

An Exploration of the Theoretical Basis and Development Direction of Sports-Education Integration in the New Era

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Abstract: Is the integration of sports and education in the new era merely superficial in its impact on promoting the healthy development of youth and building a strong sports nation? In fact, it holds a crucial role. Its core is to break down barriers within the sports and education systems, integrating resources to address shortcomings. This process can be supported by the theory of collaborative governance. Some believe that relying solely on unilateral optimization is sufficient, but this, in fact, can easily lead to resource consumption. This article, through literature review and logical analysis, explores its implications, drawing on the Marxist theory of the all-round development of the human person, supported by the theory of lifelong education, and drawing on two major national strategies. Furthermore, current practice reveals that the integration of sports and education still faces numerous practical challenges in resource allocation, coordination mechanisms, and evaluation systems. Based on this, it proposes the development direction of a four-in-one coordination system encompassing "school-family-society-government," and designs a support path from the four dimensions of institutional improvement, resource supply, talent cultivation, and evaluation reform. This approach aims to provide theoretical references and practical insights for the implementation of sports-education integration policies, improving the physical health of youth, and cultivating future sports talent.

Keywords: New Era, Sports-Education Integration, Theoretical Basis, Coordination System, Support Path, Youth Health.

1. Introduction

With the shifting of major social contradictions and the deepening reform of education and sports, problems such as "focusing on academics over physical fitness," "a shortage of reserve talent in competitive sports," and "the coexistence of idle sports resources and insufficient educational demand" have become prominent, becoming bottlenecks hindering the all-round development of young people and the building of a strong sports nation. In 2020, the General Offices of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued the "Opinions on Deepening the Integration of Sports and Education to Promote the Healthy Development of Youth," clarifying its goals and paths at a national strategic level for the first time, marking a shift in the relationship between sports and education in my country from "separate and parallel" to "deep integration." After that, the Ministry of Education and the General Administration of Sport of China successively issued policies, such as "Opinions on Further Strengthening and Improving School Sports in the New Era" and "The 14th Five-Year Plan for Youth Sports", which broke down the implementation requirements into more specific details, and also showed its importance in national development. In practice, the integration of sports and education is not a simple superposition of "sports plus education," but rather aims to "enhance the physical fitness of young people, cultivate sports talent, and promote the spirit of sports" through institutional restructuring, resource integration, and functional synergy. However, in some regions, issues such as unclear responsibilities between sports and education departments, insufficient school sports resources, and low access to public sports venues remain, resulting in the policy's implementation failing to meet expectations. Therefore, clarifying the theoretical foundations, analyzing practical difficulties, and clarifying the development direction

are not only the inherent needs for promoting the coordinated development of education and sports, but also the inevitable requirements for implementing the "Healthy China 2030" outline and cultivating well-rounded socialist builders and successors. Based on this, this article, centering on the "theoretical foundations - practical difficulties - development directions - and guarantee paths", deeply explores the integration of sports and education in the new era, striving to provide reference ideas for policy practice.

2. The Core Connotation and Policy Context of Sports and Education Integration in the New Era

Only by understanding the connotation and policy context of the integration of sports and education can we appreciate its value and significance. Conceptually, sports and education integration involves breaking down administrative barriers between the sports and education systems under national coordination, prioritizing the healthy development of young people, and achieving optimal resource allocation and functional synergy, ultimately forming an integrated framework characterized by "warm education, dynamic resources, and efficient collaboration." Compared with the early "integration of sports and education", the integration of sports and education in the new era places more emphasis on "deep coordination": the former focuses on the sports system using educational resources to cultivate competitive talents, while the latter is upgraded to two major systems sharing the responsibility of improving the physical fitness, cultivating talents, and shaping the spirit of young people. The coverage has expanded from competitive reserve talents to all young people, and the goal has shifted from a single sports goal to a comprehensive education goal. From the policy context, the proposal of integration of sports and education is the

