

Balancing Physical and Moral Development: A Study on the Core Values and Implementation Pathways of the Southwest Associated University Educators' Spirit in Cultivating Physical Education Teachers

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ABSTRACT

The spirit of educators at the Southwest Associated University represents a valuable legacy in China's educational history. Its core philosophy of "equal emphasis on physical fitness and moral character" holds significant implications for training physical education teachers in the new era. This paper addresses the demands placed on physical education teachers in the new era and the current dilemma of "prioritizing skills over spirit" in their training. Focusing on sports educators like John Mo from the Southwest Associated University, it delves into the institution's precious educational legacy of "equal emphasis on physical fitness and moral character." The study demonstrates the core value of this spirit in cultivating physical education teacher candidates' professional ideals, educational capabilities, and sense of mission. Through historical research, theoretical analysis, and case studies, this paper delves into the essence and contemporary relevance of their educational spirit, explores effective pathways for integrating it into physical education teacher training, and provides theoretical references and practical guidance for building the physical education teacher workforce in the new era. The study distills three core values: historical reflection, theoretical guidance, and practical empowerment. Historical reflection emphasizes the inheritance of the "sports for national salvation" spirit; theoretical guidance highlights the contemporary relevance of John Mo's theory of transfer in physical education; and practical empowerment underscores the driving force of perseverance and resilience in educational practice. Simultaneously, the study analyzes current challenges in physical education teacher training, including utilitarian ideologies, fragmented resources, and monolithic methodologies. It constructs a three-stage progressive training system—cognitive construction, competency enhancement, and practical transformation—and establishes implementation pathways through technological empowerment, university-gymnasium collaboration, and cultural immersion. Findings indicate that the Southwest Associated University's educational spirit effectively enhances physical education teacher candidates' professional identity and comprehensive competencies, offering historical insights and practical paradigms for advancing high-quality physical education teacher training in the new era.

KEYWORDS

Southwest Associated University; Educator Spirit; Physical Education Teacher Candidates; Core Values; Implementation Pathways.

1. INTRODUCTION

Against the backdrop of comprehensively advancing the “five-fold education” and fostering virtue through education, building a high-quality, professional physical education teacher workforce has become a critical component of the strategy to build China into an education powerhouse. As a miracle in China's educational history, the Southwest Associated University's motto of “Resolute, Steadfast, and Outstanding” and its educational philosophy of “equal emphasis on physical and moral development” hold profound implications for cultivating contemporary physical education teacher candidates. Despite the turmoil of the War of Resistance, the university maintained physical education as a core component of its general education curriculum, requiring all students to complete and pass physical education courses throughout their four-year program—a testament to its deep recognition of the educational value of physical education.[1-5] Current physical education teacher training faces multiple challenges, including the need to strengthen the cultivation of professional ethics, insufficient integration of teaching and practice, and the requirement to deepen the nurturing of an educator's spirit. Drawing upon the historical legacy of the educational spirit embodied by the Southwest Associated University, particularly the philosophy and practices of physical education educators like John Mo, offers valuable insights for addressing these challenges. John Mo, hailed as “a banner of the Chinese sports spirit,” proposed the theory of “the transfer value of physical education” during his time at the Southwest Associated University. This theory emphasizes that physical education not only builds physical strength but also cultivates qualities such as loyalty, courage, and fairness, which can be transferred to social life and patriotic actions. This theory transcends the mere transmission of skills, pointing to the essence of holistic education. This paper aims to delve deeply into the educational spirit of the Southwest Associated University, particularly the contemporary value of its sports philosophy. It explores effective pathways to integrate this philosophy into the training of physical education teacher candidates, providing theoretical reference and practical guidance for cultivating high-quality physical education teachers who meet the demands of the new era. By revisiting this invaluable historical resource, we seek to identify breakthroughs for the current challenges in physical education teacher training, lay a solid foundation for building a strong educational and sports nation, and provide historical wisdom and practical solutions for physical education teacher education in the new era.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Historical Document and Archival Analysis Method

Document Collection: Focused reading of Southwest Associated University's institutional history, biographies (e.g., Mei Yichi, Zhang Boling, John Mo), memoirs, institutional charters, academic council meeting records, and contemporary discourses on physical education.

Content Analysis: Employing qualitative content analysis, documents were coded, categorized, and thematically extracted. Key focuses included: ① Educational philosophies of Union University leaders and physical education instructors; ② Curriculum design, assessment methods, and underlying educational objectives in physical education; ③ Specific case studies of cultivating students' willpower and collective spirit through physical activities (e.g., morning exercises, military training, athletic competitions).

Value Extraction: Distilled core elements of the Lianhe University spirit with contemporary relevance for physical education teacher training, such as “Physical education is fundamental to developing a complete personality,” “Liberal arts education,” “Patriotism and dedication,” and “Resilience and perseverance,” laying a theoretical foundation for subsequent research[6-8].

