

The Future of Physical Education and Sports in Light of the Crisis of Playgrounds in Schools in the Republic of Djibouti

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Abstract

The teaching of Physical Education and Sports (PES) is increasingly compromised in Djibouti, as most of the new middle and secondary schools built in the past two decades do not have playgrounds. This situation has meant that some students have never had access to physical and sports activities as part of their school curriculum. They consequently suffer the detrimental consequences of this situation, particularly on health, well-being, and overall development. To carry out this research, we have analyzed several data sources, such as internal reports and statistical directories of the national education system. We have also studied legislative documents, articles, reports, and chapters on the evolution of school education in Djibouti, as well as ethnographic surveys. Through descriptive analyses, the purpose of this article is to highlight the disparities that exist among different schools in terms of playground equipment and, by extension, access to physical and sports activities. Ultimately, this article emphasizes the urgent need to address the crisis of playgrounds in schools to ensure a better future for PES and enable students to benefit from the physical, social, and educational advantages associated with engaging in physical and sports activities.

Keywords: Playgrounds, Physical Education and Sports, Secondary Schools, Republic of Djibouti.

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INTRODUCTION

The review of literature on physical education and sports highlights its crucial role in the physical, mental, and social development of children and adolescents. PES helps promote a healthy lifestyle, enhances motor development and coordination, strengthens social skills, and encourages active student participation. Similarly, PES contributes to improving well-being both physically and mentally (Tant & Watelain, 2015). That is why one of the internal reports of the national education system clearly states that PES constitutes an element of lifelong education and an inalienable right for every citizen without any discrimination (MENFOP, 2000).

In schools, playgrounds play an essential role in promoting physical activity and providing a safe and suitable space for students to engage in physical activities. However, many countries, including the Republic of Djibouti, face challenges related to playground infrastructure in schools. The crisis of playgrounds in schools can be caused by various factors such as lack of funding, lack of maintenance and

renovation, constraints of available space, and prioritization of other areas of education. These issues can result in a lack of proper sports facilities, poorly maintained or even nonexistent playgrounds, limiting opportunities for students to participate in physical and sports activities.

It is important to note that the consequences of the playground crisis can be detrimental to students' health and well-being. Lack of physical activity can contribute to health problems such as obesity, lack of concentration, decreased academic performance, and social isolation. In the context of the Republic of Djibouti, two problems are well-known: existing gymnasiums that require major rehabilitation work, and the absence of sports infrastructure in some schools. To address these problems, it is necessary to recognize the importance of physical education and sports in the school curriculum and prioritize the allocation of adequate resources for the development and maintenance of playgrounds. It is also essential to train teachers in integrating PES into their classes and promote a culture of physical activity within schools.

In summary, the crisis of playgrounds in schools in the Republic of Djibouti can have a negative impact on students' physical education and sports. Efforts are needed to address these issues and ensure that schools have appropriate facilities to encourage the practice of physical activities and, consequently, the overall development of students.

Contextualization of Physical Education and Sports (PES) and its Importance in Students' Development

The contextualization of Physical Education and Sports (PES) highlights its essential role in the overall development of students. PES goes beyond mere physical activity by providing learning opportunities that promote the physical, mental, and social growth of children and adolescents. On a physical level, PES contributes to improving physical fitness, motor development, coordination, and endurance among students (WHO, 2015). By providing them with opportunities to participate in various physical activities, PES also promotes the acquisition of fundamental motor skills such as running, jumping, hand-eye coordination, and more.

On a mental level, PES plays an important role in developing cognitive abilities and decision-making, problem-solving, and concentration skills. Students are encouraged to think strategically, analyze complex situations, and make quick decisions, which promotes the development of their executive functions and reasoning abilities. On a social level, PES offers opportunities for interaction with peers, encourages cooperation, strengthens social skills, and promotes effective communication. Group activities and team games allow students to develop collaboration, leadership, mutual respect, and fair play skills, while fostering teamwork and strengthening social bonds.

