

## **CHALLENGES IN THE DELIVERY OF ADVENTURE EDUCATION: THE CASE OF BOTSWANA JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This qualitative study explored the substantive issues and challenges faced by Physical Education teachers in delivering adventure education in the context of Botswana junior secondary schools. In the first stage of the study, 22 respondents completed a semi-structured questionnaire requesting information pertaining to the research objectives. The second stage entailed in-depth interviews with the 22 respondents to gain deeper insight into specific teachers' experiences. The findings indicated issues related to provision of outdoor activities; instructional strategies; Physical Education teachers' knowledge base; and administrative support. Respondents reported a lack of training in the area of adventure education. Their instructional strategies were limited to lecturing about concepts in adventure education without concomitant activity-based learning experiences. Non-appreciation of the module by school administrators also paralysed the teachers' effort to implement practical outdoor activities. In view of these challenges, the study suggests ways for enhancing effective delivery of adventure education in Botswana junior secondary schools.*

**Key words:** Physical Education teachers; Botswana; Adventure education; Outdoor activities.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In 1999, the Botswana Ministry of Education and Skills Development introduced a module on outdoor adventure education in the junior secondary school Physical Education syllabus. This module is aimed at enhancing students' self-esteem, self-reliance and self-confidence and deepening their knowledge, understanding and appreciation of environment conservation. The introduction of this module has now entered its first decade. To date there is little empirical knowledge of the opportunities and barriers to implementing this aspect of the syllabus. An exploration of the substantive issues and challenges in the delivery of this module is the thrust of this qualitative research.

Brendtro and Strother (2007) argue that outdoor education is a critical means of educating young people because it is exciting and therefore, provides powerful learning. They contend that the indoors-traditional education keeps pupils in a passive role in that it teaches them how to think and not what to think. They emphasise that the best way to learn is to become actively involved in activities: "I hear, I know; I see, I remember; I do, I understand" (Brendtro & Strother 2007:2).

According to Nicol *et al.* (2007:2), outdoor education encourages young people to develop the capacity to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective participants in societal projects. They state that it is a crucial means of conveying education especially because young people value experiences that are less formal, fun, make them feel free and expose them to nature.

Brendtro and Strother (2007) also point out that by nature; young people have more potential to initiate, develop and enjoy adventurous activities than adults because they constantly search for new experiences through exploration. Adventure education involves learning by experience, in an environment within which the excitement is derived from the contrast between new experiences and the routine of everyday life. Brendtro and Strother (2007:4) believe that since outdoor education engage young people in manageable risk and safe environments; they have to be able to find a proper balance between risk and safety. They provided the following challenge continuum:

- boredom – seeking opportunity for stimulation;
- play – exploring through fun activities that evoke little fear;
- adventure – engaging in stressful activities with manageable risk; and
- crisis – inability to cope with threat of physical or psychological harm.

Outdoor education encourages self-awareness and self-responsibility. Therefore, trying new behaviours in a group setting can contribute to pupils' increased self-awareness, self-confidence, motivation, interpersonal skills, concern for others and concern for the environment. In this regard, teachers' expectations, feedback and personalities can also contribute to increased pupils' self-concept, motivation and interpersonal skills (McKenzie, 2003). Studies have shown that people who participate in adventure activities improved their self-concept and developed socially acceptable behaviours as they interacted with the natural environment (McKenzie, 2003; Brendtro & Strother, 2007).

According to Brendtro and Strother (2007:5), outdoor adventure programs offer an authentic curriculum because:

“When students experience belonging, form strong bonds with positive adults and peers; when they experience mastery as talents are cultivated; when there is a sense of independence from exercising personal power; and when students express generosity and discover they are of value to others – then life becomes an adventure”.

Adventure programs enable young people to take on challenges; test self-courage and skills; develop leadership and problem solving abilities; share exhilarating experiences with others; build self-confidence and self-esteem. They learn how to be responsible, cooperate with others and recognise the difference between challenge and danger. Wuest and Bucher (2006) maintain that adventure education focuses on outdoor pursuits and challenge initiatives in which participants are required to work together to solve a particular problem. Some of the adventure activities are wall climbing, rock climbing, camping, rafting, horseback riding, skiing and trust-based exercises such as the ropes course. The rope course requires group efforts. Activities such as camping help youth learn about nature and ecology. These activities also improve fitness and promote environmental awareness amongst participants.

