

A Study on the Fundamental Experience of After-School Sports Services in British Primary and Secondary Schools —Based on Multi-source Textual Data and Content Analysis

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Abstract: Exploring the practical wisdom and internal mechanisms of quality assurance in after-school sports services constitutes a crucial foundation for achieving their sustainable and high-quality development. This study adopts a multi-source textual analysis approach, systematically collecting and analysing publicly available policy documents, evaluation reports, case studies, and professional commentaries related to British after-school sports services from 2010 to 2023. Using content analysis and thematic analysis methods, the research identifies and refines the core experiences of quality assurance from the perspectives of government, schools, sports organisations, and evaluation institutions. The study finds that the quality assurance system for after-school sports services in Britain is built upon four interconnected pillars: a stable policy framework and dedicated funding mechanism, a school-led multi-stakeholder collaborative implementation model, a professional capacity-building system for personnel, and a data-driven monitoring and evaluation mechanism. These elements operate within a cyclical "policy-planning-implementation-evaluation-improvement" process, forming a dynamic quality assurance ecosystem. Key experiences include: policy specificity and funding transparency providing foundational guarantees; strategic school leadership and deep community partnerships forming the operational core; systematic professional development ensuring service quality; and evidence-based evaluation driving continuous improvement. This research constructs an analytical framework that clarifies the interactive relationships among the key elements of quality assurance, namely "Policy Input → Strategic Planning → Collaborative Delivery → Professional Support → Outcome Evaluation → Policy Optimisation." The findings provide a systematic experience reference and actionable pathways for China to enhance the quality management of after-school sports services under the "Double Reduction" policy.

Keywords: After-school sports services; Quality assurance; Fundamental experience; Content analysis; Thematic analysis; United Kingdom

1. Introduction

After-school sports services, as an important extension of school physical education ^[1], play a significant role in promoting students' physical and mental health ^[2], cultivating sports interests, and developing social skills ^[3]. However, how to provide quality services and establish a long-term quality assurance mechanism has become an urgent practical issue ^[4]. In this context, systematically examining the mature experiences of developed countries holds important reference value. The United Kingdom began exploring after-school sports services earlier and, through years of practice, has formed a relatively comprehensive operational system and quality assurance framework, making it an internationally representative case. Existing research on the quality of after-school sports services primarily focuses on macro-policy introductions or individual case studies ^[5]. Common limitations include an over-reliance on secondary literature leading to homogenised content ^[6], insufficient theoretical abstraction of internal operational mechanisms, and a lack of systematic induction and validation of practical experiences from multiple stakeholder perspectives ^[7]. To address the aforementioned research gaps, this study centres on the following core questions: First, what are the core experiences and key elements in ensuring the quality of after-school sports services in British primary and secondary schools? Second, how do these key elements interact to collectively form an effective quality assurance system? To answer these questions,

this study employs a qualitative research approach based on multi-source textual analysis. By systematically collecting and analysing publicly available policy texts, evaluation reports, case study materials, and expert commentaries, and employing content analysis and thematic analysis methods, the study inductively summarises practical experiences and explores the relationships between elements. This approach effectively utilises existing publicly shared professional knowledge resources, enabling an in-depth investigation of the research questions while complying with academic research ethics and norms.

2. Methods

This study was supported by Scientific Research Fund of Hunan Provincial Education Department, China (Grant No. 23B0554). This study employs a qualitative research design based on document analysis and content analysis. It does not proceed from a pre-existing theoretical framework but rather, through systematic collection, coding, and categorization of multi-source textual data, inductively identifies key themes and patterns, thereby constructing an analytical framework for quality assurance experiences.

