

A History of Physical Education in Zambia

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- A) conception and design of the study
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ABSTRACT

The history of physical education (PE) in Zambia follows the pattern of the history of education in Zambia. Thus, the history of PE in Zambia can be divided into the indigenous period, the colonial period and the post-independence period. "PE" was essential and utilitarian in the indigenous period because it was simply part of the lives of the people at that time. People walked, swam, ran, and were involved in many other forms of physical activity. PE was indispensable. Later, the missionaries provided education to the Africans for the purpose of transmitting the Good News. However, in doing so they rid the Africans of their culture. Africans also wanted to assert themselves in the newly created society and therefore embraced European culture. Eventually, the demand for education grew and many subjects were added including PE. However, while many subjects have enjoyed immense popularity in the country's curriculum, PE has suffered marginalization. Although the subject was taught in schools supported by the mining companies and in private schools with facilities and infrastructure as well as teacher training institutions, it was not examined. Later, the subject was examined at teacher training colleges and the University of Zambia. From 2005, however, major developments have taken place in the area of PE. President Mwanawasa declared that PE should be taught in all schools. The subject was introduced to the primary school examination as part of Creative and Technology Studies (CTS) and most recently as Expressive Arts (EA). It is now also being examined at junior and senior secondary levels. Teacher education institutions have been steadfast in training students in PE. Despite this, the teaching of the subject still leaves much to be desired. It appears that the past as well as the present are vehemently holding the subject down.

KEYWORDS

physical education, indigenous, colonial, post-independence.

Because this article discusses the history of Physical Education (PE) in Zambia, it is only fair to borrow historians' approach of how they inform the masses. One scholar sheds light on how historians do this. In a dissertation reporting on African immigration to Rhodesia, Nziramasanga (1978) opens the discussion with the following citation:

*"When Lord Acton, the noted English historian, urged students of history not only to analyze their sources but also to proceed to sit in judgment on the deeds of the past, he, like many of his contemporaries, challenged historians of all creeds to the task of searching for "what is": the "When", and "Why" of human action"*¹ (Nziramasanga 1978, p. 1).

¹Nziramasanga, C.T. (1978). "Matabele" Thompson's speech to the Fingo People, 1898, NAR, File 3/18/24.

This is how this article attempts to explain the history of PE in Zambia. Not only will it state what happened, it will also attempt to explain how it happened and give reasons for the occurrences.

It is essential to define PE and make it distinct from games and sports. From the many definitions of PE, one that suits this purpose is the one given by Wuest and Bucher (1999):

“...physical education is defined as an educational process that uses physical activity as a means to help individuals acquire skills, fitness, knowledge, and attitudes that contribute to their optimal development and well-being” (Wuest and Bucher 1999, p. 8).

PE is different from games, which are goal oriented and have rules (Suits 1979). Sports, on the other hand, possess all the characteristics of games and in addition require physical skill or prowess (Torres 2014). It can be deduced from these definitions that games, sports, and PE are different despite having similar characteristics. Having established these distinctions, it is now time to turn back to the history of PE.

The development of PE in Zambia can be divided into three stages. In the order of their occurrence they are as follows: the indigenous or pre-colonial period, the colonial period and the post- independence period. This division follows the way education in Zambia has developed from the past to the present. However, borrowing from the history of world PE, one can start by exploring what is known as Primitive PE. This will help the reader catch a glimpse into the past and relate to the present.

Primitive man was unknowingly involved in “physical education.”² This simply means that PE was not thought of as an organized activity as we know it today. Primitive man did not set aside a fixed time for particular physical activities (Zimbabwe Open University 2000). Much of what he did was in the form of physical activities such as walking long distances in search of food, erecting shelters, protecting himself against fierce wild animals, foes, and the adverse environment, and climbing trees or mountains to view faraway places or even swimming across rivers and streams (Wuest & Bucher 1999). The physical activities were mainly performed for the purpose of survival. According to Oberteuffer and Ulrich (1970):

“Movement is essential to primitive man in order that he acquire food, protect himself, and travel- the individual must move to stay alive” (Oberteuffer and Ulrich 1970, p. 23).

However, children engaged in physical activities as part of play. They wrestled, raced, or chased each other and played hide-and-seek and tag (Zimbabwe Open University 2000). Primitive man also engaged in recreational activities like dances on occasions that marked important events such as successful hunting expeditions, post-war victories, religious rites, and initiations (Kakuwa 1999).

PE in Zambia has developed more or less based on influence from both within and outside the country. In pre-historic Zambia, “PE” was mainly in the form of the physical activity of daily life. People lived in clans and moved from one place to another. They were involved in activities such as swimming, hunting, fishing, gathering, and erecting shelters (Snelson 1974).

