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Shaping the Future of Physical Education in Kenya
A Reflection on Priorities

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Abstract

The development of physical education (PE) and sports in Kenya can be traced from the historical phases of precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial rule. The indigenous sports and games of the precolonial period were informal and were interwoven within the African culture. Formalized PE in the form of militaristic physical training was introduced by the British Colonialists. This laid the foundation for the current PE programs that have evolved over the years. Currently, the PE curriculum for schools is developed centrally by the Kenya Institute of Education. The teaching of PE in all schools is mandatory but not examinable. The general objectives of teaching of the subject include enhancing fitness, health, recreation habits, and total wellness of children and youth. However, the teaching of the subject faces challenges including negative attitudes toward it, insufficient number of teachers, and inadequate modern facilities and equipment. However, in addition to PE schools, a number of community-based physical activity programs exist. To further promote the teaching of PE in the country, suitable strategies need to be continually devised and implemented.

Keywords
Curriculum, Kenya, health, obesity, physical activity, physical education, teaching
Introduction

Kenya is a country in the eastern region of Africa. The country is 580,367 square kilometers (224,081 square miles) and has a population of approximately 40 million people. It is categorized as one of the developing countries with a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of $467.47 (U.S. dollars) as last published in the World Bank Report of 2010. As a developing country, Kenya has continuously emphasized the development of its educational system as an avenue for preparing and producing the required workforce for national development. The current educational system that is popularly known as the 8-4-4 system consists of 8 years of primary education, 4 years of secondary education, and another 4 years of university education. The curricula for all the public primary and secondary schools are centrally developed by the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE). However, a number of private schools in some of the cities in the country follow and offer the British and other international curricula. Physical education (PE) was made a mandatory subject in all schools and teacher training colleges through the Presidential Decree of 1980 (Kenya Republic, 1984). Like other subject curricula offered in public primary and secondary schools, the PE curricula are developed at KIE. However, the subject is not examinable at the school level except in teacher training colleges and universities that offer it.

History

Physical and health education in Kenya has attained its current status as a result of many historical events. The historical events stretch from those experienced and undertaken before the colonization of Kenya by the British in 1895, through the subsequent colonial rule between 1920 and 1963, to the educational reviews and reforms undertaken in the postcolonial era. During the precolonial era in Kenya, the natives engaged in a wide range of traditional sports and games that were directly linked to their survival, defense, and way of life (Asembo, 2003). The most popular forms of sports and games of the indigenous communities included spear-throwing, which was associated with hunting and the need for defense against aggressors; running, which was considered an essential skill in the hunting of edible wild animals; swimming as an activity, which was necessary in fishing and communication with other communities that lived across large water masses; and wrestling among youth, which was useful in identifying the strong ones who could be depended upon to defend their communities. Song and various forms of dance were also common phenomena during special occasions and seasons (Rintaugu, Mwisukha, & Munayi, 2011) such as celebrations that were held to mark the birth of a child, rites of passage, death, bumper harvest of crops, and victory in war.

Modern formal education was introduced in Kenya during the British colonial rule between 1895 and 1963. During this period, the modern forms of sports and games were introduced in the country from Europe and the Western world, whereas the indigenous forms were discarded as they were branded as being primitive (Rintaugu et al., 2011). The colonial government appointed several education commissions that emphasized the teaching of physical training and drill in elementary schools. The main objective of teaching physical training at that time was to develop the learners’ character by instilling virtues of obedience, discipline, and submission to authority, which were important in entrenching the colonial rule. Soon after Kenya attained independence from colonial rule, the postcolonial government appointed several educational commissions to restructure the education system to serve the needs and interests of the indigenous people. The recommendations of the educational commissions had some direct influence on the teaching of PE in the country. For instance, although the Kenya Education Commission of 1964 emphasized the inclusion of PE as a cocurricular activity in the school curriculum, sub-
sequent reports that included the Gachathi Report of 1975, Presidential Working Party (Mackay Report) of 1981, and the Presidential Working Party (Kamunge Report) of 1988 focused more on reviewing the education system in the country but did not emphasize the teaching of PE in schools. This can partly explain the lukewarm attention that the discipline has received in the country over the years in spite of the Presidential Decree of 1980 that made PE a mandatory but nonexaminable subject in schools. Gitonga, Andanje, Wanderi, and Bailasha (2012) noted that amid various educational commissions and changes in the education system in Kenya, PE continues to be regarded as a subject that offers no opportunity for advancement both within and outside the formal education structure.

