

Developing Comprehensive Competences of College Students through Sports: The Role of Slow Pitch Softball Training

Chengnan Lin

Guangxi University of Foreign Languages, Nanning 530222,
Guangxi, China

Abstract: *The cultivation of comprehensive competencies is crucial to college students' development. It is a primary goal of higher education and a need for social development. Currently, issues such as unhealthy mental tendencies, insufficient social skills, and weak social adaptability exist among some Chinese college students. Against the backdrop of promoting college students' holistic development through physical education, this study analyzed the roles of slow pitch softball in boosting college students' key competencies based on the features of this sport and proposed suggestions for optimizing slow pitch softball training in college physical education.*

Science Insights Education Frontiers 2023; 18(2):2959-2971.

Doi: 10.15354/sief.23.re297

How to Cite: Lin, C. (2023). Developing comprehensive competences of college students through sports: The role of slow pitch softball training. Science Insights Education Frontiers, 18(2):2959-2971.

Keywords: *Slow Pitch Softball, College Student, Physical Education, Comprehensive Competencies*

About the Author: Chengnan Lin, Physical Education Department, Guangxi University of Foreign Languages, Nanning 530222, Guangxi, China. E-mail: nan098182383@163.com

Correspondence to: Chengnan Lin at Guangxi University of Foreign Languages of China.

Funding: This study is funded by the project "Research on the Pathways to the High-quality Development of Physical Education in Private Colleges in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region" (2022ZJY3259) under the 14th Five-year Plan of Education Sciences in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

Conflict of Interests: None

© 2023 Insights Publisher. All rights reserved.



Creative Commons NonCommercial CC BY-NC: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 License (<http://www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) which permits non-commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed by the Insights Publisher.

Introduction

The development of comprehensive competencies in college students is beneficial to both individuals and society. At present, faced with social transformation and diverse emerging values, a sizeable portion of college students are experiencing a number of challenges, such as psychological issues, interpersonal communication problems, and social adaptation difficulties, which pose negative impacts on college students' holistic development.

The Strategic Plan for the National Medium- and Long-term Education Reform and Development 2010–2020, released by the Ministry of Education of China in 2010, emphasizes that both expertise and physical health development of students should be prioritized in higher education and that schools must ensure that students have ample time for physical education (PE) and extracurricular activities to promote physical and mental health and character building of students (State Council of China, 2010). Recent years' advancement of PE curricular reform has brought about a wider range of PE elective courses in colleges. This article seeks to explore the promotional effects of slow pitch softball on the holistic development of college students and to advance the pathways to successfully fostering their comprehensive competences through slow pitch softball training.

Features of Slow Pitch Softball

Slow pitch softball is a form of baseball that baseball and softball experts have developed from fast pitch softball in recent years by reducing the speed of the ball and changing the fast straight pitch into a parabolic-trajectory pitch. The number of fielders in slow pitcher softball is slightly different from that in fast pitcher softball or baseball. The simplified rules of slow pitcher softball make it easier to play than normative baseball, changes in equipment and field size reduce the difficulty for the players, and the lowered exercise intensity as well as safety risks widen the age range of eligible players. As a result, it becomes a sport suitable for both sexes and many age groups. Since its birth 40 years ago, slow pitch softball has gained popularity in the world, and an increasing number of people are paying attention to baseball and softball because of their exposure to slow pitch softball (Yang, 2021).

Researchers have examined the significance of slow-pitch softball from a variety of perspectives. Yan (1998) argued that playing slow-pitch softball was efficacious in promoting individuals' physical and mental health as well as boosting their brain power and intellectual ability. According to

Du and Zhao (2013), slow-pitch softball is valuable for improving the physical and psychological well-being of the player. Wang (2017) found in his investigation that the baseball and softball training of college students could bolster their social adaptability to a certain extent. Bai (2019) noted that softball was helpful in the construction of campus culture in universities. Features of soft pitch softball are summarized as follows:

- *A Combination of Leisure Activities and Athletics*

Slow-pitch softball, a simplified version of fast-pitch softball, has become highly popular in the U.S. in recent years. Among baseball and softball athletes and individuals with prior experiences in the two sports, 90% of them tend to choose slow-pitch softball as a leisure activity to spend time with their family and friends. As a competitive leisure activity, it has both the characteristics of baseball and softball and its own peculiarities. Its relatively simple rules make it suitable for a wide range of groups (Yan, 1998).