As man developed further and loitering gave way to a more stationed lifestyle, he began to settle in villages, building semi-permanent structures and making farms where he also raised animals.

Education remained mainly unguided with young boys and girls learning from their fathers and mothers respectively. This was mainly accomplished through observation, imitation, and repetition (Snelson 1974). However, some of it was through direct instruction. Here, too, activities included walking, hunting, fishing, swimming, dancing, climbing trees, and many other forms of informal physical activities.

Other forms of PE activities were introduced that took the form of games. Traditional games came into being, such as nsolo,³ tindi,⁴ and many others still known today (Mufalali 1974; Kakuwa 2005). Mufalali (1974) has attested to the fact that long before the Europeans set foot in Northern Rhodesia the natives were involved in activities such as swimming, wrestling, climbing, ox-racing, and traditional games. Although Blacking (1987) denies that they were games and sports by Western standards, he confirms their existence and even describes some traditional games and sports in pre-colonial Africa.

² Some scholars argue that primitive man’s activities did not amount to PE.

³ A kind of checkers common in most parts of the country.

⁴ A spear-throwing game popular in the western part of Zambia.

Before the advent of colonialism, missionaries appeared in what was known as Northern Rhodesia. The coming of missionary education introduced formal education (Mangan 1987). Schools were built mainly to teach literacy and numeracy skills, which were meant to foster an understanding of the Bible. In the beginning, the forms of physical activity in such schools were mainly those done through apprenticeship skills, like crafts and agriculture, or others such as blacksmithing and carpentry (Snelson 1974). The education was of low quality because it was poorly funded in most cases (Hinfelaar 2007). However, according to Chipande (2009), the missionaries also introduced organized sport to the natives.

Colonial Zambia saw the coming of colonial education. The colonialists had their own form of education for whites only. Whites-only schools included PE activities that were copied from Europe. At around this time, the PE in Europe consisted of games and sports (Zimbabwe Open University 2000).

Europeans were mainly educated in Southern Rhodesia before 1912, although there were small schools for them in Lusaka and Livingstone (Chipande 2009). From 1914, a good number of schools were opened; these offered subjects such as arithmetic, science, geography and English. As part of the curriculum, physical and moral welfare was offered and included medical and dental inspections, hygiene and games. The games included football, netball, cricket, hockey, tennis, etc. (Chipande 2009).

By 1936, more schools were established for Europeans other than those in Lusaka and Livingstone. This is evident in the *Annual Report on Social and Economic Progress of the People of Northern Rhodesia* (ARSEPPNR) of 1936:

“For the education of European children there were, in 1936, controlled schools at Livingstone, Choma, Mazabuka, Lusaka, Broken Hill, Ndola, Luanshya, Nkana and Mufulira, offering primary education up to Standard VII, with the additional subjects, Latin, French, Algebra, Geometry and Science in Standards VI and VII. There were controlled schools at Mulendema and Silver Rest offering primary education up to Standard V” (ARSEPPNR of 1936, p. 24).

Africans were still educated by the missionaries (ARSEPPNR 1937). However, the administration of Northern Rhodesia slowly began to take up responsibility of the provision of education for the Africans. In mission schools and in teacher training colleges PE was timetabled but there were no specific teachers for the subject, especially in primary schools. One setback in the subject was that there was little or no emphasis on its teaching. What was increasingly popular was competitive sport, which was mainly for fitness, fun and a diversion from vices. *Northern Rhodesia’s Annual Report* of 1948 states:

“Football and athletics are becoming increasingly popular amongst Africans, who at some centres have also taken up boxing, golf and tennis. European-type indoor games spread rapidly at these centres” (Northern Rhodesia’s Annual Report of 1948, p. 28).

It is important to state here that although Africans were involved in “European-type” sport, they did not play together or compete with the Europeans until later, as they were not permitted by legislation. In athletics, multi-racial competitions were permitted from 1959, as is rather tragically evidenced in this report:

“Athletics in Central Africa sustained a great loss in the death of the Northern Rhodesia middle distance runner, Yotham Muleya, as a result of a car accident in the United States. His victory over Gordon Pirie and other notable European runners in a three-mile race in Salisbury in December last year heralded a new era in Rhodesian sport with the introduction of multi-racial athletics, and the awarding this year for the first time of federal and national colours to African athletes” (Northern Rhodesia Report 1959, p. 92).

In football, the Africans were only allowed to compete with Europeans three years later. Northern Rhodesia’s *Annual Report* of 1962 explains this dramatic turn of events:

“On the home front tremendous strides were made in the soccer sphere. A multi-racial, semi-professional National League was formed bringing together the best players of both races. The league experienced acute teething troubles of racial, administrative and political natures but came through the season none the worse and probably much better equipped to face the future” (Northern Rhodesia’s Annual Report of 1962, p. 90).

