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Research Article

The Making of the Champions: A Case Study of the Development of The Young Aerobic Gymnasts in Malay Aklan

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ABSTRACT

The Philippines has the potential to excel in this field because an athlete's height is not a requirement compared to other sports like swimming, basketball, and the likes. This is qualitative research specifically employs a single case study to explore the narratives of the young aerobic gymnasts in the Municipality of Malay, Aklan. This study utilizes online interviews, observation, and data reviews in gathering the data while Yin's (2003) approach was utilized in the analysis of data. Themes emerged from stories of the participants like Personal Skills and Motivations of Young Aerobic Gymnasts is Foundational in Winning the Competition, Present DepEd Curriculum Lacks Content in Aerobic Gymnastics and Parents, School, Government, and Business Sector Support are Significant Factors for a Gymnast to Succeed. The output of the study is a proposed new Model of Young Aerobic Gymnastics Development.

Keywords: Making of Champions, Young Aerobic Gymnasts, Malay, Aklan, Philippines, Model of Young Aerobic Gymnasts Development.

Introduction

Gymnastics is a sport integrated into the first Ancient Olympic Games, practiced internationally in different disciplines particularly in Women Artistic Gymnastics, Men Artistic Gymnastics, Rhythmic Gymnastics, Trampoline Gymnastics, Tumbling Gymnastics, Acrobatic Gymnastics, Gymnastics for All, and Aerobic Gymnastics. In aerobic gymnastics, it entails the staging of lively action patterns to heart-pounding sound. One could find that this activity is an ideal sport for dynamic people

with abundant energy to burn (Gymnastics Victoria, 2021). It originated from group fitness and aerobic classes of the late 1980s and this sport present continuous, flexible, strong movement, including the utilization of seven basic steps perfectly executing the difficulty level of elements (Fahmi, et. al. 2019). Recently, this sport has been added to the discipline of gymnastics and boasts a growing number of enthusiasts throughout the UK and in most of the world (British Gymnastics, n.d.).

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Furthermore, Aerobic Gymnastics has been part of the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) and undergone reglementary review purposely to achieve a high level of functionality, harmony, and consistent structure among judges (Guitiezney and Vertina as cited by Mehrtash and Farzaneh, 2015).

In the Philippines, Gymnastics has been pioneered by Director Candido Bartolome and Mrs. Francisca Aquino (John, 2011). The Philippine Constitution specifically Article IV, section 19 mandates all learning institution to incorporate the study of MAPEH by "Promoting physical education and encourage sports programs, league competitions and the likes to advance self-discipline, teamwork, and excellence for the development of a healthy and alert citizenry (DepEd K to 12 Curriculum Guide Physical Education, 2012, p. 2).

Reflecting on the above provisions, the MAPEH Curriculum under the DepED contents lacks preparations for aerobic gymnastics. In Grades 2 and 3, one could notice the presence of rhythmic routines but its content centers on ribbon, hoop, and balls. In Grade 11, one could notice the Fitness/Exercise with aerobic activity but its activity is on traditional aerobic steps in the form of Zumba. Aside from Grades 2, 3, and 11, there are no curriculum contents that adhere to the aerobic gymnastics sports with the DepEd Curriculum Guide (K-12 Curriculum Guide Physical Education, 2016).

The researchers would like to explore the narratives of aerobic gymnasts who won champions in the Batang Pinoy National Competition and Palarong Pambansa representing the Municipality of Malay, Aklan, and out of its findings, a new Model of Aerobic Gymnastics Development.

Objectives

1. To explore the narratives of the aerobic gymnasts who competed and won in the Batang Pinoy National Championship and Palarong Pambansa;
2. To determine the gaps and challenges in honing the skills of the aerobic gymnasts; and
3. To propose a New Model of Aerobic Gymnastics Development.

