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APPRAISAL OF SYLLABI CONTENTS OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN, SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL: IMPLICATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

An appraisal of the present educational status of Physical Education as a school certificate subject gives much concern. In many schools, students do not enroll for school certificate exam in the subject and students who enrolled each year record poor performance in the subject. Many papers have been presented pointing towards the need and approach for review of Physical Education syllabus but none has been based on the direction such review should take. This paper is basically on direction review of syllabus of Senior Secondary School Physical Education. Major areas proposed for modification in Physical Education syllabi include foundation of Physical Education; History and Development of Physical Education and Sports; National and International Competition; Basic Human Anatomy and Physiology in relation to Exercise; Basic Principles of First Aid; Simple Mechanism of motion; Theory of Practice; and Physical Education, Sports and Society.

Introduction

Physical Education as a school certificate examinable subject dates back to the introduction of National Policy on Education (NPE, 1981). As a school subject, it is handled beyond school sport, though sports is an important aspect of the subject. Knowledge of the subject is acquired both theoretically and practical hence Nixon and Vendien (1985) describe Physical Education as a discrete academic discipline with unique knowledge involving general movements and sports. In the past, Physical Education was perceived as mere running and jumping or mere sports participation, but overtime, this perception changed for more realistic nature of the subject. Unfortunately, professionals are not doing enough to project the subject to a status depicting its potentiality. Okuneye (2002) states that there is widespread public acceptance of the need for Physical Education in schools, yet the subject is not receiving adequate attention.

An appraisal of the present educational status of Physical Education as a school certificate subject gives much concern. In many schools, students do not enroll for the subject for the school certificate examination. Students who enrolled each year are examined on theory of practices of sports and games, which is adversely affecting students' performance in the subject. This is so because students do not have sufficient practical knowledge upon which the theory of practice is based. Teaching and learning of Physical Education gradually drifted to theory classes devoid of practical activities. Consequently, there is low percentage of passes among candidates on a yearly basis and enrolment continues to drop.

Like other school subjects, there are two syllabi on Physical Education. The first being the teaching syllabus and the second the examination syllabus. The teaching syllabus is broader, but in Physical Education the examination syllabus is more available than the teaching syllabus. Many papers have been presented pointing towards the need and approach for review of Physical Education syllabus but none has really been based on direction of such review. This paper is basically on the direction of the review of the syllabus of Senior Secondary School Physical Education.

The content of Physical Education syllabus for the Senior Secondary School is loaded and too technical for students to understand easily. The syllabus is structured with too many activities to be covered within the short time provided for the subject in the school programme. Findings from a study on Senior Secondary School Physical Education syllabus as perceived by teachers (Okuneye, 2002) indicates that well over Appraisal of Syllabi Contents of Physical Education in Senior Secondary School: Implication for Sustainable Development sixty percent of the topics in the syllabus are perceived to be difficult to teach by Physical Education teachers. Contributory factors to this perception have been postulated to arise from constraints encountered regularly by teachers concerning lack of standard textbooks, inadequate facilities and equipment and insufficient funds for intramural and extramural programmes. Apart from the factors, the findings reveal specific areas of difficulty to be scientific, historical and practical aspect of the syllabus. These areas are core aspects of the syllabus, which should be considered as basic to the knowledge of Physical Education at Senior Secondary School level. There are clear indications from both observations and studies that fundamental to improvement of teaching and learning, and students performance in Physical Education at Senior Secondary School is the review of the syllabus.

Direction of Review of Different Areas of Syllabus

The new syllabus should clearly focus on the educational level of the students bearing in mind two facts, that some basic knowledge on the subject have been acquired at basic education level and some students may not go beyond secondary level of education. The aim of the syllabus at Senior Secondary School should be to ensure acquisition of knowledge on aspect of Physical Education relating to biological, physical and social sciences concepts. The aim should cover

acquisition of basic skills in selected sports, promotion of health, fitness, body maintenance and self-awareness; (WAEC, 2003). Topics to cover in the scheme of work for teaching and examination should fall within this aim

The new syllabus should be less ambiguous and as such, the contents should be precise on what should be known at Senior Secondary School level. From close observations, the contents as presently contained in the scheme require drastic review in order to direct the attention of both teachers and students to attainable knowledge for Senior Secondary School Students. Different content areas are discussed below on what should be the direction of any review of the syllabus.

