

Educating Through Competition: Integrating Ideological Education Into Courses Based on Core Competencies – A Study on the Optimization of Sports Competitions in Middle Schools

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Abstract

Against the background of the deepening reform of school physical education in the new era, cultivating core competencies and building ideological and political education in courses are the two main lines of reform in school physical education, and sports competition is an important practical field for their integration. The study found that the three dimensions of core competencies—motor ability, healthy behavior, and sports morality—are highly similar in structure to the three-in-one educational logic of ideological and political education in courses: value shaping, knowledge teaching, and ability training. Sports competitions, with their real situations, hands-on experience, and education throughout the whole process, have become an ideal carrier for the integration of the two. At present, the integration of ideological and political education in courses into middle school sports competitions faces three barriers: in terms of goal setting, the educational goal of ideological and political education is vague, and competitions deviate from their educational purpose; in terms of process implementation, the education chain of "before competition, during competition, and after competition" is broken; in terms of support mechanisms, there is a lack of an evaluation system and the teaching staff is not capable enough. For this, this study built a "goal system - content and process system - support system" three-in-one framework, and put forward practical paths from three areas: system improvement, teaching improvement, and evaluation improvement. It hopes to provide theoretical reference and practical help for middle school sports competitions to change from "competition-oriented" to "education-oriented".

Keywords

Core competencies; ideological education in curricula; using competitions for education; construction and optimization.

1. Introduction

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China clearly pointed out that we should "fully carry out the Party's education policy, fulfill the basic task of fostering virtue through education, and train young people who are well-developed in moral grounding, intellectual ability, physical fitness, aesthetic sensibility, and labor skills, so that they can become builders and successors of socialism." Under this task of the times, school sports have been given an educational mission like never before. In 2020, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued the *Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Sports Work in the New Era*. It clearly put forward the goal of "generally establishing a system for teaching, training, and competition," and stressed that school sports have a unique role in promoting core socialist values, developing students' patriotism, collectivism, and socialist spirit, as well as their willpower to

strive upward and fight hard, and in achieving the goals of using sports to build wisdom and shape the mind [1]. In the same year, the General Administration of Sport of China and the Ministry of Education jointly issued the *Opinions on Deepening the Integration of Sports and Education to Promote the Healthy Development of Youth*. It required primary and secondary schools as well as universities to build school teams on the basis of widely carrying out campus competitions, and to build a "four-level youth sports competition system that is divided by school stage and covers different regions." This provided top-level design for making school sports competitions more systematic and institutionalized [2]. In 2025, the Ministry of Education and four other departments further issued the *Opinions on Implementing the Student Physical Fitness Strengthening Plan*. It proposed improving the training, competition, and talent development system, and making after-class sports activities and competitions widely available to everyone. The fact that so many policy documents have come out one after another shows that school sports are no longer just about "building physical fitness." They now have a broader role—using sports to educate people. As an important part of school sports and a tool for education, sports competitions are showing more and more educational value [3].

At the same time, curriculum reform and ideological and political education are coming together more and more in the field of school sports. In 2022, the Ministry of Education released the *Physical Education and Health Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition)* (hereafter referred to as the New Curriculum Standards). It set course goals based on core competencies, and defined physical education and health core competencies as the correct values, essential qualities, and key abilities that students gradually develop through studying this course. These include three dimensions: motor ability, healthy behavior, and sports character [4]. The New Curriculum Standards stress that the whole teaching design and teaching process should center on core competencies, and it promotes the idea of integrating "teaching, practicing, and competing" into one. In terms of ideological and political education, the Ministry of Education's 2022 *Opinions on Further Strengthening the Construction of Ideological and Political Courses in Primary and Secondary Schools in the New Era* pointed out that we should strengthen ideological and political education at all school stages, build a "big ideological and political course" system for primary and secondary schools, and tap into the ideological and political resources in different subjects. In summary, core competencies and curriculum-based ideological and political education are two key words in the new era of school sports reform. Sports competitions have become an important practical field where these two come together. How to integrate the goals of core competency development and the value guidance of curriculum-based ideological and political education into the whole process of middle school sports competitions, and achieve the educational goal of "using competitions to educate people," has become a theoretical and practical question that school sports reform needs to answer urgently.

