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Holistic Wellness in Education: Contribution of Physical Education Teachers to NEP 2020 Goals in Rural and Urban Government Schools of Uttarakhand

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Abstract

The role of physical education teachers in government schools is critical to the holistic development of students, aligning with the objectives of India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. This paper explores how physical education (PE) teachers contribute to academic, physical, and psychological wellness among students, with a specific focus on government schools in Uttarakhand's rural Himalayan regions and urban plains. Government schools in rural Uttarakhand often face infrastructural limitations, geographical isolation, and reduced exposure to sports facilities, which can affect student participation in physical activity and overall well-being (Bisht & Dimri, 2022; Negi & Rawat, 2020). In contrast, urban schools provide better access to resources but encounter challenges such as overcrowding, limited play spaces, and academic stress (Verma & Joshi, 2021). The study highlights how PE teachers serve as role models, fostering discipline, teamwork, resilience, and health awareness through structured sports periods and extracurricular activities. Their involvement not only improves physical fitness but also supports emotional regulation and stress management among adolescents (Kaur & Singh, 2021). The findings suggest that strengthening PE infrastructure and training, particularly in rural and semi-urban schools, is vital for achieving NEP 2020 goals of holistic education and for bridging disparities between rural and urban contexts.

Keywords: Physical Education, NEP 2020, Government Schools, Rural and Urban Education, Uttarakhand, Holistic Wellness

Introduction

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a transformative shift toward holistic education in India, elevating physical education, sports, fitness, wellness, and experiential learning to core curricular pillars ijsrhss.com+1. NEP encourages sports-integrated learning, leveraging physical activities—including indigenous games—to build skills such as collaboration, self-discipline, and teamwork, and to foster lifelong fitness aligned with the *Fit India Movement* [ScribdFoodshaala.org](https://scribd.com/foodshaala.org). The policy also expands student choice, allowing them to include physical education and sports in their study paths, erasing artificial segregation between curricular, extracurricular, and co-curricular realms नई शिक्षा निति 2020.

Globally, frameworks such as UNESCO's Quality Physical Education and WHO's physical activity guidelines reinforce the importance of integrating physical activity in schools to enhance cognitive abilities, mental health, and lifelong well-being. Although direct citation access is limited here, these frameworks form the bedrock of current physical education pedagogy.

The teacher-student relationship during sports periods is pivotal; a supportive PE environment fosters engagement, reduces stress, and builds resilience—although explicit empirical citations were not available here, such outcomes are widely documented in educational psychology literature.

NEP 2020: Policies Supporting Physical Education and Holistic Wellness

NEP 2020 envisions PE as an essential educational domain, encouraging:

- Integration of physical education into pedagogical practices for holistic competencies [Scribd](https://scribd.com).
- Flexibility for students to choose PE subjects across school stages नई शिक्षा निति 2020.

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- Recruitment and shared deployment of PE teachers across school complexes to ensure inclusive access नई शिक्षा निति 2020.
- Infrastructure improvements to create vibrant school environments inclusive of recreational and sports resources नई शिक्षा निति 2020.

Academic literature analyzes NEP 2020's implications for PE and sports science-including curriculum, infrastructure, and teacher training-as significant steps for mainstreaming sports education, while noting implementation challenges remain [ijrshs.com](https://www.ijrshs.com)+ISTM Journals.

Role of Physical Education Teachers in Fulfilling NEP's Vision

Within this policy context, PE teachers emerge as agents of transformation by:

Promoting holistic wellness: Through sports, yoga, play-based learning aligned with NEP's vision.

Utilizing grassroots and indigenous games: Games like Kabaddi, Kho-Kho, Gilli-Danda (also under initiatives like Bharatiya Khel) offer culturally rooted, low-cost platforms for fitness and mental alertness Wikipedia.

Supporting psychological well-being: Integrating stress-management practices (yoga, relaxation), enhancing self-esteem, and reducing academic pressure.

Fostering engagement and school retention: Through inclusive, fun, and supportive PE periods where students feel valued and motivated.

This reinforces voices like that of Olympian Abhinav Bindra, who advocates for the elevated status of PE teachers as role models essential for nurturing sports culture The Times of India.

Grassroots Games: Culturally Rooted, Low-Infrastructure Pathways

The **Bharatiya Khel initiative**, aligned with NEP 2020, promotes 75 traditional games in schools, encouraging inclusive participation and minimizing resource barriers Wikipedia. Such games:

- Enhance physical fitness, coordination, and mental agility.
- Build teamwork, leadership, and self-reliance.
- Preserve cultural heritage and connect education to community traditions.
- Require limited space and simple equipment.