The introduction of free primary education and free day secondary education in 2003 and 2007, respectively, led to an increased number of pupils and students in primary and secondary schools in Kenya. Though these new developments in the education sector had numerous positive outcomes in terms of access and reduced costs on the part of parents, they led to high teacher–pupil ratios and congested classes that, to some extent, have adversely affected the teaching and learning of PE, among other subjects.

Current State of Well-Being of Children and Youth

From a traditional perspective, most African societies associate PE with child's play. For this reason, negative attitudes toward PE exist (Gitonga & Akpata, 1999; Njororai, 1994). This may justify the embracing of a sedentary lifestyle among youth in Kenya. This situation is compounded by the inadequacy and unavailability of facilities and equipment that are crucial to the implementation of quality PE programs in Kenya. Adding to this challenge, anecdotal evidence has shown that developing countries (including Kenya) are witnessing growing affluence and urbanization, leading to a population that is struggling with overweight and obesity. This is partially attributed to the shifting away from traditional economic activities of farming, herding, food gathering, and hunting to sedentary occupations, motorized transport, passive leisure activities, and the electronic age of computers, the Internet, satellite television, and cell phones, along with the proliferation of cheap fast-food restaurants (Pawloski, Curtin, Gewa, & Attaway, 2012).

Research has indicated that levels of overweight and obesity in urban and rural Kenya are different. Within urban areas, a higher incidence of overweight and obesity is reported in private schools than in public schools (Kamau, 2008). Gewa (2012) found that approximately 22% of children aged 3 to 5 in Kenya were either overweight or obese. The factors associated with obesity included having an overweight or obese mother, having a more educated mother, and having a high birth weight, and factors that were negatively correlated with obesity included being an older child and coming from a large household. These results are confirmed by local spatial analyses demonstrating that overweight mothers and children tend to cluster more in urban areas, including Nairobi, and underweight mothers and children appear to cluster in the northeastern areas and more in rural areas of Kenya (Pawloski et al., 2012). The researchers further noted that religious and cultural values can influence obesity rates, and this may influence communities' perceptions of wealth and acceptable body images among women and children. This study's findings, among others, present evidence of the rising trends of overweight and obesity among the female population in urban areas of Kenya. Obesity among female children can affect their dress code, which may consequently impede their regular participation in physical activity outside scheduled PE lessons. Second, sociocultural beliefs anchored in gender role socialization persist in Kenya, a factor that further curtails girls from Physical activity. For instance, the perception of obesity and overweight or roundness as a sign of wealth, prestige,
beauty, and good health by the African male populace may account for the higher levels of obesity and overweight among girls in Kenya (Adamo et al., 2010).

The role of physical activity and PE programs in mitigating overweight and obesity is influenced by the settings in which children live. For example, a high incidence of overweight and obesity could be attributed to lack of space for physical activity, congested classes, the electronic age, use of motorized transport to school, available junk foods, and limited spaces within neighborhoods (Adamo et al., 2010). On the other hand, the lower level of overweight and obesity in rural areas is attributable to available free space for free play and relatively active lifestyles that include children assisting their parents with fetching water and firewood, herding cattle after school, farming, walking to school, and participating in unstructured physical activity akin to their environments (Adamo et al., 2010). The different levels of engagement in physical activity between boys and girls is a result of societal stereotypes and sociocultural practices that restrict girls from playing with regard to dress code and minimal support by parents and significant others. The differentiated overweight and obesity among urban–rural and boys–girls calls for reconceptualized physical activity and PE programs, which requires cognizance of the diverse scenarios in urban and rural Kenya.