2. Theoretical Basis for Integrating Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education into Middle School Sports Competitions in the Context of Core Competencies

2.1. The theoretical connotations of core competencies

The 2022 New Curriculum Standards set course goals based on core competencies. Course content, teaching methods, academic quality, and learning evaluation all center on core competencies. Teachers teach for core competencies, and students learn for core competencies. This shift means that physical education no longer stops at passing on sports knowledge and skills. Instead, it aims at the all-round development of students as "complete persons." Core competencies include three sub-dimensions: motor ability, healthy behavior, and sports character. Motor ability is the most basic part of core competencies. When students take PE and

health classes, they can pick up and use physical fitness and movement skills, and get better at moving their bodies. The course goals hope that students will enjoy sports, take part in sports, and understand sports. Healthy behavior is the central part of core competencies. It mainly covers things like the awareness and habit of exercise, knowing and using health knowledge, managing emotions, and adapting to different environments. The course goals want students to understand what health means, learn health skills, and live a healthy life. Sports character is the value part of core competencies. It mainly includes things like sports spirit, sports ethics, and sports character. The course goals hope that students can carry forward sports spirit, build good sports character, and follow sports ethics. Core competencies in the PE and health course come from students taking part in sports activities through body movement. As they deal with different things that happen during these activities, these effects build up over time. The three parts should not be taught separately. They should be seen as a whole so that students can grow in all areas.

2.2. The Theory Behind Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education

Curriculum-based ideological and political education is not just adding "ideological and political" to a course. It is a new way of thinking about courses. It is not a separate course that schools set up. Instead, it asks every course to take on the job of guiding values while teaching knowledge and building skills. In this way, professional knowledge and ideological and political education can truly become one. Curriculum-based ideological and political education, on the other hand, focuses on hidden education. It naturally mixes value guidance into the process of teaching knowledge and building skills in each course, so that students are influenced without even noticing it—just like rain soaking into the ground without a sound. It brings together both visible and hidden education. Ideological and political theory courses serve the visible side, mainly through systematic teaching of theory and direct value guidance. Ideological and political education is the soul of physical education curriculum-based ideological and political education. Physical education curriculum-based ideological and political education is one part of "curriculum-based ideological and political education." It refers to the idea of carrying out ideological and political education while improving physical movement knowledge and ability, with physical practice as its main feature and sports events as its main content [5]. The physical nature of the physical education course gives curriculum-based ideological and political education a special advantage in its development. First, values that students experience are turned into felt body experiences through hands-on practice. Second, it is education through real situations. In PE classes and organized competitions, students face situations of competition and cooperation, and when they deal with winning and losing, conflicts, and following rules, these things are tested and taken in through action. Third, it brings together physical training and moral education. The development of curriculum-based ideological and political education in PE aims to cultivate a "complete person," and it gives full play to the special educational value of the PE subject and its role in integrated education within the "moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor" five-education framework.

2.3. The educational function of sports competitions

A famous person once pointed out: "Sports go together with moral education and intellectual education. Both moral and intellectual education depend on the body. Without the body, there is no moral or intellectual education." In sports competitions, students' ideological and political education and values education should be put first. Sports competitions bring together competition, rules, cooperation, and real situations, offering students a unique platform for value experiences and character development. Some scholars have pointed out that sports competitions and curriculum-based ideological and political education share a "symbiotic and complementary relationship in value transmission. They can provide a situational field for practical education and help achieve embodied value internalization and cognitive leaps" [7].

Sports competitions offer three special advantages for integrating curriculum-based ideological and political education. First, the situations are real. Students face real challenges in real settings, so their value choices carry real meaning. Second, the experience is embodied. In competitions, students put their whole selves into it—their bodies, their emotions, and how they handle pressure. Values are experienced and taken in through the body during this process. Third, education runs through the whole process. The entire competition—before, during, and after—is full of ideological and political elements. At the same time, from the perspective of core competencies, sports competitions are an ideal field for the coordinated development of motor ability, healthy behavior, and sports character. In competitions, students bring together physical fitness, skills and tactics, and mental ability (motor ability). They manage their own health and emotions before, during, and after the competition (healthy behavior). And they sharpen their character and spirit through winning, losing, and following rules (sports character). These three dimensions intertwine and develop together through competition practice. From the perspective of curriculum-based ideological and political education, sports competitions offer the most natural and effective form of value guidance, thanks to their real situations, embodied experiences, and education that runs through the whole process. Building a sense of rules, strengthening teamwork, and developing sports spirit in competitions—these are the most vivid ways that the "value shaping" goal of curriculum-based ideological and political education comes to life in physical education.

