

# HISTORICAL CONSTRAINTS IN THE EVOLUTION OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AS A FIELD OF KNOWLEDGE

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## **Abstract**

The focus of this paper is to discuss the constraints in the evolution of physical education as a field of knowledge. In the course of doing this, the writer reviewed some topical issues of: meaning of physical education, representative title for the field of physical education, the issue of physical education as a discipline of knowledge, the development of body of knowledge in physical education, logical sequence of knowledge in physical education, language problem in the field of physical education and the issue of physical education as a profession; and concluded that there are lots of historical constraints limiting the evolution of physical education as a field of knowledge which have not been universally accepted by experts and this has tended to constrain the evolution of physical education as a field of knowledge.

**Key words:** Historical, Constraints, Evolution, Physical Education and Field of Knowledge

Over the years, physical education has experienced some developments in its evolutionary journey which tended to limit its growth as a field of knowledge. These are:

1. Issue of meaning of Physical Education
2. Issue of representative title for the field
3. The question of Physical Education as a discipline of knowledge
4. The development of body of knowledge in Physical Education
5. Issue of Logical sequence of knowledge in Physical Education
6. The language problem in physical education

7. The issue of physical education as a profession

## **Issues of Meaning of Physical Education**

Physical education is variously defined giving it all kinds of meaning. Its most prevalent traditional definitions are that: physical education is the education of the physical/body through physical activities; the development of an individual physically, mentally, socially and emotionally through a well selected physical activities; some define it as the development of an individual through the big muscle activities; while others defined it as an integral part of the process of education which uses movement activities for the overall education of the learners. These variant definitions call for analysis with a view to ascertain their goodness, fitness or otherwise as a definition of Physical Education. A review of the definitions shows that:

- i. They portray physical education as an integral part of education process
- ii. They paint a pedagogical picture of physical education
- iii. They indicate that activities are the only learning modalities in physical education
- iv. They do not highlight or make visible the subject matter of physical education.

As a field of organized study, it is necessary for the definition of physical education to make the subject matter of the field quite visible. This has heretofore not been accepted by all in the field of Physical Education and as such it is a constraint in the evolution of physical education as a field of knowledge. Moreover, all

organized fields of study hardly define their field “as integral part of the process of education” yet, they retain their authentic meanings. The challenge of physical educators today is that of searching for a subject matter definition which should be geared towards understanding the nature of man and his movement activities. The development of man’s movement proficiency and knowing the factors which enhance and limit man’s movement capabilities as well as the effects of movement involvements on the individual and society; are the variety of ways in which human movement knowledge and activities can be applied to life in society (Ojeme, 2009); and this has given rise to such definition of Physical Education as: the study of man and his movement relations with his environment(Omoifo, 2008).

#### **The Issue of Representative Title for the Field**

Over the past decades, several authorities in the field of Physical Education have expressed their strong feelings against the use of the title – Physical Education as a representation for the field. These titles are:

1. **Gymnastics:** This title is the earliest title by which physical education was known in Europe and America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and it was found to be inadequate; for it only represents a segment of the activities in physical education. This discovery made it restricted in meaning to a series of exercises often performed in the gymnasium; consequently narrowness of scope was a major limitation of gymnastics as a title for physical education (Freeman, 1977).
2. **Hygiene:** This was another title used as a representative title for physical education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the period in which physical exercises or activities were thought of as being necessary for preserving one’s health. Since this term has been interpreted to mean science of preservation of one’s health, it was equally unfit to be an adequate title for physical education (Bucher, 1972).
3. **Physical Culture:** This is another 19<sup>th</sup> century term for the field. It was used then when other areas of human endeavour such as social, intellectual and religious concerns were also known as social culture, religious culture, and intellectual culture. It was then thought to be quite befitting to use for the realm of physical activity. This title could not be sustained because it was vulnerable to applications in commerce and industry (Wilgoose 1979 & Ojeme, 1984).
4. **Physical Training:** Physical training was interchangeably used with physical culture. It was dropped mainly because it was equated with military training and drills.
5. **Physical Education:** The search for a more befitting representative title for the field led to the coinage of “physical education” in the United States of America. The title was acceptable then in 1920’s and 1930s because of the word “education” associated with the title which came to mean that physical education accomplished the goals of education through physical activities (Wilgoose, 1979, Ojeme, 1984); but the term “physical” in physical education is reminiscent of the old mind and body dichotomy. It is further argued that physical education as a title is fully loaded with meanings, some of which are inconsistent with the name; for instance, as a generic name for the field, physical education is used to designate the profession, the discipline and educational process. These diversified and broad meanings tend to create confusion in the mind of members of the field and

consequently a constraint in the evolution of the field (Ojeme, 1984).

