

Study on the Practical Dilemmas and Development Pathways of Rural Physical Education Teachers in Embracing the Spirit of Educators from the Perspective of Field Theory

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ABSTRACT

Rural revitalization requires talent support. As participants and builders of this endeavor, rural teachers should enhance their professional development to provide an internal driving force for rural revitalization. Based on Bourdieu's field theory, this study employs a core analytical framework of "field-capital-habitus," utilizing literature review and semi-structured interviews to systematically explore the practical dilemmas and developmental pathways for rural physical education teachers in embodying the spirit of educators. Findings reveal that rural physical education teachers confront three-tiered structural challenges: Capital-level deficiencies encompass cultural capital (insufficient professional development resources), economic capital (material resource scarcity, misappropriated class hours), and social capital (limited professional exchange, weak educational synergy); - Position-level marginalization within the hierarchical subject system results in lack of discourse power and identity crises; Habitus-level conflicts arise from the mismatch between urban-oriented educational models and local culture, leading to professional burnout and diminished developmental motivation. At the habitus level, conflicts arise from the mismatch between urban-oriented educational models and local rural cultures, leading to professional burnout and diminished developmental motivation. To address these challenges, this study constructs a systematic pathway framework: Building resource foundations through capital accumulation: Strengthen support via localized training, targeted investments, and urban-rural teaching research communities. - Reconstructing professional positioning as the key: Enhance teachers' voice through educational evaluation reforms, improved incentive mechanisms, and expanded social functions. Relying on practice reshaping as the engine, it cultivates educators' commitment to rural communities through integrating local culture and developing localized curricula; ensuring multidimensional coordination as the safeguard, it strengthens policy linkage and technological empowerment to improve institutional support. This study extends teacher development research to the social structural level. The constructed "Capital-Position-Habitus" trinity analytical framework provides theoretical reference for related research. The proposed practical pathways offer guidance for the professional development of rural physical education teachers, educational policy formulation, and enhancing the quality and efficiency of rural physical education. It holds significant importance for advancing rural education revitalization and grounding the spirit of educators in rural settings.

KEYWORDS

Field Theory; Rural Physical Education Teachers; Educator Spirit; Practical Dilemmas; Generative Pathways.

1. INTRODUCTION

Against the backdrop of comprehensively advancing rural revitalization and building an education powerhouse, the development of rural education has become increasingly vital as an intrinsic driving force for rural revitalization. Rural teachers, as the cornerstone of rural education, play a pivotal role in shaping its quality and future through their professional growth and professional ethos. General Secretary Xi Jinping has succinctly summarized the spirit embodied by educators and outstanding teachers within the teaching community, offering significant insights on the spirit of educators. This not only fully affirms the excellence of these teachers but also serves as an inspiration and guiding principle for educators nationwide. As the soul of educators, promoting the spirit of rural educators holds positive significance for tackling challenges in rural education revitalization, guiding the direction of rural education, and cultivating new-era rural educators. However, rural physical education teachers currently face unique professional dilemmas.[1] On one hand, alongside China's urbanization process and the one-way migration of rural populations to cities, the “hollowing out” of rural communities has intensified, and regional educational imbalances persist. On the other hand, rural physical education teachers not only encounter professional challenges-such as weak professional identity, scarce professional development resources, high levels of burnout, and poor working conditions-but also face a gradual weakening of public responsibility. Their partial “withdrawal” from rural settings contributes to cultural deficits and insufficient development momentum in rural communities. Against this backdrop, exploring how rural physical education teachers can embody the spirit of educators is not only crucial for their individual professional growth but also vital for enhancing the overall quality of rural education and advancing the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy.[2]

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Literature Survey

This study systematically reviews domestic policy documents, academic monographs, and journal literature concerning the spirit of educators, rural physical education development, rural teacher workforce development, and the application of field theory. It focuses on clarifying the core essence and contemporary demands of the spirit of educators, elucidating the core framework of “field-capital-habitus” within field theory, It identifies the unique attributes of the rural physical education field and its theoretical connection to the practice of the spirit of educators, providing a solid theoretical foundation for constructing a value analysis and practical exploration framework within the field theory perspective for this study.[3]