2.1. Data Sources and Collection

The research data consists of publicly available textual materials from 2010 to 2023 related to British after-school sports services, with a focus on materials containing direct descriptions of practices, problem analyses, or effectiveness evaluations. Data sources include: Policy Documents and Official Guidelines: Key policy texts such as the "School Sport and Activity Action Plan," guidance on the use of the "PE and Sport Premium," and relevant sections of the Ofsted inspection framework. These documents reflect the government's quality expectations and regulatory requirements. Evaluation and Research Reports: Official evaluation reports on the PE and Sport Premium program, research reports published by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), and Ofsted thematic review reports (e.g., "Beyond 2012 – outstanding physical education for all"). These materials contain assessments of implementation effectiveness and recommendations for improvement. School Practice Case Studies: Detailed case descriptions of after-school sports programs in specific schools published in academic journals, educational practice databases (e.g., the Department for Education's case study library), and on school or sports partnership websites. Professional Commentary and Analysis: Articles, blogs, or speech transcripts from experts, scholars, headteachers, and PE coordinators published in professional media (e.g., Schools Week, TES, The Youth Sport Trust website), discussing the challenges and experiences of implementing after-school sports services.

Data collection employed a purposive sampling strategy. Using keywords such as "after-school sport," "PE and Sport Premium," "primary school sport," "extra-curricular activity," "quality," "impact," and "monitoring," searches were conducted in the UK government's official website (GOV.UK), education research institution websites, academic databases (ERIC, Google Scholar), and professional organization platforms. A total of 102 texts meeting the criteria of relevance, information richness, and representativeness were initially identified. After screening for duplication and relevance, 78 texts were ultimately included as the core analysis corpus.

2.2. Data Analysis Methods

The data analysis followed a structured process combining content analysis and thematic analysis: All texts were carefully read to gain an overall understanding. NVivo 12 qualitative analysis software was used to assist in the initial coding process. Segments of text describing specific practices, measures, challenges, or effects related to quality assurance were openly coded. For example, "schools must publish details of how they spend their PE and sport premium funding" was coded as "Funding Transparency Requirement"; "the PE coordinator meets with external coaches every half term to review progress" was coded as "Regular Partnership Communication." The initial codes were compared, merged, and organised to form broader, more analytical themes. For instance, codes such as "Funding Transparency Requirement," "Online Reporting Portal," and "Ofsted Review of Spending" were grouped under the theme "Accountability and Transparency Mechanisms." Codes like "PE Coordinator Role," "Headteacher Championing Sport," and "Whole-School Development Plan Inclusion" were grouped under the theme "Strategic Leadership and Management." The identified themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflected the data content and addressed the research questions. The relationships between themes were analysed to construct an integrated analytical framework. Through

iterative comparison and abstraction, four core thematic categories and their interrelationships emerged, forming the basis of the quality assurance experience framework. To enhance the validity of the analysis, the research maintained detailed records of the analysis process, including coding decisions and theme development rationale. A second researcher independently analysed a randomly selected subset of texts (approximately 15%). The consistency of theme identification reached 87% after discussion and calibration, indicating good inter-coder reliability.

3. Results

Through systematic analysis, this study identified four core thematic categories that constitute the fundamental experience of quality assurance in British after-school sports services. Each category encompasses several key practices and institutional arrangements.

3.1. Theme 1: Policy-Driven Accountability and Resource Guarantee

Analysis reveals that clear policy mandates and dedicated, transparent funding mechanisms form the foundational layer of quality assurance. **Specific Policy Objectives and Requirements:** The policy framework for after-school sports services, particularly the PE and Sport Premium, sets clear objectives focused on "improving the quality and breadth of PE and sport." Accompanying guidelines provide specific directions for fund usage (e.g., professional development, hiring sports coaches, and providing broader extracurricular activities). **Ring-fenced Funding and Mandatory Transparency:** Funding is allocated directly to schools as a dedicated grant, preventing it from being absorbed into general budgets. A core requirement is that schools must publicly report online how the funds are used and the impacts achieved, creating a basic accountability mechanism. **External Supervision and Incentive Integration:** Ofsted school inspections include evaluations of the effective use of the PE and Sport Premium and the quality of physical education and sports offerings. This links quality performance with the school's overall evaluation, providing an external incentive for schools to prioritize service quality.

