

Beliefs of Parents and Teachers Towards the Learning of Physical Education at Early Childhood Development Level

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Abstract

The study examined the beliefs of Early Childhood Development (ECD) teachers and parents regarding the learning of Physical Education (PE) at the ECD level. The purpose of the research was to explore stakeholders' perceptions of the value of PE in young children's developmental, academic, and social growth, and to identify factors that shape support for PE in early learning environments. A mixed-methods research design was employed. Quantitative data were collected from 20 ECD teachers and 20 parents through structured questionnaires, while qualitative insights were gathered through open-ended items. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, frequency tables, and thematic analysis.

The findings revealed that both teachers and parents hold generally positive beliefs about PE, recognizing its contribution to motor skills development, physical fitness, social interaction, emotional well-being, and cognitive readiness. However, despite favorable attitudes, the implementation of PE faces several challenges. Teachers cited limited resources, inadequate training, insufficient facilities, and restricted time allocation as barriers to effective delivery of PE activities. Parents acknowledged the importance of PE but often prioritized academic subjects and demonstrated limited awareness of the broader developmental benefits of physical activity. Both groups expressed concern over the lack of structured PE programs in some ECD centers.

The study concludes that while positive beliefs toward PE exist, gaps remain in awareness, support, resource provision, and curriculum implementation. Strengthening teacher capacity, increasing parental involvement, and improving PE resources and policy enforcement are essential for enhancing the quality of PE at the ECD level. The study recommends targeted parental awareness campaigns, professional development for teachers, provision of affordable PE materials, and the inclusion of PE as a mandatory and regularly monitored component of the ECD curriculum.

Keywords: Physical Education Early Childhood Development (ECD) teacher beliefs parental perceptions child development curriculum implementation physical activity

1.0 Background to the Study

Early Childhood Development (ECD) represents a crucial stage in human growth, during which physical, cognitive, social, and emotional foundations are established. Physical Education (PE) is recognized globally as an essential component of early childhood curricula because it promotes motor skills, healthy

growth patterns, cognitive functioning, and social interaction. In Zimbabwe, the inclusion of PE in the ECD curriculum is supported by national policy frameworks such as the Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education (2015–2022), which emphasizes holistic child development. Despite this policy support, implementation at school level often varies widely.

The successful delivery of PE at ECD level is influenced heavily by the beliefs and perceptions of key stakeholders—particularly parents and teachers. Teachers’ beliefs shape how they prioritize PE, the instructional time allocated, and the strategies used to engage young learners. If teachers believe PE is less important than academic subjects such as numeracy and literacy, they may devote limited time and effort to PE activities. Conversely, positive beliefs are likely to promote active, engaging, and developmentally appropriate PE experiences.

Similarly, parents play a vital role in reinforcing PE outside the classroom. Their beliefs about physical activity—whether they view it as beneficial, risky, or secondary to academic work—can influence their support for school-based PE programs, provision of appropriate play materials, and encouragement of physical activity at home. Limited awareness of the benefits of PE may lead parents to undervalue it, thereby undermining school efforts to implement effective programs.

Given that PE contributes significantly to healthy physical development, motor competence, discipline, and social skills, understanding the beliefs of parents and teachers is essential for improving its delivery at ECD level. This study seeks to assess these beliefs and how they influence the learning of PE, with the aim of informing strategies to strengthen PE implementation in early childhood settings.

1.1 Concept of Physical Education in Early Childhood

Physical Education in ECD aims to develop fundamental motor skills, body coordination, physical fitness, and socio-emotional abilities (Gallahue & Ozmun, 2016). PE supports holistic development, enhances cognitive functioning, and lays the foundation for lifelong healthy behavior. Research shows that physical activity contributes to improved concentration, language development, and problem-solving abilities in young children. In Zimbabwe, PE is included in the national curriculum and is compulsory at ECD level. However, implementation often depends on teachers’ knowledge, school resources, and stakeholder support.

