

Essentiality of physical education as a subject in educational institutions of India with reference to modern health issues and ARI's (acute respiratory infections)

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Abstract: The aim of physical education is personality development. The personality of an individual is said to be developed only when he/she is physically, mentally, socially, emotionally and intellectually developed. All these components are well covered under physical education, thus physical education must not be given step-motherly treatment and need to be given top priority as other core subjects particularly in higher education institutions where it is still lacking behind. The subject's full-fledged introduction into the main curriculum will act as a catalyst in the overall development of students. Also, from the health and well being point of view, physical education games and sports play a vital role in keeping the students active both physically and mentally thereby keeping them away from various health ailments. Even during this pandemic of covid-19, physical fitness and exercises are considered to be of utmost importance in terms of reducing the severity of respiratory infection. All these form the basis in this research paper for the equal importance of physical education as other core subjects and its inclusion of as a full-fledged subject in the main curriculum particularly in higher education institutions of India.

Key Words:- Physical education, curriculum, health, lifestyle, covid-19

Introduction:

The ultimate aim of physical education being the “wholesome or all-round development of an individual’s personality”, the subject must be considered equally important as other subjects in the curriculum. Physical education and sports forms an important part of educational system even when it never receives the importance it deserves. Although, the subject is included as a part of the curriculum from the early stages but it has never been taken seriously by the administrators, academicians and eventually the students. There has been misconceptions going around in the society as well regarding physical education that it is all about “running and jumping activities”, “all play and no work” are among a few misconceptions in the mind of general public. But in originality, physical education is beyond all these misconceptions. Physical education can be anything but mere running and jumping activities. It is a systematic and scientific study to train the body and mind which eventually leads to physical, mental, social, emotional & intellectual development.

Physical education is a multidisciplinary subject as it is the combination of various allied subjects such as anatomy, physiology, sports psychology, sports medicine, biomechanics, kinesiology, sociology, yoga, research, statistics, value education, management, organisation & administration etc. Having knowledge of various subjects adds in the overall knowledge and intellect of a person. Hence, its multidisciplinary nature caters for its equal importance in the curriculum as other core subjects.

Importance and objectives of physical education:

The main goals on which physical education focuses and through which wholesome personality of an individual is developed includes;

- Physical development
 - Mental development
 - Social development
 - Emotional development, and
 - Intellectual development
- I. **Physical development:** Here, body physique & various other systems of body are improved & developed. Scientifically speaking, anatomy and physiology of body involving cardiovascular system, circulatory system, respiratory system, muscular system etc. is improved through participation in various physical activities, games & sports.
 - II. **Mental development:** By participation in physical activities & sports, there is release of endorphins (happy hormones) in the body than normal. These hormones help relieving stress to a great extent and help attaining mental equilibrium & poise. Also, endorphins are responsible for sharpening the memory of an individual which is particularly beneficial for students.
 - III. **Social development:** It happens through interaction with different players all around the globe at all levels by participating in games & sports. A sense of discipline, obedience, punctuality, brotherhood, team-spirit, cooperation and many more moral values are inculcated through participation in games and sports at all levels. These traits in turn help students to become the good citizens of society.
 - IV. **Emotional development:** Physical education help students to channelize their emotions like aggression, anxiety, stress, anger, fear etc. in a constructive manner. All these emotions erupt during game situations and students get used to these emotions so they adapt and learn how to control them.
 - V. **Intellectual development:** Participating in physical activities, games and sports help students to keep their mind alert and active all the time. Thus, they develop a quest to know the logic and reason behind the things and ultimately have the awareness and the knowledge behind the things happening around.

When all the above mentioned aspects of an individual are taken care of or fully developed, the all-round personality of an individual is developed. Physical education & sports is the only avenue where all these aspects of a good personality are developed together simultaneously. Therefore, ignoring this field would not only be unfortunate but grave mistake with future repercussions.

We have been listening to the proverb that “sound mind resides in sound body” but to achieve that sound body, there must be some systematic learning & that systematic and scientific learning can be provided through physical education.

Modern health issues & ARI's (acute respiratory infections)

In this modern world where life of students is becoming more and more sedentary, there is dire need of modification in the curriculum from the very beginning so that the overall wellbeing of the students may not get compromised. It is a well known fact that sedentary lifestyle and physically inactive lifestyle gives invitation to various health ailments ranging from spinal postural deformities like cervical postural deformities, khyposis, scoliosis & rounded shoulders, etc to physiological ailments like overweight, obesity, strokes, cardiac arrests, hypertension and psychological issues like stress, depression, anger, anxiety, dementia & memory issues among many. However, NCD's (non communicable diseases) like cardiac arrests, stroke, diabetes & obesity have been prevalent globally across all developed and developing nations. The WHO's (world health organisation), current global estimates -2021 suggest that one in four adults & 81% of adolescents do not do enough physical activity [2]. Also, as countries develop economically, levels of inactivity increases and can be as high as 70% due to change of transport patterns, increased use of technology for work and recreation, cultural values and increasing sedentary behaviours [2]. Increased levels of physical inactivity have negative impacts on health systems, the environment, economic development, community well-being and quality of life [2]. It is pertinent to mention here that physical inactivity has been considered as 4th leading risk factor for global mortality causing an estimated 3.2 million deaths annually [3]. South Asian region has much worse condition alone then rest of the world where prevalence of physical activities is much less as compared to other western nations. South Asians are considered high-risk group for abdominal adiposity, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases [4]. In addition, South Asia accounts for the highest number of diabetic patients and the prevalence of diabetes among adults is over 10% in many parts of the region. It all seems to be due to the unhealthy dietary habits or lifestyle accompanied with physical inactivity (insufficient physical activity) and genetic susceptibility. A study conducted on South Asian adults regarding the prevalence of physical activities in 2013 suggested a wide variation in the prevalence of physical inactivity. However, it found females, skilled workers, professionals and the people associated with higher education to be more physically inactive than rest of the population [5].

