



International Journal of Education and Teaching

Publisher's Home Page: <https://www.hsspress.com/>



Research Paper

Open Access

The Impact of Physical Education on Foundation Phase Learners

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Article Info

Volume 6, Issue 1, June 2026

Received : 01 August 2025

Accepted : 13 March 2026

Published : 19 June 2026

doi: [10.67192/IJEDT.6.1.2026.85-94](https://doi.org/10.67192/IJEDT.6.1.2026.85-94)

Abstract

Physical Education (PE) plays a critical role in the overall development of young children. In the Foundation Phase, physical activities support not only physical growth but also social, emotional, and cognitive development. However, in many rural South African schools, Physical Education is often overlooked due to limited resources and time allocation. This study investigates the impact of Physical Education on the holistic development of Foundation Phase learners in the Vhembe District, Limpopo Province. The problem identified is the underrepresentation and inadequate implementation of Physical Education in Foundation Phase classrooms, despite its known developmental benefits. The study followed a qualitative research paradigm, using an interpretivist approach. A case study design was adopted, and semi-structured interviews were used as the main data collection method. Data were gathered from a population of Foundation Phase teachers, Life Skills subject advisors, and school principals. Through purposive sampling, a sample of 12 participants was selected from six primary schools. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. The study was delimited to the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province. Trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and ethical clearance. The paper found that Physical Education positively influences Foundation Phase learners' motor skills, classroom behavior, and concentration. Lack of resources, training, and time allocation significantly hinders effective PE delivery. The article recommended that the Department of Basic Education should prioritise PE by increasing time allocation and teacher support. Teacher training programs must incorporate practical strategies for integrating PE into daily teaching. PE is essential for the holistic development of Foundation Phase learners, and its full implementation can improve both academic and behavioral outcomes in rural contexts.

Keywords: Physical education, Foundation phase, Holistic development, Rural education, Motor skills development

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1. Introduction

The Foundation Phase (Grades R-3) is a crucial period in a child's development. Physical Education is one of the

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components of the Life Skills curriculum, and is intended to promote physical health, motor coordination, and emotional well-being. Despite its inclusion in the curriculum, PE is often neglected in rural South African schools due to overcrowded classes, a focus on academic subjects, and a lack of teacher training (Gatt, 2022). This study examines the impact of Physical Education on the overall development of Foundation Phase learners in the Vhembe District and highlights the need for it to receive greater attention in educational policy and practice.

According to Kliziene *et al.* (2023), the role of Physical Education in the Foundation Phase is vital for fostering holistic development among Foundation Phase learners. Research has shown that regular Physical Activity not only improves physical fitness but also enhances cognitive functioning, concentration, and social skills, which are essential for academic success and personal growth of Foundation Phase learners. In under-resourced areas like the Vhembe District, where many Foundation Phase learners face socio-economic challenges, PE can serve as a powerful tool to build resilience, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging. This study aims to advocate for better implementation and support of Physical Education in the Foundation Phase, ensuring that every Foundation Phase learner has the opportunity to thrive physically, mentally, and socially.

According to Lynch (2024), globally, Physical Education is widely recognised as an essential component of a child's education, promoting holistic development by enhancing both physical health and psychosocial well-being. Research has shown that regular participation in PE contributes to improved motor skills, better concentration and memory, enhanced social interaction, reduced anxiety, and overall mental resilience among young learners. Early exposure to Physical Activity also helps instil lifelong healthy habits, which are critical in combating lifestyle-related illnesses such as obesity and diabetes.

In the South African context, Physical Education is incorporated into the Life Skills curriculum, particularly at the Foundation Phase level, which lays the groundwork for children's learning and development. The curriculum emphasises the importance of Physical Activity as a means of fostering physical fitness, teamwork, discipline, and self-confidence among Foundation Phase learners. Despite this recognition, however, the implementation of PE in schools remains inconsistent and often inadequate, a situation more pronounced in under-resourced rural areas (Frazenburg, 2021).