Furthermore, PES fosters a positive attitude towards physical activity and contributes to promoting a healthy lifestyle. By exposing students to a variety of physical and sports activities, PES provides them with the opportunity to discover interests and talents that can influence their long-term engagement in physical and sports activities outside of school. In summary, PES plays a crucial role in students' development by improving their physical condition, strengthening their mental capacities, and promoting their social integration. It contributes to shaping balanced and fulfilled individuals ready to face the challenges of everyday life. Therefore, it is essential to recognize and value the importance of PES in the school curriculum to ensure the holistic development of students.

Presentation of the Specific Problem of the Crisis of Playgrounds in Schools in Djibouti.

The crisis of playgrounds in schools in Djibouti is a specific problem that limits opportunities for students to engage in adequate physical and sports activities. This crisis is characterized by a lack of

appropriate sports facilities, playgrounds in poor condition, or even non-existent ones (WHO, 2015). Several factors contribute to this crisis. Firstly, a major problem is the lack of funding. Limited financial resources allocated to education, especially to sports infrastructure, hinder the construction and renovation of playgrounds in schools. This lack of funding may be due to different budget priorities or broader economic constraints.

Furthermore, the absence of regular maintenance and renovation of playgrounds exacerbates the crisis. Sports equipment and facilities can deteriorate over time due to a lack of proper maintenance, rendering the playgrounds unusable or unsafe for students. Space constraints are also a major challenge. Schools in Djibouti may face limitations in terms of available space for the construction of adequate playgrounds. Restricted urban infrastructure can make it difficult to allocate sufficient space to meet the students' needs for physical activities. The consequences of the playground crisis are concerning. Students are deprived of the opportunity to participate in physical and sports activities, which can lead to health problems such as obesity, lack of physical fitness, and mental health disorders. Additionally, the lack of adequate playgrounds can limit opportunities for students to develop social skills, build self-confidence, and foster inclusion.

The diagnosis conducted by the Ministry of National Education specifies that the conditions for teaching physical education (PES) are not uniform across all schools (MENFOP, 2000). From primary to secondary education, there are generally infrastructure problems that hinder the development and organization of school sports. Primary schools, in addition, face a lack of resources and a shortage of trained teachers. By the time students reach the secondary level, they do not have the required level of proficiency in PE. It is therefore more than necessary to address the problems that arise in the teaching of PE, as it is undeniably recognized that PE is a catalyst for developing various qualities (physical, social, cognitive, health-related, cultural, and emotional) in individuals. Moreover, PE is both an element of education and a fundamental right for all students.

Since the year 2000, experts in national education, as part of the education action plan, have highlighted the problems hindering the teaching of PE (MENFOP, 2000). For example, in secondary education, they suggested the need for major rehabilitation work to ensure proper teaching of PE, as well as the creation of multiple playgrounds and equipping schools with sports equipment. They also lamented that in most secondary schools, PE is not taught due to a lack of sports facilities. Eighteen years later, the same observation was made by Ballah (2018). He emphasizes that in certain schools, the lack of sports

facilities sometimes leads to the removal of PE from the school curriculum. In his analysis, he explains that "such a situation would undoubtedly contribute to considering PE as a secondary discipline or even a 'sub-

discipline.' Consequently, such an approach accelerates the 'depopularization' of physical activities and sports practices as a whole."