2.2. In-depth Interviews and Expert Consultation Method

Three categories of key informants were selected: ① Senior faculty and administrators in physical education teacher training programs; ② Experts in higher education history and sports history; ③ Outstanding practicing physical education teachers (particularly those whose training models are recognized for embodying humanistic care). Interview Outline: Develop a semi-structured interview guide centered on “core values” and “implementation pathways.” Data Analysis: Transcribe interview recordings and employ thematic analysis to identify core insights regarding value recognition, practical challenges, and implementation strategies.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

3.1. The Essence of the Southwest Associated University Educators' Spirit

Surviving over eight years amidst the flames of the War of Resistance, the Southwest Associated University not only created a miracle in Chinese educational history but also forged an enduring spiritual monument. The core tenets of its educators' spirit profoundly embody the noble choices and value pursuits of Chinese intellectuals at the nation's critical juncture, offering significant insights for contemporary education[9-10].

3.1.1. Patriotic Sentiment and Mission-Driven Responsibility: The Unwavering Conviction of “Educating for the Nation”

The soul of the Southwest United University's educational spirit lies in its profound patriotic sentiment and intense sense of mission. Amidst national calamity and peril, faculty and students intertwined their personal destinies with the nation's future, establishing the resolute conviction of “educating for the nation.” Born amidst the flames of the War of Resistance Against Japan, the faculty and students of the three universities “turned their backs on the imperial palaces of five dynasties,” migrating southward to establish makeshift shelters in the remote southwest frontier of the motherland, where they continued their scholarly pursuits uninterrupted. This migration was not merely a physical relocation but a difficult choice made to preserve the cultural heritage of China and safeguard the torch of academic knowledge. As Professor Wu Baozhang of Yunnan Normal University noted, the Southwest Associated University embodied the spirit of science, democracy, and patriotism—a spirit fully reflected in its motto, anthem, and memorial inscriptions. Distinguished alumnus Wang Xiji once declared: “I aspire to be an outstanding individual who can contribute to the war effort, to national construction, and to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation!”

This sense of national and familial commitment manifested in the university's educational philosophy by inextricably linking education to the nation's future and destiny. Professor Shi Zhongying, Dean of the Institute of Education at Tsinghua University, emphasized that since ancient times, China's educational tradition has emphasized both the humanistic and social dimensions of education. Accordingly, its talent cultivation goals have stressed not only self-improvement but also service to society and the nation, placing even greater emphasis on achieving self-fulfillment through such service. Though the Southwest Associated University existed for only 8 years and 11 months, producing just over 2,000 graduates, it nurtured more than 170 academicians, over 100 cultural masters, two Nobel laureates, and eight pioneers of China's “Two Bombs, One Satellite” program. Behind these extraordinary achievements lies the intellectuals' enduring commitment to “carry forward the lost teachings of ancient sages and usher in an era of lasting peace for all generations.”

3.1.2. Fortitude and Optimism: A Spirit Forged in Adversity

The motto “Fortitude and Excellence” encapsulates the spiritual character tempered by the faculty and students of the Southwest Associated University amidst extreme hardship. This spirit embodies resilience, courage, perseverance, and exceptional achievement, forming a crucial pillar of the

university's educational ethos. The harsh conditions at the Southwest Associated University are almost unimaginable today. The campus consisted of rudimentary thatched huts, classrooms with rammed-earth walls and corrugated iron roofs, windows covered with paper, and meals of coarse, stale rice. Students were forced to take on part-time jobs outside campus-teaching, selling newspapers, copying manuscripts-while evading frequent Japanese air raids. Yet these hardships did not crush them; instead, they became catalysts for tempering their will and spurring their progress. At the 2025 freshman orientation, Tsinghua University President Li Luming noted: “Far from crushing them, these hardships became catalysts for tempering their resolve and spurring their drive, inspiring them to scale new heights and tackle ‘first-class problems.’” Amidst extraordinary adversity, the United University faculty demonstrated remarkable optimism and perseverance. The ravages of war did not dampen the professors' passion for scholarship. Hua Luogeng penned his work *The Theory of Heaped Primes* in a makeshift shelter within a cattle shed; Jin Yuelin, having lost 700,000 words of manuscript during bombings, reconstructed his *Treatise on Epistemology* from memory; Zhu Ziqing, unable to sleep through countless long nights due to hunger, still produced works like *Classic Essays*. Classic works emerged amidst the smoke of war. For instance, the households of Wen Yiduo and Hua Luogeng-comprising over a dozen people-shared a single room, divided by a cloth curtain. This unique arrangement, dubbed “Archaeology East, Calculation West,” enabled them to simultaneously complete two monumental works: Wen Yiduo's *Collation and Supplement to the Songs of Chu* and Hua Luogeng's *Theory of Heaped Primes*[11-16].

3.1.3. Unity of Knowledge and Action with Rigorous Scholarship: An Academic Ethos Integrating Theory and Practice

Another core tenet of the Southwest Associated University educators' spirit was the academic ethos of unifying knowledge and action with rigorous scholarship. This ethos emphasized integrating theory with practice and linking academic research to societal needs, embodying the educators' scholarly pursuits and pedagogical ideals. Faculty not only prioritized classroom instruction but also stressed fieldwork and social engagement. For instance, Wen Yiduo joined a hiking expedition to Kunming, where he not only traversed the landscapes of Hunan, Guizhou, and Yunnan provinces and collected folk songs from various regions but also engaged with students in discussions about the essence of poetry. This experience allowed students to witness the authentic lives of ordinary people. Botanist Wu Zhengyi and his mentor Wu Yunzhen conducted joint field surveys, collected plant specimens, and collaborated on researching the *Diannan Materia Medica*, pioneering the precursor to China's “botanical philology.” In academic research, Union University faculty upheld rigorous scholarly standards. Historian Qian Mu overcame immense challenges to complete *Outline of Chinese History*, proclaiming that “the future of our nation and people will still derive its vitality from within the cultural legacy bequeathed by our ancestors.” This declaration sought to awaken cultural confidence and invigorate the national spirit. The university mandated that the most fundamental courses be taught by renowned professors. Humanities students were required to take one natural science course, while science and engineering students had to complete one social science course. This interdisciplinary curriculum cultivated students' broad knowledge base and solid academic foundations.