Literature Review

There are fundamentals skills needed by an athlete in excelling at aerobic gymnastics. Xin, et. al (2020) stressed that kindergarten-aged children are closely linked with physical activity and a significant period in developing these foundational skills. Their findings revealed that this foundational year critical in the formation of an athlete to master these skills and excel. Bayhan & Artan as cited by Demir, et. al (2020) postulates that children's experiences gain by using their bodies are significant in their perception and appreciation of the world.

This is especially in the early years of their engagement as they experience and accumulate knowledge and skills to form the organization of motor, social, and cognitive developments. It was believed that the identification and growth of children's skills in the initial year of their growth and development are regarded as a fundamental subject area in education. In honing the skills of an aerobic gymnast, the modality of instruction must be considered. One could think of Inquiry-Based Instruction and Direct Instructions. An inquiry-based instruction model is a student-centered approach wherein the instructor or coach guides the students through questions posed, methods designed, and data interpreted by the students. Direct instruction in the honing process followed the command style and evaluated it as a very effective method for realizing physical and cognitive learning. Furthermore, this style is used for achieving goals such as uniformity, simultaneous performance, conformity with a model, promoting the team spirit mentality of the group, and using time productively, by providing the opportunity for a greater number of repeated movements under the management of the teacher or the coach (Mosston & Ashworth as cited by Demir, et.al, 2020). Culjack, et.al (2014) stressed that the daily activity of children affects both the growth process of gymnast skills and elemental activity skills.

Basic gymnastics, in combination with the proper daily activity of young children, can improve their foundational skills like running, hopping, leaping, and jumping. The objective of this is to control the movements particularly in throwing, catching, kicking, and striking. To establish stability or balance activity the rolling,

landing, bending, and stretching skills are significant to the formation process (Zeng, et. al, 2019). After a gymnasts master the fundamental movement skills, motor skills will be the next essential step to master. Zhang and Cheung (2019) disclosed that the low organizational games approach physical fitness lesson is an effective intervention to enhance children's development of their motor skills. This organizational series of motor movements in aerobic gymnastics combines the movement patterns body segments like the foundation join the games and related activities. A factor that is significantly affecting children's engagement in the activity to become skilled children that manage their physical attributes and acquire complex skills in aerobic gymnastics activities. Furthermore, it contributes to physical activities and natural enjoyment by allowing an athlete to understand and improve their confidence in maintaining an active lifestyle. Luban, Morgan, Cliff, Bernett & Okley as cited by Khajooei, et. al (2019) stipulate that these foundational motor skills include the day-to-day activity like locomotor, movement management, strength capabilities among others.

Webster, Martin, and Etaiano (2018) on foundational motor skills, screen-time, and physical activity, opined that the children's motor capabilities connected to intensive activities can positively give the children more exposure to activity to develop holistic development. They construed that honing childhood to foundational motor skills is through the physical fitness movement pattern. These patterns involved large muscle groups and fundamental engagement in the activation of smaller muscle groups while the gross skills for the motor are generally categorized into control of objects, strength skills, and locomotors like symmetrical, asymmetrical, and lateral movements. For object control skills, it involves the control and management of the item through projecting away. On the strength skills, it focuses on the stabilization of the midpoint of gravity for the body. Establishing the skills in a larger spectrum of foundational motor skills is essential for translation to more contexts - specific patterns of movements to a lifelong movement experience. Players should have full knowledge of

these requirements of simple or composite motor skills in advance for the utilization of modern technology and three-dimensional models to measure their use to learn skills and upgrading the physical and dexterity aspect of aerobic gymnastics (Elhabashy, 2019). In Aerobic gymnastics, activity-specific skills rely on how an athlete mastered essential steps and motor skills fundamentals.

Once an athlete is ready for another degree of difficulty element, the coach or trainer will introduce the specific skills and activities that are essentials in maximizing the skills of an athlete. Szloboda, et. al (2020) suggested that coaches should take into consideration the basic principles of tissue adaptation for strength, flexibility, power, and endurance of the gymnasts particularly on muscle, tendon, ligament, bone, cartilage, skin, and body systems to adapt with an imposed stress during the rest or recovery period.

