



Teachers' Anxieties and Concerns about the Impact of the National Education Policy (NEP) on Physical Education in Kerala

Shinu Patinhara Malammal^{1*}, Jagannadhan C²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Physical Education, Govt College Madappally, Calicut, pmshinu@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Department of Physical Education, Govt College Chittur, Palakkad.

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ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions a comprehensive reform of the Indian education system, emphasizing holistic development, skill-based learning, and multidisciplinary approaches to foster a more flexible and inclusive frame work. However, the policy has generated concerns among educators, particularly regarding its impact on foundational subjects like Physical Education (PE). This paper delves into the apprehensions and challenges faced by Physical Education teachers in Kerala, highlighting the potential consequences of NEP implementation on the subject's prominence, relevance and status within the school curriculum. By analysing these concerns, the paper seeks to contribute to the discourse on maintaining a balanced and equitable educational structure.

Keywords: National Education Policy (NEP), Physical Education, Teachers' Concerns, Kerala, School Curriculum

1. Introduction

Globally, it is widely recognized that 'activity' or 'movement' lies at the heart of physical education, embodying the very essence of life itself. Physical education is a life long journey and as Charles A. Bucher aptly stated, it is "an integral part of the total education process, aimed at cultivating physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially well-rounded individuals through carefully chosen physical activities designed to achieve these objectives". The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 brings transformative changes in India's education system, emphasizing flexible curricula, multidisciplinary approaches, and holistic development (Ministry of Education, 2020). The policy aims to foster critical thinking, creativity, and lifelong learning among students. One of the major shifts is the integration of physical, cognitive, and emotional growth, which includes physical education (PE). This approach is intended to promote the overall well-being of students by providing them with a balanced educational experience.

A key focus of the policy is the integration of physical, cognitive, and emotional growth where physical education plays a pivotal role. However, physical education teachers have expressed concerns about its implementation, fearing that physical education may be overshadowed by academic subjects. The highlight of NEP 2020 is its emphasis on experiential learning and activity-based education, wherein physical education is seen as a crucial component of a child's development. The policy recognizes that sports and physical activities play a vital role in improving physical health, mental well-being, and social skills (Reddy, 2021). By including physical education as part of a multidisciplinary curriculum, NEP 2020 seeks to break the traditional compartmentalization of academic subjects and co-curricular activities.

However, despite the positive intent, many teachers are concerned about how the policy will be implemented. There is a growing fear that PE may be side-lined in favour of academic subjects, especially in schools where academic performance is a primary focus. Without proper guidelines, there is a risk that physical education could be reduced to a marginal role, undermining its potential benefits for students.

The state of Kerala, known for its high literacy rate and progressive education system, presents an interesting case study for exploring the impact of NEP 2020 on physical education. Kerala's schools have traditionally emphasized holistic education, including physical activities and sports. However, PE teachers in the state have voiced concerns about the feasibility of the proposed changes. A qualitative study conducted by Nair and Joseph (2021) revealed that 68% of PE teachers in Kerala believe that the emphasis on academic subjects

could overshadow physical education. Additionally, 45% of respondents highlighted the lack of clarity regarding PE-specific guidelines in the NEP 2020 implementation plan.

This study aims to explore the concerns and anxieties of PE teachers in Kerala regarding the NEP's potential impact on physical education. Through in-depth interviews and surveys with PE teachers across various districts, the study seeks to identify the key challenges they face in adapting to the new policy. It will also investigate the extent to which school administrators, policymakers, and educational authorities address these concerns. By highlighting the voices of PE teachers, this research aims to provide valuable insights that can inform policy adjustments, teacher training programs, and resource allocation strategies for effective implementation of physical education under the NEP 2020. While the NEP 2020 offers a progressive vision for India's education system, its practical implementation poses significant challenges, particularly in the domain of physical education. Addressing the concerns of PE teachers is essential to ensure that the holistic development goals of the policy are met. By conducting empirical research and incorporating teacher feedback, policymakers can develop a more inclusive and effective strategy for integrating physical education within the broader educational framework. This study aims to contribute to this process by offering evidence-based insights into the experiences and perspectives of PE teachers in Kerala.

Objectives

1. To explore the concerns of PE teachers in Kerala about the potential impact of the NEP on Physical Education.
2. To analyse the factors contributing to these anxieties.
3. To offer recommendations for addressing teachers' concerns.

2. Literature Review

Physical education has long been considered a crucial component of holistic development in students, promoting physical fitness, teamwork, and emotional well-being. The NEP advocates for the integration of sports and physical activity within the curriculum. However, studies suggest that PE is often marginalized in favour of more "academic" subjects, especially in resource-constrained schools. Prior research highlights that teachers fear that such policies, while well-intentioned, may not translate effectively on the ground due to lack of resources and administrative priorities.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India aims to transform the country's education system by promoting inclusive, equitable, and quality education (Sethi, 2020). It seeks to address challenges in higher education, improve teaching and learning quality, and foster holistic development (Ramesh, 2021). The policy emphasizes problem-solving skills, creativity, and multidisciplinary thinking (Sethi, 2020). Implementation challenges include the need for increased academic, logistic, and financial commitments from stakeholders (Yenugu, 2022). The policy also supports private investment in higher education, which has been critically examined (Varughese, 2017). Despite challenges, the NEP 2020 is considered a comprehensive roadmap for transforming India's education system and preparing its youth for the 21st century (Ramesh, 2021).

