

AFRREV STECH  
An International Journal of Science and Technology  
Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

Vol.1 (3) August-December, 2012:150-160

ISSN 2225-8612 (Print)

ISSN 2227-5444 (Online)

## Promoting the Culture of Play through School Sports

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this paper is to examine the culture of play as a product of school sport. The paper noted that in order to develop the culture of active life, the school sports programme must be vibrant as against the present practice where activities are limited. In this regard, the paper advanced requirements for effective school sports in the area of facility, equipment, personnel etc. These and others are essential for developing the culture of play.*

### Introduction

The role of physical activity in the life of man is unquantifiable but well documented in (Van-Delen and Bennett 1971). The use to which physical

activity is applied is varied across generations in perception and value attached to it. According to Van-Delen and Bennett (1971) and Bucher (1979) physical activity during the primitive era was used to promote survival; for socialization, fitness and recreation while in contemporary society, it is used for employment, recreation as well as fitness. Whatever value is attached to physical activity, the health related value of fitness seems to be very important and therefore should be treated as a valuable component. The fact that the World Health Organization (WHO) similarly perceives physical activity as very important to human health and well being is a further confirmation of the need to sustain its use (WHO, 2002). Although United State's Department of Health and Human Services, (2002) appreciated the benefits of participating in physical activity, what it could not confirm is the intensity of engagement in sports and exercise which may be regarded as satisfactory.

### **Importance of Physical Education and Sports in Promoting Good Health**

The world today is beset with a lot of health problems one of which is heart related diseases, traced to sedentary life style (Reed, 2009). In the opinion of Carlson (1995) and Graham (1995), the prevalence of health and heart diseases can be traced to sedentary life style. The consequence is that the health care system is unduly stretched and over burdened (Mars, 2003). Much is therefore spent on curative at expense of the preventive. The situation is compounded by the attitudes cultivated in school where students were never encouraged to take active part in physical education and sports.

The role of schools in laying and developing the culture of active physical activity in the learner is mandatory. According to Ojeme (2009), the school should provide the base for initiating children into the existing tradition and culture of society, being the most organized institution to perform this function. To this end the school should be regularly strengthened and reinforced such that it is able to offer a balanced physical activity in the area of cognitive, psychomotor and Affective domain (Kim, 2003).

In order to achieve balanced learning, the three dimensions of instruction intramural and extramural or scholastics activity must be re-invigorated and refocused (Ojeme, 2009). In the opinion of Agwubike (2001) and Aibueku (2003), the formative years is the appropriate period to introduce children to sports skills. The school should therefore be adequately assisted through the provision of trained manpower and infrastructure in order to function and yield the desired results. To adequately harness and achieve results of

building persons who can constructively engage in physical activity, the school sports curriculum should be packaged to suit this purpose. Kim (2003) and Choi (2002) noted that the physical education curriculum should provide students with various experiences and continuous educational effects to reflect not only known international activities but also local and national activities. The physical education activity should educate students to appreciate by exploring and discovering values and culture of physical activities through long-term and multi-dimensional experience. Such education should be practical and functional (Choi, 2002).

The objective of modern education should be geared toward emphasizing, encouraging and cultivating students' abilities and enthusiasm in whatever they do. This approach and focus has become imperative due to social dynamics which institutional physical education and sports programme must be guided to address. To this end, both the elite sports and recreational activities must be accommodated (Guanan, 2003). The demand of contemporary society is to have citizens who will be great assets through active life. This implies that the culture of physical activity must be pursued with great vigour by the schools. According to (Kim & Kim, 2003), the culture of physical activity is not negotiable if life long active life is to be achieved. Corroborating this assertion Mondello and Fleming and Foehrt (2000) insisted that if a man must enjoy a healthy life style, school physical education and sports should offer opportunity for the acquisition of sports skills and such opportunities must be rich in scope and variety,

Physical education and sports curriculum is required to be dynamic in promoting values which are wellness related. Unfortunately, the situation the school curriculum is subjected to in the Nigerian educational setting by planners and practitioner seem to be purely academic. This is reflected in the status accorded the subject in the national policy on education (NPE) 2004, and lately by the National Education, Research and Development Council (NBRDC) which not only merged physical education and sports with Health Education but has effectively reduced the activities in the combined curriculum by 50% (Ojeme, 2009).

This paper has examined the programme of physical education and sports curriculum in schools in order to ascertain its effectiveness in building the culture of physical activity among individuals in the school.