2.2. Interview Method

To explore the practical manifestations and implementation barriers of rural physical education teachers embodying the spirit of educators from a field theory perspective, this study employs semi-structured interviews.[4] Participants include rural physical education teachers from regions with varying levels of economic development, county-level physical education administrators, scholars specializing in rural education, and experts in physical education. Interviews focused on Recognition and acceptance of the educator spirit within rural physical education settings Field level resistance encountered during implementation (e.g., capital allocation, habitual conflicts, institutional constraints) Support roles of diverse field actors - Pathways for grounding the educator spirit in curriculum implementation, teaching innovation, and professional development The study plans to conduct in depth interviews with 20 physical education teachers from five rural schools across three counties and eight education experts. This multi-stakeholder approach aims to uncover practical challenges and support needs, providing empirical evidence for subsequent pathway development.[5]

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

3.1. Theoretical Foundation: Core Principles of Bourdieu's Field Theory and Its Applicability

Bourdieu's field theory provides unique conceptual tools and methodological principles for understanding social practices. This theoretical framework, anchored by three core concepts—"field," "capital," and "habitus"—constructs a comprehensive analytical structure for examining social practices.[6]

3.1.1. Core Principles of Field Theory

This study adopts French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's field theory as its analytical framework due to its unique explanatory power in understanding the circumstances of rural physical education teachers. Field theory conceives social space as composed of relatively autonomous yet interconnected fields, each functioning as a network of power relations governed by specific logics, rules, and forms of capital. As a distinct social space, the rural education field features complex power relations, capital distribution, and positional structures that directly shape rural physical education teachers' practices and aspirations. Field theory conceptualizes the social world as a networked structure of relatively autonomous fields. Each field constitutes a social space governed by specific operational logics, where actors' positions depend on the quantity and structure of their capital, as well as their competitive dynamics within the field. Specifically:

A field is a relational social space governed by its own operational logic and rules. As a relatively autonomous field, the educational field adheres to specific educational logic and value standards; capital encompasses not only economic capital but also diverse forms such as cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital. Within the rural educational field, the distribution of these forms of capital directly impacts teachers' practical capabilities and developmental space; Habitus is an internalized, enduring system of disposition tendencies shaped by the field's structure while simultaneously guiding actors' practices. Teachers' professional habitus forms through long-term educational practice and in turn influences their educational behavior choices.[7-9]

Rural physical education teachers operate within a field woven by multiple forces: the hierarchical structure of subject-based resource allocation in schools, the cultural ecology of rural communities, and teachers' own professional development needs. Within this field, physical education teachers often face the dilemma of disconnect between "self" and "field," rooted in a lack of adaptation to and belonging within the rural natural and human environment. Field theory provides us with theoretical tools to analyze this dilemma, helping us transcend the limitations of individual attribution and explore the deep mechanisms influencing rural physical education teachers' practice of the educator spirit from structural factors.[10-13]

Applying field theory to research on rural physical education teachers helps us grasp three key dimensions: First, analyzing the capital status of rural physical education teachers within the field, including the distribution and flow of economic capital, cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital; second, examining the positional relationships of rural physical education teachers within the field, particularly the hierarchical status of physical education as a subject in rural schools and the role of teachers within rural communities; Third, it explores the formation of rural physical education teachers' habitus-how they internalize field requirements while exercising agency to develop practical strategies that adapt to and transcend field constraints. This theoretical perspective provides a comprehensive analytical tool for understanding the practical dilemmas rural physical education teachers face in embodying the spirit of educators.

Table 1. Correspondence Between Core Concepts of Field Theory and Rural Physical Education Practices

Field Theory Concept	Manifestation in Rural Physical Education	Analytical Value
Field	A relatively independent social space centered on physical education instruction in rural schools, involving stakeholders such as rural physical education teachers, students, county-level education administrators, parents, and communities, and encompassing elements including physical education curriculum implementation, teacher training, resource allocation, and evaluation mechanisms.	Define the specific contextual boundaries within which rural physical education teachers embody the spirit of educators, identify the interactive relationships and power structures among various actors within the field, and provide a spatial framework for analyzing the root causes of practical dilemmas.
Capital (cultural capital, social capital, economic capital)	Cultural Capital: Teachers' expertise in physical education, pedagogical skills, and pedagogical awareness; Social Capital: Teachers' interpersonal networks with colleagues, parents, the community, and educational authorities; Economic Capital: Material resources such as funding, facilities, equipment, and compensation for physical education in rural schools.	Revealing how the stock and flow states of different capital types constrain and support educators in embodying the spirit of educational professionals provides a basis for exploring capital integration pathways and overcoming resource constraints.
habit	The teaching behavior patterns, professional cognitive tendencies, and value judgment criteria formed by rural physical education teachers through long-term teaching practice, such as the teaching inertia of “prioritizing safety over innovation” and the passive execution mindset in their profession.	Analyzing the alignment and conflicts between teachers' habitual practices and the ethos of educators—such as innovative spirit and dedication to nurturing students—provides practical guidance for developing adaptation strategies and promoting the internalization of this ethos.

