



Physical Education in Turkey

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Abstract

By the establishment of a special unit established within the Ministry of Education, called the “Maarif-i Umumiye Nezareti” [1] in 1871 and the reforms emerged in 1924 when the tasks of this special unit were taken by the Ministry of Education itself have triggered numerous variations on physical education teacher’s education.

In Turkey it has been possible to study physical education in order to give lessons at schools since 1915, yet only male students above 18 have been permitted to these studies [10].

Between 1908 and 1920 there was another reform of physical education and as a consequence of Selim Sirri Tarcanin’s efforts physical education at schools became much more important than before. In 1933 an institute for the education of physical education teachers was established at the college of education in Ankara, where female students were admitted access for the first time. Then, some additional sports academies were founded during the 1970’s and 1980’s. Between 1975–1976 the very first implementation of physical education in universities has been realized by Ege University through its Sports Academy. In 1982, physical education studies into the curriculum of common universities were reintegrated so that now there are 65 institutes for physical education at all of the country’s universities [4].

The candidates who want to study PE teacher’s education at universities are tested for specific criteria as their physical appearance and their basic skills in athletic games and gymnastics. If these students are accepted to this programme, they will be garanted a four-year bachelor degree including a schedule above 140 credits with the aim of being a physical education teacher [5].

Key words: physical education, Turkey.

Introduction

To contribute to a better understanding of the present situation of physical education in Turkey I will first give a brief overview on the history of the subject:

On April 29th 1871 there was a special unit established within the Ministry of Education, called the “Maarif-i Umumiye Nezareti”, which was responsible for the scholar system as well as teachers’ education. Yet when the Turkish Republic was founded on March 3rd, 1924, this special unit was abolished and its tasks were taken on by the Ministry of Education itself [4].

After primary school had been 5 years for a long time it has been extended to 8 years some time ago. This has also affected the curriculum as well as physical education teachers’ education.

In Turkey it has been possible to study physical education in order to give lessons at schools since 1915, yet only male students have been permitted to these studies. The education covered the theoretical questions of physical education, e.g. sports medicine, health education and didactics of sports, as well as the practical part. In the practical part students were trained in gymnastics, “small” and “big” games, throwing and swimming.

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first time. Some additional sports academies were founded during the 1970's and 1980's.

Yet in 1982 the decision was made to reintegrate physical education studies into the curriculum of common universities so that now there are 54 institutes for physical education at all of the country's universities [4].

The Impact of Politics on Physical Education

Physical education is a schedule course in primary, secondary, high levels and universities. The course is compulsory for primary school pupils and during the first high school years. For university students physical education is an elective subject which is rather recreation-oriented. There are approximately 12,000 physical education instructors across the country [2].

During the first three years at primary school physical education courses are to be held by class teachers according to educational principles. Due to a lack of properly educated physical education teachers class teachers maintain responsibility for the physical education for the following two years as well. Only at advanced and private schools, physical education instructors are employed at all levels [1].

Physical education lessons have become important with the foundation of the Turkish Republic and the unification of the educational system. However, schedules mainly contained lessons in gymnastics and folkloric dances.

Paying more and more attention to up-to-date standards of physical education, the activities started to vary from 1968 on. In 1987 a program admitting more freedom to the teacher and considering the development, participation, demands and characteristics of the individual was modelled. This program is still in use [7].

There is a particular institution within the Ministry of Education which is responsible for physical education courses and instructors. It is called "The Department for Physical Education for Schools, Sports and Scouting". This institution takes care of the problems of physical education instructors and provides continuing education. Furthermore it focuses on some projects aiming at the leisure and holidays of kids and young people. This institution has been cooperating with

universities to research and to organize scientific conferences.

The perspective of the Turkish government is not very different from the one of other countries' governments. In the present situation, physical education, music and art courses are not held at a satisfactory level [9]. Education policies change due to the changes of government. In periods of an active administration projects featuring activity and in periods of a passive administration passive projects do prevail.

Performance sports and physical education activities are in fact distinct. However, as most of the school teachers simultaneously work as trainers in sports clubs schools are the source of professional athletics. Yet there is still no cooperation between performance sports and education units.