3.2. Systematic Elaboration of John Mo's Physical Education Philosophy

The spirit of educators at the Southwest Associated University epitomized educational wisdom under specific historical conditions, with physical education pioneer John Mo's legacy standing out prominently. His educational practices vividly embodied the “six dimensions” of the educator spirit, providing rich intellectual resources for training contemporary physical education teachers.

3.2.1. The Six Dimensions of John Mo's Physical Education Philosophy

As a pioneer of modern physical education in China and the first professor in the field, John Mo (1882–1966) put his educational ideals into practice while serving as Director of the Physical

Education Department at the Southwest Associated University. His philosophy can be analyzed across six dimensions:

1) Ideals and Convictions: Defender of National Dignity and Political Stance. Amid national crisis, John Mo resolutely chose to relocate southward to “save the nation through education,” steadfastly upholding the educational principle of “strengthening the nation through physical fitness” and determined to transform China's image as the “sick man of East Asia.” He often instructed his students: “You must train your bodies diligently, be courageous, and never fear... Do not go out and bring shame upon the Chinese people.” This conviction linking physical education to national destiny aligns profoundly with contemporary demands for “ideological and political education” and “curriculum-based ideological education.”

2) Moral Character: A lifelong exemplar of physical education and humanistic care. John Mo himself remained steadfast in physical education for 52 years, becoming a “living model advocating sports.” He emphasized sports' role in shaping character, asserting that physical education aims to cultivate citizens who are “healthy, graceful, dignified, and responsible.”

3) Educational Wisdom: A Leader in Enlightening Minds and Inspiring Hearts. In his essay “The Transfer Value of Physical Education,” John Mo systematically outlined sports' transfer effects on character development, noting that “loyalty is inextricably intertwined with honesty and self-sacrifice... These qualities extend from athletics into society, manifesting as patriotism when a nation engages in war with others.” This perspective reveals sports' unique role in moral education.

4) Dedicated Attitude: A Practitioner of Scientific Training and Pedagogical Innovation. Amidst wartime adversity, John Mo steadfastly pursued scientific training and methodological innovation. He authored theoretical works on physical education and developed training approaches tailored to local conditions, embodying a professional ethos of diligent study, steadfast practice, truth-seeking, and innovation.

5) Compassionate Heart: An Advocate for Wholehearted Commitment and Educational Devotion. John Mo demonstrated meticulous care for his students, once declaring, “I shall continue to serve our school faithfully, like a sentinel, until my last breath.” This spirit of joyful teaching, deep affection for students, and selfless dedication vividly embodies the emotional foundation of an educator.

6) Pursuit of the Greater Path: A Transmitter of Global Vision and National Spirit. John Mo possessed a broad international perspective while steadfastly upholding the stance of Chinese culture, dedicating himself to cultural education through sports. He was one of the earliest pioneers to spread the Olympic movement in China, simultaneously emphasizing the development of national sports.

Table 1. Six Dimensions of John Mo's Physical Education Philosophy and Their Implications

Dimension	Core Essence	Historical Manifestation	Contemporary Revelation
Ideals and Convictions	Education for National Salvation, Strengthening the Nation	Declining a high-paying position to remain at the University	Strengthen the Professional Conviction of Physical Education Teachers
Moral Character	Setting an Example, Exemplary Character	52 years dedicated to frontline physical education	Set Exemplary Standards of Professional Ethics
Educational Wisdom	Sports Transfer Value, Holistic Education	Proposing the role of sports in shaping character	Unlock the Comprehensive Educational Potential of Physical Education
Diligent Attitude	Scientific Training, Continuous Innovation	Persisting in research and innovation under wartime conditions	Enhance the Scientific Approach to Physical Education
Compassionate Heart	Caring for Students, Wholehearted Dedication	“Serving to the very end like a guard”	Foster Positive Teacher-Student Relationships
Pursuit of Enlightenment	National Spirit, Global Perspective	Promoting the Olympic Movement and advancing national sports	Balance Traditional and Modern Physical Education Cultures

3.2.2. The Core Principle of “Equal Emphasis on Physical and Moral Development”

Southwest Associated University's educational philosophy that “a complete personality begins with physical education” epitomizes the principle of “equal emphasis on physical and moral development.” This philosophy holds that physical education is not merely a means of physical training but also a vital pathway for moral refinement. Even during the extraordinary period of the War of Resistance, the university maintained physical education as a required course, reflecting its profound recognition of the value of sports education. John Mo emphasized that “physical education is the best tool for cultivating character,” believing that the qualities developed on the athletic field can be transferred to daily life and social behavior. This philosophy aligns with Comrade Mao Zedong's advocacy of “cultivating the spirit and strengthening the body,” and resonates deeply with contemporary educational principles emphasizing “health first” and “educating through physical education.” In training physical education teachers, revisiting this philosophy helps correct the tendency to prioritize skills over character development, thereby returning to the essence of physical education.

