (Wanyama, 2011). These setbacks in the implementation of PE programmes result in a decline in children's skill levels and physical fitness.

Research reveals that one of the setbacks in the implementation of PE programmes is the attitude of teachers, headteachers and parents towards PE due to their perception of the subject. Perception is a process by which individuals receive, organize and interpret their sensory impressions in order to give meaning to their environment (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Perception influences how people behave as it leads to a positive or negative attitude which helps define how people behave towards a situation or an object. According to Petty and Cacioppo (1981), attitude is a general affective, cognitive and intentional response towards objects, other people or social issues. If teachers, headteachers and parents have a negative attitude towards PE, this is likely to have an impact on the implementation of PE programmes in schools as attitude influences decision making. A Worldwide Survey of the situation of PE in schools (Hardman, 2008) revealed the following: PE teachers from Kuwait reported that families did not understand the importance of PE for students, the school administration did not support PE subject, parents did not give enough attention to PE lessons, the school board had no interest in PE lessons because the grade did not count in the final examination and therefore parents did not encourage their children to take part in all PE lessons. Results from USA revealed that PE was perceived to have lower value as parents favoured academic subjects and time spent on PE was perceived as a threat to academic achievement or examination performance. PE teachers from France and Germany reported that parents never protested when PE lessons were cancelled unlike when other subjects like English or Maths were cancelled as PE was not

considered as fundamental. The teachers added that parents occasionally demanded that PE lessons be converted to Maths lessons. Teachers from Norway, Greece and Malta reported that headteachers and parents did not care about PE lessons and considered them as break-time or recreation time and not lessons that had any pedagogical value. They further said that head teachers gave lip service but no actual support for PE lessons and parents saw PE lessons as a waste of time. Kang and You (2005) further posit that the status of PE in South Korea was perceived to be lower than that of other subjects as teachers, administrators, parents and students thought PE was only needed to reduce the stress of students who were studying hard for other subjects. Headteachers and school staff in Israel did not perceive PE as a valuable academic subject and PE classes were the first to be sacrificed when there was a special project, performance, trip or other school events (Harari, 2005).

To achieve PE objectives in the endeavour to realize national goals of education, PE programmes need to be effectively implemented. This therefore means that, setbacks encountered in the implementation process need to be identified and addressed. Studies on attitude towards PE have revealed different results. Rimbogi (2010) reported that principals attitude towards PE influenced learners' participation in physical education, teacher-trainees had a positive attitude towards PE (Gitonga, Andanje, Wanderi & Bailasha, 2012) while teachers were said to have a negative attitude towards PE (Gathu, Ndungu & Bomett, 2015). The aforementioned studies examined the attitude of principals, teachers and teacher-trainees and at different levels of Kenyan educational system that is secondary and teachers' training colleges. It was prudent therefore, to examine preschools stakeholders' perception of the importance of PE as they are the agents charged with the responsibility of implementation of school programmes. Their perception would guide the implementation process. Vives-Rodriguez (2005) points out that, for effective programme implementation, teachers are expected to adhere to the curriculum while educational administrators make official decisions on the formal curriculum. Swadener, Kabiru and Njenga (2000) point out that public pre-schools are funded primarily by parents and the local community and therefore their support for PE is crucial as they are stakeholders in the preschools.

It is important to consider the perception of stakeholders towards PE as this may hinder effective implementation of its programmes and the achievement of the objectives of the programme. This study therefore was to establish the influence of preschool stakeholders' perception of the relevance of PE on the implementation of its programme.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- i) examine whether the preschools teachers' perception on relevance of Physical Education influenced its implementation in Nairobi and Nyeri counties.
- ii) establish whether the preschools headteachers' perception on relevance of Physical Education influenced its implementation in Nairobi and Nyeri counties.
- iii) assess whether the preschools parents' perception on relevance of Physical Education influenced its implementation in Nairobi and Nyeri counties.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was employed. Using stratified and simple random sampling, 99 preschools were selected from Nairobi and Nyeri Counties. The counties presented varied geographical settings. The respondents included 60 head teachers, 99 teachers and 60 parents who were selected using stratified and simple random sampling. Research instruments used were

questionnaires, interviews, observation guides and documentary analysis. Questionnaires were for preschools teachers; interview schedules were for headteachers and parents. Observation guides were used to observe PE lessons and documentary analysis guides were used to examine teaching professional documents. The data collected was analysed using content analysis and descriptive statistics.

