

## **A Qualitative Inquiry into the Role and Issues of Physical Education in Primary**

### **Schools: Perspectives of Primary School Teachers**

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#### **Abstract**



*The study explored the role and issues of physical education (PE) in primary schools. A qualitative research design was used to investigate the issues. The participants of the study were purposively selected from primary schools teachers (PSTs) in lower Dir Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for collecting data. In this regard, four questions were developed after studying the literature and discussing the issue with the stakeholders. The data collected were analysed through the thematic analysis technique. Analysis of the data shows that physical education is essential for the mental, physical, and social growth of children. Moreover, it keeps students active and they feel happy in school. And physical activities can make students good citizens and useful human beings in the future. However, the study finds that physical education is not taken seriously in primary schools. There are not any dedicated teachers, a proper curriculum is missing and most of the schools lack proper grounds and indoor facilities where the students may exploit their potential.*

**Keywords:** Physical Education; Primary Schools; Issues. Primary Teachers.

#### **Introduction**

Children need not only academic success, but they also need an environment where they learn academic subjects as well as take part in such activities which develop them physically and emotionally. Physical education provides an opportunity to learn not only for playtime, but also to improve their skills, collaboration and develop positive changes in their behaviour. Resultantly, they get life skills, and they are successful throughout their lives. (McKenzie et al, 1998). Physical education is the name of all those activities which enable learners to be physically and mentally fit, attain physical and motor skills (Shephard and Trudeau 2000).

Being the formative years, physical education is essential for primary school children. Physical education is beneficial for children as well for the future of our world. Physical education can help the young generation in varying ways if implemented genuinely, as it can enhance skill-related elements, for instance, speed, quickness, response time, balance, coordination, and basic movement outlines (Valentina et al., 2019), it is significant for students' body, intellectual development, and there are many chances they will be less affected by the health issues, like, obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, moreover, physical activity positively impact the brain, learning and academic success (Shephard and Trudeau 2000).

The school environment provides, with physical education, an ideal place for moulding an individual into a healthy human being in all respects. Hence, it's essential to add Physical Education in true spirit to the general curriculum of school education (Mood et al., 2007; Raiola, 2020; Kalar et al, 2013). Farooq et al., (2020) also assert that teachers of PE are responsible for guiding students towards positive and healthy habits, this nourishes physical, social, emotional, and cognitive skills. PE is a vital course at primary level, like other curricula, and it has a great effect on the growth of children (McCaughy et al., 2009). PE is a significant subject within primary schools and offers potent links to other courses.

Pakistani schools lack essential infrastructure and related facilities for the effective implementation of PE at elementary level. The children and even grown-ups are not even aware of the paybacks of PE and the possible consequences of not carrying out physical activities. And this may be

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one of the reasons for the growing obesity in Pakistan, as Pakistan stands at the 9<sup>th</sup> number in the world. Children and grown-ups suffer from diseases that are the by-products of obesity. The reason is physical education and games are considered an extra activity in schools and mostly it is considered a waste of time. The education system is based on the memorization of content (Farooq et al., 2020). Physical education as a subject is missing from the curriculum. Consequently, the students do not have awareness and specific instruction and practical demonstration of the subject in schools. There are growing cases of obesity in Pakistan, so it also necessitates creating awareness among students about physical fitness, and its benefits. Physical activities increase the likelihood of more focus of learners on their studies, and they may perform better in academic activities (Raiola, 2020).

Physical education is important for a sound mind in a sound body, however, there is no proper system for effective physical education in Pakistan at the primary level; physical teachers at the primary level are not available. In many cases, there are only two teachers in the majority of primary schools, they can hardly teach academic subjects. All these things lead to a narrow perspective of education. It is limited to only games and sports, the broader point of view is missing in Pakistan (Farooq et al., 2020). Hence, the above situation of physical education and its importance for the holistic development of a child, it is worthwhile to investigate the condition of physical education in primary schools. There are a few studies that have investigated the issue from the perspectives of the real stakeholders, PSTs, in a rural area of Pakistan. So the current study investigated the importance and the issues of physical education in primary schools from the perspectives of PSTs. The study highlights the current situation of physical education in the schools. The study has importance for policymakers, curriculum designers and parents.