Several factors contribute to this gap. According to Williams (2024), Foundation Phase teachers often face immense pressure to meet literacy and numeracy benchmarks, which are perceived as the most critical indicators of academic success. PE is frequently marginalised in favour of Mathematics and Languages subjects. Many schools in rural areas lack the necessary resources, facilities, and teacher training required to deliver effective PE lessons. This neglect undermines the intended holistic approach of the curriculum and deprives learners of the physical, emotional, and social benefits that PE offers.

According to Abdulla *et al.* (2022), schools in these predominantly rural areas often struggle with overcrowded classrooms, limited teaching staff, and inadequate sports facilities, making it difficult to implement PE effectively. Given the socio-economic and health challenges experienced by many Foundation Phase learners in rural areas, the role of PE in fostering their holistic development is particularly critical.

This study responds to these gaps by examining the impact of Physical Education on Foundation Phase learners in Vhembe District schools. By exploring how Physical Education is currently implemented in Foundation Phase classrooms in Vhembe District. The paper also examines the effects of Physical Education on the development of Foundation Phase learners. The study also focuses on the challenges that Foundation Phase teachers face in delivering Physical Education lessons. The article also highlights what can be done to strengthen the role of Physical Education in the Foundation Phase. The findings are expected to contribute to efforts to improve the delivery of Physical Education in schools within the Vhembe West District, thereby promoting the holistic development of Foundation Phase learners in rural South African schools.

This article aims to explore the impact of Physical Education on the holistic development of Foundation Phase learners.

To achieve this aim, the following research questions were identified:

1. How is Physical Education currently implemented in Foundation Phase classrooms in Vhembe District?
2. What are the effects of Physical Education on the development of Foundation Phase learners?

3. What challenges do Foundation Phase teachers face in delivering Physical Education lessons?
4. What can be done to strengthen the role of Physical Education in Foundation Phase education?

1.1. Theoretical Framework

The article is grounded in Jean Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development, which emphasises the link between physical interaction and learning. According to Piaget, motor activity and sensory experiences are essential for cognitive growth during early childhood. Physical Education activities, such as running, jumping, and balancing, help Foundation Phase learners in the concrete operational stage develop critical thinking, coordination, and problem-solving skills (Waite-Stupiansky, 2022). This framework supports the investigation into how physical experiences shape academic and social development.

Piaget's theory highlights how physical activity contributes to schema development. Foundation Phase learners construct knowledge by interacting with their surroundings and adjusting their mental frameworks accordingly, through the processes of assimilation and accommodation. Physical Education provides opportunities for Foundation Phase learners to encounter challenges, adapt their strategies, and refine their understanding of their abilities and the social world around them (Meylani, 2024).

The theory further supports the idea that active learning is more effective than passive reception of information, especially in the early years. Physical Education aligns with this constructivist perspective by engaging Foundation Phase learners in experiential, meaningful activities that encourage discovery and reflection. By physically engaging with tasks, Foundation Phase learners not only build motor competence but also enhance their capacity to solve problems, plan actions, and evaluate skills that are foundational to academic success (Asan and Canyurt, 2025).

According to Meylani (2024), Piaget's theory helps highlight the role of developmentally appropriate practice in the Foundation Phase. It reinforces the need for PE programmes to match the Foundation Phase learners' cognitive and physical abilities while providing just enough challenge to stimulate growth. This theoretical lens enables the research to explore not only how PE influences physical development but also how it contributes to Foundation Phase learners' overall intellectual and social maturation.

1.2. Conceptualising Physical Education in the Foundation Phase

According to Xu and Yin (2021), Physical Education is an essential part of the school curriculum, especially during the Foundation Phase. It involves structured and purposeful physical activities designed to promote the health and development of Foundation Phase learners. These activities include exercises, games, and movement-based learning experiences that help improve physical health, motor skills, and teamwork. In the early years of schooling, PE provides Foundation Phase learners with opportunities to move, explore, and develop their bodies and minds in a fun and engaging way. In the Foundation Phase classroom, PE supports Foundation Phase learners' physical, emotional, and social growth (Khakimovich and Rozmatovich, 2022).

