

A Case Study of the Flag Football Course at Beijing International Studies University

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Abstract

As an emerging sport, flag football offers a practical pathway for enriching university physical education (PE) curricula and responding to students' increasingly diverse exercise needs. This paper takes the flag football course at Beijing International Studies University as a case and reorganizes the original case report around four dimensions: theoretical foundations, curriculum development and implementation, teaching outcomes and constraints, and development strategies. The case indicates that flag football is compatible with the goals of quality-oriented education because it combines basic motor skills, tactical learning, communication, teamwork, rule awareness, and competitive experience in a relatively accessible format. The course was organized around progressive learning modules covering physical preparation and rules, technical skills, tactics, and game application. Game-based learning, cooperative group work, and multimedia resources were used to increase engagement, while a combination of formative and summative assessment was adopted to evaluate technical performance, tactical application, participation, teamwork, and rule compliance. The implementation experience suggests positive educational value, but also reveals constraints related to teacher specialization, facilities and equipment, teaching time, and systematic instructional resources. Based on the case and relevant international research, this paper proposes four development priorities: strengthening the teaching staff, improving facilities and equipment, optimizing course structure and learning time, and developing systematic teaching resources and assessment tools. The case provides a reference for universities seeking to integrate emerging sports into PE curricula.

Keywords

Flag football; university physical education; curriculum development; teaching practice; curriculum assessment; Beijing International Studies University.

1. Introduction

As Chinese higher education moves toward a more quality-oriented stage of development, university PE is increasingly expected to support not only physical fitness but also students' psychological well-being, social competence, and lifelong engagement in physical activity. Conventional PE curricula may not always accommodate the diverse interests and participation preferences of contemporary students. Introducing emerging sports can therefore expand curricular choice and create new contexts for skill learning, cooperation, and active participation.

Flag football is a modified form of American football in which the defensive objective is to remove a flag rather than tackle the ball carrier. Its simplified equipment requirements and emphasis on passing, receiving, running, spatial awareness, tactical decision-making, and teamwork make it suitable for educational settings. Research in physical education has found that flag football can be used to teach tactical planning and execution, with students

progressively developing more complex strategies during a teaching unit (Yoshinaga et al., 2003). Subsequent work has also emphasized the importance of teaching tactical awareness and organizing learning tasks so that students can understand offensive and defensive space (Souno, 2013).

At the same time, flag football should not be described as completely risk-free. Prospective and epidemiological research has documented injuries in youth flag football, including injuries associated with direct impact and player collisions, indicating the importance of safety education, technique instruction, rule enforcement, and appropriate risk management (Foss et al., 2023; Locke et al., 2025). The educational value of the activity therefore depends on the quality of curriculum design and implementation rather than on the sport format alone.

Against this background, this paper examines the flag football course at Beijing International Studies University as a practical case. The purpose is to identify the curriculum's educational rationale, objectives, content, teaching methods, assessment system, implementation effects, constraints, and potential development strategies. The discussion is reorganized in an academic structure and supported by ten publicly searchable scholarly references, replacing the five original references in the source article.

2. Theoretical Foundations of University Flag Football Curriculum Development

2.1. Alignment with Quality-Oriented University Physical Education

Quality-oriented education emphasizes students' comprehensive development rather than the acquisition of isolated technical skills. In university PE, this implies an integrated approach to physical fitness, psychological development, social interaction, and the formation of positive exercise habits. Flag football is compatible with this orientation because game participation requires students to combine movement execution with communication, tactical decision-making, cooperation, and adaptation to changing situations.

Research on flag football as a PE teaching material suggests that the activity creates repeated opportunities for students to plan and execute tactical actions. Yoshinaga et al. (2003) reported that students' planned strategy patterns developed during a flag football unit and that the rate of strategy execution increased progressively during game play. These findings support the use of flag football not merely as a recreational activity but as a structured learning context in which cognitive and motor objectives can be integrated.

2.2. Educational Value and Characteristics of Flag Football

The educational characteristics of flag football can be summarized in four areas. First, the sport requires a combination of fundamental movement skills and sport-specific techniques, including passing, receiving, running routes, flag pulling, and defensive positioning. Second, players must communicate and coordinate continuously, creating opportunities to develop teamwork and interpersonal competence. Third, tactical situations require rapid adjustment to space, opponents, and teammates, thereby supporting problem-solving and decision-making. Fourth, formal rules and competitive situations provide opportunities to cultivate rule awareness, fair play, and responsibility.

