The Changing Phases of Physical Education and Sport in Africa: Can a Uniquely African Model Emerge?[1]

Lateef O. Amusa
University of Venda
South Africa
Email: amusalbw@yahoo.com

Preamble

When I was approached to give a keynote address at this auspicious occasion of the 17th biennial conference of the International Society for Comparative Physical Education and Sport (ISCPES), a lot of topics came to my mind because there are lots of issues surrounding physical education and sport in Africa. After many considerations I decided to speak on the title "The Changing Phases of Physical Education and Sport in Africa: Can a Uniquely African Model Emerge?" This presentation will therefore follow the format below:

1. Introduction
2. The adoption of "westernized" models of Physical Education (PE) and Sport
3. Post Independent African Physical Education and Sport
4. What do all these mean?
5. The way forward (African renaissance)
6. Conclusion

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 PE and Sport in Africa and concluded that it was impractical to "import" western models of PE and Sport and hope they will serve Africa needs. That was 16 years ago. Has the situation changed? And why? And how? Bressan summed up the situation regarding PE and Sport in Africa as follows:

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> 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, p. 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 (Mazru, 1986, p. 201).

Physical Education and Sport in Africa do not appear to be exceptions to the two observations above. This presentation today, takes a far more critical view at PE and Sport in Africa hoping at the end to make some suggestions which Africa Union (AU) and indeed NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development) can consider and implement.

Physical Education and Sport are not new to Africa. Rather what is new is the western model. The practice of PE and Sport in Africa is deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of its diverse ethnic communities. This is evidenced from the seminal principles of the acquisitions and mastery of physical skills (Fafunwa, 1982) which are evident throughout the evolution of traditional societies (Wamukoya, 1994). In most African countries and communities physical culture forms an integral part of traditional processes associated with hunting, pastoral activities, 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. 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 culture (education). Good examples are Nigeria and Benin Republic, South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe, to mention just a few. The different ideological practices are further exacerbated by four primary variables: class, race, religion and gender. Hunting as a sport is viewed and practised differently. From the western perspective, hunting is a sport that is pursued by the upper class; from the indigenous African perspective, it is a means of acquiring food and 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 workable PE and Sport programme. The present status of PE and Sport in Africa could then be understood in terms of these perspectives and African historical past.

Africa's past practices in PE 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 western world finds extremely difficult to comprehend (Van De Venter, 2002). Holdstock (1997, p. 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, 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 De Venter, 2002), a practice which colonial administration and religions did not support.

In an effort to understand the subject of this presentation, it is necessary to first briefly discuss Africa's colonial past and post-independent era. This will then be followed by an examination of these eras (periods) and a discussion on how a uniquely African model of PE 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 the journey will never be completed. As a continent, 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 resulting in several conflicts on the continent.

Africa has a rich tradition of culture, history, economic, sport and social institutions which are envies of the western world. Various tribes throughout 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 the 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-socialization, initiation, ceremonies, recreation, etc. Unfortunately, there was little or no documentation on some of these legacies. The tendency therefore was to think that no formal PE and Sport existed in Africa before the advent of Europeans. Sport in African societies has been sighted as a powerful weapon that binds the societies together. Riordan (1986, p. 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 PE and Sport existed in African countries long before the advent of western education. Western forms of PE and Sport were introduced to African countries through colonization by Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal and Spain. With the exception of South Africa which gained independence in May 1910 and Egypt in February 1972 most of the African countries did not become independent until the late 50's and 60's (Ajisafe, 1997). It is not surprising therefore that western PE and Sport became prominent in most African countries, particularly in the curricula of institutions of learning. This accounts for the reason for the form of PE and Sport in these countries. For example the 1933 syllabus introduced to the former British Empire, emphasized drills, marching, gymnastics, stunts and calisthenics for PE and football, cricket, netball, athletics (mainly running) etc, in the areas of sport. These activities formed the core of many African PE and Sport for decades (Amusa, 1999). Ajisafe (1997, p. 24) described the status of PE as follows:

> It was a very rigid programme conducted by whistle-blowing- and cane-carrying teachers wearing inappropriate dress

The British games and physical culture introduced to Africa permeated and polluted the traditional PE culture of the indigenous African countries by means of school, sports and clubs and 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 non-chalant attitude towards PE and Sport by the people of those countries (Ajisafe, 1997, p. 24).