According to Tas (2025), one of the key roles of Physical Education in the Foundation Phase is to support Foundation Phase learners' physical development. At this stage, Foundation Phase learners are developing fundamental motor skills such as running, jumping, throwing, and balancing. Physical Education lessons help Foundation Phase learners refine these skills through guided practice and play. Regular Physical Activity also improves overall health and fitness, strengthens muscles and bones, and helps prevent health issues like obesity and stress. Physical Education lays a solid foundation for lifelong healthy habits and physical well-being.

According to Khakimovich and Rozmatovich (2022), Physical Education contributes to Foundation Phase learners' emotional and social growth. Participating in group games and activities teaches Foundation Phase learners how to cooperate, share, and communicate effectively with others. They learn important values such as teamwork, fairness, and respect for others. Physical Education also boosts self-esteem and confidence as Foundation Phase learners overcome challenges, achieve personal goals, and express themselves through movement. These experiences help foster resilience and a positive attitude toward learning and life.

According to Tas (2025), Physical Education plays an essential role in supporting classroom learning by enhancing Foundation Phase learners' concentration and readiness to learn. Physical Activity helps reduce restlessness, improves focus, and allows Foundation Phase learners to release energy constructively. Foundation Phase learners are often more engaged and attentive during academic lessons. Movement-based activities in Physical Education can also reinforce

concepts from other subjects, such as counting, patterns, or spatial awareness, making learning more holistic and meaningful.

Physical Education in the Foundation Phase is a vital component of a child's holistic development. It promotes not only physical health but also emotional well-being, social skills, and cognitive readiness. Schools and Foundation Phase teachers should therefore recognise the importance of Physical Education and ensure it is effectively implemented with adequate time, resources, and planning (Kliziene *et al.*, 2023).

2. Literature Review

Physical Education (PE) plays a critical role in the holistic development of Foundation Phase learners, promoting physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth. Research highlights its benefits in building motor skills, enhancing problem-solving abilities, and supporting emotional regulation. Despite these advantages, PE faces challenges such as a lack of resources, inadequate teacher training, and limited policy enforcement. This literature review explores the importance of PE, its impact on child development, implementation challenges, and the need for policy and curriculum support.

2.1. Importance of Physical Education in Early Childhood

According to Polsley *et al.* (2022), Physical Education plays a vital role in the physical development of Foundation Phase learners. Foundation Phase learners are rapidly developing their gross and fine motor skills. PE offers vital opportunities for Foundation Phase learners to improve these skills through activities that promote coordination, balance, and strength. "Physical Activities such as running, jumping, and climbing not only enhance muscle strength and endurance but also contribute to the development of spatial awareness and body control" (Deng *et al.*, 2024).

Studies show that Physical Education also supports healthy growth and promotes social skills through teamwork and play for learners in the Foundation Phase. Research indicates that Physical Education enhances cognitive development by improving focus and problem-solving abilities (Purnomo *et al.*, 2024). According to Calcaterra *et al.* (2022), PE helps reduce the risk of childhood obesity and related health conditions. Studies show that regular physical activity further builds self-confidence and emotional well-being, which are essential for the overall development of Foundation Phase learners.

2.2. Physical Education and Cognitive Development

According to Sankar and Monisha (2020), cognitive development refers to the way a child's brain and thinking processes develop. Studies show that Physical Education plays a significant role in improving the cognitive development of Foundation Phase learners. Studies show that engaging in physical activity stimulates brain functions related to memory, focus, and problem-solving, all crucial for young learners (Kolovelonis and Goudas, 2023). According to Lundvall and Fröberg (2023), problem-solving is one of the significant benefits of PE. Physical Education plays a vital role in Foundation Phase learners because it enables them to "identify, describe, formulate and reformulate movement problems". Regular physical activity helps children manage stress and emotions, reducing behavioral issues and improving self-esteem, (Lundvall and Fröberg, 2023: 107). According to Sankar and Monisha (2020), Physical Education fosters the development of self-discipline as well as the maintenance of external discipline in Foundation Phase learners.

