Assessing The Status and Barriers Of Physical Education In Lower Secondary Schools: Implications For Public Health In Central Uganda

ABSTRACT

Quality physical education (QPE) is vital for holistic student development and is a key driver of public health. However, in low-resource countries such as Uganda, physical education (PE) is often marginalized. This study assessed the status of PE in lower secondary schools across Kampala, Wakiso, Mukono, and Mpigi districts. It specifically examined the implementation barriers to PE and their public health implications. Using an explanatory concurrent mixed-methods design, data was collected from thirty-seven schools—involving 317 students and 174 teachers—through questionnaires, key informants' interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. Findings revealed that although PE is part of the curriculum, it is marginalized and receives low prioritization compared to other subjects. In addition, while PE quality was rated as "good," challenges persist, including limited facilities and insufficiently trained personnel. The study also found strong support for inclusive PE, although schools struggle to meet the needs of learners with disabilities. Key barriers to implementation of QPE included deficits in teacher skills, infrastructure, staffing, and administrative commitment. These findings point to the fact that barriers to teaching QPE are not only teacher-related but also institutional and structural and do hinder effective implementation and limit PE's potential as a public health intervention. This study emphasizes the need to position PE as a strategic component of public health. Therefore, it advocates policy reforms that would elevate PE status, strengthen teacher capacity, and ensure equitable infrastructure. Such reforms are essential for achieving both quality education and improved adolescent health outcomes in Uganda.