

## ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER

# Challenges in Physical Education Instruction through the insights of Life Orientation Teachers from Secondary schools in the Tshwane Districts of Gauteng

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## Abstract

This study explored the challenges that life orientation teachers face in selected Tshwane secondary schools when interpreting and teaching physical education. With a specific focus on establishing if appointed teachers were qualified to present physical education classes, verify if the teachers attach any value to physical education, analyse the daily challenges and examine whether they could adapt in the classroom and become fully engaged in the physical education curriculum. Data was collected using a qualitative research approach where six (6) secondary schools in the three (3) Tshwane districts of Gauteng were selected with a study population of twelve (12) teachers. Interviews were conducted as a qualitative instrument to obtain the information required, and data was documented by using an audio device in which the audio was later transcribed. The content analysis method was used to analyse the data to gain a comprehensive understanding. This research is significant as the teachers' values insights endorse the issue of the study and the underlying fact that there is a lack of specialised training for the subject of Physical Education, leading to teachers lack of understanding how to teach the essential components within a physical education class to ensure holistic development of the learners. Furthermore, daily challenges outlined by teachers, such as the lack of resources, imply that it becomes the teacher's main educational task to find innovative ways and means to deal with these challenges.

**Keywords:** *physical education, Life Orientation teachers, pedagogical challenges, teacher qualifications*

## Introduction

The comprehensive growth of learners is the main focus of the Life Orientation (LO) subject. This subject encompasses various aspects of learners' development, including their social, personal, intellectual, emotional, and physical well-being and interconnect-edness (Swanepoel & Roux, 2024). In the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), the sub-section Physical Education (PE) is an integral part of the subject LO for all learners in Grades 7 to 12. LO contains six topics: Development of the self in society, Social and environmental responsibility, Democracy and human rights, Careers and career choices, Study skills and PE.

The policy restructuring in the South African public school system witnessed significant PE curricular changes. Firstly, PE had standalone subject status (before 1994) and then became one of eight learning outcomes (Human Movement and Development) in 1997 within Outcomes-based Education (OBE) in the new politically informed Curriculum 2005 (Stroebel et al., 2016; Siedentop et al., 2022). The failure of OBE became evident in 2009 when it was replaced by the Revised National Curriculum Statement (R-NCS) (Grades R to 12), which in turn was restructured in 2010 as the National CAPS document (Stroebel et al., 2016). In January 2012, the official curriculum for the Senior

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Phase and Further Education and Training (FET) in South Africa was outlined in the CAPS 2011 document (Mabusela, 2020). As the current curriculum, CAPS maintained the learning areas with the positioning of PE within LO, which will be implemented over four school phases (Burnett, 2020).

During PE's absence from the school curriculum, concerns regarding health risks among school learners arose, associated with being physically inactive. There seems to be no clear evidence of progress in the prioritisation of PE in the school curriculum or school environment at a national level despite overwhelming international evidence that physical activity and PE in schools is positively associated with academic achievement as well as other desirable outcomes for the individual and the school (Bailey, 2017); (De Beer & Barnard, 2021). PE is a fundamental cornerstone of childhood development, promoting lifelong participation in physical activities essential for holistic health (Roux, 2020). It is widely recognized as a vital contributor to the holistic development of young learners, particularly by fostering physical activity during their formative years (Carse et al., 2017). Participation in sports, as part of PE, plays a critical role in learners' health outcomes, encouraging the development of lifelong holistic learning processes that are cultivated and applied in PE settings (Fang et al., 2021). The benefits of PE are extensive, including the prevention of cardiovascular diseases, improved mental health, and enhanced overall life health outcomes (Fang et al., 2021). The status of PE has deteriorated from a standalone school subject in 1996 to being grouped within the subject of LO in 2002 and then to LO projected as not being a compulsory subject in South African public schools in 2023. Although scholars like Roux and Dasoo (2020), Burnett (2021), and Van Der Westhuizen et al. (2020) explored the state and status of PE in selected provinces of South Africa, evidence-based literature is scarce on the situation in the Gauteng Province of the country. Since the last national research survey on the state and status of PE in South African public schools was undertaken in the 1980s (Burnett, 2018), it became apparent that more recent evidence is needed for Gauteng schools to inform future national policy formulation and strategic decision-making by relevant stakeholders (Goslin, 2020). It is, therefore, further seen in literature that the global survival and revitalisation of PE in schools have been the priority of experts and lobbyists for decades. On the African continent, efforts to reawaken PE have significantly escalated recently (Goslin, 2020).

