

# Transition from "training-oriented" to "education-oriented": policy implications for the teaching workforce in Chinese basketball education under the "three major ball sports" policy

Nanshuo SUN

Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology, Qingdao 266100, China

**Abstract:** Against the background of the "Three Major Ball Sports" policy and the integration of sports and education, Chinese basketball education is increasingly expected to pursue broader educational objectives alongside competitive development. This study adopts policy document analysis to examine how relevant policies redefine the goals of basketball education and the professional expectations placed on basketball teachers.

The analysis indicates a shift in policy emphasis from predominantly competitive training toward broader educational objectives, including curriculum development, instructional quality, and student development. This shift expands the professional role of basketball teachers beyond technical and tactical training.

However, the policy transition also reveals potential challenges, including the continued emphasis on athletic skills, insufficient integration of educational theory and teaching practice, and gaps in teachers' professional competencies.

The study therefore suggests strengthening basketball teacher development, particularly in pedagogical competence and professional learning, while improving the alignment among basketball teaching, training, and educational objectives.

**Keywords:** "Three Major Ball Sports" policy; basketball education; integration of sports and education; teacher development; educational orientation; policy text analysis

## 1 Introduction

The ideals and traditions of competitive sports have long been a part of Chinese basketball. The key indicators of development efficacy under this strategy have traditionally been considered to be the selection of athletes, strict training, and competition performance. In its *Opinions on Further Advancing Basketball Reform and Development*, the General Administration of Sport of China points out the importance of innovating talent development channels and breaking down the barriers between sport and education [1].

However, with the development of school sports reform, basketball has increasingly been incorporated into educational programs. The "Three Major Ball Sports" policies have broadened the objectives of basketball by emphasizing student participation, personal development, and physical development alongside competitive objectives. This reflects a broader shift from a training-oriented approach toward an education-oriented approach in school basketball.

Nevertheless, past research on the topic of basketball reform and the policy of "Three Major Ball Sports" has largely been based on macro-level concerns such as competitive systems, policy objectives, and talent development strategies. Relatively less attention has been paid to the interpretation and implementation of these policy aims in educational settings. In particular, insufficient analytical attention has been paid to the teaching workforce which serves as the direct nexus between policy requirements and educational practice. Issues concerning teacher role transformation, professional competencies, and institutional support have generally been treated as practical matters rather than central dimensions of basketball education reform.

The education-oriented model requires basketball teachers to undertake responsibilities beyond technical instruction. Curriculum planning, student support, and the integration of educational principles into basketball teaching are becoming increasingly important. This transformation therefore involves changes in teachers' professional roles, competencies, and responsibilities. Recent research has highlighted the importance of research capabilities and evidence-based practice for physical education teachers, which can support instructional decision-making and help teachers address complex educational problems [2].

Nevertheless, it remains essential to examine whether existing professional development and teacher training programs are sufficient to support this evolving teacher role. While core competencies in the areas of educational research, curriculum design, and reflective teaching have not always been incorporated entirely into the professional development models, athletic skills and practical performance have often been given more focus in contemporary physical education teacher education. This mismatch can make it difficult for teachers to satisfy the new educational standards in basketball reform. Until teacher workforce training is systematically optimized, the disconnection between policy objectives and school-level implementation will persist.

Accordingly, this paper examines how policy documents related to the "Three Major Ball Sports" redefine the purposes of basketball education and the professional expectations placed on teachers. Rather than evaluating classroom implementation, the study focuses on the policy-level implications of these shifts for the basketball teaching workforce.

## **2 Methodology**

### **2.1 Research method: policy document analysis**

Focusing on the evolving demands placed on the teaching workforce, this paper adopts policy document analysis to explore how the educational orientation of Chinese basketball has been reflected in the recent policy development within the "Three Major Ball Sports" framework. Policy documents reflect broader institutional ideologies, priorities of development and assumptions regarding policy implementation besides being administrative documents that specify policy goals [3-4]. Consequently, examining policy texts can help illuminate the institutional context of the paradigm shift in basketball education towards an education-oriented paradigm as opposed to a training-oriented paradigm.

Most of the national-level policy documents selected to be analyzed were related to school physical education, the development of the "Three Major Ball Sports" and the training of physical education teachers. These documents were chosen as they provide essential information to understand the changes in the role of schools and teachers, and reflect the national policy orientation regarding basketball education. The analysis is centered around significant policy issues, including the educational aims of school sports, objectives of basketball development, and responsibilities entrusted to teachers. This paper demonstrates how values and expectations of basketball development in education are created in the policy discourse through a comparison of relevant policy statements and modifications of policy language [5]. And focuses on the ideas, assumptions, and institutional arrangements embedded in policy documents allow the study to examine the underlying policy logic of basketball education reform at the macro and meso levels.