3.2. The Practical Dilemmas Faced by Rural Physical Education Teachers in Embracing the Spirit of Educators from a Field Perspective

From the perspective of field theory, the multiple dilemmas rural physical education teachers encounter in practicing the spirit of educators fundamentally stem from imbalances in capital distribution within the field, the marginalization of positional relationships, and constraints imposed by habitual conflicts. These dilemmas collectively form structural barriers hindering the emergence of the spirit of educators.

3.2.1. Capital Deprivation: Structural Shortage of Educational Resources

The primary challenge rural physical education teachers encounter in their field is severe scarcity of various forms of capital. This state of capital poverty significantly restricts their educational practice space and innovative capacity. Weak Cultural Capital: Rural physical education teachers commonly face insufficient resources for professional development. On one hand, professional training opportunities are scarce and poorly targeted, with much content disconnected from rural realities, making it difficult to translate into effective teaching practices. On the other hand, “school-based teaching research” centered around physical education departments often remains superficial, lacking substantive professional exchange and guidance, leaving teachers struggling to access sustained

professional growth support. This weakness in cultural capital makes it arduous for teachers to innovate in teaching and advance professionally. Insufficient Economic Capital: Severe shortages of material resources present another significant obstacle for rural physical education teachers. The 2023 China Rural Education Development Report reveals that physical education class time is commonly diverted in rural schools. Under the influence of the “test-score-centric” mindset, physical education classes become a “flexible entity” that can be sacrificed at any time. Due to scarce teaching resources, students in some schools run on dusty playgrounds using makeshift equipment like tires and wooden sticks. This lack of basic teaching conditions means that even when teachers possess the will to embody the spirit of educators, they often find themselves constrained by resource limitations. Limited Social Capital: Rural physical education teachers possess relatively narrow social networks, lacking smooth channels for professional exchange with university experts and outstanding urban educators. Consequently, they struggle to access support from high-level professional communities. Simultaneously, due to rural population outflow and parents' limited educational awareness, the quality of interaction between teachers, families, and communities is often suboptimal, hindering the formation of a cohesive educational force. These constraints on social capital confine rural physical education teachers to a relatively isolated professional development environment, depriving them of external support and recognition.[14]

Table 2. Primary Manifestations of Capital Deficiencies Among Rural Physical Education Teachers

Capital Type	Specific manifestations	Impact on Embracing the Spirit of Educators
Cultural Capital	<p>1. Insufficient professional development resources: Opportunities for specialized training are scarce and lack focus, with content disconnected from rural realities, making it difficult to translate into effective teaching practices;</p> <p>2. Limited effectiveness of school-based teaching research: School-based teaching research centered on physical education departments often remains superficial, lacking substantive professional exchange and guidance, leaving teachers without sustained support for professional growth.</p>	<p>1. Constraints on Professional Growth: Weak cultural capital hinders teachers' ability to update pedagogical concepts and optimize teaching methods, making it difficult to embody the spirit of lifelong learning inherent in the educator's vocation.</p> <p>2. Limitations on Teaching Innovation: The absence of professional guidance and exchange platforms makes it challenging for teachers to develop innovative teaching approaches tailored to rural school contexts. This undermines the educational pursuit of “innovative practice” and impedes improvements in physical education quality.</p>
Economic Capital	<p>1. Insufficient Class Time Allocation: Influenced by the “test-score-centric” mindset, physical education class time in rural schools is frequently diverted for other purposes, rendering PE classes a “flexible addition.”</p> <p>2. Material Resource Shortages: Teaching resources are scarce, forcing students to exercise in rudimentary facilities (such as dusty playgrounds). Teaching aids are often improvised from items like tires and wooden sticks, lacking standardized sports equipment and supporting instructional materials.</p>	<p>1. Hindering the Implementation of Educational Goals: The diversion of class hours undermines the “health first” educational philosophy and violates the core mission of fostering students' holistic development through teaching and nurturing.</p> <p>2. Restricting Practical Implementation: The absence of basic teaching resources prevents educators from delivering diverse physical education activities, even when they possess the will to embody the spirit of educators. This hinders the realization of “teaching according to individual aptitude.”</p>
Social capital	<p>1. Limited professional exchange channels: Narrow social networks result in insufficient professional interaction with university experts and outstanding urban educators, hindering access to high-level professional communities for support.</p> <p>2. Challenges in forming educational synergy: Rural population outflow and parents' weak educational awareness lead to low-quality interactions between teachers, families, and communities, preventing the establishment of collaborative education mechanisms.</p>	<p>1. Trapped in a professional isolation dilemma: Lacking external professional support and recognition, teachers often find themselves in a closed professional development environment, diminishing their passion and motivation for dedicated teaching.</p> <p>2. Weakened educational effectiveness: The inability to form a collaborative educational force among families, schools, and communities constrains the effectiveness of collaborative education, hindering the cultivation of students' well-rounded personalities and comprehensive qualities.</p>

