

Challenges and Countermeasures in Ideological and Political Education within University Physical Education Curricula

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Abstract: Employing a literature review methodology, this study examines the challenges encountered in integrating ideological and political education into university physical education curricula. It analyses the approaches, theoretical foundations, and common pitfalls in such teaching, proposing the establishment of a dedicated research centre for physical education curriculum-based ideological and political education. Regular training programmes should be conducted, with teaching and research projects prioritising curriculum-based ideological and political education initiatives. This will guide the translation of academic research outcomes into classroom practice. A balanced approach combining “dynamic” and “static” elements is advocated, ensuring ideological and political content is integrated in experiential and participatory ways. Innovate pedagogical design by identifying ideological elements within physical education content; introduce courses fostering sports awareness; establish scientifically sound assessment systems with emphasis on formative evaluation.

Keywords: Ideological and political education in curriculum; Physical education; Higher education institutions; Teaching

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1. Introduction

In 2020, the Ministry of Education issued the “Guiding Outline for the Ideological and Political Construction of Colleges and Universities Curriculum”, requiring colleges and universities to actively expand the main positions of ideological and political education on the basis of promoting the construction of ideological and political courses, and to integrate ideological and political education through talents by comprehensively promoting curriculum ideological and political education. Training system, give full play to the educational role of each discipline and each course to improve the quality of personnel training in colleges and universities^[1]. In the higher education system, physical education is a compulsory course that all students need to participate in, and it plays a key role in helping students improve their physical fitness and form a good physique^[2]. The core of studying the ideological and political teaching of physical education courses is to implement the fundamental task of cultivating people by virtue. By excavating the patriotic spirit, rule awareness and

fighting spirit contained in sports, we can realize the deep integration of “sports people” and “casting souls by virtue”. This can not only solve the practical dilemma of “emphasizing skills and neglecting education” in traditional sports teaching, but also transform the sports classroom into a key position for cultivating socialist core values and promoting Chinese sports spirit.

2. Concept of Ideological and Political Education in Physical Education Curriculum

Ideological and political education within physical education curricula serves to fulfil the fundamental task of fostering virtue through education. It harnesses the implicit educational function of physical education – “cultivating character through physical activity” – and the moral education function of “cultivating virtue through physical activity” to integrate the cultivation and practice of socialist coand “cultivating character through sport” in physical education. It integrates the cultivation and practice of core socialist values into the design, objectives, delivery, and assessment of physical education. This approach fully explores the ideological and political value within teaching content and evaluation methods, thereby achieving the educational orientation of “strengthening the body physically and enriching it culturally”^[3].

3. Challenges in Ideological and Political Education within Higher Education Physical Education Curricula

3.1. Physical Education Teachers Lack Training in Ideological and Political Education

During their undergraduate education, physical education teachers predominantly acquire traditional disciplinary knowledge such as athletic skills, sports theory, and classroom teaching methodologies, with little consideration given to integrating ideological and political education into talent cultivation. Furthermore, the primary focus of physical education classroom instruction lies in teaching and acquiring fundamental and specialised athletic skills, leaving little room for contemplation of sports-based ideological and political education. The lack of relevant training in ideological and political education among physical education teachers further compounds the difficulty of implementing such education.

3.2. Heavy Teaching and Research Burdens in Higher Education Institutions Leave Physical Education Teachers Stretched Thin

Higher education institutions impose teaching and research obligations upon physical education staff. Beyond their teaching duties, these educators must undertake research work, while the pressure to advance their academic titles further diverts their attention and energy away from integrating ideological and political education into physical education. Incorporating such education necessitates gathering substantial teaching materials and devising methods to integrate them into lesson content, thereby imposing additional workload on university physical education teachers during lesson preparation.

3.3. The dynamic nature of outdoor physical education struggles to align with the static demands of ideological and political education

Physical education constitutes an outdoor activity-based course where knowledge and skills are imparted and acquired through active participation. The dynamic nature of sport necessitates student engagement in movement. Conversely, ideological and political education often possesses a ‘static’ nature, requiring students to engage in quiet reflection. This involves contemplating the significance of figures or events within ideological and political education to foster emotional and spiritual resonance, thereby achieving guiding education on values and outlooks on life. Consequently, the emphasis on ‘dynamic’ physical participation in physical education and the emphasis on ‘static’ inner resonance in ideological and political education often struggle to find a natural point of convergence. This necessitates physical education teachers to

engage in more extensive and deeper reflection on their teaching practices.

