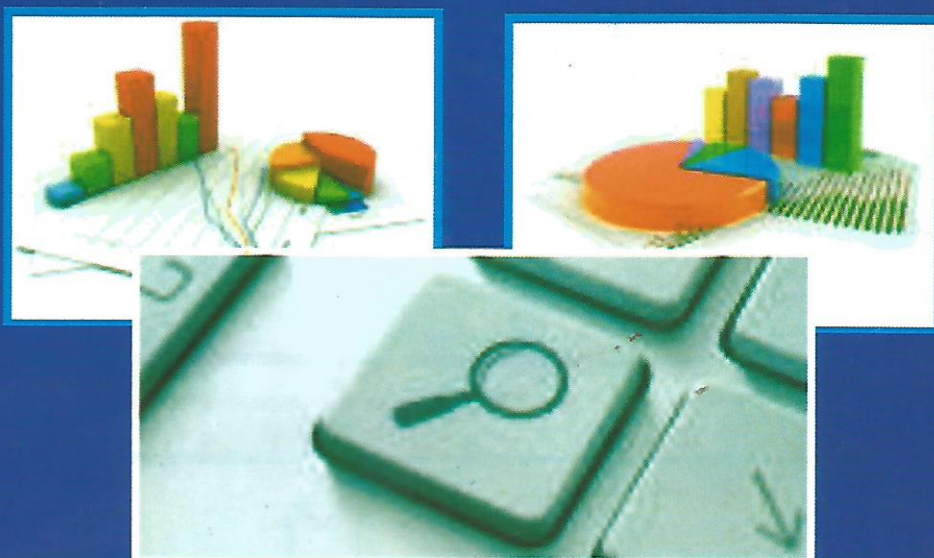


Research Journal of the Collaboration of Education Faculties in West Africa

Vol. 3, No.1, 2014

An official Journal of the
Collaboration of Education Faculties in West Africa
(CEFWA)



Research Journal of the
Collaboration of Education Faculties
in West Africa

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Thank you.

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OVERVIEW OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND CHALLENGES AFFECTING NIGERIAN WOMEN IN SPORTS

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ABSTRACT

The study reviewed physical education programme for students and challenges affecting Nigerian women in sports. Participation of students in physical education programme will improve their health status and save them from the risk of developing diseases. Promoting active involvement of Nigeria women in sport, especially competitive sports had to contend with several problems such as culture, parent, religion, peer group, gender role, mass media and politics. Nigeria can only fulfill her aspiration of being amongst the top sporting countries of the world, if the problems faced by women in sports participation successfully addressed. The authors recommend amongst others that, government should give utmost attention for the teaching of physical education as a subject in Nigeria education system, mass media should organize enlightenment program that will eliminate all barriers faced by women that prevent them from full participation in sports.

Key Words: Physical Education, Challenges, Women, Sports

Introduction

Today's technological society is one in which automation, television and the computer have turned more citizens to desk workers and sedentary spectators. Contrary to this new lifestyle, the human body is by nature, made for work. A typical Nigerian culture is a hard-working culture. But today's sedentary lifestyle has resulted in great increase in hypokinetic diseases like hypertension, heart attack, stroke, obesity and diabetes. Health and quality of life can be maintained and improved upon by regular physical activity. Physical inactivity is an undesirable lifestyle and it is a threat to good and healthy living (Emiola, 2008).

Physical inactivity is a primary risk factor driving the global increase in chronic diseases, sport can play a critical role in slowing the spread of chronic diseases, reducing their social and economic burden and saving lives. While physical activity includes a broader range of activities than sport alone (people can be physically active at work or engaged in domestic tasks at home), direct participation in sport is one of the most enjoyable and therefore, means of motivating and mobilizing people to become physically active. In addition to enhancing overall physical fitness, regular physical activity, active play and sports can have a positive impact on other major health risk factors, such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, tobacco use and stress (Right to play, 2008).

In many schools, teaching of Physical Education has been substantially reduced and in some cases completely eliminated. This done in response to budget concern and pressures to improve academic test scores, despite the fact that there are evidences that children who are physically active perform better in academics than their counterparts who are inactive (Trost, 2007). School is a powerful place to shape the health, education and well being of children and Physical Education is widely perceived to be very relevant to achieving this goal.

According to Taggart and Alexander's (2002) Physical Education is any process that increases an individual's ability and desire to participate in a socially responsible way, in the movement culture inside and outside school games, sports, dance, outdoor adventure and other active recreation pursuits. Children do not automatically develop the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours that lead to regular and enjoyable participation in physical activity. They must be taught and be made to actively and regularly participate in the activity. The responsibility for these instruction and guidance is vested primarily in Physical Education in our schools.