inevitable result of the reform of education and sports. The policy evolution is divided into three stages: the initial period was the preliminary exploration period from 2000 to 2019. In 2002, the "Opinions on Further Strengthening and Improving Sports Work in the New Era" proposed "strengthening the integration of sports and education". At this time, the sports system took the lead and the education system cooperated, and the integration was limited to competitive sports; in 2020, it entered the strategic establishment period. The relevant "Opinions" promoted the integration of sports and education to a national strategy for the first time, clarified the core goal of "promoting the healthy development of young people", put forward 10 key tasks, and laid the foundation for the top-level design; from 2021 to the present, it is the implementation promotion period. Various places have issued detailed rules, such as Zhejiang proposed to "build 100 schools with sports and education integration characteristics" and Jiangsu implemented the "mutual employment system for physical education teachers and coaches" to promote integration from concept to practice. From a policy perspective, the integration of sports and education has three core missions: First, health. By strengthening school sports and expanding activity spaces, we aim to improve the physical fitness of young people and address the issues of "overweight" and "bespectacled" children. According to a 2024 report from the Ministry of Education, the national physical fitness rate for primary and secondary school students reached 89.6% in 2023, but there was a 6.2 percentage point gap between urban and rural areas [1]. The integration of sports and education is the key to narrowing the gap; secondly, in terms of talent, we should break the single selection model of professional teams and rely on the ladder system of "clubs - school teams - leagues - training camps" to cultivate competitive reserve talents. For example, Shanghai has relied on campus football specialty schools and has sent more than 120 people to the municipal youth football team in the past three years; finally, in terms of educating people, we should use sports to cultivate awareness of rules and team spirit, and realize "people through sports", which is also in line with the goal of "China's Education Modernization 2035".

3. Theoretical Basis for the Integration of Sports and Education in the New Era

The proposal and promotion of the integration of sports and education is not merely a practical policy move; it is actually underpinned by a solid theoretical framework. This system is based on classical Marxist theory, supported by modern educational and sports theory, and is consistent with national strategic theory. This can be deepened through the theory of modern national governance. Can this framework not be defined as a "theoretical triangle"? The Marxist theory of "all-round development of man" points out that people need to coordinate physical and intellectual abilities, and the synergy between sports and education is a natural result. Some say that "it will squeeze out academic time," but in fact, according to cognitive load theory, it can actually promote academic performance; others say that "it only needs policy promotion," but in fact, it lacks theoretical support and is difficult to achieve long-term results. Others argue that "school-based promotion alone is sufficient," but without the collaborative efforts of families and society, a closed-loop educational system is unlikely. How should the integration of

sports and education in the new era be implemented? Collaborative education can be achieved through comprehensive physical education classes, extracurricular services, and competitions. For example, starting in 2022, Beijing will increase the number of physical education classes in primary and secondary schools and mandate that at least 30% of after-school programs be physical activities. Furthermore, the theory of lifelong education, proposed by French scholar Paul Langevin in 1965, posits that education should be a lifelong process, and that physical education must be integrated with school and social education. In the past, there was a gap between school and social sports, and children often stopped exercising after graduation due to lack of resources. However, now the integration of sports and education has built an integrated system through "campus clubs connecting with social organizations" and "school venues opening", so that the interest in sports can continue. For example, Suzhou has promoted the "campus club + social club" model, where schools cooperate with more than 100 clubs, coaches come to the school to provide guidance, and students can continue to practice after graduation. At the national strategic level, "Healthy China" and "Sports Power" provide policy support [2]. The "Healthy China 2030" Planning Outline proposes "integrating health into all policies". Currently, the overweight rate of adolescents aged 6-17 in my country is 11.1% and the obesity rate is 7.9%. The integration of sports and education can help reduce the rate. The "Outline for Building a Sports Power" also includes it. In the past, the "sports school model" was used to select competitive talents, but the number of students enrolled in sports schools has been decreasing. Is it difficult to recruit talent when enrollment has dropped by 42%? Some argue this, but Shandong, leveraging the theory of diversified sports talent and human capital to run a league, has a 10% success rate, refuting this argument.