### **The Issue of Physical Education as a Discipline of Knowledge**

A discipline of knowledge is any organized field of study. Discipline of knowledge represents different ways of interpreting the world and making meaning of it and of human life in it. It is concerned with matters relating to knowledge development, research, documentation and dissemination of information.

There are both primary and secondary disciplines. A primary discipline of knowledge is one whose content is independent of ideas from other disciplines, that is, it exists on its own; while secondary disciplines are those whose contents are drawn from ideas of the primary disciplines. Often times people are tempted to view physical education as a primary discipline which makes them to concluded that it is not a discipline. This contention is not completely right in that it is a secondary discipline that draws its ideas and content from the primary sources – disciplines, and it is not completely wrong in that a discipline of knowledge possesses certain characteristics which includes:

1. **A focus of study:** A discipline of knowledge must possess a unique focus of study which is distinctively associated with it. This the field has; which is the study of man and his movement.
2. **Conceptual structure or Body of Knowledge:** The field of physical education has a body of knowledge of discipline that embodies its fundamental principles or key ideas.
3. **Syntactical structure:** Physical education has a means of extending the frontiers of the discipline through research which

involves the application of pure and applied scientific modes of inquiry in such areas as motor learning, Biomechanics, sports, Psychokinesics, etc.

4. **Committed scholars:** The field parades a corpus or body of men and women whose preoccupation is in the advancement of knowledge through research and scholarship in the field of study.

Physical education as a secondary discipline evolved as a discipline much later after the development of the primary disciplines and has to wait for the primary disciplines to develop before it could borrow from them, and these tend to limit its development and acceptance as a discipline of knowledge.

### **The Issue of the Development of Body of Knowledge in Physical Education**

To clearly understand the body of knowledge in physical education, there is the need to reflect on the implications of its focus. Consequent upon the foregoing, the body of knowledge in physical education is classified and represented by the following fundamental ideas: forms of movement: Biokinesics, Psychokinesics, Sociokinesics, Histokinesics, Philokinesics.

Apart from the forms of movement which have been developed, all others are still constrained by the lack of people from the primary discipline coming to specialize and contribute to the development of these areas in physical education which means, little or no attention has yet been directly given to the problem of ordering this body of knowledge as it is a young discipline (Ojeme, 2000).

### **The Issue of Logical Sequence of Knowledge in Physical Education**

The issue of structural sequence which is a typical characteristic, has been getting the attention of scholars in the field particularly in

the non-activity components of the subject. For instance, while authorities such as Harrow (1972), Jewett and Mullan (1977), Ojeme (1984) and others have worked out a hierarchical ordering of the structure of movement activities, the same hierarchical ordering has not been considered for the conceptual areas of the discipline. The problem however is that to date, little or no attention has been given to the question of order of knowledge in this field by its scholars. The need to search for a possible logical structure of knowledge in physical education is derived from the apparent lack of such as ordered sequence in the present form of knowledge in physical education (Ojeme, 2000).

### **The Issue of Language Problem in Physical Education**

Physical education has a language problem and this has sort of limited its evolution as a field of knowledge. This problem derives from the multi-dimensional nature of its sources of knowledge. Many of the concepts and vocabularies used in the communication of meaning in physical education are borrowed from other sources or disciplines.

Furthermore, physical education is questioned by experts as to its suitability as authentic title for the field. The argument is that to use a term that carries a pedagogical connotation to represent a discipline of knowledge is a misnomer (Ojeme, 1989).

### **The Issue of Physical Education as a Profession**

A profession is concerned with rendering unique and useful services to the society. Apart from the above, a profession possesses certain characteristics which include: code of conduct, register of members, rigorous training, existence of professional body, self regulating, discipline of erring members and a profession rendering unique and valuable services to society.

Though physical education to some extent could be regarded as a profession because it possesses some characteristics of a profession such as rigorous training, existence of a professional body – NAPHER-SD, and a profession rendering unique and valuable services to society; but it still lack in some aspects as a profession in such areas as code of conduct, availability of a professional register, self regulation, and discipline of erring members, etc. These tend to limit its evolution as a field of knowledge (Ojeme, 2009).

### **Conclusion**

There are a lot of historical constraints limiting the evolution of physical education as a field of knowledge. These are the issues of meaning definition, representative title for the field, acceptance of the field as a discipline of knowledge, the development of knowledge in the field, the logical sequencing of knowledge in the field, the language problem and the acceptance of physical education as a profession; in these, there has not been universal consensus, which has tended to constrain the evolution of physical education as a field of knowledge.

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