



Research on the Dilemmas and Development Strategies of Campus Football in China

Huang Li

Shenzhen Polytechnic University, Shenzhen, Guangdong, China

Abstract: From a macro perspective, this paper explores the practical dilemmas in the development of campus football in China, including institutional and mechanism barriers, insufficient teaching personnel, imbalanced resource allocation, low student participation, absence of evaluation systems, and deficiencies in competition structures. It proposes specific strategies such as strengthening integration between education and sports, optimizing teacher allocation, balancing resource investments, streamlining talent pathways, establishing scientific evaluation systems, and refining competition structures, aiming to promote sustainable development of campus football, improve youth physical fitness, and consolidate the talent foundation for national football revitalization.

Keywords: Campus football; Youth football; Football; Chinese football

1. Introduction

Campus football is an essential foundation for revitalizing Chinese football and improving youth physical health. Since the implementation of the Overall Plan for Chinese Football Reform and Development in 2015, the government has vigorously promoted campus football, steadily increasing youth participation. However, campus football in China still faces various challenges, including institutional deficiencies, uneven resource allocation, teacher shortages, and low student engagement, all of which urgently require thorough analysis and effective solutions[1]. This paper explores, from a macro perspective, the current issues and underlying causes affecting campus football at the primary, secondary, and university levels, proposing targeted strategies to facilitate high-quality youth sports development in China.

2. Major Challenges Facing Campus Football

2.1 Institutional and Mechanism Barriers

The management system and operational mechanisms of campus football development remain inadequate. In some regions, there is a lack of effective long-term collaboration between education and sports departments, with unclear division of responsibilities, leading to inefficient resource coordination[1]. Certain schools and administrators overly pursue competitive achievements, manifesting in "medal-oriented" behaviors—prioritizing competition rankings over broader student participation and general popularization—which contradicts the fundamental educational intent of campus football[2]. The persistent emphasis on competitive outcomes at the expense of daily grassroots engagement reflects deeper systemic and institutional challenges.

2.2 Insufficient Teaching Personnel

The shortage of qualified football teachers significantly hampers the advancement of campus football. As of 2022, there was an estimated shortage of about 120,000 physical education teachers nationwide in primary and secondary schools, especially severe in rural areas where many schools have had to rely on non-specialist teachers to conduct football classes [3]. Moreover, the existing teachers often lack specialized football training and coaching qualifications. Although sports graduates from teacher-training universities participate in promoting campus football, their knowledge structures, due to inadequate football-specific training, cannot fully meet actual demands [4]. Furthermore, few retired professional players transition to campus teaching roles, resulting in a weak overall pool of qualified football teachers and coaches, incapable of supporting extensive, high-quality campus football activities.

2.3 Imbalanced Allocation of Educational Resources

A pronounced imbalance exists in the distribution of football education resources across urban and rural areas, regions, and different schools. Economically developed areas and prestigious schools typically have superior fields, equipment, and funding, whereas rural and ordinary schools often suffer from insufficient facilities and equipment [2]. Standard football fields

are primarily found in elementary schools and a limited number of elite high schools; many middle schools lack standard 11-a-side football pitches, and some regions even struggle to provide a single standard football field [2]. Additionally, fiscal investment levels vary greatly across regions, constraining the scope and quality of campus football activities. This unequal resource provision directly impacts coverage and effectiveness.

2.4 Low Student Participation

Although campus football thrives at the primary school level, student participation significantly declines upon entering secondary education, commonly resulting in the phenomenon known as "retirement at age 12"[2]. Increased academic pressure during middle school restricts students' available time for sports. Additionally, the absence of stable inter-school leagues and structured training systems, coupled with poor integration between campus football and professional youth training, significantly reduces both student enthusiasm and ongoing participation rates.

2.5 Absence of an Effective Evaluation System

The current evaluation and assessment system for campus football is incomplete. Schools often rely on qualitative descriptions or solely competition results, lacking quantitative evaluations of students' physical health, skill improvements, and participation rates[1]. The absence of unified evaluation standards and monitoring mechanisms between educational and sports authorities has led to unclear guidance and insufficient incentives for schools. Consequently, teachers' enthusiasm for football instruction remains limited, and student participation outcomes are not integrated into regular assessments, hindering the standardized development of campus football.

2.6 Incomplete Competition System

The youth campus football competition system is incomplete, lacking a clear and stable league structure, with fragmented and disorganized event arrangements and insufficient systematic inter-school competitions[5]. Referees have limited practical opportunities, resulting in generally low officiating standards[1]. Additionally, poor coordination exists between campus football events and professional youth training programs, causing confusion in competition management. It is imperative to establish a comprehensive competition framework extending from school-level to national-level, facilitating athletic improvement and talent selection pathways.

3. Development Strategies for Campus Football in China

3.1 Improving Institutional Mechanisms and Strengthening Education-Sports Integration

Improve the government-led management mechanism for campus football, ensuring coordinated efforts between education and sports departments with clearly defined responsibilities and regular coordination. Abandon the evaluation system solely based on competitive outcomes and incorporate campus football into holistic education, emphasizing broad participation and educational outcomes. Deepen the integration of education and sports to effectively connect campus football with professional youth training, promoting comprehensive youth development and football talent cultivation.

