THE ROLES OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORTS IN SUSTAINING NIGERIAN NATIONAL SECURITY

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Abstract

The article is a systematic exploration of the interactive meshwork of functions, benefits, strengths, potentials and challenges or drawbacks concomitant with, and inherent in, physical education and sport experiences vis-à-vis sustenance of national security. Literature review and participant observation were employed in bringing these into sharp relief. As a result, strengths or potentials indicated for quality physical education and sport programmes include character training, preventive health and economic benefits in savings in budget for medical care, economic benefits in increased productivity, enhanced national capacity in managing emergencies, military service in times of war and insurgency and enhanced national capacity for effective conduct of international sport relations, positively reflecting on international relations. The challenges besetting the security-sustaining roles of physical education and sport include expensive equipment, inadequate facilities, technology-engendered sedentary lifestyle, leadership failure, corruption, discrimination and ineffective physical education curriculum process. The article recommends, among other things, that: governments at the local, state and federal tiers establish standards of funding and infrastructural support, school sport and non-school sport; and non-governmental organizations, in such relevant sub-sectors as democracy, human rights, leadership, education, security and health, are to monitor and annually rate the local council areas and the states on a physical-education-and-sport-friendly-unfriendly continuum.

Key Words: International Sport Relations, National Security, Non-School Sport, Physical Education, School Sport

Introduction

Maintenance of security of human life and property is the primary rationale behind the establishment of geo-political units such as states, nations and regions. However, these geo-political units greatly vary in the degree of threats to security to which they are exposed and the effectiveness with which they perform their security functions. Also, threats to national security and efforts aimed at minimising the threats within each geo-political unit appear to vary over time, depending on combinations of economic, educational, political, religious, social, and external factors.

Aside from the health and economic productivity benefits that may be obtained from a physically active lifestyle empowered through physical education and participation in sport, numerous opportunities for leadership and followership training, team work, sportsmanship, fair play, obedience to rules, tolerance and respect
for other people’s views are accessible via physical education and sport.

Associated Press (2010) reports that the gymnasium is seen as ‘a way of keeping youths out of trouble and off the streets’ in the city. Effectively implemented physical education and sport programmes serves as a medium through which to redirect the energy of youths toward positive ends. Prior to the insurgency that is going on in Nigeria, resulting in the declaration of an emergency in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states, the streets of towns and cities are usually deserted during important soccer matches in which the Nigerian national soccer team, Super Eagles, are playing against another nation’s soccer team. This is because majority of the inhabitants will be at home or video viewing centres in order to monitor the match: a diversion of the viewers from criminal activities.

National Security

In spite of the fact that security is one of the basic needs that must be met for human survival, insecurity is a global phenomenon that manifests itself in varying degrees of severity in different parts of the world. By national security is meant protection of a nation from danger, through enhancement of national health status, national productivity and national defence and emergency preparedness. Nigeria’s continued existence appears to be sustained in resistance to a wide variety of threats to lives and property of Nigerians and the Nigerian state.

Insecurity is a vicious cycle and all the elements in the insecurity cycle and insecurity are mutually reinforcing. In sum, the elements reinforce insecurity and the latter strengthens the former (vice-versa). There are food insecurity, employment insecurity, education insecurity, health insecurity, constitutional rights insecurity and so on and so forth. However, quality physical education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, enhances the nation’s capacity to maintain its security in many ways.

Physical Education and Sport

Physical education, an academic and professional field, is concerned with systematic analysis of human motion in all its ramifications, and application of knowledge gained from it in providing useful services to society (Ajisafe, 2009). Physical education may also be considered as an inseparable aspect of the education process that involves the accomplishment of the goals of learning through the medium of carefully selected and competently guided physical activities. The sub-disciplines of physical education include sport management, instructional physical education, exercise physiology, recreation education, sport coaching, sport psychology, sport sociology, sports law, sport marketing and military training.

Sport refers to any kind of institutionalised physical contest between two individuals, two teams of players, or a person(s) and an aspect of the environment, with the object of defeating or out-performing the opponent(s) according to laid-down rules. Boxing, soccer and mountaineering are examples of the three respective categories of sport (Adedayo, 1999).

