

The Importance of Physical Education and Sports Concepts in Elementary Schools and an Examination of Their Development

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Introduction

Education is the process of consciously bringing about desired changes in individuals' behaviors through their own lives. The future of countries depends on the skills and mental development achieved by their citizens. Therefore, education is carried out with the aim of raising individuals in a way that creates a unity between their spiritual, social, and physical aspects. (MEB 2016). The purpose of Physical Education and Games lessons in primary schools is explained as preparing students for subsequent educational processes by developing their physical capacities, concepts, strategies, and related life skills through games and physical activities throughout their lives (Physical Education and Games Lesson, 2018). In today's education systems and approaches, the educational process aims to address the cognitive, physical, psychomotor, and behavioral aspects of the child and the individual

together, developing them in relation to each other (Alincak, Ayan and Abakay, 2015). When we consider sports as an educational method, it is easy to see how many similarities there are between sports and education. Sports education is very important in helping individuals understand the importance of living together. Sports education motivates individuals to improve themselves physically and mentally, better prepares them for social life, and encourages positive thinking. When considered as a complement to physical education, sports education also plays a very important role in character education. If we examine the developmental stages of individuals, the aim is for them to take their place in society as individuals who are healthy in terms of their human and social aspects, at peace with themselves, harmonious, and of sound character; who embrace national values of decency and morality and internalize the principles of democratic life. It

should be noted that sports education is no different from general education and must be considered as a whole (İnal, 1998).

Educational programs aim not only to provide individuals with the best academic education but also to develop a strong will and character. Education in many parts of the world requires individuals to embrace the culture and values of the society in which they live. Therefore, sufficient importance should be given to activities that are in line with the objectives of education that will enable individuals to be educated together and facilitate their physical, emotional, and social development (Kuru, 2003).

Eitzen (2000) views sport as a microcosm of human life. He states that sport reflects all the characteristics of the society in which people live. In other words, sport exists in humanity with its own unique products, participants, documents, magazines, newspapers, cartoons, cinemas with audiences, economic expenses, and caricatures, just like the different institutions that exist within society (Öztürk, 1998). For this reason, sport is at the forefront of social institutions that are actively and widely used in societies today. The main purpose of sports is to contribute to the physical, social, and mental development of the individual. Along with this, sports emerge as a major phenomenon in the emergence of civilized societies (Yetim, 2000).

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the importance and development of physical education and sports concepts in primary schools.

The Concept of Elementary School

Elementary school is the first step in preparing individuals to lead useful lives and adapt to their social environment. For this reason, it is referred to as “Basic Education” in our country, as it is worldwide. In our country, the right to basic education is guaranteed by Article 42 of our Constitution, and it is compulsory and free for all citizens. Ensuring this has been determined as one of the main duties of the state (Arslan, 2007). The duties and objectives of primary school, in accordance with the basic principles and policies of the Ministry of National Education, are as follows: to equip every Turkish child with the necessary social skills and behaviors and basic knowledge to grow up as a person who contributes to their country and society; to raise the child within the framework of national moral values; and to prepare them for their future life and higher education, taking into account their interests, concerns, and abilities (Büyükkaragöz, 1998).

Physical Education and Play Concepts

Physical education is a field of science that enables the development of people’s mental and physical health. It is also an effective field of science in the development of people’s

psychology and characteristics (Kürkçü, 2017). Since the human organism is based on an active lifestyle, a lack of movement can cause a number of physical problems. Studies on lack of movement show that children will benefit mentally and physically if they engage in 60 minutes of moderate or vigorous physical activity daily to become healthy individuals (Atlı, Mirzeoğlu, & Erkut, 2017).

We can define Physical Education as the science that regulates movement activities by adopting the aspects of sports that are suitable for human nature, with the development of the individual's mental and physical health. In this discipline, considering that it deals with the correct movements used in sports activities, it is an educational activity integrated with many stimuli that help strengthen the psyche, as a movement stimulates a specific point in the human body and promotes its development (Kürkçü, 2017, p. 21). Attitudes are one of the important concepts in human life. Attitude is not a concept that can be measured directly, but it is possible to measure an individual indirectly through behavioral patterns (Öztürk et al., 2017). Through play activities, children have the opportunity to recognize objects, individuals, and their own characteristics (Alıncak, 2016).