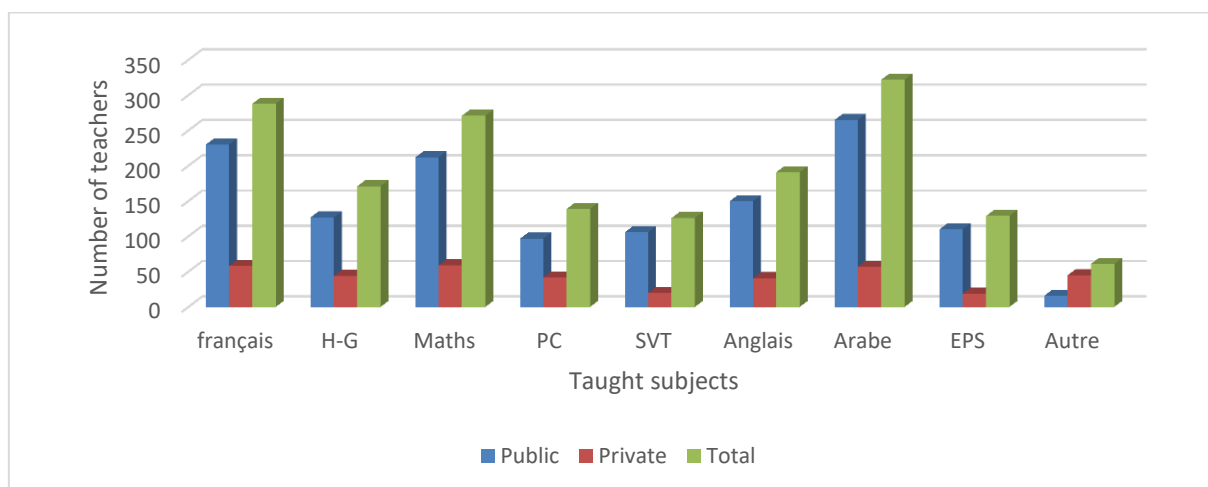


Figure 1: Distribution of teachers responsible for subjects in secondary education
Source: MENFOP (2021)

Figure 1 shows that in secondary education, there are nine groups of teachers representing their school subjects. Among the nine school subjects taught, eight are clearly identified (French, History-Geography, Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry, Biology, English, Arabic, and Physical Education). It can be observed that teachers of literary subjects (Arabic, French, and English) are the most numerous (801 teachers),

followed by the scientific subjects (Physics and Chemistry, Biology, and Mathematics) with a total of 536 teachers. Furthermore, considering the number of teachers per subject, it is notable that they are significantly more numerous for the subject "Arabic" (322) followed by the subject "French" (288), and they are the least numerous for the subject "Physical Education" (129).

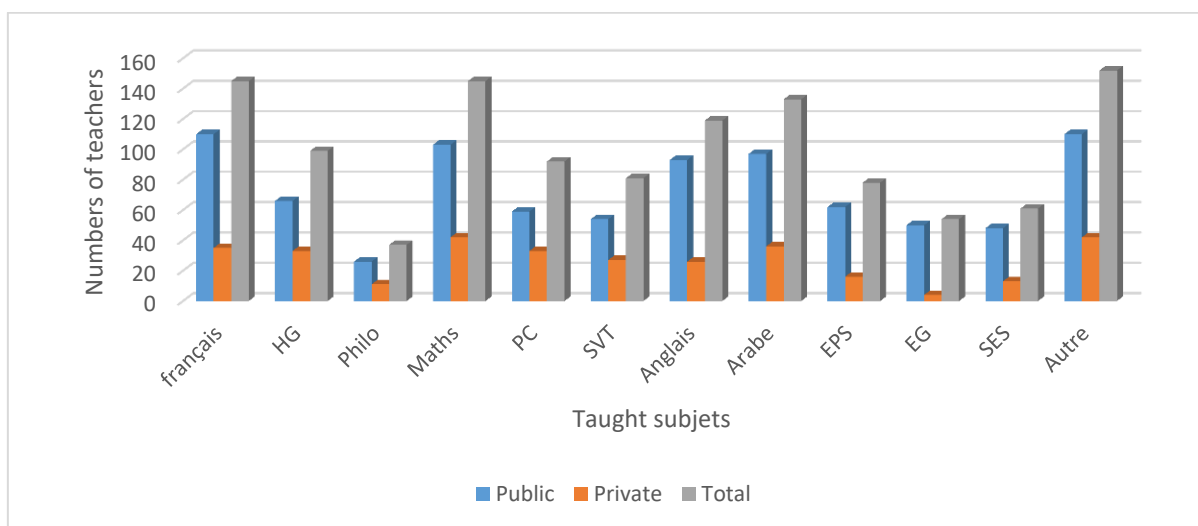


Figure 2: Distribution of teachers responsible for subjects in secondary education.
Source: MENFOP (2021)