3.2. Theme 2: School-Led Strategic Planning and Partnership Collaboration

The data indicate that effective quality delivery relies on proactive school leadership and established collaborative networks. **Strategic Leadership of Senior Leaders and PE Coordinators:** Successful cases frequently highlight the crucial role of the headteacher or a senior leadership team member as a "champion" for sports. Appointing a dedicated PE Coordinator (often a specialist PE teacher) to take responsibility for planning, coordinating, and monitoring after-school sports activities is a widespread and effective practice. **Diversified and Deepened External Partnerships:** Schools do not operate in isolation; they actively establish partnerships with local sports clubs, national governing bodies (NGBs), charitable organisations (e.g., Youth Sport Trust), and community coaches. Collaboration extends beyond simple service procurement to include co-designing programs, shared training, and resource sharing. **Clarified Roles and Communication Mechanisms:** In effective partnerships, the roles of school staff (focusing on overall student development, behaviour management, and curriculum links) and external coaches (providing specialised technical instruction) are clearly defined and complementary. Establishing regular communication channels (e.g., termly review meetings) is key to ensuring smooth collaboration.

3.3. Theme 3: Systematic Professional Development and Capacity Building

The quality of personnel is directly linked to the student experience. The data highlights systematic approaches to enhancing the capabilities of those involved. **Targeted Professional Development for Teachers:** The funding explicitly supports teacher continuing professional development (CPD). This is particularly important for non-specialist teachers, enabling them to confidently organise safe and beneficial physical activities. Training content often focuses on inclusive practices, engaging less active children, and fundamental movement skills. **Standardisation and Quality Assurance of the Coaching Workforce:** There is a strong emphasis on the qualifications and training of community coaches working in schools. Requirements often include minimum coaching qualifications (e.g., UKCC Level 2), safeguarding training, and specific training on working effectively in school environments. **Establishment of Support Networks:** Professional learning communities facilitated by organisations such as the Youth Sport Trust or local sports partnerships provide platforms for PE coordinators and coaches to share experiences, discuss challenges, and access resources, fostering collective capacity building.

3.4. Theme 4: Evidence-Based Monitoring, Evaluation, and Continuous Improvement

A shift from focusing solely on "activity provision" to emphasising "impact and outcomes" is a prominent feature of the quality assurance system. Data-Informed Planning and Targeting: Schools are encouraged to use initial assessments (e.g., of pupils' physical literacy, attitudes) to identify needs and tailor programs. Monitoring participation data—with a particular focus on engaging traditionally less active groups (girls, disadvantaged pupils)—is common practice. Multi-dimensional Impact Evaluation: Evaluation extends beyond participation numbers to include tracking changes in pupils' physical fitness, motor skills, confidence, and social skills. Some schools also explore the positive impacts of physical activity on classroom behaviour and concentration. Feedback Loops and Adaptive Management: Evaluation findings are used to inform future planning and action. For example, if data indicates low participation in a certain activity or among a specific group, adjustments are made to the program offer or engagement strategies in the following cycle, forming a "Plan-Do-Review-Adapt" improvement cycle.

4. Discussion

Based on the analysis of the four core themes and their interrelationships, this study constructs an analytical framework for understanding quality assurance in British after-school sports services. The framework illustrates how these elements interact within a dynamic system to promote continuous quality enhancement.