1.2 Teachers’ Beliefs about Physical Education

Teachers’ beliefs significantly influence curriculum implementation. When teachers believe PE is essential, they allocate more time, use creative strategies, and prioritize motor skill development. Conversely, negative beliefs—such as viewing PE as less academic or unnecessary—lead to minimal implementation.

Studies by Morgan & Hansen (2018) indicate that primary teachers without adequate PE training often feel incompetent and undervalue the subject. Similar findings in African contexts show that teachers sometimes prioritize academic learning due to pressure from parents and school administrators. In the Zimbabwean context, limited teacher training in PE, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate resources may affect teacher attitudes, resulting in inconsistent implementation.

1.3 Parents’ Beliefs About Physical Education

Parents shape children’s experiences outside the school environment. Research shows that parents who perceive PE as beneficial encourage their children to participate in physical activities, provide play materials, and support school programs. However, parents who consider PE risky or less important may discourage participation. Ogundele (2017) notes that in many African communities, parents emphasize academics over physical development, which may undermine school PE activities. Studies in Zimbabwe

also highlight that some parents view PE as optional and may not prioritize appropriate clothing, attendance, or participation.

1.4 Influence of Stakeholder Beliefs on PE Implementation

Stakeholder beliefs directly affect PE implementation. Teachers' beliefs can influence lesson planning, instructional methods, and classroom management during PE sessions. Parents' beliefs influence children's participation, motivation, and home-based physical activity.

When both parents and teachers value PE, children benefit from consistent reinforcement of motor skills and physical activity patterns. When beliefs are negative, PE is marginalized

2.0 Objectives of the Study

- To determine teachers' beliefs about the importance of Physical Education in ECD learning.
- To assess parents' beliefs regarding the value of Physical Education for young children.
- To examine the extent to which teachers' beliefs influence the teaching and implementation of PE at ECD level.
- To explore how parents' beliefs influence their support for PE activities at home and at school.
- To identify challenges arising from parents' and teachers' beliefs that affect effective PE learning in ECD.
- To suggest strategies for improving stakeholder support and beliefs towards PE learning at ECD level.

3.0 Research Questions

- What are teachers' beliefs about the importance of Physical Education at ECD level?
- What beliefs do parents hold regarding the value of Physical Education for young children?
- How do teachers' beliefs influence the teaching and implementation of PE at ECD level?
- In what ways do parents' beliefs affect their support for PE activities at school and at home?
- What challenges related to stakeholder beliefs hinder effective PE learning at ECD level?
- What strategies can be employed to strengthen positive beliefs and support for PE among parents and teachers?

4.0 Research Approach

The study adopted a qualitative research approach, focusing on understanding the beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of parents and teachers. The qualitative approach is appropriate because beliefs are subjective and best understood through rich, descriptive data.

5.0 Research Design

A descriptive survey design was used as it allows the researcher to gather detailed information from respondents about their beliefs and experiences related to PE at ECD level.

6.0 Population

The population is made up of ECD teachers in selected schools and parents with children enrolled at ECD level

7.0 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The sample include 20 ECD teachers and 20 parents

7.1 Sampling Procedure

A purposive sampling was used for teachers. They are selected because they teach PE at ECD level and can provide relevant information. A convenience sampling was used for parents and they were available and willing to participate will be included. This combination ensures that the most knowledgeable stakeholders are included.

8. 0 Research Instruments

Simple questionnaires with open- and closed-ended questions were administered to parents to collect their beliefs and attitudes toward PE.

9.0 Data Collection Methods

The questionnaires for parents and teachers were suitable for collecting data on beliefs from a larger group.

9. 0 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, tables and graphs. This helped in presenting parental and teachers’ beliefs clearly.