Apart from colonization, the second prominent avenue of introducing PE and Sport to Africa was through the missionary. It was the missionary 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 later 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 model of PE and Sport?". There is no doubt that the model satisfied the aspiration of the colonial governments. This is evident in the training of PE 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 which were to be performed in precise-like movement. The model thus developed **Physical Training** (PT) as opposed to PE. Although activities like football (soccer), netball, golf, cricket, squash, 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 PE and Sport 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 lot of ways:

- It was largely westernized (carbon-copy of practices in western countries)
- It did not take cognizance of the endemic activities, traditional activities and games (Du Toit, 1980; Botha, 1983)

- As an alien of PE 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 variation.
- The implementation of the model faced challenges of the absence and shortage of facilities and equipment

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

The general attitude of the colonial governments towards local indigenous games and sports was not favourable-the games and native activities were not fully contributing to physical and moral development of Africans; most of the activities were considered primitive, immoral and antichristian. The only way to correct these practices was through western education and through the medium of formalized PE. The most striking short-coming of the western model of PE therefore was the lack of **relevance** to the indigenous population.

Post independent African PE 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 PE and Sport. Following the attainment of independence, most of the African countries began shifting the focus of education 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 and destroyed during the colonial era. Several commissions were set up in various countries to re-address 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 are similar in the objectives of general education which among other things were:

- To further 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
- Foster positive attitudes and consciousness towards others

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

- Contribute to the physical development of the child
- Increase the physical activity of the child
- To experience a sense of development through physical activity
- To develop a sense of cooperation
- Develop champions in aspects of PE
- Make a more positive use of leisure

The outcomes of these objectives were not significantly different from the situations before independence since the 1933 syllabus still formed the bedrock of PE. A significant development during this period was the emergence of PE professionals and professional associations. Many Africans who had the opportunity to study PE and Sport in Europe and USA returned to their countries. The professional preparation received by these individuals facilitated the "revolution" in African PE and Sport. Professional preparation curricula in colleges and universities within Africa also began and initially focused on preparing the individuals for the traditional careers in teaching and coaching. This later gave way to the emergence of non-traditional or alternative careers. Thus, increase in the knowledge in PE 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, p. 1999) a situation very identical with situations in USA, Canada, Britain, etc- 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 PE in some post independent African countries from the 80s to the last decade of the 20th Century is shown in Table 1.

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

	Scientific Aspects	Arts/ Humanities	Socio-cultural
1. Theory	• Exercise Physiology • Kinesiology • Biomechanics • Anatomy • Physiology • Psychology • Sports Medicine	• Administration and Organization • Sociology • Adapted PE	• 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	Improvement of health habits, cleanliness, hygiene, preventable diseases (models of the western world).		

Adapted from: Amusa & Toriola, 2003(a)

Looked at very critically, there is no difference between PE in Africa and the western world. There is nothing uniquely African. 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 association found in the western countries.

