

## CREATING BETTER SPORTS SCHOOLS IN MALAYSIA: A CURRICULUM COMPARISON ANALYSIS

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*Sports play an important role in nation building and brings prestige and glory to the country (Azalina, 2006). In order to produce high performance, the athletes have to go through a proper sports development program and training. The performance of the athletes at junior level highly depends on the Sports School's comprehensive curriculum implementation. This analysis thus seeks to compare and evaluate the curriculum implemented by four different sports schools in Australia, Singapore, Scotland and United States to ascertain their suitability for implementation in our country. Comparison is also made on various aspects such as funding, teaching staff, facilities, partners and collaborations and many more in running a sports school. From the analysis, it is found that in some of the sports schools, the athletes are not only outstanding in their sports but also in their academic achievement as a result of good planning, clear school vision, mission, aims and the type of curriculum implemented.*

**Keywords:** Sport schools, sports development programme, curriculum comparison

In Malaysia, we have two sports schools but compared to other sports schools in the world, we are still left far behind in terms of innovative curriculum, lack of funding, inadequate infrastructure and facilities, insufficient human resources which is the teaching and coaching staff and many more. Sports schools not only emphasize sporting excellence but also on the continuous improvement of academic achievement. In this paper, we would like to suggest some improvements in the curriculum design and implementation to the Ministry of Education (MOE) with minor changes in content of the future curriculum in creating an excellent and successful sports school that would make our athletes shine in the eyes of the world.

### **Definitions and Concepts**

A curriculum is the cornerstone of a school's instructional program and reflects philosophical beliefs about what students need to know and be able to do, to succeed in high performance sports (National team) and advanced education, also in work and life later. Saedah Siraj (2001) defined curriculum as a design of an institution's (school) or country's plan that encompasses all planned programs carried out in school. The quality of a curriculum depends upon how well the contents are constructed and how well they blend into a coordinated, well designed and implemented comprehensive program. Implementation refers to what actually happens in practice as compared to what was supposed to happen. Curriculum implementation includes providing organized assistance to teaching staff in order to ensure that the newly developed curriculum and the most powerful instructional strategies are actually delivered at the classroom level. Sadly, this does not happen as planned and problems or failures are associated in this critical implementation stage due to inadequate infrastructure and

facilities, insufficient funding and human resources to run the program. Thus this situation prompted us to overcome these problems by looking at different sports schools' curriculum across the world for best practice by comparative analysis.

### **Research Questions**

Below are the few research questions to be answered:

1. What type of subjects are offered by the sports schools in these 4 selected countries?
2. To what extent is the sports school curriculum relevant in future to prepare athletes for working life?
3. What implementation strategies are being used in these 4 selected sports schools?
4. To what extent can these successful strategies be implemented in our sports schools?
5. What are the critical factors ensuring the successful curriculum implementation?

### **Research Methodology**

Our group was given the task to search the Internet on sports schools across the world and make a comparative analysis by focusing on their curriculum design and implementation and comparing with our current sports school in Malaysia. We managed to look into four suitable and famous sports schools which are as follows:

- i. National Sports Academy (NSA) at Lake Placid, New York, United States
- ii. Westfield's Sports High School (WSHS), New South Wales, Australia
- iii. Singapore Sports School (SSS), Woodlands, Singapore
- iv. Glasgow School of Sports (GSS), Scotland, United Kingdom

### **Results**

#### ***Sports School's Objectives***

Different sport schools have different vision, mission, motto and comprehensive curriculum to cater to the needs of student-athletes by providing academic and athletic programs as they prepare themselves for major competition, higher education and life. Generally sports schools have the common objectives as follows:

- i. To nurture that talent and provide the best opportunities to reach his or her fullest potential both in academics and sports.
- ii. To nurture and develop the future champions by continuing to work with key agencies.
- iii. To translate young people's sporting talent into medals at district, regional, national or international level

But, Singapore Sports School (SSS) places more emphasis on academic achievements as mentioned in their goals:

- i. To provide a top-notch education that will help pupils to fully develop their academic potential
- ii. To nurture our student's critical, creative and entrepreneurial abilities
- iii. To ignite their passion for learning and create independent and motivated learners through rigorous training of the intellect

- iv. To nurture talents in these eight areas: athletics, badminton, bowling, football, netball, sailing, swimming and table tennis.