• Foundation of Physical Education

Foundation of Physical Education according to Wuest & Bucher (1999) covers such areas as scope, objective, philosophy, history, sociology, psychology, career opportunity and issue in Physical Education. These areas are definitely beyond the scope of Senior Secondary School Students, this is because it requires higher domain of comprehension to understand. To teach philosophy, psychology or sociology of Physical Education to Secondary School Students would be too abstract and more confusing to the students. It has been observed that, examination bodies do not conveniently evaluate these aspects like other areas and from examining bodies' chief examiners' reports over the years candidates have never done well in this areas. From Physical Education teachers' perspective, it is a difficult area to teach to these level of students (Okuneye, 2002).

In place of foundation of Physical Education, Basic Components of Physical Education is suggested under which health; Physical fitness, aspects of Physical Education, Recreation, Adapted Physical Education, Intramural and extramural activities are taught and learnt. These areas are loaded with specific issues that can be easily understood at Senior Secondary level.

• History and Development of Physical Education and Sports

In the existing syllabus, areas of emphases under this sub-head which are less relevant are traditional sports and festivals, social ceremonies, roles and contributions of British and American Christian Missionaries, Colonial administrators and British Council in the development of Physical Education in the West Africa-sub region. These areas are no longer relevant and as such should be expunged. Also, since these areas were identified many years ago. There are no reference materials for students at this level.

Under this sub head, Spartans and Athenians concepts of Physical Education; Olympics and Modern Olympic Games are still very relevant and should remain. Also, proponents of development of Physical Education as pioneers in the West African countries should be documented and taught to this level of students.

• **National and International Competitions**

It is observed in the details of this aspect of the syllabus that the main concept meant for understanding is the concept of competition. This should be made clearer in the syllabus. This aspect should begin with differentiation of forms of competition, which are championship, sports festivals, school sports and international sports competitions. In the review of details of this content, consideration should be given to the basic facts on competitions such as types, organisations and administration of championships, common sports festivals among West African countries or peculiarity with each country, as well as common school sports. All Africa Games is a unique sports festival that every student should know about students at this level and as such should be taught and learnt under history, objectives, structure and organisation of the festival knowledge on international competitions at this level should be limited to Africa and this should include ECO WAS Games, WAUG, WAFU and others with Africa membership and functions of Supreme Council for Sports in Africa should be included.

• **Basic Human Anatomy and Physiology in Relation to Exercise**

In our view, this should be re-captioned as Basic Human Anatomy and Physiology in Relation to Movement. It is a vital aspect of the contents of Physical Education at all levels as it relates to the biological concept of the subject. Physical Education is hinged on movement and movement as science depends on human biology. At the Senior Secondary School level, specific biological and physiological concepts relating to movement should form the detail contents of this aspect of the syllabus. The topics highlighted in the existing syllabus seem to be adequate, therefore the review required is in the area of emphasis. Details on skeletal system should be on component of human skeleton, main bones involved in movement as well as main joints, which permit different kinds of movement in the body. The complexity of relating joints to exercise and planes of movement should be left out at this stage.

Details of muscular system at this level should be limited to identification of major muscles of the body and their functions in relation to movement. Muscle contraction should be explained as well as differences between isometrics and isotonic contractions. In nervous system, the aspect of description of the brain, spinal cord, nerves and their functions in relation to coordination of physical activities as well as simple reflex action should be enough. Under circulatory system, major parts of the heart, functions, blood vessels (names of major arteries and veins), differences between systolic and diastolic blood pressure and pulse rate should be the basic details to be taught. For the respiratory system, the details at this level should be limited to major organs of respiration, relationship between lungs, heart and air passages, exchange of gases, differences between aerobic and anaerobic physical activities, effect of lactic acid and carbon dioxide on performing physical activities.

Other details of this section include somatotype, posture hormone and nutrition. In somatotype, description of each (endomorph, mesomorph and ectomorph) and examples of physical activity

suitable for each type should be known. As for posture, definition and characteristics should be known as well as description and causes of certain postural defects (kyphosis, scoliosis, lordiosis and flat foot). Nutrition is an important aspect of movement in Physical Education. Students should be able to define and state components of balanced [or adequate] diet, digestion of carbohydrate, the relevance of diet to different sports as well as principles of pre-game nutrition. At this level as well, adrenalin is the hormone that should be studied at this level in relation to the effects of its normal, under and over secretions on human activities.