Figure 2, on the other hand, shows the number of teachers per subject in secondary education. It can be observed that, just like in secondary education, teachers of literary subjects are more numerous (397) than teachers of other subjects. Furthermore, the comparison

of teachers per subject reveals that those teaching mathematics are the most numerous (145), followed by those teaching French (133). Similarly to the teachers in secondary education, it is notable that they are the least numerous for the subject "Physical Education" (78).

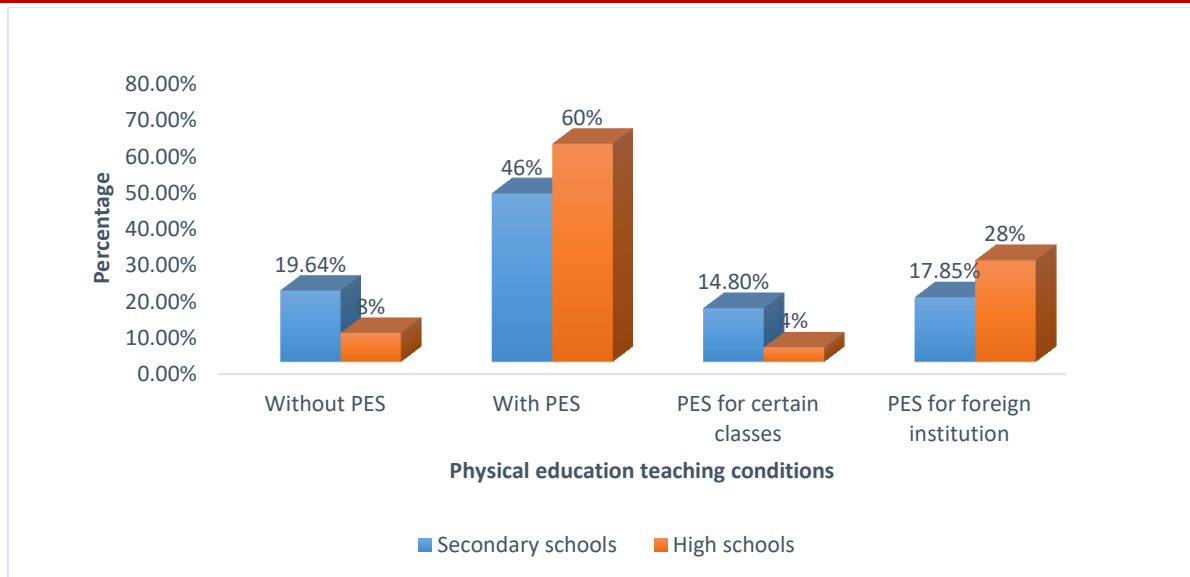


Figure 3: Percentages of different conditions of physical education teaching in colleges and high schools.
Source: MENFOP (2021)

Figure 3 presents the results of the different categories of physical education teaching conditions in French-speaking public and private colleges and high schools. Firstly, it is evident that high schools are better equipped than colleges when it comes to the requirement of physical education teaching. In fact, it is estimated that 60% of high school establishments are equipped to perfectly deliver physical education classes for all grade levels. Furthermore, among the 40% of high school establishments that do not have the necessary infrastructure for physical activities and sports, 28% adapt by relocating the physical education classes to other equipped establishments. Out of the remaining 12% of establishments, 4% choose to offer physical education classes only for exam classes (such as the First and Final Years), and the remaining 8% prefer to completely eliminate physical education from the school curriculum.