3.3. Contemporary Implications of the Southwest Associated University Educators' Spirit for Training Physical Education Teachers

The educational spirit of the Southwest Associated University serves as a valuable resource for cultivating physical education teachers. Its core principle of “equal emphasis on physical and moral development” provides value guidance for training new-era physical education teachers across four dimensions: historical context, theoretical foundation, exemplary models, and contemporary mission. The following systematically elaborates its core values in alignment with curriculum requirements:

3.3.1. Historical Mirror Value: Establishing the Spiritual Compass of “Why We Teach”

The spirit of Southwest Associated University educators anchors physical education teacher candidates in the noble professional ideal of “cultivating sound character through physical education to serve national rejuvenation.” Amidst the flames of the War of Resistance, the university upheld “education for national salvation,” viewing physical education as a vital pathway for shaping the national spirit. For instance, Professor John Mo proposed the “transfer value of physical education,” emphasizing that qualities like loyalty, courage, and fairness cultivated through sports can be transferred to social life and patriotic actions. This spirit guides physical education students to transcend the role of mere skill instructors, recognizing that physical education is a vital practice for “cultivating talent for the nation.” Yunnan Normal University strengthens students' sense of mission through experiential activities like “Retracing the Path of the Southwest Associated University,” allowing them to personally witness how faculty and students upheld their ideals amid harsh conditions.

3.3.2. Theoretical Guidance Value: Deepening the Essential Understanding of “What Physical Education Is”

John Mo's theory of “the transfer value of physical education” provides physical education teacher candidates with a profound framework for understanding the essence of physical education as a form of education. This theory asserts that physical education is not merely physical training but also character education that cultivates a fighting spirit, teamwork, awareness of rules, and resilience in the face of setbacks. For example, the United University deliberately honed students' willpower through compulsory physical education courses and team competitions, as John Mo stated: “The ultimate goal of physical education is to cultivate a sound character.” This theory underpins the contemporary concept of “cultivating virtue through physical education,” helping physical education teacher candidates reconstruct their understanding of sports' functions from an educational perspective. Yunnan Normal University established the “John Mo Sports Lecture Series” to systematically explain how this theory applies to modern physical education teaching, encouraging teacher candidates to integrate educational objectives into curriculum design.

3.3.3. Exemplary Role Value: Establishing Character Models for “How to Teach”

Educators like John Mo exemplify the “great teacher” model through their practices of leading by example, caring for students, and lifelong dedication. Having devoted 52 years to frontline physical education, he is hailed as “a banner of the Chinese sports spirit.” For instance, during the United University period, he personally demonstrated gymnastics movements, trained and competed alongside students, and inspired them with his passionate charisma. This paradigm of “actions speak louder than words” guides physical education teacher candidates to prioritize professional ethics, cultivating them into mentors who combine expertise with personal integrity. Yunnan Normal University employs immersive ideological and political courses, such as staging the play Southwest United University, enabling students to directly experience the spirit of educators and internalize their professional ethics.

3.3.4. Empowering Contemporary Value: Strengthening the Mission of “How to Strengthen the Nation”

The core spirit of “sports for national salvation” from the United University can be transformed into practical momentum for building a “sports powerhouse” in the new era. Today, sports bear the mission of promoting a Healthy China and enhancing cultural confidence. The United University spirit inspires physical education students to align personal growth with national strategies-for instance, through community sports services and teaching in frontier regions-to advance national fitness and educational equity. Liu Hao, a graduate of Yunnan Normal University's School of Physical Education, exemplifies this contemporary legacy with his Olympic pledge to “win glory for the nation.” By integrating the Union University spirit into curriculum-based ideological education (e.g., “Red Sports Culture” modules), institutions can enhance teacher candidates' professional pride, empowering them to become builders of a new-era sports powerhouse.

The educational spirit of the Southwest Associated University provides value guidance for cultivating physical education teacher candidates across four dimensions: history, theory, exemplars, and the contemporary era (see Table 2).

Table 2. Core Values of the Southwest Associated University Educational Spirit for Cultivating Physical Education Teacher Candidates

Value Dimensions	Core Essence	Corresponding Practical Examples
Historical Mirror Value	Uphold the ideal of “educating through sports to serve national rejuvenation”	During the “Retracing the Path of the Southwest Associated University” activity, students gained insights into the university's spirit of education for national salvation.
Theoretical Guidance Value	Deepen understanding of the essence of sports education (transferable values)	The “John Mo Sports Lecture Series” systematically elucidated the role of sports in shaping character.
Role Model Demonstration Value	Model the professional ethics of educators by exemplifying “leading by example and caring for students”	The stage play Southwest Associated University recreated scenes of John Mo training and competing alongside students.
Era-Empowering Value	Translate historical spirit into a sense of mission to serve the “sports powerhouse” strategy	Physical education teacher trainees participated in frontier teaching support and community sports services, putting the spirit of the Associated University into practice.