3.2.2. Marginal Position: The Disadvantaged Status of Physical Education in Rural School Contexts

Within the micro-context of rural schools, physical education teachers often occupy a marginal position. The hierarchical disparities within the subject hierarchy directly impact their voice and ability to access resources.

A pronounced subject hierarchy exists in rural school contexts, where exam-focused core subjects like Chinese and mathematics occupy central positions, while subjects such as physical education and arts are relegated to peripheral status. This disciplinary hierarchy manifests not only in class scheduling and resource allocation but also profoundly shapes teachers' professional identity and dignity. Under the influence of the “test-score-centric” mindset, physical education classes become “flexible entities” readily sacrificed. The proportion of physical education teachers promoted to senior status is significantly lower than that of teachers in subjects like Chinese, mathematics, and foreign languages. This systemic discrimination further entrenches the marginal status of physical education.

The marginal position of physical education directly results in physical education teachers lacking a voice in school decision-making. In processes such as resource allocation, curriculum planning, and activity organization, the needs and opinions of physical education teachers are often insufficiently valued. This lack of participation in decision-making makes it difficult for physical education teachers to secure the resources and support needed to improve teaching conditions, further cementing their marginal status.

More profoundly, rural physical education teachers also face an identity crisis. In traditional rural societies, teachers were widely regarded as “embodiments of knowledge” and respected figures in the community. However, societal biases against physical education such as associating athletic talent with poor academic performance undermine recognition of their professional competence. This interplay of social prejudice and institutional discrimination erodes rural physical education teachers' professional pride and enthusiasm.[15]

3.2.3. Habitus Conflict: Mismatch Between Urban Education Models and Local Culture

The third challenge rural physical education teachers encounter is habitus conflict, the discord between urban-oriented education models and local cultural practices. This conflict traps teachers in professional dilemmas. Current teacher development standards often benchmark against urban educators, emphasizing standardized and normalized teaching philosophies and methods. This “urban-centric” approach to professional growth traps rural physical education teachers in a “futile pursuit,” where they relentlessly mimic urban teaching models while overlooking the rich educational resources embedded within local culture. Rural physical education teachers are expected to deliver standardized instruction akin to their urban counterparts, yet they lack the corresponding resources and support. This mismatch of expectations breeds profound frustration among educators. Simultaneously, the growing disconnect between rural physical education teachers and their local culture intensifies the habitus conflict. As the trend of rural teachers residing in towns becomes widespread, many now live in urbanized settings, weakening their ties to rural communities. This “absence” makes it difficult for teachers to deeply understand and integrate into local culture, let alone effectively utilize local resources for teaching innovation. Consequently, rural physical education loses the resource advantages of urban education while failing to fully leverage the unique characteristics of local culture, resulting in an awkward situation where neither approach is fully realized. This habitual conflict ultimately leads to professional burnout and diminished motivation among rural physical education teachers. Faced with monotonous routines teaching the same subjects and activities year after year (such as daily morning exercises, classes, training sessions, and extracurricular activities) alongside stagnant personal lives and limited career prospects, many rural physical education teachers resign themselves to the status quo. They adopt a mindset of “avoiding mistakes rather than seeking achievements,” gradually losing their intrinsic motivation for professional growth.