### **Problem Statement**

Physical education is playing a vital role in primary school children, and it is not limited to sports and games. The realization of the education needs proper and comprehensive efforts from all the stakeholders, however, the situation of Physical Education is not satisfactory. Research has been conducted, but few studies have investigated the issue from the perspectives of PSTs in rural areas in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Hence, the researcher investigated the importance and issues in physical education from the perspectives of PSTs in a rural area.

### **Research Questions**

The research explored the following questions:

1. What is the importance of physical education for primary school students from the perspectives of primary school teachers?
2. What are the issues the teachers face in implementing physical education in primary schools?
3. What measure do the primary school teachers recommend for the successful implementation of physical education in primary schools?

### **Methodology**

The researchers opted for investigating the issue in hand through a qualitative design, as it is exploratory in nature and helps in better understanding of a phenomenon. This design is suitable for exploring the feelings, emotions and thoughts of participants. It is also helpful in discovering new vestas of human understanding about a phenomena. (Campbell, 2020).

### **Participants**

The participants were PSTs in the district lower Dir, they provided in depth details about the issue in the schools. It was appropriate and convenient for the researchers to obtain data from the participants. A total of 10 teachers were selected through purposively selected. The researchers visited the schools personally, and collected data. The participants were interviewed and their discussion was recorded after seeking their permission. T1.... T10 were used instead of the real names of the participants.

### **Research Instruments**

Interview questions were developed for exploring the objectives, role and issues of PE in the schools. The literature was gathered from different sources, reviewed and 4 interview questions were developed for data collection. The researchers took care of the ethical consideration in conducting the study, for instance, informed consent was obtained, the participants were informed before the interview, they knew the purpose of the study, and their names were not shown in public or the research article.

### **Data Collection**

To collect data from the selected respondents, the researchers personally visited different schools and requested the headmaster of the school to allow them to collect data from the respondents. Data were collected through a semi-structured interview technique, which provide an opportunity for the participants to put forth their views in a conducive environment.

### **Data Analysis**

First of all the participants were interviewed, and data were transcribed. The data were thoroughly read and corrections were made, whenever, needed. The data collected were sent to the participants, and they were requested to make changes if there is something in the data which has not been said by them. Three of the participants asked for minor changes in their opinion (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The purpose of the thematic analysis is to carefully sift the data for themes, merging from the data collected. Through this method, the data is refined and the facts, hidden in the data are revealed. In thematic analysis, the basic process is to bring together similar data within the framework of specific concepts and themes. First, data were coded, which tells about the nature of the collected data. And based on codes, themes are identified.

To analyse the data, themes were formed from the data, collected through interviews, and the segmentation of themes was tabulated. During thematic analysis, 06 themes emerged regarding the role of physical education in primary schools.

### **Results and Findings**

After data analysis six main themes were identified, which covered the importance and issues of physical education at the primary level: (i) Psychomotor activities (ii) Activeness, (iii) Lack of facilities, (iv) Curriculum development, (v) Resources, (vi) Physical trainer, (vii) Motivation.

#### **Psychomotor Activities**

Physical education is necessary for improving the physique of children. It keeps them healthy and fresh. Some of the teachers opined that physical activities develop the psychomotor skills of the students, for instance, R1 said that

*“As primary level students are young in age, physical activities help them to develop psychomotor abilities, if they do not take part in such activities, they become lazy”.*

Similarly, R3 also opined that *“... co-curricular activity in school developed students mentally healthy”.*

On the participants said, “It is very helpful for students to enhance the cognitive functioning of students” T4. T6 opined “The students will learn actively and it also enhances the cognitive functioning of the students” similarly T7 opined that “physical activities reduce the risk of developing several diseases like diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular diseases”.

It means that according to the point of view of teachers physical activities develop psychomotor skills of the students, and thus it is essential in schools. Psychomotor development seeks to provide children with several necessary skills to ensure good school performance (Fisher et al., 2011; Stodden et al., 2008). Developing specific skills and necessary abilities is the most important to prevent learning difficulties. At an early age, from 3 to 5 years, preschool children acquire a set of motor skills that enable gradual control of the body. Some of the skills that children need to grow and develop are acquired through natural movement at this age. This period is important for the development of essential movement skills (Gallahue & Donnelly, 2003).

