



Research Paper

Introducing Pickleball into the Physical Education Curriculum for University Students

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Abstract

As universities strive to modernize physical education programs, diversifying sports offerings has emerged as a key priority to boost student engagement and improve overall physical fitness. Among the newer sports gaining global traction is Pickleball—a game appreciated for its simplicity, accessibility, and adaptability to participants of various ages and abilities. This study explores the practicality of integrating Pickleball into university physical education curricula, assessing its potential to elevate both learning outcomes and student involvement in athletic activities. The research methodology encompasses document analysis, pedagogical observation, and insights drawn from hands-on teaching experiences within physical education. Leveraging these approaches, the study proposes a structured framework for introductory Pickleball instruction, strategies for effectively organizing classes, and essential conditions for implementing the sport within academic settings. Results underscore several compelling benefits of introducing Pickleball at the university level. Chief among them are its easy-to-learn rules, modest infrastructure and equipment needs, adaptability for large classes, and ability to enhance critical physical skills such as reflexes, agility, and coordination. Specifically, at Thai Nguyen University of Technology, incorporating Pickleball into the curriculum shows strong potential to improve teaching efficiency, increase student interest in physical activity, and promote healthier, more active lifestyles.

Keywords: Pickleball, physical education, university students, new sport, training program.

I. Introduction

Physical education plays a vital role in university curricula, contributing to improved health, enhanced physical fitness, and the development of lifelong exercise habits among students. In recent years, alongside societal advancements and the growing diversity of learners' interests, higher education institutions have increasingly focused on innovating the content and methodologies of physical education to better meet students' needs. A significant trend in contemporary physical education is the diversification of sports within training programs. Introducing new types of sports not only provides students with options tailored to their personal interests but also boosts engagement and enhances the overall effectiveness of physical activity programs. One sport that has seen rapid global growth and holds promise for integration into educational settings is Pickleball. Combining elements of tennis, badminton, and table tennis, Pickleball is played with paddles and a perforated plastic ball. Its simplicity, accessibility, and suitability for individuals across all age groups make it an appealing addition to sports curricula. In Vietnam, Pickleball is still relatively new but is gradually gaining attention within the sports community. Certain clubs and sports centers have started incorporating it into training sessions and competitions. However, its adoption within university-level physical education programs remains limited and unexplored. For instance, at Thai Nguyen University of Technology, students have shown increasing interest in dynamic and easily accessible sports that are both engaging and fun. Currently, however, the university's physical education curriculum largely revolves around traditional sports like athletics, football, volleyball, and badminton. Incorporating Pickleball into the curriculum could diversify the range of activities available while fostering greater enthusiasm among students for participating in sports. Given these considerations, this study explores the feasibility of introducing Pickleball into university physical education programs. It also offers recommendations on curriculum design and organizational strategies tailored to the specific conditions at Thai Nguyen University of Technology.

II. Theoretical Basis

2.1. The Role of Physical Education in University Training

Physical education holds a significant position in fostering the comprehensive development of individuals, addressing not only physical fitness but also enhancing mental well-being and social skills. Through participation in sports and physical activities, students gain opportunities to improve their overall health, develop motor skills, and adopt a positive and active lifestyle.

Numerous studies in the field of physical education highlight that engaging consistently in sports supports cardiovascular health, strengthens muscles, and boosts physical endurance. Additionally, sports activities play a key role in alleviating stress, promoting mental health, and improving focus and academic performance.

For university students, physical education contributes to establishing lifelong exercise habits. Exposure to engaging and suitable sports during university years increases the likelihood that students will continue their participation in physical activities even after completing their studies.

2.2. Emerging Trends in Sports Development within Education

In today's educational landscape, universities worldwide are increasingly incorporating innovative sports into their physical education programs to make the curriculum more appealing. Activities such as Ultimate Frisbee, Floorball, and Pickleball are gaining popularity in academic settings due to their recreational value and ease of implementation.

These modern sports often feature straightforward rules, are quick to learn, and do not demand highly specialized equipment or infrastructure, making them practical for adoption even in institutions with limited resources or space. By diversifying the sports options available, universities not only increase student engagement but also widen the scope of physical education to meet diverse interests and capabilities.

2.3. Characteristics of Pickleball

Pickleball is a dynamic sport involving paddles and a perforated plastic ball, played on a court smaller than a standard tennis court with a central net dividing the playing area. It can be played in singles or doubles formats, with doubles being more commonly implemented in educational settings due to the opportunities it provides for teamwork, communication, and coordination among players.