The conditions of physical education teaching are not better in colleges. The results in Figure 3 show that only 46% of colleges are equipped to deliver physical education classes at all grade levels. In other words, more than half of our colleges are no longer able to provide physical education, which is, nevertheless, a mandatory discipline in the Djiboutian education system. It is noted that 20% of these colleges have completely removed physical education classes due to a lack of sports infrastructure. To avoid the complete elimination of physical education, nearly 33% of colleges resort to either relocating the classes to third-party schools (17.85%) or choosing to offer physical education only for higher-level classes (14.80%) due to the limited capacity of available play areas.

To address this crisis, it is essential to recognize the importance of physical activity and physical education in the school curriculum and

prioritize the allocation of adequate resources for the development and maintenance of play areas. It is also necessary to raise awareness among relevant authorities and the community about the importance of play areas in schools and advocate for the improvement of sports infrastructure. Finally, partnerships between stakeholders, such as schools, local authorities, and sports organizations, can contribute to finding sustainable solutions to overcome the play area crisis in Djibouti.

Presentation of the benefits of physical education for the physical, mental, and social development of students

Physical Education (PE) offers numerous benefits for the physical, mental, and social development of students. Here is a presentation of the key advantages:

Physical Development:

Improved physical fitness: PE allows students to enhance their endurance, strength, agility, and flexibility through various physical activities.

Acquisition of motor skills: PE classes provide students with the opportunity to develop fundamental motor skills such as running, jumping, throwing, balancing, coordination, and object manipulation.

Promotion of a healthy lifestyle: PE encourages students to adopt healthy lifestyle habits by providing them with knowledge about nutrition, regular physical activity, and stress management.

Mental Development:

Enhanced cognitive abilities: Regular participation in physical activities promotes the development of

cognitive functions such as memory, attention, concentration, and problem-solving.

Reduction of stress and anxiety: Physical exercise stimulates the release of endorphins, the "happiness hormones," which helps reduce stress and anxiety, thereby improving students' mental well-being.

Boosted self-esteem: Individual and collective achievements in physical activities and sports enhance self-confidence, self-esteem, and positive body image.

Social Development:

Promotion of teamwork: Group sports activities promote collaboration, cooperation, mutual respect, and teamwork, thereby teaching students essential social skills.

Development of interpersonal skills: PE provides students with opportunities to interact with their peers and people from different backgrounds, fostering the development of interpersonal skills such as communication, empathy, and conflict resolution.

Inclusion and respect for diversity: PE encourages respect for diversity by providing an inclusive environment where students can interact, cooperate, and learn from each other, regardless of their differences.

In summary, physical education significantly contributes to the physical, mental, and social development of students. By offering them diverse physical activities, physical education promotes balanced growth by enhancing their physical fitness, developing their cognitive abilities, and cultivating essential social skills. These combined benefits play a key role in shaping balanced and healthy individuals ready to face the challenges of everyday life.

DISCUSSION

The evolution of the student population has undergone significant changes between 2006 and 2020. At the primary school level, the number of students increased from 56,667 to 70,324, representing a growth of 19.42%. In the middle school level, the number of students was 24,654 in 2006 and reached 46,342 in 2020, indicating an increase of 53.20%. This exponential increase can be attributed to the elimination of the entrance examination to the sixth grade. At the secondary level, the number of enrolled students was 8,210 in 2006, and it reached 17,631 in 2020, representing a growth of 46.56%. It is noteworthy that there has been a similar increase in both middle and secondary education. The mandatory schooling law for children from 6 to 16 years old, passed by the state as legislation, may explain this consistency between the two mentioned educational levels (Law of July 10, 2000). The average age of students entering secondary education falls within the age range guaranteed by the law.

Furthermore, the number of students in technical education increased from 1,711 in 2006 to 4,761 in 2020, representing a growth of 64%. This significant increase can be attributed to the implementation of a new orientation law by the state aimed at combating unemployment and social exclusion. In this regard, the quality and quantity of learning centers have been strengthened to promote self-employment and provide the job market with qualified practitioners immediately. This context has compelled educational authorities to adapt their reception system by increasing the number of schools and related infrastructure. Accordingly, the overall number of public and private educational institutions increased from 36 in 2006 to 77 in 2020, representing a total growth of 53.24% (MENFOP, 2021).

