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Practical Problems and Solutions in Junior High School Physical Education from a Stakeholder Perspective

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Abstract

Research Background and Purpose: Despite educational reforms promoting holistic development, junior high physical education in China remains heavily exam-oriented. This study applies stakeholder theory to identify key actors, analyze their interests, and propose strategies to reduce test-driven practices.

Research Methods: Through literature review and logical analysis, we examine the development of stakeholder classification models and assess their relevance to physical education, while also investigating the root causes of current problems in the field.

Research Results: The study identifies four phases in stakeholder theory: initial exploration (1980–1990), deepening development (1990–2000), steady advancement (2000–2010), and innovative breakthrough (2010–2025). Significant test-oriented tendencies were observed in junior high physical education across teaching objectives, content, methods, assessment, and broader sociopolitical dimensions. Key contributing factors include grade-driven instruction, limited awareness among schools and teachers, narrow assessment criteria, and cultural-academic pressures.

Research Conclusions: Proposed solutions emphasize shifting toward game-based and life-relevant content, adopting scientific and personalized teaching methods, and diversifying evaluation mechanisms. Aligning the core interests of stakeholders at both macro-policy and micro-practice levels is essential to restoring physical education's fundamental role in supporting students' holistic development.

Research Value: Theoretically, this work expands stakeholder theory into physical education, offering a systematic lens for understanding complex educational interactions. Practically, it provides a actionable framework to help policymakers, administrators, and teachers better allocate resources and reform teaching practices, supporting a shift toward student-centered physical and mental development.

Keyword: stakeholder; junior high school physical education; physical education teaching; interest demands

1 Introduction

The Compulsory Education Physical Education and Health Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition) (hereinafter referred to as the New Curriculum Standards) adopts "health first" as its core concept, explicitly stating that physical education should be based on students' holistic development. Through contextualized curriculum design, it aims to cultivate three core competencies: motor skills, health behaviors, and sportsmanship [1]. The New Curriculum Standards emphasize breaking through the limitations of single-skill training in physical education, focusing instead on students' problem-solving abilities in real-world contexts and fostering lifelong sports awareness. It advocates for diverse activities to stimulate student interest while addressing individual differences and personalized development.

The current objective of the physical education policy for the high school entrance examination (ZhongKao) is to raise awareness among schools, teachers, parents, and students about the importance of physical exercise, thereby enhancing the overall physical fitness of all students [2]. Against this backdrop, curriculum reform has imposed higher demands on junior high school physical education: it must adhere to educational principles, fulfill the fundamental task of moral education, promote quality-oriented education, and facilitate the coordinated development of students' physical and mental health through a scientific evaluation system. However, a significant gap remains between policy directives and grassroots implementation.

On one hand, the New Curriculum Standards reinforce the essence of "education for holistic development," urging researchers to explore practical pathways for physical education reform. On the other hand, existing studies predominantly focus on policy interpretation or innovative teaching models, with limited systematic analysis of policy implementation challenges from the perspective of stakeholder interactions. In other words, numerous issues persist in the actual implementation of junior high school physical education. Without addressing the underlying causes, resolving existing contradictions may prove difficult. For example, how can schools balance quality-oriented education and exam-oriented requirements under the pressure of academic advancement? How can teachers reconcile the principles of the New Curriculum Standards with performance evaluation criteria when formulating teaching strategies? These contradictions precisely highlight the necessity of deepening research on junior high school physical education.

This study takes the New Curriculum Standards as the policy foundation and adopts stakeholder theory as the analytical lens. By examining the behavioral logic of stakeholders,

it seeks to uncover the root causes of exam-oriented teaching practices. The research not only responds to the urgent policy call to "correct exam-oriented tendencies" but also provides theoretical support and practical transformation pathways for the implementation of the New Curriculum Standards, ultimately helping physical education return to its fundamental purpose of holistic development.

