

Optimization Paths for Talent Cultivation in Physical Education Programs from the Perspective of Teacher Education Accreditation in China

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Abstract: Drawing on the connotation and requirements of Teacher Education Accreditation in China, this study examines its impact on physical education programs, emphasizing its deep structuring effects on program positioning, training objectives, curriculum design, and practice-based learning systems. It then identifies several persistent challenges in talent cultivation within physical education programs, including overly generalized training objectives, structural imbalance in the curriculum system, the marginalization and postponement of practice teaching, and the formalization of quality assurance into a mere documentation exercise. In response, the paper proposes four pathways for optimization: redefining training objectives, restructuring the curriculum system, integrating practice-based learning throughout the training process, strengthening quality assurance, and making teacher ethics education substantive rather than symbolic. The goal is to promote a shift in physical education talent cultivation from a “technique-oriented sports training model” toward the cultivation of “high-quality physical education teachers,” thereby contributing a morally grounded and professionally competent cohort of physical education teachers to basic education, in support of national strategies for strengthening education, building a strong sporting nation, and advancing Healthy China.

Keywords: Teacher Education Accreditation in China, physical education programs, talent cultivation, teacher education.

1. Introduction

Teacher Education Accreditation in China is a national, top-level institutional design aimed at advancing the high-quality development of teacher education and continuously improving the effectiveness of teacher preparation [1]. It functions as an innovative mechanism for implementing the Party and the state's policies on building a strong teaching workforce, and as a key evaluative measure that embodies both the quality orientation and value functions of teacher education. Education modernization no longer treats knowledge transmission as its sole objective; instead, it places greater emphasis on the cultivation of core competencies, the development of practical capability, and the attainment of professional competence by learners. As an essential component of teacher education, physical education programs regard talent cultivation as both the core of program development and a critical basis for program accreditation [2]. At present, however, multiple issues remain in the talent cultivation processes of physical education programs. In response, this study focuses on four central questions: What is the connotation of Teacher Education Accreditation in China? How does it reshape the logic of talent cultivation in physical education programs? What key challenges currently exist in terms of training objectives, curriculum structure, practice-based learning, and quality assurance? And, under the perspective of Teacher Education Accreditation in China, how should talent cultivation in physical education programs be optimized? Through this line of inquiry, the study seeks to provide conceptual support for building a high-quality physical education teacher preparation system that aligns with the needs of basic education.

2. The Connotation of Teacher Education Accreditation in China

Teacher Education Accreditation in China is an external evaluation and recognition mechanism for the quality of talent cultivation in teacher education programs. Its core purpose is to ensure and enhance the quality of professional education and to promote the construction and development of these programs [3]. It represents a shift in China's higher education quality governance from an “administrative-driven” approach toward a model characterized by “standards-based guidance, professional self-regulation, and continuous improvement.” In essence, accreditation is not a one-time qualification check; rather, it is a cyclical process of “standards–evaluation–feedback–improvement.” Its aim is to compel teacher education programs to give concrete answers to three fundamental questions — “What kind of teachers are we cultivating? How are we cultivating them? How do we demonstrate that the cultivation is effective?” — and to embed those answers into program design, curriculum structure, teaching practice, and demonstrated student learning outcomes. According to the Provisional Measures for the Accreditation of Teacher Education Majors in Ordinary Higher Education Institutions issued by the Ministry of Education, as well as the accompanying accreditation standards, Teacher Education Accreditation in China is guided by the principles of “student-centeredness, outcome orientation, and continuous improvement.” It emphasizes whether graduates truly possess the professional competence required of qualified teachers, rather than merely achieving “formal compliance” through credit accumulation or course completion. This marks a substantive shift in the focus of accreditation: away from traditional “input/process indicators” such as infrastructure, faculty size, and course offerings, and toward “outcome indicators,” including student teachers' instructional competence, educational commitment, values-

based guidance capacity, classroom and class management ability, and overall capacity to educate.