- *Requiring Personal Qualities and Skills*

Slow-pitch softball is a team sport, sometimes requiring the individual player to make sacrifices according to the coach's instructions in order to win. At certain critical moments, it calls on the player's independent decisions, which best reflect their characters, such as courage and quick-wittedness (Wang & Shi, 2011).

- *Contributing to Physical Fitness*

Slow-pitch softball players can improve their physical fitness through scientific training on a daily basis. Through a comparison of the physiological indicators of a young slow-pitch softball player at different points of the game, it can be found that this sport has significantly positive effects on the cardiovascular endurance and strength of the youngster's arms and legs. It is also favorable to other physical qualities such as agility (Liu, 2017).

- *Helping Enhance Personal Psychological Qualities*

Slow-pitch softball, as a competitive team sport, requires tactical coordination during the game and takes a relatively longer time for each match. Psychological adjustment is necessitated before and after the game to address all kinds of challenges, thereby strengthening the psychological endurance of the player (Du & Zhao, 2014).

- *Boosting Teamwork Awareness*

Slow-pitch softball provides individuals with opportunities for interpersonal cooperation and helps foster collective spirits such as solidarity and mutual support in them (Lin, 2023).

- *Improving Employment Prospects*

Slow-pitch softball started to gain popularity in China very recently and is well received among various groups due to its peculiarities. Graduates specializing in slow pitch softball have excellent employment prospects, as they make up for the gap in the supply of talents in this sport in the market (Chen, 2019).

The Status Quo of Comprehensive Competences of Chinese College Students

In their college years, students need to develop not only professional skills and academic ability but also other key competences such as psychological resilience, interpersonal collaboration, and social adaptation to prepare themselves for the challenges of life and work in the future. Nevertheless, research has shown that issues with social-emotional development in Chinese college students are pervasive. According to Guo's and Sun's study, college students have experienced a decline in physical fitness and an increase in mental issues, including but not limited to bigotry, withdrawal, anxiety, and depression, in recent years (Guo & Sun, 2021). Huo (2005) found in his research that college students exhibited concerning levels of social and emotional ability, with 73.9% of them having low levels of social adaptability. Wu's investigation revealed that learning anxiety, communication perplexities, and compulsive tendencies are the main mental issues among college students (Wu, 2018).

Mental Health Issues

College students are typically in their early adulthood, experiencing the most volatile period of their lives. The rapid social development and consequential pressures bring immense challenges to their mental health (Xue, 2022). In this period, college students are striving to develop their thinking and emotional skills. The conflicts between emotion and reason, independence and dependence, ideals and reality, and desire for communication and psychological distancing are accumulating, which can easily induce psychological disorders in them (Tan, 2021). According to Zhang's investigation of 900 college students, 24.03% of them had mental health problems of moderate severity, and 59.28% needed psychological intervention to varying degrees (Zhang, 2012). Chang et al. (2020) conducted a survey on the mental health

state of 3881 college students in Guangdong Province in 2020 and discovered that the incidence of depression among college students during the COVID-19 epidemic was 21.2%, and the incidence of anxiety among them was as high as 26.6%. Hence, mental health issues among college students deserve more serious attention.

