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ASSESSING THE CHALLENGES OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AT 1ST DEGREE LEVEL IN SOUTHERN REGION ETHIOPIA: POLICIES AND PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract

It is generally believed that the teachers of Physical Education at the Undergraduate Level hold the key to the final quality of physical education delivered in degree colleges. The education policies prevalent and the resulting misperceptions of Physical Education among teachers and parents in general have given rise to several obstacles in the creation and dispensing of an ideal PE program. At the Under Graduate level students are consciously “counseled” into serious reading for with the least time spent at physical education and sport in the name of career development and focus on one’s life and career. For decades now the curriculum designers for the Undergraduate Level in Ethiopia have consistently failed to integrate the Physical Education program into main stream education. In this journal article I have identified some of the impediments that prevent the Physical Education providers from providing high quality physical education to students at the undergraduate level in South people regional state of Ethiopia

Keywords: Physical Education, Policies, Perceptions In PE, Tertiary Level PE, Challenges

Introduction

It is generally believed that the teachers of Physical Education at the Undergraduate Level hold the key to the final quality of Physical Education delivered in degree levels. However, the truth is that the Physical Education teacher alone cannot do much to maintain the quality of the Physical Education program provided to the students. The education policies prevalent and the resulting misperceptions of PE among teachers and parents in general have given rise to several obstacles in the creation and dispensing of an ideal PE program. In this paper want to identify some of the impediments that prevent the Physical Education providers from providing high quality physical education to students at the undergraduate level in South people regional state of Ethiopia

Historical Factors

Historically, Physical Education in Ethiopia has always been relegated to the margins as an extra-curricular activity and has not given emphasis in the main curriculum. The focus as we all know has always been on the Arts, Sciences, Agriculture and engineering subjects and sadly Physical Education has been to date deprived of the importance of being referred as even a one subject. At First degree level students are consciously “counseled” into serious reading for which the least time spent at physical education and sport in the name of career development and focus on one’s life and career. As far as my knowledge is concerned, there are a few universities that give degree courses in Ethiopia that has been able to involve all its students in some kind of physical education activity or sport. It is only a handful of students who are self-motivated or are motivated by a physical education provider that evince interest in participating in physical education activities and sport. Even these selected few are often reproved by the subject teachers and are labeled as non-serious students.

For decades now the curriculum designers for the Undergraduate Level in country have consistently failed to integrate the Physical Education program into main stream education. For instance, if we look at the UGC Curriculum for undergraduate Courses there is no mention whatsoever of Physical Education or sports. This failure to draw a clear cut curriculum for the Physical Education program and subjecting it to an evaluation system on par with the reading subjects has had the effect of a double edged sword – on the one hand it has diluted the significance of a physical education and on the other it has deprived young men women from gaining the benefits of a regimen that could have gone a long way in providing the future citizens and leaders of the country the much needed physical and mental wellbeing.

Social Factors

There are certain stereotypes created based on the view point of a group of people, their notions and prejudices, rather than scientific knowledge. There are social problems like gender discrimination, caste discrimination, etc., Gender discrimination in the society is a serious problem that hinders the development of girls particularly in the field of Physical Education and sport. There is a general perception that only a male child can play and sustain sports and games not a female child. There exists an on-going debate all over the world about gender discrimination and several policies are being made and implemented to curb the menace at government levels. However, there is a yawning gap between “hope” and the “happening” on the real ground.



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Economic Factors

Farming is the most common form of source of income in Ethiopia. Despite seeing some technological growth and urbanization rural Ethiopia continues to be dependent on agriculture and most men and women work as farmers or laborers in the fields. Traditionally an agricultural family requires all its members to share the responsibilities on the farm from dawn to dusk. Under these circumstances, students who are from those families (which is the case in more 90% of rural Ethiopia) have no choice but to accompany their parents from time to time in order to determine that they have a good crop which in return ensures that the family sustains its basic means of livelihood. The same is the case with students coming from the different societal community. There are no two opinions on the fact that physical education plays a critical role in educating the student holistically, and for life. In addition, a healthy, physically active student is more likely to be academically motivated, alert, and successful. Quality physical education can promote social, cooperative and problem-solving competencies. But unfortunately, there are no policies in place that ensure that every single student participates in physical education activities and/or sports. The young men and women are losing crucial years that could be used to train them to understand the value of physical fitness in a world that is becoming increasingly polluted and food becoming increasingly adulterated with chemicals and pesticides. The government does make efforts to allocate funds to universities for infrastructure development and purchase of physical education and sports material. However, rarely all of it is used for the said purpose or even sincerely utilized for the benefit of the student community.

Policy matters

At the Secondary level the curriculum prescribes two hours of PE per week whereas at the under-graduate level physical education periods are not included in the timetable. Those students who are interested in sports and games have to stay back after teaching periods and pursue their interests in sports and games; yet not all students get to play. Physical education from here on becomes an 'optional' activity.² Social factor and economic factors go hand in hand. Students who belong to financially poor family cannot afford time and material like proper dress, shoes to play games and sports. So, eventually he/she is deprived of physical education. This is as ancient as the gender discrimination or even more deeply rooted. In a place like South Nations regional state the government is taking necessary norms to provide education to the students in the region and jobs to the educated. But there is much to be done to the students for the overall development of the students. Research proves that those students who have been provided proper Physical Education get overall development and enjoy a healthy life through out.

Absence of Physical Education at the Elementary level

Generally, in primary and middle schools, government as well as private, the students are supplied skipping ropes just asked to entertain themselves. This leads to a general lack of proper training on basic physical movements and skill development, monitoring etc. Children learn through a variety of modalities (e.g. visual, auditory, tactile, and physical). Physical activity could be included in the occasions like family get-togethers, functions, village festivals and so on. Cycle race or long distance running or a team game could be conducted as a part of commemoration of birthdays of great personalities or on earth day, women's day and so on. The child also gets interested in peer group sports or physical activity. Iconic sports personalities in the respective sport or game also greatly influence the child to get motivated in a particular sport or game.

Conclusion

The government should take plan to make policies such as including physical education as part of curriculum from the elementary school itself. Trained physical education teachers should be recruited at elementary schools to carry out physical activity and sport at the early age. Most of the European and other countries have already implemented the physical education at kindergarten itself. This would help the child to understand and learn the basic physical movements. In fact, physical education should be made as a compulsory exam-oriented subject along with the other subjects at the First-Degree level. Government should conduct awareness programs and debates to increase awareness among the public about the importance of the physical education at the First-Degree level.

The Roles of the Media is very significant in bringing changes in the general perception of the public. Moreover, special care and planning must be made to encourage the students of special needs. Neglecting the differently disabled, would affect the psychological development and self-esteem of the children.

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