We can view physical education as a tool for learning and teaching. The impact of games on students' learning ability can be expressed in terms of the retention of learned information, the benefits of fostering positive behavior, and academic achievement. Games used to help students pass the time are not only enjoyable for them, but when used in coordination with physical education, they are an effective educational tool that aims to increase children's interest in school, ensure they become healthy individuals, and learn while having fun, in addition to being an interdisciplinary field of science (Seyrek and Sun, 1991, p. 9). Play is the most important factor that prepares children for life, guides their lives, and teaches them appropriate behaviors within their social lives (Alıncak and Tuzcuoğulları, 2016). Games and physical education play an indispensable role in keeping students' lives fit and dynamic. It should not be forgotten that psychological development, which is created solely through physical activities and is in harmony with mental development, is beneficial for the health, peace, and vitality of individuals and society (MEB, 2008). Play activities are a process that satisfies children's needs (Ayan, Ergin and Alıncak, 2017).

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education in the United States has listed the following characteristics as essential for a quality Physical Education class:

Time: This class should be held 5 days a week for at least 30 minutes. It can be conducted with a teaching approach that develops the student's basic motor skills and entertains them.

Class size: The number of students present in the classroom during the lesson should be the same as in other lessons (Math, Turkish, Social Studies, etc.). The most important

reason for this is that sufficient materials may not be available for the student, and the lesson may not be sufficiently effective due to the inadequacy of the space where the lesson is held.

Heart rate: The intensity of the activities performed during the lesson should be moderate to high, raising the student's heart rate to 50% above their normal heart rate. This ensures that minimum health standards are met.

Opportunity for practice: Students should be given sufficient opportunity and time to experience a skill or concept.

High success rate: Teachers should include activities in their daily plans for students with fewer skills or those who are new to the exercise process. It is necessary for these students to experience a sense of achievement and to increase their interest and motivation for the class.

Positive developmental environment: The classroom environment should be positive and friendly between the teacher and the student. Students should like and respect their teacher and not be afraid of them. Students should be taught to appreciate their achievements and not give up when faced with failure.

Teacher background: Teachers should be well-educated, knowledgeable about their job and their attitude towards students, and understand that they need to teach and guide students. They should also have good interpersonal skills.

Realistic approaches: Planning lessons that are compatible with the capacity, level, talents, and skills of the students attending the class.

Sufficient materials and sports facilities for teaching: All schools must have a gym and sufficient sports equipment for their students. However, even if these are provided, it is not enough for Physical Education and Sports classes to be taught properly. It varies depending on the teacher's ability to make the best use of the resources available to them and, if necessary, seek outside help.

It should be fun: Physical Education classes should be fun for students, not a chore; students should enjoy the way the class is taught. Teachers should find and implement methods that encourage student participation and enjoyment.

Psychomotor, social, moral, and knowledge dimensions: Physical Education classes, which focus on psychomotor development, should not neglect the moral, social, and

informational aspects. They should develop human relationships and ensure that individuals exhibit the necessary behaviors in social life.

The Importance of Physical Education and Games in Elementary Schools

Physical education and games, which exist as a complementary and supplementary element of formal education within the National Education system, also play an important role in the character development of students. It is a fundamental principle that students should be raised as individuals who contribute to the development of society, possessing a peaceful, selfless, dynamic, moderate character, being helpful, cultured, and respectful of the basic principles and rules of life (İnal, 1998).

Physical education and games are very important in positively developing students' skills and behavior, enabling them to continue sports in their lives, and protecting their physical health (Yenal and Çamlıyer, 1999). Therefore, it is very important that this course be given the necessary importance in elementary schools. Since the areas where physical education and games are taught differ from the classroom environment where other subjects are taught, the time spent together by the teacher and students differs from the time spent together and the communication in other subjects. These differences place more emotional and physical challenges and responsibilities on the teacher than on other subjects. Physical education and games classes are complementary to regular classes. Students participate in complementary education and general education as a whole (Arslan, 2008).