From a substantive perspective, Teacher Education Accreditation in China involves at least three core requirements. First, clarity of value orientation. Accreditation highlights the distinctive educative role of the teaching profession and requires that prospective teachers not only be able to “deliver lessons,” but also “teach well,” “educate effectively,” and “assume responsibility.” In essence, they must be capable of fulfilling the fundamental mission of fostering virtue and cultivating people. In this sense, accreditation is not merely an assessment of subject-matter mastery; it is an assessment of whether candidates possess the comprehensive qualities and value commitments necessary to become qualified teachers for the people. Second, systemic coherence of the standards framework. The accreditation standards take program training objectives as the organizing core and extend downward into multiple dimensions, including curriculum structure, practice-based teaching, faculty development, support conditions, and quality assurance. Together these dimensions form an internally consistent network of indicators. The framework requires universities to achieve “goal alignment, measurable standards, and verifiable evaluation.” Concretely, program objectives must correspond to the actual professional requirements of primary and secondary school teaching positions; the curriculum must be designed to serve those objectives; practice teaching must provide an authentic arena for competence development; and the quality assurance system must be able to demonstrate whether students have in fact achieved the stated objectives. Third, an improvement-oriented operational mechanism. Accreditation emphasizes continuous improvement and requires universities to establish internal quality assurance systems, including mechanisms for teaching diagnosis and enhancement, employer feedback mechanisms, and graduate follow-up mechanisms. The aim is to shift programs from “inspection-oriented, reactive compliance” toward “ongoing self-renewal,” and to gradually build a culture of self-regulation and self-optimization. This logic of “professional self-responsibility” is precisely what a high-quality teacher education system should embody.

3. The Impact of Teacher Education Accreditation in China on Physical Education Programs

The accreditation philosophy of “student-centeredness, outcome orientation, and continuous improvement” in Teacher Education Accreditation in China has driven physical education programs to shift from traditional instructional models toward more modern, diversified, and systematic cultivation models [4]. This process exerts both directional and structural influences on physical education programs.

3.1. Shifting From a Teaching-Centered Model to A Learning-Centered Model

Traditional instructional models in physical education have been predominantly teacher-centered, focusing on the transmission of knowledge and the training of technical skills. By contrast, the contemporary “student-centered” approach places greater emphasis on students’ holistic development and individual needs [5].

First, restructuring of the teaching model: deeper adoption of heuristic and inquiry-based pedagogy. Guided by a student-centered approach, physical education programs increasingly

value students’ initiative and active participation in the learning process. Rather than limiting instruction to “what the teacher teaches,” the emphasis shifts toward guiding students in “how to discover and solve problems.” In practice, this has led to broader use of diversified pedagogical methods such as heuristic teaching, inquiry-based learning, participatory learning, project-based learning, cooperative learning, group discussion, and situational simulation. These approaches not only increase student engagement in the classroom, but also cultivate collaboration skills, communication skills, problem-solving ability, and innovative thinking. As a result, students’ comprehensive qualities are developed and strengthened in authentic learning contexts, rather than being treated as abstract targets.

Second, precision in training objectives: balancing individual differences and comprehensive competence. Under a student-centered approach, physical education programs design their talent cultivation goals with greater attention to students’ developmental patterns and individual characteristics, while actively aligning these goals with the competency requirements of future professional positions [6]. The objectives of training no longer focus solely on mastery of specialized sports skills and the acquisition of basic instructional techniques. They also emphasize the development of educational commitment, classroom and activity organization skills, health promotion awareness, communication and collaboration skills, and social adaptability. In other words, talent cultivation is oriented both toward the differentiated growth trajectories of individual students and toward the practical demand in basic education and society for high-quality physical education teachers.

3.2. Focusing on Competence Development and Outcome Quality

The “outcome orientation” principle places the attainment of training objectives at the center of evaluation, shifting the focus from “what has been taught by the instructor” to “what competencies student teachers have acquired and what professional tasks they are able to perform.” Grounded in both social needs and students’ comprehensive development [7], this principle drives physical education programs to undertake systematic optimization in three areas: the formulation of training objectives, the structuring of the curriculum system, and the design and implementation of the teaching process.

First, training objectives have shifted from knowledge transmission to the cultivation of comprehensive competence. Under an outcome-oriented perspective, physical education programs are no longer satisfied with students merely mastering sports knowledge and skills; instead, they emphasize the ability to “teach effectively [8]”. The training objectives explicitly require students to develop core dimensions of teacher competence, including lesson planning and instructional design, classroom organization and management, communicative and instructional guidance skills, and an educational commitment to teaching. Students are expected to be able to address real instructional problems in actual school settings, rather than simply demonstrate technical movements. Second, the curriculum system is redesigned in reverse, starting from competence requirements. Curriculum design is no longer a simple accumulation of knowledge modules; instead, it is organized around the expected outcomes — that is, the professional competencies students are expected to demonstrate upon graduation [9]. By strengthening practice-oriented courses, project-based

