RESEARCH ARTICLE

Perception on the Instruction of Traditional Sports Games in Congo Brazzaville High School of Physical Education Instructor, Academic Advisor and Academic Inspector

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Abstract

This study examines the perceptions of three key stakeholder groups—Physical Education (PE) instructors, academic advisors, and educational inspectors—regarding the integration of Traditional Sports Games (TSG) into the high school curriculum in the Republic of the Congo. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 educational professionals (5 from each group). The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, framed within the theoretical perspective of motor praxeology as advanced by Parlebas (1999). The findings reveal a strong consensus among all participants. A full 100% of PE instructors and academic advisors affirmed the pedagogical importance of TSGs, highlighting their role in fostering holistic individual development—which encompasses social, physical, and cultural competencies—even in contexts lacking adequate infrastructure. Educational inspectors echoed this view, with all three groups converging on the belief that TSGs serve as an essential complement to modern sports. This complementary relationship is seen as foundational for a more balanced, diversified, and culturally relevant approach to Physical Education. Consequently, participants unanimously advocated for the formal integration of TSGs into the national school curriculum. Such integration is posited to address contemporary educational challenges by valorizing local heritage, promoting inclusive pedagogical practices, and offering students a broader, more meaningful connection to their cultural identity through physical activity. This research provides empirical evidence to support curriculum reform and cultural revitalization initiatives within the Congolese educational system and similar contexts.

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teacher-advisor-educational inspector trio, Congo Brazzaville high school.

1 Introduction

Physical Education, PE, is a school discipline which allows students to experience rich and varied bodily lives for the development of motor, methodical, social, safety and personal health skills. To this end, Article 1 of the UNESCO Charter [1] prescribes that PE, physical activities and sports practices are a fundamental right for all. It enhances a child's overall development and provides access to a communal and socially-valued culture. As such, McLennan and Thompson [2] consider that PE is the most effective way for all children and youths to acquire skills, behaviors, values, understanding and ideas necessary for a lifelong social participation.

OECD [3] mentions in its 2019 report that regular physical activities or school PE lessons can have helpful results on students' scholastic performance due to positive influences on cognition, executive abilities, comportment, in-class attention and psychological health. It focuses not only on the improvement of learners' physical and motor abilities, but also the acquisition of essential assets such as cooperation, respect for rules/regulations and perseverance. However, despite its importance, PE teaching always encounters considerable material constraints, particularly the lack of adequate sporting equipment. Similar guidelines for integrating health, safety, and motor skill development in educational settings have been established by the Ministry of Education, Republic of Singapore (2023), providing frameworks for holistic physical education.

This resource deficiency compromises training quality and limits the potential of physical activity exploration at numerous institutions. However, there exists an alternative solution which rests on the value of traditional sports games. Although they are sometimes overlooked in favor of modern sports disciplines, traditional sports games provide an accessible training framework requiring little or no equipment at all. Employing traditional sports games not only bypasses the resource deficiency difficulties, but it also preserves and delivers a rich cultural heritage, achieving the pedagogical purposes of PE.

The inclusion of traditional sports games in the teaching of PE would seem to be a relevant approach to provide a fair access to PE, regardless of resource availability. This approach deserves to be further explored in order to assess its impact on students' training and their involvement in physical practices.

PE rests on cultural-specific corporal techniques that are passed on by socialization and education [5]. It is a component for the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. Being a fundamental element of PE training, traditional sport games help develop social, physical and emotional skills. Thus, they form a school discipline considered essential for youths' well-being and upbringing.

The objective of PE is to offer a variety of experiences improving coordination, promoting a healthy lifestyle, reinforcing civil values and providing access to a physical, sportive and artistic culture. As such, it contributes to students' overall growth and development.

