

Innovative Development Strategies for University Sports Clubs from the Perspective of Core Competencies



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Abstract: From the perspective of “core competencies,” university sports clubs are transitioning from interest-based societies to educational platforms. This article systematically examines the current bottlenecks faced by clubs in areas such as governance structure, teaching philosophy, resource allocation, and evaluation/incentive mechanisms: ambiguous governance responsibilities, lack of curriculum stratification, shortages in facilities and instructors, and an evaluation system that emphasizes results over process. To address these issues, an innovative “four-in-one” path is proposed: organizationally, establishing a three-level collaborative mechanism involving the “university - college/school - club”; pedagogically, introducing a “big ideas + learning community” model to strengthen competency orientation; resource-wise, integrating on-campus and off-campus facilities, instructors, and social funding to form a diversified supply system; and evaluation-wise, implementing a process-oriented, visual, multi-dimensional core competency evaluation system supported by digital platforms.

Keywords: club, university sports, core competencies

1. Introduction

University sports clubs aim to meet students' diverse and individualized needs for physical education learning. By offering a variety of sports programs such as fitness, yoga, running, and ball games, they guide university students to choose suitable sports activities based on their own circumstances, thereby stimulating their intrinsic motivation to participate in physical exercise. Compared to the traditional class-based physical education model, the university sports club model holds significant advantages in cultivating students' core physical education competencies. Firstly, the club model is interest-oriented, allowing students to autonomously choose sports based on personal preferences. This intrinsic motivation can greatly stimulate students' enthusiasm and initiative, shifting

the paradigm from “making me learn” to “I want to learn,” laying a solid psychological foundation for developing healthy behaviors. Secondly, club activities are more flexible and open, breaking down barriers between classes, grades, and even majors, providing students with a broader social platform conducive to developing teamwork and interpersonal skills. Thirdly, the club model often employs tiered teaching and small-group instruction, better meeting the individualized needs of students at different skill levels, enabling tailored teaching, and thus more effectively enhancing students' athletic abilities. Finally, clubs emphasize “teaching proficiently, practicing diligently, and competing regularly.” Through regular training and competitions, they integrate skill learning, physical conditioning, and character development organically, providing students with a realistic and comprehensive context for sports practice, making the cultivation of core

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competencies more profound and enduring. This article, from the perspective of fostering student core competencies, examines the existing problems in the organizational structure, teaching and activity design, resource allocation, and evaluation and incentive mechanisms of current university sports clubs, and proposes corresponding strategies for their development.

2. Design of the University Sports Club Model

2.1 Organizational management model

Currently, the organizational forms of sports clubs in Chinese universities can be broadly divided into two categories: one is relatively loose interest-based societies driven by student interests, and the other is course-based sports clubs closely integrated with the physical education curriculum. Interest societies are usually spontaneously organized and managed by students, with activities focused on daily interaction and recreation, offering a more flexible organizational form. Course-based clubs, on the other hand, are established under the unified planning and guidance of the university's sports department, incorporating club activities into the physical education curriculum system. Students participate through elective or required courses and receive corresponding credits.

The management model of sports clubs generally adopts a combination of student self-management, teacher professional guidance, and university macro-level supervision. Students are the main body of the club, responsible for daily operations, activity planning, and organizational management, which helps cultivate their organizational skills, leadership abilities, and sense of responsibility. Teachers or coaches are primarily responsible for providing professional guidance, including technical instruction, tactical analysis, training plan development, and competition guidance, ensuring the professionalism and scientific nature of club activities.

2.2 Resource allocation and support

Sports facilities are the foundational guarantee for university sports clubs to carry out activities.

Currently, most universities have relatively well-established sports venues and facilities, such as tracks, basketball courts, football fields, swimming pools, etc. These facilities are open to sports clubs while also meeting the needs of physical education teaching and major university events.

The quality of instructors is a key factor determining the development level and educational quality of university sports clubs. Currently, the faculty advisors for university sports clubs are primarily composed of professional teachers from the sports departments/colleges. These teachers possess solid professional theoretical knowledge and rich teaching experience, enabling them to provide professional technical guidance and theoretical support for the clubs.

