

Challenges Facing Female Students' Participation In Sports: Evidence From Zamse Senior High/Technical School, Ghana

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Abstract: *The objective of this investigation was to determine the level of understanding of female students in Zamse Senior High Technical (ZAMSTECH), an Upper East Region high school in Ghana, regarding the significance of sports for their health and well-being. Furthermore, the research aimed to examine the major difficulties that prevent female students from accessing and engaging in sports and to provide appropriate measures to tackle these obstacles to female students' participation in secondary school sports. A descriptive survey approach was utilized in this study, and 200 students from the school were chosen randomly to respond to a research instrument. The responses were evaluated using descriptive statistics to answer the three research questions. The study revealed that the respondents had insufficient knowledge of the benefits of sports to their health and well-being. Physical education instructors' negative attitudes, large class sizes, insufficient school facilities and equipment, and sociocultural and religious practices were identified as the primary difficulties that female students encounter when participating in sports at ZAMSTECH. The study concludes that female students will engage in sports if they have their parents' support. The recommendations include providing equipment and facilities in schools, encouraging physical education teachers to raise awareness of the importance of female participation in sports during PTA and staff meetings, and using a student-centered teaching approach to motivate female students in both practical and theoretical lessons.*

Keywords: Challenges, Participation in Sports, ZAMSTECH

Introduction

Sport is one area where gender inequality is strongly evident. It is deplorable that men and women are treated differently, especially in sports. Women make up 50% of the world's population but they are not given equal opportunities. Men are still considered the better sex and this is one of the reasons why the world is yet to produce a female Michael Schumacher, Tiger Woods, Mike Tyson, or Sachin Tendulkar (Green & Gold, 2010; Vanos, Thompson & Delay, 2020).

It is generally accepted that physical activity confers benefits to psychosocial health, functional ability, and general quality of life and has been proven to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease and some cancers (Peterson & Peterson, 2021). Women and girls are less likely to take part in sports and active recreation compared to their male counterparts. Statistical data from a range of countries (for example, Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the USA) indicate that males participate more frequently than females in sports and more often in team sports (Riot, 2015).

Girls and women face a disproportionate number of life challenges, which reduce their ability to achieve their full potential. Recent studies show that despite formal guarantees of equality, the overall rate of progress for women, particularly those from the poorest and most marginalized regions of the world has been slow (Thompson & Delay, 2020).

The male students in ZAMSTECH have a very strong quest for success in sports. They have dominated in almost all disciplines both at the zonal and the super zonal levels. It came as no surprise when they won the football trophy during the 2015 super zonal competition at Sandema Senior High School and were runners-up in 2017. Aside from football, the boys have chalked a lot of successes in athletics, volleyball, handball, and table tennis. Unfortunately, the situation is quite different when it comes to female sports. In the just-ended super zonal games in Bawku Senior High School, ZAMSTECH placed 7th, 4th, 6th, and 8th in football, volleyball, athletics, and netball respectively out of the eight schools which competed in the games. Physical education tutors had a tough time raising teams for table tennis and even football since most of the girls contacted were not interested to participate.

The purpose of this study was to find out female students’ knowledge about the importance of sports to their health and well-being in Zamse Secondary/Technical School, to identify the challenges that affect female students’ access and participation in Sports, and to suggest appropriate measures that address the challenges that militate against female’s participation in secondary school sports in Zamse.

Three research questions were set to support the study namely;

1. What is the knowledge level of female students in Zamse Senior/Technical School on the benefits of participating in sporting activities?
2. What challenges affect female students’ participation in sports at Zamse Secondary/Technical School?
3. What measures can be put in place to address the challenges that female students in Zamse Senior/Technical School face in their participation in sporting activities?

Methodology

The Research Design considered appropriate for this study was the descriptive survey. A descriptive survey is considered the appropriate design to use since it could be used with greater confidence concerning particular questions of special interest or value to the researcher (Stockemer, 2019). The population consisted of all the 432 female students in the school. A simple random sampling technique was employed to select 200 female students to form part of the study. This translated to 46.29% of the target population. The percentage of the sample size gives the minimum size since the population is very large. This concurs with the concept of Creswell (2017) who argue that the ideal sample of a large population should be small enough to be selected economically. In employing simple random sampling, the researcher writes YES and NO on a piece of paper with yes being 200 and NO being 232, and put them in a bowl. The bowl was moved from class to class for the female students to pick. Female students who picked YES were formally addressed by the researchers and consent was sought from them after which the questionnaire was administered in the classroom.