Flag football can also be adapted to students with different levels of previous sport experience. However, inclusion should be designed rather than assumed. Research on gender-equitable engagement in secondary-school flag football has shown that football can be perceived as masculine and that unequal distribution of key playing roles may marginalize female students. Kahan (2008) therefore argued for organizational, instructional, and game modifications that promote more equitable engagement. For university PE, this suggests that teachers should

consciously distribute learning opportunities, vary roles, and design tasks that allow students with different skill levels to contribute meaningfully.

3. Curriculum Development and Implementation at Beijing International Studies University

3.1. Curriculum Objectives

The course can be organized around three interconnected objectives: knowledge, skills, and values. The knowledge objective is for students to understand the origins and development of flag football, basic rules, core tactical concepts, and fundamental safety procedures. The skill objective is to develop competence in passing, receiving, running routes, flag pulling, positioning, and basic offensive and defensive coordination. The value objective is to foster communication, teamwork, respect for others, fair competition, perseverance, and the ability to respond constructively to success and failure.

The three objectives should operate progressively. Knowledge provides the basis for understanding the activity; technical and tactical skills allow students to participate effectively; and authentic game situations provide a context in which students can apply knowledge and skills while developing broader competencies.

3.2. Curriculum Content Design

The course adopts a progressive structure that moves from basic preparation to authentic game application. Four modules are particularly suitable. The first is a foundation module covering warm-up, physical preparation, the history of flag football, basic rules, and safety. The second is a technical module focusing on passing, receiving, running routes, flag pulling, and basic defensive positioning. The third is a tactical module addressing offensive combinations, route concepts, spatial organization, zone defense, and interception principles. The fourth is a game-application module in which students use learned techniques and tactics in modified or formal game situations.

This progression is consistent with research emphasizing the role of tactical learning in flag football. Souno (2013) argued that tactical development in PE should address the organization of offensive and defensive space and should connect game situations with supporting tasks that progressively develop tactical awareness. In addition, Okumura et al. (2020) demonstrated that individual game-performance assessment can be incorporated into an eight-hour flag football unit, helping teachers identify both achievement and students who receive relatively few learning opportunities.

3.3. Innovation in Teaching Methods

The case course employs a combination of game-based learning, cooperative group work, demonstrations, video review, and tactical animation. Game-based tasks can reduce the monotony associated with repetitive technical drills and allow students to experience the purpose of a skill within a meaningful game context. Cooperative learning groups can be organized according to students' previous experience and learning needs so that students learn from one another while practicing communication and teamwork.

Multimedia resources can further support tactical understanding. Video replay and animated demonstrations allow teachers to slow down or repeat complex movements, illustrate spatial relationships, and connect tactical principles with concrete game situations. These approaches are consistent with the broader literature showing that flag football can be used to develop tactical planning and execution rather than focusing exclusively on isolated motor skills (Yoshinaga et al., 2003).

3.4. Construction of the Assessment System

A balanced assessment system should combine formative and summative assessment. In the case course, formative assessment accounts for 60% of the final grade and focuses on class participation, skill development, teamwork, and rule compliance. Summative assessment accounts for 40% and uses game performance to examine technical application, tactical coordination, and decision-making under competitive conditions.

Such a structure avoids making a single final performance the sole indicator of learning. It also allows teachers to monitor learning processes and provide feedback before the final assessment. Research on individual-based flag football performance assessment provides empirical support for this approach: Okumura et al. (2020) found that performance indicators based on attempts and successful actions could be used to evaluate individual achievement and identify students with limited learning opportunities.

4. Implementation Outcomes and Existing Problems

4.1. Positive Implementation Outcomes

The case indicates that the course has generated sustained student interest and has contributed to continued participation in campus flag football activities beyond the formal class. Students' reported learning outcomes extend beyond technical proficiency to teamwork, communication, and the ability to respond to game situations. The curriculum also contributes to campus sport culture by creating opportunities for flag football clubs, friendly matches, and campus tournaments.

Evidence from outside the university context provides additional support for the physical-education value of flag football. A 2026 randomized controlled trial in a Shanghai primary school found that a 10-week, school-based flag football program produced greater improvements than usual PE in 50-m sprint performance and one-minute jump-rope performance, although not in all measured cardiorespiratory outcomes (Wang et al., 2026). Because this study involved children rather than university students, its findings should be used as supporting rather than direct evidence for university curriculum effects.

4.2. Teacher Expertise and Professional Development

A major implementation challenge is the availability of teachers with specialized flag football knowledge. When instructors transfer from other sport specializations without systematic flag football training, they may have difficulty teaching advanced tactics, designing progressive drills, and providing competition-level guidance. Professional development should therefore include technical skills, tactical systems, safety procedures, assessment methods, and inclusive teaching strategies.