Results

Teachers' perception on relevance of PE and its implementation

Table 1: Teachers' Views on relevance of PE Programmes

Response	NAIROBI SCHOOLS					NYERI SCHOOLS				Total
	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
	PB	PR	CC	WF	Total	PB	PR	CC	Total	
PE	16	26	3	6	51	17	28	3	48	99
necessary	16.16	26.26	3.03	6.06	51.51	17.17	28.28	3.03	48.48	100
PE not	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
necessary	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	16	26	3	6	51	17	28	3	48	99
	16.16	26.26	3.03	6.06	51.51	17.17	28.28	3.03	48.48	100

Note: PB (Public), PR (Private), CC (Council), WF (Welfare)

From Table 1, it can be noted that 99 (100%) teachers indicated that it was necessary to have PE as one of the activity areas in the ECE curriculum. This implies that all the teachers both from Nairobi and Nyeri pre-schools perceived that it was essential to have the PE programme in the ECE curriculum. Awareness of the significance of PE in the curriculum would positively influence the implementation of the PE curriculum. Indeed, ACARA (2012) reports that early childhood is the ideal time for acquiring fundamental movement skills because it is during this unique period that children build the basic movement that are the foundations for learning more complex movement skills later in life.

The teachers gave various reasons for the relevance of the PE programme in the ECE curriculum. The reasons are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Teachers' reasons for the relevance of the PE Programme in the ECE Curriculum

Response	F	%
Play promotes physical growth and development, good health, physical fitness e.g. muscular strength, flexibility	58	58.6
Children interact and socialize during play	45	45.5
Children explore, discover and learn through play	32	32.3
Children relax and refresh during play	19	19.2
Play is fun, enjoyable and breaks the monotony of the classroom	18	18.2
Play enhances emotional growth e.g. self esteem	15	15.2
Play promotes the development of fine and gross motor skills	12	12.1
Children discover and develop their talents during play	5	5.1
Play links all the ECE activity areas	3	3
Play enhances moral development	1	1
Children learn the essence of winning and losing through play	1	1

Table 2 shows that 58 (58.6%) teachers indicated that PE was important because it promotes a child growth and development, enhances good health and physical fitness, followed by 45 (45.5%) teachers who indicated that children interact and socialize during play, 32 (32.3%) teachers noted that children explore, discover and learn through play, 19 (19.2%) teachers indicated that children refresh and relax during play, 18 (18.2%) teachers pointed out that play is fun, enjoyable and breaks the classroom monotony. Play was said to be necessary as it helps children discover and develop their talents by 5 (5.1%) teachers, it links all the ECE activity areas by 3 (3%) teachers, and it promotes creativity by 2 (2%) teachers, enhances moral development by 1 (1%) teacher and teaches children the essence of winning and losing by 1 (1%) teacher. Some of the teachers expressed these reasons for the importance of the PE programme in the ECE curriculum as follows:

“Play gives children a good start as they learn through play. As children play and sing, singing games, counting songs, songs about the environment, they are learning. PE is a natural way of learning and through it, children learn and acquire knowledge.” [T 43; T 69]

The teachers’ responses imply that teachers are aware that PE plays a role in the physical, social, mental and emotional development of a child. This would enhance the implementation of PE in the preschools.

To establish implementation of PE in the preschools, teachers were asked whether PE was taught in their preschools. The responses are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Teachers’ Responses on Teaching of PE in Pre-schools.

