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THE PROSPECT OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION PROGRAM: THE WAY TO OVERCOME OVERWEIGHT PROBLEMS IN IRAQ

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Abstract:

The overweight problem in Iraq has been a great issue that needs to be solved by government to ensure a better well-being. The purpose of this paper is to explore the need of the modern technology in physical education in order to overcome the issues of overweight in Iraq. The methodology used in this paper is through library research which focuses on issues of overweight and modern technology application in physical education programs. It can be concluded that the use of modern technology in physical education programs will help to promote the use of best practices in physical and health education in order to overcome overweight issues. Further suggestion relating to the prospects of modern technology in physical and health education were recommended in this paper.

Keywords: modern technology, physical education program, overweight problems, obesity, Iraq

Introduction

Physical and health education all over the universe are aimed at providing reasonable and appropriate knowledge experiences to pupils. The strategies to imbibe learning experience in youths and children in the 21st century will required that students and youths are different from that of the past. This requires that children and youths acquire critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, effective information analytical skills and

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develop an active and healthy life style (Gut, 2011; Kay & Greenhill, 2011; Chin & Edginton, 2014).

With the increased changes of the global perspective, a larger view of the physical and health education pedagogy is required and this evident the need to learn from one another around the world. An outstanding professional practice can be enhanced in a continuously developing culture that is connected technologically. Hence, knowledge of international practices can help to improve the pedagogy of physical and health education throughout the world (Chin & Edginton, 2014).

Every individual are connected with one another in today's world as individual ideas and concepts are integrated with the help of globalization and which allows educational practices to be shared like business process with another with the ability to adapt to the cultural context. This study focuses on obesity and overweight as serious problems that surfaced in Iraq and it is considered as a real challenge to healthy life. One purpose of physical and health education program is to provide students with the knowledge on how to keep them in good health and keep away from obesity and overweight. Using modern technology in this era will provide opportunities to enhance information sharing and establish networks to share different best practices across countries with the ability to adapt to cultural context of the relevant countries. Hence, the incidence of obesity and overweight in Iraq and the prospects of using modern technology in physical and health education to promote best practices in physical and health education programs are discussed in this paper. Furthermore, the challenges facing the implementation and inclusion of physical and health education in the curriculum of schools in Iraqi and the use of technology in physical and health education are as well discussed in this paper.

The prevalence of Overweight and Obesity in Iraq

The incident of obesity and overweight has become a public health problem worldwide especially in the recent years (Al-Tawil, Abdulla & Ameer, 2007; Lobstein, 2011). As the world's population is largely dominated by pupils who are vulnerable to obesity and overweight (Government of Canada, 2012). The population of Iraq is not an exemption from this epidemic. According to (Al-Tawil et al., 2007), the prevalence of excess weight (overweight and obesity) among the Iraqi population shows that obesity was 23.16% among Baghdad women aged 25 years above in 1997. Despite that, there are scanty studies on obesity among school children in Iraq, evidences have shown that the prevalence of obesity among the school children and adolescent I Iraq has increased. According to Subhi (2006), 7.3% of the children aged between 6 and 12 in Iraq are obese.

The result of Al-Tawil et al., (2007) on the prevalence and factors associated with overweight and obesity among a certain group of women indicates that 39%, 25% and 12% of the studied women are overweight obese and morbidly obese respectively.

The cause of this epidemic could be attributed on one hand to the modern lifestyles demonstrated by the Iraqi children by consumption of a diet rich in fatty and processed foods (Kleiman, Ng, & Popkin, 2012) and energy-dense foods, snacking and declining overall levels of physical activity (Al-Tawil et al., 2007). Genetic predisposition, psychological factors, diseases (hypothyroidism, Cushing syndrome) and drugs (steroids, tricyclic antidepressants, sulfonylureas, valproate and contraceptives) could also be attributed as the cause of obesity in Iraq on the other hand (Weight Control Information network, 2006; Al-Tawil, 2007).

In order to resolve these concerns of overweight and obesity, school activities and other community-based programs should be developed to reinforce the interest of every child to pursue a lifelong physical and health related programs (Chin & Edington, 2014). In addition, the screen time play should be reduced among children as it promotes physical inactivity. Watching television and playing video games diminishes the children physical activities. There is an important need to promote a healthy lifestyle among the youth and children. This might be achieved by involving the entire community in order to address the above concerns. According to Gupta et al., (2010); Sallis, Floyd, Rodriguez and Saelens, (2012), a good example of the above is creating a policy that is directed to develop the socio-physical environment and which will have a high impact in raising the positive attitudes towards improving the health and social lifestyle of youths and school pupils and not excluding the adults.

Promoting Best practices in Physical and Health Education

An important aspect of this literature is to underscore the importance of best practices in creating a learning environment in physical and health education. Edington and Chin (2012) claimed that it is important for those who design and create the learning environment to gain an incumbent knowledge of the physical and health education programs that have demonstrated a superior result for physical and health educational activities for effective motivation, inspiration and preparation of the learners of the 21st century. The best physical and health education practices are reflected in such programs. However, there are generally the programs, processes and procedures of physical and health education that continuously reduce superior results of physical and health programs when compared with the others (Chin & Edington, 2014).

The three-step process of validating best practices provided by the United State Department of Health and Human Services (2011) can as well be used in promoting best Physical and health education practices in Iraq, these validation processes are:

- i. **Identification of a promising practice:** in order to promote the best practice in physical and health education, a strategy or practice that has emerged as being promising and having a long-term sustainable impact within the institution must first be identified.
- ii. **Field-Test best practices:** following the identification of the promising practices, the result of the identified practice, strategy or activity should be demonstrated to have previously been successful and this must be supported subjectively or objectively through data analysis to a certain extent.
- iii. **Research-Validated practice:** finally, validation of the practices using various measures is necessary. This validation includes; demonstrating positive results, confirming the result through the use of an experimental or quasi-experimental design, publishing the result in a professional journal, and creating quality resources and procedures.