2 Stakeholder Theory

2.1 Classification Research on Stakeholder Theory

Academic research on stakeholder classification involves multiple theoretical dimensions. Since stakeholder theory was proposed in the 1980s, scholars have continuously enriched the classification of stakeholders. This study clarifies the progress of stakeholder classification research along a chronological logic as follows.

2.1.1 The initial exploration period (1980–1990).

Freeman (1984) proposed a three-dimensional division model from the perspective of resource power: stakeholders based on ownership relationships, stakeholders based on economic dependency, and stakeholders based on social interests [3]. Frederick (1988) [4] established a dual paradigm of direct and indirect stakeholders from the interaction mechanism perspective. During this period, scholars focused on exploring different dimensions of stakeholder division, preliminarily defining the concept of stakeholders and emphasizing their differences, laying the foundation for subsequent research to understand and standardize stakeholder theory.

2.1.2 The deepening development period (1990–2000).

Clarkson (1994) classified stakeholders into voluntary and involuntary stakeholders based on risk responsibility attributes. Mitchell and Wood (1997) [5] introduced an attribute scoring model, constructing a dynamic classification system using legitimacy, power, and urgency as criteria. This method enabled rapid stakeholder identification and classification through attribute screening. Stakeholders were categorized into three types: definitive stakeholders (meeting all three attributes), expectant stakeholders (possessing any two attributes), and latent stakeholders (holding only one attribute). Wheeler (1998) [6] developed a dual-attribute framework of social relevance and interaction intensity, forming a four-dimensional cross-classification system: primary social stakeholders, secondary social stakeholders, primary non-social stakeholders, and secondary non-social stakeholders. Yang Ruilong et al. (1998) [7] focused on state-owned enterprises, incorporating internal actors (e.g., managers, employees) and external actors (e.g., banks) into the analytical framework. During this period, stakeholder theory moved beyond simplistic dichotomies toward dynamic, multidimensional classification systems. Scholars introduced multiple attribute criteria to construct structured and operable matrix models, providing more precise and context-specific tools for stakeholder identification. This shift marked a transition from universal frameworks to context-adaptive approaches.

2.1.3 The period from 2000 to 2010 marked a phase of steady progress in stakeholder theory development.

Li Xinhe (2003) [8] classified stakeholders into four categories - supportive, marginal, non-supportive, and mixed - based on their cooperative and threatening attributes. Chen Honghui (2004) [9] established a three-dimensional analytical model in dynamic stakeholder stratification research by integrating Mitchell's attribute scoring method with multi-dimensional segmentation, categorizing corporate stakeholders into core stakeholders, dormant stakeholders, and marginal stakeholders according to their initiative, importance, and

urgency. Wan Jianhua et al. (2004) [10] constructed a dual-layer structure using contractual relationships as the classification criterion: primary stakeholders connected through formal legal contracts and secondary stakeholders linked through implicit social contracts. Zhang Jing (2005) [11] legally defined stakeholders with statutory rights and obligations such as shareholders and consumers. These research systems expanded the academic framework of stakeholder classification through dimensions of contractual intensity, behavioral characteristics, and institutional attributes. This period shared characteristics with the previous era in proposing multiple core dimensions for stakeholder classification, but notably developed more three-dimensional and refined theoretical frameworks that deepened understanding of stakeholder complexity.