In addition, the strong emphasis on scouting and ceremonies in Turkey should be mentioned. Thus one goal of physical education is to prepare special performances for April 23rd, the "holiday of the children", an May 19th, the "day of sports and youth" [8].

Obstacles to Qualified Physical Education

The main problem of physical education in Turkey is lacking or badly equipped facilities on the one hand along with the bad education of instructors on the other hand. Though the problems are more serious in rural areas they do exist in urban areas as well.

As a reason it can be put forward that already the institutes in charge of instructors' education are badly equipped so that they are not able to provide an appropriate education.

With 54 institutes at 65 universities offering a university degree at physical education there are 2,000 to 3,000 physical education teachers graduation every year of whom only about 200 can be employed due to the state's suffering from financial problems.

The problem of the extreme inequity of those graduating from university and those really finding a job could be solved if more lessons were given at schools. One possibility to achieve this might be to divide the classes for physical education. At the moment classes in Turkey have

a size making qualified sports didactics impossible, anyway.

To face the bad level of instructors' education the government offers continuing education seminars for teachers to improve the quality of physical education at schools which, of course, can only lead to a success if class size declines [1].

Problematic Legitimization of PE in Spite of a Wide Support

The separation of sexes is still obstructing physical education in practice as consequently teachers mustn't teach students of the opposite sex. Furthermore teachers are still facing problems concerning the girls' clothing.

The only material problem physical education has in Turkey is a financial one: Due to changes in administration the system of physical education has often been altered. Thus the number of lessons per week had recently declined to a very low amount. With the government having recently acknowledged the necessity of physical education, four lessons per week were scheduled. In fact there is a vast majority among the population supporting an extension of physical education but actually there is no money to realize such projects.

Physical Education at Different Levels of School

For a better understanding I will give a brief outline of the Turkish educational system.

Aged 3 to 6 years children go to kindergarten which is often a private institution. Afterwards there are 8 years of primary education (children of 7 to 14 years) leading up to 3 years of high school education. In case students wish to go on to university at the end of high school they have to pass an entrance examination as the university only have a limited capacity to accept students [5].

Physical education does already start in kindergarten, yet it is not taught by professional instructors. A sports lessons takes about 40 to 45 minutes.

At the high schools education is focused on the preparation of students for the entrance examination so that physical education is not made compulsory for high school students.

In general sports lessons are held by physical education teachers and they are seldom cancelled as even teachers of other subjects like physical instruction because they consider it an easy job.

Primary education

class 1–5: 2 hours compulsory

class 6–8: 1 hour compulsory

High school

class 1: 2 hours compulsory

class 2–3: 2 hours optional

First year of vocational schools

1 hour compulsory

Universities

3 hours optional.

Opinions on Diminishing Physical Education at Schools

There has been a study on this subject two years ago which has led us to the present situation. However, some studies could be made on the subject at any given time which is obvious if you look at the many alterations that have been made to the system of physical education in the past.

Yet I do not believe physical education courses to be cut in the near future because at present people are very conscious of the importance of this subject to motivate students to life-long physical exercise. Furthermore physical education is a way of physical compensation of the brain work done in other subjects. Finally these courses give students the opportunity to figure out which kind of sports they like most.

Thus for the reasons mentioned above I do not believe there will be less physical education lessons per week in the future.

Goals of Physical Education and How They Are Realized

The goals of the physical education course are clearly defined by the Ministry of Education and the committee of teaching and training. According to their guidelines, physical education is intended to improve the physical, social, emotional and psychological skills of the individual as well as students' endurance. Moreover their self-confidence is meant to be built up and they are to be taught at working in a

team. A further aim is to improve communication by teaching students the values of fairness and respect of the other.

Unfortunately, physical education courses are often misused. Some schools only intend to keep children busy in group activities to prepare performances for national ceremonies (like the 19th of May or the 23rd of April). Others put a focus on a soccer team of 11 kids and ignoring all the rest of the school kids.