2.3. Physical Education and Emotional Regulation

Research indicates that regular participation in physical activities enables children to better manage stress and regulate their emotions, which in turn can lead to a reduction in behavioral problems and an improvement in self-esteem. Engaging in structured Physical Education activities provides opportunities for Foundation Phase learners to experience success, set personal goals, and develop resilience, all of which contribute to emotional well-being (Martinez *et al.*, 2024). Studies have also shown that physical activity promotes the release of endorphins and other neurochemicals that support positive mood and mental health. Research shows that teamwork, play, and cooperative exercises, Foundation Phase learners also learn to navigate social interactions, resolve conflicts, and develop empathy, further strengthening their emotional regulation skills (Chen and Nakagawa, 2023).

Studies have also shown that regular engagement in Physical Education helps Foundation Phase learners develop coping strategies for dealing with frustration and setbacks. The research indicates that participating in games and group activities, Foundation Phase learners learn patience, self-control, and how to handle both winning and losing gracefully.

These experiences not only support emotional regulation but also contribute to the development of positive social relationships and a stronger sense of self-confidence (Hellison *et al.*, 2025).

2.4. Challenges of Physical Education Implementation in Rural Schools

According to Abdulla *et al.* (2022), rural schools frequently lack the physical infrastructure required to provide an effective Physical Education program. Many schools deal with issues like small gymnasiums, swimming pools, sports halls, outdated sports facilities, and a shortage of appropriate outdoor spaces such as functional playgrounds, sports fields. The lack of qualified Physical Education teachers means that schools may not have the necessary resources to provide high-quality PE. Physical Education is part of the Life Skills curriculum; its implementation is often weak due to vague policy directives and a lack of monitoring (Venter, 2022).

According to Kelmendi and Dedi (2024), the lack of professional training in Physical Education pedagogy among many Foundation Phase teachers poses a major challenge in providing effective PE lessons in Foundation Phase classrooms. The delivery of effective Physical Education relies heavily on well-trained teachers. Research indicates that Foundation Phase learners are deprived of opportunities to develop essential physical, cognitive, and social skills that are critical in early childhood.

Research indicates that Physical Education is embedded in the Life Skills subject. PE is not treated as a standalone subject, often marginalised in scheduling, as focus is placed on examinable subjects. In many education systems, Physical Education is perceived as secondary to core subjects like mathematics, language, and science. This marginalisation often leads to reduced time allocations in the curriculum, compromising the depth and breadth of the PE subject (Moloi and Muziyi, 2020).

It has been observed that Physical Education class times have decreased throughout the globe” (Rao and Rao, 2023: 42). The important subjects receive greater class time since they promote employment and, consequently, economic growth; less important subjects, including PE, find it difficult to keep their weekly allocations of 35 to 70 minutes (Spacey, 2021).

2.5. Policy and Curriculum Support for Physical Education

According to Nolan (2025), Physical Education is officially included in the Life Skills curriculum, highlighting its recognised importance in promoting Foundation Phase learners’ holistic development. However, the effective implementation of Physical Education is often hindered by unclear policy directives and insufficient monitoring at the school and district levels. Studies show that many Foundation Phase teachers struggle with limited guidance, inadequate Continuous Professional Teacher Development, and insufficient teaching resources, which affects the quality and consistency of PE delivery (Nioda and Tagare, 2024). Research study shows that disparities between well-resourced and under-resourced schools mean that Foundation Phase learners do not always have equitable access to structured physical activities. Strengthening policy frameworks, providing ongoing teacher training, and ensuring schools are adequately equipped are, therefore, essential steps to enhance the implementation and impact of Physical Education programs across all educational contexts (Nolan, 2025).

According to Li and Zhang (2024), effective policy and curriculum support for Physical Education can help schools prioritise physical activity alongside academic subjects. Studies show that clear guidelines, regular monitoring, and targeted resources ensure that PE is not sidelined, allowing Foundation Phase learners to benefit fully from its physical, cognitive, and social development opportunities. Such support also empowers Foundation Phase teachers to plan and deliver engaging lessons that meet the diverse needs of their learners.

According to Gobikas and C’ingienė (2021), addressing resource constraints in Physical Education requires coordinated efforts between governments, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and private companies. Governments can make a crucial contribution by providing funding for developing and maintaining playgrounds and sports facilities. NGOs can assist schools by providing grants or partnerships that aid in the supply of equipment, such as sports gear and materials.

