Teaching Strategies Employed by Physical Education Teachers in Gokwe North Primary Schools

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Abstract

The teaching of Physical Education requires one to have a repertoire of appropriate teaching strategies so as to enable the mastery of Physical Education concepts and skills. It seems that most physical education teachers' effective use of various strategies is negatively impacted by a variety of factors. The purpose of the study was to analyze the teaching strategies which are used by physical education teachers in Gokwe north primary schools in the midlands province of Zimbabwe and also to assess the factors affecting the effectiveness of these strategies. This study adopted a qualitative methodology, utilizing the case study design which guided the generation of relevant data. A total of twenty four participants were conveniently sampled for data collection and these included three heads of schools, six physical educators and fifteen form two students. Three focus group discussions were used to obtain the views of the three groups of participants. Research findings revealed that physical education teachers apply several teaching strategies. These included the lecture, individualised instruction, task teaching, cooperative learning, problem solving, interactive teaching, peer, station, simulation and active teaching. Among the stated teaching strategies, some were used more frequently than others. The effectiveness of these teaching strategies was found to be low because they are negatively affected by a host of factors such as negative attitudes of teachers, lack of examinations in the subject, lack of time, lack of appropriate equipment and facilities. The study recommended that the ministry should make the subject examinable so that the attitude of teachers and heads change. The heads of schools should provide the necessary equipment and facilities to enable the use of a variety of strategies and also enhance effectiveness of the strategies.

Keywords: Teaching Strategies, Physical Education, Effectiveness, Teachers.

INTRODUCTION

According to Brain (2001), teaching is both an art and science. It permits a huge degree o freedom and celebrates creativity of the individual teacher. Masston & Astworth (1986) state that teaching is an art of a teacher in which, on the basis of knowledge and experiences puts the subject matter before the students in a meaningful manner. This shows that in Physical Education the effective teacher is involved in adjusting and reviewing tasks set according to the needs of students.

Teaching strategies differ. Some teaching strategies allow learners to progress at their own pace while others develop in pupils, the capacity to solve situations previously not encountered through combining old rules and principles into new higher order ones (Harrison & Blackmore, 1992) [1]. Teaching strategies employed by some teachers may increase student responsibility for learning and feedback while others enable learners to progress through a sequence of learning activities without immediate presence of the teacher. Therefore, the ability of the teacher to put subject matters before the students in an artistic manner may influence students' performance in Physical Education. The performance of students may be credited to the teacher's implementation of various teaching strategies in Physical Education. Use of a variety of teaching strategies is given little attention by teachers in various schools. In addition Mawer (1997) states that there is no one best strategy for any one teaching style on the spectrum. It is against this background that the researchers realised the need to analyse the teaching strategies used by primary school teachers in Gokwe North District of the Midlands province of Zimbabwe.

Statement of the Problem

The teaching of Physical Education requires one to have basic knowledge on good teaching strategies so as to enable mastery of Physical Education concepts and skills. It seems that most teachers fail to use a variety of these strategies effectively due to inadequate knowledge in the teaching of Physical Education

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as well as many other reasons. This article seeks to analyse the teaching strategies employed by primary school Physical Education teachers in Gokwe North District.

Sub-Problems

- Which PE teaching strategies are employed in Gokwe North primary schools?
- Are these strategies used effectively in the teaching of Physical Education?
- What are the factors that affect the effectiveness of the used teaching strategies?
- How can the effectiveness of the PE teaching strategies be enhanced?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching Strategies

Zelazo, Muller, Frye & Marcovitch (2003) assert that a strategy is a way of translating aim into meaning. Shore (2003) views a strategy as involving a teacher's attempts to translate aims into practise. Hence, teaching strategies are ways of presenting instruction to students attaching effect and meaning or impression.

Harrison & Blackmore (1992) [1] assert that there is no one best strategy for any one teaching style, rather strategies should be selected that best meet the needs of instructional situation, and each strategy should be adapted to the parameters of that particular style. This shows that a teacher should be well versed in a variety of teaching strategies so as to link them to appropriate teaching styles.

Application of Teaching Strategies

As alluded to above, various teaching strategies can be employed in the teaching of Physical Education. Such strategies include but are not limited to the following: lecture, individualised instruction, cooperative learning, simulation, peer teaching, self instruction formats, cognitive, team teaching, task teaching and teaching through questions (Glover, Miller, Averis & Door, 2005) [8]. Glover *et al.* (2005) [8] postulate that the provision of several options in teaching strategies accommodates students' diverse learning styles and meets learning intentions of teaching sessions.