2.3 Student participation level

University students' motivations for participating in sports clubs are diverse, mainly stemming from intrinsic interest and extrinsic credit incentives. The most significant feature of university sports clubs open to all students is the expansion of the participant base from sports-specialized students to the general student population. The club model breaks away from the "elitist" tendency in traditional physical education, emphasizing "participation for all, benefit for all." Whether students have a strong sports foundation or are beginners with zero experience, they can find a suitable place within the club. This shift from "elite" to "mass" not only greatly increases student participation rates and coverage but also allows the educational function of sports to be realized on a broader scale, truly embodying the educational philosophy of "health first."

2.4 Activity formats

The activities of university sports clubs are rich and diverse, typically encompassing three levels: regular training, internal competitions, and external exchanges. Regular training forms the foundation of club activities, led by faculty advisors or coaches, involving systematic technical, tactical, and physical fitness training aimed at improving members' athletic proficiency. Internal competitions are the core of club

activities, providing members with opportunities for practical application through teaching matches, friendly games, leagues, etc., to test training outcomes and stimulate enthusiasm for sports. External exchanges represent the expansion of club activities, broadening students' horizons through friendly matches and invitational tournaments with clubs from other universities, enhancing inter-university communication and cooperation, and increasing the club's visibility and influence.

3. Main Problems Facing University Sports Clubs

3.1 Bottlenecks in organizational structure and governance

3.1.1 Incomplete governance system, unclear responsibilities and authorities

Although many universities have established management systems for sports clubs, problems of an incomplete governance system and unclear responsibilities persist in practice. On one hand, multiple departments such as the university sports department, student affairs office, and Youth League Committee may have management authority over the clubs, leading to multi-headed management, overlapping responsibilities, and potential management vacuums or buck-passing. On the other hand, internal management systems within the clubs are often unsound, with unclear roles and responsibilities for student leaders and ambiguous positioning for faculty advisors, resulting in low decision-making efficiency and frequent internal conflicts. This chaotic governance system not only affects the normal operation of the clubs but also hinders the fulfillment of their educational functions. Therefore, establishing a governance system with clear responsibilities, coordinated operation, and scientific management is the primary issue urgently needing resolution for university sports clubs.

3.1.2 Lack of long-term planning and systematic design

Currently, the development of many university sports clubs remains spontaneous and fragmented, lacking long-term planning and systematic design. The establishment of clubs often depends on student

interest and teacher expertise, without comprehensive consideration of the university's physical education goals and overall student needs. This can lead to duplication or gaps in project offerings, short-term behavior in activity organization, making it difficult to build brand effects and sustained influence. Universities should approach sports clubs from a strategic height, conduct top-level design, formulate long-term development plans, clarify development goals, construction standards, and evaluation systems, guiding clubs towards connotative and sustainable development (Fu & Mo, 2018).

3.2 Limitations in teaching and activity design

3.2.1 Monotonous teaching content, lack of stratification and systematism

Currently, the teaching content of many university sports clubs tends to be monotonous and homogenized, lacking stratification and systematism. The teaching content of some clubs remains stuck at the repetitive practice of basic skills, lacking systematic instruction on tactics, rules, officiating, and deeper exploration of the cultural connotations of the sports. Such monotonous content struggles to meet students' diverse learning needs and can easily lead to student boredom (Zhang et al., 2020). Furthermore, the lack of stratification in teaching content, without tiered design based on students' different skill levels, leads to a common "one-size-fits-all" phenomenon. Advanced students feel under-challenged ("not getting enough"), while beginners feel overwhelmed ("can't keep up"), affecting teaching effectiveness and student motivation.

3.2.2 Activity design emphasizes competition over education, insufficient integration of core competencies

In the organization and design of activities, many university sports clubs exhibit a tendency to "emphasize competition over education," focusing primarily on training and competitions, pursuing results and rankings, while neglecting the educational function of sports activities. Activity design often focuses on improving sports skills and physical fitness, with insufficient attention paid to cultivating

core competencies such as sports ethics and health behaviors.