3.4. Physical education with ideological and political content remains in an exploratory phase, lacking established models or reference materials.

The fundamental task of fostering virtue through education requires physical education teachers to give greater consideration to how sport can nurture character, and integrating ideological and political education into physical education provides an excellent approach. However, physical education ideological and political education remains in its exploratory phase, lacking established models or reference materials. Educators often find it difficult to grasp the essence of this approach, compounded by the inherent characteristics of various sports disciplines and venue constraints, making it challenging to develop universally applicable models. Relying solely on indoor classroom instruction to achieve ideological and political objectives through physical education would also undermine the fundamental purpose of physical education: promoting physical fitness.

3.5. Public Stereotypes about Physical Education Hinder Its Ideological and Political Education Effectiveness

Society's perception of sport remains overly rigid, focusing solely on its role in "building physical strength" while neglecting its educational potential. Furthermore, public discourse and cognitive biases often equate physical fitness exclusively with physical education classes, reinforcing the one-dimensional view that sport serves only to strengthen the "body". These rigid perceptions create a disconnect between physical education and ideological education, making it difficult for students to engage meaningfully with the political identity, national consciousness, cultural confidence, and character development embedded in sports figures and events. Physical and educational development are inseparable; cultivating the spirit is essential for strengthening the body. Only by guiding students to recognise the implicit educational value within physical education can physical education teachers achieve sustainable educational outcomes.

3.6. Difficulties in Assessing the Quality of Physical Education Ideological and Political Instruction

Physical education with ideological and political content differs from technical skill instruction in assessment methods. Technical teaching can evaluate outcomes through quantifiable mastery of skills. In contrast, ideological and political education in physical education is fundamentally about shaping perspectives, making assessments of the correctness or quality of these views inherently subjective and difficult to quantify. This creates significant challenges for monitoring and evaluating teaching quality.

4. Methods, Theoretical Foundations, and Misconceptions in Physical Education Ideological and Political Instruction

4.1. Methods of Ideological and Political Education in Physical Education

Physical education courses, being experiential and participatory in nature, require a distinct approach when integrating ideological and political elements. Unlike the didactic methods of traditional classroom-based ideological education, emphasis should be placed on experiential learning and active engagement^[4]. This enhances students' experiential understanding of the educational value inherent in physical education. Specifically, this involves integrating ideological and political content (such as correct perspectives on success and failure, etiquette, morality, sporting spirit, and patriotic sentiment) inherent in figures, history, and events closely associated with physical education into classroom teaching, competitions, and training sessions.

4.2. Theoretical Framework of Ideological and Political Education in Physical Education

The theoretical essence of ideological and political education in physical education lies in the mutual construction of "physical cultivation" and "spiritual forging". Its core orientation is the concurrent advancement of "moral cultivation"

and “physical development”, with the design principle centred on the interconnectedness of “moral enlightenment” and “technical mastery”, and the mutual reinforcement of “moral practice” and “academic pursuit”^[5]. The “cultivation of character” in physical education curriculum-based ideological and political education entails integrating the sports ethos, patriotic sentiments, willpower forging, and positive values and outlook on life embodied in sporting events, figures, and participation into physical education teaching. This achieves the dual objectives of “civilising the spirit and strengthening the physique”. The core of ideological and political education in physical education lies in achieving the simultaneous advancement of moral cultivation and physical development. This entails emphasising the skilful integration of “body and virtue” in instructional design and arrangements, stressing the parallel progress of moral character and physical fitness. It ensures that within the context and process of learning physical education, both explicit physical training and implicit moral education develop in tandem. The interconnection of “cultivating virtue” and “mastering skills” carries two-fold significance: firstly, it underscores that while athletic techniques form the primary content of instruction, participation in sport also encompasses moral education—adherence to rules and etiquette, commitment to fair play, and advocacy for sporting spirit. This mirrors the artisan’s craft, where skill and dedication coexist. Secondly, it involves establishing sound sporting values—the alignment of technical proficiency with moral character. “Practising Virtue” and “Pursuing Learning” guide students in understanding physical education: sound moral character facilitates the acquisition of athletic skills, while the process of mastering these skills fosters positive values and internalised spirit, creating a mutually reinforcing and mutually fulfilling relationship.