An athlete must be prepared gradually for several years to be able to safely sustain and generate the forces required in aerobic gymnastics. It is suggested that the age group development and competition program must accord with the Educational Academy Program of the Federation International Gymnastics (FIG) that focuses on the safety well-being of the gymnasts in attaining high-performance in training and competitions. Federation Internationale De Gymnastique (2017) set rules through its Code of Points. In this Code, there are categories of difficulty elements that a young gymnast should perform. This difficulty of elements is known as Dynamic Strength, stationary strength, bound and Leaps, and stability and flexibility.

In the National Developmental Level, it ranges from nine to eleven (9-11) years old and it is expected that gymnasts can perform a maximum of six (6) difficulty elements with four (4) compulsory difficulty elements like the Push-up in the area of the dynamic element, straddle support in static strength element, air turn in the area of jump and leaps element, and vertical-split in the area of balance and flexibility. In the Age Group One Level, it ranges from twelve to fourteen (12-14) years old. In this level, a maximum of eight (8) categories of difficulty el-

ements. Out of eight (8) difficulty elements under this level, four (4) compulsory elements required from a gymnast to master and perform. Specifically, these four (4) compulsory elements group is the Dynamic Strength Element that involves helicopter to Push-up and Stationary Strength element that manifested in straddle support maximum to one turn, Bound and Leaps element indicated by one turn tuck jump, and Stability and Flexibility are shown by one turn to vertical split. Aerobic Gymnastics is an event demanding great focus and discipline in terms of physical training and mental alertness.

Athletes enjoin themselves in this kind of sport not just simply to acquire knowledge and skills but to compete locally, nationally, and internationally. Success at a gymnastics competition demands high commitment and focus in abiding by the coach's training plan program. The DepEd (2016) curriculum framework particularly MAPEH requires mastery of an athlete who has an active life for fitness and health particularly in Elemental Movement Skills, Motor Skills, and Activity-Specific Activity Skills through body management, rhythms, and dances, and games and sports.

Starting with the self, family and school, community, and society as the essential support components of gymnast development. Interestingly, Knoll (2012) stressed that, unlike other sports that are performance-based, A gymnast is judged based on his/her appearance and performance. For a competitor to win, he/she must maintain the required weight because an athlete's weight affects his/her movements and so with their performances. Miltadis, Fotios, and Michalis (2014) proposed that the program for gymnastics should contain inner reinforcement through volition, deferment of negative feelings like fear, adaptive training, organization of approved training, and tactics of approved training. The gymnast's success does not only confine in his or her preparation, and motivations but also to his/her mental stamina during the preparation and competitions. The home and community have significant contributions for the athletes to succeed in this field. Kunjesic (2012) cited parent's role and support to their young ones. He stressed that parent who is a former athlete deserving

to join their kids in this sport will certainly engage their children in very early learning and exposure to this sports to develop their motor and psychological senses and eventually, later on, be directed to another sport. The parent's participation in the total development of their kids is homogeneous in attaining their success. Their area minority of parents expected their child to achieve great sports success, while many parents expect positive development of motor, cognitive, affective, group skills. Kavasoglu and Alakurt (2021) share their insights on gymnastics and the role of parents.

Gymnastics as a sport will hone their children physique and future into sports they might be interested in. Rouquette (2020) lays down the parents' participation in athletes' insights of supports that directly affects the morale and well-being among young athletes through demonstration of parent's provisions to their young ones throughout the honing process including the competitions. These will further add weight to sport organizations to include rather than exclude parents in the training processes. Knolls (2012) shared his understanding of the training of the young gymnast. There are times that an athlete experiences underlying disorders because of strenuous training and other challenges caused by aerobic gymnastics on physical and psychological perfections. There are times that an athlete may experience "anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa." During these moments, a gymnast who experienced disorders needs not only the attention of medical experts but supports of a coach/trainer, friends, siblings, and parents. Parents with the right knowledge may extend supports to an athlete by providing rest, emotional encouragement, and preparing hearty meals for their kids. In the same manner, the learning institutions are an extension of the home development and considered as the nursery of the athletes. Republic Act No. 5708, section 1 provides a framework for the development and financing of an integrated physical education program for schools by propagating to young individuals the significance of physically sound citizens, hone athletics including the grace, poise, coordination, stamina, and strength; holistic physical education program and development to address personal, physical,