10.0 Data Presentation, analysis, and interpretation

10.1 Sample Description

Table 1: Sample description

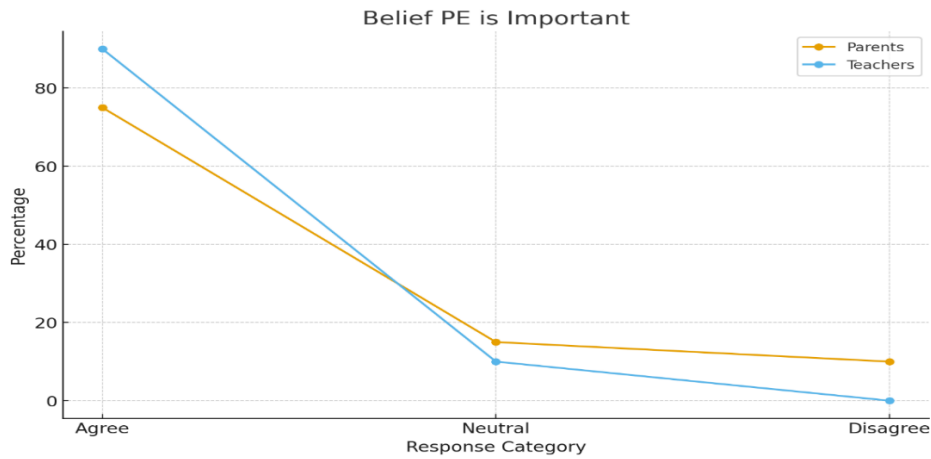
| Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Parents | 20 | 50 |
| ECD Teachers | 20 | 50 |
| Total | 40 | 100 |

Theme 1: Belief that PE in important for young children

Table 2: Belief that PE is important

| Group | Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
|---------------|----------|---------|----------|
| Parents (20) | 15 (75%) | 3(15%) | 2(10 %) |
| Teachers (20) | 18 (90%) | 2(10%) | 0(0) |

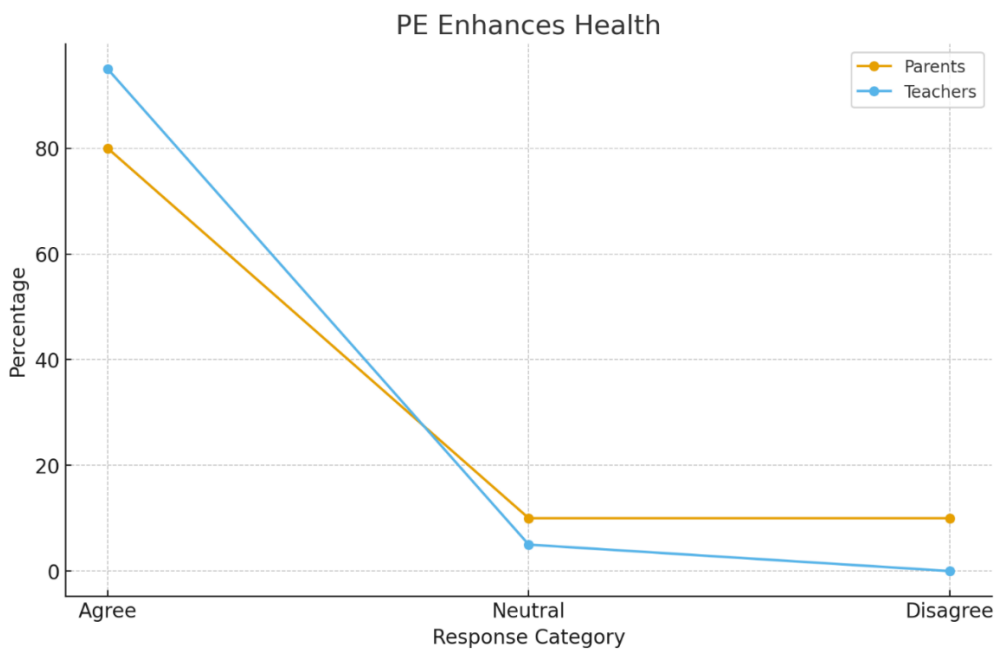
Graph 1: Belief that PE is important



Theme2: Belief That PE Enhances Child Health & Physical Growth

Table 3: Belief That PE Enhances Child Health & Physical Growth

| Group | Neutral % | Disagree % | Agree % |
|----------|-----------|------------|---------|
| parents | 10 | 10 | 80 |
| Teachers | 5 | 0 | 95 |