This vision rhymes with the importance specified by UNESCO to preserve intangible cultural heritage where traditional sports games are present. It is also emphasized that games form a pivotal part of a child's training process. Even though PE plays a key role in promoting a culture of regular physical activity, which is crucial in terms of youths' sedentary lifestyle and for public health, the boundaries between games and sports sometimes remain unclear, with disagreements among historians concerning their definitions. According to Dasen and Vespa [11], the distinguishments of games are their ludic, voluntary characteristics that are regulated and separated from daily life. Parlebas [17] considers that games are part of a culture and its history, with characteristics connected to their rhythm, moral values and relationship with a particular environment. Traditional games can be described by the way they are passed down through generational traditions within a community while showing the community's cultural identity. As such, the concept of ethnic-motricity focuses on the ways people apply their bodies and cultural dynamics specific to a given region and period.

The notion of ethno-motricity highlights the importance of physical practices and cultural dynamics specific to each territory and period. Traditional sports games can be considered from two angles: diachronic, since they are generational tradition, and synchronic, since they are profoundly anchored in a specific territory. These games allow for the expression of identity, illustrating the norms and values of a society [5]. Thus, ethno-motricity highlights the close link between motor practice and a community's culture.

Traditional sports games, being part of an intangible cultural heritage, reveals a society's cultural roots. They play an essential role in children's training and development. However, incorporating TSG in a school PE curriculum often faces hurdles, such as large class-size or the lack of suitable infrastructure.

2 Issues

Offering hidden benefits and potential, traditional sports games are rewarding physical practices with many variations. They could be included in the Congolese education system, subject to a scientific methodological approach. Although many studies have explored traditional Congolese sports games, some of which performed by Pühse [4], Lémbé et al. [15], they are practically inexistant in schools. Congolese society prefers institutional sports, often relegating traditional sports games to a secondary role. This trend is corroborated by the theory of During [9] WHO highlights that the rise of modern sports has coincided with the decline of traditional sports. While modern sport is viewed as a formalized physical activity, TSG are considered non-institutionalized.

Commonly present in the Congolese education system, sport is widely valued by institutions. Its strength, spectacular dimension, as well as its presence in the international arena, explain its predominance. Traditional sport games, often classified as 'sub-games', are considered inferior to modern sport. This situation prompts us to ask ourselves the question, 'Is modern sport the only physical practice with educative qualities that makes an effective socialization?' Yet, PE is a discipline which, at a significant way, helps with students' well-being and improvement of life quality [7, 12]. In 2009, Bernard [8] described PE as 'a science and technique of motor method' aimed to provide essential skills for daily life, autonomy and social life.

It is also important to remember that modern sports originate from traditional sport games, a phenomenon classified under 'sportification'. This process provided a standardization of equipment and a specialization of accessories, while TSG use natural objects. There are numerous challenges teaching modern sports in Congolese schools, particularly their foreign origin, because these games are traced back from the western culture. In addition, the lack of infrastructures, teaching materials and sporting equipment are high barriers hindering PE instructors. Larger classes overload instructors requiring them to adapt, adjust and formulate improvised solutions, but without real conviction. In this context, it is valid to ask, 'What do instructors, advisors and academic inspectors perceive the integration of TSG into high school curricula?'. Understanding these challenges requires considering educators' professional engagement, as Dei [21] shows in research on coaches' passion and retention.

3 Theoretical Model

In this research setup, we adopted a reference framework based on two principal epistemological foundations, including those proposed by Parlebas [5]. The research on physical practices, and more specifically on Central African traditional sports games, particularly Congo Brazzaville, remains relatively underexplored. There is a low volume of research production in this area. In contrast, much work has been carried out by researchers comparing PE and TSG, e.g. articles published by Leyinda [18, 19], Lembe et al. [14].

Current work agrees with the scientific theory of games and sports, particularly Motor Praxeology or Science of Motor Action developed by Pierre Parlebas [5]. This approach analyzes the development of student personality dimensions in games and sports. This theory rests on the scientific analysis of games and sports in a defined environment and context, considering motor behavior as the principal goal of PE. Motor praxeology, at the centre of Parlebas' reflection, enables the learning of games and sports not only as physical practices, but also as educational tools and vectors of personal development.