The student's progress has generally been found to be primarily related to the lesson time, the area where the lesson is held, and the availability of sufficient physical education teachers (Taşmektepligil et al., 2006). In theoretical terms, the game and physical education lesson is primarily focused on education and game-based programs in its initial period. Looking at the implementation of the program, it is seen that the activities carried out by first and second grade students are considered together and address the concepts of physical education and games jointly (Yaylacı, 1998).

Kale (2007) lists the objectives of the primary education part of the physical education course as follows:

- Rest, being healthy and happy.
- Maintaining health in addition to developing free time.
- Ensuring that students can improve their performance without putting their health at risk.
- Attracting students' interest in the class.
- Ensuring that students develop a desire for sports, games, and movement within the class.
- Preventing students from becoming reluctant towards the class and ensuring they are ready for all kinds of activities.
- Meeting the age-appropriate movement needs of primary school students.

- Discovering their sports and game skills by getting to know themselves.
- Learning the terms and concepts used in sports and the areas they are related to.
- Compliance with rules in the area of cleanliness.

The Role of Classroom Teachers in Physical Education and Games Classes

In this day and age, many teachers and administrators have focused solely on students' academic achievements, viewing other subjects such as physical education and games as unnecessary classes that should be excluded from education. However, numerous studies have shown this belief to be incorrect, demonstrating that sports and physical activity have a positive impact on academic achievement. It has been observed that sporting activities increase students' self-confidence, thereby significantly improving their academic performance (Arslan, 2008). Considering this, teachers need to provide opportunities for students to develop their motor skills between the ages of 6 and 11 and prepare an appropriate environment for their physical development.

MEB (2018) recommends that teachers pay attention to the following issues in the implementation of the physical education and games curriculum.

- Changes specific to the school are made in line with the characteristics specified in the curriculum, taking into account the characteristics of the students at the school.
- Daily life and other subjects are taken into account when determining the teaching-learning approach.
- Work coordination that can fulfill roles and responsibilities with the same goal is emphasized.
- The entire teaching-learning process should be influenced by the main principles of the Physical Education and Sports course curriculum. The specified principles are as follows.

Physical activities involving sports and games are for learning purposes.

Student-centered environments allow students to devise their own learning methods.

Time frames are at the forefront.

It is a continuously evolving and interconnected structure.

It has a flexible and adaptable structure.

Topics and themes are used to achieve the targeted outcomes.

In the student's educational process, their experiences and relationships with others around them are also important.

It is a tool for achieving gains in learning-teaching environments.

Students should feel physically and emotionally secure during the activities.

It is essential to be innovative through critical and expressive thinking.

Universal and social values are included.

The aim is to develop an understanding of playing fairly during the game and acting accordingly.

Teachers are given the opportunity to use their own teaching methods comfortably.
It is very important that all current students participate.
They should be sensitive to nature and the environment.
It provides an environment where students can learn while having fun.
They are subject to an evaluation process from different perspectives.
It strives to instill healthy living habits through an active lifestyle.

The responsibility placed on the teacher in the process of conducting lessons and shaping the process in the educational environment requires the teacher to have the necessary level of competence related to the subject they will teach and to be able to master the teaching and the student in line with the objectives of the intended teaching. understand the problems the student may encounter in the educational process, support the student in the learning process, and recognize the student's skills and abilities (Demirhan, 2006). Since the age to start sports coincides with elementary school age, this increases the responsibilities of the classroom teacher. The classroom teacher must have the ability to discover the student's athletic potential. The classroom teacher, who identifies students based on their abilities, should prepare a program tailored to the student's abilities and conduct activities according to this program. They should share the identified talent with the student's parents and ensure that the student is directed to an educational institution or sports course that provides sports training. Since the locations where the lessons are held are directly related to the weather conditions, the locations where the lessons are held differ depending on whether the weather is open or closed. The schedules for lessons to be held in the garden when the weather is clear and sunny and in closed areas on closed and rainy days must also be planned according to the location where the lesson will be held (Aksoy, 1999).

