

A Brief Comment on the Condition of Physical Education in Schools in Pakistan

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Abstract

This brief article aims to capture the spirit of the challenges faced by primary and secondary schools in providing adequate physical education opportunities to children in Pakistan. Since there is a severe dearth of literature in this field, information was obtained from a tight focus group of teachers and students, and from the researchers' own experiences, along with data from the Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan. It is hoped that this might form the basis for others to do more in-depth research and discover solutions to the challenges faced by those affected.

Keywords: Education, Physical Education, Sports, School, Pakistan.

Introduction

This article describes the education policy of Pakistan as it relates to schools and its shortcomings and performance in enhancing the overall literacy rate in the country. This article explains the importance of physical education in the context of overall achievements of the education sector. The article starts with a literature review, explains the benefits of physical education, and the shortcomings of the sports policy in Pakistan and its effects on education. The article also highlights study plans for primary, secondary and higher secondary classes, and shows inappropriate time allocations for physical education at these levels.

The Importance of Physical Education in Schools

As far as the term physical education is concerned, it is a very comprehensive term that includes everything like fitness of every kind, movement, dance, recreation, health, games, and sports. Not is the knowledge of the above included in this, the appropriate values and anticipated benefits associated with them are included as well. This is no doubt that physical education nowadays plays a pivotal role in the development of the personality of youth. Physical education is one of the integral parts of the total educational experience of every child and is very closely related to all other creative and learning experiences and in the making of a significant contribution to harmonious development of the mind and body. A physical education program develops competency through regular physical activities in the student's life. Students achieve personal and physical benefits from their involvement in a well-designed physical education program. Therefore, the planning and management of the physical education curriculum in

schools should always be the focus of attention towards the goal of providing value added experiences.

For the purposes of testing the capacity of children and their behavior, many theories and models have been put forth and they conclude that physical activity at early ages has significant relationship with the child's future abilities. Unfortunately, the existing literature presents a confused picture of predictors of physical activities. This is further exasperated because as most of the studies are cross-sectional in design, thereby restricting findings rather than determining general policies that impact the applicability and benefit of sport in education.

As mentioned above, there is a dearth of such literature that focuses on policies applicable to physical education in Pakistan. Most of these studies focus not on policies, but on the socio-cultural aspects of youth sports. For example, reciprocal determinism operates between some socio-cultural influences, and behavioral outcomes are result, according to Bauman et, al. (2002). Another example of this narrow focus is that according to Sallis, et, al. (1992), introduction to be active is a sociological attribute consistently reported as being associated with youth physical activity. It is likely that the intention of a child to be physically active will be higher if an active behavior pattern is already established. If the child is already involved in any regular physical activities, it becomes easier for parents and teachers to encourage and support the same behavior at school. Reported association of parental influences on a child's physical activities are accepted. Different sets of predictors incorporate 'play at school' with the same child, such as at lunch and recess times, compared with 'play in or near the home' Dollman (2002). Different influences on unstructured play can differ in between participation, gender, and age, which each moderate these influences. According to Dollman (2002), these attributes combine to form the 'Moderate Vigorous Physical Activity (MVPA) set of characteristics.

Different predictors have been applied to Moderate Vigorous Physical Activity (MVPA) performed at school (peer support among girls with no predictors for boys), and out of school (peer support and self-efficacy for boys, with no predictors for girls). According to the social-ecological framework, many attempts to model youth physical activity have been made on account of the complex network of hypothesized influences. Welk (1999) proposed the ' youth physical activity promotion model', in which he explains multiple levels of environmental "influence" (i.e., social, cultural, physical, and institutional), both direct and indirect, on physical activity behavior of children in school. Please see figure 1.

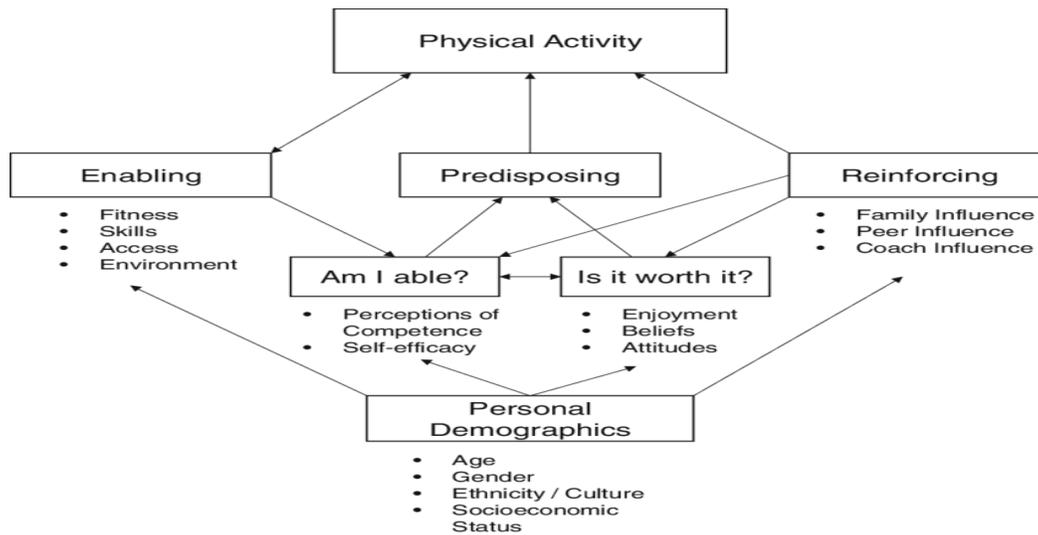


Figure 1: Adapted from Welk (1999).

