

The knowledge of Lebanese physical education teachers on Olympism and the Olympic Values

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Abstract

This research was conducted as part of a master's degree thesis, with the aim to understand the knowledge of the Lebanese physical education teachers on Olympism and the Olympic Values. This qualitative research used an interpretive humanistic theoretical framework. The data was gathered through semi-structured interviews. The findings showed that the participants in their university studies have acquired general knowledge about the Ancient Olympic Games and the revival of the modern Olympic Games. However, very few heard of the term Olympism and were unable to define it or know what it embodies. This article suggests the establishment of an Olympism Education Curriculum and recommends the Lebanese Olympic Academy and the Lebanese Olympic Committee to collaborate with institutes and universities in order to implement this curriculum in the future.

Keywords

Olympism, Olympic Values, Olympic Education, Physical Education, Lebanese PE teachers

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Introduction and Purpose

As a small country with a multicultural environment, Lebanon encompasses different communities with different ethnicities and beliefs that live peacefully together. However, due to the diversity and the different political views in the country, conflict could be easily triggered. This implies the need for a values-based education in Lebanon with Olympism at the centre of it in the interest of promoting the Olympic Values.

Olympism, defined as a “philosophy of life”, seeks to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind and to promote a peaceful and better world, by educating the youth through sport, with mutual respect, mutual understanding and no discrimination of any kind (IOC, 2015, p.13). As Nelson Mandela said, “sport has the power to change the world; the power to inspire and unite people” (2000). Evidently, Olympism seeks to promote peaceful societies through sporting activities which would embrace the core Olympic Values of Excellence, Respect and Friendship.

Olympism has the potential to promote positive and moral means, if well applied in the schools of Lebanon. Additionally, one of the roles of the Lebanese Olympic Committee and Lebanese Olympic Academy is to promote Olympism by establishing Olympic Education (OE) and sports cultural programs and implement them in the physical education (PE) curriculum adapted in schools, institutes and universities of Lebanon. This could help better educate the younger generation and develop the moral character of each individual through sport and physical activity; Bring them together in peace, friendship and respect, disregarding their differences.

However, this is not the case and there has been no research conducted in this area to check what do PE teachers know about Olympism. The purpose of this article is to discuss the findings of the research question that guided this study:

- What do the Lebanese secondary physical education teachers know about Olympism and the Olympic Values?

Physical Education and Sports

Sport is best understood as a valued human practice (Arnold, 1996). Parry (1998, 2012a), recognized physical activities as opportunities for “the development and expression of valued

human excellences” (p.29). Plato, a great philosopher and education expert, believed that the purpose of physical exercise and education was to create perfect men; A perfect man in his opinion was the man who developed his body and mind, in a balance and harmonious way (Yalouris, 1991).

Thomas Arnold, a great sportsman in England understood the importance of sport in the parallel development of body and mind. Through his ideas, he was able to impact and modify Anglo-Saxon education and had a major role in the development of modern sport (Mzali, 1984; Seners, 2002). His philosophy was to make a change in his school’s environment through sport; A change of the moral thinking among the boys, to substitute the bad behaviours with good ones (Lucas, 1967).

Pierre de Coubertin’s devotion to the Hellenic trinity of body, mind and spirit, combined with the virtues of English sports education of Thomas Arnold and its values, created the reason for the foundation of his dream of worldwide amateur athletics (Lucas, 1967). His goal was to educate the youth of the world on values such as respect, fair play, peace and friendship, by bringing them from different countries, to participate in sporting competitions. His interest and effort in physical education pedagogy eventually led him to the creation of the philosophy of Olympism (Durantez, 1996).

Olympism

Olympism is a worldwide philosophy, developed by the reviver of the Olympic Games, baron Pierre de Coubertin, who considered Olympism as a school of mutual respect for athletes and nations, and a factor of peace (Boulongne, 1993). “By blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.” (IOC, 2015, p.13). It is a culture, that comprises factors of humanism and civilization (Culpan, 2001, 2008; Mzali, 1984). This philosophy transmits cultural concepts and beliefs such as the Olympic values of friendship, equality, excellence, respect, mutual understanding, solidarity and it is applicable to everyone, nevertheless of country, gender, race, social class, religion or belief (Boulongne, 1993; Parry, 1988, 2006).

De Coubertin, in his 1935 article ‘The Philosophic Foundation of Modern Olympism’, stated the fundamental features of Olympism.