These are the issues not to be overlooked or neglected however a strong attention and execution of plans is required in this regard & the first thing that we can execute is to bring in physical education as one of the core subjects in higher education institutions. This will act as a pioneer in making a more physically active society.

With the advancement in technology comes, both advantages and disadvantages. We all know that how technology has helped in transforming human lives over a period of time ranging from the use of machines in industries, development in computers, mobiles, T.V, tablets etc. thereby reducing the manpower and giving us the luxury of doing multiple things without much effort even while sitting at home which earlier we could not have imagined. In contrary to this, it has been seen in today's society that students at a very early stage are getting more habitual towards the use of mobiles phones, mobile games & play-stations. They spend hours playing online and ultimately develop a habit of doing so regularly that they forget to play physically active games thus again leading to sedentary lifestyle. No doubt, technology has become a blessing for us in every aspect of life, but when used in a negative manner it becomes evil. That's why the old proverb “excess of everything is bad”.

Witnessing the unprecedented changes in nature, we have been facing a global pandemic in terms of covid-19 and suddenly there has been talks all around regarding immunity, physical fitness & oxygen deficiency. Everyone has now become serious like never before to develop immunity and fitness by either way possible. There has now been sufficient evidence and expert opinions regarding how important it is to be physically fit in terms of vital capacity & immunity to fight against various respiratory infections including covid-19.

Physical activity is considered a non-medical practice for the prevention and treatment of diseases of psychological physiological or metabolic origin. Regular exercise induced adaptations enhance the effectiveness of immune system which ultimately effects the severity of many ARI's (acute respiratory infections)[6]. During regular exercise practices, inflammatory responses and stress hormones are decreased; in contrast, lymphocytes, NK cells, immature B cells and monocytes are at higher levels. Thus, there is an improvement in immunosurveillance as well as a reduction in the systemic inflammatory process. These factors corroborate that regular physical activity helps to improve the immune system, while helping to prevent respiratory diseases and thus protect against various ARI's[7]. Furthermore, a study suggests that regular exercise is directly related to decreased mortality from pneumonia, and influenza, improvement in cardio-respiratory function, vaccine response, metabolism of glucose, lipids and insulin[8].

Moreover, talking about the volume(duration), intensity(frequency), benefits, types & techniques of the physical activity for different age groups to achieve the desired results, there is a specialized field of knowledge called physical education. As discussed earlier, the aims and objectives of physical education includes Physical and mental development, and both these objectives are achieved through physical activities which also includes games and sports. Thus, to achieve the state of fitness (both physical & mental) there is a strong need and urgency to adapt a physically active lifestyle at the very onset and frame such a curriculum where all the students get ample opportunity to express themselves both physically and mentally thereby moving forward towards a healthy lifestyle which will help them to stay away from various health ailments. This definitely will be a futuristic investment on human resource which will ultimately lead to a healthy and prosperous society.

Discussion

Globally, the reputation of physical education is quite good especially in American and European nations where physical education is taught as a major degree subject but in sub-continent (India), in spite of the fact that the subject is included in the curriculum from the very onset but it is considered as a side-by-side subject and not a major one. The subject has clearly not received much attention of the administrators and the previous governments which can be easily justified by the performances of India at all

Olympics. However, the condition of physical education & sports has started changing with some positive intents of the Govt. of India which has started providing infrastructure and sports facilities to the sportspersons as a result of which India has achieved its highest medals tally (7 medals) at 2020 Tokyo Olympics which also includes the only Gold medal in athletics in the history of Olympics for India. India is progressing in sports with no doubt but still there are some gaps to be filled when talking about physical education as a core subject in higher education institutions equivalent to other core subjects.

As the old proverb goes “there’s never a wrong time to do the right thing”. The positive things have started happening for physical education in the country but it’s just the beginning, more sincere efforts are required from the people at the helm of affairs. Also, the general public need to shun their misconceptions and motivate their children to opt for physical education for its immense benefits.

Conclusion

Therefore, from the above discussed points, it is clear that physical education is an integral part of general education and to excel in any field of life the health and well being of an individual cannot be ignored. Physical education is that discipline which mainly focuses on the health, personality and well being of an individual through different modes. Thus, it should not be neglected but given top priority. Although, the central board of school education (CBSE) has made physical education a compulsory subject up to XII class but still there are large no of institutions in the country especially higher education institutions involving Colleges and universities where physical education is not even introduced as a subject which clearly depicts a step motherly treatment for the subject. Through this article, we have tried to bring to light, what physical education aims for & why physical education is necessary as a subject in the curriculum of educational institutions.

Author’s contributions:

VM had the idea for the article, AK performed all the literature search, VM drafted and revised the work.

Declarations:

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