A self-administered questionnaire was the only tool used to gather data from the respondents. Creswell (2017) espoused that a questionnaire allows dimension for or beside a particular viewpoint and that questionnaire can gather a great amount of information in a reasonably short time. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: section A enquired about the knowledge level of female students on the importance of sports; section B touched on the challenges that affect female students' access and participation in sports and lastly, section C enquired about the information related to overcoming challenges facing female students’ participation in sports. The instrument was pilot tested on 30 female students at Bolgatanga Girls SHS who had similar characteristics as Zamse Senior/Technical school to assess the validity and reliability of the instrument.

Results and Discussions

Research Question 1: What is the knowledge level of female students in Zamse Senior/Technical School on the benefits of participating in sporting activities?

The first research question assesses the knowledge level of female students in Zamse Senior/Technical school on the benefits of participating in sporting activities. The results presented in table 1 revealed that female students lack knowledge of the benefits of participation in sports. For example, only 65% of respondents agreed that regular physical activity is associated with a longer and better quality of life. Additionally, only 32% agreed that sports participation can reduce chronic disease, and even fewer (less than 30%) agreed that sports can lead to the development of game skills, movement skills, and knowledge about exercise. Similarly, only 17% agreed that sports participation can develop leadership qualities. The result is contrary to studies that show the benefits of sports participation. Participating in sports has beneficial effects on physical, social, and psychological health outcomes. Additionally, engaging in sports activities promotes good health and helps to prevent chronic diseases (Riemer-Hommel, 2020). Herbert, O’Brien, Garcia, and Giesbrecht (2021) also observed that regular physical activity, active play, and sports can be a practical means to achieve numerous health gains, either directly or indirectly through its positive impact on other major risks, in particular high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, tobacco use, and stress. Huffman (2008) on the other hand also espoused that the Physical health benefits of regular physical activity are well-established. Regular participation in such activities is associated with a longer and better quality of life, reduced risks of a variety of diseases, and many psychological and emotional benefits.

This study's findings suggest that there may be a need for more education and awareness about the benefits of sports participation, particularly among female students. Encouraging and promoting sports participation can not only have positive physical and mental health outcomes but also help develop skills that are beneficial in various areas of life, including leadership and teamwork. It is important to promote a culture of physical activity and sports participation that is inclusive and accessible to all, regardless of gender or other factors.

Table 1: Knowledge Level of Female Students in Zamse Senior/Technical School on Benefits of Participation in Sporting Activities

Statement	Agree	%	Disagree	%
Association of regular physical activities with longer and better quality of life	65	32.5%	135	67.5%
Reduction of chronic disease through sports participation	32	16%	168	84%

Girls' involvement in sports leads to the development of game skills	29	14.5%	171	85.5%
Participation in regular activities helps develop movement skills	29	14.5%	171	85.5%
Girls' sports participation ensures the acquisition of knowledge about exercise	15	7.5%	185	92.5%
Engaging in sporting activities develops leadership quality among the girls	17	8.5%	183	91.5%

Research Question 2: What challenges affect female students' participation in sports at Zamse Secondary/Technical School?

The results of the study showed that female students faced several major challenges that affected their access and participation in sports. The most commonly reported challenges were lack of parental support, negative attitudes of physical education teachers, inadequate school facilities and equipment, and socio-cultural practices. Additionally, religious practices were also reported as a challenge.

The survey found that 84% of the respondents reported a lack of parental support as a major challenge, indicating that parents were not encouraging or supportive of their participation in sports. Similarly, 82.5% of the respondents reported negative attitudes toward physical education teachers as a major challenge, indicating that teachers were not supportive of their participation in sports. The inadequate school facilities and equipment were reported as a major challenge by 75% of the respondents, highlighting the need for more investment in sports infrastructure.

The results from table 2 also provided additional insights into the challenges that female students faced. For example, many students reported that socio-cultural practices such as gender stereotypes, discrimination, and lack of female role models in sports negatively affected their participation. Religious practices were also identified as a challenge, with 84.5% of the students reporting that their religious beliefs prevented them from participating in sports. This is contrary to Mohler (2010) who opined that Christianity warmly encouraged and recognized the relevance of sports to the well-being of their followers. No wonder that emphasized that sports have taken an increasingly influential role in the lives of evangelical Christians. He went further to state that, sports have the potential to give Christians a good platform for Christian witness, and also the potential to lead Christians into idolatry. On the other hand, Islam too recognizes the impact of sports on the health of believers and encourages her followers to partake in sports as long as such participation does not run counter to Islamic acceptable laid down principles and practice.