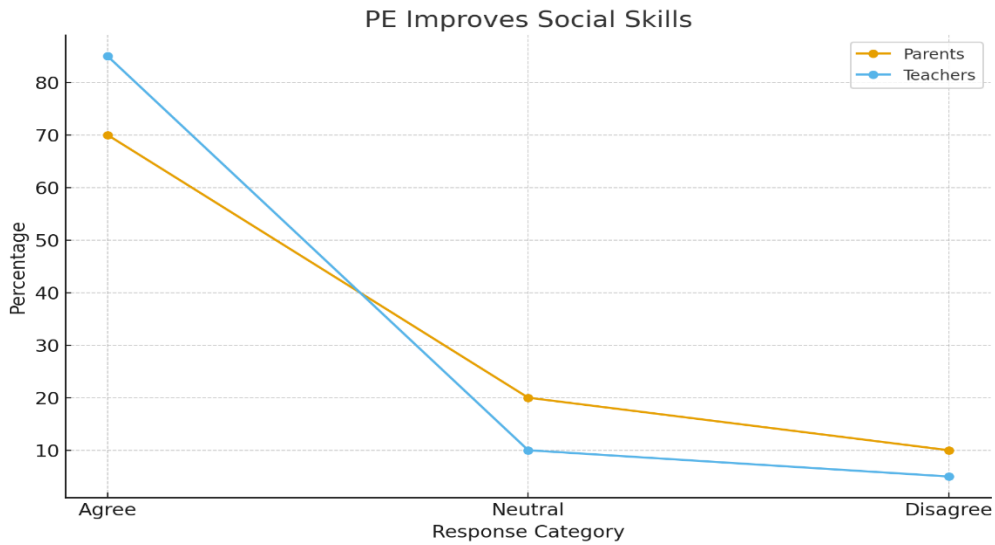


Theme 3: Belief That PE Improves Social & Emotional Skills

Table 4: Belief That PE Improves Social & Emotional Skills

| Group | Agreed | Neutral | Disagree |
|----------|----------|---------|----------|
| Parents | 14(70%) | 4(20%) | 2(10%) |
| Teachers | 17 (85%) | 2(10%) | 1(5%) |

