

**PHYSICAL EDUCATION: A PANACEA FOR GENDER EQUALITY
AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT FOR PUPILS IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA.**

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Abstract

This study embarked on finding how physical education can be a panacea for gender equality and social development for pupils in Awka LGEA of Anambra state. Three research questions were formulated to guide the study. Descriptive survey design was used for the study. The population for this study comprised 154 physical education teachers in private primary schools in Awka Local Government Education Authorities, Anambra state. Total sample of 100 teachers in primary schools in Awka-south were selected using simple random sampling technique. The instrument for the study was structured questionnaire tagged physical education for gender equality and social development (PEGESD) consisting of 19 items measured on a four Likert scale technique. It was validated by two lecturers from the department of Early Childhood and Primary Education, and one from Measurement and Evaluation unit, both from Faculty of Education. The data collected were correlated to determine reliability of the instrument using Cronbach alpha reliability test which yielded a reliability of 0.78. The responses were calculated using mean and standard deviation. A mean score of 2.50 and above were accepted while item with mean score below 2.50 were rejected. The findings of the study revealed that physical education contribute to gender equality and social development in primary school by providing children opportunity to socialize with peers, understand others feelings through social skills, enhances language development, and guarantees physically fitness. It was seen that pupils use communication and interpersonal skills to build relationships. Also there is low participation of females in physical activity; limited facility e.g. limited type of games, teachers majorly male as factors militating against gender equality and social development in primary school. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended that there should be increase in the level of awareness of teachers concerning their conduct towards boys and girls. This can be achieved through gender equity training programs.

Keywords: Physical Education, Gender, Gender Equality and Social Development

Introduction

The worth of education of any nation is determined by the policy of education of that nation. It is to this effect that the policy on primary education selected courses that would help achieve all-round development for children physically, intellectually, morally and spiritually. In other words, the NPE indicated that there is an aspect of education that encourages physical development of the individual, not only in isolation but through participation in the activities of social groups (Amadioha, 2011). Primary education, according to the National Policy of Education (FRN, 2014) is that education given to children aged 6-11/12. The bill that the Nigeria government signed brought about free compulsory education under Universal Basic Education and included physical education because it is not limited to formal schooling instruction such as English, mathematics, just to mention a few, but involves a life-long experiences (FRN, 2014). This bill on primary education, presented many opportunities that seem to help children of all gender achieve the development of the nation. Physical and health education under basic science and technology of the primary education curriculum in the national policy of education has its objectives as inculcating permanent

literacy and the ability to communicate effectively and promote patriotism, fairness, and understanding.

Physical education is viewed to play major role in the social development of children which can serve as viable tool to bring equity in the society, though it has been bordered by gender problems even in the early years of education (Alber, 2017). In the past some physical exercise was ascribed as male or female sports due to the level of violence activities involved especially in sports like rugby. But, there has been a huge U-turn on that notion thereby the government, world sport body encouraging male and female participants, teachers, and leaders to participate equally and make the most of the opportunity. Physical education is a subject taught in school. This subject focuses on developing physical fitness and the ability to perform and enjoy day-to-day physical activities with ease. Praxis (2019) claimed that children develop skills necessary to participate in a wide range of activities, such as soccer, basketball, or swimming. Regular physical education classes prepare children to be physically and mentally active, fit, and healthy into adulthood. In the same vein, Wagner (2019) posited that physical education contributes to the cognitive, emotional, physical and social well-being of children all over the world, providing opportunity for fairness amongst children of all gender, with ideal stand for better interaction between children and adults (Del Castillo-Andrés, Campos-Mesa & Ries, 2013). A number of development goals include public health and well-being, improving leisure in education, social development, human development, stability and tolerance, economic development, and peace.