Parlebas' theory stresses the codified aspect of games, whether institutionalized or not, and highlights the importance of rule systems as structural elements of physical activities. According to him, both institutional or traditional sports games, are prior codified motor situations, organizing social relations and enabling participants to develop motor and social skills. Therefore, it is pertinent to apply this definition in order to better understand the importance of traditional games in personal development, particularly in the school system.

Parlebas points out that traditional games, as opposed to institutionalized games, are often noted with great flexibility and adaptability. This agility, far from making traditional games less serious activities, is an asset in the PE framework, allowing for the development of autonomy, imagination and team spirit among young participants. As such, far from being sub-games practices, as commonly viewed as

in the school context, traditional games deserve to be recognized and valued in educational programs.

Games are defined as a motor situation of codified confrontation, according to Parlebas [5]. Designated under the terms of games or sports by social instances. They are distinguished by a rule system which determines the internal logic. Parlebas [5] classifies sports games into two broad categories: institutional sports games (sports) and non-institutional sport games (traditional games). Although it would be surprising to define games and sports the same, it is important to note that the main difference between these two forms of activities lies in their status being institutional or not. The author insists on the necessity to distinguish these two categories in official documents and to examine social and motivational impacts.

He also asks the following question. 'Do institutional sports have higher didactic educational value than non-institutional sports? According to Parlebas [5], pupils are subject to rules which govern their behavior and their social relationships. He elaborates that 'the mutual relationships between players are defined by the games content' [16]. Institutional sports games are often viewed as more complex forms of competition, particularly from rules' perspective, duration of a game, number of participants and how the game is defined and understood. Parlebas [5] defines sports by focusing on these four essential characteristics:

- Motor situation: Only motor situation can be classified as sport.
- Codes: Sport is based on a set of rules.
- Competition: Rules are set for the purpose of competition.
- Institution: This includes federation, officials and sanctions.

Parlebas [5] develops his thoughts by studying motor activities in their social environment, taking into consideration the presence or absence of partners or adversaries. This analytical framework produces a better understanding of physical activities in the context of PE. His model identifies the activities preferred by the school system, such as athletics, swimming and team sports. On the other hand, he points out the almost complete absence of traditional games in the school environment. Institutional games are delivered, taught and often learned by observation, while traditional games are free activities. The rules of institutional games are orally transmitted or acquired based on observation and experience.

Some traditional games are rule-based and institutionalized, while others are not yet registered. However, nothing stops children from playing these traditional games if they wish. Ggames require a high level of participants preparation and training, compared with physical sports activities, traditional games have less complex and more flexible rules, particularly in terms of sports ground, game duration and number of participants. They can be practiced individually or in teams. As such, these games help develop motor, social, biological and cognitive skills. Their results are indicated in Table 1.

Our data were processed and analyzed with reference to the different concepts of PE instructors, academic advisor and inspectors. The results are tabulated and presented.

4 Methodology

For the purpose of exploring how the 3 parties, instructor, academic advisors and inspectors, perceive the teaching of TSG in high schools, we invited 15 education professionals to participate in our studies. Every of the 5 members in each party attended an individual interview for data collection, and data analysis was performed using a qualitative methodological approach [22].

4.1 Data Collection Strategies

Data collection was carried out in individual semi-directive interviews with the 15 participants, for the purpose of gathering their views on TSG. These 30 to 45-minute interviews were conducted with professionals who volunteered to participate in the study. Each interview was recorded with the aid of a voice recorder to ensure an accurate transcription of exchange. The interviews were guided by a questionnaire form containing 5 questions focusing on the inclusion of traditional sports games in the school curriculum. These questions are:

1. What do you think about the practice of TSG at school? Or what is your perception of the practice of TSG at school?
2. In your opinion, can the practice of TSG contribute to or help achieve school objectives? Please comment if your answer is affirmative.
3. According to you, what benefits does the practice of TSG bring to the school and students?

Table 1. Functions and developmental dimensions of traditional sporting games.

