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Crisis Of Physical Education As A Subject Amidst Covid-19

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ABSTRACT

Physical education (PE) was one of the subjects most brutally impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused an incomparable disruption in education around the world. PE, which is stood on experiential and activity-based learning, faced many specific challenges in contrast to academic subjects that accustomed with the virtual classrooms. The health and overall improvement of students endured greatly as a result of school closings, sports competition cancellations, and controlled access to playgrounds and fitness centers.

Purpose: The aim of this study is to examine the physical education crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic, with highlighting the short-term difficulties, long-term effects, and new improvements. The analysis also emphasises how vital it is to defend physical education as a central component of holistic education in the context of international and Indian system of education. **Procedures:** Peer-reviewed literature, policy documents and institutional reports from UNESCO, WHO and national bodies were blended using a narrative review approach. The effects on physical fitness, skill development, psychological health, equity and adaptations like online and hybrid PE models were identified through a thematic analysis of the evidence. **Findings and Discussion:** The results demonstrate that students had superior rates of anxiety, obesity risk, and sedentary behavior and reduced social interaction. Virtual competitions, digital fitness applications, and online physical education classes presented some partial solutions, but they were incomplete by unequal access, lack of supplies and insufficient teacher preparation. Children with disabilities, girls and students from rural areas were among the groups that suffered most. The requirement of digital infrastructure, teacher capacity building and hybrid PE models was also emphasized by the crisis. **Conclusion:** physical education should not be analysed as an elective but rather as a fundamental part of an all-rounded education. Post-pandemic recovery calls for funding for digital platforms, teacher preparation, and long-term changes of governmental outlook. In addition to dropping the negative effects of the pandemic, strengthening PE is indispensable for forming future healthier societies for the generation next.

Keywords: Physical Education, COVID-19's Crisis, Hybrid Learning, Health

INTRODUCTION

Almost all the people consider that the COVID-19 pandemic is the most horrible worldwide health tragedy of the twenty-first century. Nearly every facet of human life experienced an unparalleled crisis in twenty-twenty when the COVID-nineteen pandemic broke out in late 2019 and rapidly spread around the entire world. Having catastrophic impacts on economies and health systems, it also drastically changed the nature of education. Physical education (PE) found it hard to adjust, whereas subjects like science, maths and the humanities were capable to maintain their activities through online platforms. The clarification is straight forward: digital instruction cannot be the replacement of physical education activities because it is experiential, embodied, and interactive, heavily depending on movement, participation and social interaction. Physical education required creativity, adaptability and resiliency to stay relevant for the duration of lockdowns and social distancing measures, in contrast to subjects that could move to online

platforms rather easily. In 2020, school closures disturbed almost 1.6 billion students globally (UNESCO, 2021). Physical education was either deprioritized or detached from curricula during this trouble in education because it was identified as less important than "academic" subjects. Yet this sidelining unnoticed the fact that physical education provides not only to physical fitness but also to mental health, social skills, teamwork, discipline, and holistic well-being factors that became even more critical during a pandemic marked by fear, isolation, and sedentary lifestyles. This article investigates the crisis of physical education as a subject amidst COVID-19 in a comprehensive manner. It looks at the immediate effects, health repercussions, equity concerns, perspectives from around the world and India, difficulties faced by educators and students, and possible future solutions.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

This study aims to (1) document and critically analyse how COVID-19 and associated school/college closures disrupted the delivery and outcomes of formal Physical Education (PE), (2) identify the primary health, pedagogical, and equity consequences for students and teacher-training programmes, and (3) evaluate adaptations (online PE, apps, virtual competitions) and recommend policy and practice steps to build resilient, inclusive PE for post-pandemic recovery. The paper considers both global evidence and the Indian context.

PROCEDURES OF THE STUDY:

The study combined policy analysis with a synthesis of critical and narrative literature. In addition to peer-reviewed journal articles and reviews on physical activity and COVID-19, it drew from international agency reports from UNESCO, UNICEF, and WHO. National programmes like the Fit India Movement were also looked at, along with current opinions and recommendations about physical education teacher preparation and classroom operations. These sources of factual data and reputable recommendations were combined to describe the difficulties physical education faced during the pandemic and to suggest workable solutions.