3.3. Pathway: Establishing a Systematic Action Framework for Building Supportive Contexts

Cultivating the spirit of educators among rural physical education teachers requires moving beyond simple individual-level motivation. It necessitates reconstructing supportive contexts through systematic actions to fundamentally optimize their professional practice environments. This pathway demands integrating multiple forces from resource infusion and institutional restructuring to cultural cultivation to form an organically interconnected system that advances collaboratively.

3.3.1. Strengthen the Foundation of Resource Support with Capital Accumulation at its Core

Capital serves as the foundation for practitioners' actions within their fields. To foster the spirit of educators among rural physical education teachers, the primary task is to assist them in effectively accumulating capital and building diverse, collaborative support networks.

Cultural Capital Enhancement: Training Systems Integrating Localization and Professionalization
Develop localized training systems aligned with rural needs, organically blending modern sports concepts and methodologies with indigenous physical culture resources. For instance, schools in Hunan, have integrated Miao bamboo pole dancing and stilts racing into their curricula, revitalizing physical education through traditional folk culture. Such localized training not only enhances teachers' professional competence but also strengthens their cultural confidence and pedagogical innovation. Simultaneously, rural physical education teachers are encouraged to embrace digitalization drawing advanced teaching concepts from the National Smart Education Platform for Primary and Secondary Schools and sharing instructional creativity via short-video platforms to foster professional growth through mutual exchange.

Economic Capital Support: Balancing Dedicated Funding and Resource Innovation: Government departments should increase dedicated funding, establish special allowances for rural physical education teachers to improve their economic benefits, and enhance sports facility construction to ensure basic teaching conditions. Simultaneously, rural physical education teachers should be encouraged and supported to leverage their initiative, becoming “resource magicians” who uncover and utilize unique natural and cultural resources in rural areas for teaching innovation. Examples include Wang Bin, a physical education teacher in Guizhou's Wu meng Mountains, who leverages the region's unique terrain for student training, and teachers in southern Jiangxi who organize “rice paddy relay races” in paddy fields both exemplifying successful resource creation.

Social Capital Expansion: Building Urban-Rural Physical Education Research Communities: Break down urban-rural barriers by establishing collaborative research communities that integrate online and offline activities to foster exchange and cooperation between teachers. Specifically, this can be achieved by organizing teaching seminars between urban and rural teachers via social networks, hosting specialized workshops for physical education teachers in county-level primary and secondary schools, and summarizing and sharing advanced experiences in teaching, extracurricular training, and other areas. Building such communities can effectively expand the professional networks of rural physical education teachers, providing them with more professional support and development opportunities.

3.3.2. Optimizing Field Power Dynamics Through Positioning Reconstruction

Reconstructing the position of physical education teachers within the rural educational field requires dual approaches: institutional adjustments and cultural transformation to elevate the status and discourse power of physical education as a subject and its practitioners in rural schools.

On one hand, deepening educational evaluation reforms is essential to dismantle the narrow “test-score-centric” evaluation mindset and fully recognize physical education's vital role in students' holistic development. School administrators must shift perspectives to advance “physical education

integration,” deeply interweaving physical education with other subjects to highlight the value of physical education teachers. When evaluating schools and educational quality, students' physical and mental health and physical literacy development should be key indicators, guiding schools and teachers to prioritize physical education.

On the other hand, the evaluation and incentive system for rural teachers must be improved, with strengthened oversight and accountability mechanisms for implementing policies on their professional development. In areas such as professional title evaluations and commendations, the unique nature of physical education and the realities of rural education should be fully considered. Career advancement pathways for rural teachers should be refined, employing both material and non-material incentives to attract outstanding talent to commit to rural schools. Particular attention should be given to resolving the barriers faced by physical education teachers in advancing their professional titles, providing them with clear career progression routes. More importantly, the unique role of rural physical education teachers in rural revitalization must be fully leveraged to expand their social functions. These educators can actively participate in promoting nationwide fitness initiatives and rural sports tourism development, applying their professional expertise in broader societal contexts. Such expanded social functions not only enhance teachers' sense of social recognition but also earn them greater societal respect and influence.

3.3.3. Fostering Professional Endogenous Motivation Through Habitus Transformation

The reshaping of habitus serves as the intrinsic foundation for rural physical education teachers to embody the spirit of educators. This requires cultivating their educational ethos rooted in the local community through cultural immersion and reflective practice.