Functions	Importance of Games	Dimensions developed by TSG
Social	Traditional games as a cultural and social fact	Traditional games are presented as a fundamental element of culture and socialization, passed down from generation to generation
	Learning social values	The aptitudes instill essential social values such as respect for rules, cooperation, solidarity, friendship and mutual aid
	Personality development	Traditional games contribute to individual personality fulfillment by promoting self-assertion, decision-making and the development of popular culture
	Education in communication and responsibility	Traditional games develop the capacities of communication, perception and environmental internalization. They also reinforce a sense of responsibility, sportsmanship and ethics.
Motor	Psychomotric Intelligence	Parlebas [5] emphasizes the importance of psychomotor intelligence in games which allows for the transfer of aptitudes in different motor situations
	Development of motor skills	Traditional sports enable the development of motor capacities such as strength, speed, endurance and stamina. They also stimulate physiological and anatomical capacities.
Biology	Psychological and Physiological Balance	Traditional games promote the balance between psychology and physiology, contributing to 'a sound mind in a healthy body'. They develop psychomotor coordination, strengthen muscles and conserve energy.
Cognitive	Creativity and Self-Confidence	Traditional games promote creativity and self-confidence. They help consolidate physical capacities and improve mental and physical health.
	Intellectual Development	Traditional games are a stimulant to intellectual development by enhancing thoughts, memory, observation and problem-solving.
	Linguistic Development	Traditional games play a pivotal role in the development of children's linguistic skills, helping them with the comprehension of verbal instructions and the improvement of communication

4. Are there any benefits and drawbacks in TSG practice at school?
5. What is your opinion on the teaching of traditional sports games at school?

These questions were validated after being tested with 7 professionals.

4.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis was made possible by following a content analysis approach, which is structured in four key steps.

4.3 Full Transcription

In order to facilitate analyzing the collected data, all interview results (including verbal, non-verbal, silences, etc.) were fully transcribed into a template specifically designed for the analysis. As recommended in Qualitative Research [13], for the purpose of being fully immersed in the data, the chief researcher was in charge of this transcription.

4.4 Floating Reading of Transcripts

This step created a total immersion in the data in order to provide a full-picture view without any prior influence. By freely reading the transcripts, one realized the major themes and concepts which emerged naturally from the text. The floating reading also allowed for the identification of the participants' language richness, particularly idiomatic expressions, metaphors and terms specific to the Congolese culture.

4.5 Coding the Transcripts

To facilitate analysis and interpretation, textual data were organized in categories and themes in this stage. Coding enabled formatting the information and identifying recurring trends in the participants' comments. This process also stressed the importance of common experiences, shared advice or differences of opinion among respondents. The verbatim coding

of input was performed by another researcher who is a qualitative research expert, and a minimum of 85% accuracy rate must be achieved to maintain intercoder reliability.

4.6 Categorization

Finally, categorization allowed for the regrouping of data into logical and coherent categories, thus helping with their interpretation. This stage helped organize the information according to their pertinent criteria and to better understand the relationships between different concepts. By regrouping the units of sense identified in previous stages, we were able to identify common themes and understand how the information is interconnected.

5 Presentation and Analysis of Results

5.1 Perception on Traditional Sports Games Practice at School

Table 2 below provides an overview of the perception on TSG practice at school of PE instructors, academic advisors and inspectors. The results contained in Table 2 show nine different points of view on the practice of Traditional Sport Games at school. Therefore, there is no single perception of the benefits of TSG practice at school. However, the perception 'Create togetherness' and 'Discover Cultural Heritage' dominate.

Table 2. Perceptions of TSG practice at school by different stakeholder groups.

Participants	Perception on TSG practice at school
PE Instructors	Teach children PE Doing good like sport Build self-confidence Create togetherness
Academic Advisors	Train body and mind Develop body in distraction Child awareness Showcase Congolese culture
Academic Inspectors	Create togetherness Discover cultural heritage

5.2 Roles and Importance of Traditional Sports Games at School

Table 3 below shows the roles and importance of TSG practices at school.

The Table 3 illustrates 8 roles and importance which have been assigned to PE at school. The majority focuses on the purposes of PE. All three parties cite a dominating role 'Train students to be sociable'.