One of these features is: A religion of sport, 'Religio Athletae'. Olympism was viewed by Coubertin as a universal religion, a cult of beauty and a tool for world peace but Parry (2007) clarifies that Coubertin's 'Religio Athletae' does not deliberately define sport as a modern religion, but rather symbolizes the moral values, principles and virtue of sport, practiced and pursued by athletes.

However, like any other great movement, Olympism has been criticized, especially at the Olympic Games which are meant to be the exemplification of it, as a devious ideology that seeks power, profit and prestige (Arnold, 1996). It is claimed that taking part in the Olympic Games may be educational and beneficial, yet, it may also be pathological (Kidd, 1996). For many, today, sport is reduced to a huge show business; Competitions, tournaments and matches are easily commercialized, or used for propaganda, embezzlement and consumerism (Lenskyj, 2004, 2012; Mzali, 1984). The Olympic Games are being considered as an "outlet for exploiting athletes", to provide two weeks of exciting TV programs, and to boost the sales of the TOP sponsors of the IOC (Lenskyj, 2012, p.319). Rather than focusing on mutual understanding and respect, athletes' main interest nowadays is winning by all means. Kidd (1996) believes that the advertising of comradeship during the Olympic Games is shallow and claims that the Games "encourages enmity, not friendship" (p.85).

However, the pursuit of excellence and win at any cost are two different philosophies. Such athletes who abuse sport because of some prodigious desire for glory, should not be confused with the ideals of Olympism and its values (Arnold, 1996). Olympism is considered as a philosophical if not a religious commitment to the pursuit of excellence "in a chivalrous manner" (Clarke, 1988, p.99).

Scholars (Kidd, 1996; Naul, 2008; Parry, 2007) support the educational worth of Olympism, however, Binder (2001,2005) and Naul (2008) suggest that there are numerous and questioned models of Olympic education around the world.

Naul (2008) described different worldwide approaches to Olympic education initiatives: the "knowledge-oriented" approach, which seeks to explain the Olympic idea by transferring knowledge, facts and figures of its historical and educational legacy, through textbooks; The "experience-oriented" approach, which emphasizes on the participation of children in sporting activities and competitions, with the objective of promoting mutual respect,

fair play and mutual understanding; The “physical achievement-oriented” approach, which stresses on Olympic education as part of physical education, and that through intense physical effort, oneself will develop desirable social behaviours and moral values; The “lifeworld” oriented approach, which was formulated by Deanna Binder (2000), associates the Olympic principles and ideals to the youth’s own social experiences in sport, and all aspects of their daily lives.

Additionally, the IOC had multiple attempts in order to promote Olympic Education and Olympic pedagogy, be it through the International Olympic Academy as a main academic centre for Olympic studies and Olympic education; The Olympic Education Commission of the IOC which focuses on the promotion of Olympic education as Values education; The Olympic Values Education Program (OVEP); and the Culture and Education Program which offers the participants during the Youth Olympic Games the opportunity to understand the true meaning of Olympism and the Olympic values (IOC, 2009).

However, Olympic education programmes are often offered in a passive and expository manner, when the aim is simply the transmission of Olympic knowledge, facts and figures, rather than the development of children’s physical, moral and intellectual ability through active participation in physical education and sport (Culpan, 2008, 2011; Kidd, 1996; Lenskjy, 2004; Naul 2008). These programmes lack the systemisation of Olympism within any coherent pedagogy (Binder, 2005; Culpan, 2011; Kidd, 1996; Naul, 2008) and seem to indorse the Olympic ideal as “an unproblematic good” (Culpan & Wigmore, 2010, p.70).

The principles of Olympism should be passed to the students not just as historical stories, but rather as living ideas that aims to the cultivation of moral characters (Parry, 2012a). Culpan (2015) stresses that there is a need for educational programmes that concentrate on Olympism and its values and not on promoting a “one-size-fits-all Olympic education agenda” (Culpan & McBain, 2012; Culpan & Wigmore, 2010). Culpan and Moon (2009) defined Olympism education as “a culturally relevant experiential process of learning an integrated set of life principles through the practice of sport” (p.1).