In the Foundation Phase (Grades R to 3), Life Skills, as referred to, features PE as a learning area where children learn and experiment with basic motor skills linked to games, body movement and free play. The Life Orientation learning area in the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4 to 6) features PE composed of multi-activities linked to games (invasion games), sports (athletics), dancing (rhythmic movement) and swimming (water safety). These activities provide the basis for the Senior Phase (Grades 7 to 9), where manipulating objects, motor performances, fitness and outdoor adventure activities are included as a progression for active living and social outcomes. These are linked to active citizenship in the Further Education and Training Phase (FET for Grades 10 to 12) (Friskawati et al., 2023).

Compulsory time allocation for PE is two hours per week for the Foundation Phase and one hour per week for the other three phases, which may be limited to one class period of about 40 minutes per week in the following three phases (Dobell et al., 2012; De Beer & Barnard, 2021).

LO teaching dominates CAPS, where theory and practice are not linked, and gender-mixed settings in large classes compromise effective teaching and learning (Stroebel et al., 2017 & 2018). South African researchers continue to report the barriers to ineffective PE practices with an ideal model of QPE as a stand-

alone subject taught by specialists. Still, less attention is paid to actionable strategic insights in the short to medium terms (Burnett, 2021). A partnership between UNICEF and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) paved the way for a national research project to produce robust evidence and an in-depth analysis of the PE space in South African public schools (Burnett, 2018).

There is a perspective that PE is being seriously compromised by some of the changes that have taken place in the South African Education system. Rapeta (2019) explains: "The right-sizing of teaching staff at State Schools has resulted in most schools losing their PE teachers rather than staff who taught academic subjects. Schools in disadvantaged areas are worse off than schools in middle-class areas, which are in a position to employ coaches and teachers over and above the quota of teachers allocated to them by the State".

The fact that many schools do not have qualified PE teachers holds specific implications for the status of LO and, more specifically, for the growth and development of learners (Roux & Dasoo, 2020). A teacher not qualified in PE would understand very little of PE programmes and terminology. A drastic decline in PE participation at schools occurred due to a need for more trained practitioners and content understanding. Kahts-Kramer et al. (2022) found that many teachers need proper training, teaching methods, materials and physical facilities to prepare their lessons. A study in selected Western Cape schools showed that only 14% of teachers teaching LO in Grades 8 and 9 had a PE qualification.

## Methodology

In this study, secondary data sourced from a master's dissertation accessed through the university's archives was utilised. Rigorous analytical methods were applied to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data. Leveraging this existing dataset enabled a thorough examination of the research objectives and goals while honouring previous research's valuable contributions to the field.

### Research design

This study adopted a qualitative research approach. The researcher chose a qualitative approach described by van Manen and van Manen (2021). Phenomenological research attempts to answer the question, "What is the meaning and essence of the lived experience of his phenomenology for this person or group of people?" Therefore, the researcher's responsibility was to understand and describe an event from the research participant's perspective.

An interpretive paradigm was used to understand "the world of human experiences" (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p. 36; William, 2024). The researcher interacted with all the participants and wanted to understand their experiences and challenges as they planned and presented PE in their specific schools. The advantage of using an interpretive paradigm is that it "describes how people make sense of their world and how they make meaning of their particular actions" (Christiansen et al., 2010, p. 23; Acharya, 2024; Chevrier, 2024). In this study, reality needs to be interpreted to discover and understand the underlying meaning of events and activities.

