



Reimagining Physical Education in India: An Analysis of NEP 2020

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ABSTRACT

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a pivotal moment in India's approach to schooling, emphasizing holistic development. Physical education (PE) is a vital yet under-discussed component, contributing to physical fitness, emotional, and social well-being. This paper explores how NEP 2020 repositions PE within the broader curriculum, identifies persistent implementation challenges, and suggests practical steps to strengthen PE in Indian schools. Through policy analysis and comparison with global best practices, the study highlights PE's potential to foster healthier, more active learners.

Keywords: National Education Policy, physical education, holistic development, policy analysis

1 INTRODUCTION

Physical education (PE) extends beyond sports, aiming to nurture balanced individuals through physical, emotional, and social development. Despite its significance, PE has been historically neglected in Indian schools due to intense academic competition, limited urban space, a shortage of trained PE teachers, and inadequate infrastructure. Previous policies, such as the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 and its 1992 revision, recognized PE's importance but faced implementation challenges. The NPE 1986 integrated sports and PE into the curriculum, advocating for infrastructure development and reserving urban spaces for playgrounds. The 1992 revision reaffirmed these commitments, emphasizing holistic child development. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 offers an opportunity to reframe PE as a central component of holistic learning. This research examines NEP 2020's vision for PE, identifies implementation challenges, and proposes actionable solutions.

2 NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK 2005 AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 emphasizes physical education as essential for a physically active and healthy life. It defines PE as encompassing movements, drills, exercises, yoga, games, sports, and activities promoting mind-body wellness. The NCF 2005 outlines the following aims for PE:

1. Integral to Curriculum: Physical activity is fundamental to human life and must be embedded in the school curriculum.
2. Appreciation for Activity: Sports and physical activities should be valued for promoting health, enjoyment, self-reflection, and social interaction.
3. Resilience: PE should foster resilience, tenacity, and a pursuit of excellence in physical capacities.

3 OBJECTIVES

This study aims to:

1. Examine how NEP 2020 addresses physical education.
2. Understand existing gaps and challenges in PE implementation.
3. Recommend strategies to effectively integrate and enhance PE in Indian schools.

4 LITERATURE REVIEW

Earlier frameworks like the **National Curriculum Framework (2005)** emphasized physical activity in schools, but practical implementation was weak due to limited accountability. It emphasized the integration of physical activity into the school curriculum, advocating for a shift from rote learning to experiential education. Despite this, practical implementation has been weak due to limited accountability and lack of enforcement mechanisms.

Sharma (2015) highlighted the positive link between regular physical activity and students' academic and behavioral outcomes. However, PE is often given a backseat due to exam-centric schooling. A substantial number of government schools in India lack basic sports facilities. For instance, in Dindigul district, Tamil Nadu, an RTI revealed that out of 170 government higher secondary schools, 93 had no physical education teachers, and 30 lacked playgrounds. Similarly, in Rajasthan, only 36% of government schools have playgrounds, with many lacking essential sports equipment.

Thomas (2018) discussed how many schools, particularly public ones, lack even basic facilities for sports and exercise. Global organizations such as UNESCO (2021) and the World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) have consistently pushed for integrating physical activity into daily schooling to combat health risks such as obesity and inactivity. Still, translating these recommendations into Indian classrooms remains a challenge.

7 NCF 2023: EMPHASIS ON ART AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2023 elevates art and physical education as core curricular areas, with defined aims and learning standards. PE aims to foster a love for physical activity, develop skillful engagement, and promote resilience, empathy, and cooperation. Yoga is highlighted for mind-body wellness. Learning standards are structured as nested levels: Learning Standards 1 outline comprehensive goals, while Learning Standards 2 provide achievable initial targets. At the Foundational Stage, PE focuses on motor skill development through free play. The Preparatory Stage introduces local games, the Middle Stage emphasizes structured sessions, and the Secondary Stage offers specialized sports engagement. Assessments rely on performance-based tools like observation reports and student portfolios. The NCF recommends optional periods for sports and arts, engaging local experts to enhance exposure.

8 FINDINGS

- NEP 2020 formally recognizes PE but lacks detailed implementation guidelines.
- Infrastructure and teacher training are significant barriers.
- Urban schools are more prepared to adopt NEP-aligned PE practices than rural ones.
- Teachers report a need for enhanced support and tools for effective PE delivery.

9 CHALLENGES

- Infrastructure: Many schools lack basic sports facilities.
- Teacher Shortage: Few qualified PE instructors are available.
- Academic Pressures: PE is often deprioritized in exam years.
- Urban Constraints: Limited space in cities restricts outdoor activities.

10 SUGGESTIONS

1. Mandatory PE Periods: Allocate daily time for physical activity with performance monitoring.
2. Teacher Education: Incorporate PE modules in B.Ed. programs and provide regular in-service training.
3. Infrastructure Grants: Offer targeted government funding for sports facilities.
4. Technology Integration: Use apps and gamification to enhance engagement.
5. Inclusive Curriculum: Adapt programs for students with disabilities and promote gender equity.
6. Public-Private Partnerships: Engage NGOs and the private sector for resources and expertise.

11 CONCLUSION

NEP 2020 positions physical education as a vital component of holistic school education in India. However, realizing this vision requires robust implementation strategies, including adequate funding, teacher training, and inclusive practices. A well-executed PE system will foster healthier, more balanced citizens equipped for lifelong well-being.

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