Sports is a human activity that involves specific administration, management, and a historical background of rules which define the object and manage the pattern of human behavior. It involves competition or challenge, and a definite outcome, primarily determined by 'physical skill' (Palfrey et al, 1987).

Theoretically, the insistence upon rules and equality (disregarding the prejudice that can exist within the framework of sport) provides an 'egalitarian utopia' in which everyone irrespective of race, religion, socio-economic stratification, and level of education can subject themselves to a symbolic test unencumbered by the traditional limitations set deliberately or subconsciously by society (Ashworth & Saxton, 1990). The setting of rules, location, time, positions of team players, complex physical activity is applied throughout preparation, and serious exercise and training for competition between individuals or team is required.

It is established that regular exercise brings many benefits of health from leaner bodies to improve mental health therefore, therefore physical education and sports program must be promoted at school level. Students must be taught skills to change their behavior in order to promote physical health and mental wellbeing throughout their life. In this regard, a quality program of physical education is a core requirement of all schools as its major component in a comprehensive health program (Deschesnes, 2003).

According to Allen et al. (2011), physical education not only provides opportunities for development of physical health, interpersonal skills, and self-esteem, but also provides nurturing to socio-psycho-social development. Throughout physical education, aims and objectives like good sportsmanship, cooperation, teamwork, giving and receiving support, real appreciation of regular exercise, emotional control, leadership, and fellowship skills, and the development of the concept of positive self can be achieved easily. All this and more makes physical education for children in school imperative.

Factors Affecting Physical Education in Pakistan

The importance of school-level sports in Pakistan has been greatly neglected. This is influenced by many factors such as:

Economic:

1. Low level of economic development
2. Low per capita income
3. Insufficient opportunities in schools for physical activities
4. Lack of finance
5. Poor health and nutrition standards
6. High individual cost of physical activity information, such as books/articles
7. Non availability of audio-visual aids for differently abled children
8. The absence of infrastructure
9. Lack of motivation from society in general

Physical/Psychological:

1. Punitive measures adopted by the teachers and a perceived of self-respect
2. Non-conducive atmosphere in schools
3. Heavy load of the schoolbag adds an unnecessary physical burden on children
4. Practice of forcing children to repeat classes because of perceived lack of interest in academic activities
5. Induction of formal education from the very first day in school.
6. Ignoring learning challenges of differently abled children
7. Unattractive/unfamiliar environment of the schools
8. Overcrowded classrooms

Geographical:

1. Scattered pattern of population in large parts of the country
2. Long distances of schools from homes.
3. Natural calamities in hilly areas.
4. Lack of focus on developing communication

Administrative:

1. Lack of supervision and weak administration of sporting activities in schools
2. Indifferent attitude of administrative and supervisory personnel towards the teaching community
3. Teacher absenteeism
4. Undue political interference

Curriculum/Educational Environment:

1. Curriculum not in harmony with the needs and abilities of different children.
2. Lack of relevance of curriculum to the needs of the community
3. Poor quality of education

4. Rigid system of examinations
5. Non-availability of textbooks
6. No immediate returns of perceived benefits expected of education (making poor parents consider it a futile exercise)
7. Rigid formal system of education right from primary classes

Teacher-Related:

1. Shortage of qualified teachers
2. Hesitation of female teachers to go to schools located in remote areas because of security concerns
3. Inadequate/improper residential facilities especially in far flung areas leading to teacher absenteeism
4. Low morale of primary school teachers and their harsh treatment towards students
5. Substandard student-teacher ratio
6. Inadequate training/knowledge of child psychology
7. Defective/outdated textbooks they are forced to teach from

Table 1: Study Plan for Primary Classes (Ministry of Education, Govt. of Pakistan)

Subject	Grades I and II		Grade III		Grades IV and V	
	No. of weekly periods	No. of weekly hours	No. of weekly periods	No. of weekly hours	No. of weekly periods	No. of weekly hours
First Language					6	4
Listening and Speaking	9	2	3	2		
Reading	12	8	9	6		
Writing	6	4	6	4		
Second Language			6	4	6	4
Activity based on textbook	4	2.4	3	2		
Mathematics	9	6	6	4	6	4
Islamic Education	2	1.2	3	2	6	4
Physical Education	3	2	3	2	3	2
Science					5	3.2
Pakistan Studies					4	2.4
Arts					3	2
Manual Work					1	0.4
Total	39	26	39	26	40	26.4

Table 1 highlights the proportionally low allocation of time for physical education at school level in the official study plan issued by the Ministry of Education.

Assessing Impact

The study plan for class one to five shows the details of time allocations to various subjects including physical education. It can be seen that physical education is included at all levels. It can be seen that in class I, only 7.6 percent of the total time is allocated for physical education during the week. Similarly, all succeeding classes follow a similar pattern.

The physical education period at school levels has no organized method of teaching. There is no specialized faculty assigned for physical education classes. In most cases physical education revolves around taking students outside the classroom allowing them to play some random games. In most cases, there are no open playground facilities and physical education periods are simply considered a leisure period where children sit and take free time, often doing their homework. Furthermore, there is no curriculum for physical education, especially in public schools. Ideally, physical education has to be a combination of classroom teaching that could cover health, sports, and competitive physical challenges, as well as the prevention of injuries alongside the actual physical activities themselves. The fact that the classroom teaching part of physical education is not included in the national curriculum at all is alarming in itself.

Conclusion

The state of affairs in physical education in schools in Pakistan is abysmal at best. Education in Pakistan is heavily controlled by the government. Unless there is recognition of the importance of physical education at the policy making levels, this will never trickle down to actual levels where it can be implemented. As the matter stands, physical education at schools is just a formality in between rigorous teaching of conventional subjects. More research needs to be done to find solutions to this challenge and make children get the opportunity they deserve.

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