

The Ideological and Political Education in University Physical Education Courses: A New Concept of Physical Education

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Abstract: Physical education courses in universities are the foundation courses for promoting students' healthy growth and comprehensive development. However, the teaching of physical education courses generally only achieves superficial educational objectives, focusing solely on sports skills and activities, while neglecting the valuable Ideological and Political Education (IPE) function of physical education courses. Ideological and political education in university physical education courses (IPEUPEC) integrates the enhancement of students' ideological awareness and the establishment of ideology into physical education teaching and sports practice, fully tapping into the profound educational function of physical education courses, namely, educating minds (enhancing students' worldview, outlook on life, values, and ideological views). In this study, I elaborate on what IPEUPEC is, why China conducts IPEUPEC, why physical education course can achieve the objectives of IPE, and explore how IPE is carried out in physical education courses. The aim is to provide a new understanding of physical education concept to international higher education institutions through such theoretical explanations, promoting the high-quality development of physical education courses.

1. Introduction

Ideological and Political Education (IPE) plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' identities, behaviors, and societal interactions, ultimately influencing the cohesion and functioning of communities and societies [1-4]. Governments and education departments in various countries attach great importance to IPE. In recent years, the Chinese government has attached great importance to the IPE in schools, and has made a series of significant deployments to strengthen and improve IPE in schools in the new era. In 2020, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued the "Guidelines for the Construction of Ideological and Political Education in Higher Education Institutions", proposing to comprehensively promote the construction of IPE in the curriculum, integrate values guidance into knowledge imparting and ability cultivation, help students shape

correct worldviews, outlooks on life, and values[4].

As one of the important foundational courses in universities, the IPEUPEC is born out of such policy requirements. It delves into the IPE resources inherent in the content and teaching methods of physical education courses, allowing students to master the laws of physical development, enrich their knowledge, shape their character, and promote their comprehensive development through learning. Its core is to promote education on Chinese characteristics socialism and Chinese Dream, socialist core values education, legal education, labor education, mental health education, education on Chinese excellent traditional culture, and the spirit of sports for students[4].

As an overview of this article, in the first section, I elaborate on what IPEUPEC is. Second, I explain why China conducts IPEUPEC. Then, I illustrate why physical education can achieve the objectives of IPE. Lastly, I explore how IPE is carried out in physical education courses. The aim is to provide a new understanding of physical education concept to international higher education institutions through such theoretical explanations, promoting the high-quality development of physical education courses.

2. Ideological and Political Education in University Physical Education Courses (IPEUPEC)

The IPE is “the deliberate, planned, and organized influence exerted by society or social groups on their members through certain ideological concepts, political viewpoints, and moral norms, aiming to shape their ideological qualities and moral characters to meet certain social requirements through social practice” [5].

The Curriculum Ideological and Political Education (CIPE) is an innovative educational concept jointly proposed by Chinese education experts based on the IPE laws, combining with the thoughts of predecessors. Its core is to deepen the reform of education and teaching, integrate IPE for students into all courses, fully tap into the IPE resources of various courses, play a role in nurturing students, and comprehensively improve the quality of talent cultivation. The main task of CIPE is to integrate education on Chinese characteristics socialism and the Chinese Dream, socialist core values education, legal education, labor education, mental health education, as well as education on Chinese excellent traditional culture. It prominently reflects the fundamental purpose of human development. In the comprehensive development of individuals, ideological and moral qualities are the core and soul. Marx pointed out, “The duty, mission, and task of any person are to comprehensively develop all their abilities, including the ability to think” [6].

The CIPE enables universities to transition from the “imposition of preaching” to the method of “implicit infiltration” in IPE. Implicit education is a common category in Eastern and Western civilizations. China has long valued “subtle influence” education, as seen in historical anecdotes like “Mencius’ mother moving three times” and “those near vermilion are reddened, those near ink are blackened”, which affirm the rational value of implicit education from the perspective of environmental influence. Western moral education has always emphasized permeation. In ancient Greece, Socrates advocated self-awareness through discussion and questioning [7], who become practitioner of virtue. Aristotle believed that moral education was not rigid preaching or imposed regulations but rather joyful interaction that brought people happiness and fulfillment experiences [8]. American educator and psychologist John Dewey believed that “life is education” and suggested that teaching activities should be closely linked to practical experiences, emphasizing the cultivation of problem-solving abilities [9]. CIPE, through the formation of an educational pattern and synergy that encompasses all members, the entire process, and all aspects, infiltrates and permeates the spiritual world of college students. By guiding students from knowledge to action and cultivating their reasoning abilities during the process of knowledge transmission, CIPE strengthens college students’ theoretical identity, political identity and emotional identity of Chinese

characteristics socialism, continuously enhancing their confidence in the path, theory, system, and culture of Chinese characteristics socialism.

