Examining child friendly schools model: Reflecting on the sport and exercise pedagogics in Wedza District schools in the Zimbabwean schools context

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Abstract

The study was carried out to establish the extent to which schools could embrace the Child-Friendly Model in the teaching of Physical Education and Sport both inside and outside the classroom using five schools in Wedza District as a multiple case. After the introduction of this Child-Friendly Schools Model into schools through Circular P77 of 2006, there has been a concentration on academic involvement of the child on to this concept leaving out a Physical Education and Sport focus. Failure by educationists to accommodate sport pedagogics that is friendly to the child has exposed the physical education and sport child to numerous abuse that is not in tandem with modern gender discourses enshrined in the United Nations Human Rights Charter, for instance, Belarus Article 32 of 1990. Providers and implementers of educational policies run a risk of failing to practically implement the concept of Child-friendly Schools Model (CFSM) during teaching and coaching/training school children in schools, worse in sport activities. CFSM is a child’s rights based philosophy that demands education providers to be much more responsive to children’s learning rights. However, this study sought to fulfil such objectives as: i) to identify areas in the teaching and learning of Physical Education and Sport to be improved in line with the CFSM in Zimbabwe ii) to draw strategies schools can use to fulfill the CFSM in the teaching and coaching/training school children in physical education and sport. Data were analysed through transcriptions and coding of field notes which formed some themes. Major findings were that the implementers, (teachers and parents) are not oriented to CFSM concept, and Zimbabwe schools are not well equipped to fully implement this concept of CFSM. Study has concluded that language used in text books and by teachers during learning processes is not gender responsive, class teachers are not oriented to Child Friendly Schools Model, and 100% of Zimbabwe schools are finding it difficult to adhere to Child Friendly Schools Model due to financial constraints and disorientation. Therefore, the study recommends school-based workshops on CFSM monitored by the Ministry of Education in all districts. Physical Education and Sport as a science subject must be examinable since it enhances Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics principles (STEM). Gender activist groups should participate in the CFSM advocacy. There is a need to revise primary school text books to be responsive to gender issues in all subjects.

Key Words: Sport, Gender, Equity, Pedagogics
Introduction

There is clear failure by schools in Zimbabwe to accommodate the principles of the Child-Friendly Schools Model (CFSM) specifically in the teaching and learning of Physical Education and Sport. The model remains a paper document sometimes skewed to academic subjects at some very few schools. Of relevant concern, Zimbabwe is a signatory to the United Nations declarations and conventions on the Child’s rights of 1990, for instance, the Sustainable Development Goals 2 and 3 which focus on the elimination of all forms of discrimination, and gender disparity in education, but until to date the concept is still facing full implementation hitches.

The then Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture in Zimbabwe through the Secretary’s policy circular P77 of 2006 directed all schools in Zimbabwe to adopt the Child-Friendly Schools Model. The purpose of this model was not simply to get children into schools, but also to ensure the achievement of high levels of access to education, quality education and high efficiency for all children in all subjects of their choice. The essence of this CFSM is based on the principles of children’s rights as a fulfillment of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) and educational ideology like Zimbabwe’s Education for All (Zvobgo, 1989, ZANU PF Election Manifesto 1980). Further to that, Child Activism episodes by Msasa, Childline, UNICEF, Ministry of Health and Child Welfare, Child and Law Foundation, FAWEZ, Child Protection Society and others (UNICEF, 2002), have given much support to the invigoration of educational rights of the child in schools, hence, supporting the implementation of the CFSM.

Unfortunately, there is virtually no any empirical research undertaken to date to verify the extent CFSM has or could be implemented in the pedagogics of Physical Education and Sport in schools, yet this field is too wide and that is where largest number of school children participate and might be exposed to abuse by teachers, coaches and trainers or the education system itself. Therefore, it is this knowledge vacuum that made this study to focus on areas that need improvement and provide strategies to implement effectively the CFMS in the teaching and learning of physical education and sport in schools.

