The changing phases of Physical Education and sport in Africa: can a uniquely African model emerge?

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Abstract

Africa has a rich tradition of culture, history, sport and social institutions. Various countries throughout the continent have demonstrated these. The rich traditional games, plays, dances and arts of the continent have stood the test of time. They were used for various purposes-socialization, initiation, ceremonies, recreation, etc. Archaeological discoveries continue to associate the continent with the origin of man, including physical culture. The practice of physical education is deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of various ethnic communities who developed physical prowess as an integral part of the traditional process associated with practices such as food gathering, hunting, pastoral activities, inter-tribal conflicts, etc. These cultural activities were grounded in traditional education wherein physical prowess was highly revered. These historical practices mark the first phase in the evolution of PE in Africa. The second phase is characterized by the contact with the "western world" which marked the beginning of the erosion of the traditional education and the establishment of colonial and missionary models of education that regarded the indigenous physical activities as primitive, immoral and anti-Christianity. Western (colonial) formalized PE and Sport placed emphasis on military drills, physical training (PT) formalized activities and training of teachers. As many African countries were colonized by various western powers, a number of PE syllabi which emphasized the above skills were introduced to the respective countries; for example, the 1933 syllabus was introduced by Britain to all her colonies. The striking element of this (colonial) system of education was the lack of relevance to the cultures and values of indigenous African populations. In third phase attainment of independence by most African countries resulted in significant developments in education (i.e. concerning PE and Sport) which was aimed at restoring those dignities and values which were repressed, maimed and destroyed during the colonial times. Most African countries redefined their education, including PE and Sport. Specifically, PE contributed to sport development and the emergent of the continent as a sport power. However, no discernible pattern of PE and Sport emerged. It was the story of old wine in a new bottle. The post-independence period and the last decade of the 20th Century marked the fourth phase in the evolution of PE and Sport wherein the disciplines experienced serious setbacks following the prevailing socio-economic challenges around the world. Several PE and Sport programmes collapsed due to lack of funding. Yet Africa (and indeed no country) did not still evolve a discernible pattern or model of its own. The 21st Century PE and Sport in Africa is still a replica of the colonial and post-independence model. The political changes on the continent did not lead to any concomitant changes in the structures of PE and Sport. This article discusses the above phases and concludes that for PE and Sport to succeed in Africa, there must emerge models that are uniquely African. They must be developed in Africa by Africans and for the benefit of Africans. Any model which continues to follow either the western or oriental models may not be sustainable.

Key words: Physical Education and Sport, curriculum development, African renaissance, culture traditional games.

 Introduction

In 1994 at the inauguration of the African Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation, Sport and Dance (AFAHPER-SD) in Gaborone, Botswana, Elizabeth Bressan (1994) took a swipe at the Physical Education and Sport in Africa and concluded that it was impractical to "import" western models of PE and Sport and hope they will serve Africa's needs. That was 16 years ago. Has the situation changed? Why did it change and how did it change? Bressan summed up the situation regarding PE and Sport in Africa as follows:

> "*In general, there appears to be sliding backwards, not into a rich and proud indigenous past, but rather into some sort of chaotic abyss*"- *(Bressan, 1994: 101).*

The same sentiment had earlier been expressed by an African author regarding developments in Africa"

> "*Instead of greater experience leading to greater efficiency, Africa's experience paradoxically seems to result in decreasing cooperation*" *(Mazrui, 1986: 201).*

Physical Education and Sport are not new to Africa. Rather what is new is its western model. The practice of Physical Education and Sport in Africa is deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of its diverse ethnic communities. This is evidenced in the seminal principles of the acquisitions and mastery of physical skills (Fafunwa, 1982) which are apparent throughout the evolution of traditional African societies (Wamukoya, 1994). In most African countries and communities physical culture forms an integral part of traditional activities associated with hunting, pastoral way of life, food gathering, inter-tribal conflicts, survival and maintenance of good health. These are depicted in numerous indigenous games, dances, initiation rites and rituals.