#### **Activeness**

Those students who are involved in physical activities are always active, and look fresh. The same was expressed by the participants of the study. Some of the teachers opined that the physical activities of the students keep them lively and interested in their schooling, For instance, R2 said:

*“As a teacher, I will prepare students not only for curricular activities but also for co-curricular activities. According to my experience if the students are more active and fit, so they can achieve something”.*

*“...through physical activity, the students will act in class. The students are mentally active, fit and refreshed”.*R2, R9.

“Through physical activities mind is refreshed for more learning. It will help students to become more active”. R10

Similarly, R7 said, “physical activities protect the health of students and also provide the best opportunity to play for the national team, and represent the country”.

The teachers shared their experiences that the more students are not aware of the importance of physical activity, the more they demonstrate it by a personal example, and the more physically active their students are. Such children are more active, motivated, and engaged in various forms of physical activity. Children who do not receive adequate motor skill instructions and practice may show a developmental delay in their abilities (Stagnitti et al., 2011; Goodway & Branta, 2003). Hence, it is essential to deconstruct the commonly accepted concepts that sports and physical activities are harmful to academic activities, sometimes supported by academics, and that children are spontaneously active. It means that when students engage or participate in physical activities they will be active, physical activities developed the activeness of the students. The students should be active in the classes. Students who take part in physical activity are always bold and more active.

### **Issues in primary schools**

Most of the respondents shared their views that in primary schools there is not any proper playground, and there is a dearth of facilities for indoor physical activities, games, and sports. Some of them said that there is a ground in their school.

Similarly, R6 said that “Only assembly grounds are available for physical activities and no other facilities are available, we only focus on assembly activities such as jumping and running ,playground, kits, and no other resources for indoor games”...R9 said that “Playground, sea-saw, slider”.R2 said that “: Up to this time, we have only the facility of the indoor game such as badminton, and jumping. We also focus on assembly activities and we constantly motivate students to do exercises, running, in assembly time”. . R3 said that “Ground is available for cricket, football hockey, and tug of war”... R5 said that “Ground and kits are available for physical activities and no others resources are available for indoor games”

From above opinions of the respondents, it is evident that there were many challenges that primary teachers faced in their schools, including overcrowded classrooms, lack of physical education resources, lack or bad state of facilities and equipment, the burden of classes, and negative attitude by parents, head teachers and no specific teachers for physical education (Aslam *et al.*, 2013; kamal et al., 2021).

From the above discussion, it is concluded that most schools only have playgrounds for physical activities and no other resources. Lack of funds, space, facilities and no interest in physical education of teachers were the main barriers to the development of physical education. Whereas some of them are available for indoor activities, they only focused on assembly activities such as jumping and running.

### **Curriculum Development**

Some of the respondents give some suggestions for the improvement of physical education.R3 said “Curriculum should be important for physical education, to engage students every day in physical activities”. Similarly, R5 said “proper course in primary schools is necessary for physical education” similarly R6 said, “Should have the proper curriculum for physical education”. And the R10 said, “Proper curriculum should be adopted towards physical activities”.

All the respondents shared the same views about the curriculum for physical education in primary schools. They told that curriculum should be necessary for physical education. The physical education curriculum is one of the most important features at the primary level.

Raiola (2020) argues that physical education at the primary level is different from education at other levels, hence, it demands special attention, facilities, and care from all the stakeholders. A high-quality physical education curriculum inspires all pupils to succeed and excel in competitive sports and other physically-demanding activities. It should provide opportunities for pupils to become physically confident in a way that supports their health and fitness (kamal et al., 2021).

### **Resources**

Some teachers opined that physical activities and resources are very important to engage students in physical activities. Similarly, R2 said “The most important is the availability of proper ground and resources for physical activities” he also mentioned, “Kits for students because these motivate students and they enhance the student’s participation positively”. Similarly, R3 said, “Government should provide more and more grounds for schools”. Similarly, R4 said, “Physical resources should be arranged for primary schools”. R6 said, “The school has needed a proper playground for physical activities”. Similarly, R9 said, “Need playground for primary school”. And R10 mentioned his point of view “need more playgrounds for students to play games”.

Based on the above analysis this study concludes that resources are very important to engage students in physical activities the lack of adequate school resources for physical activity is a barrier to implementing mandatory policies regarding the minimum accumulated time of intensity of school physical activity opportunities (Dinkel et al., 2017; Nathan et al., 2018). Schools should have a proper playground for students to play cricket, football, hockey, running, and other physical activities so that students positively participate in these activities.

