



Training Physical Education teachers in Tunisia towards mobilizing knowledge in the context of professional action

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تدريب معلمي التربية البدنية في تونس على توظيف المعرفة في سياق الفعل المهني

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Abstract:

Background: Tunisia gained independence in 1956 after several decades of French protectorate. A significant challenge for the Tunisian state was to provide schooling for its young people and, as a result, to train teachers. Nowadays, Physical Education and Sport (PES) teachers in Tunisia are trained at the Higher Institutes of Sport and Education (ISSEP) at the undergraduate level, as part of the LMD reform, a reform that teachers are finding difficult to adapt to in a complex socio-economic context.

Objectives: This study aimed to propose perspectives for innovation in the training of PE teachers in Tunisia.

Methods: This narrative review examined the existing literature on the renovation in the training of physical education and sports teachers in a first step and on the redefinition of the status of physical education in Tunisia in a second step through the Preparatory Internship for Professional Life (PIPL).

Results: The study's findings emphasize the ineffectiveness of training to equip future teachers with professional skills related to teaching PE. This is due to a reduction in the number of hours associated with the practical teaching course following the LMD reform.

Conclusion: These results highlight several vulnerabilities in the PE teacher training programs at ISSEPs. To address these issues, potential recommendations include developing the skills repository for PES trainers and optimizing a pedagogy adapted on the aims of physical education.

Keywords: PE, ISSEP, Tunisia, preparatory internship for professional life, Tunisia.

المخلص

الخلفية: حصلت تونس على استقلالها سنة 1956 بعد عدة عقود من الحماية الفرنسية. وتمثل أحد التحديات الكبرى للدولة التونسية آنذاك في توفير التعليم للشباب، وبالتالي تدريب المعلمين. وفي الوقت الحالي، يتم تدريب مدرّسي التربية البدنية والرياضية في تونس على مستوى المرحلة الجامعية الأولى داخل المعاهد العليا للرياضة والتربية البدنية (ISSEP)، وذلك

في إطار إصلاح LMD ، وهو إصلاح يجد العديد من المدرّسين صعوبة في التكيف معه ضمن سياق اجتماعي-اقتصادي معقد.

الأهداف: هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى اقتراح آفاق وتجديدات ممكنة في تكوين مدرّسي التربية البدنية في تونس. **المنهجية:** اعتمدت هذه المراجعة السردية على تحليل الأدبيات المتاحة حول تجديد برامج تكوين مدرّسي التربية البدنية والرياضة في مرحلة أولى، وعلى إعادة تعريف مكانة التربية البدنية في تونس في مرحلة ثانية من خلال التربص التحضيري للحياة المهنية (PIPL).

النتائج: تشير نتائج الدراسة إلى عدم فعالية برامج التكوين في تزويد المعلمين المستقبليين بالمهارات المهنية الضرورية لتدريس التربية البدنية. ويُعزى ذلك أساساً إلى تقلص عدد الساعات المخصصة للتدريب العملي في التدريس عقب إصلاح LMD.

الخلاصة: تسلط هذه النتائج الضوء على جوانب هشة متعددة في برامج تكوين مدرّسي التربية البدنية في معاهد ISSEP. ولمعالجة هذه الإشكاليات، يمكن اقتراح جملة من التوصيات من بينها تطوير مرجعية المهارات الخاصة بمدرّبي التربية البدنية، واعتماد بيداغوجيا مُحسّنة تتماشى مع أهداف التربية البدنية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اضطراب فرط الحركة وتشتت الانتباه، المقابلة التحفيزية، النموذج النظري المتعدي، مقياس يوريكا، دافعية لدى التلميذ

Introduction

1- Introduction: Historical and Contemporary Context

This article relates to a specific context, that of Tunisian physical education (EPS) and the training of physical education teachers in Tunisian Higher Institutes of Sport and Education (ISSEP). It is a context with a strong historical background and current issues, suggesting difficulties in addressing these challenges. Tunisia was under French protectorate for a long time, with its outlines being drawn by King Henri III of France as early as the 12th century and officially established in 1881. After several decades of the protectorate, Tunisia gained its independence in 1956. At that point, it had to face the task of assuming its future while its youth had limited access to education.

Tunisia had to address a major challenge, which was the education of its youth. Consequently, it needed to train teachers capable of meeting this challenge, making teacher training itself a significant issue. Shortly after independence, Tunisia focused on addressing the challenge of teacher training.

