Sports Participation:  
A Catalyst in Health Promotion and Quality Living

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Abstract
The essence of this paper is to ascertain the influence of sports participation as a catalyst that aids in the promotion of health and quality living among individuals in the society. The paper also tries to examine the roles in which participation in sports can play in the development of an individual and society as a whole such as physical fitness, mental and emotional fitness, skills development, recreational benefits, aesthetics/entertainment benefits, citizenship/patriotism, scholarship, career development and economic benefits. It was concluded that, sports constitutes an area of human activity and recommended that all educational and non-educational institutions should embrace sports. The ministries of education, health and social development should ensure that sports is given a priority in the school curriculum; trained and qualified personnel should manage sports positions in the schools and ministries and their inputs given consideration in policy formulation.

Keywords: sports participation, health promotion, quality living, catalyst and society.

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of conceiving the idea of establishing a school, there has to be some provision for sporting activities, equipment and facilities put in place. In most schools, no day passes by without those facilities being put to use in one form or the other. For example the football field is used daily for either gymnastics or soccer. These activities could be organized or miniature types chosen freely by students of the schools or youths of immediate communities. Also physical exercise which is a very important instrument for the healthy growth and development of children and youths normally takes place better in the field and courts. Not only that, matching activities for preparation of children towards Children’s Day, Independence Day and many other social activities like traditional dances are organized in school inform of play and sports. The development of desirable habits, attitudes, values and skills that would enable students fit well into the society is adequately encouraged and taken care by medium of sporting programmes. Good enough sports has been recognized from the onset to be an integral part of any school system.

According to Ahiauzu (1995) sports has taken a centre stage in the conduct of diplomacy, and the evolution of development and opines that sports is education, sports is life and sports bring people together. Sports has assumed an enviable height of being an instrument of promoting unity, understating and fostering peace where others like politics and religions have failed.

Edim, Emeribe and Akah (2008) expressed that it is not an overstatement to remark here that of all school subjects put together, sports alone can take a very prominent position in the educational system. Sports if properly harnessed, can contribute about fifty percent (50%) or more to the educational goals of the society. It is a well known fact that sports and recreation have been fundamental elements of the curricula of institutions throughout history. According to anthropological and historical researchers, physical education and sport are the most ancient subjects in the humanities. From early to the present time, sports in one form or the other has been promoted by all fields of world civilization. It has received varying degrees of cultural and government emphasis and attention, (Oyeniyi, 2001).

According to Ndu (1990), conditioning and training programmes guide students through various activities to achieve fitness and learn how to develop and maintain it. Modern sports programmes also provide experiences that can be directed towards self integration of the individual. It fulfills other social roles through the employment of movement activities for other learning outcomes. Sports education promotes the understanding of motion as a universal phenomenon with which to cope with life obstacles in the environment. To this end, this paper looks at the role of sports and examines the multi-dimensional perspectives of sport as a medium for health promotion and quality living in society. It is believed that there is no dynamic administrator, vis-à-vis
educationist who would overlook or wave-off this very potent socio-educational force called sports.

Oloruntoba and Achugbu (2002) defined sports as an institutionalized physical activity which operates by rules fixed externally. They further described sports as activities with clear standard of performance involving physical exertion through competition, governed by norms, definitions, role relationships, typically performed by members of organized groups, with goals of achieving some rewards through defeat of other competitors. Sports does not exist in a vacuum. It is part of the total education programme of a nation which involves local and state systems, regional councils and international organizations.

Ndu (1990) expressed further that sports is relatively a new co-curricular activity in the African educational system. It is a fact that its western origin in the continent can be traced back to the missionary activities of 1940s. This explains why up to date, the materials and most of the sporting events have been those related to foreign nations. To the layman, sports is referred to as athletic competitions which have to do with running, jumping, throwing, dancing and wrestling. Others see sports as recreational or competitive activities which involves some amount of physical strength or skills. Odigbo (1985) sees sports as a form of education through a well-planned programme of physical activities that aim at meeting up with maximum development of the whole individual-physically, mentally, morally and socially. Therefore, sports is the development of a well integrated individual having a sound mind in a healthy body, who is also socially sound. Homer, a great ancient philosopher recognizes that sporting activities help to build a sound mind in a sound body.

Through history, man invented sports primarily as a means of socially interacting with others through the display of skills that make for physical prowess, entertainment or excitement. It is based on the sociability of sports that the economic gains, and highly technological advancement that every nation strives to participate in sporting activities. This has also warranted nations to develop more facilities and put in billions of dollars to encourage their institutions of learning to take sports as very important aspect of the school curriculum in order to bring about health promotion and quality living in society.

The Role of Sports
The relevance of sports to individual, society and the nation at large is multi-faceted. The benefits of sports include social fitness, physical fitness, mental and emotional fitness, neuromuscular skill development, recreational skills, aesthetic/entertainment role, scholarship, citizenship and patriotism, career development, economic gains etc. These authors shall succinctly discuss these benefits under three major perspectives, namely: physical/physiological, sociological and economic gains.

Physical/Physiological Benefits
It is through participation in various physical activities that the vital organic systems of the body are developed (Bucher, 1979 and Ama, 1989). In order to achieve this objective, the activities must be wisely selected and made to meet individual needs and abilities. Organic systems include the heart, lungs or the cardiovascular organs in general. The development of these systems can result in physical fitness. Thus the individual is able to do strenuous physical activities of longer duration with less expenditure of energy. In a broader view, physical education has unique opportunities to develop in participants desirable social traits or character as well as physical fitness. The ultimate goals of education are to provide for the development of the individual into a responsible citizen who has good health and acceptable behaviour in society. To this end, a good degree of physical fitness with other variables being equal is proportional to longevity, broad social change, health promotion and quality living. The neuromuscular skills which form the basis for other intricate movements in life such as writing, coordination, balance, etc. are developed through sporting activities. Games skills are also developed through participation in sports, this in turn will lead to a high belongingness, achievement, and other physiological benefits for the participants. Proficiency can earn an individual participant a ticket to professionalism.