This research does not examine what teachers do in the classroom or evaluate policy implementation. Instead, it examines ideas, assumptions and institutional arrangements in policy documents. While this means that the study cannot make causal claims or claims about classroom outcomes, it allows the study to focus on the reasoning behind the basketball education reform at the macro and meso levels [6].

## 2.2 Analytical framework: policy transformation and professional expectations for basketball educators

This analytical framework moves beyond an institutional-centred reading of policy change. Drawing on educational policy scholarship [7], it focuses on the professional expectations constructed within policy discourses and the potential implications of teachers' professional development for future basketball-education reform. Ball et al.'s work emphasizes that policy is not simply implemented; actors within social and institutional contexts interpret and re-create policy texts. It should be noted, however, that this study analyses only policy-level representations rather than teachers' real-world enactment of policy.

The analytical framework consists of three interrelated dimensions. The first dimension is the restoration of basketball education goals in the framework of education-oriented policy.

Through the emphasis on instructional goals of school sports, the holistic development of students and the formation of athletic ideals, policies concerning the "Three Major Ball Sports" have gradually expanded the definition of basketball development. This paper examines how the development of basketball has shifted away from a talent identification and competitive performance model to a more holistic approach that considers children's academic, social and physical development by examining these policy changes [8].

The second dimension is concerned with the modifications of the professional responsibilities of basketball educators. As educational objectives become more prominent in the public discourse, teachers are supposed to assume additional roles that go beyond the conventional technical training.

Past research indicates that school physical education teachers who are engaged in school sport reform enhance student improvement, curriculum delivery, value generation and skill teaching [9]. To assist teachers to shift their role as training implementers to educational implementers, this paper explores the way policy texts reframe their roles [10].

The third dimension concerns the possible conflicts that can occur in the course of policy reform. Existing training practices, teacher preparation programs and assessment systems might not necessarily support these changes, even when education-focused regulations introduce new standards in teaching basketball. Past research has indicated that educational reforms tend to create issues when new professional requirements are introduced without corresponding institutional resources and support mechanisms. To comprehend the complexity of the reform of basketball education, this study takes into account the possibility of a gap between policy aspirations and real-life circumstances.

Taken together, these three dimensions provide a framework for examining how policy changes redefine basketball education and the professional expectations placed on teachers. The framework therefore connects changes in educational objectives with changes in teacher roles and the professional conditions required to support reform.

The three dimensions are considered throughout the analysis, with the first two primarily addressed in Sections 3.1-3.3 and the potential conflicts arising from the reform further discussed through an integrated interpretation of the policy findings in the Discussion section.

## 3 Analysis

### 3.1 Repositioning basketball education in the "Three Major Ball Sports" policy

The policy initiative for the "Three Major Ball Sports" has attracted considerable attention as one of the key policy measures adopted alongside China's school-sports reform in recent years. These policies have enhanced understandings of

basketball education by encouraging schools to embrace basketball as an educational tool that supports the overall development of children beyond competitive ability.

Basketball training in China has been closely linked with competitive objectives within the sports system, and performance in the game and technical advancement have been considered the main indicators of assessing the outcomes of training [11]. However, the increasing focus on integrating physical education with more general educational goals has sparked a reassessment of basketball's place in schools. As a result, school basketball has gradually changed its emphasis to improve students' physical health, encourage collaboration, and encourage ongoing participation in sports activities [12].

Basketball's position in school physical education has improved as a result of the "Three Major Ball Sports" program. Instead of only being used to select and train competitive athletes, it is now recognized as an educational tool that promotes student growth [13]. As a result, the goals of basketball instruction have changed, which has affected the professional obligations placed on teachers. Basketball instructors must provide students with pertinent learning opportunities and enhance their comprehension of sports values in addition to providing technical coaching.

### 3.2 The shift in teachers' roles from "coach-type" to "educator-type"

The way basketball instructors perceive and carry out their professional responsibilities has also been impacted by the evolving standards of school basketball instruction. Teachers in the traditional system of basketball training were usually regarded as coaches who imparted technical skills, tactical organization and preparation to compete [14]. While this strategy is still useful in competitive sports, using the same reasoning in educational settings can restrict the wider educational benefits that basketball can offer pupils.

Teachers' responsibilities in developing meaningful learning experiences have received more attention in recent physical education studies. According to Kirk, physical education instructors make a contribution by organizing and facilitating learning processes in addition to imparting motor skills. By designing engaging and stimulating physical activities, educators may help kids develop their problem-solving, cooperation, and communication abilities.

The importance of this evolving idea of teaching responsibilities has grown during China's present school physical education reform. As physical education and educational development become increasingly linked, basketball teachers must take into account both skill development and students' overall growth during training [15]. As a result, in addition to physical competency, basketball instructors today need to have a combination of pedagogical understanding, instructional preparation, athletic expertise, and student development skills.

