

The Importance of Physical Education in Elementary Schools for Child Development: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Physical education has a strategic role in supporting the holistic development of elementary school children, covering physical, cognitive, social, and emotional aspects. This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method to analyze the importance of physical education at the elementary school level. Data were obtained from various scientific sources such as journals, academic books, and reports from relevant international organizations. The results of the study indicate that physical education contributes to improving basic motor skills, physical fitness, concentration skills, and character building of children through values such as sportsmanship, cooperation, and responsibility. However, the implementation of physical education still faces various obstacles such as minimal time allocation, limited facilities, and low priority in the curriculum. Therefore, it is necessary to rearrange education policies so that physical education gets an equal position with other subjects. Physical education is not only a means of recreation, but also an important part of the national education process. By strengthening the role of physical education, it is hoped that a generation will be created that is physically healthy, mentally tough, and adaptive to the development of the times.

Keywords :Children, Curriculum, Physical Education

Introduction

Physical education plays a central role in supporting the development of elementary school children, which is a critical period in physical and mental growth. At this stage, children are experiencing rapid development in motor, cognitive, emotional, and social aspects. Physical education is a means to stimulate movement coordination, balance, and gross motor skills that are essential in this stage of development. According to Gallahue and Ozmun (2006), children's involvement in physical activities from an early age will form the foundation of basic movement skills that are important for subsequent development. In addition, the approach to learning through direct experience in physical education is in line with Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which states that elementary school children learn most effectively through concrete activities.

On the other hand, the development of the era marked by the dominance of digital technology also affects children's activity patterns, which tend to be more passive and less physically active. Children spend more time in front of the screen than playing actively outdoors, which results in an increased risk of obesity, decreased fitness, and impaired motor development. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) recommends that children do at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day, but many school-age children do not meet this standard. In this context, physical education in schools is the only structured forum that ensures children get enough physical activity. Pate et al. (2006) also emphasized that quality physical education can make a significant contribution to children's total physical activity every day.

More than just physical activity, physical education also serves as a vehicle for character building and social skills. Through sports activities, group games, and group exercises, children learn the importance of cooperation, sportsmanship, compliance with rules, and the ability to manage emotions in winning and losing situations. Physical education provides space for children to develop social skills such as empathy, communication, and leadership. Hellison (2011) stated that physical education can be an effective medium in teaching personal and social responsibility to children, which will later be useful in community life. Therefore, physical education not only contributes to physical and health aspects, but also to the formation of a strong and adaptive personality.

Unfortunately, in educational practices in Indonesia, physical education is still often viewed as a complementary subject, not as an integral part of the curriculum. The lack of time allocation, lack of supporting facilities, and uneven attention are the main challenges in the implementation of optimal physical education. In fact, the literature shows that physical education also has a positive impact on students' cognitive abilities and academic achievement. Bailey et al. (2009) emphasized that involvement in quality physical education can improve students' concentration and motivation to learn in class. Therefore, there needs to be a change in perspective from policy makers and education practitioners to place physical education as an important element in achieving holistic basic education goals.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method that aims to analyze in depth the importance of physical education in elementary schools for children's development from various aspects, such as physical, cognitive, social, and emotional. This method was chosen because it is relevant to explore and understand theoretical concepts and previous research results that discuss the topic of physical education and child development comprehensively.

The data sources used in this study come from various scientific publications, including journal articles, academic books, reports from international organizations such as WHO and UNESCO, and national education policy documents. The inclusion criteria for literature sources in this study are: (1) scientific publications relevant to the theme of physical education and the development of elementary school children, (2) published within the last 10 years to ensure the actuality of the information, and (3) have clear academic credibility, such as coming from reputable journals or official institutions.

The data collection technique was carried out by systematic review of the available literature, using keywords such as physical education, child development, elementary school, motor skills, and holistic education. The data collected were then analyzed using thematic analysis, namely by identifying the main themes related to the role of physical education in supporting child development. This process involves the stages of reading, grouping information, comparing research results, and compiling a critical synthesis of findings.

The results of this literature study are expected to provide a strong conceptual and theoretical picture of the urgency of physical education at the elementary school level. In addition, this study also aims to contribute ideas for policy makers, education practitioners, and other researchers in developing a more effective and integrated curriculum and implementation strategy for physical education in the elementary education system.

Results and Discussion

Physical education in elementary schools plays a crucial role in supporting the overall development process of children. Elementary school-aged children are at a very rapid stage of physical and motor development, where the nervous system, muscles, and body coordination develop significantly. Structured physical education helps stimulate gross motor development through activities such as running, jumping, throwing, and catching. According to Gallahue and Ozmun (2006), basic motor skills formed during this period become the foundation for more complex motor skills in adolescence and adulthood. Without adequate movement stimulation, children are at risk of experiencing delays in physical development and motor balance.

