

THE REFLECTIONS OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS ON NIGERIANS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

Amongst those uncounted human endeavours that make positive reflections on the lives of people in so many ways are physical education and sports. Almost everybody, especially young men and women are sports men either directly or indirectly in that everyone enjoys sports either as an active participant or spectator. However, much as individual enjoy physical activities and organized sports, they are ignorant of those non-negotiable benefits accruable from being in sports. This paper takes a concise look at the concepts of sports and physical education, how they are interrelated, and interwoven. It also reveals those health, fitness, social, economic and all well being benefits of sports and physical education.

The well-being of the citizenry of any nation is the greatest source of her wealth. Many factors are contributory to the well-being of individuals and groups in any environment. Amongst those predictors of good health are indices such as good food, worthy life styles with regulated physical exercises, coordinated and well-organized sports competitions, recreational activities, outdoor games and the judicious utilization of leisure hours among others.

Physical education as an academic endeavour is an embodiment of all these variables with sports being an integral part of its contents. Sport is an organised, competitive, entertaining and skillful activity requiring commitment, strategy, and fair play, in which a winner can be defined by objective means. It is governed by sets of rules or customs. Sports and

physical education are interrelated. One can not operate without the other. A lot of benefits are accruable from physical education through sports but unfortunately, the Nigeria populace are still very ignorant of these benefits hence they perceive physical education and sports as time wasting endeavours.

This work is out to have an overview of those health and well-being benefits embedded in sports and the ways by which they can be accrued and enjoyed by the Nigerian child.

Concepts of Physical Education

Anderson (1998) defined physical education as an education of and through human movement where many educational objectives are achieved by means of big muscle activities involving sports, games, gymnastics, dance and exercise. It is also a part of education which gives instructions in the development and care of the body ranging from simple calisthenic exercises to a course of study providing training in hygiene, gymnastics and management of athletics and games. Shultz (1999) pointed out that physical education is that part of education which takes place through activities which involves the motor mechanism of human body which results in an individuals formulating behaviour patterns. In the same vein, Bucher (1975) described physical education as an integral part of the total education process, a field of endeavour which has as its aim the development of physically, mentally, and socially fit citizens through the medium of physical activities which have been selected with a view to realizing these outcomes. It is also seen as an education through physical activities which have

been selected for the development of the total personality of the child to its fullest and perfection in body, mind and spirit.

The summary of all those definitions is that physical education is an integral part of the general education which adopts organized physical exercises to develop the whole man i.e in the physical, mental, social and emotional domains. From the on-goings and before one highlights the reflections of physical education on the well-being of the Nigerian child there is the need to expatiate on the goals and trends of physical education.

Trends of Physical Education

Pengrazi (2007) expressed that the physical education curriculum is designed to allow school pupils a full range of modern opportunities, dozen of sports and hundreds of carefully reviewed drills and exercises, including exposure to education with the use of pedometer, GPS, and heart rate monitors, as well as the state-of-the art exercise machines in the upper grades. Some martial arts classes like wrestling in the United States and Pencak Silat in France, Indonesia and Malaysia, are empowered to teach children self defense and to feel good about themselves. The physical education curriculum is designed to allow students to experience at least a minimum exposure to the following categories of activities; aquatics, conditioning activities, gymnastics, individual, dual sports, team sports, rhythms, and dance. Students are encouraged to continue to explore those activities in which they have a primary interest by effectively managing their community resources.

In these areas, a planned sequence of learning experiences is designed to support a progression of student's development. This allows the kids through primary schools to be introduced to sports, fitness, and teamwork in order to be better prepared for the middle and high school age. Mindanao Times News (2007), has it that the United State House of

representatives voted to require school physical education classes which included both genders. Some high schools and some middle school physical education classes are single sex. Requiring individuals to participate in physical education activities, such as dedgeball, flag football, and other competitive sorts remains a controversial subject because of the social impact these have on young children. It is however, important to note that many school budgets have seen outbacks and in some cases physical education programmes have been cut-leaving educators and students to address these needs in other ways.