Aiming at Several Fields of Life

For each type of school the curriculum does explicitly mention which exercises have to be done during the lessons. Teachers have to obey this curriculum and they have to meet stipulations concerning the amount of time scheduled for different exercises.

The goals of physical education courses are cited in the curriculum published by the Ministry of Education.

These goals may be subdivided into the groups of political ones, ones with a background of healthcare, ones aiming at the development of social skills and finally such ones intending to improve the development of students' personality.

Concerning the political issue physical education on the one hand physical education is supposed to clarify and explain the statements of Atatürk and scholars concerning sports and on the other hand it is meant to awaken patriotism by creating an enthusiasm about joining national activities.

As far as healthcare is concerned students are trained in first aid and they are told about the contribution of sports to health and leisure to provide an incentive for them to practise regularly. Furthermore there are some practical goals such as the improvement of the organic system's functionality and the interplay of nerves, muscles and joint systems. A good posture is another issue physical education puts a focus on.

In the social field students shall learn to respect values like cooperation, leadership responsibility and fairness. Moreover they are educated to act democratically, to protect public property and to cope with winning and losing.

Students' personality is referred to in physical education by building up their self-confidence and improving their ability to decide rapidly.

Finally, to counterbalance the rather serious goals mentioned so far, students are also introduced to rhythmically moving with music and they are taught to love nature and being in open field.

These goals are, briefly:

- to clarify and explain the sayings of Atatürk and scholars concerning sports,
- to improve the functions of the organic system,
- to develop the interplay of nerves, muscles and joint systems,
- to provide a good posture,
- to impart fundamental information on sports,
- to act according to music and rhythm,
- to create an enthusiasm about joining national activities,
- to know about the contribution of sports to health and leisure and to create an incentive for practising,
- to learn first aid,
- to love nature and use open field,
- to teach cooperation and leadership; to take responsibility and to accept duties; to build up self-confidence; to encourage rapid decisions; to play fair; to cope with winning and losing; to oppose cheating,
- to act democratically and to efficiently use and protect public property [2, 3].

How the Goals Are Enforced

In Turkey physical education courses are regularly monitored by state inspectors. They write a report on the quality of physical education in which they also make proposals how it might be improved. In some cases the teachers have to participate in continuing education seminars.

The Contents of Physical Education

There is a curriculum put up annually whose stipulations should be met in the courses. However, teachers have to consider the weather as well as the availability of equipment and facilities and then act accordingly. Furthermore the contents of physical education differ depending on the geographical setting of a school

(whether it is for example located on the sea or in the mountains).

For the two national holidays on April 23rd (holiday of the children, primary school) and on May 19th (festival of sports and youth, high school) students prepare special performances throughout the weeks preceding these events. Students' parents and some of their friends visit the schools on these days to have a look at the results of the students' practising.

Principle contents of physical education:

- track and field events,
- gymnastics,
- rhythmic moving (coordination exercises, folkloric dances),
- first aid and health information,
- games (basketball, soccer, handball, volleyball, badminton, chess, educational games),
- wrestling,
- folkloric dances,
- scouting,
- national ceremonial activities.

Positive Approaches to Physical Education

There have been positive and negative approaches to physical education.

Neither the political system nor the family structures have economically and emotionally contributed to extending physical education thought both are convinced of the necessity of physical education. There is no serious effort to remedy the lack of equipment and facilities and no one is about to seek a solution to the problem of a too little number of instructors. Any effort in these directions requires good will and money. Good will is present but money is not. And the willingness also declines with conservative governments ruling the country.

At present, many politicians take a positive point of view concerning physical education. So does the majority of the headmasters. Yet in the end the quality of physical education depends on the individual attitude of each headmaster. Although many of them seriously try to improve the conditions of physical education at their schools there is still a minority considering physical education to be of little importance.

Thus whether conditions are improved depends on the willingness of teachers, headmasters and not the least of administration itself to take the initiative.

Moreover regular physical exercise is not very wide-spread among society. The image of sports has only slowly but continually developed in recent years, especially due to successes in international contests e.g. in football, weightlifting, wrestling or taekwondo.