Forgan and Jones (2002:52) define an adventure project as “a curriculum that teaches students social skills, teamwork and conflict resolution through adventure games, problem solving initiatives and trust building activities”. It is an interdisciplinary program that involves experience-based learning and an alternative outdoor Physical Education program. They contend that such programs can have a strong and lasting effect on pupils when they are implemented consistently. However, in order for outdoor adventure education programs to fully meet development needs, they must move beyond self-serving thrills and help young people develop an ability to extend help where and when needed. When this happens, young people would reach out to others and in the process, put their energies to constructive use (Brendtro & Strother, 2007). Adventure education programs are also known for training peers in interpersonal skills (Bell *et al.*, 2008), which would further mould them into more responsible individuals. According to Brendtro and Strother (2007), critical components of effective outdoor adventure programs involve: problem solving based on high-impact; high expectations set for individual and group success; group processes that enhances communication, cooperation and social skills; and empathy and adventure experience.

Forgan and Jones (2002:55) believe that in addition to the critical components of effective outdoor programs, learners have the following roles to play as their contribution to the success of the program:

- they must work as team members;
- keep each other physically and emotionally safe;
- give and receive honest feedback in a kind manner;
- refrain from devaluing anyone, including self; and
- get over whatever may upset a team member during the activity.

Techniques of teaching outdoor education identified by Paisley *et al.* (2008:206) include:

“the instructor-oriented mechanism in which skills and practices are implemented by the instructor; the student-oriented mechanisms that are achieved through skill rehearsal and interaction with other group members; the student and instructor mechanism within which both parties are in control; and the qualities of the environment that describes how students achieve the learning from interaction with the natural and social environment”.

## RESEARCH PROBLEM

The requirements for implementing adventure education modules are quite different from those needed to enact other aspects of the Physical Education curriculum. These requirements include access to locations within and outside the school such as playgrounds, urban spaces, farms, parks, and wilderness areas (Nicol *et al.*, 2007), as well as specific teaching methods and materials (Davidson, 2001; McKenzie, 2003; Brendtro & Strother, 2007). Exploring Physical Education teachers’ perspectives and experiences of managing the requirements of adventure education are, therefore, very important to gain insight into the various factors impeding or facilitating the implementation process and to identify areas where teachers need specific pedagogical support. This qualitative study was aimed at exploring the substantive

issues and challenges perceived by Physical Education teachers regarding the delivery of adventure education in the context of junior secondary schools in Botswana.

## **METHOD**

A qualitative approach was used to explore the perceptions of Physical Education teachers regarding issues impinging on the effective delivery of the adventure education module. Questionnaires were administered to 40 Physical Education teachers, of whom 22 responded fully, yielding a 55% response rate. The convenient sample of 22 participants was drawn from junior secondary schools located in Gaborone. Schools in which questionnaires were administered were randomly selected from the Botswana secondary schools directories. Participants included 10 male and 12 female teachers with an average age of 32 years and age range of 25-40 years.

As their highest qualification 11 of the respondents had a diploma in secondary education, 10 had Bachelor of Education degrees and one had a Master's Degree in Education. Most of them had not received training in outdoor education. Only three indicated they had attended in-service seminars on outdoor education. On average, respondents had about six years teaching experience. In the first stage of the study, participants completed a semi-structured questionnaire requesting information pertaining to the research questions on challenges faced by the teachers. The second stage entailed in-depth interviews of the respondents to gain deeper insight into specific teachers' experiences. Responses were analysed in terms of key themes. Illustrative quotes are provided in the analysis.

## **FINDINGS**

Data analysis revealed four key issues or themes related to outdoor education experiences offered to learners: 1) instructional strategies and tools employed by the teachers to deliver the adventure education module and assess learner outcomes; 2) teachers' knowledge base regarding adventure education; 3) administrative challenges; and 4) ideas for effective delivery of the adventure education module.

### **Outdoor activities**

Respondents reported that the outdoor adventure lessons in their schools are rarely field-based. In other words, the outdoor adventure module is mostly taught in the classroom due to lack of logistical and other material support needed to engage learners in outdoor activities. They consider it paradoxical that there is little or no opportunity for learners to apply the theory and principles presented in adventure settings. They noted that schools located near a hill or river has a geographical advantage in that they are better positioned to expose learners to hill climbing and fishing. Some of the respondents reported that whenever possible they strive to arrange a school trip to a nearby game reserve for game viewing and camping. Representative responses were as follows:

“We rarely provide practical activities. Students are basically taught the theory of adventure education. This module is the most problematic to implement. Most Physical Education teachers are just muddling through”.

“We have tried several times to organise adventure trips for Physical Education students, but most of the time we are told there is no money for outdoor activities”.

“We do not have outdoor adventure equipment, not even for camping”.

