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## **A Conceptual Analysis of School Sports Development in Nigeria** (Pp. 394-403)

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### **Abstract**

*This research was undertaken to examine school sports development in Nigeria. Specifically, education and sports policies as it relates to school sports policies and implementations of these policies in Primary and Secondary schools. The paper noted that the concept of school sports as currently being used and practiced in schools is at variance with what organised and administered school sports should be. To achieve this status, qualified personnel, standardised sports facilities and equipment were recommended as necessary inputs.*

### **Introduction**

Sport is more than ever before, commanding global attention. Its influence on world peace, economy and the development of social relationships cannot be underestimated. It is against this background that most nations have come to appreciate the need to invest heavily on it. Sport as a social factor has over time assumed an influential status. In the assertion of Mars (2003), sports tend to exert more influence on people's behaviour than religion or politics.

The level of effects may vary from one country to another, although national and international sports seem to exert equal force all over.

The value of sports on behaviour is quite overwhelming. It is in this context that the accrued benefits may be adequately harnessed. Over the years, sport has been monolithic in nature and practice. The Coubertin era with its promotion of one dimensional competitive culture gave credence to this approach. Against this narrow perception, Harvey, (2002) has argued that the roles of sports are potentially many given its highly symbolic, metaphoric and polysemous nature. Consequently, in this regard, Constant as cited in Harvey (2002), identified three dimensions in which sports can make contributions. These are social cohesion, citizenship and moral qualities dimensions. However, this can only be made possible when it is perceived as shared common values in which everybody has a stake in the challenges and belong to the same culture.

Today's society is growing technologically and sports and physical education can be utilized as tools to affect functional effectiveness in this technological era. In this regard it becomes imperative for experts in physical education and sports to research and identify issues and problems peculiar to their locality as well as to a wider global context so as to ascertain how these could lead to the development of physical education and sports. There is no doubt that utilization of such information technology to drive a technologically sophisticated society will enhance better humanity. Notably, sport and physical activities are closely related with man's existence, history, culture, economy and politics (Park, 2003). The question therefore is to what extent has this been fully exploited? Much may not be said of the primitive days of man, but with the advent of civilization, the expectation is that much may have been achieved. This also stems from the conception that physical activity play a significant role in attaining the desired social construction. This may also be one reason why physical education and sports was introduced into the school curriculum. There is the tendency that PE ensures wholesome development of the individual. Against this background, policies in education and sports were formulated to ensure that the needed potentials are adequately harnessed. The extent, to which these issues are realized, will be explored in this paper.

### **Concept of school sports**

Sporting activities in Nigeria are organized and administered in the school system under the auspices of the school, and supervised by experts in the

field (Ojeme, 2002). In Nigeria, sports activities are undertaken in primary and secondary schools with the aim to build in the individual, a sound mind in a healthy body. Specifically, this is to meet the physical, emotional, social physiological and intellectual needs of students. This view is equally buttressed by Amuchie (2003), when he asserts that Institutional sports is aimed at meeting health needs, and the promotion of optimum development of students.

Importantly too, one known avenue by which the child can be totally empowered, so that he can function meaningfully within the society is by creating for him varied opportunities for worthwhile movement experiences. In the opinion of Goak and Lee (2001), play provides an inner understanding to the child. Through play, children are able to relate to their unfamiliar world, and gain the desired experiences. In all these experiences, the child not only increases his physical and health status, but along the line develops social relations and self-esteem. It is in this vein that Slade (1999), has affirmed that exposure to early motor skills through formal learning is a necessary ingredient for the development of excellent sport performance in later year. Essentially it is a period when the direction of the child's life begins to crystallize. In this regard too, failure to appropriately guide the child's tomorrow may prepare the way for future failure.

### **Education and sports policies**

As far back as the 1969 National Curriculum Conference, the Nigeria government has made effort to lay a solid foundation for physical education. According to Taiwo (1980), the conference reviewed past educational goals and identified the new course to chart with a view to setting new goals according to the present needs of society. The National Policy on Education (NPE) evolved from the recommendations of the National Conference. Generally, the NPE took cognizance of the needs of the Nigerian child at all levels of learning. In the same vein, the subjects offered in the curriculum were given prime attention. Specifically, the policy accorded physical education equal status with other school subjects. It further prescribed that Physical and Health Education (PHE) should be made compulsory at the junior secondary school level, and optional at the senior secondary school. Government recognition of the importance of PHE was further strengthened with the enactment of the 2000 and 2009 National Sports Development Policy. Significantly, the emergence of the Sports Development Policy provided the needed catalyst to propel sports organization and administration in institutions. This also included other areas as:

- a. International sports
- b. Indigenous sports
- c. Management of sports facilities and equipment
- d. Sports federation
- e. Associations and clubs
- f. Grassroots sports

While it is very important to examine the origin of policy prescription in PE and sports development in general, this paper will however focus more in the area of institutional sports growth.

