

Educating the Whole Man through Sports and Physical Education

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Abstract

This paper focused on the exploration of sports and physical education as a tool for the overall (head, heart, and hand) transformation of learners and sports participants which in turn leads to sustainable national transformation. The role of sports and physical education in the overall transformation of learners and sports participants has become an established research area in recent years, and as the discussion intensifies on national transformation through the complete transformation of citizens, it becomes pertinent to shed light once again on how far sports can go in delivering the “complete transformation” target. This study, therefore, highlights this role by establishing the current level of focus on the link between sports and the transformation of the learner, and treating domain-specific benefits of sports and physical education such as physiological benefits such as enhancing cardiovascular fitness, strength, flexibility, and overall physical endurance both among the older and younger generations, preventing sedentary living, and ultimately, reducing the risk of sedentary-related diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease; mental and cognitive benefits including the enhancement of cognitive functions such as concentration, and memory retention and better academic performance through improved blood flow to the brain; social and emotional benefits including the development of collaborative skills, and character development. The role of sports and physical education in the individual's overall growth is germane and diverse. Apart from the specific benefits that active participation in sports and physical education affords, the principle and models of instruction used in physical education can be adopted in any other instructional setting that has the aim of reaching out to learners on all three domains of being; that is the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains.

Key words: Educating, Whole man, Sports, and Physical Education.

Introduction

The journey towards sustainable national transformation must begin with the transformation of the human characters that constitute the society because the nation is only as transformed as the citizens that comprise it. The principal instrument, within every society, for human transformation is education. However, as asserted by Raj, (2017) this education irrespective of

its form, must cater for the physical, mental, psychological, social, and emotional development of the individuals subjected to the transformative process of education.

The phrase "educating the whole person" encapsulates a holistic approach to nurturing students, focusing on their intellectual development and attending to their physical, mental, social, and emotional growth. Students become adult citizens and adult citizens become leaders of the nation; the influence therefore spreading just beyond the sports or educational sector to affecting every possible facet of society. In that sense, sports and physical education can become a tool for sustainable economic and political advancement (Gorokhov, 2015).

The role of sports and physical education in the overall transformation of learners and sports participants has become an established research area in recent years. Although the research output according to Humphrey, (2012) is yet to match the level of academic enthusiasm the topic commands, there is no shortage of studies examining the link between sports and the complete development of learners or sports participants. In an investigation on how sports and physical education affect students' overall development within the framework of education Gorokhov (2015), observed that the inclusion of physical education and sports instruction in the curriculum offers pupils numerous benefits in the areas of psychosocial, physical, cognitive, psychomotor, emotional development. Furthermore, the study discovered that sports instruction and physical education greatly enhance students' fair play ideals and help them make good use of their leisure time.

So established is the link between sports and the overall human development, that sports has been identified as an instrument for the pursuit and achievement of the 2015 UN sustainable development goal whose attainment is proposed for 2030. Lindsey, Iain & Darby, (2018) ascertaining the relevance of sports in the attainment of the UN-SDG goals explained that the common orientation of the Sport for Development and Peace movement created by the United Nations General Assembly on 23 August 2013 (International Day of Sport for Development and Peace, 2024), as part of the effort to attain the defunct Millennium Development Goal, the forerunner of the SDG, aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4; potential synergies between sport participation policies and the Sustainable Development Goal 3 Target for reducing non-communicable diseases; and practices within professional football concerning several migration-related Sustainable Development Goal Targets.

The combination of sports and education or vocational endeavors has been shown to have benefits such as improving coping with adversity, protecting against poor mental health or burnout, and maintaining perspective for athletes (Raj, et al. 2022). Büning, Jürgens, &

Lausberg, (2020) explained that it is not the participation in physical activities per se, that creates the positive transformation but rather the divergent learning experiences in sports that positively influences the individual and enhances their creativity. To specifically spell out the various aspects in which the individual learner and sports participant benefits from sports and physical education it is important to treat each of these impact areas more directly.