Lecture strategy

Magill (1993) defines a lecture as a verbal presentation to an audience of a defined segment of information to a large group of students in a short time. It covers outside reports, outside speakers and panel discussions. Bergs (2005) asserts that a teacher can select a lecture strategy for students to simply listen. This shows that the lecture strategy is useful when presenting information to a number of students. However according to Johnson and Johnson (1999), the lecture strategy has a weakness in the teaching of Physical Education since it is limited to memory learning and treats students as passive recipients. Buehl (2001) [3] states that students learn better if they are actively engaged with a dominant characteristic of PE. It can therefore be concluded that while the lecture method has some degree of usefulness it is obviously not the best method for teaching PE.

Individualised Instruction

Edmonds & Kennedy (2010) [7] state that the individualised instruction strategy is a strategy which allows each learner to progress at his or her own pace and develops the ability to learn independently with minimum help from the teacher. This shows that individualised instruction can be used to help students become independent strategic learners. Individualised instructional strategy can motivate students and help them focus attention (Coates, 1997). Schmidt (1991) asserts

that in the individualised instruction the teacher must take into consideration what the students already know, what the students want to know and what the students need to know. Therefore, individualised instruction strategy enables students to master intended concepts through mastery learning task sheets, contract learning, quests and individualised packets.

According to Coates (1997) the individualised instruction strategy is too demanding in terms of time. Students can learn at high levels if given sufficient time and help. Kagan (1990) [11] establishes that the individualised strategy demands the student's ability to learn independently with minimum supervision. If the student is unable to learn independently, his or her performance may be negatively affected.

Task Teaching

Tan and Tan (1997) view task sheets as an important aspect in the teaching of Physical Education since they make students to practise tasks and keep a record of learning activities. Metzler (1990) points out that task sheets are useful for pre-class as well as during class activities where each student can be given a task sheet and a list of activities. Students are then assessed by partners or the teacher. According to Kamps (2008) [12] task teaching has an advantage in empowering students to assess each other thereby encouraging students to learn from others strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, task teaching is a strategy that instils cooperation among students.

Task teaching is sometimes called station teaching. Station teaching is a strategy in which two or more tasks are practised at the same time. Each task is allocated an area and students rotate from one station to another (Kyriacou 1991, Mawer, 1997).

Cooperative Learning Teaching Strategy

Harrison & Blackmore (1992) [1] assert that cooperative learning teaching strategy is a strategy that utilised learning in groups where learners are assigned a learning task or project to complete as a team. The teams are heterogeneous and are evaluated both individually and as a group. Holton (1998) [9] postulates that there are three common cooperative learning structures utilised in the cooperative teaching strategy. These include the pairs check, jigsaw and group activities.

Kagan (1990) [11] states that cooperative learning reflects on how well the team functions and how to function even better through interpersonal and small group skills like communication, trust, leadership, decision making and conflict resolution. Therefore, cooperative learning requires the contribution of each of the group members in order to achieve goals.

Problem Solving Teaching Strategy

Wood (2002) [23] views problem solving strategies as strategies that develop the capacity to solve previously unencountered situations by combining old rules and principles into new higher order ones. Problem- solving strategies have the capacity to present students with worthwhile problem demanding recall of previously learned knowledge.

The problem- solving teaching strategy as Zelano, Muller, Frye and Mcovitch (2003) say, encourages the application of the concepts, students, interaction and team work. Levy (2002) [13] identifies the duties of the teacher in the problem solving strategy in various ways. The duty of the teacher is to provide assistance to channel students thinking. The teacher should help children indentify problems, label problems for children when they arise in play and encourage children to describe the problems the encounter.

Interactive Teaching

Bronson (2009) defines interactive teaching as the type of teaching that incorporates a two way communication between the teacher and pupils, pupil to pupil and the teacher continuously monitors and responds to pupils 's thinking by adjusting the flow and focus of the lesson. According to Collis and Lacey (1996) in the interactive teaching strategy the aim is to allow pupils to dig deeper into meaning and concepts. It is about the notion of knowledge being constructed jointly rather than content being delivered to learners by teachers. Therefore, interactive teaching focuses on interpersonal relationships among learners and teachers.

Simulation Strategy

Ruddell and Ruddell (1995) [19] define simulation activities as selective simplifications or representations of real life situations in game or laboratory type settings. Hermin and Toth (2006) assert that simulation of an event promotes learning of game skills, knowledge, attitudes, strategies and social skills. This shows that, the simulation strategy enables individuals to learn and become proficient in skills through observation and practise.

Peer Teaching Strategy

According to Sawyer (2006) peer teaching is an instructional strategy to reach out to low performing students in a positive way. It uses parings of high performing students under the supervision of a teacher. This shows that the strategy is student centred and it emphasises active teaching and learning as students work in teams. Whitman (1988) states that peer teaching strategy induces hands- on, heads- on and hearts on learning in students.