Physical Education programme offers many benefits to children who are engaged in its activities: development of motor skills needed for enjoyable participation of physical activities; promotion of physical fitness; increased energy expenditure; and promotion of positive attitudes toward an active lifestyle (Money, 2009). Evidence also exist that good Physical Education programme may enhance academic performance, self-concept, and mental health (Allensworth, Lawson,

Nicholson and Wyche, 1997).

According to Onifade, Ologele, Abdullahi & Lawal (2012) explained that, when most adults think about exercise, they imagine working out in the gymnasium on a treadmill or lifting weights. But for kids, exercise means Physical Education programme makes provisions for all appropriate activities that suit different ages and students who participate in this programme gain the following benefits: have stronger bones and muscles, exercise helps control body fat, less likely to become overweight, decrease the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, possibly lower blood pressure and blood cholesterol levels, slowing the ageing process, reduction the risk of injury, relief stress and reduce depression.

Besides enjoying the health benefits of regular exercise, children who are physically Fit sleep better and are able to handle physical and emotional challenges which include running to catch a bus or study for a test (Sam and Bebel, 2011).

Physical education provided at school is an ideal way to encourage activity and develop fitness among students and this will be their only preparation for an active lifestyle. For this reason, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), and the American Heart Association (AHA) all recommend comprehensive daily exercises for students (Money, 2009).

Challenges Affecting Nigerian Women in Sports

Globally, sport is considered as a creator of beauty and as an instrument of ethical values that bring about peace, unity and understanding among people of all races. During sports participation which wholly the result of social invention and social heritage. Sports are highly significant in national development through leisure and recreation as they enhance a high degree of productivity and healthful living (Onifade et al, 2012).

Despite immense contributions of women to national development in Africa, they still face a number of inequitable difficulties that limit their potentials in promoting personal and collective development. Women over the years were faced with barriers that have discouraged their progress at the level of participation in sport. Okey (2011), demonstrated that throughout history men have controlled sports, used it for their own purposes and shaped it to fit their abilities. Consequently, fewer numbers of women have participated in sporting activities than men. Ikhioya (1999), reported that, women in Nigeria universities were not active sport participants. According to them, women did not regard sport as conducive to their physical wellbeing. Nigeria society still experiences significant gender inequality in sports, despite recent international class performances by women sprinters and footballers in national teams. This inequality can visibly affect the opportunities for women to participate in sport, thereby limiting their

sport experiences. Ikhiya (1999) noted that, in most communities in Nigeria, especially rural ones, cultural beliefs and attitudes had strong influences on low participation of women in sports. Besides, organization of sporting activities in most community is usually focused on combative sports, such as boxing, wrestling, archery and shooting. These sports are mainly participated in by men and tend to discriminate against women.

Although, in Nigeria, there are no legal barriers that prevent women from participating in sports competitions, there are traditional and social sanctions against women that prevent them from doing so. Adedeji (2008) observed that, these traditional beliefs are severe enough to scare many females from venturing into areas regarded as the prerogative reserves for men. Culturally and traditionally, women are being discouraged from participating in vigorous activities such as competitive sports. Historically, the discriminating attitude towards women participation in sports dated back to the time of Ancient Greek, ancient women were confined to special quarters where they supervised the house, the slaves, education of the young ones and spent long hours making themselves attractive. They live a life which did not include sports. Culture imposes its code of conduct on the women, in most cases, this code has little or no scientific background. The stigma attached to serious sport involvement is said to frequently produce much personal and social strain for women and women's participation at socially unacceptable levels. The contribution of sports to the national economy cannot be over emphasized. Therefore, if our women are discouraged from maximum participation in competitive sports it could lead to colossal waste of human potentials. This could also impede national development.

The low involvement of women in sports is not due to the lack of interest in sports by women. It is due to the long history of direct and indirect forms of discrimination and stereo-typing as well as many other problems that women have to contend with (Adeyanju, 2011). Ikulayo (1998) observed that, most developing countries, including Nigeria, have not experienced rapid changes in women's active participation in sports compared with their more developed counterparts. This is due to a number of several factors, such as religion, parental influence, culture, peer group, gender role, mass media and politics.

Religion and Sports

Religion is a belief in the practicing of a particular system of faith coupled with the social attributes of organizations and relations between people and communities play great roles in determining acceptable standards, customs and traditions. Established customs, traditions, religious practices and beliefs that have modeled the women's image worldwide and the suitability of activities they engage in. Many religions throughout the world have defined the women's role as that of living in complete obedience and subjection to the entire control of their husbands.

Some religions believe that women have no soul and mind of their own and are not allowed in the shrine. In some oriental countries, women Muslims are not allowed to worship in the mosque and even in the Christianity religions, women are refused entry into some churches during their unclean period (Ogundare, 2005).