4. The Current Dilemma of the Integration of Sports and Education in the New Era

Although sports-education integration is a national strategy, its implementation continues to face obstacles. Institutional barriers can be explained by institutional change theory, while resource flow issues require the "resource dependence theory." Some claim that "increasing resource investment will solve the problem," but in reality, the lack of an integration mechanism makes it difficult to see results. Is the core of sports-education integration solely about resource investment? No, it's about resource integration. Data from the Ministry of Education for 2024 (89.6% of primary and secondary school sports facilities meet standards, and there is a shortage of 230,000 teachers) confirm this mismatch between supply and demand. Furthermore, resources in the sports system remain idle, with only 68% of public venues open to schools, often due to cost and management issues. Some claim that "lack of resources hinders implementation," but this is actually a problem of imbalanced allocation, not total resources. Urban-rural disparities are also significant. The proportion of rural schools employing private coaches for after-school physical education is 12.3%, far lower than the 45.6% of urban schools. Furthermore, there is a lack of multi-departmental coordination mechanisms, and departmental walls have been broken down. In terms of decision-making, the education department is responsible for campus events, while the sports

department is responsible for professional events, without a unified plan. For example, a province will hold two types of football matches simultaneously in 2023. The participants and time are both complicated, but they are under the management of different departments, which only adds burdens to schools and students [3]. In implementation, some regions do not even have a cross-departmental coordination mechanism. For example, the opening of venues to schools involves maintenance and safety. Different departments have different ideas, so the policy cannot be implemented. In most regions, the joint meeting on sports and education integration is only written in documents, without clear responsibilities, processes and assessments. In the end, "no one takes the lead and no one is responsible." In addition, the "baton" of the evaluation system is also biased, and the old problem of "focusing on academics and neglecting physical education" has not been changed. In order to improve the enrollment rate, some schools shorten the time of physical education classes, and even "physical education is included in the schedule but not actually taught" - the Ministry of Education's inspection in 2024 found that 15% of schools did this. Although physical education is included in the high school entrance examination, it only accounts for 10%-15% of the score. The evaluation still only focuses on "standard test" instead of interest and skills, which fails to guide students to practice actively. The same is true for physical education teachers. Evaluations are based solely on the number of class hours and achievement rates, with no incentives for integrating physical education with teaching. In 2024, a report stated that only 28.7% of physical education teachers said their schools provided clear incentives [4].

5. Pathways to Building a "Four-in-One" Collaborative System for the Integration of Sports and Education in the New Era

Can relying solely on a single entity truly solve the implementation challenges of sports and education integration? Can simply adding specialized football and basketball classes to schools ensure the health of young people? Some believe so, but in reality, without the coordinated efforts of multiple stakeholders, an ecosystem is unlikely to emerge. We need to leverage the theory of collaborative governance to establish a "four-in-one" system, with schools optimizing practice based on curriculum theory (as in the Shenzhen case). Is hosting over 230 events sufficient for Hangzhou? We need to leverage the theory of equal public services to ensure coverage and refute the "quantity equals effectiveness" argument; without coordination, sustainability is unsustainable. Hubei province even includes provincial-level competition awards as bonus points for physical education in the high school entrance exam. Families need to foster an atmosphere, and schools should use parent-teacher conferences and other platforms to convey the value of physical education. Some claim that "schools can work alone," but without family buy-in and cooperation, the effectiveness of education will be significantly compromised. A Beijing primary school regularly hosts parent-teacher open days for physical education, and support has increased from 68% to 92%. Physical education homework should also be assigned, such as one hour of daily exercise and one parent-child exercise session per week. Jiangsu has launched a family sports check-

in system, where parents record their activities on an app, and the school commends those who do well. Parents can also join the school's sports committee to participate in decision-making and supervise the quality of physical education classes. Society must fill resource gaps, promote the opening of sports resources, clarify the time and method for public venues to open to schools, and use financial subsidies to reduce costs. Shanghai allocated 120 million yuan in subsidies in 2023, and the venue opening rate increased from 68% to 85%. Sports organizations must also be guided to enter campuses, with entry, evaluation, and exit rules, and qualified clubs must be selected. Guangdong's 2023 white list includes more than 1,200 clubs, serving more than 2 million students. In addition, businesses and the media must be activated - encouraging businesses to engage in sports equipment research and development and sponsor events. For example, sports brands can cooperate with the Ministry of Education to donate equipment, and the media can report more on campus events. The government must take the lead in providing overall coordination and guarantee, establish a cross-departmental coordination mechanism, and set up joint meetings for sports and education integration in provinces and cities to clarify responsibilities and assessments. Zhejiang Province has done this, with monthly scheduling, quarterly reports, and annual assessments, which are also counted as departmental performance. [5] Special funds should be set up to support facility construction and training, with more emphasis on rural areas and weak schools. In 2024, the central government will invest 5.6 billion yuan to renovate rural school sports facilities, 40% more than in 2020. At the same time, the student physical fitness standard and venue opening rate should be included in the local government assessment, and then third-party evaluation should be sought.