The IPEUPEC is based on the establishment of a comprehensive pattern of education with all members, the entire process, and all courses. It creates a synergistic effect between physical education courses and IPE, embodying a concept of physical education that enriches the content of physical education courses with the principle of “fostering virtue through education” [10]. It is not a specific course independent of physical education but rather an innovation in curriculum teaching concept. The IPEUPEC can be defined as: a teaching concept that takes physical exercise as its main feature, with sport items as its main content, and integrates IPE while improving physical operation knowledge and skills. In the implementation process of IPEUPEC, values guidance should be integrated into the transmission of physical education knowledge and the cultivation of sports skills, continuously strengthening the value orientation in physical education knowledge system teaching, fully tapping into the explicit and implicit educational functions of university physical education curriculum, enhancing the quality of student cultivation in universities, and ensuring the smooth realization of the fundamental task of moral establishment and student cultivation. Among these, value orientation is the top priority.

3. Why does China Need to Carry Out IPEUPEC

The CIPE is not only a strategic measure for Chinese education to achieve the fundamental task of nurturing talents with moral integrity but also an important task for educational institutions to improve the quality of talent cultivation[4]. The goal of IPE in university courses is to address the phenomenon of the disconnect between curriculum knowledge and ideological education. It requires exploring the unification of the value direction of “ideological and political” on the basis of the differentiation of subject curriculum knowledge. Its core is to strengthen the value guidance in knowledge system education, implement the fundamental task of nurturing talents with moral integrity.

Physical education courses in Chinese universities, whether as specialized courses or public foundational courses, differ significantly from other subjects. These courses emphasize education through physical practice, highlighting the experiential aspect of bodily activities. Physical education courses aim to concurrently cultivate both physical fitness and moral character, fostering a synergy between physical and mental development. However, influenced by pragmatist philosophy, these courses have long focused primarily on the economic and social functions of physical skills, emphasizing practical knowledge and exhibiting distinct characteristics of specialization, practicality, and technological orientation [11-13]. As a result, the pattern of synergizing physical education courses with IPE for comprehensive personal development has yet to be established, resulting in suboptimal implementation of holistic education.

This is mainly manifested in three aspects: First, in terms of educational concept, there is a failure to recognize the relationship between knowledge impartation and value guidance correctly. There is a lack of effective guidance on students’ outlook on life, worldviews, and values in knowledge impartation, with the focus still placed on the teaching of physical education subject knowledge, neglecting the cultivation of students’ ideological understanding. Second, in the design of physical education course content, there is a failure to properly balance explicit and implicit education. Third, in terms of evaluation methods, the relationship between the evaluation of physical education courses and IPE has not been handled properly. Therefore, in the new era of China where curriculum-based IPE is vigorously promoted, the integration of IPE into university physical education courses becomes imperative.

4. Why Physical Education Courses Can Achieve the Objectives of IPE

Physical education and IPE are important components of the overall education structure. The knowledge learning, skill training, will quality cultivation, character shaping, socialization promotion, etc. in physical education courses are consistent with the objectives and tasks of IPE, making it a very important IPE resource. Physical education is conducted through bodily education. The realization of the objectives of IPE in physical education can be discussed from five perspectives: the regulation, the classification, the ceremony, the appreciation, and the demonstration of physical skills.

4.1. The Regulation of Physical Skills and the Cultivation of Moral Qualities

In the realm of skills, bodily technique is the most enduring and constant because “the body is the first and most natural object of technology for humans, and also the means of technology” [14]. An undeniable fact is that the transmission process of bodily technique is also a process of moral, normative, and institutional impartation and formation. The formation of techniques and the growth of morals are inseparable. When the body forms specific movement techniques, it needs to follow specific bodily movement regulations, thereby forming consciousness that adheres to specific rules. This further promotes individuals to adhere to universally applicable rules in their words and deeds.

At the same time, the formation of techniques is not immediate but requires practitioners to overcome various internal or external interferences or difficulties. Only through repeated practice can they meet the bodily regulatory requirements of the movement technique. Therefore, the process of acquiring bodily technique is also a process of tempering the will of the learning subject. Cultivating students with strong willpower, fearlessness in the face of difficulties, and a forward-thinking mindset (values) is also one of the goals of IPE in the curriculum. Regarding movement techniques, merely knowing the correctness and acquisition methods of the techniques is far from possessing the techniques themselves. Only when the learning subject practices the normativity of the body through bodily practice can they truly acquire the technique [15]. Consequently, the quality of integrating knowledge and action will also be indispensable in this process.