The first issue was the democratization of access to schools for all, which was achieved in large part through an increase in the number of teachers. However, the quality of teacher training was called into question, leading to regular structural changes. The Normal Schools and Teacher Training Schools of the 1960s gave way to Higher Institutes of Teacher Training and Institutes of Education and Training Professions, similar to the establishment of University Institutes of Teacher Training in France in the 1990s. These developments indicated a difficulty in stabilizing the balance between academic aspects and professional dimensions in vocational training (Bouhouch & al, 2015).

The integration of teacher training into the Tunisian University system in 2006 marked a new stage in the quest for an optimal training framework. However, this stage proved to be challenging due to the implementation of the LMD reform, which the trainers struggled to adapt to, along with a socio-economic context that obscured employment prospects for graduates. In this tumultuous and sometimes seemingly chaotic dynamic, sports were considered a major vehicle for education by the political authorities since independence. Physical education thus became physical education and sports (EPS) in 1968 (Zouabi, 2003) consequently, policies were implemented to provide sports infrastructure, equipment, and training for EPS teachers. This led to further structural changes, such as the Normal School for EPS Monitors and the Normal School for EPS Teachers. These developments allowed for an extended training program, which reached the level of a Master's degree with the establishment of Higher Institutes of Sport and Physical Education (ISSEP) in the 1990s. The EPS training

provided by these ISSEPs, currently four in number, located in Tunis, Gafsa, Kef, and Sfax, has been impacted by the LMD reform and has now reached the level of a Bachelor's degree. Presently, trainers must operate within a new institutional framework, where Tunisian EPS faces new challenges while being weakened. Since the 2008 Orientation Law, EPS is expected not only to develop motor skills and provide access to sports culture but also to build transversal, methodological, and social competencies (Lachheb, 2008). At the same time, EPS appears to be a struggling discipline, receiving less support than in the past. Its infrastructure is aging, even obsolete, and the mandated three hours of weekly EPS classes are rarely fully covered, as there is a shortage of teachers, which affects both the morale of the teachers and the enthusiasm of the students. Consequently, recent EPS graduates have to wait for over five years before they can hope to access a potential teaching position. This waiting period is further exacerbated by a job market that is unfavorable to university graduates, especially in the field of sports. Therefore, teacher training in Tunisian ISSEPs currently faces a range of difficulties. **Contextual difficulties:** The targeted profession now faces problems of limited material and human resources that restrict its full practice. The limited job opportunities in this field are further accentuated by a socio-economic context that offers few employment prospects for university graduates, especially in the sports field. Additionally, EPS teacher training is caught in the dynamics of the ongoing LMD reform, requiring significant adaptation in the training process.

Difficulties inherent to the EPS training framework itself: The framework is fragile in its dynamics, with less activity in continuing education, which is nonetheless required by the ongoing LMD reform. The transition from a four-year to a three-year training program seems to have resulted in condensing the first year without modifying its structure. There is a strong emphasis on scientific and technological aspects of physical activities and sports, with a lesser focus on EPS teaching, despite the fact that the orientation law of 2008 shifted the perception of EPS as a purely sports discipline.

Potential difficulties inherent to training actors: Indeed, the context is likely to affect them morally. It requires an adaptation to the classic resistance to change of actors in any system or the social representations that reduce and assimilate Physical Education (PE) to a discipline of sports initiation. These difficulties suppose that the teacher training system is vulnerable and invites to think of innovative perspectives in the training of physical education teachers.

2- What innovation strategy for the training of physical education teachers?

This set of confirmed or presumed difficulties thus leads to the belief that PE teacher training in Tunisian ISSEPs is relatively vulnerable, considering vulnerability as a propensity to suffer damage, notably due to an integrated system effect encompassing context, human system, its actors, and a test of resilience capacity. The quality of training is primarily determined by its design, which states that the quality of training is ideally measured by its effects in relation to the targeted objectives and the expectations of users and employers. It is therefore reasonable to attempt to identify **some quality indicators** that relate to the functioning of training and that accumulated research and experiences suggest are guarantors of quality training:

- 1- The competence framework of PE trainers in the field;
- 2- Consistency between training and integration during the Preparatory Internship for Professional Life (PIPL).