2.1.4 The period from 2010 to 2025 represents an era of innovative breakthroughs.

Huang Wei et al. (2019) [12] applied Mitchell's three-dimensional scoring system of power, legitimacy, and urgency to identify definite, expectant, and latent stakeholder types in vocational school-enterprise cooperation. Yin Shuhua et al. (2024) [13] proposed that festival space order construction involves stakeholder power-interest relationships, classifying festival stakeholders into "key stakeholders, primary stakeholders, and secondary stakeholders." Zhang Jiajun et al. (2024) [14] identified three groups in teacher workload reduction research: authoritative stakeholders represented by administrative departments, core stakeholders represented by teachers and schools, and primary stakeholders represented by students and parents. Notably, Tian Zhilong et al. (2025) [15] developed China's context-specific "Benefit-Justice Stakeholder Theory" by integrating existing stakeholder theory with China's rich discourse on "benefit and justice," proposing that "benefit-justice stakeholders" have both interest claims and moral demands, and can be categorized into four types: benefit-centered, justice-centered, mixed benefit-justice, and other potential types based on these two dimensions. This period demonstrates contextual deepening and localized theoretical innovation in China, where researchers applied stakeholder analysis frameworks to practical scenarios like vocational education, festival activities, and educational governance, making classifications more operational and targeted. While maintaining multidimensional classification logic, greater emphasis was placed on dynamic relationships and operational order among stakeholders. Tian Zhilong's "Benefit-Justice Stakeholder Theory" broke through Western theoretical boundaries by constructing a culturally distinctive classification system through the "benefit-justice" dual-dimension model, achieving deep integration of culture and theory.

2.2 The Applicability of Stakeholder Theory in Sports

In recent years, stakeholder theory has been widely applied in the sports field, encompassing curriculum standards, school sports reform, sports research and study, after-school sports services, college entrance examination sports, and high school entrance examination sports, among other aspects.

2.2.1 Alignment with Curriculum Standards and School Sports Reform

First, the physical education and health curriculum standards at various stages can utilize stakeholder classification concepts to comparatively analyze the collaborative participation levels in regional sports and health curricula. This involves assessing how different stakeholders perform in physical education classes and how they act based on their own and others' interests. For example, at the compulsory education stage, stakeholder theory can be applied to quantitatively compare three editions of China's compulsory education physical education and health curriculum standards, analyzing the frequency of mentions and

collaborative participation of students and other stakeholders [16] . Second, school sports reform involves the interests of multiple parties, and each policy must be carefully weighed before implementation. Any misstep could threaten the interests of certain groups, potentially triggering social conflict. This intricate web of relationships often deters progress, but stakeholder theory provides a solution. It helps analyze the internal and external factors constraining school sports reform and development. Internal factors include people—such as principals, physical education teachers, students, parents, and administrative leaders at various levels—while external factors encompass the education system and school sports policies [17] . Thus, stakeholder theory plays a role in organizing, coordinating, and controlling curriculum standards and school sports reform through its classification of interest groups.

2.2.2 Supporting Sports Research and After-School Sports Services

Stakeholder theory provides a core framework for classifying key actors in sports research and after-school services, facilitating the analysis of their respective interests. Both sports research and after-school services are social activities involving human interaction, inevitably requiring cooperation among teachers, students, parents, and other groups. For instance, in sports research, stakeholder theory can classify stakeholders involved in the management, organization, implementation, and participation stages of sports study trips, including administrative departments, schools and their teachers, research institutions, and participants [18] . Regarding collaborative governance in after-school sports services, stakeholder theory offers a unique analytical perspective, examining conflicts of interest among stakeholders and clarifying their roles [19,20]. Therefore, stakeholder theory systematically identifies the interests and interactions of key players in sports research and after-school services, providing a solid theoretical foundation for understanding their underlying dynamics.

2.2.3 Facilitating Policy Optimization for Physical Education in Gaokao and Zhongkao

Professor Xie Weihe from Tsinghua University points out that the essence of Gaokao reform is to coordinate the relationships among various stakeholders, much like "dividing an inheritance," requiring consideration of all parties' interests. Similarly, Zhongkao and Gaokao are essentially tools designed by the state for talent allocation, characterized by enforceability and fairness. The application of stakeholder theory enables systematic identification and analysis of the diverse interests of multiple stakeholders, thereby influencing the formulation of physical education policies in these exams. For Gaokao physical education, stakeholder theory helps identify the key stakeholders advocating for its inclusion, clarifies their respective demands, and explores feasible pathways under the backdrop of the integration of sports and education [21]. Regarding Zhongkao physical education, stakeholder theory aids in examining the implementation status and strategies, revealing that the central government, local education authorities, schools, physical education teachers, students, and parents are the primary stakeholders driving policy changes, as evidenced by relevant research findings [22].