Not only does it function as a means of developing motor skills, physical education also plays a role in strengthening the immune system and physical fitness of children. Routine physical activity has been shown to increase endurance, heart and lung function, and maintain ideal body weight. WHO (2020) recommends that children should do moderate to vigorous physical activity for at least 60 minutes per day. However, the reality in the field shows that many elementary school-aged children do not reach this figure due to minimal playtime and lack of physical education hours at school. Therefore, the implementation of systematically scheduled physical education in

elementary schools is a strategic solution to overcome the trend of decreasing physical activity in children.

Furthermore, physical education also has a major contribution to cognitive development. Several studies have shown that children who are physically active have better attention and concentration abilities in class than children who are passive. Bailey et al. (2009) in their research explained that physical activity carried out regularly can stimulate the brain's executive functions such as working memory, decision making, and impulse control. This shows that physical education does not interfere with academic learning time, but rather supports the improvement of student learning achievement. Integration between physical activity and classroom learning is now starting to be developed through approaches such as "active learning" and "movement-based learning".

Furthermore, physical education also helps shape character and social values in children. In activities such as team games, children learn about the importance of cooperation, communication, sportsmanship, and leadership. Children are also taught how to manage emotions when experiencing defeat or victory in a game, so that they can strengthen emotional resilience. Hellison (2011) in his approach to Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility emphasizes that physical education must be used as a learning space for personal and social responsibility, which is very important for the formation of children's personalities in the long term. Thus, physical education becomes a medium for character education that is applicable and contextual.

In a social context, physical education is also an important tool for building inclusion and diversity. In physical education classes, all children—both boys and girls, from all socio-economic backgrounds—have equal opportunities to participate. This creates an inclusive space that fosters tolerance and acceptance of differences. Physical education provides a space for children to get to know each other, work together, and build solidarity through healthy physical interactions. A study by Block (2007) showed that physical education has high potential in promoting social learning and reducing discriminatory behavior in elementary schools.

Unfortunately, in practice, physical education is still often considered as a complement compared to other academic subjects. Many schools allocate very little time for physical education lessons, and sometimes replace it with other class activities when there are school events. This shows the low priority of physical education in the curriculum system, even though its contribution to holistic education is very large. According to the UNESCO report (2015), countries with education systems that place physical education as an integral part of the curriculum tend to have higher child health indexes and lower obesity rates than countries that ignore it.

Other issues that affect the effectiveness of physical education are the quality of teaching and limited facilities. Many elementary schools, especially in remote or densely populated areas, do

not have sports fields or adequate equipment to support physical activities. In addition, some physical education teachers do not have the appropriate educational background, so the learning approach is less varied and not adjusted to the child's developmental stage. This is exacerbated by the high administrative burden, which makes it difficult for teachers to focus on designing innovative and enjoyable physical education learning.

Therefore, a paradigm shift is needed in viewing physical education as an important component in the elementary school curriculum. Physical education is not just a play activity or a stress reliever, but an integral part of the educational process that shapes children physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally. Literature studies from various sources show that investing in quality physical education can have a significant long-term impact on children's quality of life. Therefore, education policymakers need to ensure adequate structural support, including teacher training, provision of facilities, and integration of physical education into the national curriculum.

In conclusion, this literature study confirms that physical education in elementary schools has a strategic role in supporting children's holistic development. Through a systematic and evidence-based approach, physical education has been proven to improve physical fitness, cognitive intelligence, social skills, and character building. By strengthening the position of physical education in the elementary education system, we are not only creating a physically healthy generation, but also a mentally resilient generation that is adaptive to changing times.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the literature study that has been discussed, it can be concluded that physical education has an essential role in supporting the overall development of elementary school-aged children. Physical education not only has an impact on physical aspects such as physical fitness and motor development, but also contributes to children's cognitive, social, and emotional aspects. Physical activity has been shown to improve children's concentration in learning, memory skills, and mental health. Through games and sports, children also learn important values such as sportsmanship, cooperation, discipline, and social responsibility. In this context, physical education becomes a vehicle for character learning that is inseparable from national education goals. Unfortunately, the reality in the field shows that physical education still does not get the same attention as other academic subjects. The lack of time allocation, inadequate facilities, and varying teaching quality are the main challenges. Therefore, systematic efforts are needed from education policy makers to improve the quality and strategic position of physical education in elementary schools. This step can be started by providing teacher training, improving facilities and infrastructure, and integrating physical education into the curriculum as a whole. Thus, physical education will become an integral part of the education process that forms a healthy, intelligent,

and characterful generation. The results of this study also serve as a starting point for further research that can explore the implementation of physical education in the local context in more depth. Through a comprehensive literature approach, collective awareness of the urgency of physical education in elementary schools is expected to continue to grow and strengthen.

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