



STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON PHYSICAL EDUCATION PRACTICAL ASSESSMENTS ON THE OVERALL QUALITY OF THE BSC-PES: A CASE FOR MASVINGO REGION, ZIMBABWE

Gondo Thembelihleⁱ

Department of Physical Education and Sports,
Zimbabwe Open University, Masvingo, Zimbabwe

Abstract:

The study sought to establish students' perceptions on Physical Education (PE) practical assessment on the overall quality of the BSC-PES Programme. The study employed the descriptive survey design to collect data through questionnaires and interviews. A purposive sample of 30 students was used in the study. Results indicated that practicals played a major role in the BSc PES programme. The study found out that practicals strengthen the PE programme and these practicals are always well handled by their tutors. Students expressed their satisfaction in the challenge that these practicals give them and they appreciated the fact that they are given ample time to practice before assessment as this ensures quality of performances. However, the study also revealed that time allocated for Weekend schools was not adequate for students to master some of the practical aspects in their practical courses. Students however expressed their concern and dissatisfaction in the fact that ZOU does not provide them with equipment to carry out their practicals. The study recommended that Practical remain a major component in the BSC-PES programme to ensure quality of the product. The study also recommended that ZOU could consider levying PE students' practical money so that basic equipment to be used for practicals could be bought and kept by the University.

Keywords: PE practical assessment, quality, practical aspects, criteria

1. Introduction

Historically general lack of assessment characterized PE and mostly informal assessment were not directly related to skill performance. Skill assessment in physical

ⁱ Correspondence: email mathegondo@gmail.com

education is a process that focuses on measuring the individual as he/she performs a skill for different purposes. This may assist to move to the next skill which is a bit more challenging. Masters (1994:2) asserts that measures of student performance are central at all levels of education to any consideration and effectiveness of educational provision. PE is therefore no exception to this assertion and suffices to add that practical assessment should part of all practical learning. BSc PE ZOU students engage in these practical assessments so that they may be able to proceed to the next level of their course. Besides personally benefitting, these practical skills may also be taught and demonstrated at their work places with ease and as such, the quality of teaching the subject would be enhanced. McDonald and Brooker in Kirk and Tinning (1990) observed that the lower status of physical education has been largely due to devaluing of the practical aspect against traditional 'academic subjects.' The practical aspect of physical education needs to be stressed and emphasized so that graduates from the university appreciate it and also implement and stress it at their own stations when they qualify. Gipps and Murphy (1994) posit that opportunities that are given to students to demonstrate their best level of performance are limited. It is hoped that as more practical assessment opportunities are availed to Zimbabwe Open University students, quality of performance would also be enhanced as commitment and effort would be improved.

2. Statement of the problem

Practical assessments are an integral part of the physical education and sport as they help evaluate the practical skill level of a student in an area that has been covered for the course.

3. Purpose of the study

To establish students' perceptions on PE practical assessment on the overall quality of the BSc PES programme.

4. Background to the study

In the BSc PES at the Zimbabwe Open University students, register for four courses one of which should be a practical subject per semester. Students must be assessed in these practical so as to ensure that they understand both the theoretical aspect of the syllabus. According to University regulations, a student must score at least 50% in the practical

and those who do not avail themselves for the practical assessment automatically. This is in line with McDonald and Broker in Murphy (2005) who observed that students have to do well on both academic and physical tasks since the subject demands mobility and proficiency in both. Besides it being a requirement student themselves should feel a sense of achievement in being able to perform these practical tasks successfully. Students are issued with practical task so that they may go and practice before they present themselves for assessments. The University by its nature of being an Open University does not provide students with equipment but it only avails facilities where these practicals can be performed. Hay in Kirk et al (1990) advocated for quality of movement to be assessed. Thus, it is crucial to identify the focus of the area to be assessed as quality of student learning will be largely enhanced through practical involvement. Competent performance of movement must be correctly captured as a process as students perform the identified skill. For example, a skill of discus throw can look at preparation, release; follow though broken down during assessment. Assessment guides instruction for quality and helps to improve students' ability to acquire knowledge (Wright & Mars, 2004).