According to Makhanya (2020), Continuous Professional Teacher Development is vital for Physical Education teachers to stay up to date with best practices for inclusion. Continuous Professional Teacher Development in adaptive Physical Education, understanding different disabilities, and learning new teaching techniques can improve Foundation Phase teachers’ ability to support diverse Foundation Phase learners. Studies emphasise that Foundation Phase teachers

should establish peer support and mentorship programmes. Establishing peer support and mentorship programmes can offer encouragement and motivation for Foundation Phase learners with special needs.

The review demonstrates that Physical Education is essential for developing foundational physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills in early childhood. However, its implementation is hindered by inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teacher preparation, and marginalisation in the curriculum. Addressing these challenges requires stronger policy frameworks, resource allocation, and teacher training initiatives. Strengthening PE in the Foundation Phase is key to fostering lifelong health, academic success, and holistic learner development (Nolan, 2025).

3. Methodology

This article employs an interpretivist paradigm as its guiding framework, focusing on the personal experiences of Foundation Phase teachers regarding Physical Education in the Foundation Phase. This approach complements the qualitative nature of the study, which aims to understand the impact of Physical Education on Foundation Phase learners.

The study is grounded in a qualitative approach, employing the case study approach. This approach allows for a detailed exploration of the impact of Physical Education on Foundation Phase learners in an educational context. By examining a selected group of Foundation Phase teachers, the study intends to gather in-depth and richly descriptive data concerning their experiences and interactions with Foundation Phase learners.

The data collection methodology of the study involves semi-structured interviews with Foundation Phase teachers, school principals, and Life Skills subject advisors. This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of the nature and the impact of Physical Education on Foundation Phase learners.

The population for this research paper consists of Foundation Phase teachers, school principals, and Life Skills subject advisors in Vhembe District. The study employed purposive sampling to choose a sample of 12 participants from 6 schools. This selection ensures representation from Foundation Phase teachers, school principals, and Life Skills subject advisors who have in-depth knowledge and experience regarding Physical Education.

Thematic analysis is employed to analyse the data by identifying, interpreting, and presenting recurring patterns or themes. The themes focus on the forms of the positive effects on motor and physical development, improved classroom behavior and concentration, limited time and resource allocation and teachers' lack of confidence in delivering Physical Education.

The paper obtained informed consent from all participants. The paper also ensured their anonymity and confidentiality and respected their right to withdraw at any point. To establish the trustworthiness of the study, the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were addressed. Member checking was conducted to verify the accuracy of the collected data, while rich, detailed descriptions were provided to enhance the study's transferability. Dependability was ensured through triangulation by collecting data from Foundation Phase teachers, thereby strengthening the reliability of the findings.

4. Presentation of Findings and Discussion

The results of this study are presented according to the main themes identified during the data analysis process. These themes shed light on the positive effects on motor and physical development, improved classroom behavior and concentration, limited time and resource allocation, as well as teachers' lack of confidence in delivering Physical Education. The perspectives of Foundation Phase teachers offer meaningful context, highlighting the experiences and views that underpin these themes.

4.1. Theme 1: Positive Effects on Motor and Physical Development

The first theme explores the positive effects on Foundation Phase learners' motor and physical development. The findings reveal that Physical Education significantly enhances Foundation Phase learners' motor and physical development in the Foundation Phase. Teachers in the Foundation Phase reported noticeable improvements in both gross and fine motor skills, including running, balancing, and hand-eye coordination. These developments were particularly evident in Foundation Phase learners who initially displayed weaker physical abilities, suggesting that regular PE lessons help close developmental gaps among Foundation Phase learners. Foundation Phase teachers also

highlighted that Foundation Phase learners became more confident and willing to participate in physical and classroom activities as their movement skills improved.