3. The Current Status and Issues Regarding The Integration of Ideological Education Into Physical Education Courses in Middle Schools

3.1. Dilution of ideological and political objectives: The purpose of these competitions deviates from their role in fostering education.

At present, middle school sports competitions have long been influenced by the idea of "results first." Competition goals focus too much on sports results and rankings, and the educational goals of curriculum-based ideological and political education lack a clear position in competitions. The "correct values, essential qualities, and key abilities" stressed by core competencies have not been turned into concrete educational goals for sports competitions. "Using competitions to educate people" still remains largely a policy slogan. The reality that competitions center on results has not really changed. Ideological and political education is not seen as a necessary part of competitions, which leads to a disconnect between competition and education in real settings. In terms of value guidance goals, most organizers of middle school sports competitions fail to fully recognize what competitions can do for ideological and political goals like political identity, love for the country, and awareness of the rule of law. They simply focus on fighting for rankings. As a result, competitions become nothing more than pure skill contests or physical tests, which drifts away from the fundamental direction of fostering virtue through education.

3.2. Disruption in the integration process: Breakdown of the educational continuum across 'pre-match – during-match – post-match' phases

The educational function of sports competitions should run through the whole process—before, during, and after the competition. But in practice, this chain is badly broken. Pre-competition preparation centers on skills and tactics training. Educational parts like rule education, respect education, and mental preparation are squeezed out. In many competitions, pre-competition preparation is just "practicing skills, practicing tactics, and talking about the opponent." However, there is a lack of systematic guidance for students on rule awareness, competition ethics, and team responsibility; During competitions, teachers pay too much attention to the score and winning or losing. They fail to catch and use the teaching moments that happen in

real time during the competition. When students show disrespect for referees or break sports ethics, these behaviors are simply criticized and then dropped. They are not turned into teaching moments for guiding values; Post-competition reflection often turns into a results analysis meeting. There is a lack of systematic reflection on students' spiritual growth and character development. Moral education like "not being proud when winning and not giving up when losing," etiquette education like being thankful to opponents and referees, and value education like drawing growth motivation from the competition experience—these parts are seriously ignored. Over time, this has become a habit in practice: before competitions, the focus is on skills training; during competitions, the focus is on results; and after competitions, reflection and summary are ignored. This seriously narrows the educational function of competitions. The broken education chain turns competitions into isolated sporting events rather than a complete educational process.

3.3. Weak safeguard mechanisms: lack of evaluation and insufficient teaching staff competence

The integration of ideological education into sports competitions lacks effective evaluation mechanisms and adequate teaching staff support. On the one hand, from the perspective of evaluation standards, the evaluation system for middle school sports competitions is highly one-sided. Most of it uses competition rankings and sports results as the core indicators. From the perspective of evaluation methods, current evaluation values final results over the process, and values numbers over quality. For educational outcomes that are hard to measure, such as sports character and sports spirit shown by students in competitions, there is a lack of effective qualitative evaluation methods. From the perspective of evaluation subjects, current competition evaluation uses teachers and referees as the only subjects. As for who does the evaluating, current competition evaluation only uses teachers and referees. Students evaluating themselves or each other is not used at all. On the other hand, most PE teachers only know curriculum-based ideological and political education as a policy term. They don't really know how to find these elements in their teaching, how to catch a teaching moment when it happens, or how to guide students and check if their values are growing. A lot of them just put a label on it or keep it separate from the actual class. Some PE teachers don't connect "teaching, practicing, and competing" with this kind of education at all. They feel it takes time away from teaching skills and training for competitions. To them, it's extra work, not something that's already part of teaching. So with weak evaluation and weak teacher training, there's no real quality control or professional support for this integration.