### **Physical Trainer**

Some teachers opined that the physical trainer is most important for physical education in primary schools. For instance, R2 said “Proper time management for physical activities and there should be a proper trainer”. Similarly, R4 said, “There should be proper PT teacher available to give them preferred training”. And the R9 said, “Need a special teacher for physical activities”. Similarly, R10 said, “: Physical trainer is most important in primary schools”.

The role of the physical education teacher is fundamental for the child development process. At this stage, quality teaching practices should stimulate children, considering their characteristics and needs, to help them acquire during the development of several essential abilities and skills (Fisher et al., 2011; Valentini et al., 2019)

In this sense, the current study has highlighted the importance of PE teachers in child development. By analysing the study outcome, we argue that PE teaching is important for preschool children's psychomotor development because it increases their overall development. Hence, from the above analysis, we can conclude that most primary schools do not have a physical trainer. Physical trainer is important at the primary level, to guide students in physical activities. Need a special physical teacher for physical activities.

### **Motivation**

Some of the respondents said that motivation is important for students to do physical activities. For example, R2 “Kits for students must be available, because these motivate students and they enhance the students’ participation positively”... R6 has a shared view “Motivate students for physical activities”... R4 said that “Motivate and encourage the students and show the right way”.

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that, motivation is important for students to engage in physical activities (Beni et al. 2017; Crooks et al.,2021). Motivation in physical education plays an important role which inspires lifelong participation, early positive experiences of play, games, and physical activities should be prioritized for all to lay a foundation of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and motivation necessary for the maintenance of lifelong participation in physical activity and sport. When we motivate children, they will take interest in physical activities.

### **Discussion**

The findings suggest that physical education is important for primary school children. Most of the respondents mentioned that physical activity affects psychomotor skills. Secondly, physical activities help students to become more active in society and class. Physical activity increases classroom work time (Fisher, 2011-Mehr, 2006). Students who participate in physical activities will be healthy, strong, and full of energy. It provides children with opportunities to improve fitness and be active to counter societal trends towards obesity and increased sedentary behaviours (Dinkel et al., 2017; Nathan et al., 2018). Physical education is very important for children according to Bailey (2006) dependable participation in physical activity is associated with a longer and better quality of life, reduced risk of disease, and several psychological and emotional benefits. Also, basic movement skills are taught in physical education classes which provide students the opportunity to apply those skills in a sports or amusing setting. The importance of sports activities for young and old is well supported. According to Ratey-John, (2008) by combining hundreds of scientific studies and research reviews, physical exercise can improve brain function at all ages. Optimize brain cells to maintain and improve brain function so you can learn and focus.

Physical Education also provides students the opportunity to enhance their social and cognitive development. The participants of the research mentioned that, physical activities develop the students’ psychological skills and help children to improve their social skills, and allow children an opportunity to experience success in a unique learning environment (Aslam *et al.*, 2013; kamal et al., 2021). The physical education curriculum is important according to Pagare et al., (2005) physical education curricula, physical education teachers need to focus on students’ attitudes toward physical education. Generally speaking, students have favourable attitudes toward their physical education

teachers and classes. Curriculum development for physical education is important; many participants mentioned that proper courses should be necessary to engage students in physical activities.

### Conclusion

Teachers believed that PE is beneficial as a vehicle for physical activity and positively impact learning and behaviour in the classroom. This study is based on the data analysis and the participant's physical and mental health, strong body, strong will, full of energy. Participants in physical education are satisfied with the importance of physical education, but they face problems just as a lack of inadequate resources, playgrounds, lack of PE teachers and facilities, and a limited offering of physical education programs collectively contribute to the weak and low standard of physical education in Pakistan.

Physical education is an effective way to improve the health of children and has a unique effect on the formation of youngsters' moral character, intellectual development, aesthetic achievement, and healthy lifestyles. The results suggest that a teacher is a key individual that promotes physical activity at school during physical education classes, and integrate physical activity into other subjects, or promotes physical activity during breaks. However, due to a large number of tasks performed, a lack of expertise in physical activity, the priority of other subjects, and a limited focus on physical education, the quality of physical activity promotion is low. Thus, an increase in the number of physical education classes per week, and establishing a position of physical education teacher was highly recommended as well as parents' involvement in promoting physical activity at school.

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