### Study sample

The population studied consisted of twelve (12) appointed Life Skills teachers at six (6) different schools in the three (3) Tshwane districts of Gauteng, with two teachers from each school. School selection included two schools in Tshwane North, two in Tshwane South and two in Tshwane West. The sampling was done with a specific purpose in mind. Purposive sampling selects participants representing this study's characteristics (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). Each school's quintile ranking was considered

to have an even spread of participating schools. Although all six participating schools have a quintile ranking of 5, they are all different regarding their socioeconomic class, background, geographical features, location and access to resources. Only teachers assigned to teaching PE as part of LO were included.

#### *Data Collection*

Interviews were conducted as a qualitative instrument to obtain the information required. Data was documented using an audio device during the interviews, and, at a later stage, the interviews were transcribed by the researcher to get as much information as possible.

A set of questions was constructed. Semi-structured, open-ended questions were asked to elicit views and opinions from the participants. The initial questions obtained demographic information; after that, a set of questions was created on the participants' understanding of PE as a topic of LO and how they presented a PE lesson. Questions on the implementation of PE as stipulated by CAPS also formed part of the interviews. Teachers were also asked about the challenges and obstacles in this field. Finally, the participants answered questions on their formal training/education and qualifications. A face-to-face method was used for all interviews, which were recorded to ensure that all data could be appropriately transcribed and analysed.

The following components formed an essential part of the document process of every interview:

- Each participant filled in the "Informed consent form",
- The date, place, interviewer as well as interviewee were documented,
- Procedures were explained to every participant,
- Each interview was recorded to ensure that no valuable data would not be lost in the transcribing process,
- After the interview, participants were personally thanked and handed a note of appreciation for the time and effort taken to form part of the research.

#### *Data analysis and trustworthiness*

The content analysis type of data analysis was used. This entails categorising verbal or behavioural data into classification, summarisation, and tabulation. The content can be analysed on two levels: the descriptive meaning (describing the data) and the interpretative meaning (what the data means). Document analysis is a valuable source of information in qualitative research (Agarwal et al., 2024). According to Creswell (2009) and Lemon and Hayes (2020), data analysis makes sense of the text and data collected.

The researcher followed the six recommended steps in qualitative data analysis by Creswell (2009) and Lester et al., 2020. In step 1, the data was prepared and organised for analysis. This included transcribing the interviews, scanning materials if necessary, typing notes and categorising the data into different types. After completing the initial data preparation, in Step 2, the researcher read through all the data thoroughly to get a sense of the general information obtained from the participants—step 3 involved in-depth analysis with a coding process. Coding involves dividing the material into text sections before assigning meaning to the information. This meant that sentences or answers given by the participants during the interviews were categorised and labelled with specific terms. Step 4 involved creating a description of the setting or people and defining categories or themes. This description allowed for an in-depth interpretation of the information about the individuals. When analysing Step 5, the researcher looked for further relationships and similarities in the descriptions. In the concluding step, Step 6, the researcher interpreted the data. This involved delving into who made statements during the

interviews, understanding the reasons behind those statements, and exploring ways to uncover answers to the research questions.

Content analysis categorically categorised verbal or behavioural data to classify, summarise, and tabulate information. The analysis operated on two levels: the descriptive meaning of the data and the interpretative meaning behind the data (Reyes et al., 2024); Kumar & Ujire, 2024). The data was organised into categories, followed by a deductive approach, where the researcher identified patterns or relationships among the categories. The constant comparison method enabled the researcher to continuously group and continuously compare data to determine similarities and differences (Nicmanis, 2024).

To enhance the credibility of the research, various strategies were implemented. First and foremost, well-established research methods and a design aligned with the research questions were adopted. Creating a comfortable environment for all participants was a priority, achieved through informal and friendly explanations of the research purpose. The researcher employed a well-defined, purposive sampling technique to ensure the selection of relevant participants. Regular discussions were maintained with the supervisor throughout the research process, fostering ongoing guidance and support. Detailed notes were taken during and after each interview to guarantee the accuracy of the gathered information. Additionally, the researcher strived to comprehensively describe the phenomenon under investigation whenever possible. These combined efforts aimed to strengthen the overall credibility of the research.