Current Practices

Given that the teaching of PE is compulsory at primary and secondary school levels of education in Kenya, structures and mechanisms exist for developing and reviewing its curriculum. This responsibility is mandated to the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), the national center for curriculum development and research. The institute is well structured to ensure that quality and relevant curriculum and curriculum support materials are developed. The support materials developed by KIE include audio programs in various formats, teachers' guides, pamphlets and booklets, video programs, films, slides, tape-slide programs, overhead transparencies, charts, still pictures, computer programs in various formats, and realia. The objectives of teaching PE at every level of education are clearly defined to guide the teaching–learning processes. The general objectives of teaching PE include promoting learners' health and fitness; enhancing their growth and development, socialization, inculcation of moral values, and discipline; encouraging active lifestyles; and identifying and nurturing sports talent. Specific objectives of teaching PE at each level of education are derived from these broad objectives. However, given the diversified nature of PE activities, numerous objectives of the subject are outlined, but not one is identified as most critical (Amusa, 1999). In general, the PE curriculum in Kenya's educational institutions lacks variation and progression of activities. Furthermore, no standardized or uniformed criteria are available for evaluation in PE, especially in public primary and secondary schools. Consequently, excellent performance in either PE classes or sports programs is not a requirement for promotion to the next class.

In a nutshell, the teaching of the subject is geared to enhancing physical wellness, health, and social skills of learners. Given that some of the primary and secondary schools in Kenya are coeducational, both male and female learners are taught together. To ensure standardization in the teaching of PE, the frequency and duration of each lesson per week is specified at each level of education by the KIE. At lower and upper primary schools, learners are taught five lessons of 30 minutes and three lessons of 35 minutes per week, respectively. At the secondary school level, time allocated to PE varies, being only one lesson of 40 minutes per week for the learners at Levels 1 and 2 and three lessons of 40 minutes per week learners at Levels 3 and 4. Except at the teacher training college level, where both the theoretical and practical aspects of PE are taught,
PE is exclusively practical in nature, covering a variety of exercises with and without apparatus, ball games, track and field, swimming, and racquet and batting games. In this respect, the question of whether PE is an academic subject or a nonacademic discipline permeates the practice of PE in Kenya. This is because academic areas of PE such as physiology, anatomy, motor learning, and psychology are given little attention in the stipulated PE programs for schools and teacher training colleges, yet the nonacademic areas of "sports and games" dominate the curriculum. Consequently, this may have contributed to the apparent and continued marginalization of PE in the school curriculum. Njororai (1994) conceded that students pursuing PE programs at the university are regarded by their peers and community at large as dull and unintelligent. Quality of PE personnel is buttressed in the notion and practice that a PE teacher is a second-rate person. The number of PE teachers is far from being adequate in all the educational institutions in Kenya.

Various forms of physical activity, facilities, apparatus, time, rules, and regulations as specified in the PE curriculum are adapted to suit the physically challenged learner. However, the main challenge in Kenya in this regard is an inadequate number of teachers to teach adapted PE, as only one institution trains such teachers and few teachers are trained per year; hence, the severe shortage. This leaves the physically challenged learner at the care of the teacher who does not have specialized skills to teach adapted PE.

Apart from actual PE topics, the trainer is expected to infuse and integrate emerging and contemporary issues into the most suitable topics. Emerging issues include environmental conservation, drug and substance abuse, integrity, gender issues, and HIV and AIDS. Each of these topics has a connection with PE, and as a matter of fact, it is generally agreed that PE is a better vehicle through which these issues can be addressed.

Curriculum support materials play an important role in the curriculum implementation stage at the classroom level. In Kenya, PE textbooks are published by independent authors and private publishing firms. The KIE is a publisher of the last resort, and as such, it is expected to publish books that all other authors have failed to publish. This, in a way, explains the prevailing limited opportunities that are available for publishing a variety of reference materials that are required for effective learning and teaching of PE. However, KIE develops teaching and learning resources other than textbooks. These include audio programs in various formats, teachers' guides, pamphlets and booklets, video programs, films, slides, tape-slide programs, overhead transparencies, charts, still pictures, computer programs in various formats, and realia (Kenya Republic, 1984).