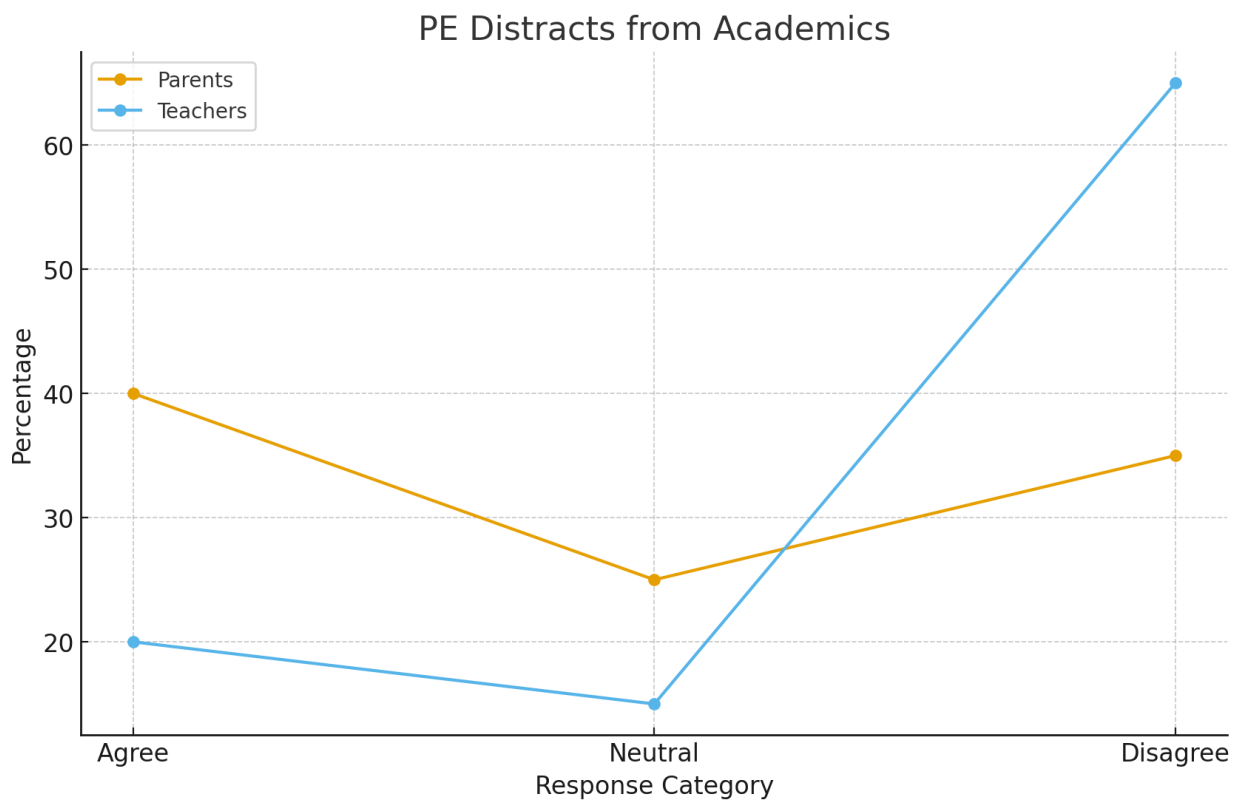
Graph 3: Belief That PE Improves Social & Emotional Skills



Theme 4: Belief That PE Distracts from Academic Learning

| Group | Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
|----------|--------|---------|----------|
| Parents | 8(40%) | 5(25%) | 7(35%) |
| Teachers | 4(20%) | 3(15%) | 13(65%) |

Graph 3: Belief That PE Distracts from Academic Learning



Theme 5: Belief That PE Should Be Taught Daily at ECD Level

| Group | Agree | Neutral | Disagree |
|---------|---------|---------|----------|
| Parents | 12(60%) | 6(30%) | 2(10%) |

| | | | |
|-----------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|
| Teachers | 15(75%) | 4(20%) | 1(5%) |
|-----------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|

According to the table the majority of parents and teachers belief PE should be taught daily at ECD level

Overall Positive Beliefs Toward PE

| Group | Agree | Disagree |
|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Parents | 65% | 35% |
| Teachers | 85% | 15% |

According to the overall analysis teachers have stronger positive beliefs about the value of PE than parents.

10.2 Perception Differences Between Parents and Teachers

Importance of PE

Teachers (90%) show stronger support than parents (75%).

PE’s contribution to health

Very high support from both groups, but teachers show stronger belief (95% vs 80%).

Social/emotional benefits

Parents: 70%

Teachers: 85%

PE distracts from academics (negative belief)

Parents are more likely to believe this (40% agree).

Teachers disagree strongly (65%).

PE should be taught daily

According to overall analysis teachers (75%) and parents (60%) agree that PE should be taught daily.

Key findings

- Teachers consistently show higher agreement with positive beliefs toward PE.
- Parents exhibit more uncertainty (higher neutral responses) compared to teachers.
- Parents have more misconceptions such as believing PE reduces academic focus.
- Teachers reflect professional understanding of holistic development benefits.

10.3 Interpretation of Findings

10.3.1 Positive Attitudes Among Both Groups

Both parents and teachers generally believe PE is important, improves health, and enhances social and emotional development. This suggests a supportive environment for implementing PE at ECD level.

10.3.2 Teachers Hold Stronger and More Informed Beliefs

Teachers’ higher agreement scores reflect:

- Training in child development
- Awareness of the curriculum
- Experience observing children's growth through activity

Their stronger agreement (average 85%) shows the profession’s commitment to PE.