Benefits of Sports and Physical Education in the Overall Transformation of the Learners

Physical Benefits

Technological advances in modern society, unlike in earlier centuries, have made sedentary lifestyles a new norm for adults and children alike. This condition according to Kohl, Cook, and Board, (2013) has led to the alteration of the composite indices (physiologically speaking) of the aged, mid-aged, youths, and even children. Imbroda et al., (2012) observed that children today weigh more and have a higher body mass index (BMI) than their peers of just a generation earlier. This according to them is a result of the behavioral changes in the activity level of people in this technologically-driven age as most people now hardly engage in vigorous- or moderate-intensity physical activity for the recommended 60 minutes or more each day, with as many as one-third of children and young adults reporting zero-physical activity for as long as 5 whole days (CDC, 2012). This inactivity has increased the risk of disease, increased the prevalence of childhood obesity, and decreased physical fitness (muscular strength, flexibility, and cardiorespiratory capacity). This is an alarming condition for society not just in the present but in the future.

Sports and physical education programs have been shown by numerous studies to significantly enhance cardiovascular fitness, strength, flexibility, and overall physical endurance both among the older and younger generations. It is believed and has been empirically verified, that students who engage in regular physical activity are better equipped to maintain a healthy weight, which is crucial in preventing lifestyle diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease (Mayer, Ádám, & Wilhelm, 2024; Gasibat, 2024; Tosun, Yılmaz, Arıcı, & Kaplan, 2024).

Regular physical activity is fundamental to maintaining good health (Leaf, et al. 2024). However, this physical activeness has to be cultivated at a very early age in life. Because according to Kohl, Cook, and Board, (2013), the promotion of health-enhancing behaviors must also start early in life to provide the best possible results, and when children develop these health-enhancing habits, they will not only be more successful learners, they will also be more likely to make a more successful transition to adult life. Additionally, sports and physical

education help develop essential motor skills that are both vital for sports and daily life activities. Developing these motor skills during formative years lays the groundwork for a lifetime of physical competence and confidence (Park, et al. 2024).

Mental and Cognitive Benefits

Beyond the physical realm, sports and physical education offer substantial mental and cognitive benefits (Bidzan-Bluma, Jurek, & Lipowska). There is a well-documented correlation between physical activity and enhanced academic performance. Physical exercise improves blood flow to the brain, which in turn enhances cognitive function, concentration, and memory retention and various studies have shown that students who participate in regular physical activity tend to perform better academically (Nugroho, et al. 2024). Physical education has also been shown to play a critical role in stress reduction among learners and participants in sports. The release of endorphins during physical activity is a natural antidote to stress, anxiety, and depression (Holland, Cole, & Owens, 2024).

In today's fast-paced and often high-pressure educational environments, providing students with a healthy outlet for stress is invaluable. This is why it is important to expose students to and engage them in sports and physical activities as this will allow them to channel their energy positively and manage stress more effectively (Shankar & Park, 2016). Sports also foster the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Strategy and tactics are integral components of most sports, requiring students to think quickly and make decisions under pressure. These experiences are transferable to academic and real-life situations, where problem-solving and quick decision-making are crucial.

Social and Emotional Benefits

The social and emotional benefits of sports and physical education are just as significant as its physical and cognitive importance. Participation in team sports and group physical activities teaches students the value of teamwork and cooperation, working towards common goals, understanding roles within a team, and learning to collaborate with others are skills that extend far beyond the sports field (Parry, 2019). These experiences help students develop strong interpersonal skills, which are essential in both personal and professional life.

Leadership skills are other critical outcomes of sports participation (Imbroda-Ortiz, Castillo-Rodríguez, & Chinchilla-Minguet, 2015). Sports provide numerous opportunities for students to take on leadership roles, whether as team captains or peer mentors. These roles help students develop communication skills, responsibility, and the ability to inspire and motivate others.