4. Strategies for Bringing Ideological and Political Education into Middle School Sports Competitions under Core Competencies

4.1. Building the Goal System: Setting Teaching Goals That Bring Together Core Competencies and Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education

With core competencies as the guide, we should take "fostering virtue through education" as the foundation, make core competency development the main line, and use curriculum-based ideological and political education as the way to get there. This way, sports competitions can move away from being all about winning and become more about educating students. The goal is to help young people grow into a new generation with the right values, the qualities they need, and the key abilities for life. If we look at each part of core competencies, motor ability is what makes "learning through competition" possible. Competitions are a key way to test and go deeper into what students have learned about sports. Without solid motor ability, competitions lose the base they need to teach anything at all. Healthy behavior is about building a lifestyle where competition helps you stay healthy. This goal connects "healthy behavior" in core

competencies with "ability development" in curriculum-based ideological and political education. It makes competitions more than just a place to show off skills—they also become an important way for students to build health literacy. Sports character is what gives "educating through competition" its values direction. It matches the heart of "value shaping" in curriculum-based ideological and political education, and it's the highest form of what competitions can teach. Competitions at different levels and of different types should aim to teach different things. School class leagues should be about everyone, not just the best players. The main thing here is to help students build basic sports character and healthy habits. "Competing" at this level just means playing regularly. Once students get a solid start from these school competitions, they'll be more ready to show good sportsmanship when they face tougher competitions later on.

4.2. Building Content and Process: A Framework for Before, During, and After the Event

To make sports competitions better at teaching students, we need to set clear goals before the competition, put them into practice during the competition, and then get teachers and students together to reflect and evaluate afterward. This way, the whole process becomes a complete cycle of learning by doing, and competitions can actually teach students more effectively [8]. Sports competitions teach students something at every stage, so we should build a framework that brings curriculum-based ideological and political education into all three stages: before, during, and after the competition. The main idea here is that this kind of education is not something you just add on to a competition. It is part of what a competition is supposed to do at every stage. Before the competition, the main focus is on guiding values and teaching rules. The main job here is to help students understand what competition is really about and build the right attitude toward it. This can be broken into a few parts. First, teach the rules. Get students to learn the rules and understand the fairness and respect for law behind them. Second, teach respect. Guide students to respect their opponents, the referees, and the audience, and to show good manners and sportsmanship. Third, guide their goals. Help them build the right view of competition. During the competition, the focus is on real experiences and giving guidance right away. This is the most important part of bringing in curriculum-based ideological and political education, and it's also where the best teaching moments happen. In a real competition, things like staying strong when you're behind, making choices at key moments, being understanding when a teammate messes up, and accepting a referee's call—these moments can't be recreated. Teachers need to catch them as they happen and guide students right then. After the competition, the focus is on reflection and growing in values. This stage makes the whole thing go deeper. The main job is to help students turn what they felt during the competition into a real understanding of values. By getting them to reflect and share, teaching them manners, and helping them set new goals, the lessons from the competition can stay with them and go deeper over time.

4.3. Building the Support System: How Evaluation and Teacher Skills Work Together

The main job of building the support system is to set up a good evaluation mechanism and improve teachers' ability to carry out curriculum-based ideological and political education. This gives us both the rules we need and the people we need to bring this kind of education into middle school sports competitions. Right now, competitions are judged mainly by rankings and results, and there is no good tool to measure how well they teach values. To build a real evaluation mechanism, we need to make changes in three areas: what we evaluate, how we evaluate, and who does the evaluating. Here's what this means in practice. For what we evaluate, we need to build a "three-in-one" set of indicators. That means turning motor ability, healthy behavior, and sports character from core competencies, along with the teaching goals of curriculum-based ideological and political education, into things we can actually see and write

down. For how we evaluate, we need to mix process evaluation with final evaluation. For who does the evaluating, we need to get more people involved, not just one type of person. We need to move past the old model where the teacher is the only judge. Instead, we should bring in student self-evaluation and peer evaluation as well. PE teachers are the ones who actually make curriculum-based ideological and political education happen in sports competitions. How much they understand it and how good they are at it largely decides how well it all works.

5. How to Better Integrate Ideological and Political Education into Middle School Sports Competitions

5.1. Improving the System: Better Planning and Rules for Competition-Based Education

The key here is to start from the top. We need to take the goal of bringing curriculum-based ideological and political education into middle school sports competitions and turn it into clear, firm rules—not just something nice to say. We should break the idea that "ordinary young people focus too much on academics and not enough on sports, while elite athletes focus too much on sports and not enough on academics." With the shared goal of promoting the healthy development of young people, we should scientifically plan the strategic layout and implementation rules of the school sports competition system [9]. First, "educating through competition" should be included in the evaluation system for school sports work. At present, the evaluation of middle school sports competitions uses competition results and the number of awards as the core indicators. This makes schools naturally focus more on competition results. We should push for structural changes in the evaluation system and treat the educational results of competitions and competition results as equally important evaluation dimensions. Second, we should set up standard procedures and rules for educating through competitions. This will turn integrating curriculum-based ideological and political education into competitions from something optional into something that must be done and done in a standard way. We should make clear the focus of ideological and political education at each level of league competitions, the process rules for organizing competitions, and the management of education records. Next, we need to build a competition system with different levels. We should start from the top and push competitions away from being just for elite athletes toward something everyone can join. At the four levels—class, grade, school, and between schools—the teaching focus should be different at each level. This way, we get a system where everyone takes part, each level builds on the one before, and each level has its own focus.