Response	NAIROBI SCHOOLS					NYERI SCHOOLS				Total
	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
	PB	PR	CC	WF	Total	PB	PR	CC	Total	
PE taught in the school	16	25	3	5	49	16	25	3	44	93
	16.16	25.25	3.03	5.05	49.49	16.16	25.25	3.03	44.44	93.94
PE not taught in the school	0	1	0	1	2	1	3	0	4	6
	0.00	1.01	0.00	1.01	2.02	1.01	3.03	0.00	4.04	6.06
Total	16	26	3	6	51	17	28	3	48	99
	16.16	26.26	3.03	6.06	51.51	17.17	28.28	3.03	48.48	100

Note: PB (Public), PR (Private), CC (Council), WF (Welfare)

Table 3, reveals that 93 (93.94%) teachers indicated that PE was taught in their pre-schools while 6 (6.06%) indicated that PE was not taught in their pre-schools. Those who indicated PE was not taught in their school were 3 (3.03%) teachers from Nyeri private pre-schools, 1 (1.01%) from a Nairobi private pre-school, 1(1.01%) from a Nairobi welfare pre-school and 1(1.01%) from a Nyeri public pre-school. Out of the 6 (6.06%) teachers who indicated that they did not teach PE in their pre-schools, 4 (4.04%) were from Nyeri pre-schools, and 2 (2.02%) from Nairobi pre-schools. This implies that a higher percentage of pre-schools which did not teach PE were from Nyeri county and from private pre-schools. This may be due to the different preschools’ managerial structures in Kenya which is reflected in the implementation of school policies.

Although 93 (93.93%) teachers reported that PE was taught in their pre-schools, the observation schedules portrayed different results as some 18 (18.18%) of the public pre-schools which claimed to teach PE did not while some 6 (6.06%) of the private pre-schools were very keen on the teaching of PE. PE should be taught daily but the actual practice on the ground is where children are allowed to go to the playground and the teacher stands at the corner of the field denying children the instructional aspect of Physical Education.

The teachers were further asked to indicated the time allocated to PE lessons in their preschools. The responses are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Time Allocation for PE lessons in the Pre-schools

Response	Nairobi Schools				Nyeri Schools.			F %
	PB	PR	CC	WF	PB	PR	CC	
5 days x 30mins	12	11	2	2	9	10	0	46 (46.46)
3 days x 30 mins	1	1	0	0	3	4	1	10(10.10)
2 days x 30mins	0	3	0	0	0	4	1	8 (8.08)
No PE lesson	0	1	0	1	1	3	0	6 (6.06)
1 day x 30mins	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	4 (4.04)
5 days x 20mins	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2 (2.02)
1 day x 35mins	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2 (2.02)
3 days x 40mins	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1 (1.01)
2 days x 45mins	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1 (1.01)
5 days x 40mins	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1 (1.01)
2 days x 35mins	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1 (1.01)
2 x 30mins breaks	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1 (1.01)
5 days x 45mins	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1 (1.01)
2 days x 40mins	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1 (1.01)
3 days x 45mins	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1 (1.01)
1 day x 4hrs	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1 (1.01)
5 days x 15mins	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1 (1.01)
2 days x 50mins	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1(1.01)
1 day x 1hr30mins	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1 (1.01)
3 days x 1hr	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1 (1.01)
Total	16	26	3	6	17	28	3	99
	16.16	26.26	3.03	6.06	17.17	28.28	3.03	100

According to the results in Table 4, there were varied time allocations for PE in the pre-schools both in Nairobi and in Nyeri; 46 (46.46%) of the teachers indicated that PE was taught daily for 30 minutes, followed by 10 (10.10%) 3 times a week for 30 minutes, 8 (8.08%) daily for 35 minutes, 8(8.08%) twice a week for 30minutes, 4 (4.04%)once a week for 30 minutes, 2(2.02%) daily for 20 minutes, 2 (2.02%) once a week for 35 minutes, 1 (1.01%) 3 times a week for one hour, 1 (1.01%) one day a week for one and half hours, 1 (1.01%) twice a week for fifty minutes and 1 (1.01%) one day for four hours. The Early Childhood Development and Education Handbook (KIE, 2008)

recommends an allocation of 30 minutes daily for PE. The varied time allocation as displayed in Table 4 is contributed by the various type of sponsorship in pre-school education in Kenya. The different time allocation is an indicator that some pre-schools do not distinguish between PE and games. They deny children the opportunity and adequate time for PE instructions in a PE lesson but offer a block time of one afternoon such as Friday afternoon for games for the whole pre-school.