4.3. Misconceptions in Ideological and Political Education within Physical Education

As ideological and political education within physical education curricula remains in its exploratory phase, the absence of established, referenceable case studies has led some institutions to mistakenly treat it as a simple addition of ideological content to physical education courses. This confuses the distinct concepts of dedicated ideological courses and curriculum-embedded ideological education. Ideological and political courses constitute explicit ideological education focused on theoretical instruction. In contrast, ideological and political education within the curriculum involves uncovering inherent ideological elements within the subject matter and integrating these with physical education knowledge, representing implicit education^[6].

Secondly, the integration of ideological and political education into physical education curricula must adopt a student-centred approach, respecting individual differences. Teaching should not be designed solely around ‘teacher expectations’ but must fully consider ‘student expectations’ to enhance active participation and promote the internalisation of ideological education. This internalisation should be fostered through student engagement, identification, and acceptance. Students should engage in interaction and sharing, comparison and reflection during physical activities, thereby forming a cyclical process of self-insight, self-awareness, self-demand, self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and self-pursuit. This cultivates a high degree of self-awareness and self-education in ideological and political education^[7]. This self-education must embody the interactive and experiential dimensions of ideological and political teaching design, avoiding the imposition of teachers’ personal standards that would reduce it to indoctrination. The emphasis lies in stimulating students’ intrinsic motivation for ideological and political education, thereby achieving internalised ideological cultivation.

5. Strategies for Ideological and Political Education in Physical Education

5.1. Establish a Research Centre for Ideological and Political Education in Physical Education Courses, Conducting Regular Training

The integration of ideological and political education into curricula constitutes a vital contemporary educational imperative. To enhance physical education teachers’ comprehension of ideological and political teaching methodologies and assist them in effectively implementing ideological and political elements within physical education classes, thereby amplifying the educational value of physical education instruction, higher education institutions should establish dedicated

research centres for the integration of ideological and political education into physical education curricula. These centres should develop methodologies and content tailored to institutional and student contexts, identifying and leveraging ideological and political elements within physical education teaching. The centre should provide regular training in ideological and political education for physical education teachers to enhance their capabilities in this area. Concurrently, it should conduct research projects on ideological and political education within physical education curricula to ensure the sustainable development of such teaching. Furthermore, physical education teachers should be encouraged to participate in teaching competitions and training programmes focused on ideological and political education within physical education, actively absorbing exemplary teaching cases and internalising them into practical teaching experiences and methodologies suited to their own teaching contexts.

5.2. Prioritising Curriculum Ideological and Political Education in Teaching Research and Scientific Projects to Guide Teachers in Translating Research Findings into Classroom Practice

Physical education ideological and political teaching remains in its exploratory phase, with the integration of ideological and political elements into traditional physical education instruction imposing additional workload on lesson preparation for physical education teachers. To advance the implementation of ideological and political teaching within physical education curricula, priority may be given to research and teaching project applications, assisting teachers in fulfilling their research and teaching responsibilities while enabling research outcomes to enhance ideological and political teaching practices. This approach alleviates the pressure on physical education teachers regarding professional title evaluations and research obligations, while simultaneously expanding the scope for implementing ideological and political education within physical education courses. It enhances the quality of such teaching and reduces the tendency towards perfunctory teaching that merely mechanically incorporates ideological and political elements.