Modification in everyday life and the way of living coupled with the ever increasing academic pressure on the children seems to take away the time for physical activities. The children in the later years of their childhood face a range of developmental issues such as anxiety, mistrust, and inferiority complex (Romania, 2019). This stage of life is enormously important because the children have to make the compulsory transition to late childhood ([Wilhelmsen](#) et al, 2019). It is also imperative that children have the needed environment to get that education, starved of any form of discrimination. UK Essays (2018) stated that early exposure of a child to activities that involve movement promotes a positive self-concept. It gives training to body and mind, whilst providing enjoyment to the children as they mature. On the same note, Murphy, Rylee, Litchfield and Litchfield (2014) outlined three strategies for improving teaching and learning in physical education, they include providing orderly sequences of motor skill education, making provision for individual differences and setting appropriate goal structures. Ministry of Education, Singapore (2016) claimed that the results of movement are not limited to the physical part of an activity. Therefore, the physical education programme provides children with:

...An understanding about how pupils make informed decisions in relation to work and recreation for example movement concepts, principles and theories, game rules, tactics and strategies, health- and fitness-related benefits, and environmental risks and personal safety concerns. An extensive knowledge base about movement across a wide variety of settings, within and outside of school, to help generalise and transfer learning to new and challenging real-life physical activity, More importantly, pupils develop the ability to transfer knowledge to additional skills while continuing to refine existing ones as self-directed and independent learners Singapore(2016)

This revealed that learning of physical education has positive influence on the cognitive, affective and social development of children, no matter their gender.

Gender is seen as the roles ascribed to male and female individuals by their immediate society. These roles determines what is expected from them, thereby drawing a line on what is acceptable or things that should never be done, a taboo or out-of-the-norm by a particular sex. Ibiam, Ugwu and Okondugba (2016) described gender as the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female, the relationship between women and men, and girls and boys and the relations between women and between men. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a girl or boy in a given context. Similarly, gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of male and female such as norms, roles and relationships; it varies from society to society and can be changed (United Nations Office for The Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs OCHA, 2012).

Gender discrimination in physical education is a socially constructed matter and there are different outcomes for access to facilities, participation and opportunities (UK Essays, 2018). The gender discrimination in physical education can lead to many personal upshots making children vulnerable to emotional bankruptcy, though dispossession of equal access to physical education also means that girls are not being able to avail necessary education linked to health and can tell upon the health of girls ([Wilhelmsen et al 2019](#)). This minor discrimination can lead to extensive negligence generating divisions between children and leading to many social problems like gender inequality outside school as well. The nonconformity from the active life results in a hampering effect on the development of the child who can face problems in making successful transition to late childhood ([Wilhelmsen et al 2019](#)). Social inclusion for girls and boys can help curb this discrimination on the basis of gender by providing equal opportunities for adequate social development. According, [Wilhelmsen et al \(2019\)](#) girls can overcome the stereotypes of male and female involvement patterns if given the opportunity. as supported inclusive classes provide a socialising atmosphere that benefits both boys and girls and provides the more capable girls, helping them to reach their potential.

The growing demand for gender equity in education is based on the idea that a child's quality of education reflects on their future lifestyle. It is believed that physical education contributes to equity practices; and it is likely to bring about positive and lasting foundation for a society that will prosper in equality for children of all gender (Alber, 2017). The researcher defines equality in education as the degree of attainment and opportunity obtainable in education. It is often linked with excellence and equity. Educational equity present itself as playing fair for all which denotes that conditions specific to children's gender should not interfere with the potential of academic success. A physical education teacher with the mind for equity depicts the subject as a social learning, involving interaction between teacher-pupils, pupil-pupil and open for all in a welcoming and accepting ambience.

Social interaction is imperative component in every aspect of human lives since the development of skills required to form positive and lasting social interactions begins in infancy till adulthood. Skills, such as trust, cooperation, emotions (joy, anger, sadness, frustration), develop throughout childhood. For most children, some of these skills needed for social interaction come naturally. These skills are acquired through the process of natural interactions within the environment, home and school, gatherings. By the time children reach adolescence, they begin to test the values and ideas that they have accumulated throughout childhood ([Wilhelmsen et al. 2019](#)). As children acquire social skills, they become aware of how to communicate with others, the messages they send, and how they can improve communication to become more effective (Erol & Orth, 2011). [Wilhelmsen et al. \(2019\)](#) defined Social development as a means of improving the well-

being of every individual in society so they can reach their full potential, as the success of any society is associated with the well-being of every citizen. Social development, according to the scholar means investing in people. It requires the removal of barriers so that all can journey toward their dreams with confidence and dignity. These skills are acquired over time as a child grows. Thus they are developmental in nature because social skills are developmental. As with most social skills, teachers need to ensure pupils acquire the necessary core skills for successful social interactions (Antia, Jones, Kreimeyer, & Reed, 2011).