4.2. The Classification of Bodily Techniques and the Cultivation of Cooperative Spirit

As bodily techniques of social action, whether individual or collective, they all exhibit “the mutual orientation of social action” [17]. Any bodily technique possesses a collective nature [14], existing not only within individual bodies but also in the social relations among bodies, such as teaching and learning bodily techniques, evaluation and being evaluated, mutual competition and mutual achievement, all of which belong to the specific domain of social relations. Ayebou (2016) believes that the techniques formed through cooperation and coordination have the characteristic of social classification, based on which he proposed the concept of “social classification” [18]. This is particularly evident in sports. The formation process of bodily techniques all exhibits the characteristic of social classification, and no bodily technique formation can escape from the constraints of social classification, whether in team items or individual activities. This perspective helps us better observe and reflect on the issue of “cooperation” in bodily techniques.

Many sports require body techniques to be performed in a classified manner, which cannot be completed independently by individuals. The classification of bodily techniques directly simulates social relationships, with issues of teamwork and intersubjectivity fully manifesting in the forms of bodily techniques, such as baton passing in track and field, DanceSport, martial arts sparring, ball sports, tug-of-war, and others. The group nature of these sports determines that skills must exist between two or more people. Classified bodily techniques dictate that learning subjects must have

the ability to handle the relationships between individuals and between individuals and groups when forming corresponding bodily techniques.

4.3. The Ceremonies in Bodily Techniques and Patriotism

How does sports relate to patriotic education? Body techniques are often concentrated in the form of competitive competitions, and they often aim towards the ritualistic interaction of competitive competitions. Within the arena created by competitive competitions, numerous elements such as the body, techniques, symbolic representations, and discourse systems are fused together, creating a solemn ritual and ceremony. Randall Collins (2012) regards modern sports competitions as “natural rituals”, believing that competitions are not consciously or deliberately formed to create the necessary elements for successful rituals. Instead, their planned, predicted, and carefully designed purpose is to provide more moments of collective emotion [19]. Individuals who possess and demonstrate body techniques are endowed with divinity within the rituals and ceremonies of competitive competitions, and emotions of collective worship are instantly aroused, allowing participants to feel the collective cohesion in the space. It is sports that have assumed certain functions previously undertaken by religion; sports can attach participants morally to the society in which they live, making it crucial in modern society [20]. This corresponds with Durkheim’s (1965) view that “integration into the community can reinforce identity” [21].

Competition is a ceremony that establishes group boundaries, and thus also sets the boundaries of moral responsibility [22]. It provides a model for explaining how unity and shared symbols emerge through interaction in small groups. In terms of collective cohesion, modern and traditional sports differ only in content and form, but their internal logic in influencing social cohesion among people is consistent. Individuals naturally belong to certain groups, such as families, communities, cities, and nations, but often need to participate in ritualistic cultural activities to truly experience a sense of belonging and identity.

5. How can IPE be Conducted in Physical Education Course

University physical education courses and other courses, although having different content, we need to share the common responsibility and mission of nurturing talents for the nation, fulfilling the fundamental task of fostering students’ moral character and imparting of professional knowledge. This study suggests that to effectively carry out IPE in university physical education courses, the following aspects should be emphasized:

5.1. Leading the Innovation of IPEUPEC through Cultural Infiltration

Culture is the lifeblood of a nation and its people’s spiritual home [16]. As an integral part of social and cultural activities, university physical education courses not only rely on Chinese excellent traditional culture for their existence and development but also represent an organic process of cultural sedimentation, transmission, reproduction, and re-creation.

5.1.1. Promote Traditional Sports Culture to Enhance Students’ National Confidence and Pride

Cultivating people through culture is one of the important measures for university education [4]. In the new era, university students should not only maintain cultural awareness but also have firm cultural confidence. Traditional sports culture can enhance students’ national confidence and pride. In university physical education courses, it is important to actively explore traditional sports activities that contain deep national or ethnic cultural heritage and cultural genes. For example,

Chinese universities actively encourage and promote traditional sports items which rich in Chinese cultural heritage, such as CuJu (ancient Chinese football), martial arts, dragon boat racing, and others, allowing students to personally experience the charm of traditional Chinese sports culture. It can also involve cultural infusion, emphasizing the inheritance of the sports spirit inherent in the national or ethnic sports development history, as well as the promotion and pursuit of sports values such as striving for national glory, perseverance, fairness and justice, unity, and mutual assistance.