It appears that eventually the Africans got what they wanted and would soon make demands regarding their freedom and their ability to rule themselves.

In the area of PE, it seems that the Northern Rhodesia Ministry of African Education realized the need for enhancing supervision in selected subjects, including PE. Perhaps the Ministry saw the need to strengthen the teaching and learning of these selected subjects. Northern Rhodesia's *Annual Summary* for the Year 1961 states:

"In July a separate inspectorate branch of the Ministry was formed at Headquarters, consisting of two posts of Senior Inspector of Schools and posts for officers with special qualifications and experience in English, Domestic Science, Trades Education and Physical Education" (Northern Rhodesia's *Annual Summary* for the Year 1961, p. 1).

After 1964, education in the new republic was more or less the same. PE was part of the curriculum, which was also influenced by colonial education in many ways (Njelesani 2012; Alexander 1997), although there was more emphasis placed on academic subjects than practical ones. Alexander (1997) narrates the state of affairs at the time:

"Practical subjects are not given a high priority by most teachers at present. It would also appear that technical skills are not fully integrated into the secondary curriculum in that it appears possible to gain the new Zambian School Certificate without taking examinations in practical subjects" (Alexander 1997, p. 88).

Consequently, only the mining schools offered PE. This was because even in the colonial era most facilities were found in major towns in the Copperbelt. However, reforms in the early 1970s enhanced the reintroduction of PE in primary schools and teacher training colleges. Mwanakatwe (2013) points out the contents of the primary school syllabus at the time:

"In primary schools, instruction is provided in the following subjects: arithmetic, arts and crafts, English agricultural science, handicrafts, needlework (for girls only), physical education, scripture, singing, science and social studies (and vernacular where qualified teachers are available)" (Mwanakatwe 2013, p. 128).

Syllabi for PE were available in all schools and teacher training colleges. Despite the emphasis placed on PE in the 1977 Educational Reforms, the subject was still on the back burner. One problem in particular was that it was not examined at both levels. There was a lack of teaching and learning materials in schools, as well as a general lack of understanding among teachers and administrators on the importance of the subject. Parents also, thought teaching PE was a waste of time especially at the expense of the examinable subjects (Mweembe 2006). This went on until the early 1980s. In the mid- and late 1980s PE lessons became a rarity in schools. This state of affairs continued, although there was a shift in emphasis to extracurricular sports activities.

Even though PE was one of the core subjects in the secondary school syllabus (Mwanakatwe 2013), the schools resisted the actual introduction of PE; it must be remembered that the curriculum at this point was academic and examination oriented. The teachers saw no need for adding to the many existing subjects the burden of teaching a subject that would not be examined.

Teacher training colleges, though, had a full-fledged PE program that included locally as well as centrally⁵ set examinations from the 1980s. Despite teachers' rigorous training in the subject, many of these teachers did not actually teach citing a lack of equipment, non-existent infrastructure, and absence of reference books.

Only a few government schools offered PE in the 1990s. An example of one of the schools that had a serious PE program was Munali Secondary School in Lusaka. Mudenda (2017) explains how PE was valued in the 1990s at the schools where it existed:

"The day that I first set foot in my grade eight class at Munali Boys Secondary School in Lusaka in 1992, I was greeted by a timetable on which physical education (PE) was highly pronounced. The attire was clearly defined and everyone was expected to take part in a particular day's activities. Skipping the PE class attracted punishment. The way school authorities took PE

⁵ These were national examinations.

seriously in the past showed that it was as important as physics, biology, maths, history, English, civics, geography, environmental science, commerce, office practice, or indeed any other subject offered in school” (Mudenda 2017, p. 1).

However, private schools offered the subject especially those that were for the more affluent as they had the necessary facilities and qualified teachers. The private schools employed teachers that were from government colleges or the University of Zambia, but enhanced their teaching skills through further training either on site or abroad. This was the case even in schools that were run by the mining companies.

The year 2005 was declared the year of PE and sports by the United Nations (UN). The UN Secretary-General at the time, Koffi Annan, stated this in a message in the UN’s *Report on the International Year of Sport and Physical Education (IYSPE)*:

“To highlight the role that sport can play in our pursuit of a safer, more prosperous, more peaceful world, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2005 the International Year of Sport and Physical Education” (IYSPE 2005, p. 7).