Westfield's Sports High School (WSHS) demanded that .... "For all students, the achievement of their academic performance is the main objective". These traditions make WSHS excellent in all areas as summarized by Alan Jones of Radio 2GB Broadcaster on 5 July 2003:

Westfield's Sports is more than a Sports High School. Under the control of Phil Tucker, it's a school which dedicates itself to ensuring that kids, whatever their talent, are able to realize their potential. Their academic results are outstanding, their dance, their music fantastic, their sport unbelievable. It's the school that has produced Harry Kewell and the outstanding young John Thornell to name a few.

However, the Malaysian sports school's goals place more emphasis on sports achievement rather than academic achievement. Here, we believe we should look back and emulate WSHS and SSS's objectives if we are serious about becoming a world-class sports school; we have to take some serious steps to rectify it.

### ***School Curriculum***

The Singapore Sports School (SSS) has a similar structure as our Malaysian Sports School system. The SSS follows the same academic syllabus as the local mainstream schools, thus preparing its students for the O level examinations (equivalent to the SPM) at the end of four to five years. The School has implemented a modular system of education; online learning resources and lesson compact discs are provided for students to access when they are training or competing overseas.

Students also are given two hours of supervised study time every night for them to revise their weaker subjects and topics. In addition, there are development and enrichment programs for students to acquire entrepreneurship, cooking skills, leadership and public speaking skills, and appreciation of the arts, music and life sciences. Students will be taught weekly lessons on sports science so that they can apply its principles in training and competition.

- i. **Subjects Offered**

Lower Secondary level students study a total of 7 subjects: Language Arts, Mother Tongue / Higher Mother Tongue, Mathematics, Science, History, Geography and Arts Program.

At the Upper Secondary level, they are offered core Subjects and also Electives subjects: English Language, Mother Tongue / Higher Mother Tongue, Mathematics 'D', Combined Humanities, English Literature, Geography, History, Additional Mathematic, Biology, Chemistry and Physics

Comparing the subjects offered in the western world like from NSA of Lake Placid, WSHS of New South Wales and GSS of Scotland, it can be seen that they offer more choice with core and elective subjects to be chosen according to students' preferences and ability. For example at the NSA, the curriculum approach is student-centered where programs are built around students with varying athletic interests and academic pursuits. The expectation is that they will excel within the framework of their abilities with special curricula, small classes (an average of 8 students per class), with supportive and flexible teachers. Classroom teachers teach academics subject and athletic staff coach the athletes which offer students the opportunity to learn and train with adults who are excellent in their particular fields from skiing to Shakespeare. This atypical approach to boarding school education ensures that students receive a high level of instruction in the classroom, as well as in their individual sports. The NSA follows the same academic syllabus as the New York Association of Independent Schools and National Association of Independent Schools. The core subjects are English, Mathematic, Science, History, Earth Science (Geography), Foreign Language and Sports Science, while students are given more choices for elective courses such as health, cinematography, music, drama, arts, yoga

and so forth. However, WSHS is more impressive with the most comprehensive curriculum for their students as shown below:

ii. Courses in Years 7 – 10

In addition to English, Mathematics, Science, Geography, History and PD/H/PE the school offers courses in Accelerated English and Mathematics, Applied Sport, Commerce, Dance, Digital Media, Drama, Food Technology, Graphics Technology, Industrial Technology, Information and Software Technology, Italian, Japanese, Music, Physical Activity and Sport Studies, Spanish, Technology Mandatory, Textile Technology and Visual Arts.

