

# Research on Mining and Integration Path of Ideological and Political Elements in College Pickleball Courses

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**Abstract:** As an emerging sport integrating tennis, badminton, and table tennis techniques, pickleball has gained rapid popularity in university physical education programs in recent years due to its learnability, entertainment value, social engagement, and moderate competitive intensity. Against the backdrop of China's national policy to advance ideological and political education integration into curricula, exploring the ideological elements inherent in pickleball and developing effective approaches for incorporating it into university sports teaching holds significant importance for fulfilling the fundamental mission of moral education and achieving the goal of "educating through sports." This study systematically analyzes the ideological components embedded in pickleball characteristics—including rule awareness, teamwork, competitive spirit, cultural confidence, and global perspective—while examining practical teaching cases from higher education institutions. Four implementation pathways are proposed: integrating teaching objectives, embedding instructional processes, incorporating competitive practices, and incorporating evaluation feedback mechanisms. These insights aim to provide theoretical references and practical guidance for advancing ideological and political education in university sports curricula.

**Keywords:** pickleball; ideological and political education in courses; university physical education; ideological and political elements; integration approaches

**DOI:**10.12417/3029-2328.26.03.028

## 1.Introduction

In 2020, the Ministry of Education issued the "Guidelines for Ideological and Political Education Integration in Higher Education Courses," explicitly proposing to integrate ideological education throughout talent cultivation systems, comprehensively advance curriculum-based ideological education in universities, and maximize the educational impact of every course. The guidelines specifically require public physical education courses to help students enjoy sports activities, enhance physical fitness, develop well-rounded personalities, and strengthen willpower. As mandatory public courses for all undergraduates alongside ideological education courses, integrating ideological education into physical education programs fully leverages the curriculum's educational potential, serving as an effective approach and key measure to implement the fundamental mission of "moral education and talent cultivation." The development of ideological education in physical education courses aims to nurture "holistic individuals," fully utilizing the unique educational value and interdisciplinary integration capabilities of sports disciplines within the five-dimensional education framework encompassing moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor education, thereby endowing physical education courses with innovative educational functions.

Pickleball, an emerging sport that blends techniques from tennis, badminton, and table tennis, has gained rapid popularity worldwide in recent years thanks to its user-friendly rules, flexible pace, and strong social appeal. According to the 2023 report by the American Sports and Fitness Industry Association, participation in this sport has surged over 170% within five years, making it the fastest-growing sport in the United States for three consecutive years. In China, the sport has attracted 5.8 million participants nationwide, with many top universities integrating it into their physical education curricula. Institutions such as Kunming University of Science and Technology, Northwest University, and Xiamen University have introduced pickleball courses, which have been warmly welcomed by students. However, current university teaching focuses primarily on skill acquisition and physical training, while the rich ideological and political education resources inherent in the sport remain underutilized. How to effectively incorporate ideological education elements into pickleball instruction to achieve an organic integration of "physical fitness" and "moral cultivation" has become a critical research topic requiring urgent attention.

## **2. Deep Integration of Ideological and Political Education in Courses with University Physical Education**

### **2.1 The Connotation of Ideological and Political Education in Courses and the Unique Advantages of Physical Education Courses**

Course-based ideological and political education integrates political education into various academic disciplines as both a philosophy and practical model. Its essence lies in identifying and leveraging ideological resources embedded within courses, ensuring alignment between regular courses and political theory classes to create synergistic educational outcomes. The implementation of ideological and political education in university physical education programs has become a pivotal driver for helping students derive enjoyment from exercise, enhance physical fitness, develop well-rounded personalities, and strengthen willpower. It also serves as a crucial pathway to reinforce students' ideals and convictions, cultivate patriotic sentiments, improve moral integrity, foster perseverance, and elevate comprehensive competencies.