- **Basic Principles of First Aid**

Details of contents of basic principles of first aid as contained in the existing syllabus are appropriate for Senior Secondary School Students. Focus of review of this aspect should be on proper arrangement of topics such that facts can be logically comprehended by the students in a way they could practically apply the knowledge gained. The topics should be re-arranged as first aid and first aid box and its contents; common injuries in sports requiring first aid - sprain, strain, dislocation, fracture, bruise, muscle pull and cramps, causes, symptoms, first aid treatments and prevention; special condition or situations requiring first aid — exhaustion, drowning, shock and fainting; artificial ventilation and methods; safety precautions in physical activities. As from the penultimate class, students should be exposed to practical usage and application of first aid items in the first aid box.

- **Simple Mechanics of Motion**

This aspect is one of the aspects of the syllabus identified as difficult to teach and learn (Okuneye, 2002). That notwithstanding, it is important that students at this level have basic knowledge of motion. Topics in the existing syllabus should be modified only to make them easy to comprehend

Appraisal of Syllabi Contents of Physical Education in Senior Secondary School: Implication for Sustainable Development by students. Topics that seem to be technical for this level should be expunged such as principles involved in work and angle of trajectory and application of these principles to service and throwing delivery in various sports.

- **Theory of Practice**

Theory of practice is basically on sports. Sport is a major component of Physical Education. Wuest and Bucher (1999) state that sport is identified as a vital but not sole concern of Physical Education. It has three major divisions thus athletic, (track and field event) games (ball and racket) and gymnastics (mat and box works). The practical nature of Physical Education hinges mostly on this aspect and as such it attracts more attention. This aspect should be well taught and well comprehended at the senior secondary school level not only for purpose of examination but also for lifetime benefits. Zeigler (2007) posits that both the quality and length of life can be

improved significantly through experience and practices in sports and exercise. Many people do not have opportunity of learning about sports in classroom situation immediately after secondary school education and since everyone needs one lifetime sport for healthful living, opportunity for acquiring the knowledge at secondary school should be maximised.

The call for review of the entire Physical Education syllabus particularly the examination syllabus mostly affect the contents of theory of practice. The practical components of sports should be highlighted and the theory less emphasised. The sub title should change from theory of practice to “practice of sports”. This will indicate from the onset that practical is the hub on which to acquire necessary knowledge on each of the sports identified.

Syllabus as a guide and directory greatly influences what to teach and learn. What is being experienced now is that both teachers and students attentions have shifted away from practical teaching to theory just because the dictate of examination syllabus is that students are examined theoretically. This has extensively affected the educational status of the subject ranging from low enrolment, poor result and disenchantment on the part of stakeholders. Okuneye (2001) reported that the practical aspect of Physical Education has never gained necessary attention at Secondary School compared to the old Grade II training institutions due to the problems in the current Physical Education examination syllabus.

Detailed contents as reflected in the existing syllabus seems adequate for examination syllabus but could be expanded by adding swimming and squash to the teaching syllabus. These two are among common sports for both competition and lifetime sports for recreation. There is the need to have a major shift from what obtained now in term of examination whereby questions are featured in all sports in the syllabus at every examination year. The sports in the syllabus are many, each with its specification, facility, equipment, officials, rules and regulations. We strongly feel that students should not be exposed to all these sport at one examination. The syllabus should therefore be reviewed such that sports are grouped into years and each examination would cover not more than three sports. This will give room for proper comprehension of basic facts on the sports students are exposed to. Examination bodies would also have the opportunity of increasing their question banks with more variety of items. In an earlier study (Okuneye, 2003), recommendation was made on the grading pattern of practical exam as well as aspects that should not be included in the practical exam items.

- **Physical Education, Sports and Society**

Some of the topics and detailed contents is this aspect of the existing syllabus are beyond the scope of students at this level. Such concepts as sports and politics, unity through sports, femininity and sports are sociological issues in sports meant for discussion and not mere facts for comprehension. Topics under these areas should be deleted while areas like sports in schools; violence in sports, crowd control, and drug education should form contents under Physical Education, Sports and Society.

Conclusion

The pace of development of the Physical Education at Senior Secondary School has been slow and one major cause of this is the problem of curriculum contents. Professionals should be assembled by the relevant authorities without further delay for the task of reviewing details of every aspect of the syllabus.

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