3.2.3 Lack of scientific training methods and personalized guidance

Scientific training methods and personalized guidance are key to improving students' athletic abilities and preventing sports injuries. However, many university sports clubs currently show significant deficiencies in this area. The training methods of some clubs are relatively traditional and monotonous, lacking scientific basis and specificity, often resembling "collective pot" training sessions without personalized training plans tailored to individual differences and the characteristics of the sport. This lack of scientific training methods and personalized guidance not only hinders the improvement of students' athletic abilities but also increases the risk of sports injuries.

3.3 Dilemmas in resource allocation

3.3.1 Insufficient facilities, struggling to meet all students' needs

Inadequate facilities are the primary bottleneck restricting the development of university sports clubs. With the continuous expansion of university enrollment and the growing enthusiasm of students for sports participation, existing sports venues and facilities are already struggling to meet the needs of all students. Many university sports facilities operate at full capacity during after-school hours and weekends. Clubs often need to book venues well in advance, sometimes failing to secure suitable spaces. Particularly for popular sports like basketball, badminton, and tennis, the phenomenon of "no available slots" is common. Additionally, many university sports facilities are aging, poorly maintained, and pose safety hazards, also affecting the student sports experience.

3.3.2 Shortage of professional instructors, varying levels of guidance quality

Professional instructors are crucial for ensuring the teaching quality of university sports clubs. However, many universities currently face a shortage of professional instructors for sports clubs. On one hand, the number of physical education teachers is

limited, making it difficult to meet the guidance needs of the increasing number of club programs. On the other hand, the knowledge structure of existing physical education teachers is relatively narrow; for some emerging or niche sports, they lack specialized knowledge and teaching experience. To compensate for the shortage, some universities hire external coaches or retired athletes, but the teaching quality and sense of responsibility of these external personnel vary, making it difficult to guarantee teaching standards. The shortage of professional instructors and the uneven quality of guidance directly impact the teaching quality and educational effectiveness of university sports clubs.

3.3.3 Limited funding, constraining club development

Funding is the material foundation for the survival and development of university sports clubs. Currently, the primary source of funding for university sports clubs relies on university allocations, which is a single channel with limited amounts. University funding for sports clubs often falls short of their actual development needs. Insufficient funding directly constrains the organization of club activities. Limited funding makes it difficult for many university sports clubs to develop, struggling to achieve scale and brand effects.

3.4 Lack of evaluation and incentive mechanisms

3.4.1 Singular evaluation system, emphasizing results over process

Currently, the evaluation systems of many university sports clubs remain relatively singular, exhibiting a tendency to "emphasize results over process." The evaluation content often focuses on students' sports skill levels and competition results, while paying insufficient attention to aspects such as learning attitude, participation level, teamwork, and willpower (Zhang, 2022). The evaluation methods also predominantly rely on summative assessment, such as final technical tests or competition rankings, lacking continuous, dynamic evaluation of students' performance throughout the learning process. This singular evaluation system can easily lead students to adopt a utilitarian mindset, focusing only on the final

assessment result while neglecting the experience and growth during the learning process.

3.4.2 Lack of comprehensive evaluation of core competencies

The core competencies of physical education include three aspects: athletic ability, health behaviors, and sports ethics, forming an organic whole. However, the current evaluation systems of university sports clubs mostly remain at the singular evaluation of athletic ability, lacking a comprehensive assessment of core competencies. Evaluating health behaviors and sports ethics, due to their implicit and process-oriented nature, is difficult to measure with simple quantitative indicators, and is therefore often overlooked in practice. The lack of a comprehensive evaluation of core competencies makes it difficult to truly implement the educational goals of university sports clubs and can lead to the “hollowing out” of physical education.

3.4.3 Singular incentive methods, struggling to motivate students

Effective incentive mechanisms are important guarantees for motivating student participation and maintaining club vitality. However, the incentive methods of many university sports clubs are relatively singular, primarily relying on credit incentives and honor incentives. While credit incentives can increase participation rates to some extent, their effect is often short-term and utilitarian, struggling to ignite students' intrinsic passion for sports. Singular incentive methods make it difficult for university sports clubs to form sustained and powerful internal drivers.