Compared to traditional ideological and political courses, physical education courses possess unique educational advantages. Firstly, physical education employs physical activities as its medium, allowing students to gain more direct and profound experiences and insights through sports practice. Secondly, sports inherently contain moral education resources such as rule awareness, fair competition, teamwork, and perseverance, which align closely with socialist core values. As scholars have pointed out, traditional university physical education tends to prioritize skill development over moral education. By leveraging these moral education resources, curriculum-based ideological and political education effectively combines physical fitness with character cultivation, thereby returning physical education to its fundamental purpose of fostering virtue and nurturing individuals.

### **2.2 Multidimensional Framework of Ideological and Political Elements in Physical Education Courses**

Regarding the exploration of ideological and political elements in physical education curricula, existing research has systematically analyzed them through three dimensions: political literacy, moral literacy, and personal development. The political literacy dimension encompasses patriotism, collectivism, and national sentiment; the moral literacy dimension includes rule awareness, fair competition, respect for others, and integrity; while the personal development dimension involves perseverance, willpower, self-management, and emotional regulation. This three-dimensional framework provides a theoretical reference for identifying ideological and political elements in pickleball curriculum design.

The ideological and political education construction in physical education courses also requires addressing the intrinsic connections among five dimensions: moral orientation, moral responsibility, moral system, moral process, and moral function. This implies that the exploration of ideological and political elements should not be arbitrary or fragmented, but rather systematic and integrated, organically combining with the teaching objectives, content, and methods of physical education courses.

## **3. Sports Characteristics of Pickleball and Its Educational Value in Ideological and Political Education**

### **3.1 Core Movement Characteristics of Pickleball**

Pickleball was born in the United States in 1965. It is a netted competitive ball sport played on a court similar to a badminton doubles court, using a short-handled solid racket and perforated hollow plastic balls. The sport integrates technical characteristics from tennis, badminton, and table tennis, and exhibits the following prominent features:

First, ease of learning. The pickleball uses lightweight porous plastic balls with moderate elasticity, making them relatively easy to control with rackets. Students only need to attend a few instructional sessions before attempting competitive matches. Enthusiasts have aptly summarized the strong inclusiveness of pickleball by comparing it to "playing tennis on a badminton court with a large table tennis racket."

Second, entertainment value and social interaction. Pickleball can be played in a harmonious and joyful atmosphere without requiring aggressive playstyles, allowing participants to engage in relaxed gameplay. This sport not only breaks down barriers between traditional sports but has also emerged as a novel social interaction among young adults. Research indicates that the doubles format of pickleball provides students with numerous opportunities for interaction and collaboration.

Third, moderate competitive intensity. From a sports perspective, pickleball requires students to move quickly and rotate their bodies flexibly, effectively training speed, agility, and coordination. Its intensity ensures optimal exercise efficacy while reducing fatigue and injury risks. This makes pickleball suitable for participants with varying athletic foundations.

Fourth, excellent venue adaptability. The pickleball court size is similar to that of a badminton court but with a more compact layout, offering relatively flexible venue requirements. This facilitates the renovation and promotion of existing sports facilities in universities.

### **3.2 The Ideological and Political Educational Value Embedded in Pickleball**

The unique characteristics of pickleball make it an excellent resource for ideological and political education. Firstly, its rule system embodies legal awareness and the spirit of rule of law. Like other ball sports, pickleball has strict competition regulations and penalty standards. Through learning and adhering to these rules, students develop respect for rules, a sense of reverence, and compliance—a goal perfectly aligned with socialist legal education. Secondly, the doubles format emphasizes teamwork and communication skills. As a team sport requiring close coordination, mutual trust, and real-time communication between partners, pickleball fosters collective consciousness and teamwork spirit. Thirdly, its competitive nature cultivates perseverance and resilience. The dynamic game of alternating wins and losses helps students develop a humble attitude and strong mental fortitude. Fourthly, as a rapidly growing global sport originating in the United States, pickleball's international spread reflects cross-cultural exchange and global perspectives. It has become a new bridge for youth exchanges between China and the U.S. President Xi Jinping noted in his response to a delegation from Montgomery County, Maryland, that pickleball serves as a vital link in Sino-American youth interactions. This provides a vivid platform for integrating national pride and global awareness into curriculum-based ideological education.