Approach: Comparing direct effects (loss of practical classes, cancelled competitions), indirect health outcomes (sedentary behaviour, mental-health effects), and adaptive practices (online classes, gamification), the author synthesised findings qualitatively. Where available, high-quality empirical studies and rapid reviews were used to substantiate claims.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS:

Physical Education before the Pandemic: An Overview:

Physical education has always been more than just exercise. It is a versatile educational element that supports human development on all aspects. Its center objectives consist of physical fitness improvement, motor skill improvement, enrichment of cognitive growth, encouragement of social interaction, nurturing of teamwork and the development of emotional regulation. These goals reflect the balance among the physical, mental and social aspects of health. It gives the accurate shape of the students into all-rounded development as an individual. In schools, physical education programmes usually functioned through planned classes, intramural and inter-school competitions and recreational activities that presented opportunities for movement, cooperation and friendly rivalry. Outside of the classroom, engaging in physical activity provided as a stage for social bonding and a way to reduce stress. With the training of coaches, physical trainers, and educators, physiologists, and sports scientists who would later on supply society by encouraging health, wellness, and athletic excellence, PE also take part in a professionalizing role at the higher education level. On a wider societal scale, sports and physical activity formed networks of social cohesion, pride, and identity. They brought communities together, offered opportunities for inclusion, and frequently reinforced cultural and national unity through combined participation or support for teams and athletes. Thus, physical education was never restricted to individual health alone—it carried educational, professional, cultural, and socio-political values.

On the other hand, the pandemic, at the same time, disturb each of these dimensions. The easy entrée to sports fields, playgrounds, gyms, and group activities which were once established as commonplace and taken for granted unexpectedly disappeared over night. The planned setting for physical activity was

removed when schools had to close. All types of competitions and tournaments—from amateur to professional—were cancelled, abolishing not only the opportunity for physical interaction but also the sense of inspiration. Lockdowns even restricted unofficial recreational play in communities, depriving both adults and children of chances to attach with others and discharge physical energy.

The Nature of Physical Education and Its Vulnerability:

Physical education revolves around active participation in sports, games, fitness training, and leisure time activities. The purposes of physical education are to enhance motor skills, teamwork, discipline, physical fitness and general wellness. Social distancing protocols, however, stop meetings, team sports, and group activities for the period of the pandemic. Access to necessary facilities was obstructed by the shutting down of playgrounds and institutions. The practical components of physical education were given less importance by the digital shift, which placed the importance on sedentary learning. Physical education was therefore left vulnerable because it could not be sufficiently replicated in a virtual mode, while other academic subjects could adjust on online teaching. The move to distance learning decreased children's physical activity, mounting sedentary behaviour. Worry about obesity, destabilized immunity, and reduced mental health outcome from the enlarged screen time and a dropped outdoor play opportunities. Students in rural areas who have not proper technological advantage, they cannot use the online recourses properly. Many pupils become unsuccessful to follow even the majority of basic guidelines for keeping on active at home. Usually, performance, involvement and skill observation are used to assess physical education. Online teaching reduced the academic weightage of the subject by making fair evaluation challenging. Students faced stress, anxiety and depression as a result of their segregation and lack of physical activities. At the time of crisis, core academic subjects like mathematics and science got priority in online teaching, whereas PE was often sidelined or measured "non-essential." This decreased its importance in formal education.

The Impact of School and College Closures:

While schools and colleges shut down, physical education classes were either fully suspended or replaced with token homework. For this reason, millions of students missing planned physical activity from their every day routine. Yearly sports meets, college tournaments, district, state championships and also international events (like **Tokyo 2020 Olympics**) were postponed or cancelled. Students who rely on these events for scholarships, recognition or career opportunities meet sudden massive setbacks. PE classes are vital for motor skills, hand-eye coordination, reflex training and tactical understanding in sports. Universities offering B.P.Ed., M.P.Ed., and diploma courses in physical education featured brutal disruption. Practical classes, internships and fieldwork—all indispensable for training—could not be carried out effectively in online. Months of immobility and lack of organized practice led to skill declining among students. Younger students, who depend heavily on play for holistic progress, faced stunted growth in motor skills and cognitive-physical combination. Students in rural areas or poor families miss access to physical education classes more or less entirely. Gender differences widened, as girls faced more limitations in engaging with outdoor or digital activities. Children with disabilities were excessively affected, as their adapted physical education programmes were undecided.