In doing this, attention was paid to:

1. Physical education and sports practices;
2. Requirement for effective physical educations and sports; and
3. The Implication of these for the development of necessary physical activity culture.

### **Physical education and sports practices**

There is no denying the fact that sport is exerting more influence on human behaviour than religion and politics (Mars, 2003). However, the intensity may vary from country to country. It will not be out of place to exploit the necessary potentials associated with physical education and sports for the good of the individual and society. Generally, physical activity is associated with the existence and survival of man. It is in this perspective that sports has been described as being woven around the people's everyday life, from mode of dressing, talk and dealings with others (Mars, 2003). From this understanding physical activity selected for schools ought to be made to reflect the environment and the people's needs. According to Guanana (2003) the developing of modern education is directed towards fulfilling the cultivation or student's needs and abilities, in order that they are able to cope with changing social environment.

The practice of physical education and sports in developed countries, like in United State of America, Australia, Britain and many other countries are structured to reflect the experiences in the environment, such that every child in the school is given the opportunity to develop motor skills. This accounted for intramural sports in which there is mass participation and recreation for leisure while intercollegiate games are to care for elite sports. The school setting is seen as the place to achieve this programme (Ojeme, 2009)

Unfortunately, the practice of restricting sports to a few individuals is not helping the culture of play. This situation is similar to observations by Kim & Joo (2003), who observed that constraints in the area of funding and managerial no-how have resulted in the neglect of majority of the students in sports. According to Shin (2003) physical education and sports programme which cater for mass participation is instrumental to the cultivation of skill acquisition. This is central to the development of emotional well being and the building of confidence. This none the less, the laudable benefits of physical education and sports in schools, less than 10% of students in schools are able to access the programme (Mars, 2003). The unfortunate consequence of more emphasis on elite sports practices is the emergence of the culture of

spectatorship development as against the culture of active participation. Although, data are not available locally, observation of P.E and sports practice is not impressive.

The limiting of physical education and sports activities to athletics and games only is a reflection of the conservative nature of our school sports curriculum. Gymnastics, aquatic movement and dance movement although are included in the sports curriculum, they never get actual attention in practice. The effect is that motor skills necessary to participate gainfully in recreation essential for general well-being is made difficult. According to Mars (2003) and Vanreusel (2003), the practice of physical education and sports should be made more realistic, by providing activities likely to bring excitement and rewarding experiences to the students.

### **Requirements for effective school sport programme**

The formal learning environment is designed to help achieve educational objectives in the area of cognitive, psychomotor and affective domain. The essence of physical education and sports in the school curriculum can only be achieved when a rich and stimulating environment is available (Aluko, 2004, Ojeme, 2009). Massive sports involvement will ultimately help develop motor and sports skills and create the culture and habit of play. However to achieve this goal, there is the need to address the following:

### **Policy provision and physical education curriculum**

In any effective and efficient programme there must be a sound theoretical background upon which other structures are to be rooted (Ojeme, 2000). Most programmes often fail, ostensibly due to lack of policy guide. Consequently, Toriola (2002) observed that lack of proper sports framework can be a serious limitation to sports development in schools. It is important that policy not only prescribe role, but also specify the process of accomplishing provisions set out in the physical education and sports curriculum.

The school physical education and sports curriculum is an assemblage of activities capable of promoting the values and norms assumed to be important and worthy for the sports growth of the society. The school is perceived to be in good position to initiate children into the existing traditions and culture of the society in view of the formal structure put in place (Ojeme, 2009). The curriculum should be broad and adequate in scope to cover, instructional, intramural and extra mural sports activities. The

programme should provide experiences in theory and practice which are selected in such areas as gymnastics aquatic movement, athletes, dance movement patterns and a variety of games and sports. These programmes of activities should be structured to cater for all categories of learners without discrimination.

Importantly too, the success or otherwise of school sports activity may depend on the organizational structure employed. Since intramural sports emphasise mass participation, there is need to create units to ensure equal opportunity among participants. In this regard, Bucher (1979) made a case for the employment of specialist staff, coaches, teachers and sports administrators to manage the unit. Through departmentalization of sports, quality services can be rendered and every child given the opportunity to acquire motor skills.

### **Facilities/equipment and personnel**

One major requirement for a sound programme of physical activity in schools is adequate provision of indoor and outdoor facilities (Bucher, 1979; Daughtery and Woods, 1976). Unfortunately the cost of providing facilities are usually very high and most schools not only lack the required facilities expected for effective teaching of physical activities, but also do not have the needed funds to construct them. The effect is that physical education and sports is either removed from the time-table or replaced with another subject.