3 The Realistic Challenges in Junior High School Physical Education

Since the introduction of Zhongkao physical education policies, exam-oriented teaching has become prevalent in junior high schools across China. In compulsory education, especially at the junior high level, the exam-driven approach under Zhongkao's influence is particularly pronounced [23]. Major news outlets and scholars have highlighted this phenomenon. For instance, Xinhua News Agency reported that schools, in pursuit of higher enrollment rates, narrow their curriculum to repetitive training of test items like long jump and rope skipping [24]. In terms of teaching methods, current physical education in middle schools predominantly relies on high-intensity skill decomposition and performance-driven drills [25]. Regarding

evaluation, the overemphasis on quantitative scores in Zhongkao physical education has led to diminished student interest in sports, inadequate health literacy development, and even physical injuries and psychological burnout [26,27]. Renowned sports scholar Ji Liu [28] also criticizes this trend, stating, "Influenced by traditional concepts, many schools have turned physical education into mere fitness test preparation, reversing priorities and fostering excessive utilitarianism." These utilitarian practices starkly contradict the "holistic development" philosophy advocated by the New Curriculum Standards. Thus, unresolved challenges persist across social and policy dimensions, student development, teaching practices, and assessment, revealing the severe predicament of exam-oriented physical education in China's junior high schools.

3.1 Social and Policy Level

With the increasing weight of physical education in high school entrance exams and the standardization of test items, exam-oriented teaching in junior high school PE has become a prominent issue under the reform of the exam system. The teaching evaluation system drives schools to adopt exam-focused strategies, while parents hope their children can pass the PE tests but worry that exam preparation may encroach on time for academic subjects. Moreover, the uneven distribution of resources between urban and rural areas and among schools may lead to a "Matthew effect" in exam-oriented teaching outcomes. After PE was included in the high school entrance exams, achieving full marks became a priority for every student and parent, prompting schools and teachers to implement exam-focused teaching measures [29]. For instance, to ensure students do not lose points in the PE exam, teachers often align their curriculum design and teaching methods closely with the test requirements, inadvertently turning school PE into an exam-oriented practice [30]. This phenomenon clearly reflects stakeholders' shared goal of improving students' PE exam performance, with teachers' instructional objectives primarily focused on boosting test scores. Scholarly research and media reports confirm the prevalence of exam-oriented teaching in junior high school PE at the instructional objective level.

3.2 Student Development Level

Although China's junior high school PE and health curriculum aligns with the Compulsory Education Physical Education and Health Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition), its actual implementation heavily emphasizes the exam syllabus, with repetitive training on test items and insufficient instruction in diverse motor skills (e.g., ball games, gymnastics, emerging sports). This limits students' exposure to varied physical activities, resulting in strong performance only in tested items while lacking comprehensive abilities such as coordination and flexibility. The principle of "teaching to the test" remains dominant among most teachers, students, and parents, with exam pressure diminishing the enjoyment of sports and dampening some students' enthusiasm for active participation [31]. Admittedly, the fairness and quantifiable nature of high-stakes PE exams necessitate a focus on testable content, but such content is inherently limited and one-sided. While it should not dominate classroom teaching, it cannot be ignored for exam purposes [32]. Many test items, due to their simplicity or focus on physical fitness, involve minimal "teaching" and instead emphasize repetitive "practice," potentially reinforcing a utilitarian mindset of "exercising for scores" among students and parents. This deviates from PE's fundamental goal of fostering well-rounded character development. In practice, students' extracurricular and even commercial PE training before exams often concentrate narrowly on tested items, with short-term intensive training for score improvement, reflecting a clear tendency toward exam-oriented PE instruction.