Learning Contracts

Swanson & Holton (1997) assert that learning contract is a document used to assist planning of a learning project, a written agreement negotiated between a learner and a teacher. Hence, a learning contract involves negotiation and agreement on the part of learner and the teacher. According to Dixon (1991) a learning contract considers psychological principles of the adult learner since the learner is encouraged to take more responsibility for their own learning. The elements of learning contract include learning objectives and goals, and the strategies and resource available to achieve the objectives. It also demands the evidence to indicate that objectives have been achieved.

Questioning Strategy

According to Wells (2001) [22] questioning is a core function of both learning and teaching. It is a designer of curricular and instructional activities that facilitate interactions. Questioning enables interaction where student interact with their teacher and peers. Questioning promoted higher order thinking through explanation of high level questioning. (Covey 1990)

Active Teaching

According to Hermin and Toth (2006) active learning refers to the level of academic student engagement in and outside classroom. Active teaching is intended to make students active rather than passive participants in learning. Silberman (1996) states that active hands on teaching strategies and learning activities are designed to take students out of their seats or classroom. This shows that active teaching involves active participation on the part of the student rather than passive recipients. Buehl (2001) [3] asserts that many individuals learn best and become proficient in skills by practising them rather merely being a spectator to the skill. This shows that individuals learn by doing which are active hands on approach

Utilisation of Teaching Strategies/Effective Teaching

According to Siedentop (1991) when one sets out to do anything, it is important to ensure that the atmosphere is conducive. In teaching Physical Education, it is important to ensure that all the requirements are available. Pinnell and Founters (1998) state that in order to enable children to learn successfully, it is necessary to make sure that the atmosphere allows them to do that. The two assertions show that a teacher should set conducive environment for student learning.

Moyles *et al.* (2003) [16] advocate that various factors that affect student learning depend on the teacher and students. Other things maybe beyond the teachers control but the teacher remains accountable for them. The teacher should be in a position to interpret them and make them effective. Coates (1997) states that the spectrum permits a huge degree of freedom and celebrates the creativity of the individual teacher. In this respect, it is the art of the teacher or the ability of the teacher to use a variety of teaching strategies that makes learning effective. Hence, effective learning is centred on the mode of presentation, which is the way in which subject matter is expressed.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative case study design of Gokwe North District in the Midlands province of Zimbabwe. The qualitative approach was found to be appropriate for this study because it enables the researcher to gain insight, explore the depth, richness and complexity inherent in a phenomenon. It is also an appropriate approach for studying human behaviour and habits. The population consisted of heads of schools, PE teachers and students. Three heads of schools, six PE teachers and 15 form two students were purposively sampled making up a total study sample of twenty four participants. Having sought authority from relevant authorities the researcher scheduled time for the three focus group discussions.

Focus Groups and Constitution

The researcher used three focus groups one for Heads of schools (n=3) one for PE Teachers (n=6) and one for students (n=15).

DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data analysis was conducted as described below.

Segmenting

The data were segmented by dividing it into meaningful analytic units. This was done by carefully reading the transcribed data one line at a time, taking into cognisance the following questions:

- Is there a segment of the text which is important for this study?
- Does it differ in any way from the text which precedes or succeeds it?
- Where does each segment begin and end? Such segments (words, sentences or several sentences) were bracketed as a way of indicating their starting and ending points.

Coding

Codes or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during the study were created and placed on a master list.

Enumeration

The frequency with which observations were made was noted in order to help the researcher identify and take note of important ideas and prominent themes, occurring in the research group as a whole, or between different groups.

Categorization

Coded data were categorized into the following sub-themes which were mainly based on the sub-problems

- Observation of PE lesson by Heads of schools
- Types of teaching strategies used
- Effective use of teaching strategies
- Factors affecting effective use of teaching strategies
- Ways of enhancing effectiveness of teaching strategies

These sub-themes were used as a basis of results presentation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The above sub- themes informed the presentation of results below.

Observation of PE lessons by heads of schools

This theme was important to establish if heads of schools had valid and relevant knowledge of the teaching strategies used by their teachers. This knowledge can only be obtained mainly through lesson observations. All heads of schools constituting the focus group claimed that they supervised their PE teachers regularly. This implied that the Heads of schools were strategically positioned to comment of the types of teaching strategies used by their teachers and the effectiveness of these strategies.