Unique Models and Community Programs

All public schools and colleges in Kenya teach PE programs that are centrally developed by the KIE. The programs are generally practical, as they focus on the teaching of skills of various outdoor sports and games. However, there are two other categories of privately owned schools that provide the education of the upper class: the international schools that have their own unique PE programs that are modeled on the British and American systems and local private schools that follow the KIE PE curriculum. The private schools are generally adequately empowered to teach PE due to the provision of modern sports facilities and equipment. The schools also recruit adequate professional teachers and coaches for their PE programs.

Although the objectives of teaching PE in private schools slightly vary from one school to the other, the most common objectives include promoting physical, mental, and social well-being of youth; developing their life skills; and instilling virtues of self-confidence, cooperation, and work ethic that they need to succeed in various facets of life. The PE programs are also
meant to give learners opportunities for enjoying and developing their fitness capacities. The PE curriculum activities for private schools mainly include swimming, basketball, tennis, rugby, track and field, soccer, field hockey, cricket, rounders, and outdoor excursions. Because most of the private schools are located in urban areas where the prevalence of obesity is relatively high among school-aged youth (Kamau, 2008), a curriculum that offers a wide range of sporting activities is relevant. The children of the upper class who attend the high-cost private schools in Kenya are affected most by the problem of obesity and overweight due to the affluent and inactive lifestyles that they lead in their homes. For this reason, PE programs are emphasized in their schools for fitness and health purposes. It is apparent that the PE programs in private schools have succeeded due to parental support. On most occasions, parents join their children during PE and sports activities and functions such as School Sports Days and extramural competitions. Notably, private schools regularly engage their children in outdoor adventure activities such as mountain and rock climbing, canoeing, and boating. This contrasts the practice in public schools where it is assumed that children and youth interact with the natural environment on a regular basis.

Major strides have been made in ensuring effective teaching of PE for learners with disabilities in Kenya at the secondary school level. This is demonstrated through the considerable emphasis on adapted physical education (APE) in these schools due to the various benefits and the substantial number of teachers who have been trained at the Kenya Institute of Special Education (KESI). Research evidence has indicated that the APE program contributes to the physical fitness of deaf children in Kenya (Riungu, 2002).

Apart from the institutional PE programs, a number of community-based sports programs are available for youth in urban and rural areas of Kenya. The main programs include the Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA), TeglaLoroupe Peace Foundation, and Moving the Goalposts Kilifi. The MYSA is a self-help youth program that links sports with environmental cleanup, AIDS prevention, leadership training, and other community service activities. It was formed in 1987 within the Mathare slums in Nairobi, which currently has a population of over 20,000 youth. The organization promotes youth sports for development by organizing football leagues for both boys and girls year-round. The football matches avail youth with opportunities for enjoyment, for socialization, and to access information on HIV and AIDS, drug abuse, and crime prevention, as well as bring them together for community service activities (Rintaugu et al., 2011). Anecdotal evidence has shown that the various skills and virtues learned by participating in MYSA activities are carried over by the participants into adulthood.

The TeglaLoroupe Peace Foundation uses sports to bring peace to conflict-ridden regions of the North Rift Valley of Kenya. The foundation, established by TeglaLoroupe, a three-time world half-marathon champion, organizes an annual series of marathon events that brings together warring nomadic groups of youth from communities in the North Rift in Kenya, in Uganda, and in Sudan to bring peace among them (Obare, 2010). The running races and marathons organized by the Peace Foundation attract participants of all ages and, more important, youth who are out of the school system. This unique program that combines physical activity with peace initiatives could be replicated in other parts of the country where civil strife is imminent.