Deep Integration into Local Culture: Rural physical education teachers should deeply integrate into local culture, achieving a shift in identity from “teachers in the countryside” to “rural teachers.” This implies that teachers must not only impart physical education knowledge and skills but also become interpreters, inheritors, and innovators of local culture. Researchers emphasize that examining rural teachers' professional development must be grounded in the specific context of the village community and its unique cultural landscape, following a path of “presence, reflection, and return.” Rural physical education teachers should proactively study local sports traditions—such as folk games, traditional martial arts, and ethnic dances—and creatively transform these into teaching resources.

Localized Curriculum Development and Implementation: Rural physical education teachers should actively participate in developing localized curricula that integrate physical education with rural life and local culture. Examples include utilizing the natural environment for outdoor activities, transforming traditional farming movements into physical training exercises, and organizing sports competitions around folk festivals. Such localized curriculum development not only enriches teaching content but also strengthens students' identification with local culture, allowing physical education to truly take root in the rural soil.

Conscious Practice of the Educator Spirit: Rural physical education teachers should embrace the value of educating through sports, elevating physical education beyond mere technical training to the level of holistic education. As a university physical education teacher in Tianjin stated: “The professional pursuit of a physical education teacher is not only about teaching techniques and training physical fitness, but more importantly, using the unique ‘language’ and practical vehicle of sports to educate through physical activity and forge character through physical training.” In daily instruction, rural physical education teachers should focus on cultivating students' willpower, team spirit, and well-rounded personalities, transforming physical education classes into “fertile ground for nurturing students' sound character.”

3.3.4. Strengthening Institutional Support Systems Through Multidimensional Collaboration

Table 3. Pathway System for Cultivating the Educator Spirit in Rural Physical Education Teachers

Strategy Categories	Specific Implementation Path	Core Objective
<p>Capital Accumulation: Building a Diverse and Collaborative Support Network</p>	<p>1.Cultural Capital Enhancement: Establish a training system integrating localization with professional expertise (e.g., incorporating Miao bamboo pole dance and other local cultures in Hunan). Leverage the National Smart Education Platform for Primary and Secondary Schools and short-video platforms to facilitate professional growth.</p> <p>2.Economic Capital Support: Increase government funding (establish special allowances, improve facilities) to encourage teachers to innovate using rural resources (e.g., leveraging geographical features in Guizhou's Wu meng Mountains, organizing “rice paddy relay races” in southern Jiangxi);</p> <p>3.Social Capital Expansion: Establish urban-rural physical education research communities, fostering collaboration through online/offline teaching exchanges and county-level thematic seminars.</p>	<p>Assist rural physical education teachers in achieving effective capital accumulation, establish a multi-faceted collaborative support network, and lay the material and professional foundation for embodying the spirit of educators.</p>
<p>Positioning Reimagined: Enhancing Physical Education Teachers' Voice in Rural Educational Settings</p>	<p>1.Deepen educational evaluation reform: Eliminate the“test-score-centric approach,” advance the integration of physical education and general education, and incorporate students' physical and mental health as well as sports literacy into school quality assessment indicators.</p> <p>2.Improve the evaluation and incentive system: Consider the unique characteristics of physical education in professional title evaluations and commendation programs, streamline career advancement pathways, and strengthen policy implementation oversight and accountability.</p> <p>3.Expand societal functions: Participate in rural fitness initiatives and sports tourism development, leveraging professional expertise in broader contexts.</p>	<p>Elevate the status and influence of physical education as a subject and its teachers in rural schools, enhancing teachers' sense of social recognition and professional value.</p>
<p>Habit Reshaping: Cultivating an Educator's Passion Rooted in the Local Community</p>	<p>1.Deeply Embrace Local Culture: Transition from being a “teacher in the countryside” to becoming a “rural educator,” evolving into an interpreter, guardian, and innovator of local traditions through the developmental approach of “presence, reflection, and return.”</p> <p>2.Develop Localized Curriculum: Design physical education content and activities integrating the rural natural environment, agricultural practices, and folk festivals.</p> <p>3.Consciously embody the spirit of educators: Uphold the philosophy of “educating through physical education,” elevating teaching to the level of holistic development to cultivate students' willpower, team spirit, and well-rounded character.</p>	<p>Cultivate in rural physical education teachers a deep-rooted educational ethos that anchors them to their hometowns, providing the essential intellectual and emotional foundation for embodying the spirit of educators.</p>

At the policy coordination level, interdepartmental collaboration among education, sports, and culture-tourism sectors must be enhanced. A dedicated support plan for rural physical education teachers should be formulated, outlining complementary measures for resource allocation, evaluation incentives, and career development. For instance, the “regional liaison meeting” mechanism could be adopted to regularly assess teacher development challenges and bridge the “last mile” gap in policy implementation.