Statement of the problem

The introduced Child-Friendly Model for schools is clearly not implemented in the teaching and learning of Physical Education and Sport, leaving children exposed to abuses of their rights by the teachers, the coaches/trainers and the education system. This has made some children resenting participating in the learning of this subject.

Research questions

1. What are the tenets of the Child-Friendly Schools Model?
2. To what extent are the tenets being violated in the school system?
3. Which teaching and learning strategies can be used to improve the teaching and learning of Physical Education and Sport in line with CFMS principles?

Objectives

1. To identify the CFMS tenets.
2. To explain the extent to which CFMS principles are being violated by the education system in Zimbabwe schools.
3. To draw up strategies to implement CFMS in the teaching and learning of Physical Education and Sport in schools.
Significance of the study

This study sought to empower school children and enlighten the school authorities, policy makers, teachers and coaches with and on the implementation of the Child-Friendly School Model as one of the modern teaching and learning trends so that they are better placed to avoid child abuse at school. The research document would be distributed in school libraries, and workshops would be contacted by the researcher on the findings and recommendations. Non-governmental organisations, which are child responsive could also benefit from this document online.

Review of related literature

This section of the study made references to the conceptual framework, and what other authors have said concerning the same research questions which became subheadings in the review of related literature. Gaps were raised and some ideas critiqued to provide deeper arguments in this study.

Conceptual framework

Philosophers, such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Basedow, Froebel, Herbart, Pestalozzi and others put together arguments which in many ways are providing the underlying framework or principles for all current world wide educational reforms including the Child Friendly Schools Model. The centrality of their standpoint was opposing the old curriculum imposed on the child, loaded pupil’s memories with dead facts, passive learning, stressed mechanical drill and memorization and was teacher-centered. All these made the school a hostile place. Once a school is Child-Friendly, it is committed to upholding children’s rights under the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child. This is why this study views the practice of the CFSM as critical and a must.

The Child-Friendly Model propounds the pedagogy of learning to be inclusive, gender-responsive, child-centered, health-promoting, protective environment and community involving, (UNICEF, 2006). These approaches are intended to increase children’s right to learn. Currently, the CFS framework is in use by many UNICEF country programs in all geographic regions and by many national and NGOs, all of which are striving to adapt CFS to suit many different local contexts, (National Education Quality Initiative, Human Science Research Council Report, 2006). Cobbolt, (2011), posits that Child-friendly school approach focuses on providing children with optimum conditions and learning environments and experiences that develop their potential to the fullest extent possible. It is unfortunate that there is too much skewedness towards academic subjects in the implementation of this model, leaving the teaching and learning of physical education and sport not applying the tenets of CFS, yet that is where most child rights are abused. Therefore, it is the intention of this study to highlight areas of child rights abuse in sport and come up with some formidable strategies to address the system.

Child friendly school model tenets

Inclusivity

Inclusive school is used to mean integrating pupils identified as having special educational needs (SEN) into mainstream school, (Gary, 2003). However, UNICEF, (2005) contends that inclusion has become a wider commitment to all pupils, regardless of their socio-economic background, gender, language and ethnicity or cultural background. Campell (2002) views inclusivity as representing a general commitment to human rights irrespective of ability, gender
or ethnicity. He/She further advances the fact that inclusivity provides a focus for tackling all forms of discrimination, unfair disadvantage and exclusion.

The above schools of thought, although not specifically mentioning the learning of any school subjects, pave way for other subjects looked down upon by curriculum implementers like teachers. The teaching of Physical Education and Sport at school level is devoid of addressing this tenet of inclusivity at school. For instance, marginalised groupings like the girl child, because of the nature of her dress, unlike the boy child in a short or trousers, is not adventurous, meaning to say cannot move or demonstrate freely in certain sport and exercise skills during learning process as demanded by the teacher. For instance, during jumps, girls’ pants are exposed and boys are often heard laughing and jeering at the girl child, leading the girl child refraining from talent show-casing anymore. Such scenario shows sport as an activity not addressing the needs of the girl child in terms of correct attire at school level.