Moving the Goalposts Kilifi is a program based in the coastal region of Kenya that uses football to promote athleticism and leadership skills among females aged 9 to 12 from poor backgrounds. The program caters to over 2,000 girls and young women (Rintaugu et al., 2011). Other than involving the youthful female participants in football matches, the program includes projects that address issues of reproductive health and empowers them with the skills they need to set up and run their own small businesses.
A number of sporting events that are geared toward addressing health concerns of Kenyan youth and general population are also organized annually. For instance, the annual Karen Hospital Heart Run and the Mater Heart Run are organized by the Karen Hospital and the Mater Hospital, respectively, to raise money to perform heart surgeries on needy children. The Diabetes Walk is organized annually by the Kenya Diabetes Management and Information Center as a fund-raising and awareness activity for youth and adults on issues pertaining to diabetes. The other major national sports events that are held once a year and that involve both elite and non-elite athletes include the UAP Ndakaini Marathon, the Sotokoko Safari Marathon, the Standard Chartered Nairobi Marathon, and the Safaricom Marathon. These marathon events provide opportunities for youth not only to experience the fitness and health benefits of physical activity but also to raise funds for charity courses. It is important to note that marathon and other forms of long-distance running have become a unique daily phenomenon in many rural communities in Kenya and has contributed not only to promoting the health of youth but also to identifying and nurturing sports talent.

Future Visions

One strategy to realize Kenya's long-term development plan, the Vision 2030, is to improve the health sector. In this respect, teaching of PE and sports in schools and provision of sporting activities at the community level are viewed as tools of making this goal a reality (Government of the Republic of Kenya, 2007). A number of strategies that may be exploited to guide future directions for PE and physical activity in Kenya are suggested. The curriculum has to be reviewed more regularly than has been the case in the past so as to continually align it with the physical, health, psychological, and social needs of the learners, as well as provide for societal dynamics. To offer a curriculum that promotes active lifestyles of youth, regular surveys should be conducted to determine learners' interests and needs so that their input is integrated into the curriculum content. Such reviews should also aim to diversify the curriculum activities, for instance, by including more indigenous sports and games, as well as activities that do not require the use of apparatus, as the current curriculum is based on imported models that have little relevance and application in the African culture. Since Kenyan society is highly diversified in terms of ethnicity and socioeconomic status of its citizens, an integration of the equally diverse indigenous sports and games in the PE curriculum will enable youth to appreciate their cultural differences and thereby promote national unity.

Embracing elements from successful PE and health programs from other countries may prove beneficial. For instance, to ensure that PE is given the necessary attention and put on the same status as other academic subjects, some countries have made it an examinable subject at various levels of schooling in secondary schools. This could prove useful to enhance the teaching of PE in Kenya. Indeed Mahlmann, Asernbo, and Korir (1993) stated that PE lags behind in Kenyan secondary schools because it is neither examinable nor required for promotion of learners to the next class. After independence, many public facilities (free land) were set aside for the assembly of sports and recreation facilities. However, most of these have been diverted to other alternative uses or grabbed by private developers. Governmental regulations and policies need to be put in place to protect such public facilities. Indeed, the provision of required PE facilities and equipment in educational institutions must be addressed. It is incumbent for the government, public authorities, and schools and appropriate agencies at all levels to develop joint plans for developing and providing facilities. In addition, there is a need to explore and maximize communal sharing of facilities owned by local authorities to mitigate the prevailing shortage.
To address the problem of the inadequacy of PE teachers, more financial resources need to be channeled by the government toward the training, employment, and remuneration of PE teachers to drive PE programs in the country. To ensure adequacy of PE teachers in the country, the government will need to expand the teacher training institutions. The future focus for institutions that train PE teachers will have to be PE pedagogy, skill development, and content related to health. This approach in PE teacher preparation will empower potential teachers to assist youth in preventing and managing the emerging problem of obesity and overweight.

Due to the emphasis on excelling in examinations in academic subjects, Kenyan children tend not to be keen/active during structured PE lessons. However, most of them are often physically active during out-of-class sessions. Therefore, nonstructured physical activity (which allows for free play) can be used to reduce obesity among Kenyan children needs to be explored. Ways by which such nonstructured physical activity can be further popularized and promoted as leisure and recreation experiences for youth is by availing more time in schools' daily schedules for learners to participate in the activities and ensuring that PE teachers provide the necessary technical guidance.