Africa is not a single place and Africans are not a single group of people as it is erroneously believed by other people from other continents. Africa is a region of vast cultural diversity. To travel over 200 kilometers in Africa today is to encounter the multicultural fabric of the continent (Bressan, 1994; De Venter, 2002). The multiculturalism and diversity of the continent was influenced by the forces of the Western world and Islamic tradition which have produced a mixture of incompatible ideologies and practices. It is therefore not uncommon that two countries that share common boundaries could have different ideologies and practices of Physical Education. Good examples are Nigeria and Benin Republic,

South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe, to mention just a few. The different ideological practices and values are further exacerbated by four primary variables: class, race, religion and gender. For example, hunting as a sport is viewed and practised differently. From the western perspective, hunting is a sport that is pursued by the upper class; but from the indigenous African perspective, it is a means of acquiring food while from the Islamic view point it can be either (Bressan, 1994). These ideological differences and practices have serious and extra-ordinary practical problems when trying to design a quality Physical Education and Sport programme. The present status of Physical Education and Sport in Africa could then be understood in terms of these perspectives as well as Africa's historical past.

Africa's past practices in Physical Education and Sport are also influenced by the concept of *holism*. Holism in Africa is a lived experience, a way of life, a oneness with all things, living and non-living. It represents a reality, which the western world finds extremely difficult to comprehend (Van De Venter, 2002). Holdstock (1997:7) once recounted an experience with an African who said:

> *"We are all flames of the same fire, which is God and we are all fingers of the same hand, indicating that in our belongingness, our separateness and individuality are incorporated."*

The *holism* concept transcends all cultures in the continent and its practices. Although it comes with different names, the meaning and practices are the same. Expressions like "*Ubuntu", "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu"* (meaning a person is a person through other persons) are not uncommon and depict how differently a person is conceptualized in Africa, differently from the western world. Such concepts influence Africa's movement practices such as dances, traditional rites and ritual practices. Dance in Africa, like many other forms of movement behaviours, is not an event in itself but a connectedness with others and the external world (van Deventer, 2002), a practice which colonial administration and religions did not support.

This article first briefly discusses Africa's colonial past and post-independent era. This is then followed by an examination of these eras (periods) and a discussion on how a uniquely African model of Physical Education and Sport could evolve.

Africa's colonial past: adoption of Westernized models of physical education and sport

The history of PE and Sport in Africa is that of "progressive-retrogression", that is to say, you take one step forward and two steps backwards, meaning that the journey will never be completed. As a continent, a large part of Africa has not enjoyed peace and tranquility necessary to stabilize its development. This is largely attributed to the interruptions from the western world- the scramble for Africa's resources, resulting in colonization and several conflicts on the continent.

Africa has a rich tradition of culture, history, economic, sport and social institutions which are envied by the western world. Various racial and ethnic groups in the continent have demonstrated these legacies. The Masai of East Africa, the Zulus of South Africa, the Yoruba of the West Africa sub-region, the Tuaregs and Bedouin Arabs of North Africa are just a few examples (Amusa, 1999). These tribes evolved traditional games, sports, plays, dances and arts that were used for various purposes, such as socialization, initiation ceremonies, recreation, chieftaincy coronations, etc. Unfortunately, there was very little or no documentation on some of these legacies. Consequently, we have gradually lost a greater part of indigenous knowledge systems, values and activities. The tendency therefore is to think that no Physical Education and Sport existed in Africa before the advent of Europeans. Sport in African societies has been cited as a powerful weapon that binds the societies together. Riordan (1986: 288) explains:

> *"Sport in developing societies is a serious function to perform. It is....state controlled (with) specific utilitarian and ideological designs...associated with hygiene, health, defense, patriotism, integration, productivity, international recognition, even cultural identity and nation building. Sport therefore, often has the quiet revolutionary role of being an agent of social change, with the state as pilot."*

Based on available evidence, it is clear that traditional Physical Education and Sport existed in African countries long before the advent of western education. Western forms of Physical Education and Sport were introduced to African countries through colonization by Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal and Spain. With the exception of South Africa which initially gained independence from England in 1910 and Egypt in February 1972 many African countries did not become independent until the late 50's and 60's (Ajisafe, 1997). It is not surprising therefore that western Physical Education and Sport became prominent in most African countries, particularly in the curricula of institutions of learning. This probably accounts for the present form of Physical Education and Sport programmes in these countries. For example, the 1933 syllabus introduced to former British Empire by Britain, emphasized drills, marching,

gymnastic stunts and calisthenics for Physical Education and football, cricket, netball, athletics (mainly running) etc, in the areas of sport. These activities formed the core of many African Physical Education and Sport programmes for decades (Amusa, 1999). Ajisafe (1997: 24) described the status of PE in colonial African countries as follows:

> *"It was a very rigid programme conducted by whistle-blowing- and cane-carrying teachers wearing inappropriate dresses."*

The British Empire games and physical culture introduced to British colonies permeated and polluted the traditional Physical Education culture of the indigenous African countries by means of school sports and clubs and other activities organized by the imperial society (Ndee, 2000; De Venter, 2002). The "just for the fun of PE and Sport" attitude in the British colonies marked the beginning of the nonchalant attitude towards Physical Education and Sport, held by the people of those countries (Ajisafe, 1997:24).