iii. Courses in Years 11 – 12

Westfields Sports offers courses in Ancient and Modern History, Biology, Business Studies, Chemistry, Community & Family Studies, Dance, Design & Technology, Drama, Economics, Engineering Science, English (Standard, Advanced, Extension I & II), Food Technology, Geography, General Science, Hospitality, Information Processes & Technology, Industrial Technology (Furniture & Multi Media), Italian, Japanese, Legal Studies, Mathematics (Standard, Advanced, Extension I & II), Music, PD/H/PE, Physics, Photography, Retail Studies, Spanish, Sport, Life and Recreation, Textiles & Design, Visual Arts and an extensive range of vocational courses. Approximately 40% of Westfield's sports students go directly to university while a very high number enrolls in TAFE.

### ***Curriculum Implementation***

i. Teaching and Coaching Staff

This is the most important area and great emphasis was given by the school management to ensure the successful implementation of all program of any sports school. In SSS, on 14 February 2003, it launched its staff recruitment drive seeking key coaching and sports science staff for its eight sports academies which resulted in attracting some of the best and talented names in the local and international sporting scene. The same applied to GSS, NSA and WSHS; all have the same reputation of having the best teaching and coaching staff to deliver individualized programs to their students and achieving numerous outstanding results both in high performance sports and academic pursuits.

The best practice among these selected sports school was at NSA of Lake Placid with ratio of one teacher to six students and an average class size: 8 students! How can this be workable? Funding seems to be the key. Students at NSA have to pay USD 30,000 a year on tuition and other additional fees. So, with this funding NSA of Lake Placid runs its program just like any exclusive private school with best services that attract student-athletes from all over the world from as far as Japan.

ii. Time Table

The NSA, WSHS and GSS sports schools start their day at 6 am for breakfast before preparing for their first training session at 7.00 am until 11.00 am at their respective training facilities. Then ready for lunch from 11.45 am until 12.30 pm. Academic classes start at 1.00 pm until 6.15 pm. Dinner time is from 6.15-6.45 pm. All students are required to attend preparatory class from 8.00-9.15 pm. Lastly, the students still have their own private time before lights off at 11.00 pm. While in SSS, their day starts at 6 am when they prepare for their first training session. Then breakfast is at 8.30 am and by 9.00 am students are ready to attend modular lessons based on the curriculum taught in mainstream schools. Lunch is from 1.00-2.00 pm followed by enrichment programs, a nap, then a second training session at 4.00 pm. Dinner starts

at 7.00 pm followed by supervised study time for 2 hours before lights out at 10.30 pm. This routine is similar to that of the Malaysian Sports School.

#### *Time Table during Competition*

At NSA, travel is part of being an elite athlete. These offer creative opportunities for students to manage this challenge. From blocked scheduling, which allows students to complete a full year's study in three quarters the time, to winter travel curricula available to students in September, the school will support students in meeting their athletic goals with flexible structured academic programs to meet the varying demands of students when traveling for major competitions overseas. Extra help is given by coaches and tutors who regularly travel with the students within the United States as well as abroad. In fact some of the elite athletes will travel over three months during the competitive winter season. The NSA views this as a golden opportunity for the student-athletes to gain more experience and improve their performance rather than seeing it as a problem. The same applied to WSHS and GSS but are causing problems for Malaysian Sports School's students training overseas especially in China for a duration longer than 3 months.

#### **Recommendations**

Since we are not the experts in this area, this study is based on our findings and logical thinking. We would like to recommend some minor changes in the curriculum design and implementation process with reference to some of the best practice available. We also believe that some others factors are critical and need to be addressed to ensure the success of the Malaysian Sports Schools for the years to come especially for the proposed two new sports schools as mentioned in the Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006-2010 (2006, p. 480).