A sound mind in a sound body dictum is equal to a composite mental capacity. This is not the same as Intelligence Quotient (IQ), it refers to the development of an individual who is mentally alert. For example, no amount of sporting activities will change a child who has inherited a low IQ from the parents into a genius. In this case what sports does is to provide the developing child with activities which are physically wholesome and mentally stimulating. A student who is required to accomplish a motor task like handspring over a box in gymnastics will not only think of how to perform the activity only, but when and how to take-off, the correct position of the body in the flight and his safety. Every other previous knowledge associated with the task is brought to play through mental image or perception. This is how mental alertness is developed through sports. Also, the elevation of winning, or the ordeal of defeat in sports provides an experience which helps to develop the child emotionally. This does not end in the sporting arena, but is transferred consciously or unconsciously to other life endeavours.

Sociological benefits
Sports is a social agent that brings different people of different ages, nations and religious backgrounds together either as sports producers or consumers so
that both make good use of their leisure time. The players usually referred to as primary producers engage in sporting activities in order to entertain their spectators (primary consumers) that watch at them perform. On the aspect of recreational benefits, Oyeniyi (2001) stated that, sporting activities at the armature level are more recreational in nature. Since recreational activities border on leisure time activities that would ease, recreate and refresh one from daily routine and tiresome duties, sports play such role in solving these problems. Sports can serve as antidotes to our mental and emotional tensions. Stress which is the wear and tear of our daily living finds its outlet via sports. Hence the “adage all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy and Jane a dull girl”.

Most international sporting events such as FIFA World Cup, Olympic Games and other continental sports have borne witness to the test of unity among different nations of the world. Such events are the only occasions by which people of multiple diversity, race, colour, nationality, religious and political school of thoughts come together. All their differences are buried automatically and spontaneously. Everybody is found to be speaking in one voice and praying fervently for the success of his or her squad. Sports then tend to satisfy the following societal needs:

- a. Sports provide safety values for both spectators and participants through dissipation of excess energies, tensions and hostile feelings in a socially acceptable way.
- b. Athletes or players serve as role models, possessing proper psychological and physical traits to be emulated by other members of the society. They are heroes, worshipped and highly publicized by the media.
- c. Sports offer secular quasi-religious rituals, and ceremonies which reinforce the values of society and regulate behaviour prescribed by custom. There are found in national colours, flags and anthems displayed in sporting arenas.

It is true that sports is not a frill. Aesthetically, sports facilities serve as beautiful ornaments to most people, institutions of learning, the country and the society as a whole. Although they are quite expensive, they create room for the display of the spacious and green fields, clean swimming pools, stadia and gymnasia which are the aesthetic of nature. Of particular interest too is the beauty embedded in most sporting activities. Just imagine the manner of a diver perform in a swimming pool; a goal keeper heading to catch an air ball. Sports provide media for individuals to test their movement abilities. This is done with all amount of seriousness in order to yield positive results that would bring about some social change in the lives of the participants.

- **Economic benefits**

Today, sports has formed a big career for many. Professionalism in sports has created big earnings for those concerned. Many sporting industries that specialized in production of sports products have no regrets. For example sports administrators, coaches and sports journalists have unlimited opportunities to grow in the career. Science and technology is leaving no stone untorn in the search for advancement in sophisticated gadgets including electronic media for sports performance coverage worldwide. Physical education and sports is known to be a discipline like every other ones such as psychology, biology, physics, sociology, etc. Students need to read and engage in real scholastic works. Sports is a science as well as an art. It integrates knowledge and principles from sister disciplines like biology, mathematics, physics, psychology and sociology. To gain perfection in sports does not call for practical performance only, theoretical framework is inclusive. In a nutshell, results as to the relationship between academic achievement and athletic performance are correlated.

It is easy for an average citizen who reads daily newspapers, listens to the radio or watches the television to realize that there are enormous economic and monetary gains associated with recreational, educational and professional sports. The attendance of spectators in sporting competitions increases at various sporting events such as basketball, soccer, handball, etc., irrespective of the ever-increasing prices of gate fees charged. Thousands of spectators from all works of life, be they young or old, healthy or handicapped despite the economic crunch would not mind to allocate their meager income to the attendance of amateur or professional sporting events. Different governments of the world have given sports a place of priority in their budgetary allocations. Corporate organizations and philanthropists too do not hesitate to donate huge grants to sports. These are all indices to show that sports is a veritable instrument that enhances broad social change, health promotion and quality living.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, sports constitute an area of human activity that is as old as the human race and an ever new and challenging sphere due to its potent force. Sports can contribute immensely to foster attainment of both social and educational goals. This paper has no doubt led us to this logical conclusion. Sports then is a potential socio-educational process that should be adopted by every educational institution, most especially those desirous to target health promotion and academic excellence. By so doing, it will enhance the crusade in health promotion and quality living in the society.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the testimonies of the laudable contributions of sports as a medium for health promotion and quality living, the following recommendations are made:

1. All educational and non-educational institutions should embrace sports.
2. The Ministries of Education, Health and Social Development should ensure that sports is given priority in the school curriculum.
3. Building of recreational centres in our communities for sporting activities should be a welcome innovation.
4. Replacement and renovation of sports equipment and facilities should be a regular affair.
5. Trained and qualified personnel should manage sports positions in schools and ministries and their inputs given consideration in policy formulation.

REFERENCES


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