and social growths adherences for all pupils and learners with superior athletic achievements for those who are sports inclined; and an integrated program on sports and development. Aside from the personal, parents, school, and community support system, studies revealed that the active role of the government and the private sectors matters in every gymnast's claim to succeed in any competition. President Fidel V. Ramos during his term issued an Order to advance the sports and athletics of the country through and Executive Order No. 163, series of 1994 on Philippine Games as the Centerpiece Program. This Order includes all LGUs in propagating and creating a sports development council that will think-thank body for the Sports and Development Program initiatives in the locality. Through the council, the LGU was directed to extend its full support and active participation in the Philippine National Games.

Along with this, the LGUs were allowed to set budget in whatever amount necessary from their available budget for the propagation and advancement of the National Policy and Program which is the "Sports for All". Under section 3 of this Order, all non-government organizations, the Philippine Olympic Committee, the National Sports Associations, and the private sectors were urged to lend their cooperation for the success of the National Games leading towards Philippines 2000. Republic Act No. 6847, section 6 asserting the commission's duty to lead, set policies and priorities in the Commission emphasizing grass-roots participation and participation of all sectors in advocating the growth and development of amateur sports including budgets.

Methodology

This study is qualitative research that employs a Case Study as a design. It utilized Robert Yin's (2003) approach in exploring the phenomena within their context to establish the rigors of the research. The study was conducted in Malay, Aklan from September 2020 to January 2021. There were Fifteen (15) participants that participated in the study composed of young aerobic gymnasts who won as Champion in Batang Pinoy National championship and Palarong Pambansa, parents of the gymnasts,

school administrators, and the Head of SK Federation in Malay using the purposive sampling procedures. Data gathered were analyzed right after every interview to immerse the researchers with the data. Research protocols were observed as embodied in the ethical considerations of entire research activities.

Results and Discussions

The data collected from the online interview via zoom that was audio recorded were transcribed. From the transcription, it was analyzed to structure the pattern, identifying significant statements to cluster the theme. The themes that surfaced from the stories of the informants are:

Theme # 1: Personal Skills and Motivations of Young Aerobic Gymnasts are Foundational in Winning the Competition

Unlike other sports events that require height requirements like swimming and basketball, aerobic gymnastics has no height restrictions. Our young aerobic gymnasts can compete nationally and globally and possibly won. To be successful first, an athlete should master the elemental movement skills considered critical during the honing of an athlete. First, these initial moments of his/her training and the experiences they gained formed motor, social, and cognitive development. Second, a gymnast should master the motor skills known as the organizational series of movements in aerobic gymnastics that combines the movement patterns of body segments like the foundation to join the games and other related activities. An essential element that affects the gymnasts' progress and accumulation of skills in becoming well versed to manage and control bodily movements to more complicated skills in an athlete's activities. Furthermore, it contributes to physical activities and rapid satisfaction by allowing an athlete understand and improve their confidence in maintaining an active lifestyle. The third is the activity-specific activity that relies on how an athlete mastered essential movements and motor skills. Once an athlete is ready for another degree of difficulty element, the coach or trainer will introduce the specific skills and activities that are essentials in the development of an athlete.

Theme # 2: Present DepEd Curriculum lacks content in Aerobic Gymnastics

Republic Act No. 5708, section 3 mandated the Department of Education a program of physical fitness for all learners. Looking at the K-12 Curriculum content, revealed that the lack of preparations particularly in gymnastics. For example, in Grades 2 and 3, one could notice the presence of rhythmic routines but its activity is on ribbon, hoop, and balls while in Grade 11, the fitness exercise is present in the form of Zumba. This perhaps the reason why the training on aerobic gymnastics if not neglected is being undermined.