Similarly, Islam supports any physical activities that will promote increment of the body for physical and mental growth; hence the Islamic Republic of Iran organized an international sport for women on 24th march 1994. It was limited to Muslim women from Muslim countries mostly. One cannot be strong without engaging in one sport or the other. Islam is a way of life; Muslims are members of the generality of the world society. They are expected to participate in activities of the world, which will not lead them to sin. So, Islam encourages every sport for all Muslims. But women who are to participate can only do so according to Islamic injunctions and should also dress as Muslims (Yunus, 1995).

Parents and Sports

The education of a child begins from home hence, the first teacher of the child is the parent, when a child is born, he/she first learns the language of the parents particularly that of the mother. The child, therefore learn the value, attitude and expected behaviour of the society in which they live, first from their parents. The effect of parents training over their children is too great that the effect of this is found in the general adage that says "charity begins at homes". This implies that the development of child starts from home where parents play dominants roles, other social factors like schools, mass media and peer group will build on what had been laid down by the parents. In this situation therefore, a child from the parents are intimately related to sport in a variety of ways. The family (parents) serves as socializing agent for the learning of sport roles (Ahmed, 2002). Fatiregun (1993) stated that, no other agent of socialization is as important to the total make up of the child as his family since her primary socialization begins on the family set up.

Ahmed (2002) observed that, female children usually find themselves in an environment containing power figures that almost completely dominate their every move and taught. Their parents are able to control their movements from one place to another, as well as exert a number of subtle social and emotional constraints on their thoughts and actions. However, the effectiveness of the way these parents bring up their children depend largely on the way they were brought up by their own parents and that is why certain ways of behavoiur or way of life of a particular family has continuity. Parents determine whether their ward will participate in sports as well as type of sports from which they can participate. Hums (1998) reported that, parents respond differently to females than the males regarding sport participation. Parents tend to respond to males and females in sex stereotypic reason. Males are more encouraged to participate in action pursuits outside the home while female are reinforced for engaging in activities within the confines at

home.

Culture and Sports

The concept of culture is fundamental in understanding human social behaviour. Culture according to Hardman (1997) is the changing pattern of learned behaviour which includes attitudes, values, knowledge and material objects that are shared by and transmitted among members of society. Culture is everything about the way we live and do things and how we develop from one stage to another. Culture encompasses every aspect of society, including language, religion, politics, economics, arts, technology, values, beliefs and social organization.

Coakley (2003) pointed out that, many people like to think in terms of freedom of choice and independence, the fact is that it is quite difficult to think of any individual whose behaviour has not been molded to social pressures. Industrialization and socialization have almost wiped away most of our beliefs of the various cultures in this country. However, many still hold such cultural beliefs and these beliefs of course have no scientific proves. Some of the cultural beliefs have actually curtailed social interaction of the female folk. It was believed that women athlete jeopardized her womanness in biological as well as social terms. Some believes that women participate in strenuous sports may have problems in child bearing. Coakley (2003) also added that, this belief has been based on the ideas that any intensive exercise hardens the muscles in the pelvic region to the point that they may lack sufficient flexibility for the delivery of a child. In fact studies indicate that women athletes have shorter and easier delivery than other women. Okey (2011) established that, cultural expectations shape children's physical activity patterns and the gender differences in their motor performance. Adeyanju (2011) pointed out that, physiological myths in Nigeria, like in many other parts of the world, many still believe that physical exercise by women has a detrimental effect on their reproductive organs and that women lose their feminist through active participation in sports.

Peer Group and Sports

The influence of peer group on youth cannot be taken with levity. It is a known fact that right from youth, children find it most convenient to move in company of little ones like themselves. Peer influence in the neighbourhood provides early socialization in sport. The opportunity to learn athletic skills and to evaluate one's perception of ability is likely to occur in childhood among peers.

Ahmed (2002) explained that, peer group acts as a filter for parent norms. The sex type's behaviour is reinforced by a child's peer group resulting in designed of differential sport participation by male and female. The peer group organizes, regulates and facilitates one's behaviour associated with sports. The male through psychological support encouraged more boys to have positive attitude towards

sports, showing that most of the peer influence is sex linked. Female athletes receive more support from female friends than from male friends. There are no doubts that, the opportunity to learn athletic skills and to evaluate one's perception of ability occur in childhood among peer group. Coakley (2003) conducted an investigation on why college women enter into athletic participation, in the research, the female peer group served as the most significant agent of socialization into sports participation from childhood through adulthood. It was reported that, peers constitute important agent stimulating interest in most sports. During adulthood, the most influential predictor was found to be the peer group accompanied by a significantly decreased influence exerted by the family. From the fore-going therefore, it is needless saying that the roles played by the peer group to influence female participation in sports is immeasurable.

Gender Role and Sports

The most casual observer can see that, the experiences of women and men in the world of sports are different and those experiences are rapidly changing. Sex is described as biological differences while gender is used in connection with the social roles and expectations that go along with being male or female. Gender is concerned with the social belief of what is expected to be performed by either of the sexes.