#### *Ethics*

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Faculty of Education's Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria, South Africa (Ref.: UP 15/09/02). The research followed all relevant ethical guidelines and principles stipulated by the University of Pretoria and adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which governs research involving human participants to protect their rights, safety, and well-being. The study emphasized transparency, voluntary participation, and minimizing potential risks, in alignment with these principles. The researcher also obtained permission from the Department of Basic Education to conduct research in the six secondary schools in the districts of Tshwane. Each principal at the six schools gave written permission for the study to be conducted at the school. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

## **Results and Discussion**

The objectives of this study were carefully formulated to address critical aspects of the role of LO teachers in selected Tshwane Secondary Schools, particularly concerning the presentation of the PE section as outlined in the CAPS document. To gain comprehensive insights, qualitative data was collected through interviews facilitated by content analysis, allowing for a detailed examination of the responses and identifying recurring patterns. The four primary objectives of the study included establishing if appointed LO teachers in selected Tshwane Secondary Schools are qualified to present the PE section as stipulated on CAPS, verifying if LO teachers attach any value to PE in Secondary Schools as well and analysing the challenges teachers in secondary schools face daily and to lastly examine whether LO Teachers can adapt in the classroom and become fully engaged in the PE curriculum.

This discussion will explore the objectives which collectively contribute to the overarching aim through content analysis. The content analysis facilitated the integration of insights from diverse questions according to similarities and differences and identifying characteristics, leading to identifying critical categories aligned with the study's objectives. These categories offer valuable insights

into the perspectives, challenges, and adaptability of LO teachers in the context of PE within secondary schools. The identified categories include qualification and training, perceptions of value, daily challenges, and adaptability and engagement.

The findings reveal a significant gap in formal training for many LO teachers assigned to present PE. 10 of the 12 teachers (83%) indicate backgrounds which range from B Com subjects, Economics, and Business Studies (School A, Teacher 1) to Science (School B, Teacher 1) and History and Psychology (School C, Teacher 2). When the researcher allowed the teachers to elaborate on the other subjects they teach, some reckoned that LO was only given to them to fill up a period. Special training is necessary to deliver the curriculum effectively. As a teacher from School D expressed, "It is unfair from the Department to make teachers teach PE without proper training. Unqualified teachers should not teach PE because it is unfair and dangerous." From the sample of teachers, the two teachers who teach LO were Heads of Department at their respective schools. It was interesting to note that they taught LO to all grades from grade 8 to grade 12, regardless of their experience and seniority. A teacher from School F stated, "I teach only LO for all the grades, along with several other teachers. I am the HOD for LO at this school."

The responses reflect diverse perspectives on the value attributed to PE within the LO curriculum. While some teachers emphasise its importance, others express reservations and need more passion for the subject. Teacher 2 from School A conveys, "I feel one needs to be passionate about the subject you teach, and I have no passion for LO." This attitude divergence might impact the enthusiasm and effectiveness with which PE is presented to students. Furthermore, the data generated from the question "What is your understanding of PE?" indicated that most teachers see PE as an instrument to improve the learners' health, both mentally and physically, as stated by a teacher from School B: "I will say it includes mental health and physical health..." Learners must be equipped to interact optimally on a personal, psychological, cognitive, motor, physical, moral, spiritual, cultural and socioeconomic level. Teachers should expose learners to the value of regular participation in physical activity (Belano et al., 2024) and involvement in education programming. One of the teachers from School C reiterated this in their response: "Learners must learn how to live a healthy life, and the skill that we teach them in that short space of time, they must take home and practice at home." Furthermore, a teacher from School F says, "The teachers must teach skills and let learners experience movement. The teacher must also teach the importance of physical activity so that they know why they do certain things."