Psychological and Physical Health Consequences:

Serious health consequences upshot from the lack of planned physical activity. An enlarged sedentary behaviour brought an opportunity to students to spend a lot of time before screen. Poor diet and inactivity increased obesity during lockdown. It also reduced muscular strength, flexibility and cardiovascular fitness. The covid diminished self-discipline and motivation. Escalating susceptibility to diseases other than COVID-19 was a common occurrence. Depression and anxiety brought on by isolation and a lack of leisure time activities. Joy, creativity and emotional control were all disappeared when planned activities was lost. Social skills decreased as a result of less peer communication during sporting events and games. Communication, teamwork and leadership abilities that are normally fostered through physical activities were gradually weakening. Children had fewer probabilities to form social bonds.

Shift to Online Physical Education: Opportunities and Limitations:

Teachers searched for alternate ways to teach physical education after schools, colleges, and training facilities unexpectedly closed. The shift to online PE classes, which were carried out via Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, or by sharing recorded video lessons was one remarkable adaptation. They might be done in small spaces and needed little to no specific equipment. Yoga, aerobics, Zumba, dance fitness, Pilates and bodyweight exercises gained attraction and fame. Pedometers, smart watches, and heart-rate monitors were the devices that were helpful to the students and they were encouraged to use those wearable fitness trackers.). They encouraged using YouTube tutorials and mobile fitness gadget to monitor and control their own activity. Some institutions used activity streaks, online leader boards and step-count competitions to maintain engagement and motivation. This transformation to digital technology produced new opportunities. Beyond the regular PE activities, students could access a vast collection of fitness-related materials. A family-based initiative to fitness and health was run. As a result, parents become more implicated in their kids' schedules. Students are encouraged to take part in physical activity at their own pace. As a result, online physical education demonstrated the prospective of technology-enabled physical education as an additional tool for the future, yet though it did not entirely replace the in-person experience. Move to internet, while promising, also fetched to noteworthy limitations. Many homes not have the balls, mats, skipping ropes, or gym equipment necessary for usual physical education activities. As a result, the range and level of complexity of the exercises were inadequate. Small-space urban peoples found it hard to engage in movement-demanding physical activities like team sports or running activities. Possibly, the major obstacle was that many students from economically weaker section or rural backgrounds were not capable to take part in online sessions because they not have electricity or smartphones or laptops or dependable internet connectivity. There have a major chance to be accustomed to the unsafe techniques or improper postures lacking a physical education teacher present .it might also be the cause of injuries. Students' enthusiasm for more online physical activity time shrinkd due to their academic classes went on online. These limitations brought to light the systemic inequalities that manipulated students' capacity to uphold an active lifestyle during the pandemic. Students could enthusiastically take part in online physical education programmes if they had stable finances, helpful families, and adequate resources. They had access to suitable gadgets, internet connections and private workout areas. Children from disadvantaged communities, rural areas, and low-income family unit were unreasonably left out. Extra difficulties were commonly faced by girls because they were likely to help to the household work and this lead them leaving little time for exercise.

COVID-19: a crisis for all:

Institutions quickly changed to digital fitness resources in nations like the USA, UK and Australia. Some schools incorporated virtual fitness challenges, and national physical education associations presented online toolkits. The digital conversion was mainly challenging in places like Bangladesh, India and African countries owing to a lack of infrastructure. Students could not manage to pay for devices or data for virtual classes and many physical education teachers not have sufficient training in online pedagogy. The global paralysis of sports and physical education activities was identified by the rescheduling of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. A lot of physical educators faced decreasing their working hours, cut in their pay or even fired from their jobs as academic subjects were given priority in institutions. Teachers of physical education struggle to employ students since they have not experience with digital teaching methods. Teachers who were trying to adjust to a new teaching atmosphere faced the same feelings of anxiety, uncertainty and frustration as students. There were interruptions for more than 250 million students in india, and physical education was virtually ignored by the most of the institutions. In spite of the introduction of online learning, physical education was repeatedly overlooked. Digital campaigns were used by schemes such as the Fit India Movement to encourage exercise at home, but there was little involvement. Coaching programmes, internships and practical exams were interrupted for university students following degrees in physical education. Crisis for the COVID-19 in physical education is not only a short-term factor but also it has long-term consequences. It's possible that students, who compelled to miss one or two years of PE classes, will never be capable to build up the lost motor learning chances. Institutions run the risk of permanently thinning its significance by treating it as a secondary subject. Rising rates of childhood's obesity and mental health issues could create serious disputes to public health systems.