5. Research questions

- What are your views of Physical Education practical assessments in your BSC-PES programme?
- How would you rate the quality of your practical assessments in your programme?
- How far do these practicals challenge you?
- Which aspects of these practicals would you like to be improved?

5.1 Objectives

- To examine students' views on the practical assessments in their BSC-PES programme.
- To assess students' value of PE practicals in their programme
- To assess the quality of PE practical assessments in their BSC-PES programme
- To examine the extent to which these practicals challenge them
- To suggest the aspects they would like to see improved in their practical assessments

6. Assessment

Assessment fundamentally involves the collection of information which varies in scope, depth, reflecting the process used and purpose of that information (Smith, 1997). On the other hand, Siedentop and Tannehill (1999) see assessment as a variety of tasks and settings where students are given opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge, skill, understanding and application of content in context that allows continued learning and growth. Assessment is done to improve curriculum instruction and it is important in physical education to create the best assessment tool (Brown and Hopper, 2006). Practical assessments must therefore match specific instructional intentions of the program. Since PE is performance based, performing a practical skill should be a priority when assessing in PE. Johnson (2005) observed that student's ability to perform a skill must be assessed and this type of assessment should be developmentally appropriate. Furthermore, identified predetermined criteria should be in place and students must be informed on what is to be assessed since this assessment is part of learning a task. It is through quality of these practical assessment tasks that we can be able to ascertain whether students are learning what we set out to teach (Hopple, 2005). Thus, students in PE must demonstrate their capacities in the selected areas for the program.

Students must demonstrate their capabilities in practicals when given authentic and achievable task as they attain the most in the assessments. Specific meaningful and achievable outcomes should be set for learners for their benefit. Assessment in PE helps to measure student's current levels of ability, progress and their own skill proficiency (Rudner & Schafer, 2002). This is bound to encourage further improvements, progress, achievement, confidence and feelings of competence and better attitudes to learning PE (Grant & Long, 2009). Wright (2000) argues that practical knowledge is a legitimate kind of knowledge and can therefore not be judged to be inferior to academic study since it is a distinctive kind of knowledge. Thus, theoretical knowledge becomes practical in its application, valued because it can improve performance. All PE activities involve elaborate patterns of movement, procedures, and methods of play or performance which govern the manner in which the activities are pursued and make it possible to engage in them with skill, application and discernment.

6.1 Awarding grades

It is critical for assessors to be objective when they assess practical performances since these practicals have a huge contribution towards students learning. Students will demonstrate their understanding of movement concepts, principles, strategies, tactics in

the performance of physical activity and assessors should be able to follow set criteria to come up with a suitable grade. Participation focuses on the high quality of performance as well as the ability by students to replicate activities or sequences with ease. Students must also perform at maximum level in terms of accuracy if they are to be awarded good grades. There are important elements that make assessments authentic and before awarding grades the tutor has to ensure that the complexity of the task is within students' ability so that as many facets as possible can be measured simultaneously in the practical area chosen (Frey, Schmitt & Allen 2012).

Accuracy, body control, spatial awareness, form/tension, tactical approach and general application of these skills during performance are some of the aspect that can be measured Hay (2009). Students find themselves in a situation whereby they are able to assess their capabilities versus given criteria. They therefore measure their practical knowledge level, skill and understanding of their practical skills. This is likely to improve the quality of their performance and they will be able to reflect on the practical aspects so as to be better teachers or demonstrators of practical aspect of skills. There is however a need to ensure that effective assessment strategies are in place for adult learners to be adequately challenged. Key to the issues of practical assessments is that the main focus of the assessment should be maintained.