The title is formulated against the background of the study's research question, aim, objective, and methodology to identify and describe the challenges teachers assigned to teach PE as part of LO face. From the above two discussed categories, one can summarise that teachers are already faced with two challenges, namely, that it was not their area of specialisation and only served as a filler for their educational task and that they were unable to define the nature of PE as found in the CAPS document. It is, therefore, clear that the challenges teachers face in presenting PE are multifaceted, ranging from inadequate facilities and equipment to time constraints and attitudinal barriers, as well as qualification and knowledge. Teachers cite issues such as noise disturbance (School B, Teacher 1), negative attitudes from colleagues and parents (School B, Teacher 2), safety concerns (School C, Teacher 1), and inadequate dress codes and timetable scheduling (School D, Teacher 1). These challenges collectively hinder the seamless execution of PE sessions and necessitate adaptive strategies on the part of the teachers. Although teachers mentioned many challenges, it was clear that each one had personal integrity and tried

to do their best most of the time. They are creative and improvise so learners can participate in some activities. Essentially, the teacher responses led to three conclusions: one, the environment and lack of facilities hamper the teaching and learning of PE; two, an integral part of teaching physically based activities such as PE is based on behavioural principles for motivation; and three, the most critical responses centres around teacher didactical competency, skills and ability to teach the subject in an educational and accountable manner. Teacher 1 at School E stipulated that she is not a trainer PE specialist and does what she thinks is right. This corresponds with the findings of Kahts-Kramer and Baard (2020) and Roux and Sakala (2020), who stated that many teachers need more specialists in teaching LO. She said she needs to learn how to teach specific skills to learners and mentioned that some classes have too many learners.

Adaptability emerges as a crucial factor in navigating the challenges of teaching PE. Teachers describe improvisation, resourcefulness, and a commitment to motivating learners despite limitations in resources and training. Teacher 1 from School D highlights the ability to adapt: "Teachers should know the steps when teaching new movements... Teachers must be resourceful and creative. They must be able to improvise and make the time count because, for some children, it is the only time they move and exercise." The same teacher also emphasises that "unqualified teachers should not teach PE because it is not fair and it is dangerous." This is echoed by Teacher 2 from School A: "... if the school expects me to teach PE, they need to train me and make sure there are enough workshops and opportunities." Teacher 1 from School B stated, "... the school needs to employ someone trained to teach PE." As much as teachers do their best and improvise, it is clear that some teachers lack the passion to teach LO. If not trained in the subject's content, presenting the topic and planning a successful lesson is challenging.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, addressing the challenges outlined in this study requires a comprehensive approach involving targeted training, resource allocation, and a collective acknowledgement of the importance of PE within the LO curriculum. Only through such concerted efforts can the standard of PE be improved, ensuring a more meaningful and impactful experience for learners in secondary schools.

The findings of this study underscore the need for several recommendations to enhance the state of PE in schools. While all schools investigated fall within quintile 5, a notable disparity in resources among them was evident early in the study. To gain a more comprehensive understanding, future research endeavours should extend their focus to schools with varying quintile rankings, including those in more advantaged areas with the financial capacity to appoint a dedicated specialist PE teacher. Additionally, further investigations should be undertaken to gauge the attitudes of learners, parents, and administrators toward PE education in schools. This holistic approach considers the diverse perspectives that shape the PE learning environment.

Moreover, a meaningful assessment of teachers' performance during the actual implementation of PE activities is recommended. This evaluation serves as a valuable tool to identify areas for improvement. It informs tailored professional development initiatives for LO teachers, ensuring more effective delivery of PE curriculum in secondary schools.

## Limitations to the study

One potential limitation of this study is the small sample size, which included only twelve teachers and six secondary schools. Such a limited sample restricts the generalizability of the findings,

emphasizing the need for future research with larger and more diverse sample groups to explore this important topic better. Additionally, this study did not involve any direct contact with learners, focusing solely on teachers. Future research could expand on these findings by investigating learners' attitudes toward the teaching of PE in secondary schools, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the subject.

**Received:** 02 September 2024 | **Accepted:** 09 January 2025 | **Published:** 15 January 2025

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