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

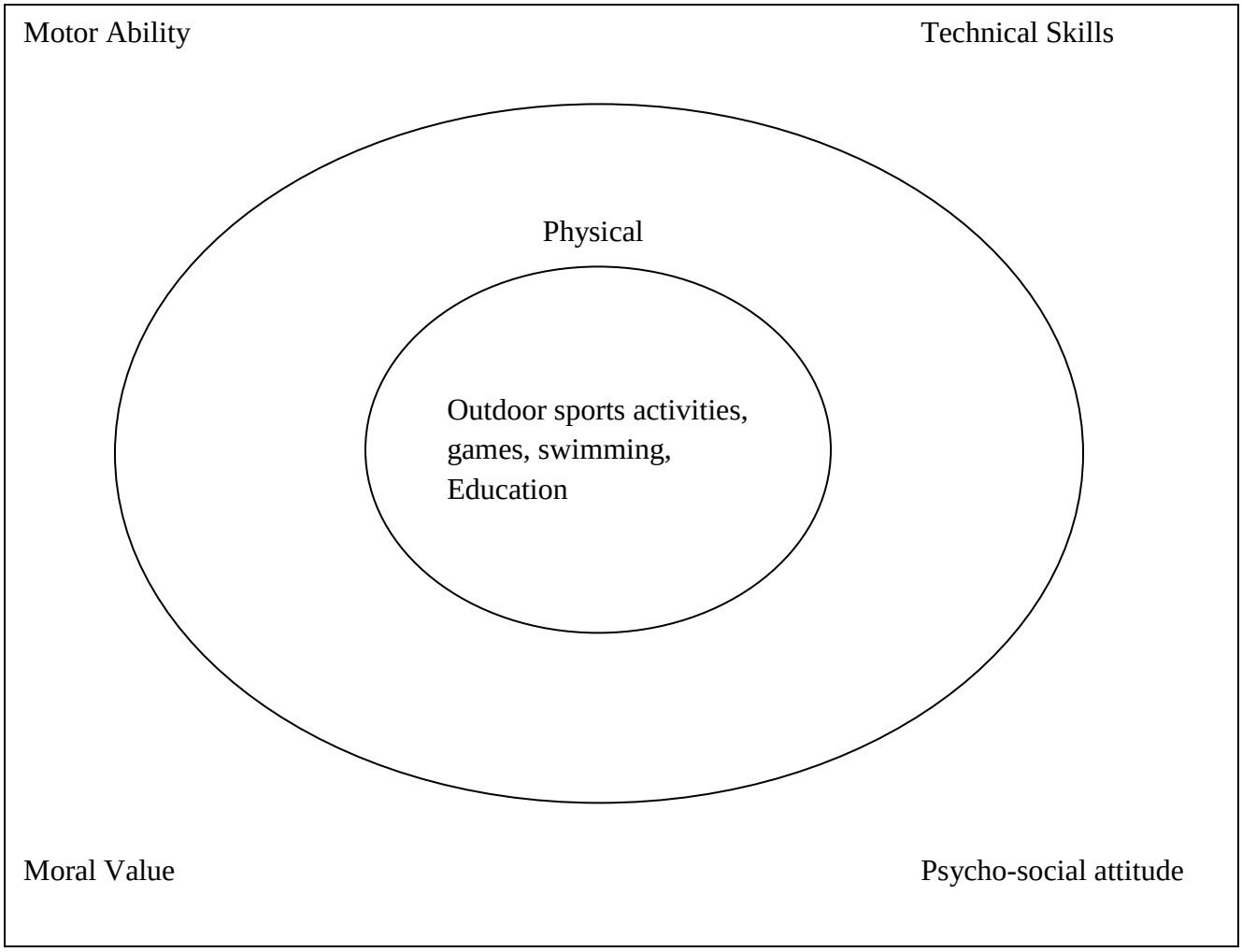


Figure 1: concept of PE in curricula of Tertiary institutions in some African Countries (Amusa, 1994; Amusa, 2003; Amusa & Toriola, 2003 (a), 2003 (b); Naul, 2003)

What are the significant gains of the decades? - Decades of transformation of PE and Sport curricula in most African Countries. A careful examination of these decades indicates no significant gain or particular shift in emphasis on PE 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 PE- a cut in the budget, removal of PE from the curriculum of some schools, a decay of PE and sport facilities, etc. (Hardman, 2003). In some African countries, it was the decades of military intrusion in government administration highlighting budget cuts, high unemployment rates of PE 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 PE and devaluation of former standards in PE 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 PE and Sport during these decades can be described as "progressive-retrogression"- you take one step forward and two steps backward. "When PE and Sport in the western world coughed, African PE and Sport sneezed". For example when PE was called upon to justify its existence in the western world, PE in African countries reacted the same way. An effort to justify the existence of PE world-wide led many countries to evolve new names for PE. Names like Kinesiology, Biokinetics, Human movement etc. replaced PE in some countries. But has anything changed despite the changes in the names of the discipline?

What do all these mean to us as professionals?

The signal is clear. In a nutshell, PE and Sport curricula in Africa are still towing the lines of the past practices. Most African countries still implement the PE 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 PE 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 PE and Sport curricula should help to popularize these rich cultures, traditions and practices. The traditional and indigenous African games and sports do not still feature in All African Games. 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 PE and Sport based on:

- The needs of Africans
- The heritages of African continent

- The materials and infrastructures that are Africans.
- Culture, traditions and practices of African societies
- African customs and practices

If PE 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 the 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 successful PE 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 ethnical realities (Bressan, 1994). Individuals with innovative skills and ideas and with charismatic leadership at the national, regional and continent wide levels are called upon to show concern in this direction. Curriculum developers, educationists and administrators should ensure that African indigenous games and sports are marketed through All African Games. Some of these games cut across several cultures. The education wing of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) also has an important role to play here, to ensure the games and sports become part of the school PE curriculum. The Supra Council for Sports in Africa (SCSA) is requested to implement the featuring of the games and sports as components of All Africa games. It is far from an easy task, but it can be done.

Conclusion

I have attempted in this short presentation a description of African PE and Sport from the pre-colonial to colonial and post colonial eras. It is clear from the presentation that to date there is nothing uniquely African in PE and Sport as presently practised. This is quite worrisome. In conclusion, I will like to leave this audience with two vital questions:

(i) Can we make PE and Sport in Africa in the 21st Century more relevant to the indigenous African population?

(ii) Can we evolve competitiveness out of African games and sports such that they will feature in All African Games?

I thank you for your attention

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