At the technological empowerment level, digital development portfolios for teachers should be established through smart education platforms to enable precise needs identification and intelligent resource matching. Simultaneously, leveraging technologies such as virtual teaching research and remote observation can narrow the professional development gap between urban and rural physical education teachers, facilitating their self-improvement.

Through these systematic actions, rural physical education teachers will gradually transition from external resource empowerment to intrinsic motivation within a restructured supportive environment, laying a solid foundation for the sustained cultivation of an educator's spirit.

4. RESEARCH SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

4.1. Summary

This study systematically analyzed the practical dilemmas faced by rural physical education teachers in practicing the spirit of educators and the pathways for its development, grounded in Bourdieu's field theory. Findings reveal that these challenges fundamentally stem from the combined effects of capital distribution imbalances, marginalized positional relationships, and habitual conflicts within the field. Specifically: Uneven distribution of economic, cultural, and social capital across different fields places rural PE teachers at a competitive disadvantage. Marginalized positional relationships further constrain their professional development space. Significant conflicts exist between the habitual practices characteristic of rural settings and the professional habits demanded by the educator spirit. Theoretically, this study constructs an integrated “capital-position-habitus” triadic analytical framework, expanding teacher development research from the individual psychological level to the social structural level. It reveals the structural factors and institutional barriers influencing teacher practice. This framework is applicable not only to research on rural physical education teachers but also provides theoretical insights for teacher development studies across other disciplines and teacher types. At the practical level, this study proposes multidimensional pathways to foster the emergence of pedagogical spirit: enhancing teachers' resource acquisition capabilities through capital accumulation, optimizing their relational positions within educational settings through positional restructuring, and cultivating professional confidence and rural attachment through practice reshaping. These pathways collectively form a systematic practical plan, offering concrete guidance for the professional development of rural physical education teachers.

4.2. Research Limitations and Future Directions

Despite achieving certain outcomes, this study retains several limitations. Future research may deepen in the following areas:

4.2.1. Expanding Research Methods

Current research primarily relies on theoretical analysis. Future studies could strengthen qualitative research on the daily lives and practical experiences of rural physical education teachers. Methods such as in-depth interviews and participant observation could be employed to gain deeper insights into the micro-level dilemmas they face and their coping strategies. Concurrently, quantitative research could collect data through surveys to analyze correlations between field factors and teacher practices.

4.2.2. Enriching Research Perspectives

Future studies may explore other core concepts within field theory, such as “symbolic power” and “social skills,” examining their specific manifestations and operational mechanisms within the rural physical education field. For instance, investigations could examine how rural physical education teachers leverage social skills to secure greater capital and advantageous positions within their field.

4.2.3. Exploration of Practical Pathways

Action research could be conducted in collaboration with rural physical education teachers to explore concrete pathways and methods for practicing the spirit of educators, achieving an organic integration of theoretical research and practical improvement. For example, intervention measures could be designed to help teachers accumulate cultural capital and reconstruct social capital, with subsequent observation of these measures' impact on their professional practice.

4.2.4. Advancement of Comparative Research

Comparative studies can be conducted on the development of rural physical education teachers across different regions and types, examining their commonalities and unique characteristics to provide empirical evidence for differentiated support policies. Simultaneously, comparisons with teachers of other subjects can reveal the distinctiveness of physical education teachers within their field.

4.2.5. Refining Theoretical Frameworks

Future research may integrate field theory with other frameworks (such as ecosystem theory and social network theory) to construct a more comprehensive theoretical framework for the development of rural physical education teachers.

Against the backdrop of comprehensively advancing rural revitalization and building an education powerhouse, the flourishing of the educator spirit among rural physical education teachers is crucial not only for enhancing the quality of rural education but also for the holistic development of rural youth and the prosperity of rural culture. By cultivating an environment conducive to nurturing the educator spirit, we can support rural physical education teachers in their transformation from “teaching craftsmen” to “educators,” thereby injecting greater vitality and hope into rural education.

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