Several studies have examined the implementation challenges of educational reforms. According to Sharma (2019), teachers often feel underprepared to adapt to curriculum changes, especially in developing countries. Similarly, a study by Thomas and George (2021) on higher education reform in Kerala noted that while policy changes were progressive, the lack of teacher training led to resistance.

Kerala's educational system is known for its high literacy rates and robust schooling infrastructure (Menon, 2020). However, the introduction of the NEP 2020 and its UG programs has created anxiety among teachers, mainly due to concerns about academic freedom, curriculum delivery, and the shift towards multidisciplinary studies (Varghese, 2021).

From the available literature it is evident that there is no study regarding the teachers' anxiety on NEP in the domain of physical education. This is the sufficient background for initiating this study.

3. Methodology

This study uses a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews to assess the concerns of PE teachers across various districts in Kerala. A structured questionnaire was used to gauge their attitudes toward the NEP, focusing on perceived risks and challenges. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with select teachers to delve deeper into their anxieties.

Sample Size: 100 Physical Education teachers from 40 schools in Kerala.

Data Collection Tools: Structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

Analytical Tools: Descriptive statistics were used to summarize survey data, while thematic analysis was applied to interpret qualitative responses.

4. Analysis and Findings

4.1 General Concerns about NEP and Physical Education

The National Education Policy (NEP) has raised several apprehensions among physical education (PE) teachers. Table 1 highlights some of the key concerns:

Table 1: Key Concerns of Teachers regarding the impact of NEP on Physical Education

Concern	Percentage of Teachers Expressing Concern
Reduced Importance of PE in Curriculum	65%
Focus on Academics at the Expense of PE	55%
Lack of Adequate Resources for PE	45%
Increased Workload for PE Teachers	40%
Marginalization of PE in Higher Classes	50%

A significant number of teachers are worried that NEP's strong emphasis on academics and its multidisciplinary approach might inadvertently deprioritize physical education. Many fear reduced allocation of time and resources for PE, potentially affecting students' holistic development.

4.2 Impact on Teaching Time and Resources

Teachers expressed concerns regarding how the NEP could impact the time and resources allocated to PE. Around 60% of respondents believed that teaching time for PE might decrease, particularly in higher grades where academic demands intensify. Many teachers emphasized the lack of infrastructure, such as sports equipment and adequate facilities, as a persistent barrier to effective physical education programs. This infrastructure gap could worsen if PE's significance diminishes further in school priorities.

4.3 Anxieties about Professional Development

Another critical issue is the readiness of PE teachers to adapt to the changes proposed by the NEP. Table 2 summarizes the preparedness levels reported by teachers:

Table 2: Level of Preparedness of teachers towards the adaption of NEP

Preparedness Level	Percentage of Teachers
Adequately Prepared	20%
Somewhat Prepared	35%
Not Prepared	45%

Nearly half of the respondents (45%) reported feeling unprepared to implement NEP-driven changes. Many cited the absence of clear guidelines for integrating PE into a multidisciplinary curriculum and insufficient training programs tailored to NEP objectives.

4.4 Concerns about Marginalization in Higher Education

The NEP's multidisciplinary focus has also led to apprehensions about the future role of PE in higher secondary education. Half of the respondents feared that physical education might be side-lined in favour of core academic subjects, especially in exam-oriented environments. Teachers highlighted that competitive exams and university admissions criteria often place negligible weight on physical education, potentially exacerbating its marginalization in senior grades.

4.5 Challenges Faced by Physical Education Teachers

Interviews conducted with PE teachers revealed several on-going challenges, including:

- **Inadequate Infrastructure:** Many schools lack basic sports facilities, such as proper playgrounds, sports equipment, and indoor spaces for activities.
 - **Insufficient Training:** Teachers reported not receiving any targeted training on the NEP's vision for physical education, leaving them unsure about their roles and responsibilities under the new policy.
 - **Low Priority in School Timetables:** PE classes are frequently relegated to non-prime time slots or cancelled to accommodate academic lessons, further reflecting the low priority given to physical education.
- These challenges highlight the need for a more balanced approach within the NEP framework, ensuring that physical education receives adequate attention and resources to contribute to the overall development of students.

5. Conclusion

While the NEP 2020 presents an opportunity for a holistic education framework, PE teachers in Kerala express significant concerns about its impact on physical education. Many fear that the NEP's emphasis on academics and skill-based learning may marginalize PE, especially in higher grades. These anxieties are compounded by a lack of infrastructure and insufficient professional development. For the NEP to achieve its goals there must be a clear and well-funded strategy for integrating PE as a core component of the school curriculum. **Important recommendations according to this study were given below:**

1. **Increased Investment in PE Infrastructure:** Schools need better infrastructure, such as playgrounds and sports equipment, to effectively implement the NEP's vision for physical education.
2. **Teacher Training:** Professional development programs should be created to help PE teachers adapt to the NEP's multidisciplinary approach.
3. **Incorporation of PE into Core Curriculum:** Clear guidelines should be established to ensure that physical education is not side-lined in favour of academic subjects.
4. **Balanced Timetable:** Schools should create a balanced schedule that integrates PE as a key component, even in higher secondary levels.

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