Social Interaction Issues

Increased social and economic integration has raised high requirements for individuals' social skills. Qualities such as teamwork, spirit of sacrifice, and excellence in interpersonal communication have become core strengths of individuals and are increasingly emphasized by all sectors and industries. As a pool of talent for socio-economic development, college students should focus on cultivating social skills in various aspects to adapt to the practical needs of social development. However, survey data from *China Youth Daily* showed that 53.66% of Chinese college students tended to feel nervous and embarrassed when required to speak to a large audience; that 52.11% reported feeling uneasy in social activities; that 45.94% would feel nervous when communicating with strangers; that 43.17% would be embarrassed when seeking help from others; that 41.15% may feel uncomfortable when they first arrive in a new environment; and that 33.29% would choose to pretend not to have seen those acquaintances they encounter accidentally (*China Youth Daily*, 2021). These survey results revealed the severity of social anxiety that contemporary college students are suffering from.

Social Adaptation Issues

“Adaptation issues” among Chinese college students are the most prominent in two periods: the initial period of their college life and the finishing period spent on job seeking. Typical adaptation issues in the first period include their incompetence in self-directed learning, their inability to live independently, a lack of communication with teachers, and problematic interactions with classmates. On graduation, how to find a decent job and adapt to the professional life is a new challenge for them. In a relevant survey, 20.9% of college students polled claimed that they had worry about their adaptation to the accelerating social change; 65.9% of them complained about the intense social competition and uncertain employment prospects; 48.9% reported being in a low spirit; 45% declared they were experiencing a sense of emptiness; and 34.3% felt restless (Yang et al., 2014). The survey findings indicate college students' concerns about their positions and situations in society after graduation. In a survey on the social adaptation of college graduates, 44.2%, 17.4%, and 11.1% of the respondents reported that the insufficient stock of expertise, lack of key competences, and problematic work re-

relationships were the top issues they had in the workplace, respectively. 61.6% claimed that they had difficulty adapting to their first job (Yang et al., 2014).

Roles of Slow Pitch Softball in Developing Comprehensive Competences in College Students

Bolstering College Students' Psychological Qualities

In response to academic and life challenges, college students need to constantly adjust their psychological state to release pressure. Slow-pitch softball is effective in fostering courage, self-confidence, and resilience in them.

Cultivating Personal Courage

It takes courage for a college student to confront all imminent and potential challenges. Slow-pitch softball provides them with opportunities to hone their courage. In the softball game, the ball usually flies at a high speed. It may bring great pain to the fielder's body or raise the risk of injury to their face. At times when they fail to catch the ball with gloves, they may have to block the ball with their body to seek more defensive time. Therefore, it calls on both their skills and courage to win the game.

Enhancing Self-Confidence

Slow-pitch softball requires the self-assurance of players in all aspects of the game. Before hitting the ball, the batter faces various pressures, such as the threat of the fielders, the cheers of the audience, and the expectations of their own teammates. At this point, the batter, if not sufficiently confident, may act indecisively when hitting the ball, leading to an improper batting play and affecting the hitting results. Hence, the batter must be absolutely assured of their skills and techniques, maintain positive attitudes, and seize the right opportunity to swing the bat in order to attain optimal performance. As the core of the defense, the pitcher must exhibit strong confidence to gain an advantage over the batter and guarantee ideal teamwork to actualize the established plan. Thus, slow-pitch softball has the potential to enhance the self-confidence of college student players.

Building Psychological Resilience

The development of psychological resilience is imperative for college students, as it aids them in resolving adverse situations and managing adversities and failures in their present college lives as well as in their future careers.

In the process of their engagement in slow-pitch softball, the participants may encounter complications such as adverse weather conditions, incomplete sports facilities, and physical injuries. Colossal amounts of physical output are a test of the players' willpower. In the seven innings, running around the bases repeatedly can exhaust them, which may even result in no scores. Physical and mental frustration is likely to affect their performance throughout the entire game. Through practicing slow-pitch softball, college students can strengthen their capacity to navigate through challenging circumstances, which is beneficial to their future survival and achievement.

Improving College Students' Social Skills

Slow-pitch softball is a team sport, entailing a lot of interpersonal communication. It helps reduce emotional barriers to interpersonal communication among college students. In the meantime, engaging in the game motivates college students to modify their behaviors and to develop their self-concept, thus enhancing their interest in healthy interpersonal communication and social interaction.