Scholars support the suggestion that Olympic education needs to be re-conceptualised as Olympism education and distinguished from the insignificant pedagogical worth of OE (Culpan &

McBain, 2012; Culpan & Wigmore, 2010). Olympism education should have more importance on the philosophy of practice of Olympism through physical education and sport, to develop individual's characters into becoming virtuous citizens, which will contribute to making the world a peaceful and better place. (Culpan, 2015; Culpan & Wigmore, 2010).

The philosophy of Olympism has always been suggested to be an effective educational tool, through physical education and physical activity, a way to build a peaceful and better world through sport (Arnold, 1996; Culpan, 2015).

Scholars, (Arnold, 1996; Culpan, 2008, 2011; Mzali, 1984) suggest that Olympism is a rightful and legitimate part of PE and that through physical education and sport education in schools, Olympism is best promoted. However, this implies that Olympism must be connected to the curriculum and maintained by pedagogical considerations (Culpan, 2015).

According to Parry (2012a): "Olympism celebrates the values of humanism and the contribution of sport to the development and promotion of humanistic values" (p.30). He defines Olympism as an educational philosophy, that encourages the function of ethical sports in educational and social development, suggesting that the future of Physical Education lies in the philosophical anthropology of Olympism, which would provide the individuals with many human values and excellences (Parry, 2012a).

Culpan (2011), suggests that Olympism education within physical education would promote the development of "physical, social, intellectual, moral and ethical values and skills" (p.40). Furthermore, he implies that the future of PE should rely on the philosophy of Olympism, focusing on the values associated with the Olympic ideal (Culpan, 2011).

Physical Education in Lebanon

It is difficult to establish a true status of teaching and developing physical education in Lebanon due to different factors: The lack of significance and academic research; The absence of facilities in public and even some private schools; The lack of equipment; The deficiency in materials; PE is considered as 'sport' to many, rather than an educational subject, disregarding its pedagogical and educational benefits.

In 1997, the decree number 10227 officially registered Physical education and sports as an official subject in the Lebanese curriculum (CRDP), making every school, whether public or private, obliged to provide students with two hours of PE per week. However, due to the lack of sports facilities in most schools, and particularly in public schools, principals do not feel obliged to impose PE in the curriculum of their schools. Additionally, PE is not part of the official examination for the obtaining of the Lebanese Baccalaureate and graduating from school, which is another reason for its absence (Nadim, 2013). It is important to mention the case of schools and institutions that follow the French Baccalaureate. In their case, physical education is mandatory and follows official examination in order to graduate.

The Lebanese PE curriculum developed in 1997 (cited in CRDP, 2017), contributes to the delivering of moral values through physical activity during PE classes at school; However, it is argued that the curriculum is only present on papers, not applicable in Lebanon. The curriculum is incompatible and doesn't fit the requirements of the Lebanese schools in general and the public schools in particular. This curriculum wasn't and would not be implemented because it lacks the facilities, the staff and above all, the mentality of the people and the leaders. As Arnold (1996) suggested, sport as an educational program should take place within the schools' curriculum as 'physical education', and be taught by professional educators rather than coaches and trainers.

Decisively, this study will examine the knowledge of the Lebanese Physical Education teachers on Olympism and the Olympic Values, thus increasing academic research in this field.

Methodology

Theoretical framework and paradigm

The research paradigm chosen for this thesis is the interpretive paradigm. The purpose of interpretative research is to understand people's experiences and views of the situation being studied from a subjective nature of knowledge (Creswell, 2014; Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012; Cohen, Manion & Morisson, 2007).

Furthermore, the theory of "humanism" will underline this study, given that Olympism is a humanistic philosophy and the Olympic Values, such as tolerance, fair play, respect for others,

multiculturalism, equality, friendship and non-discrimination are all consisted with the humanistic goals (Culpan, 2001; IOC, 2010; Muller, 2003; Parry, 2008).

Research design

Given the interpretive paradigm employed for this study and the nature of the research question, the 'case study' research design is considered the most suitable approach to be used. It provides a systematic method to collect information, evaluate data, report the results and consequently understand the specific studied case in great depth.

"It is a very useful design when exploring an area where little is known or where you want to have holistic understanding of the situation, phenomenon, episode, site, group or community" (Kumar, 2011, p.127). It provides a variety of participants perspectives.