The need to identify and validate best field practices have been pointed out in the literatures as research gaps existing between field practices and practices in the laboratory (Chin & Edington, 2014). This research gap has created a disconnect which negatively influenced the physical and health education teachers' preparation plus the availability of better forms of physical and health education pedagogy (Burgeson, Wechsler, Brener, Young, & Spain, 2001). Hence, it is important to combine practice and theory to reveal the best physical and health education practices to advance effectively in this information age.

This gap between the theory and practice has a significant effect on the physical education teachers (Korthagen, 2001). Korthagen (2001) noted that there is fairness in the consideration of abstract knowledge as having greater importance and recognition than the skills and information demonstration, in particularly when outstanding performance is being reflected on. Students are expected to first gain theoretical perspective and then followed by the application of the theories gained in the classroom setting. Nevertheless, a substitute for this practice must be sought.

On the argument whether practices in physical and health education should come before theoretical knowledge, Korthagen and Kessels (1999) proposed that the theoretical information was separated from connecting to the practices by the "*technical-rational model*" of teachers. Moreover, practices within theory should be more integrated into the model of teachers' education. This is revealed in a top-down standards and guidelines which most times is not responsible for the stimulating improvements that

occurs at the domestic levels. A framework for developing standards should therefore be provided by such models of best practices. Many a times, actual practices are found missing in the standards and guidelines developed by experts and which has been successfully covered up by the implementation of best practices in physical and health education.

Prospects of Modern Technology in Physical and Health Teaching Pedagogy

Children born in this millennium are regarded as the “iGeneration” (Rosen, 2011). These children have access to different forms of technological gadgets that were not in existence in the past two decades. Their lives are entangled with cellular phones with data and/or wireless high speed internet connections, texting or video games consoles (Mears, 2012). Many of these individuals know the technology interfaces too well and uses it on a regular basis. This dramatic change implies that children and youth are self-evident in all areas of learning (Chin & Edginton, 2014).

Different applications are available in physical and health education pedagogy and can be used within school settings to enrich and offer physical and health education curricular to offer school curricular. These technologies used in offering physical and fitness activities can be easily availed and accessed. However, teachers and students competencies and practices are required to utilize these applications. Students' demonstrations of competence in basic motor skills are required to use the technology and such technology will encourage the learning in a student-centered self-directed style. Thus, a greater skill in time management is required to appropriately enhance time to complete tasks. A contemporary knowledge of technology-based instructional strategies is as well required of the teachers. Furthermore, an awareness of the teaching strategy that allows teaching at anytime, anywhere and embed the application of technologies are required by the teachers (Herring, et al., 2012).

The following important consideration developed by Sanders and Witherspoon (2012) are hereby recommended for adoption in Iraqi education sector in order to use technology in physical and health education in classes:

- i. Funding must be considered as it is challenging to use technology in physical and health education.
- ii. Professional development capabilities must be considered as important in training physical educators to use technology.
- iii. Classroom technology that includes budget for physical education must be regarded as a priority

- iv. Policy relating to age-appropriation and safety of the use of technology must be created in all setting for physical and health education and it must be given a consideration.
- v. Consideration must be given to consistent updating of facilities and which must be incorporated in the budget procedure.
- vi. The use of technology must be integrated into the university teacher preparation of physical and health education programs.
- vii. Consideration must be given to technology for use in the assessment process.
- viii. Information sharing with teachers, administrators, students and parents must be considered using technology.

A better way for teaching and learning among students have been promised by technology, hence physical and health instructors are tasked to be more apt in the technology-driven environment that provides better avenue to learners beyond the boundaries of the traditional classroom settings (Papastergiou, 2009).

Conclusion

Physical and health program is globally facing the challenge of providing a meaningful and relevant learning experience to youth and children. The ever changing nature of the entire world requires the need of a broader and international perspective of physical and health education pedagogy. Thus, indicating the need to learn from one another throughout the world. As a matter of fact, we live in a world where information exchange is highly instantaneous and thus sharing information is needed for best practices model.

As obesity and overweight issues have become an epidemic throughout the world and in Iraq particularly among the youth and children, there is a need of a strategy to prevent the escalation of this epidemic. Thus, including physical and health education programs in Iraqi education curriculum will promote a healthy living style throughout the children's life span and drastically reduce the incident of overweight and obesity among the youths and children.

There is a need to refocus the curriculum of school I order to promote the inclusion of physical and health education in the school curriculum to bridge the link the school programs and the resources of the community. This will complement the physical and health activities of the school and the opportunities available to youths and children in the community.

The role played by technology in shaping the future of physical and health curriculum cannot be underestimated. It provides a more engaging, dynamic and

meaningful learning environment for students and provides teachers with the new ways of teaching physical and health activities. In addition, opportunities for sharing, measuring and monitoring physical and health education gained by individuals can also be monitored through technologies.

Numerous opportunities and challenges are provided in this 21st century therefore, it will be necessary to be connected to others all over the world in order to develop and acquire new strategies, models, procedures and programs that can cater for the emerging needs. On several occasions, there requires a rethink if not reinvention of the physical and health education pedagogy. Exploring new and different models of best practice can serve as a starting point for the rejuvenation and renewal of physical and health education in Iraq and the entire world.

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