Various sets of sport are featured in sport programmes that are planned and implemented in different backgrounds or settings. Using the school setting as a reference point, sport programmes may be broadly classified into school sport and non-school sport categories. Club sports, intramural sports, interscholastic sports, inter-collegiate sports, institutional sports and recreational sports are examples of school sport programme that are targeted at students at different levels of participation. Non-school sport programmes include grassroots/ community/ recreation sports, extramural sports, professional sports and military sports.

Strengths/Potentials/Values

Numerous strengths and potential national-security-sustaining benefits are accruable through physical education and sport. The many aspects of physical education and sport generate jobs, each of which in turn has its own constellation of jobs. For example, the sport sector includes the sport-industrial complex of apparel and equipment manufacture and facility design, construction and management, each of which possesses its peculiar set of jobs. In each sport are engaged professional athletes, coaches, trainers, managers, journalists, physicians, lawyers, referees and governing body officials.

The game situation appears to be a near-facsimile, simulation of the real-life situation. As
such, the former equips the active participant with the affective, cognitive and psycho-motor competencies with which to effectively and efficiently handle the latter. Team players learn about teammates’ personalities and skill sets and figure out how to configure these as jigsaw-puzzle or mosaic pieces into a big picture. That is, the team’s game style.

According to Yancey, Fielding, Flores, Sallis, McCarthy and Breslow (2007), physical inactivity and its attendant reduction in energy expenditure significantly contribute to the epidemic profiles of many chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, obesity, type II diabetes, osteoporosis and breast and colon cancer. They identify increasing occupational sedentary lifestyle, reliance on remote-controlled labour-saving devices, motorised transportation and sedentary entertainment as the key drivers of physical-inactivity-generated chronic disease epidemic, pointing out that the economic costs of physical inactivity in medical care and reduced productivity outstrips those imposed by consumption of tobacco and alcohol.

Melina and Little (2008) explore physical activity in terms of its transitions over time from pre-industrial, through industrial to post-industrial societies. They note that the physically active lifestyle of earlier human populations stressed the cardiovascular endurance component and energy expenditure, marked by de-emphasis on gross and fine motor skills. Melina and Little (2008) point out that the transition to emphasis on such aspects of physical expertise as accuracy with projectiles and reduced emphasis on prolonged exertion (cardiovascular endurance), the transition to a sedentary lifestyle and dietary changes has culminated in an epidemic of overweight/obesity and cardiovascular disease: a situation that potentially increases budgetary requirements for medical care, on the one hand, and leads to an upsurge in the number of persons who are ill, and the attendant loss of man-hours of labour.

Many countries are known for excellence in some sports. Cuba and Nigeria are known for boxing; Brazil and Nigeria for soccer; United States and Nigeria for athletics; and East African countries for long-distance races (FIFA, 2014; International Olympic Committee, 2012; International Athletic Associations Federation, 2013. This situation has given rise to efforts at international exchange of ideas on food, dress, skill acquisition, training and strategy through playing tours and friendly competitions in various sports; and sport coaches and professional athletes plying their trade in foreign countries, thus enhancing international friendship and understanding.

Sport is a potent tool for the advancement of a modern state’s domestic and foreign policy goals (Cornelissen, 2008). De Voss (2002) discusses an instance provided by U.S. President Richard Nixon’s use of table tennis as a means of thawing the cold relations between the United States and China in the early 1970s. Quality physical education equips the potential diplomat with the mental, social and physical skills that enhance his performance of his duties and ease relations between him and his counterparts and, by extension, relations between their countries. In a related development, Adeyanju (2011) touches on the efficacy of youth sports as a means of resolving conflicts and promoting peace. She recommends that the programme manager and his team should understand the causes of the conflict, be security-conscious, define the mode of communication in clear terms, identify common beliefs shared by the conflicting groups in order to build the programme on the beliefs, actively involve the key leaders and large number of people in the area, carefully choose the sport(s) to feature on the programme, and implement the sports programme in an unassuming manner.