10.3.3 Parents Show Relatively Lower Confidence and More Misconceptions

Parents:

- Show lower agreement (average 65%)
- Have more neutral responses, showing uncertainty

- Hold the belief (40%) that PE distracts from learning

This suggests a need for parent education programs to inform them about:

- The role of PE in cognitive development
- How physical activity enhances academic readiness

10.3.4 Strong Support for PE Implementation

A majority in both groups agree that PE should be taught daily. This provides strong justification for:

- Strengthening PE in the ECD curriculum
- Improving resources and training
- Conducting awareness campaigns

10.3.5 Summary of Overall Interpretation

- Both groups value PE, but teachers show much stronger, more informed beliefs.
- Parents need increased awareness about the holistic benefits of PE.
- Negative beliefs (e.g., PE distracts from academics) are more common among parents and must be addressed.
- Findings support policy efforts to enhance PE teaching time, training, and parent engagement.

10.4 Conclusion

The study examined the beliefs of ECD teachers and parents regarding the learning of Physical Education (PE) at the Early Childhood Development (ECD) level. The findings indicate that both groups generally acknowledge the importance of PE in promoting children's holistic development, including physical fitness, motor skills, social interaction, emotional regulation, and cognitive growth. However, despite positive beliefs, gaps were identified between attitudes and actual support or implementation.

Teachers largely viewed PE as a crucial component of the curriculum but reported challenges such as inadequate resources, limited training, overcrowded classes, and insufficient time allocation for PE activities. These constraints weakened the full integration of PE into daily teaching and learning.

Parents, although recognizing PE as essential for health and physical growth, tended to prioritize academic subjects over physical activities. Some parents lacked awareness of the broader developmental benefits of PE, resulting in limited encouragement for children's participation in structured physical activities outside the school setting.

Overall, the study concludes that while beliefs towards PE learning at ECD level are generally favorable, effective implementation is hindered by limited stakeholder knowledge, inadequate resources, and institutional constraints. Strengthening awareness, teacher capacity, and support systems is essential to promote meaningful PE learning in ECD.

11.0 Recommendations

11.1 Strengthen Parental Awareness and Engagement

- Conduct parental education workshops to increase knowledge of the developmental importance of PE beyond physical fitness.
- Encourage parents to support home-based physical activities through simple games and movement routines.
- Provide parents with PE information pamphlets or communication through WhatsApp groups and school meetings.

11.2 Enhance Teacher Training and Professional Development

- Offer continuous professional development (CPD) programs focusing on PE pedagogy for ECD teachers.
- Integrate PE teaching methods into teacher training colleges and ECD certification programs.
- Provide teachers with teaching guides, lesson plans, and activity resources aligned with the ECD curriculum.

11.3 Improve Availability of PE Resources

- Schools should prioritize acquiring basic PE equipment such as balls, hoops, beanbags, cones, and mats.
- Encourage resource mobilization through community donations, NGOs, and government support.
- Promote the use of low-cost, locally available materials to create PE equipment.

11.4 Allocate Time for PE in ECD Timetables

- ECD centers should ensure that PE is included at least 3 times per week, consistent with curriculum guidelines.
- School administrators should monitor implementation to ensure PE is not replaced by academic subjects.

11.5 Strengthen Policy Enforcement

- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should monitor compliance with PE curriculum requirements in ECD centers.
- Development of clear guidelines and standards for PE delivery at ECD level is recommended.

11.6 Promote a Supportive School Environment

- Create safe play spaces with adequate supervision for children's movement activities.
- Encourage school-wide events such as sports days, movement festivals, and fun days to promote a positive attitude toward PE.

11.7 Encourage Collaborative Partnerships

- Strengthen collaboration between teachers, parents, school administrators, and community leaders to support PE initiatives.
- Partner with local sports clubs or health organizations to provide demonstrations or volunteer coaching

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