It was observed by the researchers that most schools have no ramps for those physically disadvantaged learners into and out of the classrooms, at the toilets found at playfields and some playfields have some steps that lead children to these pitches, yet ramps are a requirement at any learning center from disability activist perspective like Booth and Ainscow (2002).

**Academically effective**

Teachers at a child-friendly school encourage classroom participation and adopt interactive, child-centred, gender-sensitive and effective teaching methods. This approach provides children with relevant knowledge and skills not just for surviving but also for thriving in life, (UNICEF, 2008). This argument encourages teachers to use several teaching approaches enshrined under renowned philosophies by Dewey (1922), Rousseau (1956), in Barker, (1986). Jannassen (2009) who advocates constructivism which is active participation of the child, the child being at the center of manipulating the learning environment and discovering new knowledge. If Physical Education at a school is taught following such methods whereby the child learns through encouraged to handle sports equipment, demonstrating the skill dynamics as individuals, pairs and groups, learners gain much cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills.

Mugari and Masocha, (2015) has revealed that learners who participate in sport activities at school excel better in academic subjects also as they are always closer to their trainers who are the teachers also. Therefore; schools which encourage children to love sport are fulfilling one of the CFSM tenets of offering children opportunity to be academically good. Unfortunately, most Zimbabwean government and council schools do not examine PES as a subject which renders those children good in sport useless.

**Safe and protective**

This CFSM tenet ensures that all children can learn in a safe and protective environment. UNICEF (2006) increasingly supported strong violent-prevention policies and innovative mechanisms that allow pupils to report abuse. In Zimbabwe, cases of child abuse involve improper association by teachers with school children, child rape at school, corporal punishment, early child marriages. All these are forbidden by Acts of Parliament and distributed to schools through circulars and statutory instruments. In Tanzania and Rwanda, extra-curricular clubs called *Tuseme* (Speak Out), provide a platform for learners to gather in peer groups and share experiences and views on how to protect themselves from child abuses at school and during sport participation where freedom could mutate into bodily abuse. Such platforms are not common in Zimbabwean schools, instead there is a subject known as Guidance and Counseling, which gender
Health-promoting

Participation in sport requires much energy, therefore; sport learners or participants at a CFS deserve nutritional and health care foods that are mostly energy-giving. Nutritionist advocates for supplementary feeding schemes in schools especially in countries affected by climatic changes. This recommendation falls short in most schools, for instance, Zimbabwean schools in drought-stricken areas. A decent meal such as lunch must be provided particularly to the OVCs. A health promoting school which is healthy for children, teachers, parents and is seeking-promotes physical, mental, emotional health, life-skills and HIV and AIDS, gender-based violence education. It is a healthy school where girls and boys learn from a quality learning environment, for instance, adequate and separate toilets for boys and girls with water as sanitary facilities at sport fields, friendly again to children with disabilities. One child activist with Shamwari Yemwanasikana Advocacy Group, goes on to suggest provision of sanitary-ware for the sports-girl and adequate supply of safe water at the grounds.

Community linkages and partnerships

A child-friendly school is involved with families, promotes community partnerships. The school should purposely develop a school/community plan which can be utilised as a tool for mobilising for quality education and provides an opportunity to clear definition of roles and responsibilities of various partners. This strategy deals with the whole child, young person, before, during and after class, is family focused supportive of parents, encourages local partnerships in school-based management and governance as it works with others with constant attention to children and young people’s rights, to promote child-friendly spaces. The community should be involved in activities which improve the performance of girls, boys and young people. Creating synergies is enshrined in the Sport Policy Draft of 2016 (Priority Area 9.2, p. 22).