Selection/Sampling

The population on which this research focused are Lebanese secondary PE teachers. Taking into consideration that the researcher can't gain information from the whole population, data was obtained from a smaller group representing the targeted population. This subset is the sample for this study. Generally, case studies include about four to five cases (Creswell, 2014). The sample size for this qualitative study is 6 secondary PE teachers, who graduated from the four different universities in Lebanon that graduate PE. The selection was made randomly and equally, a male and a female graduate from each university.

Data Collection

Qualitative interviewing is a flexible, useful and powerful data collection method for gathering in-depth information, where the researcher keeps a focus on what people make meaning of their experience (Creswell, 2014; Kumar, 2014). For this research, the semi-structured interview approach was used, allowing the collection of rich and descriptive data regarding the knowledge and the Lebanese PE teachers' understanding of Olympism and the Olympic Values. The semi-structured format ensured a relaxed and informal interview, allowing the participants to feel comfortable sharing their story. The participants were

purposefully selected, specific ethical considerations have been identified and ethical issues were adhered to, respecting the policy of the University of Peloponnese and the guidelines of the International Olympic Academy.

Data Analysis

The data gathered was analysed using a qualitative and descriptive approach: “thematic analysis”. Braun and Clarke (2006), provided a six-step process for identifying, analysing, and reporting qualitative data using thematic analysis: Familiarisation with the data; coding; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; writing up (producing the report). The six-step process enabled the following themes to emerge: Teachers’ understanding of Olympism; Teachers’ understanding of the Olympic Values; Teachers’ university studies.

Findings and Discussion

Teachers’ understanding of Olympism

When the participants were asked if they have heard of the term Olympism and what do they understand of it, the 6 participants were unfamiliar with the word and they related it to the Olympic Games. However, one of the participants tried differentiating Olympism from the Olympic Games, stating that Olympism could be the relation between the Olympics and the quality of life. Another stated that it means the values of sports related to the Olympic Games. The rest of the participants also tried to guess what it means and the majority of the participants related their answer to the Olympic Games and top-level athletes while describing the Olympic Games. The literature (Brownell & Parry ,2012; Mzalli, 1984, Parry, 1994; Parry, 2006) already mentions that when someone is asked about his understanding of Olympism, automatically the answer will be ‘Olympic Games’. The answers of the participants when they were asked about their understanding of Olympism proves it.

However, Olympism is not limited to the Olympic Games. Coubertin wanted the Olympic Games to be a way for spreading the sporting ideals and Olympic values, and not just merely being an athletic event. His vision was of education through sporting activities, which would enhance character development and promote peace and friendship for a better world (Kidd, 1996;

Mzali, 1984). Conversely, for many today, the Olympic Games is reduced to a huge show business; Competitions, tournaments and matches are easily commercialized (Lenskyj, 2004, 2012; Mzali, 1984). How could people differentiate the gigantism of the Olympic Games from the philosophy of Olympism? The answers shared by the participants regarding their understanding of Olympism seem to indicate that the majority do not know what it truly means. The understanding is of the Olympic Games and not Olympism. Olympism doesn't seem to be well promoted in Lebanon and the mere focus appears to be on the Olympic Games as a mega sporting event rather than an educational tool.

Teachers' understanding of the Olympic Values

When the teachers were asked about their understanding of the Olympic Values, they surprisingly stated that they are not familiar with this term and very few could understand the meaning of it. However, when asked about the values shared during PE and their importance, they acknowledged that the main purpose of physical education and sports is to develop the physical and moral character of every individual; developing the qualities of body and mind. Researchers (Austin & Brown, 1978; Talbot, 1997) claim that PE and sports could benefit the social development of the youth and people who practice sports tend to demonstrate values such as respect and sportsmanship.

Although Olympism is not taught in the schools, universities or institutions of Lebanon, the participants were able to recognise the similarity between the values shared in physical education and the values shared during the Olympic Games by the athletes (respect, fair play and peace for example). The same values that are considered educational. Thus, they were able to come up with an understanding for the Olympic values.

The majority of the participants related the importance of the Olympic values to the daily lives of people, acknowledging its significance on the development of the character of the youth, making the world a better and peaceful place. They also indicated that if the Olympic values were applied in the schools and during physical education classes, it could demonstrate how the Olympic athletes compete together in peace, respect and friendship, and eventually have a positive impact on the children's moral development.