Individuals in the field of PE need support from the community for the realization of the objectives of PE and sports. Widening the scope of active input by encouraging teacher–pupil–parent participation in planning programs will make them copartners in sports endeavors. Because parents influence their children, they need to be relied upon to encourage and promote the active and healthy lifestyles of their children. Regular physical activity events that bring together parents and their children in school settings would be useful in encouraging active lifestyles among children and youth. Furthermore, effective teaching of PE in Kenya in the future will depend heavily on the moral and material support of identified stakeholders such as parents, teachers, government officials, local authorities, sports federations, and the private sector. For instance, the training and engagement of coaches and physical trainers as instructors in the out-of-class physical activity programs is imperative.

Kenya's dominance in the middle- and long-distance races in international athletic competitions has spurred youth in various corners of the country to embrace running at an early age. Consequently, the available role models in athletics and other sports disciplines should be used to strengthen the PE program in the education sector. Schools should consider actively engaging the support and services of role models as a means to create and sustain the interest of youth in PE and other forms of physical activity. Moreover, the practice of long-distance running being infused in the recreational and competitive marathon and road races, which are widespread in the country, is a potent way to encourage youth's involvement in physical activity.

The use of mass communication channels such as print and electronic media (radio, television, and Internet) to propagate the message on PE is worthwhile. Radio broadcast has been successful in the transmission of knowledge in various academic disciplines and can be used to broadcast PE, physical activity, and health messages as well. The same media can be an important tool for inculcating a more positive attitude toward PE among youth, parents, and educators. The corporate sector has been keen on providing financial and material support to schools during the annual sports, drama, and music festivals. In view of this positive relationship, schools can improve PE programs as a foundation of competitive sports. The corporate sector could tie their partnerships and support to those schools or institutions that have successfully implemented PE programs. Kenya enacted a new constitution in the year 2010. The new constitution, under the bill of rights, emphasizes children's rights and, more fundamentally, the right to access free education. As further espoused in the UNESCO Declarations, PE is capable of developing the whole child including his or her education. Therefore, policy makers and imple-
menters in Kenya need to recognize and enforce the provisions of the national constitutions and international conventions with regard to the teaching of PE.

The standards and norms for fitness measurement and evaluation in Kenya are borrowed from the Western world, yet the socioeconomic and cultural practices of Kenyan children and the population are different from those of Western countries. Consequently, Kenyan-based norms are needed in order to evaluate fitness through research. This is only possible with the availability of adequate modern fitness testing equipment. More research also needs conducted in physical activity and PE in Kenya so that more new knowledge will be used to improve the teaching and learning in PE and to positively reverse the negative attitudes toward the subject and the marginal status it is accorded in the educational system.

For PE teachers in Kenya to enhance their effectiveness in teaching, as well as be able to assess their learners' extent of success in executing various PE skills and the effect of the PE programs on their wellness, they must embrace modern technology. Indeed, Gibbone, Rukavina, and Silverman (2010) argued that technology use in schools immensely influences the way teachers plan, design instruction, and assess their students. Continuous innovations in educational technology will no doubt continue to have a positive bearing on systems of communication, learning resources, and preparation of PE teachers. However, the teaching of PE in Kenya has not significantly benefited from available technology due to the insufficient availability of the technology; the lack of training of PE teachers on their use and integration in teaching; and to some extent, the lack of interest. The use of modern relevant technology for analyzing human movement and performance must be recognized as important in obtaining data upon which the PE programs can be reviewed and the teaching of the subject can be enhanced. For improved communication, PE teachers should embrace the use of computer programs, Internet programs, and video and other communicative tools as they enter the market. Some of the simple technological tools that are relevant in this aspect include heart rate monitors (for measuring heart rate), pedometers (for measuring distance traveled), DigiWalkers (for counting strides), SportsBrain (for measuring hip undulations and calculating the number of steps an individual takes), Speed Distance Monitors (for measuring distance covered and speed at which one covers a given distance), and many others.

References


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