### 3.3 The critical role of teacher development in basketball education reform

Basketball instructor training has grown in significance as Chinese basketball instruction shifts toward a more educational approach. Previous studies have demonstrated that teachers' professional competency has a direct impact on the effectiveness of learning opportunities offered to pupils and the quality of physical education [16].

Enhancing the professional development and training of physical education teachers has grown in importance as a policy priority in China. Issued in 2020, the *Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Physical Education in the New Era* jointly released by the General Offices of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council underscores that strengthening teachers' professional development and training is fundamental to improving the overall quality of school physical education. These policy criteria have rendered teacher development as a crucial aspect of school sports reform.

Nevertheless, recent studies reveal that basketball teaching in schools of China continues to experience several practical issues, including unequal access to instructional resources and the absence of professional development opportunities [18]. In certain school contexts, traditional training practices continue to have a significant influence on

instruction in basketball, and there is relatively little incorporation of instructional strategies and educational ideas.

Against the backdrop of the "Three Major Ball Sports" policy, the pursuit of more comprehensive educational objectives in school basketball therefore calls for improvements to basketball teachers' professional development. Beyond aligning the developmental goals of basketball education with competitive sports, enhancing teacher preparation and support systems can help bridge the gap between what is expected by the policy and teaching practice.

#### **4 Discussion**

The policy shift identified in this study should not be understood as a simple replacement of competitive basketball with educational basketball. Rather, it represents an expansion of the purposes assigned to school basketball. Competitive development remains relevant, yet it is increasingly positioned alongside student development, physical literacy, participation, and educational values. This broader policy orientation is consistent with the wider understanding of school physical education as a means of supporting students' physical, social, and personal development [19][8]. The significance of the reform therefore lies in the changing balance between sporting performance and educational outcomes, rather than in the rejection of competitive development itself.

The expansion of educational objectives also creates a broader professional boundary for basketball teachers. When basketball is positioned as part of school education, teachers are required to translate broad policy objectives into concrete learning experiences. This means that technical and tactical competence remains necessary, but it is no longer sufficient on its own. Teachers also need to determine how basketball activities can support participation, cooperation, physical development, and students' learning. From this perspective, the shift from a "coach-type" to an "educator-type" role should be understood as an expansion of professional competence rather than a complete abandonment of coaching expertise. Such a change is consistent with research emphasizing that effective physical education involves both subject-specific knowledge and the ability to organize meaningful learning experiences [8][14].

However, the policy transition may reveal a mismatch between the expanded expectations placed on basketball teachers and the support provided by existing teacher development systems. If professional preparation continues to prioritize athletic skills over educational theory, curriculum design, instructional strategies, and reflective practice, teachers may be insufficiently prepared for the broader responsibilities of school basketball reform. This suggests that teacher professional development needs to be more closely aligned with the changing policy expectations [16][18].

The historical influence of competitive-sports governance also needs to be considered when interpreting the current reform of school basketball in China. The long-term emphasis on elite sports has shaped the structure and objectives of school physical education and continues to influence how basketball is understood within schools. Although recent policies have promoted greater integration between competitive sports and education, maintaining an appropriate balance between educational purposes and talent development remains challenging. This suggests that the transition toward an education-oriented model should not be understood as a complete rejection of the competitive tradition. Instead, future reform needs to coordinate curriculum development, school sports management, and teacher preparation so that educational and sporting objectives can be pursued within the same school basketball system.

Overall, the "Three Major Ball Sports" policy creates an opportunity to reconsider how competitive and educational objectives are balanced within school basketball. The policy transition should not be understood as replacing training with education, but as redefining the role of training within a broader educational framework. Future reform therefore needs to develop differentiated pathways that allow basketball to serve both general student development and the identification and development of talented players. Rather than treating competitive performance and educational outcomes as opposing goals, school basketball should seek a more balanced model in which talent development is pursued without weakening its

broader educational responsibilities.

## 5 Conclusion

This study examined the implications of the "Three Major Ball Sports" policy for basketball education and the teaching workforce through policy document analysis. The analysis suggests that school basketball is being positioned within a broader educational framework in which student development, participation, physical literacy, and educational values receive greater attention alongside competitive development. This change expands the purposes of basketball education and consequently broadens the professional responsibilities of teachers. Basketball teachers need to retain strong subject knowledge while strengthening curriculum planning, instructional design, student support, and reflective practice. Existing challenges in teacher preparation, professional development, and resource support may limit the ability of schools to respond to these expanded expectations.

The key implication is therefore that policy objectives should be accompanied by corresponding investment in teacher professional development and school-level support. Because this study analyzes policy texts rather than classroom practice, further empirical research is needed to examine how teachers interpret and implement these policy expectations in different school contexts.

## Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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