A conference was held in Livingstone as one of the activities to mark the IYSPE from the June 10- 13, 2005. It was during that time that a presidential declaration stated that PE was to be taught in all schools in the country. The UN General Assembly (60th session) was presented the following report of the Secretary-General on August 11, 2005:

“Although a national focal point has yet to be identified by Zambia, President Levy Mwanawasa has announced the re-introduction of physical education into the mandatory school curriculum as a universal pillar to foster education, health and personal development after the Next Step II Conference in Livingstone” (p. 6)

This declaration was reiterated in February, 2006 during a workshop for PE at the University of Zambia.⁶ This helped the revival of PE in schools, as most schools took up their roles. Despite this, more effort was needed because a number of schools still had no PE on their time tables. This was largely due to its non-examinable history. PE has not been in the main examinations at most education levels in Zambia except at teacher education and university levels.

However, the inclusion of PE in Creative and Technology Studies (CTS⁷) from Grades 1-7⁸ has seen components of PE being included in the Grade 7 Examinations for the first time starting in 2009. This was necessitated by a change in policy that sought to solve the problems of an overloaded and compartmentalized primary curriculum. However, more recently PE is taught in Expressive Arts (EA) together with music and art and design at primary school (in Grades 5-7), though it is still being examined as CTS at the end of Grade 7.

Large strides were made by the government in the production of new syllabi for PE for all levels of primary and secondary education in Zambia starting in 2011. At secondary school, the first examinations in PE were written at Grade 9 and Grade 12 levels in the schools where it was introduced in 2015 and 2016, respectively. As has been noted, future major examinations at both primary and secondary levels will now include PE. This is a gigantic step in the history of PE in Zambia. At long last the subject will be examined, and this is the impetus needed to propel the teaching and learning of PE to a greater status.

The history of PE in Zambia shows to a large extent that PE has barely survived the times. In the indigenous period it thrived because it was utilitarian in nature. It was essential to man; therefore man could not do without it. The indispensable character of PE at this time was what kept it alive.

The introduction of formal education killed the utilitarian aspect of PE. It came to be seen as leisure, recreation, diversion, and fun. In essence, PE ceased and was merely sports at this point.

Snelson (1974) discusses the missionaries’ task of uprooting traditional education when they brought formal education:

“Similarly, it is necessary to remember that most missionaries of our period honestly believed that evangelisation meant not only taking the Good News to the people of Northern Rhodesia, but

⁶ The workshop was organized by the University of Toronto and University of Zambia.

⁷ CTS comprise PE, home economics, industrial arts, art and design and music.

⁸ Primary school years.

also attempting to replace African traditional culture and mores with what they regarded as the more civilized standards and ways of living of the western world” (Snelson 1974, p. v).

These views are shared by Mangan (1987) and Watson, Weir and Friend (2005). They agree that the missionaries condemned most aspects of African culture and sought to deliver the “savage” from his waywardness. They used Christianity, formal education, and sports to introduce western culture and suppress indigenous customs, traditions, and other ways of life.

During the colonial period, sport was also used to inculcate western culture. Many Africans in Northern Rhodesia saw that taking part in sport was a way to assert their position in the newly created society. Little did they know that they were ridding themselves of their most valuable possession; their uniqueness and identity. Some resisted, of course, but were met with brutal force that they could not contend with. This led to a subservience that would last for almost a century. Credit, though, is due to the Europeans for introducing sports and games and for laying the foundation for the development of schooling for the Africans.

The post-colonial era, which began after October, 1964, was heralded with the excitement of independence and self-reliance, as well as hope for a new beginning. However, this too was to blame because most of what transpired was crowded by influence from the past. The country continued with its inherited elitist and individualistic education which favored a small minority (Ministry of Education 1976). PE was taught at first, but later faded into the background as other academic subjects were stressed rather than practical ones. Yet again, PE went back to its status of just being sports and games played for fun and fitness.

It was only after the Ministry of Education realized that a particular component that was needed to contribute to the holistic development of a child was missing that PE was reintroduced.

The sidelining of PE in the education system is not a phenomenon unique to Zambia. Many researchers have revealed the declining nature of PE in schools, especially in Africa (Akindutire & Olanipekun 2014; Nhamo & Muswazi 2014; Mulima 2010).

The past has taken its toll on the present, but this cannot keep educators pointing an accusing finger at what is long gone. In fact, the present is also to blame because technological advancements have also made physical activity dispensable in some instances. Labor-saving devices have made man avoid even the most basic of human activity. What is also appalling is that educators have joined the band wagon of those who hardly see the need for PE. Rather than being seen as a necessity, PE has been pushed into a defensive position.

Therefore, while the distant past can be responsible for what happened in the recent past, this cannot be the basis for not changing the status quo. The question of what contemporaries have done to improve the situation that has befallen PE in the education sector must be asked.

Perhaps it is time to make PE different from what it has been. The education sector, with the assistance of researchers, must find ways and means to improve the current status of PE. The importance of PE in the health and wellbeing of the people cannot be overemphasized. It is time the educators and the masses at large joined hands to put PE in its rightful place so as to avert the huge health concerns awaiting us in its absence.

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