Minta (2003) argued that traditional assessment in Physical education neglects the great variability among students making it difficult for some students to keep pace with Physical education activities. This might not be the case with this level of students who are prepared to commit themselves and excel in the selected practical area for assessment. Outward behaviours will be measured and determine one's grade motivating students to learn, improve performance and display their expertise. Students are bound to apply techniques across different sports and physical activities as well as apply principles of effective performance to their own practical work. Since these students are adult learners, they are bound to analyze and improve performances when measured against their own previous performances. Awarding grades would also ensure that they develop knowledge and skills in a range of physical activities. Judging success will vary on initiative, creativity, and innovativeness on how the performer will exceed the set criteria. Observation of that engagement by experts who in this case are tutors, will determine what constitutes excellent practical knowledge and judge success. Consistency of performance has to be present through practice so that techniques are turned into habits in practical performance grading. Practical knowledge is therefore distinctive and a skill that is simple may not necessarily mean it was easy to master for grading. Thus, the performance itself will be assessed and graded as a whole according

to set criteria that define and characterize the performance. Final grades reflect a total picture of how well students have met the domains (Lund and Kirk, 2002).

7. Methodology

Walliman (2005) says a descriptive survey research answers questions like who, what, where and why and how in an attempt to address a given phenomenon. Leedy (1980) says a survey is an excellent and orientation prevalent on a large population. Leedy (1980) further argues that the descriptive survey method can be used to select information and attitudes of individuals to a given situation within an organization. Neutens and Robinson (1997) assert that the most important aspect of the descriptive survey method is its strength to investigate the present status of the problem hence referred to as the study of status by Thomas Nelson (1996). Open ended questionnaires were used to get information from respondents engaged in practical assessments at ZOU. The study was limited to those students who were registered in the BSc-PES programme in Masvingo Region. All registered students who had at least one practical subject which they had registered and had been assessed in previous semesters were targeted as the sample.

7.1 Analysis data and discussion of results

A. What are your views of Physical Education practical assessments in your BSC-PES programme?

PE is practical in nature and as such students felt there was need for more time towards practical work to enhance their performances when they graduate. Students felt that these practical assessments were of great value to them and saw them as a very important aspect in their course as they gave them a picture of what they should impart to teams and individuals in their teaching and coaching engagements. This is in agreement with observations that through engaging in practical performance assessment students become increasingly effective in the performance of physical education activities (Thornburn, 2003). Students felt they needed more practicals so as to do well in their practices. Practical were seen to be very helpful as they helped them master the game itself. There was a general feeling that time given was inadequate as respondents felt they needed time to be taught basic skills before assessments. These practicals empowered them with the right practical skills to impart to their students when they complete the course. This is in agreement with observations that practicals enable students to become increasingly competent through being engaged in a range of

physical activities (Thornburn, 2003). Practicals were a noble idea as they enlightened students on aspects they will not be aware of.

B. What is the value of Physical Education practicals to you as an individual?

The value of Physical Education practicals was seen as a way of improving the quality of professionals and a good way of evaluating one's practical performance. They were seen as a valuable way of enabling students to attain the ability to be able to demonstrate to learners. Practicals are seen as a way of helping students in their physical fitness. Again, as a way of helping students acquire more skills in all sporting disciplines offered by their degree programme. Respondents felt that practicals were very good and should be encouraged since they covered the most essential components of the courses with practical aspects. This is in agreement with observations that practicals enable students to develop the ability to engage independently and successfully in different types of physical activity (Thornburn, 2003). Respondents felt that theoretical knowledge was sometimes too abstract and could not be easily understood without practical exposure. As PE specialists students felt that one should be able to play and coach the skills and a good coach must play the game well. Respondents felt practicals assisted every student to be better coaches as they improved through hands on experiences. Practicals helped a coach in the nurturing of good athletes and students felt there was need for them to engage in more practicals than theory as this would help them polish up their practical skills for better performances in the field. They felt that practicals made them experts and improved their ability to demonstrate as they enhanced practical knowledge in the field of study. Practicals also helped students to develop and maintain their involvement in physical activity (Thornburn, 2003).