Furthermore, the analysis of Figure 1 and Figure 2 reveals that physical education teachers are the least numerous among all disciplines, both in middle and secondary education. However, physical education is compulsory at all levels, starting from the 6th grade up to the terminal class. This shortage of physical education teachers is likely due to some institutions not offering physical education classes due to a lack of suitable infrastructure and absence of play areas. Consequently, it seems that the number of physical education teachers has been adjusted according to the availability of sports facilities. However, it was explicitly recommended to restructure all institutions that did not meet the physical education teaching standards. From a legal standpoint, it can be said that the right to engage in physical and sports activities is not being respected.

The results of Figure 1 and Figure 2 show, relatively speaking, that the number of physical education teachers is reduced compared to teachers in other disciplines. Unfortunately, this can be explained by the fact that the physical education course is not taught according to the requirements of the official bulletin of national education. In other words, the teaching of physical education greatly depends on the levels and quality of sports facilities in each school. In this regard, Figure 3 shows that more than half of the colleges do not have enough basic infrastructure to teach physical education. Specifically, it would be more precisely 22,326 out of 13,339 students who do not have the opportunity to participate in physical education classes in their own school. Among these 13,339 students, 4,770 have never experienced a physical education session (19.64%). Furthermore, this trend decreases at the high school level. There would be only 6,310 out of a total of 15,773 students who cannot benefit from physical education classes in their own school. Among them, 1,262 will never experience a physical education class, either in their own high school or in another school.

It is immediately noticeable that there are fewer high schools than colleges. This means that high schools accommodate a significant number of students from different colleges. Among the students admitted to high schools, there are some who come from colleges where physical education is never taught. Therefore, physical education teachers in high schools face situations of heterogeneity. In the same class, they have students at beginner and advanced levels. However, the planning of learning sessions is common to all students in the same class (MENFOP, 2015). To date, it does not take into account intra-class disparities. Teachers, for their part, are never prepared to deal with such pedagogical and didactic challenges. Under these circumstances, it would be beneficial to know what teaching content to offer to students with diametrically opposed skills. Similarly, it would be wise to regulate the purposes of physical education teaching practices and shed light on their philosophical foundations.

Faced with this "institutional void," physical education teachers find themselves torn between attempting or being obliged to manage heterogeneity due to students coming from different colleges with varying levels of physical education skills. On the other hand, they face the difficulty, even impossibility, of leading students with such different skill levels towards the same learning objectives. The challenge for local sports science researchers and practitioners is to find a way to approach pedagogical and didactic aims that open up integrated perspectives, considering both the ambitions of the physical education project and the constraints of the reality on the ground.

LIMITATIONS

This study does indeed have some limitations. Firstly, it is observed that this study was primarily based on the analysis of various internal reports from the national education system. However, it would also be interesting to delve deeper into the subject of this article by conducting interviews, for example, with physical education teachers and students enrolled in schools without a physical education program. It would also be interesting to compare the behaviors of students or even the success rates between schools that offer physical education and those that do not. In short, the results obtained in this study already provide interesting prospects for future research.

CONCLUSION

The results obtained in this study have shown that a number of middle and secondary schools do not have suitable sports facilities for the teaching of physical education. Similarly, despite early recommendations from various internal reports of the national education system aimed at improving the conditions of physical education teaching, the same problems persist blatantly to this day.

To address the crisis of playgrounds, it is necessary to engage in multifaceted actions such as the construction and renovation of sports facilities, strengthening the training of physical education teachers, raising awareness among policymakers, and promoting partnerships between stakeholders in the sports and education fields. For a better future perspective, we suggest further investigation through a comprehensive national survey specifically focused on the conditions of physical education teaching.

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