In Singapore, pupils from primary school through junior college are required to have two hours of physical education every school week, except during examination sessions. Pupils are able to play games such as football, badminton, captains ball and basketball during most sessions. Unorthodox sports such as fencing and skateboarding are occasionally played. In more prestigious secondary schools and in junior colleges, sports such as golf, tennis, shooting and squash are played. A compulsory fitness examination (NAPFA) is conducted in every school once every year to assess the physical fitness of the pupils. They are given a series of fitness tests (pull up, inclined pull ups for girls, standing broad jump, sit-ups, sit and reach and 1.6km run for secondary and 2.4km run for junior colleges) students are graded by gold, silver, bronze and fail. In Malaysia, pupils from primary to secondary schools are expected to do two periods of one hour of physical education throughout the year except a week before examination. In most secondary schools, games such as badminton, sepak takraw, football, basketball and tennis are available. Pupils are allowed to bring their equipment to the school with the authorization of the teacher (Shultz 1999). In some secondary schools, physical examinations are rarely done, schools record pupils heights, weights and how many push-ups

they can do. In Scotland, pupils are expected to have two periods of physical education in first year, one in second years and two in third and fourth years. In fifth and sixth years, physical education is voluntary. Some countries include martial arts training in schools as part of physical education class. In Nigeria however, physical education and sports are still regarded by many as a waste of time or a good for nothing endeavour. These notwithstanding, it has reflected positively in the lives of many especially the youths, the handicapped and many adults.

Goals and Objectives of Physical Education

Bucher (1975) postulated the following as the objectives of Physical Education and Sports;

- a. **Physical development objectives:** This is aimed at the proper development and maintenance of physical fitness. The main target of this aspect of physical education is to facilitate optimal functioning of the muscular and cardiovascular systems. The product of these is expressed in terms of muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility, balance, agility, stamina and power.
- b. **Motor-skill development objective:** The motor skill objective is concerned with the acquisition of skills and good body mechanics. Every physical activity, which an individual engages in, demands some specialized skills. Consequently, it is of great importance if an individual performs an activity with less or no mechanism of fatiguing factors, which makes an individual vulnerable to injury
- c. **Mental/intellectual development Objective:** This encompasses development of mental alertness and

retention of concepts learned after performance of physical activities. Participation in physical activities enhances development of quick perception, imagination, reasoning, precise judgment and decision. Participants acquire knowledge when they learn new skills, terminologies, rules and regulations and strategies of sports and games.

- d. **Socio-emotional objectives:** This embraces the development of qualities such as self control, discipline, perseverance, spirit of sportsmanship through wholesome interaction with people (fellow students and teachers) in his/her school, students from other schools and members of the society at large.
- e. **Recreational development objective:** This concept encompasses provision of varied sporting activities, which enables an individual participant to utilize his/her leisure hours judiciously. However, it is imperative to emphasize the need for such recreational activity to be socially acceptable. Having explored and elucidated the concepts, trends and objectives of physical education, it is pertinent to diverge on the concept of sports and its interrelationship with physical education before looking at the reflections of both on the well being of the Nigerian child.

The Concept of Sports

Sports, according to Agbaje (2008) forms an aspect of physical education. They are activities performed for enjoyment during leisure hours and they involve competition. Some sports are performed individually, or with a partners while some are performed in groups or teams.

These are referred to as team sports. All sports are governed by rules and regulations which players must strictly adhere to. An individual who through sports participations learns to adhere to rules and behaves well to his/her team mates and opponents is regarded as a good sportsman.

Paradigm Consulting Group (2002) defined sports as an organized, competitive, entertaining, and skillful activity requiring commitment, strategy, and fair play, in which a winner can be defined by objective means. It is governed by a set of rules or customs. Activities such as card games and board games are classified as “mind sports” and some are recognized as Olympic sports requiring primarily mental and physical involvement. Non-competitive activities, for example as jogging or playing cards are usually classified as a form of recreation. Physical events such as scoring goals or crossing a line first often defined the result of a sport. However, the degree of skill and performance in some sports such as diving, figure skating is judged according to well defined criteria. This is in contrast with other judged activities such as beauty pageants and body building, where skill does not have to be shown and the criteria are not as well defined. Records are kept and updated for most sports at the highest levels, while failures and accomplishments are widely announced in sport news. Sports are most often played just for fun or for simple fact that people need exercise to stay in good physical condition. However, sport is a major source of entertainment. While practices may vary, sports participants are expected to display good sportsmanship, and observe standards of conduct such as being respectful of opponents and officials, and congratulating the winner when a game is lost.

Physical Education and Sport

Sports cannot be severed from physical education. Sport is a subset of physical education. A meaningful and effective programme of physical education should include different games, sports, rhythms and recreational activities. Skills, techniques, strategies and rules and regulations of sports and games are learnt in physical education classes. In the words of Nokia (2004) physical education trends have developed recently to incorporate a greater variety of activities in which students are introduced to lifetime activities such as bowling, walking/hiking or Frisbee at an early age with the objective that students will develop good activity habits that they will carry over to adulthood. Some teachers he noted have begun to incorporate stress-reduction techniques such as Yoga and deep breathing activities. Non-traditional sports which can help students to learn about other cultures are now being introduced as part of physical education lessons. Physical education as a subject is all encompassing as it integrates into its scope other subjects such as history, social studies, nutrition, diseases, physiology, anatomy etc. However, sport is a core content of any physical education programme.