The results of the study on time allocation for PE in pre-schools revealed that 46 (46.46%) of the pre-school teachers conformed to the KIE (2008) guidelines of 30 minutes of PE each day of the week while 53 (53.53%) did not conform. Other studies reveal the problem of time allocation for PE lessons at other levels of education in Kenya (Muniu, 1986; Kiganjo, 1987; Muindi, 1998). According to McWilliams et al, (2009), the amount of time allocated for physical activity, the teacher's training and instructions, and the appropriate physical settings for play influence physical activity levels.

To further assess the implementation of PE in pre-school, the study sought to establish whether the PE lesson was indicated in the timetable. The findings from the teachers' responses are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Indication of the PE lessons on the Timetable

Response	NAIROBI SCHOOLS					NYERI SCHOOLS				Total
	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
	PB	PR	CC	WF	Total	PB	PR	CC	Total	
PE lesson indicated on timetable	16	25	3	5	49	17	25	3	45	94
	16.16	25.25	3.03	5.05	49.49	17.17	25.25	3.03	45.45	94.94
PE lesson not indicated on timetable	0	1	0	1	2	0	3	0	3	5
	0.00	1.01	0.00	1.01	2.02	0.00	3.03	0.00	3.03	5.05
Total	16	26	3	6	51	17	28	3	48	99
	16.16	26.26	3.03	6.06	51.51	17.17	28.28	3.03	48.48	100

Note: PB (Public), PR (Private), CC (Council), WF (Welfare)

From Table 5, majority of the teachers 94 (94.95%) indicated that PE was included in the pre-school timetable while 5 (5.05%) of the teachers, indicated that PE was not indicated in the timetable. From those who indicated that PE was not timetabled; 3 (3.03%) teachers were from Nyeri private pre-schools, 1 (1.01%) from a Nairobi private pre-school and 1 (1.01%) from a Nairobi welfare pre-school. The results show that, out of the 5 (5.05%) of the teachers who indicated that PE was not included in their pre-schools timetable, 4 (4.04%) were from private pre-schools from Nairobi and Nyeri counties. This implies that some private pre-schools from Nairobi and Nyeri counties did not include PE in the school time table and thus PE was not taught in these

schools. This may be attributed to the different sponsorship of preschools in Kenya which have different school policies.

One teacher from Nyeri pre-schools commenting on the timetable stated:

“PE is indicated in the time-table daily but it is taught only for three days in a week.” [T 13]

This teacher’s comment shows that, PE is indicated on the timetable as a formality. This implies that the PE lessons are used for other activity areas thus denying the children play time opportunities for learning and acquiring motor skills. These results at the pre-school level are similar with Muindi (1998) and Nyonje (2004) who also established that PE lessons were indicated on the primary schools’ timetables though not all primary schools taught PE as indicated in the time-table while others used the PE lesson to teach other subjects such as Mathematics and English.

To further examine the implementation of the PE curriculum, the study sought to find out if the PE lesson was used to teach other activity areas instead of PE. The teachers’ responses are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Use of PE lessons to Teach Other Activity Areas

Response	NAIROBI SCHOOLS					NYERI SCHOOLS				
	F	F	F	F	Total	F	F	F	Total	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
	PB	PR	CC	WF		PB	PR	CC		
PE lesson used to teach other areas	5	11	2	5	23	13	16	3	32	55
	5.05	11.1	2.0	5.0	23.23	13.1	16.16	3.0	32.32	55.5
		1	2	5	(45.09%)	3		3	(66.67%)	6
Lessons used not to teach other areas	11	15	1	1	28	4	12	0	16	44
	11.11	15.1	1.0	1.0	28.28	4.04	12.12	0.0	16.16	44.4
		5	1	1				0		4
Total	16	26	3	6	51	17	28	3	48	99
	16.16	26.2	3.0	6.0	51.51	17.1	28.28	3.0	48.48	100
		6	3	6		7		3		