4. Innovative Development Strategies for University Sports Clubs

4.1 Organizational innovation: building a new collaborative education mechanism

4.1.1 Establish a “university - college/school - club” three-tier linkage management system

To address the challenges of an incomplete governance system and unclear responsibilities, a “university - college/school - club” three-tier collaborative management system should be

established (Zhang et al., 2015). At the university level, form a “University Sports Club Management Committee” led by a relevant university leader and composed of heads of departments such as Sports, Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and the Youth League Committee (Na & Gu, 2017). This committee is responsible for formulating macro policies, development plans, and evaluation standards for all university sports clubs, coordinating sports resources university-wide, and providing top-level design and institutional support for club development. At the college/school level, establish “College/School Sports Club Working Groups,” responsible for implementing university policies, guiding and supporting student participation in sports clubs, and integrating club activities with the college's educational work. At the club level, improve internal governance structures by establishing “Club Councils” composed of faculty advisors, student leaders, and member representatives, responsible for daily management, activity planning, and fund usage, achieving democratic decision-making and scientific management. This three-tier linkage management system clarifies responsibilities at each level, forming a governance structure with clear duties and efficient operation, providing solid organizational support for the healthy development of university sports clubs.

4.1.2 Strengthen the student's primary role, improve the student self-management system

Students are the main body of university sports clubs. Strengthening their primary role and improving the student self-management system is key to stimulating the clubs' internal vitality. Firstly, fully respect student interests and needs, soliciting their opinions widely on club establishment and activity planning, making students true masters of the clubs. Secondly, strengthen the selection and training of student leaders, enhancing their organizational, communication, and sense of responsibility through training sessions and experience exchanges. Thirdly, establish sound democratic management systems within the clubs, such as general membership meetings, council systems, and financial

transparency mechanisms, safeguarding members' rights to information, participation, and supervision, achieving democratic decision-making and transparent management. Finally, establish scientific assessment and incentive mechanisms to recognize and reward outstanding student leaders and active members, stimulating participation enthusiasm and a sense of ownership. By strengthening the student's primary role and improving self-management, university sports clubs can truly become effective platforms for student self-education, self-management, self-service, and self-monitoring.

4.2 Teaching innovation: exploring competency-oriented new teaching models

4.2.1 introduce “big ideas” teaching to integrate teaching content

To overcome the problems of monotonous and non-systematic teaching content, the concept of “big ideas” teaching can be introduced to integrate and restructure the content. “Big ideas” refer to core concepts, principles, or methods that reflect the essence of a discipline and possess broad transfer value. In physical education teaching, “big ideas” could be “mechanical principles in movement,” “strategies for teamwork,” or “prevention and rehabilitation of sports injuries.” By introducing “big ideas,” fragmented knowledge points like techniques, tactics, and rules can be connected into an organic network, helping students build a holistic understanding and deep comprehension of the sport. For example, in a basketball club, teaching could be organized around the big idea of “creating and utilizing space,” integrating skills like dribbling, passing, movement, and screening with tactical plays, enabling students to understand not just the “how” but also the “why.” This “big ideas”-centered instructional design helps cultivate students’ knowledge transfer ability and comprehensive application skills, enhancing their athletic ability and physical literacy.

4.2.2 Build “learning communities” to promote deep learning and collaboration

A “learning community” is a group composed of learners and their facilitators (including teachers,

experts, peers, etc.), united by common learning tasks, aiming to promote the comprehensive growth of members. It emphasizes communication, exchange, and sharing of various learning resources during the learning process, jointly completing learning tasks, thus forming interpersonal connections characterized by mutual influence and promotion among members (Dong et al., 2001). Within university sports clubs, “learning communities” can be built, bringing together students of different levels and majors. Through collaborative learning, inquiry-based learning, and sharing, deep learning and collaborative skills can be enhanced. Building “learning communities” can create a positive, mutually supportive learning atmosphere, allowing students to grow together through mutual learning and assistance, achieving a shift from “individual learning” to “collective intelligence.”