Theme # 3: Parents, School, Government, and Business Sector Supports are Significant Factors for a Gymnast to Succeed

There is a saying that "It takes a village to train a child." There are times that a gymnast encountered problems like arm fracture, swollen muscles because of stretching and splitting, and colds and fever due to muscle pain. This sometimes discourages the gymnasts go with the training. During this time, parental support is badly needed. Since aerobic gymnastic training ideally starts at nine (9) years old, the school plays a pivotal part in the honing journey of a gymnast. The school facilities, curriculum, and trainer matter in the development. One could not negate the assistance from the public and private sectors as partners in this endeavor. When an athlete competes, he/she needs financial assistance and can seek help from the LGU and other related agencies. This serves as a good motivation for the athletes to excel during the competition. In exchange, the government will receive merit and accolades for athletes winning in every event since they represent the locality. Along with this, a private company can share the burden by sharing their resources as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). It is assumed that athletes can be a future employee of companies particularly in the tourism industry such as entertainer, sports event coordinator, and a member of the team building activities.

Conclusions

The Philippines has the potential to excel in the field of aerobic gymnastics because this

field has no height restrictions. This sport is highly competitive physically and psychologically that requires an athlete's early training, focus, and determination to win the competition. The personal skills development and motivations of the young aerobic gymnasts are a cornerstone of winning in any competition. Along with this, a relevant and responsive curriculum would support the gymnasts' dream to succeed in this event. Parents and community support matters to the athlete during the training period and in joining any competitions. No man is an island as they say. This holds to the life of an aerobic gymnast.

Recommendations

It is strongly recommended that a gymnast should be trained at the early stage of her life for them to develop better personal skills and motivations in aerobic gymnastics. Schools both public and private under the DepEd should revisit their curriculum in Physical Education and incorporate the study and training of aerobic gymnastics in the curricula in Elementary to Senior High School. Active participation of parents and community in this sport must be adhered to to ensure the success of an athlete during training and most especially during the competitions. Valencia, Maming, Medina, and Macasarte Model of Aerobic Gymnastics Development is proposed for the gymnasts' development. Further studies will also be conducted.

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Appendix A

Valencia, Maming, Medina, and Macasarte Model of Young Aerobic Gymnasts Development

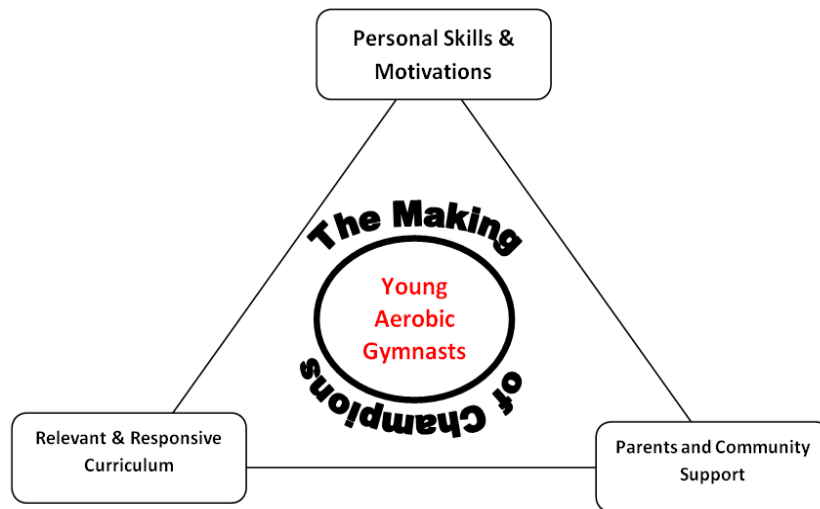


Figure 1. Valencia, Maming, Medina, And Macasarte Model Of Young Aerobic Gymnasts Development