3.4. Practical Challenges: Integrating the Educational Spirit of the Southwest Associated University into Physical Education Teacher Training

As a valuable legacy in China's educational history, the core principle of the Southwest Associated University's educational spirit—"equal emphasis on physical fitness and moral character"—holds significant implications for contemporary physical education teacher training. However, the process of integrating this spirit faces multiple practical challenges that require systematic examination and in-depth analysis. These challenges not only hinder the effective transmission of the United University spirit but also impact the quality of physical education teacher development in the new era. This chapter explores the existing challenges in the integration process from four dimensions: philosophy, content, methodology, and environment.

3.4.1. Conceptual Challenges: Utilitarian Tendencies Dominated by Technical Rationality

In current physical education teacher training, a utilitarian tendency—prioritizing physical skills and techniques over spiritual cultivation—remains pronounced. This tendency stems from a long-standing “technical rationality” paradigm that reduces the value of physical education to the transmission of athletic skills and the achievement of competitive results, while neglecting its essential function as a vehicle for character education. At the practical level, training programs, curriculum design, and evaluation criteria all revolve around “physical fitness” and “technical skills.” For instance, the excellence of physical education teacher candidates is often primarily judged by their mastery of athletic skills rather than their educational passion or teaching competence. Against this backdrop, the holistic development philosophy of “equal emphasis on physical constitution and character” advocated by the Southwest Associated University struggles to take root. Spiritual cultivation often becomes a mere embellishment to skill training rather than a core educational objective. This conceptual deviation limits physical education teacher candidates' self-perception to that of “skill instructors” rather than “guides for comprehensive development,” thereby weakening the intrinsic motivation for integrating the spirit of the Associated University.

3.4.2. Content-Level Challenges: Insufficient Historical Resource Exploration and Fragmented Curriculum Content

At the content level, integrating the educational spirit of the Southwest Associated University faces dual challenges: systemic gaps and inadequate resource transformation. On one hand, the current physical education teacher training curriculum generally lacks systematic incorporation of the history of physical education, the history of physical education thought, and especially the practical experiences of physical education at the Associated University. For instance, valuable resources such as John Mo's theory of “the transfer value of physical education” and the vivid scenes of United University faculty and students persisting with compulsory physical education amid wartime turmoil are mostly scattered throughout classrooms as isolated case studies or anecdotes, failing to be integrated into logically coherent teaching modules. On the other hand, the exploration of existing resources often remains superficial, lacking in-depth refinement and contemporary interpretation. For instance, while some universities have attempted to compile textbooks like *The Hardships of the Southwest United University in Xunyong*, effective pathways for transforming such materials into pedagogically sound content for teacher education students remain elusive. This fragmentation and superficiality in content delivery hinder students' ability to develop a systematic understanding of the United University spirit, let alone grasp its intrinsic connection to contemporary physical education.

3.4.3. Methodological Challenges: Monolithic Integration and Disconnect from Professional Practice

Methodologically, current approaches to integrating the United University spirit suffer from uniformity and disconnection. Key manifestations include: First, reliance on traditional “lecture + field trip” models, such as organizing visits to the United University site or hosting thematic seminars. While these methods offer some introductory value, they predominantly involve one-way

transmission, failing to foster deep resonance or value alignment among students. Second, the spirit of the United University has not been deeply integrated into physical education curricula or teaching practices. For instance, core courses like “Theory of Physical Education Teaching” lack instructional designs specifically addressing the United University's sports philosophy. Similarly, during teaching practicums, there are few explicit requirements for students to observe, reflect on, or practice the United University spirit. Third, insufficient synergy exists within campus sports culture. Although Yunnan Normal University has attempted innovative expressions like staging the play Southwest United University, such activities are often treated as extracurricular extensions rather than integrated into routine physical education teaching. This disjointed approach makes it difficult for the spirit of the United University to penetrate the core of physical education teacher candidates' professional development.

3.4.4. Environmental Challenges: Weakened Professional Identity and Disconnect from Contemporary Context

External environmental pressures and challenges in subject cognition further complicate integration. At the societal level, the utilitarianism prevalent in a market economy erodes physical education teachers' professional identity. Some physical education teacher candidates prioritize “hard metrics” like certification qualifications and civil service exams, lacking motivation to appreciate the value of historical spiritual resources. For instance, surveys indicate that physical education teacher education students' professional identity diminishes with each academic year, reflecting the profound influence of external environments on individual career choices. At the era-context level, the spirit of the United Front University emerged during wartime, creating an inherent disconnect between its lofty ideal of “saving the nation through education” and the relatively comfortable life experiences of contemporary students. Though moved by the Union University narrative, students generally perceive it as “too distant from reality,” struggling to translate historical ideals into contemporary action guides. Furthermore, the current societal bias toward intellectual pursuits over physical education, coupled with the mismatch between this mindset and the actual status of physical education teachers, further diminishes pre-service teachers' recognition of the Union University spirit's contemporary relevance. The process of integrating the educational spirit of the Southwest United University into the training of physical education teacher candidates faces significant challenges across four dimensions: philosophy, content, methodology, and environment. These intertwined difficulties collectively constrain the full realization of the educational efficacy of the United University spirit. Only by systematically analyzing the essence of these challenges can we lay the groundwork for constructing effective integration pathways moving forward.