4.3 Resource innovation: expanding diversified resource supply channels

4.3.1 Integrate internal and external resources to achieve facility sharing

To address the shortage of facilities, university sports clubs should actively integrate internal and external resources to achieve facility sharing. Within the university, break down departmental barriers to achieve coordinated planning and comprehensive utilization of sports venues, teaching buildings, dormitory areas, etc. For example, simple basketball courts, badminton courts can be built near dormitories for convenient exercise; vacant classrooms can be used for indoor programs like yoga and aerobics. Externally, actively establish cooperative relationships with surrounding communities, enterprises, and sports venues, sharing their facility resources through agreements, service purchases, etc. Integrating internal and external resources can effectively alleviate the shortage of facilities, providing material support for the development of university sports clubs.

4.3.2 Introduce social resources to expand funding sources and cooperation channels

To address limited funding, university sports clubs should actively introduce social resources to

expand funding sources and cooperation channels. Firstly, strengthen cooperation with enterprises, attracting corporate funding through naming rights, event sponsorship, scholarship establishment, etc. Secondly, strengthen ties with alumni, seeking donations and support by establishing alumni foundations, organizing alumni matches, etc. Thirdly, clubs can also engage in appropriate market-oriented operations through fee-based services, organizing commercial competitions, etc., to increase their own “self-financing” capacity (Yang et al., 2021). Introducing social resources can effectively alleviate funding shortages, injecting new vitality into the development of university sports clubs.

4.4 Evaluation innovation: building a core competency-oriented comprehensive evaluation system

4.4.1 Introduce process-oriented evaluation, focusing on student growth and progress

To change the current “results-over-process” evaluation model, process-oriented evaluation should be introduced, focusing on student growth and progress during club participation. Process-oriented evaluation should run through the entire club activity process, collecting information on students’ learning attitudes, participation levels, cooperative spirit, willpower, etc., through observation, records, interviews, questionnaires, and other methods. For example, student growth portfolios can be established to record incremental progress; students can conduct self-assessment and peer assessment to reflect on their learning process and gains; regular interviews can be conducted to understand their learning experiences. Through process-oriented evaluation, students’ strengths and weaknesses can be identified promptly, providing targeted guidance and help, thereby stimulating learning motivation and promoting continuous development.

4.4.2 Utilize digital means to realize data-driven and visualized evaluation

To enhance and effectiveness of evaluation, digital means should be actively employed to realize data-driven and visualized evaluation. Modern information technology, such as smartphones, sports

watches, heart rate monitors, can be used to collect data during exercise (e.g., heart rate, steps, movement trajectories), providing objective, quantitative basis for evaluation. Specialized sports club management apps or mini-programs can be developed to informatize functions like student attendance, activity records, performance statistics, and evaluation feedback (Li et al., 2025). Big data technology can analyze and mine collected data, generating individual and group sports health reports, visually presenting student growth trajectories and development trends. Using digital means makes evaluation more scientific, precise, and efficient, providing strong support for teachers’ instructional decisions and students’ self-directed learning.

5. Conclusion

This study systematically explores innovative development strategies for university sports clubs from the perspective of core competencies. The research argues that under the dual background of the fundamental task of “fostering virtue through education” and the “Healthy China” strategy, university sports clubs, as an important part of higher education physical education, play an irreplaceable and unique role in cultivating students’ core physical education competencies. However, current university sports clubs still face numerous problems in organizational structure, teaching and activity design, resource allocation, and evaluation/incentive mechanisms, which hinder the full realization of their educational functions. Therefore, this study proposes development strategies centered on “four innovations”: through organizational innovation, building a “university - college/school - club” three-tier linkage management system and collaborative education platform; through teaching innovation, exploring competency-oriented teaching models like “big ideas,” “large unit” teaching, and “learning communities”; through resource innovation, expanding diversified channels for facility, instructor, and funding supply; through evaluation innovation, constructing a multi-dimensional, process-oriented, data-driven comprehensive core competency

evaluation system. These strategies aim to promote the transformation of university sports clubs from traditional interest societies into modern educational platforms, thereby better serving the holistic development of students.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that she has no conflicts of interest to this work.

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