

# Student's Physical Activity Preferences: Implications for the Design and Implementation of Physical Education Curriculum

## 學童選擇體育活動對體育課程之設計及應用

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### Abstract

Using a survey research method this paper examines the concerns and needs of youngsters with respect to physical education and sport in their schools. Participants were (574) boys and girls in the Community Junior Schools. These students were asked among other things to rank order their most preferred activity. The results show that most of the students still prefer team sport over more individualized programs. This could be a function of developmental needs since students at this age seem to prefer team sport rather than more individualized activities. The results also show that the students are very enthusiastic about physical education, it is therefore, incumbent upon us as curriculum developers to introduce activities that have a carry over to adult years.

### 摘要

本文以調查方式進行探討青少年對體育及運動的需求，共有 574 名小學生接受調查，結果發現大部份學生喜愛團隊運動多於個人項目。整體而言，學生對體育運動的興趣均十分濃厚，課程編排需要把活動延伸至成人階段。

### Introduction

Student preferences and values they attach to physical education and sport are in many cases ignored by school administrators and curriculum developers when designing curriculum. This is in part due to the fact that curriculum planners know very little about student attitudes, values and preferences toward physical education (Ha, Johns, Shiu, 2003). Consequently, this lack of understanding results in the failure by schools to offer programmes that are meaningful to the learners. Physical education in Botswana is a new subject in the school curriculum and does not warrant much of a priority (Mokgwathi, 1999). It first became a subject of serious debate in the 1994 Revised National Policy on Education. As Mokgwathi (1999) points out this policy was a major

attempt at school reform since the 1970's Education for Kagisano Report. Closer scrutiny shows that the Revised National Policy on Education attempted to introduce a more student centred approach and urged planners to immediately implement policies to suit the changing and complex economy of Botswana.

### Policy Context

The 1994 Revised National Policy on Education made several recommendations, some of which were adopted as policy. Two of these recommendations are of particular importance to physical education in the schools. Recommendation 17 (d) [ par 4.7.22] states that immediate initiatives be undertaken to develop a syllabus in the primary schools for art, music,

home economics and physical education. This was a positive step for physical education and bode well for its inclusion in the school curriculum. Recommendation 32 (a) [par 5.5. 13] stated that each student should be encouraged to take at least one co-curricular activity in the form of a sporting activity, a club, or a hobby in secondary school. In section (f) two important recommendations were made to the Ministry of Education. These are: a) to develop curriculum for physical education and other subjects mentioned in recommendation 17 and; b) to determine time allocations in the school time table for the said subjects.

Clearly, recommendations (17 & 23) have far reaching consequences for the provision of educational experiences in the schools. The underlying implications for these recommendations were to create a policy whose broad aims were to encourage increased participation of students in their learning. However, as Johns and Drummond (1999) state the gap between policy and practice has not decreased over the years especially in physical education. If the students were to make choices and select co-curricular activities, their preferences and needs would be given more a much more serious consideration. This would as several studies reflect (Ha & Johns, 1999; Daley & O'Gara, 1998; McKenzie, Alcaraz, & Sallis, 1994) a concern for student needs and preferences. This concern would lead invariably to programmes that students would easily identify with and accept. Student collaboration in curriculum design has been noted as the number one factor in positive attitudes toward participation (Luke & Cope, 1994). Furthermore, when students are accorded an opportunity to select activities, they become more motivated to participate and play.

## Participants

The participants for this study were 574 junior community secondary school students who volunteered to take part. 574 questionnaires were sent out to 29 schools in Gaborone, the capital city, Francistown in the North East district and Selebi-Phikwe in the Central District. The participants were in their second year of the Junior Certificate of Education. The sample in this study did in many respects, exhibit the same characteristics as those in the total population of students in their second year of the Junior Community School in Botswana and the results can be generalized to this population. An equal number of boys and girls (287 each) ranging between the ages of 13 and 16 were randomly selected to respond to this questionnaire.

## Instrumentation and Procedures

The process of data collection was accomplished through the use of a written questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher after reading the current research and literature on student needs and interests in the process of curriculum design and implementation. The nine item questionnaire provided a vehicle by which the basic factual and perceptual data regarding the attitudes and value placed on physical education and the preferred physical activities by the respondents were obtained. The questionnaire was sent to a panel of experts to ensure for both face and content validity of the instrument. The panel of experts suggested a few changes to the phrasing of some questions to make them more relevant to the existing local situation. Prior to circulating, the questionnaire was field tested on 50 junior community school students to test for reliability. The students were asked to respond to the same questionnaire within a period of a week and a reliability score of 87 % was obtained.