Table 3. Primary Challenges in Integrating the Spirit of Southwest Associated University Educators into Physical Education Teacher Training

Dimensions of Dilemmas	Core Issues	Concrete Manifestations
Conceptual Level	Dominance of technical rationality with pronounced utilitarian tendencies	Emphasis on skills over literacy, narrow evaluation criteria, marginalization of spiritual cultivation
Content Level	Insufficient exploration of historical resources and fragmented curriculum content	Failure to systematically integrate physical education philosophy into curricula, superficial resource adaptation, fragmented content delivery
Methodological Level	Monolithic integration methods disconnected from professional practice	Reliance on lectures and field trips, lack of integration with specialized courses and internships, insufficient campus cultural coordination
Environmental Level	Weakened professional identity and disconnect from contemporary context	Pragmatism undermining professional convictions, disconnect between history and reality, inadequate societal recognition and support

3.5. Implementation Pathway: Systematically Integrating the Educational Spirit of the Southwest Associated University into Physical Education Teacher Training

The educational spirit of the Southwest Associated University serves as a valuable resource for cultivating physical education teachers. Its core principle of “equal emphasis on physical fitness and character development” must be systematically integrated throughout the entire training process. This chapter constructs an actionable implementation pathway across four dimensions—curriculum integration, practice cultivation, cultural immersion, and collaborative education—to transform historical spirit into vibrant contemporary practices in physical education teacher training.

3.5.1. Curriculum Embedding Pathway: Integrating Spiritual Essence into the Curriculum System

Curriculum serves as the primary channel for spiritual inheritance. Establishing a curriculum system that combines explicit and implicit elements forms the foundation for systematically integrating the spirit of Southwest Associated University educators.

Explicit Curriculum Modular Design: Offer elective courses such as “Special Topics in Southwest Associated University Physical Education Philosophy,” systematically teaching core content including John Mo's theory of “the transfer value of physical education” and the university's physical education systems and practices. Incorporate “Case Studies of the United University's Physical Education” into core professional courses like “School Physical Education” and “Sports Psychology.” For instance, when discussing the educational function of physical education, emphasize how the United University cultivated qualities such as “loyalty, courage, and fairness” through sports. Yunnan Normal University's practice demonstrates that integrating the United University spirit into ideological and political courses and professional curricula effectively strengthens students' value recognition.

Implicit Curriculum Resource Development: Develop an online resource repository integrating multimedia materials such as Southwest United University documentaries, celebrity lectures (e.g., “Zhang Guimei Ideological and Political Lecture Series” on Yunnan Normal University's online platform), and oral histories. Compile the school-based publication *Stories of Sports at the United University* to showcase the optimism and resilience of its faculty and students during wartime. These resources should be made accessible to students through digital platforms to support personalized learning.

Table 4. Specific Initiatives and Examples of Course Embedding Pathways

Course Types	Specific Initiatives	Reference Cases
Explicit Curriculum	Launch an elective course titled “Special Topics in Sports Education at the Southwest Associated University”	Yunnan Normal University Launches “Southwest Associated University Forum”
Explicit Curriculum	Incorporate case studies on the Associated University's sports programs into specialized curricula	Integrating Associated University Sportsmanship Training Cases into “Theory of Physical Education”
Hidden Curriculum	Develop an online resource repository (documentaries, lectures)	Southwest Associated University Museum Online Resource Library, with Annual Visits Exceeding One Million
Hidden Curriculum	Compile a school-based publication titled “Stories of Sports at the Associated University”	Associated University Books Featured in Yunnan Normal University's “Six Ones” Patriotic Education Campaign

3.5.2. Pathways for Cultivating Practice: Internalizing the Spirit Through Active Engagement

Practice is key to internalizing the spirit. By integrating professional practice with extracurricular activities, students are guided to “learn by doing” and “gain insights through learning.” Deep integration of professional practice: During teaching observation and internship phases, a special topic-“Observing and Reflecting on the Spirit of the United Nations University”-is incorporated, requiring student teachers to document and reflect on how frontline educators embody this spirit. Students are encouraged to design physical education curricula infused with the United University Spirit, such as embedding cooperation and rule-consciousness training into team sports. Yunnan Normal University's successful implementation of this approach involves organizing student teaching placements at institutions like Huaping County No. 1 Middle School in Lijiang City, bringing the United University Spirit into grassroots classrooms. Experiential Extensions in Extracurricular Activities: The “Retracing the United University Path” sports and culture summer camp organizes hikes along the route of the university's southern relocation, enabling participants to experience history firsthand. Hosting sports events themed around “Resilience and Excellence” (e.g., marathons, team-building activities) to temper willpower through competition. The “Four-Stage, Three-Dimensional, Dual-Collaboration” model proposed by Zhao Fuxue's team at Wuhan Sport University emphasizes cultivating core competencies through contextualized practice, offering methodological insights for translating the spirit of the United Nations University into action.