The role of sports equipment in school is inelastic. According to Bucher (1979) and Amuchie (1979), physical education and sports require good and functional equipment. Lack of them may hinder smooth running of sports programme. This problem is evident in most schools (Aluko 2008). In the same vein, the quality of sports personnel engaged to manage and administer sports programme can be a factor in determining the success of the programme. It takes a creative mind and trained personnel to translate policy and curriculum into success (Odejide, 2004). The programme of school sports activity requires professionals who possess the enthusiasm, culture, knowledge and skills to achieve success. It is imperative that to achieve much in school sports, the personnel engaged are sufficiently trained.

### **Funding**

Funds are undoubtedly the back bone upon which school sports success may be determined. The administration, procuring of infrastructure and their maintenance are dependent on available funds (Odejide, 2004; Igbanugo,

1992). A well structured and articulated programme of sports activity may be marred by lack of finance (Morankinyo, 1991). Sports programmes that have witnessed crises are usually traced to lack of adequate funds (Igbanugo, 1992). It is imperative therefore that the issue of funding must be treated with all the seriousness it deserves. Generally all of the foregoing have implications for developing of play in school sports.

### **Implication for the development of physical activity culture**

In order that literacy and enthusiasm is achieved through school physical education and sports (PES), the programme of activity needs to be pragmatic. In this regard the success of physical education and sports can only be measured when certain quality are achieved. The physical education and sports (PES) activities in schools should be directed toward the mastery of the necessary sports technique, and motor skills in specific sports. The mastery of the required skills in sports not only allows for participation in physical activity, but also builds confidence in the individual. The acquisition and application of mastered skills is essential in developing the culture of exercising.

### **Appreciation and ability to execute strategic play in specific sports**

The knowledge and understanding of sports and games in respect of technical and tactical approach may encourage the individual to develop the culture of participation. The appreciation of basic strategy for each game and sport when employed will limit the level of injury and promote the beauty of recreation.

### **Participation in games**

Mass participation in school physical activities is one way of encouraging and promoting the culture of exercising and skill development. School programme of sports activities should consider structuring to meet the age, grade and skill level of the child. Every game and sport should aim to accommodate mass practice and mini-competition. This probably informed various sports federation in making provision for mini-basketball, volley ball, handball, soccer etc. It is through participation and opportunity to practice that motor skill can be acquired and culture of active play, developed.

### **Effective team play**

The physical activity curriculum should be able to provide varieties in team and individual games and sports experiences. The need to develop the spirit

of common goal is essential to success. The learner needs to appreciate what team work is all about in a group situation. In this regard individual learners need to be educated on the importance of complementary role as a way of developing strong communal tie inherent in the African culture. This virtue is ultimately to be transferred to the individual's daily routine.

### **Sound knowledge and interpretation of rule and regulation of games**

The content of physical education and sports should try to teach the various guiding rules and regulations. Good knowledge in this regard will not only enable the learner to develop the culture of fairness and equity but the culture of honesty and probity. Specifically, when the culture of living by the tenets of enabling laws is adhered to, it will not only show in engaging in leisure and recreation, but will also be manifested in interaction on the larger society. In leisure and recreation the participant not only plays but interprets the rules without an arbiter. This consciousness is equally expected to reflect in our daily activities.

### **Planning and administration of sports**

When acquiring the culture of play in school, opportunity to learn how to plan and manage our environment, is equally imbibed. This knowledge will not only be useful in organizing recreation in school sports but also be handy in other areas of life, which will help promote efficiency and maximization of available resources.

### **Decision making in sports**

At every stage in a man's life, decisions will have to be made. Such important attribute may be difficult to develop if opportunity were never there to cultivate it. Sports and games practice in schools offer such an opportunity to acquire the decision making attribute. The school sports curriculum should not only be structured to accommodate elite sports, but provide the much desired experience to guide sports administration. These experiences, to be worthwhile, should be initiated early, and most importantly woven around motor skills, physical activities as well as rules and regulations of traditional local and national sports.

### **Conclusion**

The physical education and sports in its present status in schools may hardly be able to realize the aforementioned outcome expectations due to inability to meet basic requirements if the subject must address the current dynamics of



recreation and health, like in developed countries, the instructional, intramural and extramural phases of the school physical education and sports programme should be made more pragmatic. The programme need to be able to produce learners who will be active participant, as opposed to inactive participant, produce individuals who are cultured to view physical activity participation as positive, important and valuable way of spending quality life time.

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