Building self-esteem and confidence is another profound benefit. Achieving personal and team goals in sports, overcoming challenges, and experiencing success contribute to a positive self-image. These experiences are instrumental in shaping resilient and confident individuals, ready to face life's various challenges, making them psychosocially competent students and citizens. Psychosocial competence, in the context of sports education, is defined as a person's ability to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life (Klaperski-van der Wal, 2022). A person can maintain a state of mental well-being and demonstrate this in adaptive and positive behavior while interacting with others, his/her culture, and his/her environment. These positive habits provide social benefits and are a facilitator of sustainable development.

Character Development

Sports and physical education are powerful tools for character development. The discipline required for regular practice and improvement in sports instills a strong work ethic in students. They learn the importance of perseverance, dedication, and hard work. Facing and overcoming failures in sports teaches resilience and the ability to bounce back from setbacks (Naylor & Yeager, 2013). Sports, although perceived primarily as an extra-curricular "pastime", serves as a necessary platform and a failure-proof guide for the learner and sports participants in the creation of values and personal virtues (Myer, Faigenbaum, & Logerstedt, et al 2015). Respect and sportsmanship are core values promoted through sports. Fair play, respecting opponents, and adhering to rules are essential principles in sports. These values translate into everyday's life, fostering a sense of integrity and ethical behavior in students (Dishon, 2017). Moreover, sports provide a unique environment for ethical and moral development. Students learn to value honesty and integrity in competition, understanding that success achieved through fair means is more fulfilling and respected. This ethical grounding is crucial for their overall moral development.

Sports education offers a unique opportunity for character-building in students. The benefits of sports education go beyond just physical health. It has been found to play an important role in building character and teaching values essential for success in life (Opstoel, Chapelle, Haerens, & De Martelaer, 2019). Sports education, is established in sports research, sports education can teach important values such as teamwork, leadership, determination, and sportsmanship. Additionally, sports education can benefit students, such as improved physical fitness, self-confidence, and social skills. Overall, this study suggests that sports education can play a significant role in character development and has the potential to impact students both on and off the field positively (Bisa, 2023).

Integration into the Education System

For sports and physical education to achieve their full potential, they must be seamlessly integrated into the education system. Designing a curriculum that balances academics and physical activities is essential, and schools should ensure that physical education is not sidelined but given equal importance (Nugroho, et al. 2024). This can be achieved by incorporating a variety of physical activities and sports into the daily schedule, catering for different interests and skill levels.

Extracurricular activities, such as school sports teams and clubs, play a significant role in this integration. Encouraging students' participation in these activities promotes a culture of physical fitness and teamwork. These programmes provide students with additional opportunities to engage in sports and develop their skills further. Community and parental involvement is another critical factor. Engaging the community in sports programs and encouraging parents to support their children's participation in physical activities creates a supportive environment. When students see their community and family valuing physical fitness and sports, they are more likely to adopt these values themselves.

Conclusion

In conclusion, sports and physical education are indispensable components of a holistic educational approach for sustainable national transformation of citizens. They contribute to physical health, enhance mental and cognitive abilities, foster social and emotional development, and build strong character. By integrating sports and physical education into our education systems, we can ensure that we are truly educating the whole person's head, the heart and the hand. As we move forward, all hands must be on deck in advocating for policies and practices that prioritize physical education and sports and create environments where students can thrive physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally. By doing so, we will be nurturing not only healthier individuals but also well-rounded, capable, and confident members of society.

This study strongly recommends taking advantage of the various models by which sports can be harnessed for the overall development of the learner, particularly the Sports Education Model (SEM); A method of instruction in sports education intended to provide children and youth with more authentic and enjoyable sports experiences by taking an active role in their own sports experience and serving in varied, realistic roles that are obtainable in authentic sports settings such as captains, coaches, trainers, statisticians, officials, publicists, and members of a sports council.

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