Apart from colonization, the second prominent whereby Physical Education and Sport was introduced to Africa was through religious missionaries. It was the missionaries who pioneered the establishment of rural hospitals and dispensaries and education (learning) centers (schools). They also took crucial steps in establishing health education in school curricula- a model or pattern aimed at producing a healthy, responsible and local colonial workforce (Wamukoya, 1994). The introduction of health education (called hygiene) into the school curriculum brought to the forefront the need for a healthy and sound body as well as the building and maintenance of a sound character that would eventually lead to the ideal colonial (British) citizen (Wamukoya, 1994; Amusa, 1994:1999), a model that could be translated to the cliché "*mensana in corpora sane*", meaning "a sound mind in a healthy body".

A pertinent question to ask at this stage is, "how effective/efficient was this colonial model of Physical Education and Sport?" There is no doubt that the model satisfied the aspiration of the colonial governments. This is evident in the training of Physical Education teachers (for the school system) as well as sanitary inspectors (for hygiene and cleanliness). But we cannot say so for the citizens of the African countries. To the teachers (who were products of the model) emphasis was placed on military drills and formalized activities and movements which were to be performed with military-like precision. The model thus developed Physical Training (PT) as opposed to PE. Although activities like football (soccer), netball, golf, cricket, squash and field hockey were introduced to the school system, the contents of these activities still remained closely tied with physical training (Jones, 1925; Wamukoya, 1994; Amusa, 1999; 2003).

The colonial 'western' model of Physical Education and Sport thus fulfilled the following objectives:

- Satisfied the colonial and missionary agenda
- Produced teachers and sports masters
- Focused on the 3C's- Commerce, Christianity and Civilization

The western model has a lot of flaws and has been criticized in a number of ways:

- It was largely westernized (carbon-copy of practices in western countries),
- It did not take cognizance of the endemic activities, indigenous African values and games (Du Toit, 1980; Botha, 1983),
- As an alien Physical Education syllabus, it did not make provision for the personal, environmental and cultural habits of the native child (Erasmus, 1983; Ajisafe, 1997; Amusa, 1999),
- The syllabus provided little or no direction as it depended much on the enthusiasm and initiative of the PE/PT teacher,
- The lesson content inevitably consisted of unimaginative drills, fitness exercises and games, with very little flexibility, and
- The implementation of the model faced challenges characterized by a gross shortage, and in many cases, absence of facilities and equipment.

On a more serious note, the western model did not recognize/respect African traditions of collective association, social interaction and group values, but rather focused on individual achievements (Burnett-van Tonder, 1985).

The general attitude of the colonial governments towards local indigenous games and sports was not favourable. To the colonialists, the games and native activities were not fully contributing to physical and moral development of Africans. Consequently, most of the activities were considered primitive, immoral and anti-Christian. The only way to correct these practices was through western education and through the medium of formalized Physical Education. The most striking short-coming of the western model of Physical Education, therefore, was the lack of its *relevance* to indigenous African populations.

Post-independent African physical education and sport

The attainment of independence by most African countries in the 50's through the 80's marked a significant phase in the practices of Physical Education and Sport. Following independence, many African countries began shifting the focus of their education systems to meet the needs of the respective countries. The

post-independence governments viewed education as a means of restoring those elements which were repressed, maimed or even ruined during the colonial era. Several commissions were set up in various countries to re-examine the focus of education. Two examples of these commissions were the Onosode Commission in Nigeria (Fafunwa, 1982) and the Ominde Commission Report of 1964-1965 in Kenya (Wamukoya, 1994). These two commissions proposed similar objectives of general education which among others were:

- To foster national unity,
- To serve the needs of national development,
- To prepare and empower the youth with necessary skills, knowledge, values and attitudes,
- To promote social justice, and
- To foster positive attitudes and consciousness towards others.