Slow-pitch softball improves college students' social skills by enhancing their communication abilities. Tactical planning is of vital importance to slow-pitch softball as it involves multiple links, thereby necessitating large amounts of communication. Every team member plays a crucial role in the game and contributes to its outcomes, making the development of communication skills a key component of the training. The communication during the game includes not only verbal but also behavioral communication such as gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions. The runs resulting from effective communication and collaboration bring players an enormous sense of achievement and boost mutual trust and attachment among them, consequently heightening their interest in communicating with others. Thus, slow-pitch softball is effective in enhancing college students' communication capabilities, which is fundamental to their social skill development.

In addition, slow-pitch softball upgrades college students' social skills by encouraging teamwork. Group work plays a substantial role in strengthening interpersonal relationships. Slow-pitch softball does not depend on a few superstars but rather on the collaboration of all players from all positions to achieve good results. When the batter enters the strike zone, ready to hit the ball, the teammates cheer them on to boost their confidence. If the batter makes the correct judgment about the pitch, their teammates applaud their successful play. If the batter misses the ball, their teammates encourage rather than blame them, which is beneficial for the next hit. When the batter misses three pitches, the encouragement of the team members and the comfort of the coach drive him to hit a good ball in the next round. When there are multiple runners on the field, coordination between them is vital to

avoid two runners grabbing one base, causing unnecessary outs. Collaboration between the fielders is even more important. When catching a fly ball, the player closest to the ball's landing point should shout loudly, clarifying who is to catch the ball to avoid missing the ball or a scramble for it between several players, and teammates in close proximity should be prepared for supplementary fielding where necessary. When catching a ground ball, outfielders must pay more attention to cover in order to catch the ball within the shortest time. A force-out requires close collaboration between the fielders because if one fielder makes a mistake, the situation will get out of control. Slow-pitch softball is a game proceeding at a fast pace and full of accidents, in which mistakes by the players are inevitable. In light of this, mutual support between team members helps boost morale and cheer the team up to play the whole game well. Teamwork is crucial to winning a slow-pitch softball match, and every team member enhances their teamwork capability through the game, which is also a key social skill for college students to develop.

Increasing Social Adaptability of College Students

Cui (2013) argued that participation in sports, especially team sports, had a positive effect on college students' social adaptability. According to Ma (2012), participation in sports significantly impacted the formation and development of characters in college students. Miao's research found that there was a significant difference in social adaptability between sports-major college students and non-sports-major ones in China. Sports majors exhibit significantly stronger social adaptability because qualities such as solidarity, endurance, cooperation, responsibility, and resilience can be well developed through sports training (Miao, 2016). To a certain extent, high levels of social self-efficacy predict proactive social participation in students, while social avoidance is a negative mental state that can be corrected through sports activities.

A key quality emphasized in slow-pitch softball is "perseverance," meaning the team never gives up until the last player is out. Qualities such as self-sacrifice and being supportive of team members are highly valued in this game. Both the offense and defense stress the collective spirit. In addition, slow-pitch softball is an experience-focused outdoor team sport that integrates a variety of challenging elements, underscoring the importance of experience and adaptation among the players. Therefore, slow-pitch softball can potentially play a positive role in fostering social adaptability in college students (Yang, 2021).

Pathways to the Successful Development of Comprehensive Competences in College Students through Slow Pitch Softball Training

The State General Administration of Sports and the Ministry of Education released a report in August 2020 called “*Advancing the Integration of Sports and Education to Promote the Healthy Development of Youth.*” It says that all levels of education should offer more sports activities on campus and create or improve school sports teams; that students should be encouraged to join school sports teams and train in their spare time, as well as taking part in local and national leagues; and that higher education institutions should build more sport teams for ball games and expand the team sizes of collective ball games (State Council of China, 2020).. Slow-pitch softball is a competitive, engaging ball game with the potential to provide a unique experience of teamwork. To give full play to its role in enhancing students’ overall competence, it is imperative to improve its training quality and increase its popularity in colleges and universities.