Skill gained through social interaction according to Wagner (2019) results in increased pupils' physical health, better academic performance, builds healthy bones, and improves strength and endurance. It helps reduce stress and anxiety, helps control weight, boosts self-esteem, and promotes psychological well-being and establishment of life-long healthy behaviour patterns. Moughalian (2019) recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity for children aged 6–17 years as research claims that habits gained during childhood often lasts into adulthood. Warner (2019) showed that mere 20 minutes of walking affects brain functioning, help to stimulate pupils' minds and improve academic success. Children who participate in P.E. are more likely to remain active during after-school hours. Lack of physical activity among youth is known to increase the risk of obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and more. This was one of the reasons the year 2005 was celebrated as the International year for sport and physical education. The United Nation called to the attention of governments in 2003 to use sport as a means to promote education health, development and peace.

Physical activities with the full involvement of all gender is an important goal of development and belongs to the basic and universally acknowledged civil, cultural, economic, political and social privileges (Del Castillo-Andrés et al, 2013). Yet, Harris (2018) revealed that the challenge with physical education is the grading system, which is old and out-dated. The scholar affirmed that the way that male and female pupils are being graded in physical education only creates a hostile environment for bullying and low self-esteem. When pupils are graded unfairly, it brings antagonism between the different gender groups, tribes and religion. Children would develop low self-esteem, and instead of physical education serving as the solution, it becomes a problem. Amongst the challenges facing physical education is gender in equality.

Gender inequality faces a number of disputes, both at the hem of government and at the grassroots. One of which is how to prove to teachers that they treat girls and boys in a different way (Del Castillo-Andrés et al, 2013). Teachers do this by giving male and female children different rewards objectively, and the boys have been expected to get better grades than the girls. Teachers have been noticed to support boys more, expecting much from them (Del Castillo-Andrés et al, 2013). Regrettably, this stereotype is currently affecting equity in sports participation in primary education. Gender is vital where issues in physical education are concerned (David, 2012). Sport is usually and often associated with masculinity and there are a number of communities that seem to perceive it inappropriate for the women to take part in such activities (Del Castillo-Andrés et al, 2013). In some cases, female children who take part in sports activities are considered to be masculine because of their body structure, developed over the years. Likewise, male children who are reluctant towards physical activities may be branded as girlish. Some of the societies consider physical education to be productive as it provides the necessary physical exercise to the workforce (Del Castillo-Andrés et al, 2013). Formerly social disparities existed both in the access to physical education and in the success also as a result male and female had differentiated curriculum ([Wilhelmsen](#) et al 2019). The curriculum, in most cases, was presented as 'different but equal' to

pass it off as equity in education. The general lack of influential female leaders in decision-making bodies necessitated the under representation of females in most educational institutions (David, 2012). This disparity deeply affects the development of the girl child in the pre-primary and primary education.

The unpleasant condition surrounding the development of children during the early years necessitates the need for consistent and considerable change in teachers' approaches towards pupils and positive perceptions of pupils towards gender inequalities. Changes can be made to eliminate the gender inequalities in physical education. Quite a number of changes can be effective in bringing a massive change in favour of gender equity. To eliminate the inequities based on gender, there is need to understand social development as teachers are in position to use social inclusion and manage the guidelines in a way that is adequate to the pupils.

The under representation of women in decision-making bodies in the educational institutions is also an issue that needs to be changed so that the participation of women can expand the talent of sports officials in the institutions. This will mean that all the sports related activities and development schemes would become more reachable, targeting all the people (Del Castillo-Andrés et al, 2013). This can be understood as the reason why the level of physical education in schools should have been two decades back in terms of equality and productivity. Schools continue to follow the deep rooted stereotypical ideological values on games girls can, and cannot participate in, coupled with organisational concerns to propagate single sex grouping. These experiences can easily reinforce the conventional images about how the children should feel about their bodies, the difference in physical abilities and the acceptability in indulging in different physical activities (Wilhelmsen et al 2019).