During this period, Physical Education (although still largely based on the 1933 syllabus) was directed to achieve the following objectives:

- To contribute to the physical development of the child,
- To increase the physical activity of the child,
- To promote a sense of development through physical activity,
- To develop a sense of cooperation,
- To develop champions in the various aspects of Physical Education and Sport, and
- To promote a more positive use of leisure.

The outcomes of these objectives were not significantly different from the situations before independence because the 1933 syllabus still formed the bedrock of Physical Education. A significant development during this period, however, was the emergence of Physical Education professionals and professional associations. Many Africans who had the opportunity to study Physical Education and Sport in Europe, especially, UK and USA returned to their home countries. The professional preparation received by these individuals facilitated the "revolution" in African Physical Education and Sport. Professional preparation curricula in colleges and universities within Africa also began and initially focused on preparing individuals for the traditional careers in teaching and sports coaching. This later gave way to the emergence of non-traditional or alternative careers. Thus, increase in the knowledge-base of Physical Education led to the gradual development of other sub-disciplines and new career opportunities like sport psychology, exercise physiology, kinesiology, motor learning to mention just a few (Amusa 1994; 1999) a scenario that is identical with situations in USA, Canada, Britain, France, etc., which were countries from

where the professionals received their training. The situation was very prominent in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya (not much was known about South Africa at that time due to the alienation of the country). The structure of Physical Education in some post-independent African countries from the 80s to the last decade of the 20th Century is shown in Table 1.

Looked at very critically, there is no difference between Physical Education in Africa and the western world during this period. There is nothing uniquely African in Table 1.

Table 1: Structure of Physical Education in some African Universities (from the 80's to 2000's)

Didactic Categories	Scientific Aspects	Arts/ Humanities	Socio-cultural Studies
1. Theory	• Exercise Physiology • Kinesiology • Biomechanics • Anatomy • Physiology • Psychology • Sports Medicine • Biokinetics	• Administration and Organization of PE programmes • Adapted PE • Sports Management	• Comparative PE • Historical Perspective • Sociological Perspective
2. Practicals	Using sports, games and other activities as a mode (mainly western forms of games and sports). Individual sports, team sports, ball games; racket sport, striking games; aquatic and water activities, combative and martial arts, dance (mainly western forms of activities).		
3. Health Education/ Wellness	Improvement of health habits, cleanliness, hygiene, preventable diseases, HIV/AIDS (models of the western world)		

Source: Amusa and Toriola (2003a).

The post-independence era also witnessed the emergence of professional associations in Physical Education, Sport, Dance and Recreation at sub-regional, regional and continental levels. These are the same professional associations found in western countries.

These situations are prominent in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and South Africa (Amusa, 1994; 1999; Amusa & Toriola, 2003). The concept of Physical Education and Sport curriculum during the period (not different from the European concept) is further illustrated in Figure 1, emphasizing four areas-development of motor abilities, moral values, psycho-social attitude and technical skills.