Practices Implemented by the Classroom Teacher in Physical Education and Games Lessons

The classroom teacher responsible for teaching programs aimed at instilling physical activity habits in students is responsible for preparing the lesson and conducting it in accordance with the program. (Dast and Pangrazi, 2009, p.156). As in other countries around the world, in Turkey this responsibility lies entirely with the classroom teacher who teaches the lesson (Arslan and Altay, 2009, p. 16). Gaming has been a part of our lives since the dawn of time, an activity in which people of all ages, young and old, spend a significant portion of their time. With technology making every aspect of our lives easier, it has also become increasingly widespread, particularly in the areas of entertainment and gaming (Özmen, Alıncak and Cağdanlıoğlu, 2023).

Physical education and games are taught in grades 1-4 in our country, and activities related to the teaching of the course are considered and planned separately for each grade. This is because there are differences in what students can do in physical education

and games classes due to their ages. The following activities are carried out in the 1st grade application of the course.

- Balancing activities.
- Location change attempts.
- Movements involving controlling an object.
- I am dancing.
- Health awareness 1 and 2.
- My food pyramid.
- Safety.
- We are a team.
- Direct your partner.
- Variation.
- I know my culture.
- The above-mentioned activities can be performed individually or combined with two or more others. In addition to these activities, teachers utilize games such as:
- I sell oil, I sell honey
- Frog leap
- Rolling toward the target
- Hanging the peg
- Finger game
- Four-touch
- Snowflakes
- Holding the basket
- Whisper down the lane
- (MEB, 2018 et al., 2019, p. 13).
- In addition to the 1st grade program, the Physical Education and Games class includes:
- Safety and equipment
- Active participation—open field games
- Active participation—traditional children’s games, etc. In addition to these activities, the following games are also beneficial:
- Five Stones
- Caucasian Dance
- Folk Dance
- Hide and Seek
- Trash Pickup
- Musical Chairs
- Throw Far
- Hopscotch
- Slalom Run.

Third-grade students are given the “physical activity pyramid” application in addition to the applications given in first and second grades. The specified applications should involve at least 20 minutes of moderate or high-level physical activity. Circulatory system, endurance, muscle strength, and flexibility exercises should be performed together with these activities. Fourth-grade Physical Education and Games activities include:

- Movement to change position
- Movement to control objects
- Combined movements
- I am dancing
- I am learning about my culture
- Active participation—open field games. During these activities, elements from Paralympic games, catch the ball, and hop and jump games are also utilized (MEB, 2018).

The Role of Physical Education and Games in Teacher Training Programs

When we conduct research on teacher development and training practices in undergraduate

programs, we can clearly see that Physical Education and Games courses are subject to constant change. An example of these frequent changes is that in the 1998 undergraduate program curriculum, Physical Education was given as a 2-credit theoretical course in the 3rd and 4th semesters, while in the 6th semester, it was given as a total of 7 credits, consisting of two hours of practical application and two hours of theoretical play and physical education. The Physical Education course accounted for 4.5% of all other courses (YÖK, 1998). In subsequent years, the Higher Education Council (YÖK) decided to reduce the course hours to 6 and the credits to 4. With the decision taken, the Physical Education and Sports Culture course was set at 2 credits in the 3rd semester, and the Physical Education and Games Teaching course was set at 2 hours of practical and 1 hour of theoretical instruction in the 4th semester and put into effect.

The elementary school teacher undergraduate curriculum was changed again starting in the 2014–2015 academic year, adding the Games and Physical Activities course to the 4th semester with 1 hour of theory and 2 hours of practice, and the Physical Education and Sports Teaching course to the 5th semester with 2 hours of practice and 1 hour of theory. The Higher Education Council made another curriculum change on May 30, 2018, adding the Games and Physical Activities Teaching course and deciding that it should be taught for 3 hours of theory. Looking back from 1998 to the present, we see that the number of class hours and lessons in the primary school teaching degree curriculum has been reduced, and the practical components have been completely removed. When we look at the general profile of primary school students, we can see that they are in their developmental and play years and need more Physical Education and Games lessons throughout the school year. It is questionable how and to what extent classroom teachers, who graduate after taking only three hours of theoretical classes during their four-year university education, can meet the Physical Education and Games needs of their students.