Benefits of Physical Education and Sports

Involvement in sporting activities as well as being a part of a physical education programmes hold a lot of benefits for the participants such as good health, job opportunity, financial or economic satisfaction, socialization, fitness, mental alertness, good physique crime reduction, increased academic output, leadership and life skills and increased community pride and empowerment. This paper is out to look at the reflections of physical education on the health and well-being of the Nigerian child. Hornby (2000) defined well-being as “general health and happiness. Health and well-being are synonymous but not the same. Well-being is

broader than health and that is why this work is focused on the benefits of physical education and sports on the well-being of Nigerians and not just on their health status.

Health Benefits: The impact of physical education and sports as an important aspect of the total school curriculum to the health status of the child cannot be over-emphasized. Adenipekun and Adebuseyi (2004) believe that a physical education programme is always organized to involve the functioning capacity of the body, its organs and systems. In his own contribution, Anderson (1998) confirmed that this would help the health status of school children to increase their fitness level to achieve a total development for a successful living.

According to Orunaboka (1998) it may be counter productive to think about health promotion for the child without considering the role played by physical education programme. He asserted that the involvement of the school child in physical education activities improves his ability to carry out his daily tasks with vigour and alertness, without undue fatigue and with ample energy to enjoy leisure time, and meet above average physical stresses encountered in emergency situations.

Belloc and Breshow (1972) found from a similar research that if attention is directed towards health related aspects of physical education programmes, it will offer some protection against degenerative diseases such as coronary heart diseases, obesity, poor posture, and musculoskeletal diseases that attack the school child to mention by a few. They further pointed out that exercising regularly was rated second in the United States as one of the identified seven health practices that are positively associated with physical health status.

Commenting on the contributions of physical activities to the physical fitness level of an individual, Paradigm (2002) held views that with increased involvement in physical activities,

the physical fitness capacities of every individual improves. According to Decimal Research Inc. (2004) physical education makes positive contributions to the development of fitness perceptual motor efficiency, socio-emotional growth, improved academic performance and wise use of leisure hours.

The world summit on physical education made an urgent call to members to provide quality physical education programmes for every child around the world. Participants agreed that physical education could enhance cognitive, academic achievement and social development. They noted that it is the most effective way to provide children with varying age, gender, ethnic backgrounds with an avenue to acquire skills and knowledge that will assist them in the future. The summit indicated that it was essential for Ministers to recognize the distinctive role that physical education and sports play in educating youths. It was also highlighted that sport is a human right to which all children should have access (United States Sport Academy 1999).

Agbaje (2008) highlights the following as the health and fitness benefits of physical education activities such as anaerobic and aerobic exercises;

- Strong and tough muscles are developed which gives the body frame a better solidity and stability.
- Improved max vo₂ (the highest amount of oxygen one can consume during exercise) and thus an improved cardio-respiratory system).
- Greater capacity to withstand the buildup of waste substances such as lactic acid and increased ability to remove them from the body. This means that individual participants endurance and an ability to fight fatigue.
- That anaerobic exercise burns fewer calories than does aerobic exercise and may be somewhat less beneficial for cardiovascular fitness. However, it is

better at building strength and muscle mass, it still benefits the heart and lungs. In the long run, increased muscle mass helps a person to become leaner and lose weight, because muscles use a large amount of calories.

Other health benefits of physical education and sports according to Agbaje (2008) are as listed:

- Reduces body fat and improved weight control
- Lower resting systolic and diastolic blood pressure
- Reduced total cholesterol
- Improved glucose tolerance and insulin resistance
- Increased clinical symptoms of anxiety tension and depression
- Increases maximum consumption of oxygen, the more you are able to exercise, the more oxygen you are able to consume and the more you are able to perform at higher intensities
- Improvement in heart and lung functions
- Increased blood supply to muscles and ability to use oxygen
- Lower heart rate and blood pressure (including resting heart rate) and
- Increased threshold for muscle fatigue (lactic acid accumulation)

It suffices to say that health and well-being of an individual is not based on the physical alone but also along social, mental and emotional phenomena. Physical education and sports also reflect on these dimensions of health.

A report from the United Nations inter-agency Task force sports titled "Sport for development and peace" towards achieving the millennium development goals" which examined whether or not sport is an effective tool to increase development and peace in countries around the world. It found that sports could be

used to create social structures, develop employment skills and act as a catalyst for economic development. It also stated that sports have demonstrated great success in community based peace initiatives. It therefore concluded that sport is a cost effective and powerful way to achieve health (United Nations, 2003).