3- A competence framework for PE trainers

The professional skills framework can be presented as a regulatory action for the training of PE teachers in Tunisia. It is considered an effective teaching tool that allows for the unification of training activities. However, it is clear that training is taking place as it is in the absence of any professional skills for Tunisian PE teachers. Such a lack of reference points can hinder any

prospect of questioning the representations of the actors in the sense that it is likely to lead them to reaffirm their credo according to which PE is assimilated to a sporting initiation. What is meant by a skills framework? A skill corresponds to a set of diverse resources that one has and is able to mobilize to deal with a problem or a series of problems (Perrenoud, 2002; Fargier, 2002). How can a professional skills framework be constructed? If we refer to Perrenoud (2001), this development is best done “by analyzing the profession for which one claims to be preparing.” According to this author, this involves identifying the types of situations encountered in the exercise of this profession as well as the decisions and actions they require. A situation here corresponds above all to what the practitioner considers as such in the daily dynamics of his profession. More precisely, these are situations that pose a problem and call for action based on available resources. The reality of Tunisian PE suffers from its own identity, which remains too attached to sports. Nothing is being done to reform PE through educational and cultural projects that can absorb the unemployment flow. Concrete solutions are not anticipated by the country's decision-makers to facilitate the professional integration of teachers. A competence framework common to all trainers in ISSEPs is a cornerstone of a well-structured curriculum based on the precise description of reference professional practices as a basis for their didactic transposition into a training plan.

4-Importance of Preparatory Internship for Professional Life (PIPL) to physical education Student Trainees

The pedagogical internship in physical and sports education (EPS) is a critical component in the training of prospective teachers, representing a significant transition into their professional careers. This internship is recognized as the most vital element of teacher training programs (da Cunha, Batista, & Graça, 2014), as it presents students with the diverse challenges and realities of the profession (Hébert, 1993; Phaneuf, 2012; Sylvain et al., 2007). During this period, students are expected to assume the roles and responsibilities of a teacher, applying the theories and knowledge obtained throughout their studies (Chaplain, 2008; Montgomery, MacFarlane, & Trumpower, 2012).

Regarding the training of physical education teachers in Tunisia, several studies, including Bali (2017), have indicated lack of consistency between training and integration in the PIPL with student trainees. As part of my scientific intervention, it is about demonstrating the importance of initial training at ISSEP for preparation for professional life. This highlights the relevance of the link between theory and practice, the connection between the knowledge taught and didactic transfer. The establishment of a functional articulation between theory and practice allows for better responses to students' needs in the face of societal transformations and pedagogical evolutions.

Several studies have shown this including Ria et al 2010 have mentioned that one of the difficulties which could appear during initial training for the second-degree teachers in France was due to the fact of being unable to concretely prepare them for the difficulties of their future profession.

5- Conclusion

My scientific intervention revolves around a detailed diagnosis of the training of physical education teachers in Tunisia. Several studies have shown potential sources of vulnerabilities. We were able to distinguish three types of vulnerabilities, including institutional (training curriculum) and economic (the gap between obtaining the diploma and the year of hiring for a potential teaching position). Based on this, in order to propose avenues for innovation, my scientific intervention focused on establishing a competency framework as well as valuing practical pedagogy hours for preparation for professional life.

The establishment of a competency framework for trainers is an effective way to professionalize training for future teachers. These aspects highlight the concept of innovation. What is innovation?

When we talk about innovation in everyday language, we refer to new objects, such as the introduction of computers as a flagship tool for secretaries. However, in terms of teaching and training, Cros (1999) argues that *"innovation cannot be identified with a new object introduced."* In this sense, innovation refers first to a process leading to novelty, which can emerge from a social group within an organization (Cros, 1996). Innovation is both a bearer of novelty in order to achieve a specific educational or training objective (Cros, 1999).

The training of PE teachers in ISSEP is ultimately subject to the randomness of its context, but the difficulties they face should not be seen as the death knell for this training. While some of the difficulties are experienced by the actors of this training, they potentially possess keys to overcome these challenges and rebuild. How can the integration of a competency-based framework and enhanced practical pedagogy reshape the professional identity and effectiveness of future physical education teachers in Tunisia?

6. Practical recommendations:

- Develop and implement a national competency-based framework for physical education teacher training, tailored to the specific needs of the Tunisian educational context.
- Increase the number of supervised practical training hours within the ISSEP curriculum to better prepare future teachers for real classroom challenges.
- Establish structured mentorship programs where experienced teachers support and guide student-teachers during their initial field experiences.
- Reduce the waiting period between graduation and employment by creating transitional programs or provisional teaching roles.
- Promote continuous professional development through workshops focused on pedagogical innovation, inclusive education, and classroom management.
- Encourage collaboration between academic institutions and schools to ensure training programs remain relevant to the realities of the profession.
- Incorporate feedback from trainee teachers to regularly adjust training content and delivery methods.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

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