

Sport As A Means Of Preventing Conflicts In Institutions Of Higher Learning

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Abstract

Conflicts in Institutions of Higher Learning have been a disturbing phenomenon for many years. Colleges and Universities in many parts of East Africa have experienced problems associated with student riots and demonstration.

Conflicts are known not only to be expensive to institutions of learning in terms of time, money and inconvenience, but also to the learners, sponsors and other stakeholders in education. A lot of effort has been put in place to eradicate this menace in the education sector, yet student unrest continues to be on the rise. More concerted effort needs to be put in place to eradicate this problem.

Sport has certain unique values that can help learners enjoy their leisure time. Sport is a human activity that involves specific administrative organisation and a historical background of rules, which define the objective and limit the pattern of human behaviour. It involves competition or challenge and a definite outcome primarily determined by physical skill. Through participation in sports; students release emotions, experience success, socialize, control behaviour and affirm identity. Therefore if institutions of learning took sport seriously, putting rules and regulations to ensure that all students engaged in sport as an agent for change and development, cases of student riots and demonstrations might be controlled.

Introduction

Sport has become one of the most popular activities of Man in the Modern World. It is appreciated and embraced in almost every corner of the world. The benefits of sport are now widely understood and better recognized than ever before (Payne & Hahn, 2000). The gains enjoyed by communities that are actively involved in sporting activities are extremely immense. The physical and psycho-social benefits of sports can contribute significantly to harmony and order in any given community, including the various institutions of learning (Beashel & Taylor, 1992; Kraus, 1989).

Sports As A Tool For Preventing Conflict

Socialisation

Sport is widely acknowledged as a very important tool for bringing people together and according them opportunities to socialise (Beashel & Taylor, 1992). Since sport provides opportunities for group interaction, it is a crucial part of, and makes important contributions to society. Much social interaction occurs in sport, leading to social and racial integration, and the learning of acceptable ways of expressing aggression and avoiding antisocial behaviour. Through team games and other group activities, for instance, members of institutions of higher learning can socialize and act in unity, and develop friendly relations and respect for one another. Interaction through sport promotes understanding between an individual and the rest of the group as well as the wider community. As such, they can make an important contribution towards social efficiency and develop secure relationships.

Leadership Training

Participation in sport presents opportunities for leadership training and development (Jewett, 1974; Singer et al; 1970). There is evidence that physical prowess and athletic ability are often important factors in determining group leaders. Sports leaders such as team captains, assistant captains, umpires and referees develop a sense of responsibility and accountability. This way, they are better prepared to handle and manage cases of conflicts that may arise.

Physical Fitness

There is ample scientific evidence that sport and other organized forms of physical activities assist in enhancing physical fitness and health (Corbin & Lindsey, 1994; Siedentop, 1994). Physical activity enhances physical fitness qualities of flexibility, muscular strength endurance and cardiovascular efficiency. Sport and other physical activities also help in reducing risk factors in the development of coronary heart diseases (Jack et al; 1999; Heyward, 1991). Research has similarly illustrated the importance of exercise in the prevention and control of diabetes, osteoporosis, asthma, hypertension, anxiety and depression (Bruess & Richardson, 1989; Jackson et al; 1999).

The development of sporting environments in institutions of Higher learning is therefore a crucial measure in helping physically active learners enhance their health status. This in turn contributes to minimizing the number of problems and conflicts that are bound to arise relating to matters of medical care in the various institutions of Higher Learning.

Rules and regulations

Sporting activities are played according to stipulated rules and regulations (Frost et al; 1988). The main purpose of the rules and regulations for each sporting activity is to guide play and ensure fair play for competitors. By observing and keeping the rules and regulations of play, participants learn the virtues of obedience, tolerance and fairness. The inculcation of these virtues among students through the diverse sporting activities is a crucial step towards helping them avoid disobedience and rebellious tendencies, which would otherwise create misunderstanding and conflicts within an institution. Through observance of the rules and regulations of the various sporting activities, students also learn the need and importance of keeping the rules and regulations that govern their institutions of learning, thereby creating orderliness and tranquility.

Leisure time

Sport is also widely viewed as a crucial tool for keeping people occupied during their free time (Kraus, 1989). Idleness has often been cited as a factor that encourages people, young and old, to engage in socially undesirable behaviour and activities, thereby bringing them loggerheads with legal authorities (Lockhart et al; 1988). Sport, perceived as an important leisure and recreation activities should therefore be given a prominent place in the programs of institutions of learning.

Sportsmanship

Sporting activities encourage and develop the spirit of sportsmanship, which enables participants to understand the feelings and rights of others. Through sports, participants are presented with opportunities to learn how to win and lose gracefully; participants learn to tolerate and accept defeat without expressing hostility. This is useful to students in institutions of higher learning.

Catharsis

Institutions of learning exist for the express function of propagating knowledge. Most of the programs in the institutions are geared towards academic activities. Students therefore spend much of their time in classrooms, lecture halls, libraries and resource centres. This state of affairs can cause fatigue and tension which may be expressed through unnecessary aggression and violence (Siedentop, 1994). However, scientific findings have shown that participation in sport can offer freedom from tension, sense of security, peace of mind, diversion or conduit, thus providing relief for built-up tension and negative emotions.

Sublimation

Psychiatrists believe that Man has aggressive instincts or impulses that have to be expressed at one time or another. They argue that the best way to express the aggressive impulses is to sublimate them (divert by substituting something else) (Tutko et al, 1971). This can easily and safely be done in competitive sport in which aggressive feelings are expressed in socially acceptable ways.

Self image

The role of sports in enhancing self-image of each participant cannot be overlooked. Organized sporting activities that provide some measure of success and achievement for each participant helps concerned individuals develop some positive feelings about their personal worth and abilities (Daughtrey, 1969). Young people with positive feelings about themselves stand a better chance of tolerating difficult situations and striving to get over challenges that come their way on their own. In addition, an individual who holds him or herself in high esteem learns efficiently, does not distort reality but accepts him or herself and others.

Conclusion

In view of the benefits of sport for the active individual and the community, at large it is necessary to put in place strategies geared towards the popularisation and development of sporting activities. Institutions of Higher Learning, for instance, need to strengthen their sports programmes. Sports managers and technical personnel should be hired in sufficient numbers to plan and implement sports programmes in the various institutions. The need for a variety and adequate number of sports facilities, equipment and supplies should never be overlooked. Emphasis should be put not

only on competitive but also on recreational sports so that both the skilled and unskilled participants are catered for. Sports programmes should accommodate all, irrespective of sex, age and skill level. Both intramural and extramural sporting activities should be included in sports programmes as a way of keeping participants busy within their institutions as well as exposing them to external challenges.

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