learning, school observation and internship components, programs require students to complete teaching tasks in real or simulated classroom settings, reflect on their instructional behavior, and refine their teaching methods. In this way, “being able to teach, and to teach well” becomes the direct training objective of the curriculum. Third, the evaluation mechanism has shifted from process-based inspection to outcome-based verification. Assessment no longer relies primarily on written exams or attendance, but instead evaluates student teachers through classroom teaching demonstrations, instructional design portfolios, teaching practicums, and reflective teaching reports [10]. The goal is to determine whether students truly possess the capacity to teach independently. In other words, students are not only expected to “say the right thing,” but also to “do it in practice.”

Overall, the outcome-oriented approach has enabled physical education programs to shift from “transmitting knowledge” to “developing competence,” and from “completing instruction” to “demonstrating professional readiness.” This transformation has strengthened the alignment between talent cultivation in physical education programs and the actual competency demands of physical education teaching positions in primary and secondary schools.

3.3. Building a Dynamically Optimized Quality Enhancement Mechanism

The principle of “continuous improvement” emphasizes that talent cultivation is not a one-time acceptance of outcomes, but rather an ongoing, dynamic process of diagnosis, feedback, adjustment, and enhancement [11]. In contrast to traditional “one-time assessment,” this principle requires that program quality be continuously monitored, that problems be identified in a timely manner and translated into concrete improvement actions, and that the cultivation of talent remain aligned with the evolving competency demands of professional teaching positions.

First, closed-loop evaluation: using feedback to drive optimization. Under the principle of continuous improvement, physical education programs are gradually establishing a closed-loop process of “evaluation–feedback–optimization” [12]. Institutions regularly assess training objectives, curriculum structure, teaching methods, and practice-based components, and they collect information on student learning outcomes, classroom teaching performance, feedback from internship schools, and student satisfaction in order to identify weaknesses in the cultivation process. Based on this feedback, programs then adjust course content, instructional approaches, and assessment standards in a timely manner, keeping the training plan under dynamic revision. For example, if it is found that students are insufficiently prepared in areas such as classroom organization or safety management, the program does not merely add superficial content to existing courses. Instead, it strengthens targeted training in classroom management and scenario-based responses to real teaching contingencies.

Second, continuous innovation in teaching models: using improvement to drive quality enhancement. Routine monitoring is not only a means of identifying problems; it also promotes innovation in teaching [13]. Guided by the principle of continuous improvement, physical education programs are shifting from one-way demonstration teaching toward interactive, situated, and task-driven instructional models that emphasize student participation, reflective capacity, and authentic teaching competence. At the same time, the use of

educational technologies has become an integral part of this improvement process. For example, online platforms and blended learning models are employed to increase flexibility and personalization in learning; virtual reality (VR) and related simulation technologies are used to recreate classroom settings and safety-risk scenarios, helping student teachers practice classroom control and emergency response. These practices make instructional training more closely aligned with real school-based teaching contexts.

4. Problems in Talent Cultivation within Physical Education Programs

4.1. Overgeneralized and Overinflated Training Objectives

Some institutions continue to frame their training programs in broad and inflated terms such as “cultivating comprehensive sports professionals” or “serving the entire spectrum of national sports development.” Such positioning creates a mismatch between program objectives and the core competency demands of primary and secondary school physical education teaching posts. As a result, many students develop strong specialized technical skills in specific sports and solid training literacy, yet struggle to perform routine instructional tasks in real school settings — such as differentiated instruction, classroom regulation, student safety management, communication with parents, and basic health and fitness guidance. This pattern of being “technically strong but pedagogically weak” is especially evident in hiring feedback from grassroots schools.

4.2. Structural Misalignment in the Curriculum System

Physical education programs commonly divide coursework into parallel modules such as “disciplinary knowledge in sport,” “specialized sports skill training,” “educational theory,” and “teaching methodology.” This results in structural separation among these modules and a lack of situational integration. For example, students study human structure and functional principles in courses such as Sports Anatomy, practice techniques in specialized skill courses, and learn instructional principles in methodology courses. However, they are not given sufficient opportunities to synthesize these forms of knowledge in authentic classroom teaching contexts to address concrete problems. Questions such as “How can jump rope instruction for third-grade pupils be conducted safely and efficiently?”, “How should a teacher design adaptive fitness training for an overweight student while avoiding psychological resistance?”, or “How can classroom order and safety be maintained in a large class?” are precisely the kinds of challenges physical education teachers confront every day. Yet these scenarios are often not systematically incorporated into professional training as structured, task-based teaching situations. The traditional model of “parallel course delivery, student self-integration” produces a clear gap in the development of classroom competence: students receive knowledge in fragments, but they are not consistently trained to mobilize that knowledge to solve the real instructional problems they will face in schools.