3.3 Teaching Practice Level

According to investigations by major media outlets such as Guangming Daily, junior high school physical education and health classes currently focus heavily on repetitive drills of physical test items for the high school entrance examination (zhongkao), aiming to achieve high scores—a phenomenon consistent with the aforementioned issues in teaching objectives. Some schools and parents push students into excessive, intensive training before the physical test, negatively impacting their health and physical development. This high-intensity, exam-oriented repetitive training may lead to sports injuries or foster student aversion to physical education [33]. Therefore, the "training and competition" under the influence of the physical entrance exam tends to be narrow and singular, primarily emphasizing individualized physical exercises, with little actual "competition" involved (even "competitions" used as regular assessments are limited to a few individuals). However, it must be acknowledged that if this exam-oriented approach is properly managed—balancing stakeholders' interests—these training sessions could enhance physical fitness, cultivate well-rounded character, and even improve academic performance, thereby transcending mere exam-focused education [34]. While the benefits of exam-driven physical education are evident, they still deviate from China's goal of fostering all-around development, possibly due to policy shortcomings. Given the exam's influence on teaching and extracurricular activities, the relationship between testing and instruction is a classic case of "teaching to the test" [32].

3.4 Assessment Level

Since the implementation of the physical education zhongkao policy, most regions have designed exam schemes focusing on skill- and fitness-based items, with some areas incrementally raising the score weight. For instance, Jiangsu Province is exploring a comprehensive evaluation mechanism integrating daily participation, fitness monitoring, and specialized skill tests [35]. Yet, this approach still fails to address what parents and students truly desire. Under such scoring systems, teachers inevitably tailor instruction to exam items, leading students to prioritize practicing those specific tasks—echoing the earlier issue of teaching content. Daily participation and fitness assessments may be treated perfunctorily, a phenomenon frequently observed in junior high physical education. Moreover, the dominance of summative evaluation risks reducing physical exercise to extreme training, jeopardizing student health [36]. While some cities now incorporate partial formative assessments into zhongkao scores, the heavy weighting of summative results continues to incentivize short-term utilitarian behavior, such as last-minute cramming, potentially undermining long-term interest in sports and health goals, resulting in a "learn-for-the-test, forget-after-the-test" mentality.

4 The Formation Causes of Exam-Oriented Teaching in Junior High School Physical Education

Exam-oriented teaching in junior high school physical education is a product of systemic imbalance in China's educational evaluation system. Its essence lies in the combined effect of the single-score evaluation system and the traditional social concept that emphasizes academic subjects over physical education. This has led to rigid test item design and a lack of innovation in teaching. To solve this practical problem, it is necessary to clarify its underlying causes. In China's junior high school physical education, the emergence of exam-oriented teaching is primarily due to the following reasons.

First, all teaching activities are geared toward grades. In China's educational evaluation system, the fundamental cause is the single college entrance evaluation system that prioritizes test scores. In 2023, Guangming Daily published an article titled "Breaking Exam-Oriented Physical Education Requires Advancing Process and Value-Added Evaluation," pointing out that if standardized test scores are used as the main or heavily weighted component of physical education entrance exam results, schools and students will inevitably focus on training specifically for these test items, leading to exam-oriented tendencies [37]. In the same year, Guangming Daily published another article, "Ensuring Adequate and High-Quality Physical Education Classes," highlighting that some schools treat physical education entrance exams in an exam-driven manner, focusing solely on training for test items rather than cultivating students' sports interests and skills [38]. The inclusion of physical education in high school entrance exams is one of the key reasons stakeholders adopt an exam-oriented attitude toward the subject.