Based on the BJSS reports (Arena, 2007) the academic achievements of the students were just average; the school had only a few high achievers. This is due mainly to the admission of students which was based on sports results rather than strong academic background. To solve this problem we would like to recommend some practical solutions such as:

- i. We should learn from our neighbor's sports school. Singaporean representatives came in 2002 to learn from us and two years later in 2004 they built a far better Sports School. It is time to look back at SSS on their comprehensive curriculum and implementation. We recommend that our current curriculum be reviewed to prepare for the future needs of our student-athletes. The establishment of first MSS was BJSS in 1996 and their curriculum is still the same as that of the local mainstream schools based on "Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah" (KBSM) with more focus on academic performance and very limited elective subjects that suit or cater to the students' likes and abilities to build their sporting career. We should introduce new elective subjects to attract student interest in learning new skills such as development and enrichment program for students to acquire entrepreneurship, computer skills, ICT technical courses such as telephone or computer repair courses, cinematography, cooking and baking skills, leadership and public speaking skills, and appreciation of the arts, music and life sciences.

Also, an extensive range of vocational courses at upper secondary should be offered, such as Design & Technology, Basic Engineering Science, Food Technology, Hospitality, Information Processing & Technology, Industrial Technology (Furniture & Multi Media), Sport, Life and Recreation studies for students who are not academically inclined. This has proven a success story for Westfield's sports students where approximately 40% go directly to university while a very high number enrol in Technical College.

- iii. School administrators and teachers should advise their student-athletes to take minimum subjects suitable for their career and advanced education in college or university. The best career options for them are to become professional athletes, coaches, sports administrators, sports teachers and so forth. So, core subjects have to be relevant for them and more elective subjects need to be offered to suit to their abilities. The students also need to acquire practical skills in preparation for their future career.
- iv. Sports schools should employ top-notch teachers especially from Fully Residential Schools and "Subject Specialist Teacher" (guru pakar) and coaches with outstanding reputation. We should pay them accordingly and offer special allowances to attract them to join these prestigious Malaysian sports schools. By having the best teaching and coaching staff to deliver individualized programs to students we believe our students will achieve outstanding results both in high performance sports and the academic field.
- v. Employ more teachers and coaches with a ratio of 1 teacher to 15 students and classroom size of 20-25 students, not the present of 25-30 students in a class. A smaller class definitely will enhance the students' learning and make for more effective teaching. At the same time with more teachers available, it also means fewer teaching hours in school and time can be used to give special tuition class for weaker students especially night classes. Moreover specialist teachers can accompany the traveling team for competitions aboard as tutors to ensure the athletes' complete their academic tasks.
- vi. Introduce flexible curriculum and implement a modular system of education, where online learning resources and lesson compact discs are provided for students to access when they are training or competing overseas. E- Learning and teleconferencing is a must and need to be implemented soon.
- vii. Students should be taught weekly lessons on sports science so that they can apply the basic knowledge in sports nutrition, psychology, biomechanics, physical conditioning and its principles in training and competition, sports medicine on injuries and preventive measures; exercise physiology on how their body function and train to the optimum performance level. All this should start at lower secondary class in Form One, Two and Three rather than in Form Four and Five.
- viii. The examination timetable for the students should be flexible too, enabling them to prepare and participate in international competitions. In Malaysia, the Lower Secondary Assessment (PMR) and Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) examination which falls at the end of the year makes it difficult for the student-athletes to compete as they coincide with major international competitions.

### **Conclusion**

The sports school is unique and it is a right partnership blending academic achievements with athletics performance to world class level. Curriculum design and implementation play a major role in the structure of an educational system. With new development in sports science and the demands of modern sports, new job opportunities and careers in sports, changing environment in social, economic and political situations, we need to review the current curriculum to meet these future demands to prepare our student athletes to achieve greater heights. With our recommendations and together with other critical factors such as sound and strong financial assistance, world class human resources support team of teaching and coaching staff, professional administrators and management team, plus adequate and quality sporting facilities, it is really the best model for implementation in our future sports school. In conclusion, we can always have better sports school if our Ministry of Education could fine tune their planning and implementation of all policy related to making Malaysian Sports School achieve world class standard.

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