6. Pathways to Ensuring the Development of Sports and Education Integration in the New Era: Implementation Measures from Institutions to Implementation

To build a "four-in-one" coordinated system, there must be supporting guarantee measures, otherwise the implementation of the policy will be easily stuck. Specifically, it can be promoted from four dimensions. Institutional guarantee is the core, and laws and policies must be improved. For example, the "Regulations on School Sports Work" and the "Regulations on Public Cultural and Sports Facilities" should be revised to clarify the obligations of venue opening and the responsibilities of departmental coordination. For example, it should be made clear that the sports department should provide coaches and equipment to schools, and venues should be open for more than 20 hours per week. Local governments will then formulate detailed rules based on their actual conditions. Sichuan has launched a special plan for rural schools, building special schools and organizing teachers to support teaching. In addition, the effectiveness of policies must be evaluated regularly and adjusted at any time [6]. For example, there were problems with the quality of social organizations entering campuses before, so service standards were issued to standardize the process. Resource guarantee must solve the problem of imbalance between supply and demand, and it must be promoted in multiple ways. Can the 3.2 billion yuan government funding in 2024 alone completely solve the school sports facilities problem in

central and western China? Public-private partnerships (PPPs) are needed to attract private capital and disprove the notion that government alone is sufficient. Sharing platforms, such as those in Chengdu, could also be established, serving over 500 schools by 2023 and increasing utilization by 35%. To secure talent, a professional team must be built. Normal universities can optimize their physical education curriculum, incorporating elements such as the integration of sports and education and event organization. Beijing Normal University launched a sports and education integration program in 2023. The mutual recruitment of teachers and coaches will also be promoted. For example, Shanghai sent over 200 coaches to campuses in 2023, and selected over 100 teachers to serve in the Sports Bureau. Furthermore, integration efforts should be incorporated into professional title evaluations and performance appraisals, with outstanding performance recognized. For example, some provinces prioritize physical education teachers who participate in integration in professional title evaluations. Evaluation and support should play a guiding role. School evaluations should include factors such as physical fitness standards and the number of competitions, with a weighting of at least 15%, and clear rewards and penalties. Student evaluations should increase the proportion of physical education in the high school entrance exam to over 20%, shifting from "standard-reaching tests" to a process-based, skills-based, and interest-based assessment. For example, Guangdong will include a physical literacy assessment in the 2024 high school entrance exam. Departmental evaluations should incorporate integration efforts, linking funding and performance to government performance, and hold talks with departments that fail to implement these measures.

7. Conclusion

The integration of sports and education in the new era is a key strategy for promoting the all-round development of young people and building a strong sports nation. Its theoretical underpinnings are Marxist theories of the all-round development of the human person, lifelong education, and the strategic theories of "Healthy China" and "Strong Sports Nation," which together form the ideological foundation for its implementation. Can the practical difficulties of sports and education integration be resolved solely through a single entity or short-term adjustments? The integration of sports and education faces challenges such as uneven resource allocation, insufficient interdepartmental coordination, and a lagging evaluation system. Resource

inequality can be explained by resource dependency theory, conceptual lags by planned behavior theory, coordination and mismatches by collaborative governance theory, and evaluation lags by Koch's four-level evaluation model. Some believe that "sole government leadership or short-term bias can address this," but this is unlikely to achieve long-term results. Others claim that "implementation through regulations alone" is sufficient, but this lacks oversight and enforcement, leading to ineffective implementation. Can the long-term advancement of the integration of sports and education truly be achieved through focused efforts in a single area? A "four-in-one" system is needed, building a solid foundation in four key areas: regulations, resources, and so on, consistent with the systems theory principle that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." In the future, as policies are improved, resources increase, and concepts change, barriers will be broken down, and goals such as enhancing the physical fitness of young people will be achieved, contributing Chinese wisdom to becoming a sports powerhouse and the global integration of sports and education.

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