## **4. Integration Pathways of Ideological and Political Elements into University Pickleball Courses**

### **4.1 Integration of Teaching Objectives: Establishing the "Three-in-One" Educational Goal**

The integration of ideological and political education into sports courses is first reflected in the redesigned teaching objectives. University pickleball programs should establish a three-dimensional teaching framework encompassing "motor skills, physical literacy, and moral education." At the motor skills level, students are required to master fundamental techniques and tactics of pickleball. Regarding physical literacy, the program aims to cultivate lifelong exercise habits and healthy lifestyle concepts. On the moral education dimension, pickleball instruction fosters students' awareness of rules, teamwork spirit, competitive drive, and cultural confidence. These three interconnected dimensions collectively form the instructional framework for ideological education in pickleball courses. In practice, educators can translate political education objectives into observable behavioral indicators such as "actively communicating tactics with teammates during doubles matches," "maintaining positive attitudes when trailing in scores," and "making fair calls as referees." This approach transforms implicit ideological education into explicit practices, clarifying abstract concepts through measurable outcomes.

### **4.2 Integration into the teaching process: Incorporating ideological and political education throughout all stages of "learning, practice, competition, and evaluation"**

The teaching process serves as the core domain for integrating ideological and political education into curriculum. Pickleball instruction can be divided into four stages: "learning, practicing, competing, and evaluating," each of which presents opportunities for ideological and political education.

In the "Learning" phase, students develop global perspectives and cross-cultural understanding through explanations of pickleball's historical development and cultural background, while rule awareness and legal consciousness are cultivated via rule systems instruction. The "Practice" phase features appropriately designed training intensity to foster perseverance through challenges, with group and paired exercises enhancing teamwork and communication skills. Competitions like class leagues and grade-level tournaments allow students to experience sportsmanship through fair play, respect for opponents, and maintaining humility in victory and defeat. Competition results are incorporated into course evaluations to reinforce educational value. The "Evaluation" phase integrates ideological-political assessments—including classroom participation, teamwork performance, and sports ethics—ensuring systematic feedback and motivation. Wuxi University's three-tier curriculum framework (Basic + Specialized + Distinctive) strengthens ideological-political integration in pickleball teaching, embedding value guidance throughout instruction. This approach has achieved full coverage of model ideological-political PE courses, providing replicable models for integrating political education across learning, practice, competition, and evaluation stages.

#### **4.3 Integration of Competition Practice: Enhancing Ideological and Political Education Through Competitions as a Vehicle**

Competitions serve as the optimal platform for sports education and a key measure of ideological and political education effectiveness in curricula. Universities should actively establish a three-tier pickleball competition system comprising "in-class contests, class leagues, and university championships" to provide more students with opportunities to receive ideological education through competitive practices. During event organization, students can participate in event planning, refereeing, and volunteer services to develop organizational coordination skills and social responsibility. For instance, some universities have extended final assessment scenarios for specialized pickleball courses from campus classrooms to external competition venues, incorporating students' practical performance in event planning, professional refereeing, organizational coordination, and emergency response into core evaluation systems. This approach effectively promotes the transformation of teaching paradigms toward "competency development" and "social contribution." Additionally, encouraging student-led pickleball clubs and university teams through regular training and international competitions extends ideological education beyond classrooms and campuses, creating an integrated on-and off-campus educational framework. Northwest University, leveraging its pickleball association, adopts a "learning through competition, teaching through practice" model to engage increasing numbers of students with the sport.