Second, insufficient awareness among schools and teachers. Currently, many school administrators still view physical education only in terms of its impact on admission rates, turning physical education classes into training sessions aimed at boosting exam scores—teaching only what is tested. Due to school performance demands, physical education teachers adhere rigidly to outdated teaching methods, often employing a fixed "three-stage" process dominated by repetitive drills, lacking diversified activities such as gamification or inquiry-based designs. Some teachers, influenced by their professional backgrounds, resort to rote teaching methods, largely ignoring student engagement. Under exam pressure, all teaching activities focus on test-taking techniques, gradually diminishing students' interest in participation. The practice of training only for exam items must be firmly opposed—this is not an inherent flaw of the exam system but rather a result of teachers' misconceptions and inadequate professional competence [39].

Third, homogeneity in exam evaluation methods. While physical education test items vary by region, most areas maintain long-term fixed formats (e.g., standing long jump, shot put) with minimal updates, predominantly emphasizing basic fitness tests while lacking practical skills (e.g., swimming) or region-specific activities. Although some regions have adopted diversified testing schemes, nationwide implementation remains limited, making it difficult for students to develop lifelong fitness habits through these exams. Additionally, the "one-test-determines-all" outcome-based evaluation contradicts the "Double Reduction" policy's emphasis on process-oriented growth, exacerbating academic pressure on ninth-grade students. To secure higher scores, schools and teachers resort to "cramming" tactics, structuring classes around exam strategies [40].

Fourth, college admission pressure within China’s cultural context. Since the imperial examination system, Chinese society has predominantly evaluated talent based on test scores—a trend extending to physical education, where "physical fitness" has never been internalized as a fundamental educational goal. Under the intense pressure of high school entrance exams, physical education instruction is often influenced by administrators, parents, and students, deviating from curricular standards to align narrowly with exam requirements. The utilitarian approach of "teaching only what is tested" remains difficult to effectively counteract [41].

5 Strategies to Address Exam-Oriented Physical Education in Junior High Schools

Media outlets and scholars have been focusing on solutions to exam-oriented physical education across different educational stages. This study specifically examines junior high

school physical education, proposing policy-based theoretical solutions to address exam-oriented teaching, as shown in Fig. 1.