Binder (2000, p.45) identified five Olympic values in her publication 'Be a Champion in Life!': Body, Mind and Spirit (Inspiring children to participate in physical activity); Fair Play (The spirit of sport in life and community); Multiculturalism (Learning to live with diversity); In pursuit of Excellence (developing the identity, self-confidence and self-respect); The Olympics Present and Past (Celebrating the Olympic spirit). Binder argues that Olympic education is better understood as an integrated 'lifeworld orientation', merging Olympic values and concepts in various and different subject areas (Armour, 2012). The author claims that by using Olympic values education, educators and coaches can help their students improve their moral behaviour.

The participants were able to identify some of these values without even understanding the term 'Olympic values'. This is due to the fact that the values physical education share complete the aim of Olympism.

The philosophy of Olympism has always been suggested to be an effective educational tool, through physical education and physical activity, a way to build a peaceful and better world through sport (Arnold, 1996; Culpan, 2015). Nevertheless, not everyone appears to practice the philosophy of Olympism through PE or sporting activities (Culpan & Wigmore, 2010).

Teachers' University Studies

The participants stated that during their university studies, they did not receive any formal teaching regarding Olympism and the Olympic values were never mentioned. Furthermore, the Olympics were discussed in the history of physical education courses but the focus was on knowledge and facts about the Games, rather than Olympism and its educational worth as a philosophy through the practice of sports. The majority of the participants identified that they learned more about the Olympic movement through informal sites such as social media due to the continuous effort of the IOC in promoting the Olympic values shared during the Olympic Games: Respect, Peace and Friendship. Others stated that they learned more about the Olympic Games through media due to their interest in some Olympic athletes and role models.

They agreed that neither the universities or any other institutions in Lebanon address Olympism openly and clearly. The Lebanese

Olympic Committee and the Lebanese Olympic Academy have done very little in the past to promote Olympism and the Olympic ideals in Lebanon (it is important to mention that this research was done in 2016 and the Lebanese Olympic Academy has done a lot of effort in promoting Olympism in Lebanon since). When they were shown the definition of Olympism, the participants expressed their interest in learning more about it and about the Olympic values and suggested that it should be part of the educational program in the universities.

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this article was to discuss the findings of the research, the knowledge of the Lebanese physical education teachers on Olympism and the Olympic Values. One of the main key findings of this study is that Lebanese physical education teachers are unfamiliar with the term Olympism. The participants were confused when asked about it and directly related it to the Olympic Games. Their knowledge about the Olympic Games comes from their university studies, where they took courses on the history of the ancient and modern Olympics. They also seem to be unfamiliar with the term 'Olympic Values' but are able to identify the values shared at the Olympic Games by high level athletes. These values are appreciated and are reckoned to be of great importance specially if shared through physical education. Recalling that the participants are physical education teachers, they already know the values shared through the practice of sports and during physical education courses, therefore they could relate the Olympic values to the values shared through physical education. It is important to note that some of the participants follow the Olympic Games through the media, however, they never heard of the term Olympism. The media seems to share the Olympic Games as a great spectacle and promote the performance of Olympic athletes. Coubertin wanted the Olympic Games to be a way for spreading the sporting ideals and Olympic values, and not just merely being an athletic event (Kidd, 1996; Mzali, 1984).

Additionally, the educational aim of Olympism does not seem to be part of the educational sector's curriculum. It is essential for the Lebanese PE teachers' education to develop understandings of Olympism, its purpose, and the Olympic Values it encompasses. Thus, it is suggested that an Olympism education course is necessary in the universities and institutes of

physical education and sports in Lebanon, where teachers and educators will acquire fundamental knowledge about Olympism and the Olympic Values, with the aim of developing an Olympic Education Curriculum based on the philosophy of Olympism in the near future. Through physical education, the philosophy of Olympism would flourish, because physical educators already appreciate the potential of physical education in promoting good behaviours and values which would benefit the individuals through their continuous lives.

Every four years, athletes from all over the world gather to compete in the biggest international sporting event, the Olympic Games. Taking into consideration that the athletes come from different backgrounds, cultures and traditions, they all compete under the same Olympic Values: Friendship, Respect and Excellence. If Olympism can accomplish all that on an international scale, and bring people together in peace, respect and friendship, how effective would it be on a local scale in a small country with different communities, ethnicities and beliefs such as Lebanon? If Olympism is well applied in the schools of Lebanon, it could help better educate the younger generation and develop the moral character of each individual through sport and physical activity, bring them together in peace, friendship and respect, disregarding their differences.

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