5.3. Balancing ‘Dynamic’ and ‘Static’ Elements: Integrating Ideological and Political Education into Physical Education Requires Experiential and Participatory Approaches

Physical activity is inherent to physical education pedagogy. Simplistic application of traditional, didactic ideological and political teaching may provoke student resistance. In instructional design, the ‘active’ component requires thoughtful integration of ideological and political elements. For instance, training and competition segments should incorporate experiential designs centred on perseverance, resilience, and understanding of success and failure. This enables students to internalise positive, healthy sporting values and ethics through personal engagement. Here, the “dynamic” design refers to students’ recognition of the intrinsic, evolving nature of sport. For the “static” aspect of ideological and political education, consideration must be given to the timing of integration. Specifically, during post-training or post-competition debriefings, students’ positive or underdeveloped aspects can be addressed. By drawing on ideological and political elements within sporting events and the lives of sports stars, students are guided towards embracing positive sporting spirit and ethics. This facilitates post-participation reflection and internalised understanding, helping students develop the courage and perseverance to overcome difficulties and refine their shortcomings. This approach achieves mutual enrichment between the participatory and experiential strengths of physical education and the ideological guidance advantages of ideological and political education, fostering a harmonious integration of the “dynamic” and “static” dimensions in sports and ideological education.

5.4. Innovating the Design of Ideological and Political Education in Physical Education Courses to Uncover Political Elements in Teaching Content

All endeavours require dual creation: conceptual innovation in thought and practical implementation^[8]. Sports educators should be encouraged to engage in theoretical conceptualisation through teaching competitions, research, and academic development, thereby innovating the theoretical foundations of ideological and political education within physical education. These theoretical outcomes should then be applied in practical classroom settings, achieving the practical creation of teaching methodologies. This process enables the design of pedagogical paradigms tailored to individual

teaching contexts. Here, ideological and political elements necessitate deep exploration of existing teaching content to distil relevant aspects within physical education. Building upon student expectations, enrich teaching materials with elements that capture student interest, thereby fostering voluntary acceptance of ideological and political content and cultivating positive, healthy perspectives on such matters.

5.5. Establishing Sports Awareness Guidance Based on the First University Physical Education Session

Freshmen's inaugural physical education session typically covers classroom discipline, teaching content, examination requirements, university sports facilities, and campus sporting activities, often lacking in-depth interpretation of physical education. Students frequently perceive physical education through a "broad sports" lens, conflating "physical education" with "sports" as mere athletic activities or events, lacking recognition of its educational value. It is precisely this educational value that holds the key to fostering lifelong engagement with physical activity, rather than merely promoting physical fitness. Therefore, the inaugural university physical education session—indeed, the very first such session in primary and secondary education—must guide students towards recognising this educational value. This approach will transform simplistic perceptions of physical education, facilitate the implementation of ideological and political education within the curriculum, and cultivate students' appreciation for the inherent educational significance within physical activities.

5.6. Establishing a Scientific and Rational Evaluation System with an Emphasis on Formative Assessment

Assessing the quality of ideological and political education within physical education courses presents challenges in achieving precise quantitative evaluation metrics. The influence of ideological and political education on students' thoughts and behaviours is often latent and cyclical, making it difficult to quantify whether students have developed healthy perspectives on physical education, ethical values, and observable behavioural changes. Consequently, when evaluating such teaching, it is essential to consider the inherent principles of ideological and political education, establish a scientific and reasonable evaluation system, and prioritise formative assessment for both teachers and students. Teacher evaluations should incorporate the translation of research and teaching achievements into practice, guiding and encouraging educators to engage in research relevant to physical education ideological and political instruction, thereby promoting the sustainable development of such teaching. The formulation of evaluation systems for ideological and political education within physical education curricula must be scientifically grounded. Teachers should be categorised for evaluation based on their age: young teachers should be assessed primarily on their professional ethics and teaching competence; middle-aged teachers should be evaluated with a focus on teaching outcomes and the development of teaching teams, thereby stimulating the core strength of ideological and political education; and older teachers should have their workload reduced, with evaluation emphasising the transformation of research and teaching achievements and their guidance of new teachers^[9]. Teaching quality evaluation should encompass four dimensions: direction (guiding positive and correct values), theory (implementation of ideological and political principles and acceptance of their concepts), transformation (internalisation and externalisation of classroom ideological content), and service (student-centred ideological teaching perspectives dedicated to resolving students' ideological and practical issues and enhancing their cultivation)^[10].

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