Presently, the world of sport is still being led by men, and female participation for gender equality is still critical (Del Castillo-Andrés et al, 2013). Many schools through physical education teachers give children the impression that some activities are too sophisticated and hard for female children. Thereby depriving female children skills nurtured and developed in physical education to stimulate economic development, social inclusion and political development (David, 2012). Some teachers claimed that the main benefits for pupils in P.E. include rest/relaxation, the reduction of pressure and anxiety. This is a fixed and limited understanding of physical activities and might be the reason for their changing behaviour towards children when they become conscious of the gender differences (Romania, 2019). It is vital to raise the awareness of the teachers towards their gender prejudices in challenging unequal power relation on the basis of gender (David, 2012). This is reason the researchers seek to examine how physical education can be a remedy for gender equality and social development in primary schools, Anambra state. Unfortunately, most of the teachers don't realize that they are treating boys and girls differently.

Statement of the problem

Gender inequality and social underdevelopment in the world at large has been demanding attention for restructuring at all levels. As a result, there are vacuums to be filled for gender equality and social development in our time. Majority of the female pupils are marginalised and are not encouraged to explore the sports world as they ought to. This gap seems difficult to be bridged even with the National Policy of Education directives on equal opportunity for every child. Therefore, it is imperative to explore how physical education can help in bridging this gap. It is against this background that the study seeks to find out how physical education can serve as a panacea for gender equality and social development in primary schools in Anambra state.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study

1. How can physical education contribute to gender equality and social development in physical education?
2. What are the factors militating against gender equality and social development in primary school in Anambra state?
3. What are the measures to take in using physical education in achieving gender equality and social development through physical education?

Method

Descriptive survey research design was used for the study. The population for this study comprised of 154 physical education teachers in private primary schools in Awka Local Government Education Authorities, Anambra state. Total sample of one hundred teachers in primary schools in Awka-south were selected using simple random sampling technique. The instrument for the study was structured questionnaire tagged physical education for gender equality and social development (PEGESD); consisting of 19 items measured on a four Likert scale technique of Strongly Agree (4 points), Agree (3 points) Disagree (2 points), and Strongly Disagree (1 point). The instrument was validated by three lecturers in the Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra state for content and face validity. The data collected were correlated to determine reliability of the instrument using Cronbach alpha reliability test which yielded a reliability of 0.78. The responses were calculated using mean and standard deviation. A mean score of 2.50 and above were accepted while item with mean score below 2.50 were rejected.

Result

Research Question One: how can physical education contribute to gender equality and social development in primary school?

Table 1: Mean rating on physical education contribute to gender equality and social development in primary school

S/N	Physical education contribution to gender equality and social development in primary school	\bar{X}	Decision
1	Physical education provides children opportunity to socialize with peers	3.31	Agree
2	Social skills from physical education enables children to understand others feelings	2.59	Agree
3	Interaction during physical education enhances language development	3.30	Agree
4	regular exercises and good physical education guarantees physically fitness	2.85	Agree
5	Pupils exercise personal leadership based on own talents and interests.	2.44	Disagree
6	Pupils use communication and interpersonal skills to build relationships.	2.59	Agree

Table 1 showed that respondents agree with all the items physical education contribution to gender equality and social development in primary school; except for item 5. The mean values of

item 1-4 and 6 ranged from 2.59 and above. In item 5 teachers disagreed that pupils exercise personal leadership based on own talents and interests.

Research Question Two: What are the factors militating against gender equality and social development in primary school in Anambra state?

Table 2: mean rating of the factors militating against gender equality and social development in primary school

S/N	Factors militating against gender equality and social development in primary school	\bar{X}	Decision
7	Religious beliefs discourages female participation	2.25	Disagree
8	Stigma from family members discourages female participation,	1.98	Disagree
9	The rate of participation in physical activity for females is low	3.42	Agree
10	There is limited facility for Physical education e.g. limited type of games	3.47	Agree
11	Physical education teachers are majorly male	3.30	Agree
12	Physical exercise is best for fat individuals only	2.45	Disagree

Table 2 revealed that respondents agree with items 9, 10 and 11 but disagree with items 7, 8 and 12. In other words respondents agree that factors militating against gender equality and social development in primary school includes low rate of females participation in physical activity, limited facility for physical education e.g. limited type of games and teachers majorly male. Their disagreement in items 7, 8 and 12 exonerates physical exercise for fat individuals only, religious beliefs and stigma from family members discouraging female participation as factors militating against gender equality.