Chiome and Mupa (2012) contributed to this notion of linkages by encouraging schools to conduct School Open Days, End of Year Prize Giving Days. Advantages enjoyed by such schools are that parents would support infrastructural development of the school such as construction of adequate sport facilities, to the extent of hiring sport specialist teachers, a practice common at affluent schools like Watershed College, PeterHouse, and Gateway, among others.

Furthermore, once the school accommodates the school leavers back into school’s sporting activities and sport administration, on one hand the school is viewed as part of the community assets, thereby, enjoying security against vandalism from thugs and intruders from the same community. Certain sport donations may come from the school leavers who constitute the alumni of that school.

Research methodology

Research Paradigm

The study took a qualitative approach to solicit information used as the study’s data given by the rich informants. As Silverman, (2011) has argued against quantitative approach, this qualitative approach has provided a deeper understanding of a social phenomenon (the Child-Friendly Model), where and how the tenets of this model were being breached by teachers, coaches, educationists, parents as well as by the Zimbabwean education system today.

Such purportedly deep understanding of
the phenomenon rose through studying and mapping very different territories such as participants’ inner experiences, language, narratives sign systems and forms of social interactions.

**Research design**

This study has employed multi-case study as an appropriate design. Stake (1994) in Gray 2010, p. 168), posits a case study as one of the strategies of enquiry which studies a specific ‘bounded’ system, for instance a person or institution. This study focused on selected number of schools as a case whose operations can be generalized to other schools in Zimbabwe. The integration and contrasting of different perspectives from rich informants has enabled building up of rich and detailed understanding of a context (Child-Friendly-School-Model).

**Population**

The population that was identified from which a sample was selected involved coaches in schools, Heads of schools, class teachers, School Development Committee Members, the District Education Inspectors and students since these were true implementers of the CFSM.

**Sample and sampling techniques**

The sample was not conclusive, it was dynamic, ad hoc or phasic since one informant or piece of information led to another source of data, and therefore, there was no sample size. Purposive sampling was deemed most appropriate technique in this ethnographic study. Informants with rich information were roped into the study. Class teachers, Heads of schools, District Education Officers, and students were conveniently chosen because of their intense involvement in the actual teaching and learning process from which the researcher checked the extent of CFSM implementation.

**Data generation**

Interviews and observations were the procedures deemed suitable and effective in this study to solicit data from the sample. The use of these techniques afforded opportunity for triangulation of the data and provided chance for creating trustworthiness of the findings. Trustworthiness of qualitative research is witnessed by credibility of description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation or other form of account, (Maxwell, 1996). Therefore, coming up with a practical package of CFSM for schools which was well explained, easy to interpret and implement during teaching and learning of Physical Education and Sport would exhibit trustworthiness of this study.

**Data analysis**

The data were presented qualitatively. The analysis took the form of transcribing data recorded from interviews, and collating notes from observation. As recommended by Daymon and Holloway (2002), data were segmented into coherent themes. Coding was developed by the researcher as the data were being read and understood into their commonalities. The generated data were intensively discussed so as to come up with formidable conclusions and recommendations.

**Discussions of major findings**

**Tenets of CFSM**

From the interviews and observations conducted, a general consensus was that all schools in Zimbabwe are finding it difficult
to meet the tenets of the Child-Friendly Model. That has been attributed to economic demise being experienced by Zimbabwean communities from the concept’s inception to date. The concept of CFSM is country-wide known and accepted, but the actual implementation hits a snag because most of the existing text books in schools have not been revised in terms of their language terms which are still not gender responsive. This has been noted on language terms like headmaster, sports-master, batsman, sportsman, policeman, class-monitor, even at a school where females hold these posts the words do not change. The impact is that the girl child is trivialized or stereotyped and socialised that such leadership posts are for men only and is not motivated to be one.