5.1.2. Utilizing Sports System Culture Effectively to Enable Students to Experience Tangible Constraints

Every sports activity has its own competition rules, which are rational choices to ensure the smooth progress of the competition. Through preparatory activities before formal teaching content in university physical education courses, such as assembling and practicing team formations, students' organizational discipline can be strengthened. In-courses sports competitions can also be arranged, which not only provide practical training in learning sports rules but also cultivate students' rule awareness, making students understand the importance of rules and the consequences of violating them.

5.1.3. Building Sports Environment Culture that Invisibly Guides Students

The sports environment can be divided into soft and hard environments. In terms of soft environment construction, sports culture can be integrated through diverse classroom formats. For example, in games or competition segments of physical education courses, each student is required to high-five for encouragement, there should be chanting and cheering rituals during formal competitions, students should politely acknowledge the audience, and they should express respect to referees and opponents through handshakes, hugs, etc. Through such practices and insights into sports etiquette, university students will further understand sports ethics, internalizing them as their own values and cultural cultivation.

In terms of hardware environment construction, complete sports infrastructure facilities are the guarantee and prerequisite for sports activities and culture, influencing the enthusiasm of university students to participate in sports. At the same time, the publicity columns, LED screens, multimedia screens, and other media in university sports venues are excellent educational platforms, where inspirational sports videos can be played, sports slogans can be posted, and national soft power and cultural spirit can be disseminated. University sports classes take place in specific sports venues, where through sports teaching and activities, students voluntarily accept cultural influence, internalizing sports culture as conscious awareness and practical action, to achieve the effect of nurturing talents.

5.2. Promoting the Optimization of IPEUPEC through Teaching Reconstruction

The IPEUPEC is not a specialized ideological and political course, but rather IPE based on the foundation of the knowledge system of physical education. Promoting comprehensive curriculum reform is the key to advancing IPEUPEC. This study suggests the following specific measures for implementation.

5.2.1. Innovating Curriculum Objectives and Expanding the Educational Scope of Physical Education Courses

To achieve the objectives of IPEUPEC, it is necessary to closely integrate the “knowledge and skills objectives of physical education”, “process and method objectives”, and “emotional,

attitudinal, and values objectives”. The setting of attitudinal and values objectives can be specific to different sports activities. For example, for endurance-type activities like long-distance running aimed at fostering students’ spirit of perseverance and hard work, while team sports like basketball and football can aim to cultivate teamwork among students. Alternatively, objectives can be set in stages. For instance, in a Tai Chi class, discipline awareness can be cultivated through practicing team formations at the beginning, cultural confidence can be instilled through the practice of traditional Tai Chi movements during the main part of the class, and aesthetic literacy can be enhanced through relaxation exercises accompanied by traditional music at the end of the class.

5.2.2. Building New Curriculum Structure and Constructing Multi-dimensional Classroom Centered on Nurturing Students

The physical education classroom is part of the education and teaching process, but not the entirety of it. In addition to the “first” physical education classroom, universities can also extensively conduct extracurricular physical education activities, known as the “second” physical education classroom. It can start from the unique educational and teaching forms of physical education courses, break through barriers such as class, grade, and gender, and integrate classroom teaching with extracurricular sports activities by means of elective courses. This includes combining physical education club courses, off-campus practical courses, sports training, and competitive observation courses with purpose, planning, and organization into the physical education curriculum, forming an organic connection between in-class and out-of-class, and on-campus and off-campus activities. Research through physical activities simulates social interpersonal situations and leads students closer to society, promoting the improvement of students’ practical inquiry and innovation abilities, and enhancing the socialization of university students.

5.2.3. Innovating Curriculum Content and Serving the Needs of National Development

From the perspective of closely linking “physical education” and “ideological education”, by introducing new teaching contents such as traditional ethnic sports, wilderness survival, military sports, and orienteering, research aims to closely integrate the education of the physical knowledge system with the promotion of college students’ physical fitness improvement, and simultaneously integrate teaching content with the dream and needs of national prosperity and ethnic rejuvenation, serving national defense and modernization. It is particularly emphasized here to pay attention to the excavation and integration of ideological elements in different curriculum contents, to seize opportunities, and to complement explicit education with implicit education.

6. Summary

Physical education courses in universities are the foundation courses for promoting students’ healthy growth and comprehensive development. However, the teaching of physical education courses generally only achieves superficial educational objectives, focusing solely on sports skills and activities, while neglecting the valuable Ideological and Political Education (IPE) function of physical education courses. In the new era, Chinese universities have innovatively developed the concept of physical education curriculum, namely: ideological and political education in university physical education courses. It integrates the enhancement of students’ ideological awareness and the establishment of ideology into physical education teaching and sports practice, fully tapping into the profound educational function of physical education courses, namely educating minds.

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