Equal Esteem of PE and Teachers in Comparison to other Subjects

Physical education is mostly considered similarly to painting and music courses. However, it usually has a higher value than these because every kid features the will and demand to move.

Another advantage is that physical education courses is a source of talented athletes for performance sports. However, the fact that no questions related to physical education finds its way into the university exam diminishes the incentive for families and students to get involved. Even if you ask the students mathematics, sciences and social sciences are considered to be more valuable for university education.

As far as the teachers are concerned they are absolutely equal to those of other subjects: they give the same number of lessons and receive an equivalent salary.

The Didactic Model of Physical Education

There one central institution called TKK which has developed a didactic concept in cooperation with the Ministry of Education of Sports. This concept is handed down to the schools to be carried out by the teachers.

Although it features a progressive approach to school programs and the education of instructors, application is dominated by "status quo" approach. As a consequence of the wide-spread military influence among Turkish population one focus of physical education is discipline which is counteracting the ministry's coeducational and rather liberal concept. Furthermore games and a playing kind of teaching sports prevail in the courses and

teachers concentrate on the mechanical issues of movement. Other aspects like intellectual and emotional progress or individual physical condition are not taken into account. That is why methods related to problem solving and discovery are rarely applied.

According to recent surveys teachers frequently use the command method [2].

Coeducation in Physical Education

In primary school (1st to 8th grade) boys and girls have joint physical education courses. After 8th grade they are separated for physical education. Usually girls are instructed by females and boys by male instructors.

To my knowledge there are presently no debates on the coeducational courses promoted by the ministry. But in fact teachers as well as their students would prefer separated physical education courses from 1st grade on.

Little Importance of Physical Education Grade in Practice

Performance in physical education courses is graded just as it is in all the other subjects, too. However, I have never heard of a case in which a student has not been moved up due to a bad physical education grade. In fact these grades are only given to maintain the students' motivation to participate in the courses. Thus physical education is assigned an equal level of importance in comparison to the other subjects.

In physical education courses teachers do regularly give a feedback to their students. As a consequence there is very often a very personal relationship between physical education teachers and their students so that these teachers are very often the favourite ones of a class.

Additional Elective Physical Education Courses

The Ministry of Education and Sports suggests offering additional sports courses at schools. These courses are offered by physical education instructors after the regular school time has ended or on weekends. For these courses teachers receive an additional payment by the government.

In addition to these possibilities some schools cooperate with sports clubs to offer extended training possibilities to particularly talented and motivated students. Thus physical education is connected to the field of performance sports [8].

Controversial Debates on the Rectification of PE

There have been fierce debates on the acceptance of physical education in the first years of the Republic. However, it has been put on the schedule from the beginning on. The most important argument supporters of physical education referred to was the Roman saying of "mens sana in corpore sano". In other words they were of the opinion that children had to take care of their health along with their mental capabilities. Thus they argued that children had to be given an incentive to physically exercise all their life. Another argument which was put forward in favour of physical education was the fact that it provides a platform to impart social values such as tolerance, respect and the ability to cooperate to the students.

In the first years, German gymnastics was predominant on the schedule followed by Swedish gymnastics. But from the 1930's on the variety of activities has increased. The first school to educate physical education teachers was founded in 1932. Before, the courses had been held by teachers who had received 3 to 6 months of additional instruction to enable them to teach physical education [5].

About Health Education in Physical Education

Although it would be justified to combine health and physical education as the two fields are closely related to each other, health education does not play an important role in physical education at present. In fact the curriculum requires teachers to do health education in their classes. However whether a teacher does what he is required to or not still heavily depends on his or her personal attitude towards health education. Thus some students do receive a health education whereas others do not.

Recently, frequent debates have arisen on the question whether healthcare should be

integrated into physical education courses or not, especially because obesity among students is a fast-growing problem. Thus a majority has realized the importance of health education in order to provide better information to students so that the spreading of obesity might be contained. In so far it seems to highly probable that health education will soon be a common thing also in the practice of physical education.