One of the key features of Pickleball is its simplicity—its rules are easy to comprehend, and the small court minimizes excessive movement while still ensuring adequate physical exertion. This aspect reduces the physical strain on participants while enabling efficient management of larger classes. The equipment required for Pickleball, such as paddles made from composite or hard plastic materials and perforated plastic balls, is both accessible and cost-effective, making it an attractive option for schools with budgetary constraints.

In addition to its straightforward setup, Pickleball offers substantial developmental benefits. The sport promotes key physical attributes such as reflex speed, agility, hand-eye coordination, and overall motor skills. During gameplay, players must swiftly analyze the ball's trajectory, position themselves strategically, and execute precise shots, fostering enhanced focus and strategic thinking.

Given these characteristics, Pickleball has emerged as an ideal sport for educational purposes, particularly within university physical education programs. Its adaptability to various skill levels, affordability, and contribution to students' physical and mental growth make it an excellent addition to the curriculum aimed at holistic student development.

III. Research Methods

To conduct this study, the following methods were used:

Document analysis method: Collecting and analyzing scientific documents related to physical education, sports teaching methods, and the characteristics of Pickleball.

Pedagogical observation method: Observing students' learning and sports participation activities during physical education classes.

Summarization of practical experience method: Synthesizing teaching experience of sports subjects in the physical education curriculum at Thai Nguyen University of Technology.

IV. Proposed Pickleball Teaching Program for Students

4.1. Teaching objectives of Pickleball

Introducing Pickleball into university physical education programs presents a unique opportunity to promote physical fitness and motor skill development among students. The sport combines accessibility and entertainment, making it an ideal addition to the curriculum. Through learning and practicing Pickleball, students can enhance physical attributes such as agility, reflexes, and hand-eye coordination. Additionally, the interactive nature of match activities fosters essential skills like teamwork, cooperation, and effective communication within sporting contexts.

4.2. Basic Teaching Content

A well-structured Pickleball teaching program can be developed as an 8-to-10-week course. Initially, instructors would familiarize students with the sport's history, court layout, equipment, and rules. Once foundational knowledge is established, the curriculum should focus on teaching basic techniques such as paddle grip, forehand and backhand strokes, and serving. As students gain confidence, lessons can evolve to include advanced skills such as court movement, ball coordination, and handling competitive match scenarios. To consolidate their learning, friendly matches and action-packed movement games can be organized at the end of the course to give students practical exposure to real gameplay.

4.3. Class Organization

Physical education classes at universities are often large, requiring flexible organizational strategies to ensure inclusive participation. A practical approach is to divide the class into small groups of four to six students for rotational activities on the court. While one group competes, other groups can engage in technical drills or reflex training nearby. This setup optimizes movement time for all participants while fostering a dynamic learning environment. Friendly matches between groups can further encourage healthy competition and active engagement.

V. Results and discussion

Based on experiences at Thai Nguyen University of Technology, integrating Pickleball into the physical education curriculum offers numerous benefits. The sport's straightforward rules and ease of learning enable efficient implementation, ensuring a high level of student participation in both training sessions and competitive play. One of Pickleball's key advantages is its ability to create an enjoyable and engaging exercise environment. The lively atmosphere generated by matches or movement-based games motivates students who might otherwise lack enthusiasm for traditional sports in physical education. Additionally, Pickleball provides significant physical benefits, requiring players to track the ball's movement, navigate the court strategically, and execute precise shots—all activities that develop reflexes, agility, coordination, and overall body control. Regular participation also has a positive impact on cardiovascular endurance and general well-being. The sport uniquely contributes to students' social development as well. Group activities like doubles matches enhance their ability to collaborate with teammates, strategize effectively, and provide mutual support during competition. Such interactions cultivate teamwork, communication skills, and a sense of shared accountability. Introducing Pickleball not only enriches physical education curricula but also creates a welcoming and engaging exercise environment tailored to today's students. When executed effectively, the inclusion of this sport could serve as a valuable aspect of university-level physical education programs.

VI. Conclusion

This study underscores Pickleball's potential as an excellent addition to university physical education curriculums due to its simple rules, adaptable court requirements, and minimal investment costs. At Thai Nguyen University of Technology specifically, implementing Pickleball instruction appears highly feasible. Doing so holds promise for enhancing the quality of physical education while fostering greater student interest in sports and encouraging participation in athletic activities across campus.

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