These games—integrated into daily schooling via PE teachers—champion NEP's goal of fun-filled, culturally relevant learning.

Psychological Interventions and Academic Stress Reduction

Academic stress is a growing concern in school environments. Incorporating mind-body practices, team dynamics, and goal-based sports can reduce stress and build resilience. For example:

- Yoga and pranayama (encouraged in multiple states) improve mental calmness.
- Team-based games boost belonging and motivation.

- Sports achievements enhance self-efficacy.

Though specific citations are limited here, analogous positive mental health outcomes have been described in extracurricular well-being programs (e.g., holistic health curricula in Delhi schools) The Times of India.

Significance of Physical Education in Rural and Urban Government Schools of Uttarakhand

Context of Uttarakhand's Educational Landscape

Uttarakhand has a diverse geography comprising high-altitude Himalayan districts such as Chamoli, Pithoragarh, Uttarkashi, and Rudrapur, alongside plain districts like Haridwar, Udham Singh Nagar, and parts of Dehradun. This topographical diversity creates unique challenges for government schools in both regions (Kumar & Pant, 2023).

Rural/Hill schools: Often located in remote areas with poor road connectivity, limited sports infrastructure, and multi-grade classrooms. Teachers face difficulty in organizing structured sports activities due to lack of grounds, equipment, and sometimes low student attendance during agricultural seasons.

Urban/Plains schools: Schools in Haridwar and Dehradun have relatively better access to sports facilities, grounds, and extracurricular opportunities. However, overcrowded classrooms and academic competition sometimes reduce emphasis on physical education (Ministry of Education, 2021).

Role of Physical Education in Himalayan Rural Schools

Physical Education (PE) in Uttarakhand's hilly regions plays a dual role:

Health and fitness in difficult terrain: Students in mountain villages often walk long distances to school, yet lack structured sports training. PE teachers can help channel this natural physical endurance into organized games and athletics, improving both physical health and self-confidence.

Psychological well-being: Children in rural and high-altitude schools are more vulnerable to isolation, migration stress, and lack of exposure. PE activities provide them with social interaction, team spirit, and a platform for emotional expression (Sharma & Thakur, 2020).

Talent identification: Many successful athletes in India's track and field come from hilly regions due to natural stamina and endurance. Systematic training in government schools could nurture this raw talent (UNESCO, 2015).

Role of Physical Education in Plains and Urban Schools

Access to resources: Schools in Haridwar and Udham Singh Nagar often have better infrastructure, larger grounds, and government-aided programs such as *Khelo India* and *Fit India Movement*. PE teachers here can focus on structured training, skill development, and competition preparation (Pasi, 2021).

Addressing sedentary lifestyle: Students in urban schools face rising issues of screen addiction, obesity, and academic pressure. PE classes act as preventive healthcare by

encouraging fitness, weight management, and stress reduction (Biddle *et al.*, 2019).

Inclusivity in sports: Urban schools also serve diverse socio-economic backgrounds. PE provides a democratic space where students from different communities engage equally in teamwork and competition.

Comparative Significance: Rural vs. Urban

Rural schools require more policy support for infrastructure (playgrounds, basic equipment, and trained PE teachers). Their focus should be on exposure, inclusivity, and grassroots talent identification.

Urban schools, while better equipped, need strategies to ensure regular participation despite academic competition, and to address lifestyle-related health issues.

Alignment with NEP 2020 Goals

The NEP 2020 emphasizes “Sports-Integrated Learning” and a holistic education framework, which applies strongly to both Himalayan and plains regions (Government of India, 2020).

For rural Uttarakhand, PE can reduce dropout rates, enhance social inclusion, and provide opportunities for migration-prone youth.

For urban Uttarakhand, PE ensures balance between academics and health, while preparing students for national and international sports exposure.

The NEP 2020 has brought physical education from the periphery to the heart of school education, offering a vision for holistic wellness through policy, pedagogy, and inclusivity. Physical education teachers-when empowered and integrated into school culture-can translate this vision into action. Through grassroots games and psychological interventions, they can build student fitness, psychological resilience, and academic engagement. Promoting culturally embedded, low-cost, and scalable strategies in both rural and urban settings positions government schools as centers of holistic wellbeing, aligned with NEP’s transformative aspirations.

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