The operational logic of this framework can be described as a cyclical process: Policy Input and Accountability Requirements (Theme 1) set the direction and provide resources. This drives Strategic Planning and Partnership Building (Theme 2) at the school level, determining how resources will be organised and deployed^[8]. The effectiveness of deployment depends crucially on the Professional Competence of Personnel (Theme 3). The outcomes of implementation are then measured through Monitoring and Evaluation (Theme 4). The evidence generated from evaluation feeds back to inform policy adjustment^[9], refine school planning^[10], and identify new professional development needs^[11], thereby initiating a new cycle of improvement. This process is supported by an overall culture that values evidence, collaboration, and continuous learning^[12]. The elements within this framework exhibit clear interactive relationships. For instance, transparent accountability mechanisms (Theme 1) motivate schools to engage in serious strategic planning (Theme 2). Professional development (Theme 3) enhances the effectiveness of partnership collaborations (Theme 2). Robust monitoring data (Theme 4) provides the evidence base for demonstrating the impact of funding (Theme 1) and for advocating for ongoing policy support. This interconnectedness suggests that quality assurance is most effective when these elements are developed in concert, rather than in isolation^[13].

This quality assurance model differs significantly from the traditional physical education model of direct administration. It emphasises *decentralised governance*, shifting quality responsibility to schools and their community partners^[14]; emphasises *professional specialisation*, expanding the supply of services from within-school teachers to include a wider range of qualified sports professionals; and emphasises *outcome orientation*, extending assessment beyond simple activity provision to multidimensional impact measurement^[15]. This transformation reflects the modernisation of educational governance, moving from standardised control to empowered, evidence-based professional communities. Within this framework, the role and function of the "PE Coordinator" are particularly noteworthy. Acting as a key node connecting policy, school leadership, external partners, and classroom practice, this role assumes responsibility for strategic planning, partnership management, quality monitoring, and data interpretation. The effectiveness of this specialised coordination role is a crucial micro-level mechanism for ensuring quality, which has often been overlooked in previous discussions on systemic design.

Furthermore, the model demonstrates strong adaptive capacity. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many British schools and their partners swiftly transitioned after-school sports services to online formats, developed home-based activity resources, and utilised digital tools for participation tracking and motivation^[16]. This responsiveness stems not only from policy flexibility but also from the professional capabilities within the collaborative network and a culture accustomed to data-driven decision-making. This indicates that a robust quality assurance system should be both structurally stable and possess sufficient adaptive resilience^[17].

5. Conclusions

This study, through multi-source textual analysis and content analysis, systematically identifies and summarises the core experiences of quality assurance in after-school sports services in British primary and secondary schools. The research delineates four key interconnected components: a policy and accountability foundation, a school-led partnership model, a professional capacity-building system, and an evidence-based improvement cycle. These components interact within a dynamic framework that promotes sustained quality enhancement.

The significance of this research lies in synthesising fragmented practical knowledge into a coherent analytical framework that clarifies the relationships between different elements of quality assurance. It demonstrates that effective quality assurance is a systemic endeavour requiring coordinated action across policy, management, practice, and evaluation domains. For China, the key takeaway is not to copy specific British measures directly, but to consider how to develop a coherent set of mutually reinforcing mechanisms—encompassing policy design, resource allocation, partnership models, professional development, and evaluation practices—within its own educational context. Future research could apply this framework to analyse local practices in China, explore contextualised adaptation pathways, and conduct comparative studies to further understand the factors influencing the effectiveness of quality assurance systems in different settings.

6. Limitations and Future Research

This study has limitations inherent in its methodology and scope. Firstly, reliance on published texts may not capture the full complexity of frontline implementation or stakeholder perceptions. Secondly, the qualitative analysis identifies patterns but cannot establish causal relationships or quantify the relative impact of different quality assurance elements. Finally, the British experience is context-specific; direct applicability to a non-British, distinct educational ecosystem requires careful adaptation.

Future research should pursue three main directions. First, researchers should conduct comparative case studies within non-British contexts to explore how quality assurance mechanisms are locally adapted and function in practice. Second, they should develop and validate context-specific evaluation tools based on the identified quality dimensions to enable systematic self-assessment and improvement. Third, scholars should employ longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs to empirically examine the causal impact of different quality enhancement strategies (e.g., teacher training vs. partnership models) on student outcomes.

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