What are the significant gains of the decades of transformation of Physical Education and Sport curricula in African countries? A careful examination of these decades indicates no significant gain or particular shift in emphasis on Physical Education and Sport. The disciplines still resemble how they are practised in the western world. African indigenous games and sports have no place in the curriculum. The decades in the western world marked a downward turn in Physical Education - a cut in the budget, decline in the emphasis on PE, and in some cases its removal from the curriculum, a decay of decline in Physical Education and sport facilities and infrastructures, etc. (Hardman, 2003).
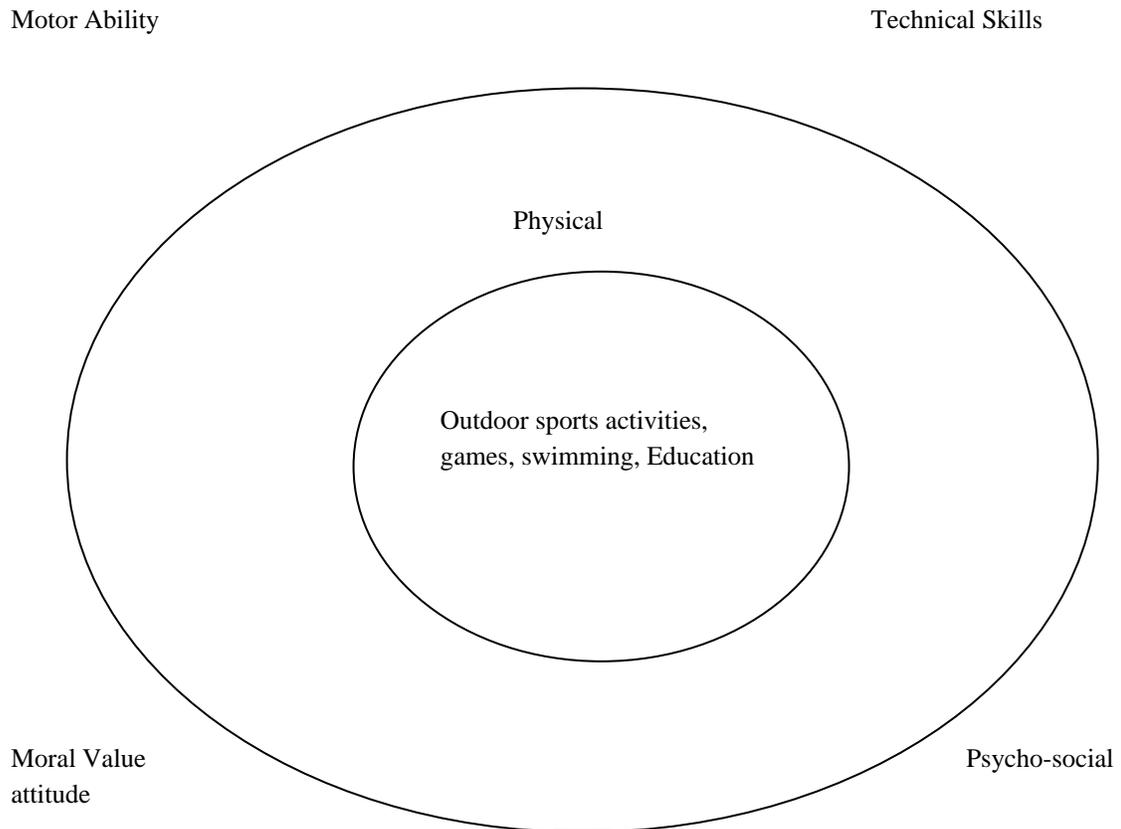
Motor Ability   Technical Skills

Physical

Outdoor sports activities,
games, swimming, Education

Moral Value   Psycho-social
attitude

Figure 1: Concept of PE in curricula of Tertiary institutions in some African Countries (Amusa, 1994; Amusa, 2003; Amusa & Toriola (2003a; 2003b); Naul (2003).

In some African countries, it was characterized by decades of military incursion in politics, budget cuts, poor facilities provision, reduced statutory time allocation and high unemployment rates of Physical Education teachers. "Teachers leave your kids alone" became a noticeable practice in some countries and characterized the change to **de-schooling**, **de-education**, **de-sporting** activities, demoralization in Physical Education and devaluation of former standards in Physical Education and Sport. Mazrui's (1986:201) observation perfectly describes the happenings during these decades:

> *"Instead of greater experience leading to greater efficiency, Africa's experience paradoxically seems to result in decreasing competence."*

Paradoxically, developments within Physical Education and Sport during this era can be described as "progressive-retrogression"- that is, you take one step forward and two steps backward. There were very few developments (if any) in curriculum design, facilities and infrastructure, etc. What ever happened in Physical Education and Sport in the western world has a semblance in Africa. For example when Physical Education professionals were called upon to justify the existence of their field in the western world, Physical Education professionals in African countries reacted the same way. In an effort to justify the existence of Physical Education world-wide many countries evolved new names for the discipline. Names like Kinesiology, Biokinetics, Human movement, Human Kinetics, etc. replaced Physical Education in some countries. But has anything changed despite the changes in the names of the discipline?

What do all these mean to professionals in Physical Education and Sport?

The signal is clear. In a nutshell, Physical Education and Sport curricula in Africa are still towing the lines of past practices. Most African countries still implement the Physical Education and Sport curricula similar to those in the western world. There is really nothing new.

It is astonishing, that with the attainment of independence, one would have expected a radical change in Physical Education and Sport curricula. The former President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, called for African Renaissance- a rebirth of African lost glories, doing things in truly and uniquely African ways. Our cultures and traditions need to be brought to light. Our Physical Education and Sport curricula should help to popularize these rich cultures, traditions and practices. The importance of indigenous games and sports cannot be overestimated. From Cape to Cairo, Senegal to Mombasa, the vast lands and the national resources, the rich cultures and traditions are all needed to be developed. Ironically, the traditional and indigenous African games and sports do not still

feature in All Africa Games and at national levels in many African countries. The first decade of the 21st Century is almost gone. When will Africa wake up to these clarion calls?