“In my school, we once managed to take the students to a nearby game reserve. The students viewed the animals for a few hours and returned to school. That was many years ago”.

### **Instructional strategies**

Participants in this study reported that due to lack of facilities and equipment for outdoor education in their schools, they resort mostly to theory lessons involving concept definitions, class discussions, note-taking, oral presentations, individual assignments and pen and paper assessments. In terms of outcome evaluation, learners are usually asked to define outdoor education, name the equipment that has to be used for activities and identify safety precautions during adventure activities. The continuous assessment test items are generally similar to those contained in the end of year theory examination. Participants argued that they could not develop practical assessment tools for the module because the teaching-learning activities are mostly theoretical, thereby failing to address the syllabus objectives of equipping learners with outdoor skills and giving the opportunities to apply those skills. The respondents mentioned the following:

“Delivering content in the classroom is not going to equip students with outdoor skills. Students need to interact with the environment. It is difficult to achieve the stipulated objectives without activities”.

“It’s pathetic that we do not have opportunities for practical activities given that adventure education is supposed to engage students in challenging, cooperative and nature-based activities”.

### **Physical Education teachers’ knowledge base with regard to adventure education**

All the participants lamented that their teacher education programs did not prepare them to facilitate outdoor education. They pointed out that Physical Education teacher education programs at the University of Botswana and Botswana colleges of education do not offer courses in outdoor or adventure education such as camping and mountaineering, orienteering, hiking, rock climbing, abseiling, canoeing and related risk management strategies. Due to the lack of content and pedagogical knowledge bases in this area, the participants said that Physical Education teachers in Botswana secondary school tend to depend on their own devices to cover the adventure education portion of the syllabus. Below are some excerpt responses in this regard:

“Our teacher preparation is not aligned with the secondary school Physical Education syllabus. Physical Education teachers must be trained in adventure education to enable them deliver it in a meaningful manner. We teach theory only because we lack outdoor education skills”.

“We teach the adventure education module by reading and giving notes to students. Students need the notes to pass the junior certificate exams”.

“Physical Education teacher education in Botswana must include courses in adventure education to empower prospective teachers of the subject. Most importantly, we need in-service workshops and outdoor education sessions to help us deliver this aspect of the Physical Education syllabus”.

### **Administrative challenges**

Participants indicated that while a few principals provided some support towards the delivery of the adventure education module, most of them were unwilling to allow outward-bound school trips for adventure education. They stressed that this reluctance was a problem because some principals would describe such trips as a waste of money even where the school has funds. Some respondents attributed the negative attitudes of principals to a lack of understanding and appreciation of the subject. They reported that although learners and their parents were not averse to outdoor experiences, administrative support was a major challenge, for example:

“School administrators have a negative attitude towards this module. We fail to take students out for activities due to their lack of administrative support and understanding”.

“Administrators are not supportive of this module; it’s like a waste of time and financial resources to take students outdoors or into the wilderness. Some are rightly worried about students’ safety”.

“Sometimes when we think of taking students out, we fear that we would be held accountable for any mishap or accident because we are not supported or trained for the task. What we need is pedagogical and administrative support, not refusal”.

### **Ideas for effective delivery of the adventure education module**

Participants generally agreed that instructional strategies for the module must include practical activities, such as rock climbing; camping; water activities such as canoeing and water safety; biking; hiking; and survival skills. They reasoned that such activities would help improve learners’ self-awareness; self-concept; and team spirit. They also suggested that assessment modalities must cater for both theory and practice. They called for training, in the form of workshops for school administrators and parents so that they could understand and appreciate the subject.

Participants felt that learners should be actively involved in the teaching process of the module so as to enhance their learning process. They argued that learners would understand and learn faster once they are involved in practical activities. Since practical activities cannot be realised without funds, it was recommended that schools be given enough funds to cater for these activities, as well as for procuring outdoor equipment and library resources. Other ideas offered include in-service training in adventured education for Physical Education teachers and regular monitoring and evaluation of Physical Education curriculum

implementation. Participants appealed to the University of Botswana and Botswana colleges of education to include adventure education courses in their Physical Education teacher education programs.

“Schools need outdoor education equipment and facilities for practical activities”.

“We appeal to the examination council not to make questions on adventure education compulsory, as our students always fail that section because it is poorly taught”.

“Part of the problem could be solved by proper preparation of Physical Education teachers. Proper preparation of Physical Education teachers will improve the delivery of outdoor or adventure education in secondary schools”.