A report of the United States development of Health and Human services (1996) brought together for the first time, what had been learned about physical activity and health from decades of research. Major findings included; people who are usually inactive can improve their health and well being by becoming even moderately active (e.g playing volleyball for 45minutes, shooting basketball for 30 minutes, swimming laps for 20 minutes etc) on a regular basis. Physical activity need not be strenuous to achieve health benefits and greater health benefits can be achieved by increasing the amount (duration, frequency or intensity) of physical activity. Further, regular physical activity that is performed most days of the week reduces the risk of developing or dying from some of the leading causes of illness and death diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, colon cancer and depression. (United Sports Academy, 1999).

Reflection of Sports on Socio-Economic Life of the Youths

Other phases of life where physical education and sports have made positive reflections are areas such as social economic life of youths and adults. In fact, research findings show that sports have made significant reflections on the economy of individuals, groups, communities and even nations. Social maladies such as crimes, juvenile delinquents; inform of drug abuse, rape, cultism and alcoholism have been reduced by sports programmes.

Decimal research Inc (2004) found from the product of a conducted nationwide survey

that the respondents of the survey felt that community level sport influenced youths values and promoted positive values; that sports had not yet reached its full potential in this regard. Beyond the impact on youths, a significant number of Canadians also see community-level sports significantly benefiting their local communities more generally as a source of fun and recreation (64%) reducing crime (49%) bringing people together (48%) building community pride (43%) and providing a rich source of tradition and history (26%).

Another research conducted by Sports England (2002) found that as a result of youths participation in sports, there had been 77% reduction in youth crime in Barking and Dagenham between June and August 2001 compared to August, 2000 before the programme was introduced. These findings indicated that physical education through organized sports holds a lot of social, economic, physical and mental benefits for individuals especially the youths who are the stronghold of any nation. It is also found that increasing the time spent on physical education in schools does not reduce marks in intellectual subjects but rather improves the ability of some students to learn and retain information. One study found that education between the ages of six and twelve those who do the at least five hours per week of physical activity achieve better marks than those who are active for less than one hour (United State's Department of Health and Human Services 1996).

Reflections of Sports and Physical Education

Physical education and sports are reflected on the citizens of Nigeria, most especially, as from the onset of this century in so many ways as indicated in the benefits accruable from them as hereby summarized.

- Sports and physical activities have been sources of health promotion as well as disease control lifestyle. If integrated

into primary health care system, it will go a long way to improve the health status of the people.

- Ojeme (2007) stressed that sports had, and could still be used to enhance national reformation of the democratic process. The author highlights that the essential features of the democratic process which can be influenced by sports are; competitive election, independent officiating, open and unhindered citizen participation, constitutionalism, adherence to rules and regulations, faithful acceptance of the outcome of a democratic contest, unbiased officiating and team focus.

Uzoalor, (2007) asserted that the basic needs of life can be acquired through participation in sports. This is so, realizing that sports at all levels deal with the youths and unless the youths are reoriented, the problems in the society will persist. Sports have been used to change many youths and reshape their life styles.

The very rich and developed countries dominate sports because sports require and contribute to economic stability in any nation. That is why a lot of money is spent on hosting rights for international competitions. Such competitions will definitely attract tourists as well as boost the economy and the image of the host nation. Sports is also a veritable tool in achieving peace and patriotism.

Sports and physical activities help in developing better social interaction and relationship and in the maintenance of the existing relationship among youths, communities and nations.

Saba (2007) believes that sports helps in the re-orientation of values, reduction of poverty, creating job opportunity and even creating wealth.

Conclusion

From the ongoings, it could be inferred that physical education and sports hold a lot of benefits for the health and wellbeing of Nigerians if well articulated into the academic time-table in all tiers of education in the country. It is also noted that the benefits of sports and physical education are not limited to health in the physical alone but also in the social, mental and emotional dimensions. It also extends to the areas of finance, job opportunity and economy of individuals and the nation.

All sports, through a well organized physical education programme are of physical, social, mental and financial benefits.

Recommendations

In view of the foregoing, the following are recommended:

- That physical education should be made a core-subject in all primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. That mass sports should be made a compulsory endeavour in all higher institutions.
- That specialists in the field of physical education should organize campaigns, seminars and workshops to intimate and sensitize the masses; youths and adults into participating in sports and recreational activities by letting them know the values they hold for them.
- The national sports commission should be more empowered to expand its programme to include organizing local, and community sports and recreational activities.

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