### **Education and sports policies as related to school sports**

The recommendations of the 1969 Curriculum Conference which evolved as the Nigeria National Policy on Education (NPE, 1977) gave physical education (PE) a new status. P.E was formally recognized as a school subject just like every other subject. There is no gainsaying that P.E as a school subject has its implication for health, physical skill and moral value and character development of the child. In this context, and to fully develop the totality of the individual using physical education and sports as the vehicle, the elementary and secondary schools are seen as appropriate starting point. Notably, even from pre- school, the culture of play is imbibed in the young learner. In this regards, and as prescribed in the NPE (2004), some of the goals which the pre-school seeks to achieve include:

- i. Molding the character and developing sound attitude and morals in the child
- ii. Developing in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment.
- iii. Giving the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him function effectively in the society within the limit of his capacity.

To meet the above needs, the curriculum of pre- school just like that of primary school was expected to include physical and health education. Significantly, physical and health education as a school subject has the capacity to increase the individual's ability and desire to participate in socially responsible ways in and out of school (Taggart, 2003). It is this perceived importance of the subject in the wholesome development of the individual that led the National Policy on Education (NPE) to specifically recommend that specialist physical education teachers be trained and

employed to teach the subject at the primary school stage. Unfortunately, inconsistency in physical education policy implementation in schools may have been responsible for the poor handling of the subjects in our schools (Dankadai 2001). What seem prevalent is a situation where the decision to teach P.E is left to choice. This no doubt contradicts the prescription of the NPE.

However, by way of reducing drastically, this non-challant attitude to P.E at the school level, the National Sports Development Policy (1989) revised under article 8 sub-sections 9 made the following provisions:

- i. Participation in sports shall be compulsory in primary, secondary schools and institutions of higher learning.
- ii. The Federal Government through Federal Ministry of Education shall provide facilities and funding for sports in institutions of learning at all levels (NSDP. 1989; NSP, 2009).

In addition to the above policy prescriptions, the Ministries of Education and Sports have also been useful in emphasizing PE in schools. However, how well these policies are translated to concrete reality at the schools' level leaves cause for concern. In other words, the actual status of PE in our school today is not truly a reflection of some of these policies. The question therein is: what is expected in the implementation of such policies?

### **Implementation of sports policies**

Policy formulation is the primary stage of addressing observed short, medium or long range problems. The process of policy formulation could be quite cumbersome, especially if not properly managed. Essentially, policy formulation involves consultation, participation and choice making, all from a wide range of alternatives. While acknowledging this complex nature of policy formulation, such formulated policy may not automatically translate to success, without appropriate working guideline, for its implementation. Importantly too, the implementation of the policy depends to a large extent on the character of the team of implementers (Nwagwu, 2002).

Using the foregoing as our context, the implementation of sports policies in the Nigeria primary and secondary school may be assessed

### **Primary school**

Primary school is generally seen as the foundation of formal teaching. It is aimed above all at the wholesome development of the child. Essentially,

activities of learning at this level should be adequately diversified to ensure good growth and development of the child. By virtue of their age, children at this level of growth possess a lot of natural energy and drive to learn. Taggart (2003), has therefore suggested that what is required for them is a programme of activity capable of stimulating their interest and attention. The recent trend across nations is to inculcate the culture of sports activities in children. This is in addition to imbibing in them, a culture of play. The goal is to develop in these young ones appropriate movement patterns necessary for all physical activities.

Even with emphasis on the foregoing, PE in Nigeria primary school still lacks the attention it deserves. Before now, what was prevalent was a situation where even though PE was allotted time on the time table, it was taken more like an unserious routine. This is the sense that the classroom teachers (not the specialist in PE) engage their learners' usual sports and games. The hope was that it would help elicit some potentials stars that could be nurtured. Even at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not much can be said of redefining the status of PE in Nigeria primary schools. It is in this context that Ojeme (2010), has lamented the handling of the subject at this level of learning, observing that unqualified teachers were left to teach the subject. More disheartening is the observation of Toriola (2002), and Adebayo (2002), where football fields have been converted to school building, thereby denying school children the much needed facilities to play. There is no gainsaying that with the above situation no effective teaching of physical education would be done in primary schools. More so when most public primary schools lack basic facilities and equipment necessary to conduct physical education classes, in addition to the reported zero funding of physical education programme and activities.