Note: PB (Public), PR (Private), CC (Council), WF (Welfare)

From Table 6, it is observed that majority of the teachers 55 (55.56%) from Nairobi and Nyeri pre-schools reported that PE lessons were used to teach other activity areas while 44 (44.44%) reported that the PE lessons were not used to teach other activity areas. Nyeri pre-schools had a higher percentage of teachers 32 (66.67%) who reported that PE lessons were used to teach other activity areas than Nairobi pre-schools 23(45.09%). This implies that Nyeri preschools did not efficiently implement the PE programme.

The responses from the varied categories of pre-schools indicated that though the PE lessons were indicated in the timetable, other activities were conducted during the lessons. The PE lessons were used by teachers to cover work in other activity areas or to cover the syllabus. The main activity areas indicated were number work and language. Preparation of children for examinations and standard one interviews was done during the PE lessons. The time was also used to allow children to complete their class work. One of the teachers from Nairobi pre-schools commenting on the use of PE lessons to teach other activity areas summarized this situation by stating that:

“The teacher is always under pressure to teach other activity areas and so does not follow the PE timetable.” [T 14]

Another teacher commented:

“No one asks for mean scores in PE. Our teaching is all about mean scores and academic performance of the children. Sustaining a job is based on the academic performance of the children.” [T 83]

These teachers’ comments allude to a situation where PE was not taught in some pre-schools due to pressure for children to perform well academically.

The observation schedules also revealed that teachers used the PE lessons to teach other activity areas as the researcher would visit a pre-school to observe a PE lesson during the PE scheduled time, only to find the children still in class learning other activity areas. The results on the use of PE lessons in pre-schools to teach other activity areas are similar with those of Muindi (1998) and Nyonje (2004) who also observed that at the primary level of education in Kenya, PE was indicated in the timetable but other subjects especially English and Number work were taught during the PE lessons.

Headteachers’ perception on relevance of PE and its implementation

Sixty (100%) headteachers said that the PE programme was an essential part of the ECE curriculum. The following quote from one of the headteachers summarized the headteachers’ views on the relevance of the PE programme in the ECE programme:

“PE is necessary because any activity area that does not include play is incomplete as play is essential for the growth and development of young children.” [H 46]

Another head teacher commented that:

“Play is very important in the life of young children as it improves their physical growth, body fitness, mental development and development of social skills such as team work.” [H 10]

These responses from the headteachers imply that they were aware of the significance of PE. This would enhance their support for the PE programme in the preschools.

The study sought to find out from the headteachers whether there was a government policy on the teaching of PE in pre-schools. Out of the 60 headteachers interviewed, 47 (78.33%) reported that

there was a government policy on the teaching of PE while 13 (21.67%) reported that they were not aware of the policy. Indeed, one of the headteachers said that he had never heard of the policy while another headteacher who heads both the public primary and pre-school sections said that he did not know what happens in the pre-school. The headteachers further indicated that, although they were aware of the PE teaching policy, some did not follow it.

The headteachers pointed out, there were challenges in the teaching of PE in pre-schools. Some of the pre-schools which did not teach PE had no facilities such as playgrounds while others had the facilities but did not teach PE so that they could teach children how to read and write or prepare the children for standard one examination. There was a lot of competition among pre-schools and pressure from parents for academic performance. This led to the side lining of PE teaching. Some headteachers also assumed that PE is what children played during break and lunch time while others assumed children would acquire motor skills on their own.

One headteacher made the following comment:

“PE should be taught but it is not taught due to competition with other schools in academic performance. The school management checks the standards constantly and the work covered. Therefore, we do not teach children PE but allow them to play during break time and have games on Thursdays because if the children fail in the examinations, the teachers and the head teacher are blamed.”