4.3. Practice-Based Teaching Shows a Tendency Toward Being Deferred and Formalistic

In many institutions, students do not enter a real classroom and assume authentic teaching responsibilities until their third

or even fourth year, which means they lack a progressive, iterative, and repeatedly refined teaching experience. Practice-based teaching also shows two concrete problems. First, the stages of school observation, assisted participation, and internship with partial or full teaching responsibility are not well aligned. As a result, students experience an abrupt role shift from “observer” to “quasi-teacher,” without an adequate intermediate phase of mentored co-teaching. Second, there is often no stable, clearly defined, and coordinated supervisory and evaluation mechanism among university instructors, on-campus mentors, and in-service school mentors. In some cases, practicum assessment still relies on procedural confirmation — “attendance counts as qualified,” “completion counts as passing” — rather than on hard criteria such as classroom instructional quality, depth of teaching reflection, pupil feedback, communication with parents, or awareness of safety and risk prevention. As a result, practice teaching may exist procedurally and appear complete in documentation, but it remains insufficient in terms of actual competence development.

4.4. The Quality Assurance Mechanism Tends Toward Self-Justification and Lacks External Validation

In some institutions, internal quality assurance efforts still focus primarily on compiling teaching documents, standardizing policy texts, and refining course syllabi — activities that are largely indicator-driven. However, there is a lack of structured and sustained tracking of key questions such as: “How long is the adaptation period for graduates when they begin teaching?”, “After one year in post, can they maintain stable and manageable classroom control?”, and “Do they have the ability to independently prepare lessons, independently organize physical activity and class sessions, and independently carry out health-oriented interventions for students?” This approach — “demonstrating quality through documentation and asserting quality through self-report” — weakens, to some extent, the authenticity and effectiveness of quality assurance, and it also reduces the strength of the improvement feedback loop within the talent cultivation process.

5. Talent Cultivation Strategies for Physical Education Programs from the Perspective of Teacher Education Accreditation in China

In response to the above problems, it is necessary to take Teacher Education Accreditation in China as a strategic lever to systematically reshape and optimize the talent cultivation model of physical education programs. The goal is to construct a cultivation system characterized by: clearly defined professional orientation, a curriculum structure with internal alignment, practice-based learning embedded throughout the entire training process, a closed-loop quality assurance mechanism, and teacher ethics that are internally grounded rather than externally imposed.

5.1. Reframing Training Objectives

Physical education programs should take “the cultivation of high-quality physical education teachers for primary and secondary schools” as their foremost objective and define a clear competency profile for these teaching positions. This profile should include: the ability to deliver effective PE instruction in the classroom; the ability to promote adolescent

health and ensure safety; the ability to monitor and intervene in students’ physical fitness and health status; the ability to organize school-based sports activities and provide after-school physical activity services; and the ability to offer value guidance and support students’ character development. On this basis, these professional competencies should be decomposed into measurable learning outcome indicators, which then serve as anchors for backward design of curriculum content, practice-based components, and assessment standards. In doing so, the program shifts from “training objectives stated on paper” to “training objectives enacted in teaching practice.” This outcome-oriented chain helps prevent the training objective from once again becoming a vague slogan.

5.2. Reconstructing the Curriculum System

The curriculum system should shift from a discipline-listed model to a task-integrated model. In other words, it should be organized around typical instructional situations and recurring practical problems in primary and secondary school physical education classes. These units should integrate multiple dimensions of professional competence, including the teaching of motor skills, analysis of adolescents’ physical and psychological characteristics, strategies for differentiated instruction, classroom safety management, teacher–student interaction, and school–home communication. For example, tasks such as “maintaining classroom order and ensuring safety in a Grade 7 basketball lesson,” “providing differentiated instructional guidance in jump rope lessons for primary school pupils,” “designing targeted exercise prescriptions for students who are overweight or have low fitness,” and “planning after-school physical activity services as part of school-based sports programming” can be treated as comprehensive instructional scenarios. Within each scenario, knowledge and methods that were previously scattered across separate courses are bundled into actionable classroom solutions. At the same time, assessment within the curriculum should gradually move away from the traditional model of “written examination plus technical skill testing” and toward a model based on micro-teaching, simulated classroom enactment, reflective teaching reports, peer evaluation, and mentor assessment. The core criterion should be “Can the student actually teach effectively?” rather than merely “Can the student perform a technical demonstration?”