4.3. Facilities, Equipment, and Curriculum Time

The case also identifies limitations in dedicated facilities and equipment. When football fields or athletics areas must be temporarily divided for flag football, space limitations can affect class organization and game quality. Short weekly sessions may also limit the time available for students to consolidate technical and tactical skills.

Course planning should therefore distinguish between short-term and long-term solutions. In the short term, existing fields can be marked flexibly and supplied with flags, cones, training vests, balls, and other essential equipment. In the longer term, universities can include flag football in campus facility planning and develop dedicated or semi-dedicated training areas.

Safety should be incorporated into this infrastructure planning. Foss et al. (2023) reported 47 injuries among 1,939 youth players across 9,228 athlete-exposures, with direct impact accounting for 74.5% of injuries in that sample. Locke et al. (2025) likewise identified player-

player collision as the most common mechanism in a national analysis of U.S. flag football injuries. These findings do not establish the injury risk of the Beijing university course, but they provide a rationale for formal safety protocols.

4.4. Teaching Materials and Instructional Resources

The case indicates that course instruction has relied substantially on teacher-prepared materials, suggesting room for more systematic resources. A university flag football curriculum can benefit from a structured teaching package containing weekly lesson plans, technical demonstrations, tactical diagrams, safety guidance, assessment rubrics, and video resources.

The need for systematic resources is also supported by the literature on PE assessment and tactical teaching. Yoshinaga et al. (2003) emphasized progressive tactical learning, while Okumura et al. (2020) demonstrated the feasibility of performance-based assessment. Together, these studies indicate that course materials should connect learning objectives, tactical tasks, game performance, and assessment criteria.

5. Development Strategies

5.1. Strengthen the Teaching Staff

Universities should establish a continuing professional-development system for flag football instructors. Teachers can participate in coach education programs, workshops, competitions, and inter-university teaching exchanges. Partnerships with universities or sport organizations that have more mature flag football programs can support peer observation and shared lesson planning. External coaches or experienced athletes may also be invited for specialist workshops and competition feedback.

5.2. Improve Facilities and Equipment

Facility development should combine immediate improvements with long-term planning. Existing football or athletics fields can be divided into appropriately sized teaching areas, while basic equipment should include flags, footballs, cones, bibs, markers, and timing or recording tools. Long-term campus planning should consider standard field dimensions, safe surfaces, storage, maintenance, and access scheduling. Safety inspections should be incorporated into routine facility management.

5.3. Optimize Course Structure and Learning Time

If instructional time is limited, teachers should prioritize high-frequency learning tasks and minimize transition time. Small-sided games can increase individual involvement, while task constraints can focus attention on particular tactical problems. The teaching sequence should move from simple individual skills to small-group cooperation and then to full game application. This approach is consistent with evidence that flag football can progressively develop students' tactical planning and execution (Yoshinaga et al., 2003).

5.4. Develop Systematic Teaching and Assessment Resources

A standardized teaching-resource package should include course objectives, weekly lesson plans, technical and tactical progressions, safety checklists, video resources, formative-assessment sheets, and summative game-performance rubrics. Assessment should combine process indicators with authentic game performance and should provide students with feedback on both successful actions and learning opportunities. The performance-assessment approach proposed by Okumura et al. (2020) provides one possible methodological reference.

5.5. Promote Inclusive Participation and Student Engagement

Curriculum development should explicitly address equitable participation. Teachers can rotate playing roles, ensure that all students receive opportunities at key positions, and adapt rules or

team structures when necessary to maximize meaningful involvement. This is particularly important because previous research has identified gendered participation patterns in school flag football (Kahan, 2008). Inclusive curriculum design can therefore support both learning effectiveness and broader participation.

6. Conclusion

The flag football course at Beijing International Studies University illustrates how an emerging sport can be integrated into a university PE curriculum through explicit objectives, progressive content, diversified teaching methods, and a combination of formative and summative assessment. The case highlights the potential of flag football to connect physical skill development with tactical cognition, communication, teamwork, rule awareness, and competitive experience.

At the same time, curriculum quality depends on implementation conditions. Teacher specialization, facilities and equipment, instructional time, teaching resources, and safety management can constrain learning outcomes. Evidence from international flag football research also indicates that the sport requires systematic injury surveillance and prevention rather than being treated as risk-free (Foss et al., 2023; Locke et al., 2025; Balachandran et al., 2025).

Future development should therefore focus on professional teacher development, facility and equipment improvement, optimized course scheduling, systematic teaching resources, evidence-based assessment, and inclusive participation. The case provides a practical reference for universities considering the integration of emerging sports into PE curricula, while further empirical research is needed to evaluate university-level outcomes using larger samples, longitudinal designs, and standardized measures.

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