The Effect of Physical Education and Play Classes on Child Development

The most obvious benefit of physical activities is that they aid in the child's physical development. No other field incorporates the student's ability to move and methods for solving health problems as much as Physical Education and Play classes. Physical activities carried out with programs that take into account the student's age and development, appropriate to their level, affect students' development in many areas. Teaching through physical activities contributes greatly to the development of manipulative, locomotor, and balance activity skills. Physical play activities aim to promote the development of the following objectives in students. Developing nerve-muscle coordination: The development of motor skills is related to the mental and sensory development of the society in which the student lives. All characteristics develop as a whole. The inclusion of physical activity in education is a very important factor for students to have a healthy childhood. It directs them towards developing their neuromuscular abilities (Çamlıyer, 1999).

Psychomotor Development: This involves developing the student's movement abilities with the aim of improving their physical activity. It means strengthening the balance and control of the metabolism. For example, it forms the basis for the development of basic skills such as swimming, running, and walking. Fundamentally, opportunities, teaching, and motivation within society are important in reaching the desired level of development (Gallohue, 1976).

Physical Fitness Development: It is a natural characteristic for students to reach their level of physical development. Physical activities provide significant benefits to the metabolism in terms of physical fitness. This is referred to as the chronic and acute benefits of exercise. The ability to play sports and live in close contact with sports, acquired in early childhood, is an important factor in acquiring physical movement skills (Çamlıyer, 1999).

We can define physical fitness as the ability to easily manage daily tasks. To perform our daily activities more effectively or to consciously engage in any sports activity, we need more than our normal abilities. Physical fitness is related to body health and composition. Characteristics such as cardiac health, speed, balance, strength, endurance, body mass index, hand-eye coordination, and agility can be improved through physical education and play activities (Gökmen and Karagöl, 1995).

Perceptual Motor Development: All skills consciously help trigger bodily responses. Perceptual skills are learned abilities, and this learning process constitutes a very important part of physical movement activities. It is stated that for the two targeted characteristics in students to reach the intended level, motor knowledge transfer and perceptual events must interact with each other (Vannier and Foster, 1973).

Social-Emotional Development: Another goal of movement education is for students to be at peace with themselves, to be able to react to stimuli, and to be able to renew themselves so that they can advance their movement abilities. Students should realize that they can behave more comfortably, safely, and simply in the park, at home, and in society.

Educational games are not only for Physical Education and Games classes. They are games planned to achieve the lesson objectives for all other courses. Students both spend their free time in a meaningful way and take on an educational responsibility. Educational games are seen as a model for advancing the mental and physical abilities of the student participating in the game by utilizing feelings of fun and excitement (Hazar, 2000).

Developing Learning Capacity: In terms of science and language development,

Physical Education and Games classes can be beneficial for students' activity skills. If a student has difficulty learning an abstract concept described in a theoretical class, they can learn it by engaging in different physical activities or events (Çamlıyer, 1999). A six-year study conducted in Quebec demonstrated that students who engaged in five hours more physical activity than average achieved higher academic scores than their peers. It was observed that students who participated in sports and physical activity classes in their daily lives were more prepared to learn than other students in Canada. It was seen that students who had a good time with their peers were less irritable and performed more harmoniously with other students (Leblanc and Dickson, 2005).

The student's habit of consciously using their free time is defined as the student acquiring desired behaviors and spending time doing various activities. The purpose of students acquiring the ability to make good use of their free time can be expressed as looking at life through a happier lens and achieving psychological and social satisfaction. It is a natural way of spending free time for students to engage in physical activities during the time they set aside for themselves. It is as important to teach students that they need to set aside time for themselves as it is to explain to them how important studying is (Çamlıyer, 1999).

Physical Education and Games is an important complement to education, and its primary goal is to maximize each student's personal abilities through movement skills training. Achieving this goal will be possible through psychological and movement training. Physical Education and Sports education are complementary subjects in general education (Yavaş and İlhan, 1996). Advancing students' physical abilities is a goal specific to physical education classes. The human body's movement mechanism is actively formed by muscles and passively by bones. Physical activities are essential for muscle and bone development. Since Physical Education and Sports classes in schools are conducted for scientific purposes, improvements in the functions of internal organs occur as a result of the student's metabolism adapting to physical activities and becoming more resilient and suitable for them. As a result, students in society are observed to have increased endurance against fatigue by adapting to changing situations. For individuals in society to be able to perform all positive activities, the individuals that make up society must have acquired the habit of exercising regularly (Brewlow, 1990).

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