The findings reveal that Foundation Phase teachers observed that Foundation Phase learners developed greater muscular strength, endurance, and balance through structured physical activities such as ball games, stretching exercises, and obstacle courses. These improvements translated into better posture, stamina, and attentiveness in class. Activities that challenged Foundation Phase learners' balance and spatial awareness further enhanced their confidence and ability to interact physically with peers, contributing to a more positive classroom environment and increased participation in group tasks.

These findings underscore the crucial role of regular, structured Physical Education in fostering physical growth and holistic development during early schooling. In resource-constrained settings like the Vhembe District, where children may have limited opportunities for safe Physical Activity outside of school, Physical Education provides an essential platform for promoting health, fitness, and readiness for academic learning. The improvements observed highlight the value of maintaining and strengthening Foundation Phase provision, despite the pressure to prioritise literacy and numeracy outcomes.

4.2. Theme 2: Improved Classroom Behavior and Concentration

The second theme focuses on the improved classroom behavior and concentration of Foundation Phase learners. The findings of the study demonstrate that participation in Physical Education has a positive impact on Foundation Phase learners' classroom behavior and concentration levels. Foundation Phase teachers reported that Foundation Phase learners who engaged in regular physical activities during Physical Education lessons were more attentive and focused during subsequent academic periods. Foundation Phase learners appeared less distracted and were able to sustain their attention for longer durations, particularly in subjects that demand cognitive effort, such as Mathematics and Languages. Foundation Phase teachers attributed this improvement to the fact that PE helped Foundation Phase learners release excess energy, leaving them calmer and better prepared to engage with academic tasks.

The findings reveal that Foundation Phase teachers observed a marked decrease in disruptive behavior among Foundation Phase learners who participated consistently in Physical Education. Incidents of restlessness, inattentiveness, and peer conflicts reportedly declined after Foundation Phase learners had the opportunity to engage in structured physical activities. Teachers in the Foundation Phase noted that the cooperative nature of many PE exercises also helped instil a sense of discipline, teamwork, and respect for others, which translated into more positive interactions and conduct in the classroom. These behavioral improvements were particularly notable among Foundation Phase learners who had previously struggled with self-control and classroom rules.

The study findings emphasise the broader value of Physical Education beyond its physical benefits, highlighting its role in supporting emotional regulation and social skills that contribute to a conducive learning environment. In under-resourced settings such as the Vhembe District, where large class sizes and limited facilities often challenge effective teaching and learning, the inclusion of PE provides an accessible means to improve classroom dynamics. By fostering better attention spans and reducing disciplinary issues, PE enhances not only individual learner outcomes but also the overall classroom atmosphere, reinforcing its importance as an integral part of the Foundation Phase curriculum.

4.3. Theme 3: Limited Time and Resource Allocation

The third theme examines the challenges of Physical Education in the Foundation Phase, such as limited time and resource allocation. The findings reveal that the implementation of PE in Foundation Phase classrooms is significantly hindered by limited time and inadequate resources. Foundation Phase teachers reported that Physical Education often receives minimal attention in the school timetable, with more instructional time allocated to academic subjects such as Mathematics and Languages. Many Foundation Phase teachers indicated that the pressure to meet Mathematics and Languages targets leaves little opportunity to conduct regular and meaningful Physical Education lessons.

The study revealed that the lack of appropriate resources further undermines the effectiveness of Physical Education lessons. Foundation Phase teachers highlighted the shortage of sports equipment, such as balls, cones, and mats, which limits the variety and quality of physical activities that can be offered. Many schools also lack adequate open spaces, designated sports fields, forcing teachers to conduct activities in cramped or unsuitable environments. These challenges were particularly pronounced in rural and under-resourced schools within the Vhembe District, where infrastructural limitations are a persistent concern.

These findings underscore the systemic barriers that hinder the successful delivery of PE in the Foundation Phase. Without sufficient time allocation, proper facilities, and appropriate equipment, teachers are unable to provide learners with the full benefits of a structured physical education program. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensuring that PE fulfils its intended role in promoting learners' holistic development. Greater prioritisation of Physical Education within the curriculum and targeted investment in school sports infrastructure and resources are needed to improve the quality and consistency of Physical Education delivery in schools, particularly in disadvantaged communities.