Coping Strategies:

Development of gamified fitness apps, Use of YouTube channels for guided PE lessons and Virtual sports competitions (e.g., step challenges, online yoga contests) may be some strategies to cope with such situation. Parents can be encouraged to take an active role in children's physical activities, turning family time into fitness sessions. Governments and institutions introduced guidelines for home-based PE. Some schools mandated daily exercise logs to ensure accountability. A blended approach combining online and offline methods are emerging as the future. For example, virtual lessons can be increase with outdoor activities in small and safe groups. Implementation of activity models can survive both online and physical engagement even during crises.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY:

Interruption of Practical Learning:

The review's conclusions reveal how the COVID-19 pandemic notably altered physical education's (PE) experiential factors. Students lost out on planned opportunities for physical activity, hands-on learning and organized training when schools, colleges and sports facilities postponed. Vital chances for involvement, skill development and motivation were missing when most important events like professional competitions, intercollegiate tournaments, and annual sports meets were stopped. Students of professional PE courses (B.P.Ed., M.P.Ed.) faced more obstacles in their fieldwork, internships and practical exams. Their curriculum could not be completed proficiently which led to turn down the motor skills. It led the career advancement of those students in jeopardy.

Physical and Mental Health Consequences:

The health and wellbeing of the students were also extensively affected by the covid attack. Long-term confinement in house and too much screen time led to a rapid rise in sedentary behaviour. This behaviour increased the threat of obesity, damaging immunity, reduced cardiovascular fitness and musculoskeletal strength. Children and adolescents who took part in sports, they now in this changing situation, faced high levels of anxiety, stress and depression due to the lack of organized play and social communication. PE's usual role in encouraging holistic growth was weakening. The opportunities for teamwork and peer partnership were in question and it led to demolish social communication and leadership skills.

Equity and Access Issues:

Due to a lack of smartphones, internet and a appropriate exercise area, students from rural areas and those from lower-income family groups were excessively excluded. The gap between the sexes developed as girls were repeatedly prohibited from engaging in digital or outdoor activities. The children with disabilities were deprived of admission to particularly physical education exercise. These inequalities built up long-term drawbacks in health, confidence and skill development.

Limitations of Online Transition:

There were remarkable drawbacks to the digital conversion. The variety and intensity of activities were incomplete because many students lacked of safe places to exercise or equipment. Inadequate teacher supervision frequently resulted in improper posture or risky exercise methods, which raised the possibility of accidents. Furthermore, it was challenging to fairly assess motor skills in an online setting, and the majority of physical education teachers were ill-prepared for digital pedagogy. Students' desire to participate in more online physical education classes was further diminished by extended exposure to academic online courses.

Overall, the study shows that the pandemic has long-term effects on physical education in addition to causing immediate setbacks. It's possible that students who missed one to two years of organised physical education programmes won't ever fully regain the necessary motor learning opportunities. The crisis also pointed to the urgent need for hybrid PE models, recognition of physical education as a main subject, investments in digital infrastructure and teacher preparation.

CONCLUSION:

The vulnerability of physical education systems around the world was made clear by the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to its essentially physical and interactive nature, physical education (PE) struggled while academic subjects found refuge in online modes. As the teachers faced both personal and professional challenges, students missed the chances for skill development, mental health and physical fitness. On the other hand, the crisis also encouraged innovation, convincing teachers to invent hybrid models, digital solutions and family-friendly activities. The lesson is clear: PE needs to be given priority to survive in upcoming urgent situation. It is about the overall progress of people and societies, not just about games or sports. Spending on physical education now can help generate healthier generations who will handle all the challenges of life.

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