## Results & Discussion

Data were analyzed and reported using means, percentages and rankings among gender and grade levels. All of the 574 questionnaires distributed were returned (100% of the sample). Of all the participants, 230 boys (88.5%) and 273 girls (87.5%) indicate that they would opt to take physical education if it were offered in their school curriculum as a core subject. It would appear from the results that physical education is popular to many students, both boys and girls. It also seemed like there was very little variation in attitude between the boys and girls. This positive attitude may also have the effect of influencing those who at the moment feel ambivalent to the subject. The total number of responses was 572 students indicating that two students did not respond to this question. On the question of the association between gender and sport, the results indicate that more boys (54.8 %) than girls (30%) are involved in school sport. It is interesting however, to note that a higher number of girls (55%) are involved in activities offered outside the school. The fact that more girls participate outside of school maybe due to a restricted offer of activities within the school and the lack of interest that the school system shows toward girl participation.

Participants were asked to rank by order of preference the kinds of physical activities they would like to see included in the physical education curriculum in the schools. Table 1 (attached) depicts the most preferred activity among boys

and girls in this study. The sports are ranked in descending order from the most to the least popular among the students. For the boys the most preferred activity was tennis with 71 % and the least preferred is netball. For the girls, tennis is also the most preferred with 72 % and the least judo with 12%. There seems to be an inclination toward more team sport than individual sport for the students. This maybe due to the function of needs of developmental stages as students at this age seem to prefer group activity more than individualized programs. It also seems that the students prefer the activities which are perceived to be less demanding and less rigorous. The case in point is Jogging and running which seems to be ranked low by both boys (36%) and girls (46%). On the other hand this activity might be seen as redundant as most students still walk/run to school in the mornings.

Participants in the study were also asked who they thought should be responsible for designing the physical education curriculum. The results showed more boys (87%) than girls (79%) feel that they should be given a chance to select preferred physical activities. On another related issue, the girls showed an inclination toward being given more opportunity to engage in physical activity during the lessons. On the question of how many times a week they would like to have physical education classes, the participants, (boys 92% & girls 89%), indicated very strongly that they would like to have daily physical education lessons.

## Conclusion

Physical education in Botswana in the schools is relatively new when compared to other course offerings in the school curriculum in Botswana. It was introduced into the schools as an enrichment subject side by side with Religious Education and Moral Education. Recently another subject was introduced into the curriculum. This new subject, computer studies, has eroded the few lessons allocated to physical education in the school timetable. To compound this problem of limited time, physical education classes are no more than glorified sports coaching sessions. The curriculum is limited to offering basic ball sports and nothing else. Most of the activities performed in the junior community schools are team sports. These are activities not commonly performed throughout life. If the wishes of the students were to be taken into consideration then such offerings as self-defense, fitness, dance and camping would find their way into the teaching of physical education. These are activities that have a carry on effect after the physically demanding activities of youthful days have gone past.

It is time that the policy makers started to listen to the wishes of the students and offer daily physical education and a varied menu of activities in the schools. However, ones should take into cognizance that the reorientations of the physical education curriculum toward a more balanced program that caters for the needs and aspirations of students will not be easy and will not happen instantaneously (Penney & Harris, 1997). Furthermore, these two authors contend that real change takes time and demands that long held views, attitudes and beliefs of many people should change. Therefore, this curricular change as suggested, will take political will and planning to achieve. As adults, policy makers and educators it is our duty to provide an education that will be beneficial to the next generation. It is incumbent upon us to learn more about students needs in order to design meaningful and positive student learning experiences.

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**Table 1. Sport Preference by Gender.**

	Males	Frequency %	Females	Frequency %
Most preferred	Tennis	71	Tennis	74
	Basketball*	67	Softball*	64
	Football*	64	Volleyball*	65
	Volleyball*	60	Basketball*	63
	Softball*	59	Badminton	58
	Karate	58	Table-Tennis	57
	Table-Tennis	48	Dance	56
	Cricket*	41	Netball*	52
	W/Training	39	Karate	51
	Rugby*	37	Jog/Walk	46
	Jog/Walk	36	Camping	29
	Camping	28	Football*	28
	Squash	27	Cricket*	25
	T & Field	25	Squash	24
	Dance	24	W/Training	23
	Judo	23	Folk Dance	21
	Field Hockey*	18	F/Hockey*	18
Least preferred	Folk Dance	08	T & Field	17
	Netball*	05	Judo	12

\* indicates team sport