#### **4.4 Integration of Evaluation Feedback: Establishing a Multi-dimensional Ideological and Political Evaluation Mechanism**

Evaluation serves as a crucial component of teaching and a key safeguard for integrating ideological and political education into curricula. Higher education institutions should establish a multi-dimensional evaluation system combining "skill assessment, competency evaluation, and ideological-political performance," incorporating the effectiveness of ideological education into course evaluation frameworks. Specifically, evaluations can be conducted through three approaches: First, formative assessment focusing on students' classroom participation attitudes, collaborative performance, and rule compliance; second, competition performance evaluation highlighting students' sportsmanship and moral conduct demonstrated during events; third, reflective evaluation requiring students to write learning reflections or competition analyses, guiding them to systematically summarize their ideological-political growth. The "Sports + Ideological Education" integrated pedagogy pioneered by Yunnan Agricultural University has transformed ideological education from "soft requirements" into "hard constraints" by incorporating ideological-political performance metrics into evaluations, providing practical experience for establishing effective assessment mechanisms.

## **5. Implementation Strategies and Support Recommendations**

### **5.1 Strengthen teacher training to enhance educators' ability to integrate ideological and political education into curriculum**

Teachers serve as the primary implementers of ideological and political education in curricula, where their political literacy and instructional capabilities directly impact teaching effectiveness. Higher education institutions should enhance ideological and political training for pickleball instructors through regular specialized teaching seminars, helping educators thoroughly understand the core principles and requirements of curriculum-based ideological education while mastering methods for identifying and integrating political elements. Anhui Agricultural University's Physical Education Department specifically arranged for Hong Yingjie, the pickleball program coordinator, to deliver lectures covering the sport's origins and development, competition rules, teaching methodologies, and event interactions. He also shared practical insights on incorporating political education components into courses—a model approach worthy of broader adoption.

### **5.2 Developing teaching resources to enrich the supply of ideological and political materials**

Universities should organize efforts to develop ideological and political education resources for pickleball courses, including pickleball cultural readers, case libraries for ideological and political education, and teaching videos. They should fully explore ideological and political materials in pickleball sports, such as the innovative spirit in the founding story of pickleball, the struggle stories in the promotion of China pickleball, and the growth stories of outstanding athletes. These materials should be systematized and incorporated into courses to provide teachers with abundant resources for conducting ideological and political education.

### **5.3 Improve institutional safeguards and establish a collaborative education mechanism**

Higher education institutions should integrate the ideological and political education component of pickleball courses into their comprehensive sports development plans, establishing robust institutional support systems. Clear teaching requirements, evaluation criteria, and incentive measures for this educational approach must be defined, with its implementation outcomes incorporated into faculty performance assessments and curriculum evaluations. Concurrently, collaborative mechanisms should be developed between sports departments, student affairs offices, and publicity departments to create a multi-stakeholder educational framework that ensures coordinated efforts in ideological cultivation.

## **6. Conclusion**

Pickleball, as an emerging sport that combines accessibility, entertainment value, social interaction, and moderate competitive intensity, serves as a unique platform and rich resource for integrating ideological and political education into university physical education curricula. The game's inherent elements—including rule awareness, teamwork spirit, perseverance, and global perspective—align perfectly with the fundamental mission of moral education. By systematically incorporating four key components: teaching objectives, instructional processes, competitive practices, and evaluation feedback, pickleball-based ideological education can transform from "skill transmission" to "value guidance," and evolve from "physical fitness" to "holistic wellness."

Currently, the adoption of pickleball in university physical education curricula is experiencing accelerated growth, presenting a valuable window for integrating ideological and political education. Higher education institutions should seize this opportunity to thoroughly explore the ideological elements inherent in pickleball courses and actively develop integration strategies. This approach enables pickleball instruction to not only enhance students' physical fitness but also effectively improve their political awareness, achieving the educational goal of "cultivating character through sports and fostering moral values via athletics." As pickleball curriculum systems continue to mature and ideological education practices deepen, the sport is poised to become a flagship initiative in university physical education programs. It will contribute unique value to nurturing well-rounded socialist builders and successors who excel in moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor development.

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