## DISCUSSION

Outdoor education is activity-based and provides learners with opportunity to guide the experiential learning process (Seaman & Gass, 2004). According to Davidson (2001:1), the “essence of learning from adventure is the process of making meaning out of experience” and therefore, without participation in activities, outdoor education is incomplete and would not benefit learners. Outdoor education activity experiences can lead to a better retention of learning than the traditional classroom methods, as learners are more likely to remember and apply what they practised. They offer roles to learners and empower them to acquire new responsibilities in new settings (Seaman & Gass, 2004). These activities also offer vital development to learners such as the ability to resolve conflict, enhancing self-esteem, cooperation skills, leadership skills and relationships with peers (Leupp, 2007; Bell *et al.*, 2008). In order for outdoor education to be more effective, school administrators must facilitate the use of experiential methods of learning (Paisley *et al.*, 2008), rather than the classroom method of teaching.

Learners’ participation in activities also enhances their ability to work in groups, interpersonal skills and build a positive self-concept (Larson, 2007; Bell *et al.*, 2008). Some of the outdoor activities such as rock climbing, camping, hiking need to be done far away from schools, and therefore, schools have to be ready to fund these activities. Findings from this study indicate that there was lack of access to places that could possibly be used for outdoor activities such as hills and rivers. This is a problem because activities in the adventure education module are supposed to be done outdoors and sometimes within the natural environment; therefore, without places for activities, the module delivery is problematic and incomplete (Leupp, 2007).

Paisley *et al.* (2008) suggest that outdoor education formal classes must not be delivered in a lecture-based fashion because its keyword is the act of doing. Formal classes must incorporate role-playing, activities and discussions. In the same vein, McKenzie (2000:21) argues that: “Students are more likely to be motivated when they are able to praise themselves and feel good about their performance because they have achieved or exceeded the goals they set”.

Nicol *et al.* (2007) noted that young people value experiences that are fun and enjoyable, that leave them feeling uninhibited, being close to nature and being exposed to the effects of weather and not always knowing what will happen next. In this context, Paisley *et al.* (2008) advocate learner-oriented mechanisms for teaching learning objectives in outdoor education. These are achieved through skill rehearsal and interaction with other group members in the physical environment.

Lugg and Slattery (2003) explain that the traditional approaches to outdoor education have created a limitation by focusing on the objective of achieving personal and social development. Their content has focused on outdoor activity skills, personal and group development skills, safety management, camping and outdoor survival skills with less emphasis on environmental issues. However, proper outdoor education programs should emphasise environmental education through experiences, especially in natural settings.

According to Lugg and Slattery (2003), the objectives of environmental education are shaped by three characteristics. Firstly, there is an applied science approach that develops knowledge about the environment. Secondly, there is the practical interpretive approach that emphasises learning in and about the environment, and lastly, a social critical perspective advocates action for the environment. The authors further argued that with the current environmental problems, the social critical perspective characteristics are often considered the most appropriate justification for outdoor education. They further outline two approaches used for outdoor education: the experiential; and the transformative approaches. Experiential approaches to outdoor education have incorporated environmental education. They provide opportunities for enjoyment, appreciation and awareness of the environment. Transformative approaches promote change within the individual but they do not necessarily educate individuals for deeper societal change, which is regarded vital for environmental sustainability.

Participants in this study lamented the fact that most school administrators did not appreciate the outdoor education module. They argued that it was a waste of time when learners are taken out to experience and learn within the environment. They attributed this factor to a lack of understanding the module, its role and purpose. Sensitisation meetings and workshops would therefore be necessary. School administrators must be trained to understand the role of and rationale for outdoor education programs. Once they do, they would be able to support the activities, negotiate and lobby for increased funding and implementation of programs in schools (Seaman & Gass, 2004). Similarly, once parents understand the need for activities, they would appreciate it and be more willing to assist with the costs of outward trips where necessary (Nicol *et al.*, 2007).

Trained teachers can make a difference in the lives of students by setting the direction of the experience and maximise the potential for learning (Miller & Allen-Craig, 2006). Participants in this study claimed that they lack the essential training to effectively teach outdoor education. Physical Education teacher education programs in Botswana must be revised in line with the proposed national qualification framework to assure quality and encourage the delivery of meaningful outdoor education.



## CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the delivery of the outdoor education module and discuss challenges perceived by teachers in junior secondary schools of Gaborone. It is evident from the results of this study that substantial problems and challenges were experienced with the delivery of this module. It can therefore, be argued that although this module is part of the syllabus, it was basically poorly delivered. The study identified the problematic areas from the perspectives of a sample of Physical Education teachers and suggestions for effective delivery of adventure education in Botswana junior secondary schools were provided. However, ethnographic studies are needed to provide richer accounts of what goes on in the name of adventure education in Botswana junior secondary schools.

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