In the development of the young aerobic gymnasts, there are skills needed to master like the fundamental movement skills that need to establish in the formative years particularly in the pre-school age which is closely linked with physical education. Children's experiences contribute to their perception and recognition of sports. As a mode of training and instruction, one could embark on inquiry-based and direct-based modalities. Other skills that need to master are the fundamental motor skills considered as the building blocks that lead to specialized movement sequences and sports skills required for ample involvement in physical activity in children, adolescents, and adults. Low organization game methods can be an effective intervention to this level of skills acquisition. This is a combination of movement patterns such as foundations to participate in games and other physical activities that involves the daily routine and physical activities. One could not negate the fact that children's motor skills linked to Vigorous Physical Activity (VPA) can help develop holistic growth and development. Player's understanding of all requirements like the simple and composite one can facilitate their upgraded physical and skills understanding in aerobic gymnastics. Acrobatic-Specific Skills rely on the attainment of a gymnast's

fundamental movement and motor skills. Coaches and trainers should consider the basic principles of tissue adaptation, flexibility, power, and endurance training of gymnasts to sustain the safety and generate forces required in aerobic gymnastics. There is a degree of difficulty elements that the gymnasts and trainers or coaches should take into considerations. They are the Dynamic Strength, Static Strength, Jump and Leaps, and Balance and Flexibility. Aside from the degree of difficulty, there are levels set in aerobic gymnastics such as the National Developmental, Age Group One, and Age Group Two.

Taking these into considerations, a gymnast's self-preparation and motivations matter in winning over the competition. This sport is regarded as highly competitive in terms of appearance and psychological stamina. An athlete must maintain a balance between the two. Taking the suggestions and advice of his coach or trainers would give the athlete an advantage to be highly competitive and winning the competition since his/her coach can easily figure out his routines, weight, and performances. Notwithstanding, this sport is a judged one therefore the subjective lens of judges matters to the scoring and winning in the game.

Parents and community support are essential elements for the gymnasts to reach their dreams in the field of aerobic gymnastics. Parents who have knowledge and experiences of the games tend to let their children train early. This is to develop their motor (physical) and psychological aspects. However, there are times that young gymnasts experience disorders due to the nature and demands of this sport. At this juncture, the support of siblings and parents matters to the recovery and continuous participation of the young gymnasts in aerobic gymnastics, to compete and excel. The community plays a pivotal role as well by extending helps both morally and financially to the athlete particularly in the time that an athlete will compete locally, nationally, and internationally.

Part of the nurturing process of an athlete is the school. A relevant and responsive curriculum would not only offer them a physical education but will hone an athlete's giftedness in Aerobic Gymnastics. It is believed that the earlier the training and development of a young gymnast into this kind of sport the better their chances to be skillful and advance in this sport.

Moreover, a Filipino athlete has the potential to excel in local, regional, national, and international gymnastic competitions because it

does not employ height restrictions compared to other sports like basketball, volleyball, swimming, and other related sports. Carlos Edriel Yulo won the gold medal in the 49th FIG Artistic Gymnastics World Championships in Stuttgart, Germany on October 12, 2019 (Inocencio, 2019) while Charmaine Dolar nabbed the Southeast Asian Games dated December 9, 2019, at Rizal Memorial Coliseum (Esponga, 2019). Sometimes in August 2019, the Malay Gymnastics Team represented the Municipality of Malay to the National Championship Batang Pinoy Competition and Palarong Pambansa garnered Gold Medals. Those glories, could not be without the restrictions, difficulties, and challenges on the part of the gymnasts, the coach, and the parents. For the Philippine gymnastics to advance and stay afloat, the government both local and national including the private sectors should assist by allocating budget to the sports sector to support the gymnastics clubs, groups, and advocates. Developing young gymnasts does not exempt the trainee and the trainer from financial difficulties. Therefore, the government and private supports play a significant role in surviving and winning every competition.