3.2 Strengthening Teacher Training and Talent Development

To address teacher shortages, targeted measures should enhance both the quantity and quality of football educators and coaches. Educational departments must ensure schools meet prescribed teacher-student ratios: primary schools (1 teacher per 5 classes), middle schools (1 per 6 classes), and high schools (1 per 8 classes) [6]. Establishing dedicated football coaching roles, recruiting retired professional players and military veterans through public recruitment or government services into educational settings, will bolster the professional ranks. Existing teachers' capabilities should also be enhanced through targeted football-specific professional development. Additionally, guaranteeing fair compensation, clearly defining coaching-related tasks within workload assessments, and incorporating football-related achievements into promotion criteria will incentivize long-term professional commitment. These strategies aim to create a robust, stable, and skilled football educator workforce essential for sustainable campus football growth.

3.3 Balancing Resource Allocation and Improving Facilities

To achieve balanced resource distribution, government investment in less-developed regions should increase substantially, targeting football-specific infrastructure and equipment. School facility standards must mandate inclusion of football fields during construction or renovation. Additionally, nationwide implementation of the National Football Facilities Construction Plan should be accelerated with clear timelines. Innovative resource-sharing models should be adopted, promoting facility sharing between schools and community sports venues, enhancing utilization efficiency. Diverse funding mechanisms—integrating government subsidies, corporate sponsorship, and community contributions—will ensure sustainable funding,

promoting equitable access and participation opportunities nationwide.

3.4 Facilitating Talent Pathways and Sustaining Student Engagement

Long-term student participation requires comprehensive pathways from primary education to universities. Enrollment policies should accommodate team-based progression, enabling school teams to move collectively through educational levels, preventing dissolution due to academic pressures. Pilot initiatives establishing football-specialized classes, cross-regional talent recruitment, and flexible education completion for students in professional youth clubs are essential. Expanding university-level elite athlete recruitment programs, especially at top universities, will build a seamless talent development pipeline. Additionally, integrating sports participation into student evaluations and fostering a vibrant football culture through regular school-level and inter-school competitions will maintain high participation levels.

3.5 Establishing Scientific Evaluation and Assessment Mechanisms

Developing a scientific, standardized evaluation system to regularly monitor campus football effectiveness is crucial. Education and sports authorities should jointly establish evaluation metrics—including health improvements, skill development, participation rates, and talent cultivation effectiveness. Integrating these assessments into local governments' and schools' accountability systems, combined with systematic supervision, will ensure targets are met. Schools should also incorporate football-related student progress into teacher assessments. Digital platforms tracking student training and competition data will further facilitate objective evaluations, creating incentives for continuous improvement.

3.6 Refining Competition Systems for Structured Event Management

A structured, multi-tiered campus football league system covering primary, secondary, and university levels should be established, including regular class-based, grade-level, and inter-school competitions progressing to regional and national tournaments. Educational and sports authorities must coordinate to avoid conflicts and ensure comprehensive coverage. Transparent competition rules, schedules, and improved referee training systems will further professionalize competitions. Encouraging schools to actively participate in higher-level competitions and partnerships with professional clubs will significantly enhance competition standards and talent scouting capabilities.

4. Conclusion

Reforming campus football is vital to improving youth physical fitness, supporting educational reform, and revitalizing national football. By implementing these strategies, China can overcome existing challenges, creating a sustainable, integrated development framework for youth football. This reform not only enhances student resilience and physical health but also fosters a widespread football culture nationwide, laying a strong talent foundation. Ultimately, campus football reform aligns with the national "Healthy China" strategy, significantly contributing to the comprehensive physical and personal development of Chinese youth and driving the high-quality growth of sports and related industries.

References

- [1] Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China. Implementation Opinions on the Reform and Development of Youth Football in China. Q&A with Reporters[EB/OL].https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/202404/content_6942756.htm.
- [2] Xinhua News Agency. Campus Football: What are the Problems?[EB/OL].https://m.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_25180127.
- [3] XINHUANET. China unveils measures to improve physical education in schools[EB/OL].<https://english.news.cn/20250127/0974500d2d89452db2f0141d11ae4dc2/c.html>.
- [4] ZHAO Sheng, WU Hongfang, ZHOU Yi. The Research about Important Underlying Logic, Realistic Challenge and Practical Approach of Chinese Campus Football[J]. *Guangzhou Sport University*, 2024, 44 (01): 72-80.
- [5] ZHOU Yongming. Analysis and Resolution of Systematic Problems in the Development of Campus Football in China[J]. *Guangzhou Sport University*, 2021, 41 (06): 46-50.
- [6] CCTV.com. Physical Education teachers enjoy the same treatment as teachers of other subjects.[EB/OL].<https://news.cctv.com/2025/01/25/ARTItAxP0FGkdQdp5wgX0KME250125.shtml>.