The Way Forward

As professionals, the relevant question to ask ourselves now is, "Wither way Africa?" The time has come to evolve a truly, uniquely African Physical Education and Sport based on:

- Contemporary needs and challenges of African societies
- The various cultural heritage of African peoples
- The materials and infrastructures that are African - E.g. Design of the Soccer City Stadium (Calabash) in Johannesburg used for 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup
- Culture, traditions and practices of African societies
- African customs and values

If Physical Education and Sports programmes are to succeed in Africa, they must be developed, designed and nurtured on the African continent. Because of the cultural diversity of the continent, it is "impractical" to import models of programmes from overseas. The imported models were designed to serve the specific situations of past colonial powers. Present conditions in Africa are dissimilar to those of the colonial era. "It is therefore unlikely that any African situation will find its equivalent in a western or eastern culture" (Bressan, 1994).

The practical road to evolving effective Physical Education and Sport programmes is proposed through deliberate efforts of curriculum developers, educators, administrators, etc. who are committed to change and who will harness the technical and scientific principles within a context of political, aesthetic and ethnic realities (Bressan, 1994). Individuals with innovative skills and ideas and with charismatic leadership at national, regional and continent wide levels are called upon to show concern in this direction. Curriculum developers, educators and administrators should ensure that African indigenous games, culture, values and sports are marketed through various national and All Africa Games. Some of these games cut across several cultures as well as ethnic and racial divides. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) also has an important role to play here, to ensure that the games and sports become part of the school Physical Education curriculum. The African Union is requested to introduce the traditional games and sports as components of All Africa Games. It is far from an easy task, but it can be done. This is one of the steps that we can take to ensure that the Physical Education curriculum responds to the challenges, needs, cultures and values of traditional African societies.

One should not lose sight of good examples in this area, such as South Africa which organizes indigenous games. Also, one should acknowledge the good work done by professionals such as Cora Burnett and her team at the University of Johannesburg who researched into and compiled the indigenous games of South Africa. Others including Lateef Amusa, Abel Toriola, Mwangi Wanderi, Anneliese Goslin, Floris van der Merwe, and others have also published books on traditional and indigenous games and sports in Africa. Chapters in these books cut across traditional and cultural practices in the various regions of the African continent – Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Tanzania.

In order to design a uniquely African Physical Education and Sport curriculum and teach the subject effectively, research is necessary. The values of good researches in Physical Education and Sport cannot be overstated. It is through research that we understand the past legacies in these disciplines, use and modify them accordingly for better performance in the future. Such researches can be initiated individually or collaboratively across diverse interests nationally and internationally. An example is a joint study with our colleagues in Sweden, Greece and South Africa concerning physical education as a tool for developing public health and social skills. The research was designed to answer the following objectives:

- What are the factors which steer the development and transformation processes in Physical Education in terms of constitutional (policy documents), organisational (allocated time) and physical (facilities and equipment) aspects?
- What are the envisaged outcomes of Physical Education perceived by pupils as consumers or end users?
- To what extent do these outcomes form the basis of the empowerment of individual pupils leading to upgraded social skills and development of healthy/active lifestyles?
  In summary that research covers the following areas:
- Comparative perspectives
- Quality of Physical Education and School Sport (PESS) in both countries
- Policy trajectory issues
- Perception of PESS by learners
- Social skills development – Interaction, integration, discipline, etc.
- Health/lifestyle –related issues

The preliminary findings from the study have already been published (Toriola, Amusa, Patriksson & Kougioumtzis, 2010).

Conclusion

In this article, we have attempted to describe African Physical Education and Sport from the pre-colonial to colonial and post-colonial eras. It is clear from the information on the historical past that to date, there is hardly anything uniquely African in Physical Education and Sport as presently practiced. This is quite worrisome, considering the diverse and rich cultures, traditions, sports and games, the continent is blessed with.

In summary the following questions are imminent to understanding the problem of evolving a uniquely African model of Physical Education and Sport programme/curriculum.

(i) Can make Physical Education and Sport in Africa in the 21st Century be made more relevant to the indigenous African populations?

(ii) What should be the focus of School Physical Education in the 21st century? Should it be sport participation, or physical activity, health and development of social skills?

(iii) How can Physical Education curriculum be design to better respond to the pressing challenges of contemporary African societies such as HIV/AIDS, etc.?

Acknowledgement

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