5.3 Benefits of Traditional Sports Games for Students and School

Table 4 below identifies the benefits of TSG practices for both students and schools.

As shown in Table 4, while all participants identified benefits for students, only a portion of Academic Advisors (2 out of 5) and Academic Inspectors (3 out of 5) provided responses regarding benefits for schools. This selective response pattern suggests that these stakeholders may perceive TSG benefits primarily at the individual student level rather than at the institutional level.

5.4 Benefits and Drawbacks of Traditional Sports Games at School

Table 5 below shows the benefits and drawbacks of TSG practices at school.

The results contained in Table 5 show that the participants find traditional sports games practices beneficial. Meanwhile, some drawbacks are reported (Not regulated, Accidents and Casualty). Sport games practices at school would be recommended due to the infrequent existence of drawbacks in the general practice of traditional sport games.

5.5 Opinions on Traditional Sports Games Teaching at School

Table 6 below shows the opinions of PE instructors, academic advisors and inspectors.

The content of Table 6 illustrates an apparent lack of TSG institutions. Most of the respondents think that TSG is not taught due to the lack of institutions although some think TSG have a distracting characteristic.

6 Discussion

The objective of this research is to understand the viewpoints of the 3 parties, instructors, advisors and academic inspectors concerning TSG in Congolese senior high schools.

The results in Table 2 illustrate nine different opinions on TSG practice at school. As such, there is no unique way of TSG practice. However, the perception points out that TSG develop a togetherness and allow for the discovery of cultural heritage to dominate. In addition, Table 3 shows eight roles and importance are assigned

Table 3. Role and importance of traditional sports games practice at school.

Participants	Traditional Sports Games Practice at school	
PE Instructors	Role and Importance	Students' growth and development Train students to be sociable Educate and train students to be globe citizens
Academic Advisors		Educate and teach children Traditional Sports Games play the same role as PE Train students to be sociable
Academic Inspectors		Develop the same dimensions as PE Train students to be sociable TSG encourage children to express themselves Understand the culture

Table 4. The benefits of traditional sports games practice for students and schools.

Participants	Benefits for students	Benefits of PE practice for school
PE Instructors	Togetherness Growth and Flourishment Physical development Well-being Good health	Transformation/the school will be in demand School development School momentum Positive impact on the school
Academic Advisors	Good health Stamina Awareness Well-being Responsibilities	Friendship building Dynamic school environment
Academic Inspectors	Awareness Intelligence Self-confidence Social awareness Togetherness	Training & Development Movement School success

Note: Two Academic Inspectors and three Academic Advisors did not respond to the question regarding benefits for schools. The benefits listed in the "Benefits of PE practice for school" column represent only those mentioned by respondents who provided answers to this question.

Table 5. Benefits and drawbacks of TSG practices at school.

Participants	Benefits	Drawbacks
PE Instructors	Togetherness Discover Passion Well-being Health	Not regulated
Academic Advisors	Good health Relationship Togetherness Physical development Integration	Accidents
Academic Inspectors	Awareness Intelligence Child development Physical development Fair Play	Accidents

to TSG practice at school. The majority agrees with the aims of PE. This lack of consensus can be explained by the existence of several games combined with the lack of fully understanding them. These results corroborate those of Lembe et al. [14]. All 3 parties (instructors-advisors-inspectors of PE) cited that the role of training students to become sociable is the dominant factor. This dominance is explained by the fact that most of these game practices are performed in groups. These results are in unison with those of [10, 14]. In this sense, games develop team spirit or togetherness. It follows that Table 4 demonstrates how many times TSG can provide students with significant training and learning opportunities. Each participant found that students obtained benefits. Two inspectors and three academic advisors did not answer this TSG benefits question.

The results in Table 5 endorse that all interviewees find TSG beneficial. However, some drawbacks were reported (Unregulated, Accidents and Fights). TSG

Table 6. Participants' opinions on TSG teaching at school.