Traditionally, differential expectations and demands are placed upon males and females. Another essential aspect of role expectation is that of sex differentiation. From day one, babies are taught gender role, expectation by their parents and siblings and these role expectations differ according to the norms and customs of the society in which they are being raised (Ahmed, 2002). The females in the modern Nigeria have been valued for her soft and delicate body and good looks. All of these characteristics have been assumed to be incompatible with the physical vigor strength and force supposedly required for sport competition. It is not surprising to find that males are channeled into sports while females are not, when female do participate in sports, it is usually limited to a few sports out of the total ranges of sports open to boys and men (Gunwa, 1993).

Ahmed (2002) observed that, sports is not the exclusive prerogative of one sex, it has the same importance for men and women. It is in recognition of this that the following pronouncement was made at the Baden Olympic congress of 1981 which states 'considering the present trend which consists of recognizing the right of women to equal opportunities with men, to allow them to reach fulfillment as human beings, we must look for effective means to increase women participation not just at the level of competition but also at a technical, managerial and administrative level in sport Olympics'.

Mass Media and Sports

The way our media houses in Nigeria handling female participation in sport is also a problem that discouraging women from sport participation. Apart from the inability of prominent Nigerian female athletes to secure commercial sponsorship with mass media channels of communication and most mass media in this country did not encourage maximum female's participation in sports? Media coverage of female sporting event is rather shallow and infrequent compared to that of men. The media, by their mode of coverage and presentation of women sports tend to reinforce existing societal perceptions about female participation in sports (Adeyanju, 2011).

Politics and Sports

The politics and power use in sports is also a problem that constitutes a significant constraint to women participation in sports. This is because men wield a great deal of power over the development and management of female sports. Moreover, men constitute a large presence in female sports management and administration. The input by women in the formulation of policies for the development of female sports is therefore, insignificant. This is also true in the allocation and use of resources to implement policies and programmes designed for the development of women sports (Audu, 1999).

Future Prospects of Women Participation in Sports

Adeyanju (2011) explained that, despite problems encountered by Nigerian women in sports participation, like their counterparts worldwide, Nigeria women are constantly breaking the fetters with which they had historically been bound and their skills speed and endurance are continually improving. Gunwa (1993) observed that, Nigeria women have continued to boost the country's international image by their achievements at continental and global competitions where they have won medals for the country. At the Atlanta Olympics in 1996, Nigeria's female athletes won one gold, one silver and two bronze medals. The first individual gold medal won by Nigeria after 38 years of Olympic participation was by the female long jumper, "Chioma Ajunwa"

The sweet memories of soccer display with skill and class by Nigerian female teams remain long after the games. As analysis of gold medals won by Nigerians in all the African Games since inception shows, while Nigerian men had won 28 gold medals, their female counterparts won 57 gold medals. In football, the female national team, the Super Falcons, have become a major force not only in Africa, where they are perennial champions, but also globally. The Super Falcons participated in the three female world cup finals in 1991, 1995 and 1999. The Super Falcons based on their performance at the 1999 world cup final, qualified for the finals of the female football competition at the Sydney 2000 Olympics in Australia

(Audu, 1999).

Conclusion

The exposure of student to well designed physical education programme improves their motor fitness levels in components that include speed, agility, reaction time and power and this will enable students enjoy the full benefits of physical education programme.

The low involvement of women in sport in Nigeria was not due to the lack of interest in sport by women, it was as a result of discrimination and problems faced by women and this had affected the development of women in sports. The barriers that prevent women participation in sport should be successfully addressed.

Despite the major impediments that hinder the involvement of the women in sports, the future of women in sports in the country is bright. The talent, commitment and professionalism that women can contribute to the development of Nigeria through sports are enormous. Bringing women into the mainstream of sports is an important end in itself and a key to improving the quality of life of everyone. Sustainable human development is not possible without the full and equal participation of women. The empowerment of women is imperative for national development. We in Nigeria must now more than ever before, adopt a culture and structure that provide equal access and opportunity to all irrespective of being female or male

Recommendations

In line with issues raised in this paper, the followings recommendations were made;

1. The government should give utmost attention for the teaching of physical education as a subject in Nigeria education system.
2. More time should be allotted to physical education lessons on the time table to enable students spend sufficient time on physical activities.
3. More professional physical educators should be trained and employed to teach the subject in schools.
4. Government should encourage female participation in sport by providing scholarship and other incentives to female athletes who excel in any sports competition.
5. Mass media should organize enlightenment programme that will eliminate all barriers faced by women that prevent them from full participation in sports.
6. Government and private sectors should provide and improved sports facilities and equipment in schools so as to enable more participation in sports by both sexes.

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