5.3. Establishing a Whole-Process, Progressive, and Collaborative Practice-Based Teaching System

Physical education programs should construct a progressive practice pathway built on the sequence of “observation → co-teaching → lead teaching → full internship → reflective consolidation.” In the first year, students should enter primary and secondary school classrooms for observational field experience. The goal at this stage is to understand classroom rhythm, student characteristics, and potential safety risks. In the second year, students should participate in teaching as instructional assistants, taking responsibility for specific segments of the lesson. Typical tasks include small-group guidance, in-class safety supervision, and post-class health guidance for students. In the third year, under a dual-mentor model (a university mentor paired with an in-school mentor), students should assume responsibility for full-class teaching. Their performance should be systematically evaluated in multiple dimensions, including classroom organization and

management, clarity and effectiveness of instructional language, activity design, and the ability to respond to unexpected situations. In the fourth year, students should complete an internship in a near full-post capacity. At this stage, they are expected not only to deliver regular PE lessons, but also to take part in after-school sports clubs, organize school sports events and competitions, and participate in student physical fitness monitoring and intervention — in other words, to undertake the full range of duties of a working physical education teacher. This staged model enables physical education teacher candidates to complete the identity transition from “learner” to “quasi-teacher” in a gradual and supported manner, thereby significantly shortening the adaptation period after formal employment.

At the same time, performance in practice-based teaching should be incorporated as a compulsory graduation requirement. Programs should explore the establishment of a “teaching readiness assessment” system, making “the ability to independently stand in front of a class and teach with control and safety” a necessary condition for graduation, rather than an optional advantage.

5.4. Constructing a Quality Assurance Feedback Loop Centered on Students’ Real Teaching Competence

On the one hand, universities should establish a feedback mechanism for talent cultivation quality that actively involves employers — in particular, primary and secondary schools. These schools should regularly be invited to evaluate graduates in areas such as classroom teaching performance, student safety management, health education competence, teacher–student communication, and school–home collaboration. Such external feedback should then serve as key evidence for revising training objectives, adjusting curriculum structure, and optimizing the design and sequencing of practice-based learning. On the other hand, internal quality assurance should shift from a “documentation-driven” model to a “competence-driven” model. Indicators for quality monitoring should explicitly include student teachers’ actual classroom performance during practicum, their ability to reflect on teaching, their capacity to improve instruction based on reflection, and their professional and ethical conduct. In this way, programs can build a cyclical mechanism of “diagnosis → improvement → reassessment.” More importantly, teacher ethics and professional conduct should be transformed from declarative, lecture-style “explicit education” into a set of binding, practice-based requirements. Whether student teachers possess an authentic commitment to education, whether they demonstrate a strong sense of responsibility for student safety, and whether they uphold professional ethics such as respect for student differences and educational equity should all be written directly into practicum assessments and graduation evaluations. In doing so, “ethics” is no longer treated merely as a politically correct statement of training intent, but becomes an entry threshold for qualification.

6. Summary

Physical education programs bear the strategic mission of supplying high-quality physical education teachers for basic education. They are a foundational force in building a strong education system, a strong sporting nation, and a Healthy China. Teacher Education Accreditation in China provides a clear directional constraint and an actionable path for

improvement in the talent cultivation of physical education programs: it not only requires universities to answer “Whom are you training?”, but also requires them to demonstrate “How well are you training them?”; it not only asks what the curriculum “teaches students to know,” but also what it “teaches students to be able to teach.” From the perspective of accreditation, physical education programs must adhere to a teacher-oriented professional logic, redefine training objectives, break down curricular fragmentation, advance practice-based teaching to earlier stages of preparation, strengthen closed-loop quality assurance, and internalize teacher ethics as a substantive requirement. Only by achieving a substantive shift from “training sports technicians” to “training educators in and through physical education” can these programs truly respond to the real needs of basic education. In doing so, they will be able to play an irreplaceable role in promoting the physical and mental health of young people, cultivating lifelong physical activity habits, guiding values, and shaping character. Ultimately, this transformation will provide strong teaching capacity in support of the high-quality development of basic education in the new era.

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