4.4. Theme 4: Teachers' Lack of Confidence in Delivering Physical Education

The fourth theme focuses on teachers' lack of confidence in delivering Physical Education. The findings indicate that many Foundation Phase teachers lack confidence in delivering effective Physical Education lessons, primarily due to inadequate training. Several Foundation Phase teachers reported that their pre-service education placed little emphasis on Physical Education, leaving them without the necessary knowledge and skills to plan and implement structured physical activities. Many felt unsure about the appropriate exercises for Foundation Phase learners, how to adapt activities for different ability levels, and how to assess the progress of Foundation Phase learners in Physical Education. This lack of confidence often led Foundation Phase teachers to avoid teaching altogether or to deliver lessons that were unstructured and repetitive.

Foundation Phase teachers also highlighted the lack of support materials as a major barrier to their confidence in teaching Physical Education. Many reported that they lacked access to clear guidelines, lesson plans, or curriculum-aligned resources to support them in planning and conducting effective Physical Education sessions. Without these materials, Foundation Phase teachers found it challenging to align their activities with curriculum objectives or to introduce variety and progression into lessons. Some Foundation Phase teachers also expressed concern that their limited expertise might lead to injuries or inappropriate activities, which further discouraged them from prioritising PE in their teaching.

These findings suggest that strengthening Foundation Phase teachers' capacity to deliver quality Physical Education is essential for improving its implementation in the Foundation Phase. Providing targeted professional development opportunities, such as workshops and in-service training, could enhance Foundation Phase teachers' knowledge and practical skills. In addition, equipping schools with user-friendly teaching guides and curriculum support materials could help boost Foundation Phase teachers' confidence and ensure that Physical Education lessons are purposeful and beneficial for Foundation Phase learners. Addressing these issues is vital for ensuring that all Foundation Phase learners, regardless of their school context, have access to meaningful and effective PE.

5. Recommendations

The Department of Basic Education should take a more active role in enforcing curriculum compliance by ensuring that Physical Education receives adequate time allocation in Foundation Phase schedules. Equal priority should be given to Physical Education alongside core academic subjects to achieve the intended holistic development of learners. In addition, there is a critical need for teacher development initiatives aimed at equipping Foundation Phase teachers with the practical skills and confidence required to deliver effective Physical Education lessons. This can be achieved through targeted workshops, Continuous Professional Teacher Development programs, and the provision of user-friendly teaching guides and resources aligned with the curriculum.

Improving infrastructure is another key priority. Schools, particularly in rural and underprivileged areas, should be provided with basic sports facilities and essential Physical Education resources such as balls, mats, and cones to enhance the quality and variety of physical activities offered. Where government resources are limited, partnerships with NGOs, local businesses, and community organisations can help in supplying equipment and maintaining sports spaces. Furthermore, parental and community engagement play a vital role in promoting active lifestyles and reinforcing the importance of Physical Education outside the school environment. Schools should implement awareness campaigns and involve parents in school-based physical activities to build a supportive network that values and encourages regular participation in physical education. These combined efforts will ensure that Physical Education becomes an integral part of the Foundation Phase experience, contributing significantly to the physical, cognitive, and emotional development of young learners.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study make it clear that Physical Education is a vital component of holistic education during the Foundation Phase. It contributes not only to physical health and motor skill development but also to improved classroom behavior, enhanced concentration, and stronger cognitive abilities. These benefits extend beyond the classroom, fostering social interaction, emotional regulation, and resilience among young learners. Despite these significant advantages, the study reveals that the implementation of Physical Education remains inconsistent and inadequate, particularly in rural areas where resource constraints, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of teacher training are major obstacles. Without deliberate efforts to strengthen PE delivery, learners in these contexts risk being deprived of essential developmental opportunities that are critical in their formative years. To address these issues, it is necessary to adopt a coordinated strategy that includes policy enforcement, adequate time allocation in the curriculum, teacher capacity building, and investment in sports infrastructure and learning materials. When these measures are in place, schools can create a supportive environment that prioritises physical activity as an integral part of learning, thereby promoting the holistic growth of Foundation Phase learners and laying a strong foundation for lifelong health, learning, and success.

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