Types of Teaching Strategies Employed

There was general consensus from the three focus groups as well as from the members of the focus groups that a reasonable variety of teaching strategies were used by most of the PE teachers in question. Active teaching, problem- solving, interactive teaching, peer teaching, station teaching, lecture strategy, cooperative teaching, task teaching, individualised instruction, simulation and questioning strategy were some of the teaching strategies that were identified by many of the participants in the three focus groups. This is a positive observation considering that authorities such as Glover *et al.* (2005) [8] argue that the usage of several options in teaching strategies accommodates students' diverse learning styles and meets learning intentions of teaching sessions. For instance, the emotional aspect can be developed through use of active, cooperative, interactive, task, peer and station teaching strategies (Glover *et al.* 2005) [8]. The social component is catered for by peer, task, cooperative, station and interactive teaching. The mental aspect can be developed through problem solving, active teaching, individualised instruction, task teaching and the simulation strategy while the spiritual aspect can be addressed by using interactive, cooperative, simulation, task and station teaching (Glover *et al.*, 2005) [8].

All Heads and PE teachers concurred that, there is no one teaching strategy that best suits the total development of students. They highlighted that rather a variety of teaching strategies contribute to that effect.

The Effectiveness of the Teaching Strategies employed

Most participants concurred that the effectiveness of teaching strategies definitely needed to be improved and that there was room for that improvement to occur. This was because in spite of the fact that most Physical educators used some variety of teaching strategies some were not knowledgeable and confident enough to be able to discern how and when to use teaching strategies that yield good results. For those few who prophesised knowledge of when and how to use teaching strategies also indicated that there was a myriad of other problems which Physical educators face which militate maximum effectiveness of strategies which are utilised.

Factors affecting the Effectiveness of the Teaching Strategies employed

Both Physical Educators and Heads of schools pointed out that there were many challenges encountered by Physical Education teachers which hampered the effectiveness of the teaching strategies employed. Most participants cited lack of adequate resources, lack of appropriate equipment, lack of conducive facilities, lack of knowledge and creativity as well as negative attitudes of teachers, heads, pupils, parents and other stakeholders. This negative attitude stemming from the fact that PE was a non examinable subject and this tends to militate against the effectiveness of teaching strategies as teachers are not compelled to expend the necessary effort.

One participant lamented that "one of the causes of lack of knowledge and creativity stems from the fact that the Teachers' College Physical Education training curriculum is not comprehensive enough to give the teachers the necessary confidence". This observation was also made by the Nziramasanga commission of Inquiry into training and Education (1999) which highlighted that the Physical Education training programmes in colleges are not comprehensive and not standardized. This inadequacy results in teachers failing to interpret the syllabus and coming up with meaningful PE activities.

It was observed that the effectiveness of PE teaching strategies is affected by most of the factors that also affect the general teaching of PE. The teaching of Physical Education is associated with many barriers. Morgan and Hansen (2008) [14] classify the barriers that restrict teachers from teaching PE under institutional (outside the teacher's control) and teacher- related conditions (arising from the teacher's behaviour). Jenkinson (2010) [10] observes that previous research has highlighted many institutional barriers including budget constraints, scarce resources, reduction in time provisions in the curriculum, the absence of professional development, the crowded curriculum itself and lack of facilities and equipment. Similarly, Dwyer, Lemoine, Adalf, Goodman & Faulkner (2003) [6]. report that the lower priority given to Physical Education, the absence of performance measures, and its insufficient infrastructure were three major institutional barriers identified by generalists' elementary school teachers in Canada. The teacher- related barriers which have been identified include possessing low levels of confidence or interest in teaching PE, being unable to provide safely planned and structured lessons, having had negative personal experiences in PE and lacking training, knowledge, expertise and qualifications (Morgan & Bourke, 2005; Xiang, Lowly & McBride, 2002).

Strategies to enhance the effectiveness of teaching strategies employed

Most participants concurred that there are indeed strategies that can be used to enhance the effectiveness of the teaching strategies employed. They cited such things as provision of adequate resources to address budget constraints, prioritisation of the procurement of appropriate equipment, provision of appropriate facilities, Provision of in-service training courses, As Rink (1998) asserts, good teachers need a variety of approaches and patterns of working and the flexibility for several different strategies. Therefore, through in service courses, physical educators would know how and when to use teaching strategies that yield good results. In addition the participants also suggested the review of the college PE training curriculum and introducing national examinations in the subject so that teachers will be equipped with relevant teaching skills as well as cultivate a positive attitude and a sense of seriousness in teaching the subject.

Summary

This study sought to analyse the teaching strategies employed by Physical Education Teachers in Gokwe North Primary Schools. The

objectives of the study were to identify the PE teaching strategies employed by teachers in Gokwe North primary schools and find out if these strategies are being effectively used, also to identify ways to improve the effectiveness of the teaching strategies. It can therefore be concluded from this study that Gokwe North P Educators use a reasonable variety of teaching strategies but the effectiveness of these strategies is affected by a myriad of factors including lack of adequate resources, lack of appropriate equipment, lack of conducive facilities, lack of knowledge and creativity as well as negative attitudes of teachers, heads, pupils, parents and other stakeholders. The study also recommended addressing the above issues as a way of enhancing effectiveness of teaching strategies,

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