Establishing a Complete On-Campus Training Framework for Slow Pitch Softball

A sound training framework for slow-pitch softball in universities should include specialized training courses, complete facilities, and professional training staff. First, establish slow-pitch softball as an elective course in higher education institutions’ PE curricula. Second, increase investment in slow-pitch softball facilities. Universities should build specialized slow-pitch softball venues and supply quality equipment to offer students an engaging training environment. Third, introduce professional training staff. Universities can hire professional slow pitch softball coaches from outside the school to provide students with high-quality training and guidance; in the meantime, it is necessary to formulate slow pitch softball training programs for in-service PE teachers to build the school-based pool of slow pitch softball coaches.

Enriching Instruction Methods for Slow Pitch Softball Training

It is advisable to develop a training strategy that pertains to the characteristics of slow-pitch softball. First off, PE teachers should work to create an intriguing exercise atmosphere that is different from the traditional way of harsh sports training, allowing students to experience the fun of slow-pitch

softball. Furthermore, various forms of activities should be introduced into the class, such as simulative matches and teacher-student role swapping, to increase inter-student and teacher-student interaction. In addition, there should be conversations between students and PE teachers after the training sessions to reflect on the training process and formulate improvement measures.

Initiating Diverse Activities Surrounding Slow-Pitch Softball

Slow-pitch softball training can be offered as a public elective course or a basic component of PE courses in colleges and universities. In addition, students should be encouraged to set up slow-pitch softball clubs to host a wide range of after-school activities related to this game. Slow-pitch softball matches and leagues are effective means for popularizing the sport. The slow-pitch softball culture festival on university campuses is also a valuable event for spreading knowledge about the sport and maximizing student participation. More activities like these should be explored to increase the popularity of slow-pitch softball among college students, which contributes to their competence development and character building.

References

- Bai, C. & Zhang, S. (2022). The impact of softball on sports culture in colleges and universities. *Sports Goods and Technology*, 2022(6):138-140. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1006-8902.2022.06.049>
- Chang, J., Yuan, Y., & Wang, D. (2020). The mental health state of college students in COVID-19 epidemic and influencing factors. *Journal of Southern Medical University*, 40(2):171-176. Available at: https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=v0gKrRoz1UcFjwTHUzFVEolrY4i0njSWUSICbph32c45_H0ltuFJtH9AbxK6qxLs3wTOZIB13Fo3wKsgshioHv6PWEQg0dxgmroB_NIE2FIUL4nsd-WCSykuCdTLyYnbhuMvV3FLM=&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS
- Chen, X. (2019). The training of slow pitch softball talents in physical education universities: A case study of the practice of Jilin Institute of Physical Education. *Sport & Style*, 2019(2):262. Available at: https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=v0gKrRoz1UeGZ1LuhxaJiY0ZNN1SO5HxqDTxxe3Gyvuy8YcMNSmKL7Yh qJVnCdE7c9dGdBVuVsluIua65LS0slat6R-PHJ_D7X1WWi8GhNiXIHJEyHSeq6fAwdxdf0lo3qxmuVu4XE=&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS
- China Youth Daily. (2021, November 23). More than 80% of college students surveyed reported they had mild “social anxiety.” Available at: <http://edu.people.com.cn/n1/2021/1123/c1006-32289450.html>
- Cui, Q. (2013). Effects of Sports on Social