Violating CFSM in schools

The issue of socialising girls to be gentle, meek, aesthetic deters girls from engaging in muscular sport like rugby, boxing, marathoners as these demand the body to be muscular, a stature that females think men do not admire as marriageable stuff. This perception was common in all school girls and boys studied in this research and it concurs with what Anyanwu (1980) in Amusa, Toriola and Onyewadume (1999, p. 281) has found that girls are regarded as weaker sex whose natural charm, beauty, and femininity may be destroyed by participating in vigorous activities. The belief that girls should behave gentle, shy, fragile, conventional and subordinate to the male sex as gathered by Adedeji (1978) in Amusa et al, 1999, p.181) has also been echoed in this study among boys and girls in schools.

The above sentiments are testimonial to the weakness of the schools cultures which are failing to demystify the stereotypical notions that disadvantage the girl child and disqualify the schools from implementing the CFSM as required by the tenets of the CFSM.

On the aspect of inclusivity, it emerged that those children with disability challenges, schools were not responsive to the plight and needs of these learners in the area of PES. The schools cited the reason of having few numbers of the disabled at school, therefore could not afford to spare the meager resources on such an insignificant population. Such a notion tantamount to being inconsiderate and verifies the schools’ weakness already in relation to CFSM implementation. It was observed that noschool had sport facilities and equipment for the physically challenged learners among the studied ones, no matter having enrolled such learners.

It also emerged that sports grounds were far from school toilets, and those toilets had no water for proper healthy conditions as expected by health officials. The failure to provide toilets nearest to sports arena infringes the right of the child, especially to the girl-child who finds it difficult during menstruation days. Instead, it became a common practice for the girl child to drop participating in sport activities during such hard times.

It also emerged that hegemonic masculinity discourses as observed by Kirk, Cooke, Flintoff and McKenna (2008) impact negatively in the teaching and learning of Physical Education and Sport on the aspect of negative attitude by the child, the teacher and the parent, maybe because of this subject not examinable as yet, since 1980 to date in Zimbabwe. Those sport talented children are denied an opportunity to excel and develop their skills for their future employment in the field of sport, recreation and sport tourism. This means school system was not yet able to value-add our children at tender age in terms of talent development.

Ninety (90%) of the schools do not see any relevance of maintaining community linkages in terms of sport development. The CFSM views such a synergy as beneficial to both the schools and the learners as it encourages children to do sport by emulating
their off-school brothers and sisters as well as providing security to sports facilities at school because the community would feel ownership of the school sports facilities.

Conclusions

From the findings above, this study made these conclusions:

1. The state through the Ministry of Education realises the importance of CFSM as depicted by several legal frameworks introduced in the education sector, but, the implementation of this concept in sport is at its lowest rung as it needs substantial financial support.

2. Sport administrators and sport teachers have lack of orientation about the concept of CFSM. That might be contributing to abuse of child-rights in physical education and sport.

3. Girls suffer more than boys in their quest to participate in learning this subject of Physical Education and Sport Science and Recreation.

4. Language used in current text books advance gender stereotyping and socialising children to have negative attitude towards determining to develop sport skills.

5. Failure by school system to be child-friendly in sport learning activities leads some children to hate sport at school level.

Recommendations

Strategies

1. All schools should be well equipped with human resources, technical equipment, science laboratories that enhance STEM knowledge development and promotion.

2. Since the government recognizes the importance of the CFSM, with assistance from world-bodies like UNICEF, the monitoring and evaluation of this CFS concept should be invigorated, particularly to develop a procedure/tool to assess at school, community and system level learner achievement through child-friendliness.

3. School-based workshops must be carried out by the Ministry of Education to orient teachers and the community as vital implementers of this concept.

4. There is need for revising school text books language so that the terms used can be gender-responsive.

5. Reasonable participation by every child into sport would only be achieved once the Ministry of Education has recommended Physical Education Science and Recreation as an examinable subject in schools.

References


Belarus Article 32 of 1990.


MOSEC Policy Circular P77 of 2006


UNICEF (2002)

UNICEF (2006)


UNICEF (2008)