Table 2: Challenges Female Students Face in Participating in Sports at ZAMSTECH

STATEMENT	AGREE	%	DISAGREE	%
Lack of Parental Support	168	84	32	16
Negative Attitude of Physical Education Teacher	165	82.5	35	17.5
Large Class Size	160	80	40	20
Inadequate School Facilities and Equipment	150	75	50	25
Socio-Cultural Practices	163	81.5	37	18.2
Religious Practice	169	84.5	31	15.5

The study's findings highlight the need to address the major challenges that female students face in accessing and participating in sports. Parents, physical education teachers, and school administrators should be encouraged to create a supportive environment that promotes female participation in sports. This can be achieved through education campaigns that aim to change attitudes towards sports and female participation. Additionally, more investment is needed in sports infrastructure to provide adequate facilities and equipment for female students.

Research Question 3: What measures can be put in place to address the challenges that female students in Zamse Senior/Technical School face in their participation in sporting activities?

This third research question assessed the measures of overcoming challenges facing female students' participation in sports at Zamse Senior High/Technical School. As evident in Table 3, 165 respondents representing 82.5% agreed to the assertion that the provision of parental support will greatly improve female students' participation in sports, while 35 respondents representing 17.5% disagreed. Embarking on education to enlighten people on the benefits of female students' participation in sports recorded the highest number of respondents (177) in ZAMSTECH. This finding is consistent with Hallack (1990) who said that organization of workshops, seminars, and conferences to educate stakeholders and the general public on the importance of female sports will contribute a great deal to females' participation in sports. The results of the study also revealed that positive teachers' contributions will eliminate challenges facing female students' participation in sports. This finding is consistent with Edward (2003) who opine that physical education and sport have a variety of positive cultural effect they build character and encourage teamwork and team spirit and also with that of Kane (1998) observed that sport could be regarded as one of the most important sites for the production of cultural beliefs and practices that equate gender differences. These cultural beliefs make women think that they will never attain the levels

of their male counterparts where sport performance is concerned. "A woman's place is in the kitchen" is still a common saying and many cultures firmly believe it. Participation in sports masculinizes females and is therefore viewed negatively (Fasting, 1987). The above sentence confirms the fact that masculine and feminine behaviors are culture-bound. Most males are accepting of females not participating in sports. Again, 171 respondents representing 85.5% agreed that providing adequate school facilities and equipment will help overcome challenges facing female students' participation in sports. Onifade (1995) espoused that adequate facilities and equipment play a key role in overcoming challenges facing female students' participation in sports. Torkildson (2000) expressed the same opinion that the presence and absence of facilities and equipment, their accessibility, quality, pricing, structure, and policy could not have a substantial influence on recreational participation.

Table 3: Overcoming Measures to Address Challenges ZAMSTECH Students Face in Sports Participation

STATEMENT	AGREE	%	DISAGREE	%
Provision of parental support	165	82.5	35	17.5
Positive teachers contribution	175	87.5	25	12.5
Adequate school facilities and equipment	171	85.5	29	14.5
Cultural factors	160	80	40	20
Education	177	88.5	23	11.5

Limitations of the study

The following are some limitations of the study:

1. Limited generalizability: The study was conducted on a specific group of female students from a single school in a particular region of Ghana. Therefore, the findings may not apply to other regions or schools, and caution should be taken when trying to generalize the results.
2. Self-report bias: The data was collected through a self-designed research instrument, which may be subject to self-report bias. Some respondents may have provided socially desirable answers or may not have accurately remembered their level of knowledge or experiences with sports.
3. Small sample size: The study used a small sample size of 200 female students, which may limit the statistical power and robustness of the study's conclusions. A larger sample size may have provided more representative and reliable results.
4. Lack of control group: The study did not include a control group or compare the results with male students or students from other schools, which may have provided additional insights into the challenges and barriers to female students' access and participation in sports.

Conclusion

The study provides valuable insights into the knowledge level of female students on the importance of sports in their health and well-being, the major challenges that female students face in accessing and participating in sports, and the measures that can help curb the challenges. The findings highlight the need for collaborative efforts from parents, physical education teachers, school administrators, and policymakers to create a supportive environment that promotes female participation in sports. Addressing these challenges will ensure that female students can enjoy the benefits of sports participation and achieve their full potential.

Recommendations

In light of the findings discussed above, and the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations were made to improve female participation in sports in high school;

1. School authorities should provide equipment and facilities in schools.
2. Physical education teachers should make presentations on the importance of females' participation in sports during Parent Teacher Association meetings and staff meetings.
3. Physical education teachers should create awareness of female students, apply a student-centered teaching approach to motivate (encourage) female students in both practical and theoretical classes, and strongly exercise tutorial programmes.
4. Further studies should be conducted in this area with all coverage of schools in the central zone, accommodating more female students and teachers.

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