3.5.3. Cultural Immersion Pathway: Fostering a Campus Culture that Reveres the Spirit of the United Nations University

Campus culture is the fertile ground for nurturing spirit. Through spatial design and signature events, integrate the United University spirit into daily life unconsciously. Visualize Spatial Environments: Display quotes and historical images of United University sports figures (e.g., John Mo) in venues like gymnasiums and corridors, creating tangible spiritual spaces. Yunnan Normal University preserves historical sites and establishes cultural landscapes like the Garden of Eminent Figures, embedding the spirit visually into daily life. Regular Branded Events: Cultivate the “SWUES Sports Spirit” brand through initiatives like the “John Mo Cup” series competitions and sports-humanities lectures. Yunnan Normal University's musical dance epic “Southwest United University” embodies this spirit through art, becoming a “walking ideological education class.” Such activities should become annual traditions, such as themed events on International Olympic Day.

3.5.4. Innovating a “Value-Driven + Digital Empowerment” Cultivation Model

Employ modern educational technologies to innovate methods for inheriting the educational spirit of the Southwest Associated University and enhance cultivation outcomes. Three-stage progressive cultivation system: Establish a progressive cultivation framework of “cognitive construction - capability enhancement - practical transformation.” During the cognitive construction phase, develop a “Teacher Ethics Scenario Simulation System” using virtual simulation technology, and employ AR technology to recreate key events from John Mo's educational practices. In the competency enhancement phase, establish a case resource repository on the National Smart Education Platform and develop AI-driven personalized learning pathways. During the practical transformation phase, achieve the collision and integration of educational wisdom and sportsmanship through “dual-teacher co-teaching” and “joint teaching research.” Immersive experiential learning leverages the Southwest United University Digital-Intelligent Education Integration Base, using technology to breathe life into silent historical resources. Cultural landmarks such as the Southwest United University Museum and University History Museum established by Yunnan Normal University, along with artistic works like the Southwest United University Suite, provide immersive learning experiences for physical education teacher candidates.

Table 5. Curriculum System and Teaching Model Innovations for Integrating the Spirit of Southwest Associated University Educators into Physical Education Teacher Training

Innovation Dimensions	Specific Initiatives	Case Reference	Expected Outcomes
Curriculum System Reconstruction	Establish a “Specialized Study Program on the Spirit of Educators”	Yunnan Normal University “John Mo Sports Lecture Series”	Strengthen value alignment
	Develop a Teaching Case Library for Physical Education and Ideological Education	John Mo “Translational Value of Sports” Case Development	Promote integration of professional and ideological education
	Organize a “Retracing the Path of the Southwest Associated University” Practical Activity	Field Research in Mengzi, Jinping, and Other Locations	Enhance emotional engagement
Teaching Model Innovation	Use AR/VR Technology to Recreate Key Events in Educators' Lives	Development of John Mo Educational Practice Virtual Simulation Project	Improve learning experience
	AI-Driven Personalized Learning Pathways	National Smart Education Platform Case Resource Library	Achieve differentiated instruction
	Implement Dual-Teacher Co-Teaching and Collaborative Teaching Research	Collaborative Teaching and Research Between University and K-12 Physical Education Teachers	Facilitate practical application

3.5.5. Collaborative Education Pathway: Establishing a “University-Society-Alumni” Synergy Mechanism

Breaking down campus boundaries, we harness diverse stakeholders to cultivate a symbiotic ecosystem for spiritual legacy transmission. Through university-museum partnerships, we establish practical training bases in collaboration with the Southwest United University Memorial Hall and Museum, facilitating volunteer-led tours and field research activities. The Southwest United University Museum at Yunnan Normal University welcomes over 1.23 million visitors annually, providing students with an immersive learning platform. The alumni network reinforces the legacy lineage by inviting distinguished alumni and frontline sports educators to share their experiences of embodying the United University spirit. This approach of “people sharing stories from their own lives” enhances the spirit's relatability and appeal, forming a traceable lineage of transmission. Leveraging social resources through collaboration, the model draws inspiration from Ankang University's “One Teacher, Three Roles” approach. Partnerships with primary/secondary schools, sports associations, and communities organize teacher trainees to participate in volunteer services and champion-led public welfare classes, deepening their understanding of the United University spirit through social practice. Integrating the Southwest United University Educator Spirit requires synergistic efforts across four pathways—curriculum, practice, culture, and collaboration—to build a comprehensive, multi-layered, and sustainable ecosystem. Its success hinges on transforming historical spirit from static knowledge into dynamic practice, internalizing external requirements into conscious action, and ultimately cultivating new-era physical education teachers who possess both solid skills and the heart of an educator.