[H 22]

The results on the teaching of PE in pre-school reveal that, despite the awareness of the significance of PE, PE is taught in some pre-schools and not in others. The results show a lack of a clear ECE policy which makes it hard for the headteachers to spearhead efficient implementation of the pre-school programmes. The results of a lack of a clear ECE policy are supported by Wawire (2006) and Gatumu (2010). This situation is compounded by the partnership policy in the provision of ECE services. These partners offer different modes of ECE and no set standards are enforced by the government. This eventually influences curriculum implementation in pre-schools (Ng’asike, 2004; Wawire, 2006).

Parents’ perception on relevance of PE and its implementation

Among the sixty parents interviewed, 46 (77%) indicated that PE was an important activity area and should be included in the ECE curriculum. Majority of the parents 28(47%) with this view were from the Nairobi pre-schools as compared to those from the Nyeri pre-schools 18 (30%). Some of the parents made the following comments:

“Physical education is relevant in ECE and it should be taught to young children because pre-school is mostly about play and just a bit of learning. More emphasis should be put on play as it is vital for the physical and mental growth of children.” [P 2; P 31; P36]

“What happened to play? There was plenty of time for play and games in our childhood but today, children no longer play. Children should be given the opportunity to learn and enjoy performing physical skills and games.” [P 50]

Among the parents interviewed, 28 (47%) of the parents from Nairobi county were aware that PE was taught in pre-schools while only 18 (30%) of the parents from Nyeri county were aware. This may be due to the varied avenues of exposure on the role of PE and sports and healthy living that the parents with higher levels of education both from Nairobi and Nyeri counties have access to.

The parents who were not aware of the teaching of PE in pre-schools said that they did not know all the activity areas taught in pre-schools. Some of the parents 12 (20%) said that the decision to teach PE in the preschools was the duty of the administrators and the teachers as they knew what was best for the children. One of the parents from Nyeri pre-schools commenting on the teaching of PE said:

“I am not sure whether they learn PE or not but I know that Friday is a games day for the school because the children are required to wear their PE attire on that day.” [P 1]

However, some of the parents insisted that even if PE was taught in the pre-schools, it should be allocated less time to give more time to the academic subjects. One of the parents had the following to say on whether there was need to teach PE:

“Schools should have less play time and more time to learn English. Children have all the time to play at home. At school, they should learn more and play less.” [P 38]

The parents’ comments show that some parents did not fully get involved in their children learning but left the whole task to the school. This may imply that some parents do not contribute positively towards their children’s learning in pre-school. These parents’ comments indicate that some parents viewed PE as a waste of learning time and it should be allocated less time in pre-school. However, some parents lamented about the lack of opportunities for child play at school as schools denied children time to engage in play activities or games. The parents pointed out that children need play opportunities to learn, relax and enjoy.

The study observed that parents from Nairobi and Nyeri pre-schools with higher levels of education had an understanding of the role of PE in the lives of children. However, Wawire (2006) noted that parents from Nairobi were better informed about the aspects of pre-school than parents from Machakos. Abagi (2008) on the other hand, observed that parents who took their children to high cost pre-school were aware about the benefit of ECE.

Conclusions

PE is a relevant activity area in the ECE curriculum as it enhances the holistic growth of the child. This was affirmed by the headteachers, teachers and parents from Nairobi and Nyeri pre-schools as they reported that there was need for the PE programme in the ECE curriculum.

Despite the positive perception of the relevance of PE, lack of full support from all the stakeholders affects the implementation of the programme. Lack of maximum support leads to non-teaching of PE lessons, inadequate time allocation and use of PE lessons to teach other activity areas.

Recommendations

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology should organize seminars and workshops to create awareness and to sensitise all the implementers and stakeholders of pre-schools on the importance of PE in the lives of young children.

The pre-schools administrators should use educational talks in their schools and during schools open days, parents' days, and sports days to sensitise teachers, pre-school children, parents and the community on the relevance of PE and the need to support PE programmes.

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