Kaufman and Bar Eli (2005) are of the view that the development of sport in any country is a process that is neither in nor of itself but, rather, a product of historical, economic and political processes that continuously shape the character of the country. They give an account of the use of physical education and sport create the ‘New Jew’ in repudiation or replacement of the ‘backward, weak diaspora Jew’ in Israel after centuries of the removal of body culture from Jewish life. This kind of focus appears to be lacking in the National Policy on Sports Development for Nigeria.

In a related development, Nichols (2006) acknowledges the potentials of sport and other recreational activities in reducing criminal behavior among youths. However, he observes the
difficulties involved in teasing out evidence of such effect of participation in sport. However, important sporting events are a major source of diversion of youths’ attention, at least for their duration.

Dalleck and Kravitz (2002); and Wuest and Bucher (2009) point out that the country whose citizens are physically inactive and unfit tend not to be amenable to quick military training and mobilisation in an outbreak of war, insurgency, or emergency situations such as flood, typhoon, hurricane, and earthquake. They observe that material prosperity often make citizens to adopt a lavish sedentary lifestyle that tend to make them physically unfit for military: a trend that has led to the fall of the ancient Greek city-states and Roman Empire.

**Challenges**

A lot of challenges are besetting the national-security-sustaining roles of physical education and sport in Nigeria. Insecurity is a global phenomenon but, in Nigeria, as in many other developing nations, it is not being effectively managed. This is so because of a myriad of factors, not the least of which is corruption. Corruption appears to be evolving into a predominant aspect of Nigerian national character. Despite all the inter-ethnic nationality differences, corruption transcends ethnic, gender, religious, generational and socio-economic borders. Physical education and sports may be employed in refining the character of Nigerian youths by using physical education and sports to propagate the values of team work, honesty, good spirit of sportsmanship, communication skills, obedience to rules and constituted authority and fair play among them (Adedayo, 2009).

Owing to inadequate funding, lack of infrastructural support in terms of sport facilities, lack of equipment, inadequate staffing and inadequate assessment of learner achievement via exclusive adoption of objective-type test of theory and practical aspects of physical and sport appear to constitute a vicious cycle that imperil physical education curriculum development process at the primary and junior secondary school levels in Nigeria (Adedayo, 2003). Attempts at infrastructural renewal being made by state governments in public educational institutions at these basic levels in the country have not included upgrading existing school playgrounds. The ultra-modern mega-schools or model schools are mostly designed without including physical education and sport facilities.

Bartlett (2010) observes that the current global population is the youngest in history. He discloses that half of the world’s population is under the age of 25. Therefore, the nation faces a serious challenge in providing the youths with sound education and the adequate infrastructure for school life and post-school years.

**Conclusion**

The meshwork or functions, benefits, values, strengths, potentials of physical education and sports, and the challenges with which their practitioners are faced, are interactive. The interactive interconnectedness among them is such that the challenges, when ineffectively addressed, tend to detract from the synergy among the functions, benefits, values, strengths and potentials of the field. The challenges also tend to interact with one another in worsening their individual deleterious effect on the potentials of physical education and sports to facilitate the sustenance of Nigerian national security.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations are put forward with a view to fostering the use of physical education and sport in sustaining national security in Nigeria:

(a) Governments at the local, state and federal levels should establish standards of funding and infrastructural support for school and non-school sports;

(b) Non-Governmental Organisations in such relevant sub-sectors as democracy, human rights, leadership, education, security and health should monitor and rate the local council areas and the states on a physical-education-and-sport-friendly-unfriendly continuum;

(c) Sport should be structured as an important sector of the country’s economy;

(d) The Nigerian Government should deregulate much of the sport sector and substantially limit itself to a regulatory role;
(e) The physical education curriculum process should be conducted such that a balance is maintained between physical education and health education in the planning, design and implementation of content; and

(f) The National Policy on Sports Development for Nigeria should be reviewed to enhance the use of sport for education, national integration, team work, rule of law, good health and readiness for military service and emergency.

References