Table 6. The Five-Pronged Pathway System for Integrating the Spirit of Southwest Associated University Educators into the Training of Physical Education Teachers

Pathway Dimensions	Core Objectives	Key Initiatives	Safeguard Mechanisms
Curriculum Integration	Systematically comprehend the spiritual essence	Modularization of explicit curriculum, establishment of implicit curriculum resource repository	Curriculum review mechanism, digital platform support
Practice Cultivation	Internalize the spirit through action	Thematic education internships, experiential extracurricular programs	Practical training base development, institutionalized activities
Cultural Immersion	Cultivate an atmosphere that reveres the spirit	Visualization of spatial environments, regularization of signature events	Special funding for cultural development, student club participation
Digital Empowerment	Innovate methods for inheriting the spirit of educators at the United Nations University to enhance cultivation outcomes	Virtual simulation, AI-enhanced learning	Digital-Intelligent Education Integration Base, United University Museum/University History Museum, “Southwest United University Anthem”
Collaborative Education		University-museum collaborations, alumni giving back, societal synergy	

4. CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

4.1. Research Findings

The educational spirit of Southwest Associated University, which emphasizes “equal importance of physical and moral development,” stands as a shining gem in the treasure trove of Chinese educational thought. Through systematic analysis and examination, this study draws the following core conclusions:

4.1.1. Reaffirmation of Spiritual Essence and Contemporary Value

The educational spirit of the Southwest Associated University centers on “fortitude and perseverance,” deeply integrating patriotic devotion, mission-driven responsibility, unity of knowledge and action, and an optimistic, enterprising ethos. Its core lies in transcending mere physical training, viewing sports as the cornerstone for cultivating sound character and national rejuvenation. John Mo's theory of “transfer value in physical education” scientifically demonstrates the educational essence of sports in cultivating a fighting spirit, teamwork, and resilience. This spirit aligns profoundly with the new era's strategies of “cultivating virtue through education” and “building a sports powerhouse,” offering

historical insights to counter the utilitarian tendency of “prioritizing skills over character” in physical education teacher training.

4.1.2. Practical Implications for Physical Education Teacher Training

This study reaffirms that the spirit of the Southwest Associated University instills three core values in physical education teacher training: Value Anchor: Guiding students to embrace the professional ideal of “serving national rejuvenation through physical education,” transcending the limited role of mere “skill instructors”; Practice Paradigm: Taking the Associated University's wartime practice of maintaining mandatory physical education classes and joint teacher-student training as a model, emphasizing the deep integration of physical education with character development; Role Model Guidance: The figures of educators like John Mo, exemplifying “leading by example and lifelong dedication,” provide teacher trainees with the character model of the “great teacher.”

4.1.3. Systematic Summary of Implementation Pathways

Addressing the practical challenges of integrating the spirit of Southwest Associated University educators into physical education teacher training, this study proposes a systematic, multidimensional solution. It constructs a “five-in-one” implementation pathway centered on “curriculum embedding-practice cultivation -Cultural Immersion-Digital Empowerment-Collaborative Education.” - Curriculum Embedding: Systematically transmits the spirit's essence through modular design of explicit courses (e.g., “Special Topics on Southwest United University's Physical Education Philosophy”) and implicit resources (e.g., online document repositories, school-based reading materials). Practice Cultivation: Incorporating United University spirit themes into teaching practicums and internships, combined with experiential activities like “Retracing the United University Path,” to internalize values into action; Cultural Immersion: Creating a campus ecosystem that reveres the United University spirit through campus space renovations (e.g., displaying inspirational quotes) and branded events (e.g., the “John Mo Cup” competition); Digital Empowerment: A three-tier progressive cultivation system (virtual simulation/AR restoration, case repository/AI learning, dual-teacher co-teaching/joint teaching research) activates historical resources through immersive experiences; Collaborative Education: Leveraging a “university-society-alumni” linkage mechanism (e.g., co-building bases with the United University Memorial Hall, inviting distinguished alumni to share) to form a synergistic force for spiritual inheritance. This system provides a complete closed-loop for physical education teacher training, transforming the static historical resources of the Southwest United University educators' spirit into a dynamic educational force. It truly achieves the contemporary inheritance of the philosophy of “equal emphasis on physical and moral development.”

4.2. Research Limitations and Future Directions

4.2.1. Research Limitations

This study primarily relies on literature analysis and case reviews, lacking large-scale empirical data support. For instance, there is insufficient long-term tracking and quantitative validation regarding changes in career beliefs or improvements in teaching practices among physical education teacher candidates after receiving United University spirit education. Additionally, while the proposed pathways incorporate practices from institutions like Yunnan Normal University, they do not fully account for the differentiated needs of institutions across regions and types. The universality and adaptability of these pathways require further testing.

4.2.2. Future Research Prospects

Future research may deepen in the following directions: Longitudinal Tracking and Effectiveness Evaluation: Conduct career trajectory tracking of teacher education students who received United Nations University spirit education, establish “Professional Ethics Development Archives,” and quantitatively analyze the long-term impact of spirit integration on their career development and

teaching effectiveness; Teaching Resource Development: Develop standardized teaching case libraries and digital resources (e.g., VR recreations of UN University physical education scenarios) to provide reusable course templates for different institutions; Evaluation System Construction: Explore translating the essence of the United University spirit into observable, measurable indicators of teacher education student competence, integrating these into teacher certification and professional evaluation systems; Interdisciplinary Research: Combine psychology, sociology, and other disciplines to deeply analyze the mechanisms through which the United University spirit shapes contemporary youth values, providing theoretical innovation for the inheritance of the educator spirit. Research on the educational spirit of the Southwest Associated University must ultimately anchor itself in the era's mission: "cultivating exemplary educators for national rejuvenation." Only through sustained theoretical refinement and practical innovation can this historical treasure truly become a living wellspring nourishing the development of physical education teachers in the new era.

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