- Adaptability of College Students (doctoral dissertation). Suzhou University.
- Du, Y. & Zhao, Z. (2013). An analysis of the value of slow pitch softball. *Journal of Educational Institute of Jilin Province*, 29(12):124-125. DOI: <https://doi.org/110.16083/j.cnki.1671-1580.2013.12.061>
- Guo, L. & Sun, M. (2021). Pathways to promoting the mental health of college students through physical exercise. *Heilongjiang Science*, 12(1):148-149. Available at: https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=v0gKrRoz1UcACM_vuvcvLb7zVzONimq32t9X0mqBfvwL0_lspKkEzEnCPG8kdLnsxBKSzCdVel98mr6evMJkvzrqbgCI4O7eNOP6DjZbg_5v8rvP4ZafdqvmFFIIF0QHWEoVgOA=&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS
- Huo, F. (2005). Promoting the development of social adaptability in college students through physical education. *Journal of Henan Normal University (Natural Science Edition)*, 2005(3):180-182. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16366/j.cnki.1000-2367.2005.03.056>
- Lin, Z. (2023). The Impact of Softball on the Social Adaptability of Students at Shanghai International Studies University (master's thesis). Shanghai International Studies University, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.27316/d.cnki.gswyu.2022.000801>
- Liu, B. (2017). Effects of slow pitch softball on the physical fitness of teenagers. *Contemporary Sports Technology*, 7(35):235-236. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16655/j.cnki.2095-2813.2017.35.235>
- Ma, W. (2012). Considerations on the reform of physical education. *China School Physical Education*, 2012(S2):10. Available at: https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=KiAZ1SjiA-6c5Mr9z7EatDPRw_D-SLWRvO8-evs2ZoN02oby1fVgGgAZWGxw148PuJP-ZrsYUX7rTeha_Zqf86sOGUJaVmbq3VoD-px?dbname=CMFD201701&filename=1016178897.nh
- Ministry of Education of China. (2010). The Strategic Plan for the National Medium- and Long-term Education Reform and Development 2010-2020. Available at: https://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2010-07/29/content_1666937.htm
- State Council of China. (2020). The State General Administration of Sports and the Ministry of Education jointly issued the "Opinions on Advancing the Integration of Sports and Education to Promote the Healthy Development of Youth." Available at: https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-09/21/content_5545376.htm
- Tan, X. (2021). The Impact of the Built Environment on Physical Activity of College Students (master's thesis). Central China Normal University. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.27159/d.cnki.gzsu.2020.001296>
- Wang, G. & Shi, J. (2011). The development of slow pitch softball in general higher education institutions. *Sports Culture Guide*, 2011(5):84-86. Available at: https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=v0gKrRoz1UcerqBvxj227iV7a_hvXN3-Qmm3H_2kF62yk94aCGynveRbPdEfkXNkUDZroII50Kk8eqsDztAUHKiRcc4iMvXWY0W5cNgyDDSUgliFSkOvc2austl8&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS
- Wang, Z. (2017). Effects of Slow Pitch Softball on College Students' Social Adaptability (doctoral dissertation). Suzhou University.
- Wu, S. (2018). Psychological health of vocational college students in Changsha City and influencing factors. *China Journal of Health Psychology*, 26(1):139-142. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13342/j.cnki.cjhp.2018.01.037>
- Xue, X. (2022). Effects of physical exercise of varied intensity on mental health of college students. *Contemporary Sports Technology*, 12(13):44-47. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16655/j.cnki.2095-2813.2111-1579-6293>
- Yan Li (1998). A brief profile of slow pitch softball. *Journal of Tianjin Institute of Physical Education*, 1998(3):2.
- Yang, Y. (2022). The Current State of Slow Pitch Softball Training in General Higher Education Institutions in Jiangsu Province from the Perspective of Sports-Education Integration and Suggestions (master's thesis). East China Normal University. DOI:

Lin. (China). Comprehensive Competences of College Students through Sports.

<https://doi.org/10.27149/dcnki.ghdsu.2021.002104>

Yang, Y., Zhang, F., & Sun, X. (2014). Social adaptability of college students. *Statistics and Management*, 2014(5):154-155. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1674->

[537X.2014.05.065](https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1674-537X.2014.05.065)

Zhang, X. (2012). An investigation of the psychological health of 1990s birth college students and suggestions. *Culture and History Vision*, 2012(6):62-66.

Received: 20 August 2023

Revised: 20 September 2023

Accepted: 11 October 2023