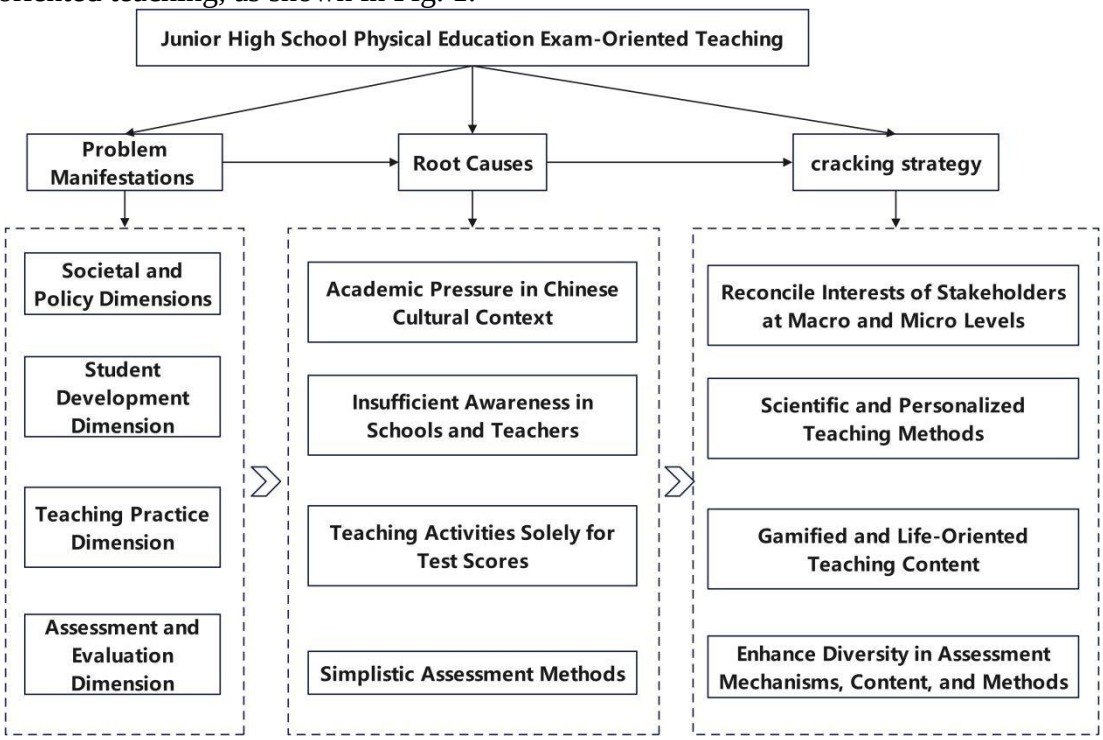

Fig. 1. Analysis of the cracking path of examination-oriented teaching of junior high school physical education

5.1 Shifting Teaching Content Toward Gamification and Life Relevance

Transforming junior high school physical education content into gamified and life-relevant forms is key to overcoming the monotony of traditional teaching, stimulating students' interest in sports participation, and ultimately internalizing exercise habits learned in class into lifelong healthy lifestyles. First, current junior high physical education must move away from the conventional three-stage teaching model to avoid rigidly following fixed syllabus designs, which often result in monotonous course content and neglect students' actual experiences and athletic interests. Gamifying physical education content not only allows students to genuinely enjoy the fun of sports while actively participating but also prevents declining interest due to repetitive training [42]. Second, how can life-relevant teaching be implemented? Research suggests that physical education classes can incorporate real-life scenarios into lesson designs [43]. For example, integrating family-based activities (such as parent-child relays) into classroom teaching or other school sports events can foster connections between in-class and out-of-class activities. This approach may help shift parents' misconceptions about physical education, helping them understand that sports are not merely about achieving high scores in entrance exams or competitions but about fostering health and cultivating unique athletic values that other subjects cannot provide. Therefore, by reforming physical education and health curricula to emphasize gamification and life relevance while optimizing exam content design, we can make meaningful progress in mitigating exam-oriented tendencies in junior high physical education.

5.2 Advocating Scientific and Personalized Teaching Methods

On one hand, physical education classes in junior high schools should focus on designing a scientific training system with phased and tiered approaches [44]. Specifically, endurance running training can adopt the "interval running" strategy, combined with scientific breathing rhythms and stride frequency; shot put training should emphasize the coordination of force application sequence to prevent students from relying solely on upper body strength for throwing practice. Simultaneously, it is crucial to strengthen students' awareness of sports injury prevention. For example, "heel raises on steps" can be used to enhance calf and Achilles tendon strength, while softer surfaces can be chosen for jump rope training to reduce knee impact.

On the other hand, personalized teaching is essential for both students and teachers. As the American educator Emerson said, "The secret of education lies in respecting the student." Although China's education system differs from those abroad, the modernization of school physical education in China requires drawing on excellent foreign teaching philosophies, integrating the concept of respecting students throughout the entire process of physical education. Therefore, it is necessary to strongly advocate tailored teaching methods, developing individualized training plans based on students' physical differences. For instance, specialized small-group tutoring classes can be offered for students with weaker physical foundations, or the "Pomodoro Technique" can be used to incorporate fragmented physical activities into students' daily lives [45]. These measures collectively address the key challenges of exam-oriented physical education in junior high schools. Scientific training improves efficiency and safety, while personalized teaching focuses on students' diverse sports needs, breaking away from the traditional "training for exams" model and building a student-centered school sports ecosystem. This fundamentally weakens test-oriented tendencies and promotes the return of physical education to its essence of nurturing students.