Even with the prescription of the National Policy on Education (1977) which makes physical education a compulsory subject at this level, the situation remains the same. The needed policy leverage may not have been quite attained. Hence the subject is yet to gain the needed impetus to grow. Ojeme (2009), has asserted that this continuous set back can largely be attributed to Ministries of Education and Youths and Sports. At this juncture, it becomes imperative for these Ministries, and all other stake holders in primary school PE programme, to revisit the aims and objectives of PE at this level of learning, and the expected fruitful gains it hopes to achieve. Until this is done the desired status of PE in primary school may continue to suffer neglect.

### **Secondary school**

The situation in Nigerian secondary schools is not different from the described situation in primary schools. One cannot totally rule out the fact that there are some forms of physical activities on ground, but to what extent do these meet the required standard for secondary school sports remains the concern. There is no gain saying that even the few activities available in most schools are those made possible by the effort of education planners as far back as the colonial era. Unfortunately not much of such legacies are left. This is largely due to poor planning and management of Nigeria school sports as a whole in the last two and half decades. The expected change in the status of PE was the concern of National Policy on Education and National Sports Development Policy. These policies variously made prescription for the subject. The implication was to make P.E have equal status with other school subjects. This made the subject examinable both in the West African Examination Council (WASC), General Certificate of Education (GCE) and National Examination Council (NECO). The question again is how this can be when the same policy makes the subject compulsory only up to the junior secondary school, while making it optional at the senior secondary schools. It was thought that with the revised policy in 1998, this anomaly would be corrected, instead, the subject was further relegated from a core and separate subject to elective and Physical and Health Education (PHE). One wonders if such a stance may not force the subject into extinction, rather than the expected intent of sustaining its growth for its developments.

As presently practiced in Nigerian secondary schools, physical education is organized under three major phases, namely: instructional, intramural and extramural programmes. The instructional programme ought to be an avenue for implementing the compulsory teaching of physical education at the junior secondary schools. However what obtains in most schools is not quite the case. Not much is done by way of instructional programme.

Following the trend of the organization of P.E in phases, what should logically follow the instructional programme is the intramural programme. Ojeme (2010) has described the intramural programme as an all year programme of activity with an intention of mass participation and broad based activities. But what is prevalent by way of the intramural sports in our schools is the annual inter-house competitions. This tends to defeat the policy of intramural programme which logically should provide opportunity for everyone to participate in. It is also expected that, there will be the need for adequate facilities and equipment if participants are to have a fair share of

participation in intramural sports. However, the case is contrary, with a focus on organization for selected few.

Besides the dearth of essential equipment and facilities, personnel for the management of intramurals are also inadequate, and at times there is the absence of qualified personnel to run the programme. The nature of intramurals is such that almost every admitted student is entitled to participate. This will stretch the facilities and equipment available. Where such facilities cannot meet the students demand, the expectation is that personnel should be able to improvise, so as to fulfill the programmes' needs. But this is made worse where qualified personnel are lacking and at other times inadequate. The only option left would be to leave the administration of the programme in the hands of unqualified individuals who may end up thwarting the desired goals of the programme. So far, the foregoing has been the unfortunate trend with secondary school sports. At the secondary school level there are hardly sports units or offices. Even where equipment is procured, they are poorly maintained. Since the Ministries of Education, Youth and Sports scarcely provide funds, the schools usually turn to the students for sports levy. This is in a bid to sustain school sports at their level. The question therein, is in what direction can status of the Nigeria secondary school sports be turned around so as to put it at par with other nations that take great concern on the total development of the child? Moreover how can Nigeria, with this attitude towards school sports boast of the philosophical dictum of "the sound mind in a healthy body."

### **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that Nigeria school sports today may have lost its validity in relation to the conception of school sports (at all level). If school sports must earn its status as an organized and administered sporting activity under the auspices of the school, supervised by expert then we may need to go back to revisit what is presently termed "school sports." Perhaps the beginning point could be from the suggestion of Ojeme (2010) who stated that standard facilities and equipment should be provided for schools, while qualified sports personnel are engaged to administer the programmes. There is also the need to created sports unity both at the Ministry of Education and in the Schools. This will signal the beginning of paving the path for re-negotiating the status of school sports in Nigeria. Indeed, sports in the school system are not merely "doing activity". Ojeme (2010) believes that a good quality curriculum is one with a valid representative of its subject matter. It is in this context that Ojeme (1993) asserts that the physical education curriculum in



Nigerian primary and secondary schools has lost the power and the quality that would make it flower and blossom into the production of great athletic potentials. Ojeme's (2010) plea therefore, is to have a school sports that would integrate both theory and motor skills.

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