C. How would you rate the quality of your practical assessments in your programme?

High quality performance is expected from students and the problem of equipment and some facilities should not reduce the high quality expected. These practicals gave confidence to students when demonstrating skills back at their stations and they were therefore seen to be very valuable. Good and difficult skills in some instances were selected and students got corrected and they learnt in the process. Students felt that as learners they always want to know the criteria by which their performances will be judged and this was provided to them when they got their practicals to go and prepare. This is in agreement with observations that learners enjoy practicals when they are given set criteria to be used (Lambardi, 2008). These practical assessments were done thoroughly since students were given practicals that were administered in one day in

the whole country although they felt there was no adequate time to do practicals during lecture time in the Open and Distance learning environment. Thus, students observed that the issue of time resulted in some of them performing below standard especially those who could not get the assessment criteria on time. Those who got their criteria on time to guide their work had a deeper understanding of the assessment task resulting in high levels of achievement (Gardner et al., 2008). High quality equipment exposed students to high quality performance and improvisation due to lack of equipment may not depict the standard of performance expected. Good and fair assessment of high quality and challenging is practiced by lecturers who assess these practicals. The rubric provided students an opportunity to reflect on the criteria of the task that would assist in leading to the assessment of the task (Gardner et al., 2008). As such, practical assessments were seen to be highly effective and fruitful and for the good benefit to students. Good quality performance was due to the fact that students were given adequate time for preparation before practical assessment.

D. How far do these practicals challenge you?

Demonstrating some activities can be a challenge and at times, it is very difficult to master some movements for assessment. At times, it is difficult due to lack of practice and hence flexibility and co-ordination to perform these movements especially in gymnastics may be a challenge. Practical are good for students since they are challenging and always ensure that students practice before these assessments. Gardner et al. (2008) argued that knowing and using the criteria for the standard of work required demonstrates to students what they should be giving for and providing them evidence of how judgements about their learning are made. Practical therefore give students the spirit of encouragement and encourage them to keep engaging in practicals so as to become specialists in various selected areas. Students found practicals to be interesting and worthwhile. This is due to the fact that there was clear, explicit rubric/criteria to guide preparation for practical assessments task (Gardener et al., 2008).

Students observed that at times selected activities were challenging and they needed adequate time to practice and prepare before assessments. Respondents felt there were big challenges for ladies who did not have adequate time to practice and join some teams. Students also observed that practical performance assessments allowed the coach to emphasize coaching points when demonstrating. They also mentioned that practical assessments kept them fit and well versed with technical skills as well as improving one's coaching weaknesses.

E. Which aspects of these practicals would you like to be improved?

Since ZOU is an Open and Distance University students only get a maximum six hours face-to-face and from these two hours they are expected to set aside time to be used for practical assessments. These practicals were summative in nature and contributed 50% towards their final mark. A student who failed to attend practical exam automatically failed that particular course. Students felt that they would like to see the time for these practicals increased both for practice and for engagement so that they benefit more. Students also felt that it was easy to assess a well-equipped student. The issue of facilities for cricket and tennis might not be possible to get at venues where these practicals are done and students may use a hard court or loan tennis court which they might not be used to.

Since the situation now is that ZOU does not provide equipment for distance learners and students source their own equipment from their schools or borrow from neighbouring schools, student suggested that rather than having individual assessments group work assessments could be encouraged where the group members got a group mark. While this may be a prudent idea, it is not possible to make it a reality in the wake of reduced numbers and it might mean forming just one group and assessing once and giving a group mark. Assessment cannot be continuous in the six hours since the six-hour slot also includes the theoretical aspects of that particular aspect. Students felt they needed practical skill development but the nature of the programme favoured those students who majored in Physical Education at diploma level.

8. Conclusion

Adult learners find assessment important as it provides feedback to students on programs and mastery of skill. Good assessment and evaluation is premised on the interdependence of instruction, curriculum and assessment and it is important to assess areas of need for the program. Producing relevant informative and immediate feedback to athletes requires one to have a concrete data about how students have developed over the course of time. Direct observation results are immediately available and adult learners are likely to measure own performances against set criteria. Thus, for knowledgeable adult learners like ZOU students, formal timely feedback is likely to put into perspective the physical literacy skills that need to be evaluated at any given time during practical assessments. Linking concepts to be taught with assessment variables will enhance quality in the programs offered. Practical knowledge when looked at holistically is the performance that is all important in assessing whether learners have

practical knowledge or not so as to endeavour to maintain high standards of excellence in Physical education. Thus, this practical performance component should be seen as a powerful form of accountability in the subject area and good teaching should not be inseparable from practical performance assessment.

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