The Situation of Social Learning and Fair-Play

In cooperation with the National Olympic Committee a group of sports scientists has been set up publishing books on social learning in which such topics as fair-play and education by sports are treated. Furthermore the group works together with teachers of other subjects to make sure that social learning will not only become part of physical education but will also be implemented in other subjects.

Only a short time ago universities have added the fields of social learning and the sociology of sports to the education of physical education teachers, which has already had a positive impact on the quality of physical education courses.

How PE Should Be Improved in the Future

First of all, the physical, cognitive, emotional and social progress and socio-cultural characteristics of individuals should be analysed in detail and the targets should be reformed according to these analyses. Briefly one could say that a program should be developed which should be aimed at the personal requirements of the students and should no longer try to adjust students to the requirements of the curriculum.

Going more into detail there are many aspects sports teachers should change the most important of which might be that the military imprint of physical education courses should be abolished. Furthermore all students should be treated equally which means that teachers should no longer only care about the most talented students but they should also pay attention to the less talented ones.

The main objective of physical education is to improve the skills of the individual so that it is

essential for good education to pay attention to each student's individual talents during the courses and especially in times when performance is to be graded. Furthermore the contents of the courses should vary so that every student is in a way attracted by physical education and all talents are somehow referred to.

Student-oriented programs offer more room for pupils to play games or exercise on their own so that they get the opportunity to make individual experiences with sports.

These measures have to be put into practice by every teacher. They have to put themselves into second places and give their special attention to their students.

Precautions to Be Met in Order to Improve Public Acceptance

First and foremost it is important to involve the families into the concept of physical education so that they learn about the advantages sports in general and physical education in particular. This might be done by means of sports days or tournaments in which the whole family can participate. Extra course hours would be another possible way to increase family involvement into physical education.

Another problem is that presently universities do not ask any questions related to physical education in the entrance examination. In case they did so public attention for sports would rise and it would no longer be considered as unimportant as today. As I have already mentioned, above, there are no compulsory physical education courses at high schools simply because teachers, students and parents have the opinion that only what might be subject of the entrance examination is what really counts and everything else, such as sports, may and even should be neglected.

Furthermore the cooperation of different subjects should be improved so that education is no longer limited to only one subject but can overcome the classic borders between different subjects. In that way the students' knowledge would have a much wider and more solid basis. One means to achieve a better cooperation with subjects such as mathematics or social science would be to encourage the teacher of the latter

ones to choose their examples from the field of sports. Thus sports would receive a much greater importance in students' eyes as they would recognize its relevance for different fields of life.

Moreover, students should be taught facts and figures about their body and the organic system to convey a better imagination of the vital processes. In this context there should be efforts to make students understand that sports is not only important at school in order to get good grades but that it is also an essential part of every-day life. Teachers should actively encourage the integration of sports into every-day life.

Finally teachers have to take care they do not forget about the variety of sports. Even though football might be very popular in Turkey at the moment they must resist the temptation to only teach football. In such a situation it is still very important to realize the unabridged concept and to show the students the whole range of possibilities sports have to offer.

Summary and Personal Notes

At the moment the biggest problem of physical education in Turkey is money. No matter what project ideas are put forward, financial support is missing. Very often physical education at schools is hardly possible as they do neither

have enough equipment nor can they dispose of enough space.

Anyway the education of physical education teachers must experience an utter improvement. Administration has to make sure that no longer every university has the right to install an institute for the education of teachers in case it cannot prove their sufficient degree of expertise.

Another problem that I have already mentioned, above, is that classes are heavily oversized. Thus class size has to be reduced in order to improve the quality of physical education, in fact that of every kind of education.

At the moment improvements of physical education appear to be very close as these days there are a lot of sports scientist who are very committed on behalf of improvement.

The education of teachers is presently reformed and also the dialogue between scientists and has experienced an extension so that now a serious cooperation is likely to emerge.

However, physical education is a universal concept. Thus, the cooperation of the institutions in charge of the subject in different countries should be extended. Joint programs with supra national organizations would be very useful to support efforts at international cooperation.

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