Research Question 3: What are the measures for achieving gender equality and social development using physical education?

Table 3: Mean rating on the measures for achieving gender equality and social development using physical education

S/N	Measures for achieving gender equality and social development using physical education	\bar{X}	Decision
13	Recruitment of equal number of male and female PE coaches	3.26	Agree
14	Ensure appropriate facilities are available.	3.13	Agree
15	Disseminate data about the health benefits of physical activity for females.	3.85	Agree
16	Providing public and media recognition for the contributions of women	3.26	Agree
17	Host sports/play day camps for children ages 6-14	3.27	Agree
18	support and encourage pupils to develop rightly and excel in academics	3.26	Agree
19	Ensure equal participation in physical activity	3.27	Agree

Table 3 showed that respondent agree with all the items in the table because the mean value of the entire item in the value ranged from 3.13 and above. This was strengthened by the aggregate mean of 3.33.

Discussion

Result in the study revealed that physical education contribute to gender equality and social development in primary school by providing children opportunity to socialize with peers, understand others feelings through social skills, enhances language development, guarantees physically fitness. It was seen that pupils use communication and interpersonal skills to build relationships. These collaborate with the findings of Ministry of Education, Singapore (2016) which pointed that understanding about how pupils make informed decisions in relation to work and recreation for example game rules, tactics, and strategies, health- and fitness-related benefits, and personal safety concerns, this includes that they gain extensive knowledge base about movement to help generalise and transfer learning to new and challenging real-life physical activity, More importantly, the scholar agreed that pupils develop the ability to transfer knowledge to additional skills while continuing to refine existing ones as self-directed and independent learners.

Findings identified low participation of females in physical activity; limited facility e.g. limited type of games, teachers majorly male as factors militating against gender equality and social development in primary school. These findings complement the unequivocal stance of Alber (2017) who claimed that physical education has been bordered by gender problems even in the early years of education, meaning that it is nothing new. Some exercise in physical education used to be ascribed as male or female sports, and this stereotype is currently affecting equity in sports participation in primary education. Unfortunately, Del Castillo-Andrés et al (2013) concurred that the world of sport is still being led by men, and female participation for gender equality is still critical. Respondents out-rightly disagreed that physical exercise is best for fat individuals only. They did not accept religious beliefs and stigma from family members discourages female participation. This finding aligned with Harris (2018) who affirmed that the way that pupils are being graded in physical education only creates a hostile environment for bullying and low self-esteem and this would bring antagonism between the different gender groups, tribes and religion, not religious barrier itself.

Further findings in the study identified measures for achieving gender equality and social development using physical education. These measures include recruitment of equal number of male and female PE coaches, ensuring the availability appropriate facilities, dissemination of data about the health benefits of physical activity for females, provision of public and media recognition for the contributions of women. Hosting of sports/play day camps for children ages 6-11, supporting and encouraging pupils to develop rightly and excel in academics, and ensuring equal participation in physical activity were shown to be measures for achieving gender equally and social development using physical education.

Conclusion

The study investigated the role physical education in achieving gender equality and social development in primary schools, Anambra state. The result of the study showed that physical education plays vital role in the social development and gender equality of children in primary school.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. There should be increase in the level of awareness of teachers concerning their conduct towards boys and girls. This can be achieved through gender equity training programs.
2. Adjustment should be made in the curriculum in order to challenge the inequalities in physical activities and education due to the male dominance in the field.
3. Comprehensive change of the leaders can bring about this change where women man the administrative places so that they can positively contribute in the decision making.
4. The stakeholders should be consistent and dependable to bring about this change.
5. Teachers have to learn to respect the individuality of the pupils whilst maintaining a sense of team participation and learning.

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