5.2. Improving Teaching: Bringing "Teaching, Practicing, and Competing" Together with Curriculum-Based Ideological and Political Education

The main point of improving teaching is to work curriculum-based ideological and political education into the whole process of "teaching, practicing, and competing." That way, competitions become a real part of educating students, not just some separate event. First, we should bring curriculum-based ideological and political education into the "teaching" and "practicing" stages early on. When teaching motor skills, teachers can slip in these elements at the same time. During practice, teachers can build situations into training to help students develop willpower and character. By getting this kind of education going in daily teaching and training, students will already have the right values and be mentally ready before they step into a competition. That way, guiding them during the competition doesn't start from scratch. Second, we need to get better at catching teaching moments during the competition and giving guidance right away. The competition itself is the best time to work in curriculum-based ideological and political education. We should help teachers become guides, not just coaches.

They need to be more sensitive to these moments, so they can quickly spot the ones that really matter for teaching. Third, we need to make reflection after the competition a regular part of the process. It should no longer be optional—it should be a must. Instead of just going over scores, it should be about what students learned and how they grew. This can happen in three steps: write it down, share it, and take it deeper. Reflection after a competition is not just about making the teaching stick. It also helps students learn how to learn from what they've been through. That ability itself is a big part of core competencies.

5.3. Improving Evaluation: Setting Up a Broader System to Measure How Competitions Educate Students

First, we need a system that looks at both how students compete and what they end up with. Right now, everything is judged by results alone. That way of doing things pushes the whole point of education off to the side. Process evaluation is about watching how students act and think during the whole competition—before, during, and after. Teachers can write down what they see, and students can also give feedback on each other. When we look at final results, we don't just check the rankings. We also care about how students grew in their values and thinking through the competition. When we mix process evaluation with final evaluation, we keep things fair while still paying attention to how students are growing along the way. Second, we should get more people involved in evaluating—not just the teacher. Students can evaluate themselves, they can evaluate each other, and the teacher can evaluate them too. If only one person does all the evaluating, we miss a lot. Student self-evaluation helps them look at themselves. Peer evaluation helps them learn to watch and appreciate what others do. And teacher evaluation brings in professional judgment—teachers can see the whole picture and guide students as they grow in their values and thinking. Each of these three types of evaluation has its own job, and they back each other up. Together, they give us a fuller picture of how well competitions are actually teaching students. Third, we need to come up with tools and indicators to measure how curriculum-based ideological and political education is working in competitions. Starting from the three dimensions of core competencies, we should design things we can actually see and write down. These indicators should do three things: be clear enough to observe, be divided into different levels, and point toward teaching students the right values. We should also keep regular records of how students perform at each stage, so we can see how they grow in their values and thinking over time.

6. Conclusion

The study shows that the three dimensions of core competencies—motor ability, healthy behavior, and sports character—are highly similar in structure to the three-in-one educational logic of curriculum-based ideological and political education: value shaping, knowledge teaching, and ability development. Sports competitions, with their real situations, embodied experiences, and education that runs through the whole process, become an ideal carrier for bringing the two together. At present, integrating curriculum-based ideological and political education into middle school sports competitions faces three main problems: unclear goals, a broken process, and weak support. To deal with these, this study builds a three-in-one integration framework: a goal system, a content and process system, and a support system. It also puts forward practical paths from three angles—improving the system, improving teaching, and improving evaluation. The hope is to offer theoretical reference and practical ideas for the educational transformation of middle school sports competitions. Sports competitions are not just about skills. They are also a place where character is built and values are guided. When competition goals go beyond winning and losing, when education runs through the whole process, and when evaluation focuses on how a person grows, "educating

through competition" can truly take root. Only then can sports competitions truly live up to the mission of fostering virtue through education.

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