Participants	Summary of Opinions
PE Instructors	Traditional sports games will develop the same results as PE. They will deliver our national culture to our children. TSG are not really different from PE despite the lack of institutions.
Academic Advisors	We don't teach traditional sports games because they are not institutionalized. Even if TSG provide an image of our culture, they are more of a fun activity and all about entertainment.
Academic Inspectors	TSG suffer from the lack of institution and that's the ultimate reason why they are not taught. Otherwise, they develop the overall growth of children.

practice at school would be welcome because the drawbacks identified in this table do not occur too often when TSG are generally practiced. Effectively, TSG prepare students for the roles they will play in adulthood. They help safeguard national cultural identity and contribute to students' physical, social, cultural, cognitive and psychological development [6]. TSG are considered a means of children's socialization and integration. Thus, incorporating TSG into the PE curriculum in the Republic of Congo would be a way to combine the achievement of PE objectives and promoting cultural appropriation.

The content of Table 6 overwhelmingly shows the lack of TSG institutions. Most participants think that TSG are not taught due to the lack of institution, although some think that TSG have a characteristic more than distraction. To this end, it makes Wanderi [12] to define them games by their characteristics of being ludic, voluntary, regulated, and different from daily life dimension, since our participants think that games possess a characteristic of distraction. However, Parlebas [17] thinks that games form an integral part of a culture and its history, with their characteristics, a rhythm, a morality and a connection to a specific environment. This perspective complements Wanderi's analysis of ludic appropriation in games [12]. TSG are defined by their intergenerational transmission in a given community, reflecting its cultural identity. Focusing on their absence from Congolese school programs, one would find that TSG seem to be gradually losing their popularity. This is detrimental to the cultural identity of Congolese, and consequently of learners. All the interviewed instructors fully affirm that games are essential for the training and the preservation of cultural heritage. Traditional games help children to integrate socially, develop their cognitive and physical skills, and value respect and cooperate [5].

In brief, TSG, though are not institutionalized, are beneficial to both schools and children. These games contribute to children's personal and social enrichment, allowing them to explore and learn in a ludic framework. Although some academic advisors express their reservation, most agree to state that the benefits outweigh the drawbacks. In conclusion, incorporating TSG in PE is judged essential for the cultural and personal development of Congolese students.

7 Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to understand the perception of Physical Education (PE) professionals (instructors, academic advisors and academic inspectors) on the teaching of Traditional Sports games at school. Employing a qualitative method, we collected opinions on this practice by interviewing the three groups.

The results illustrated a consensus. All instructors and academic advisors recognize the importance of Traditional Sports Games (TSG), even in the absence of adequate facilities and institutions. These games help develop essential dimensions of students' personality, particularly: biological dimension, emotional dimension, decision-making ability, relationship or social dimension and cognitive dimension. These results agree with the dimensions developed in PE as cited by Mosston et al. [20]. Academic advisors also share this conviction, highlighting that the teaching of TSG is necessary for complementing modern sports. Therefore, the coexistence of traditional and modern cultures would be beneficial for youths' socialization. Incorporating TSG into education is indeed regarded as a mean of appreciating the local culture and enriching educational experience. That is the reason why we are proposing a scheme to enable the combination of modern sports and traditional games, as well as the inclusion of TSG in school

curricula. It is essential that education professionals play their roles to warrant adequate teaching and provide fruitful outcomes. Therefore, we recommend:

1. The establishment of a hybrid system merging modern sports and traditional games;
2. The inclusion of TSG in academic curricula;
3. The development of national guidelines for the integration of TSG in official PSE programs;
4. The collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture, which seems to be a powerful lever for building TSG as a tool connecting heritage and education; and
5. The delivery of continuing education modules for instructors focused on the pedagogical implementation of TSG. These recommendations seem essential for cementing the solid integration of TSG into the educational programs in the Republic of Congo.

Data Availability Statement

Data will be made available on request.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate

Not applicable.

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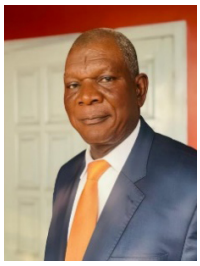

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