5.3 Enhancing the Diversity of Examination Evaluation Mechanisms, Content, and Methods

First, in terms of evaluation mechanisms, a comprehensive physical education examination system can be established or improved by combining basic-supportive evaluations with advanced-developmental evaluations [46], ensuring the core interests of students—the primary stakeholders—are protected. Specific measures include: (1) For all students, basic, supportive, and process-oriented evaluations can be implemented by refining physical education proficiency or standardized examination systems; (2) For sports majors and student-athletes, advanced-developmental evaluations can be incorporated to varying degrees, encouraging high-level development while accommodating different training and evaluation systems under the concept of "integrating sports with education," thereby improving enrollment systems for sports majors and student-athletes.

Second, regarding evaluation content, in addition to traditional events, greater emphasis should be placed on skill-based and interest-based assessments, such as soccer dribbling and basic badminton skills, to comprehensively reflect students' athletic abilities. For example, the Chongqing Municipal Education Commission's 2025 meeting on key tasks in basic education proposed a "required + elective" model for the high school entrance physical examination [47].

Third, in terms of evaluation methods, diversified standards should be introduced, moving beyond reliance on single test scores. Student evaluations should prioritize daily physical education performance, physical health status, and participation in sports activities, emphasizing comprehensive assessment rather than just exam results [48]. Additionally, measures to reduce student burdens, such as gradually phasing out standardized examinations

in compulsory education, should be considered to align with the principles of quality-oriented education.

5.4 Coordinating the Interests of Stakeholders at Macro and Micro Levels

At the macro level, it is essential to address policymakers' concerns and align the interests of all stakeholders with policy objectives. At the micro level, meeting the diverse demands of schools, teachers, and students while adjusting the cognition of stakeholders (such as students, parents, and teachers) through the "cognition-behavior model" is key to resolving the dilemma of exam-oriented PE teaching in junior high schools. In fact, the revisions to the compulsory education PE and health curriculum standards, which occur every decade, already reflect thorough consideration of stakeholder interests. However, inadequate understanding of policies at the micro level still leads to exam-oriented PE teaching. Therefore, specific recommendations for the micro level include: for students, providing psychological counseling and guiding them to focus on self-improvement rather than mere competition through goal-setting [49]; for "home-school-community collaboration," establishing parental cooperation mechanisms, encouraging parents to participate in "family sports days," and using parent-child activities to stimulate students' interest in exercise. Schools should strengthen communication with parents and offer scientific guidance on extracurricular training plans to avoid excessive reliance on off-campus tutoring [40]; for teachers, enhancing professional development through skill training and interdisciplinary collaboration (e.g., sports medicine knowledge) to improve teaching methods and avoid monotonous, repetitive training approaches [50,51]. Theoretically, these measures can modify some stakeholders' perceptions to some extent. However, assessments remain selective—individuals choosing not to adopt exam-oriented methods does not guarantee others will follow suit. Darwin's principle of natural selection applies here as well.

6 Conclusion

As a crucial component of China's PE education system, junior high school PE teaching has long been a focus of attention. Influenced by traditional exam-oriented education and the inclusion of PE in the high school entrance examination, PE teaching has increasingly fallen into an exam-oriented predicament. Based on stakeholder theory, this study thoroughly examines the manifestations of exam-oriented PE teaching, revealing that it is not driven by a single factor but rather results from the complex interplay of multiple stakeholders' interests. Building on a systematic analysis of its causes, the study proposes targeted strategies to address different aspects of exam-oriented teaching. Looking ahead, in the era of rapid AI development, exploring the deep integration of AI technology with junior high school PE teaching—particularly its potential in balancing stakeholder interests, optimizing teaching evaluations, and promoting students' physical and mental health as well as lifelong sports awareness—will be a key research direction. This study hopes that junior high school PE teaching can return to its fundamental purpose of holistic education rather than merely serving as a tool for academic advancement.

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Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies Statement

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Conflict of Interest Statement

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