

University Teachers' Perceptions Towards Health and Physical Education

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Abstract

Health and Physical Education (HPE) is the crucial area of health promotion and quality life. This study aims to explore the teachers' perceptions towards HPE. To achieve the research objectives, narrative research design following qualitative approach was used. Seven teachers teaching HPE at B.Ed. level were selected purposively from Prithvi Narayan (PN) Campus Pokhara. Information was gathered using unstructured interview. This study reveals that, though HPE is crucial area of teacher education (TE) to prepare quality manpower in the field of health promotion and disease prevention, less priority is given in school level curriculum and the number of students is decreasing in B.Ed. level, therefore, it is in crisis gradually. The existing practices are not supporting for its acceptability and sustainability. There is not a position for HPE teacher in schools and Teachers Service Commission (TSC) does not announce the vacancies for HPE teachers. Teachers, students, curriculum, policy and employability are responsible for this phenomenon. The findings of this study will be useful to policymakers, professionals, students and other stakeholders to take necessary steps for improving the present phenomena.

Keywords: competencies, curriculum, health and physical education, teacher education

Introduction

Teacher education (TE) comprises an educational endeavor aimed at fostering the academic and professional competencies of students, thereby facilitating the attainment of a profound level of intellectual and ethical maturity. It leads students towards value oriented and quality life (Srivastava, 1999). Special knowledge, attitude and skills are required for the teaching professions which are acquired through TE. TE is supposed as teachers' training which is minimum qualification to be a school teacher. To prepare competent teachers, it plays a vital role. A competent teacher must have

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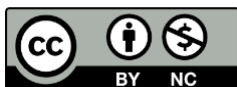
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three Cs, namely, Competence, Commitment, and Confidence (Devi, 2014). TE program is an investment which gives better and standard education as a rich dividend for the prospective teachers. Without a competent teacher, curriculum and adequate infrastructure cannot provide quality education (Varughese, 2005). So, TE is essential to advance the necessary proficiencies to develop envisioned skills, positive attitudes, love and respect for teaching profession.

The history of TE in Nepal is relatively brief. Its inception can be traced back to the establishment of the College of Education (CoE) in 1956 and Tribhuvan University (TU) in 1959, with formal institutionalization occurring in 1971 (Joshi, 2003). When it comes to Tribhuvan University, the Faculty of Education has key responsibilities to prepare human resources necessary for the education sector. TE is the foundation of all kinds of education which decides the quality of a teacher. The quality of students depends upon the quality of teacher (Prasadappa, 2017). They mentor and empower the students through teaching learning activities. Health and Physical Education (HPE) was given the prime importance after the establishment of CoE. It was included under the Normal School, which was one, among the seven divisions of CoE (Joshi, 2003). HPE was the subject of public concern and a focused areas of higher education.

HPE aims to produce knowledgeable and skilled human resource needed for teaching and educational leadership in the given subject area. PN Campus serves the same aim by preparing educators, supervisors, administrators, teachers who play key role to prepare healthy citizens (Adhikari, 2021). HPE is comprised as major subject in TE program under Faculty of Education (FoE), TU. To be a teacher, candidates must have requirements of minimum assigned academic qualification, teaching license, and success in teacher selection examination. Pre-service TE is delivered by universities and the Teacher Service Commission (TSC) conducts the exams for teaching license and teacher selection. It is necessary to make corroboration between university curriculum and TSC curriculum (National Campaign for Education Nepal, 2017). This indicates that the Faculty of Education (FoE) must revise its curricula to align them with those of the Teacher Service Commission (TSC) and cater to the requirements of the students.

Health and Physical Education (HPE) became a compulsory subject in the school-level curriculum in 1971, extending to the Proficiency Certificate Level (PCL) and Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programs by 1973, where it was designated as a major subject. Graduates from PCL and B.Ed. programs were eligible for lower secondary and secondary level teaching positions, respectively (National Campaign for Education Nepal, 2017). However, the PCL program was phased out in 2010. The curriculum of HPE has undergone fluctuations; since 1992, it was divided into HE and Physical Education (PE), only to be reintegrated into the B.Ed. level in 1997. At the master's level, HE and PE were separated, with HE commencing in 1992 and PE

in 1996. The Faculty of Education (FoE) initiated M.Phil. and Ph.D. programs in HE (Gnawali, 2013). With the implementation of the four-year B.Ed. program in 2015, HPE now exists in an integrated form as a major subject, while HE and PE are offered separately as minor subjects.

National Curriculum Framework (2019) restructured the policies, principles, vision and mission of education which changed the status of HPE in school level curriculum pattern. At basic level, it is integrated with general science from grade one to three. It is integrated with creative arts in grade four and five, separate subject as HPE in grade six to eight, and optional subject in grade nine and ten (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2020). This policy shows that the position and priority of HPE in school level curriculum is gradually minimized.

In 2018, TSC advertised for 1106 vacancies in different subjects to recruit secondary level teachers but only two seats (0.18 percent) were for HPE, 10 (0.90 percent) seats for Health, Population and Environment subject and only one seat for lower secondary level (TSC, 2018), though, it was a compulsory subject. Likewise, another advertisement was announced in 2023 demanding 1055 vacancies in different subjects but in HPE there was zero seat (TSC, 2023). It shows that HPE is one of the neglected subjects and the concerned authorities do not give priority to HPE and the situation is becoming more terrible in the field of health promotion and disease prevention.

In initial phase, HPE was core and compulsory subject in school level curriculum and number of students was high in PCL and B.Ed. level, but at present, I have experienced that the number of students in HPE is decreasing gradually. Several affiliated campuses removed HPE from the list of major subjects. In this rationale, this study is an attempt to explore the campus level teachers' perceptions towards HPE.

Methodology

This study adopted narrative research design following qualitative approach and interpretive paradigm (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design focuses on informants' narratives. HPE teachers teaching at B.Ed. level from PN Campus, Kaski, Pokahra, Nepal, one among the oldest constituent campuses under Tribhuvan University, were purposively selected. The process of sampling was ended when no new phenomena and additional information could be found (Rosenthal, 2018). The record of teachers was taken from the Educational Administration Section of PN Campus.

Unstructured interviews were conducted with seven teachers, comprising five male and two female educators, all possessing over sixteen years of teaching experience. Follow-up interviews were arranged at the convenience of the informants. The gathered information was transcribed and translated into English. Initial codes were generated through highlighting and margin notes, which were subsequently revised and consolidated into four overarching themes. Interview

transcripts and findings were shared with the informants for member checking. Zotero software facilitated in-text citation and referencing.

Ethical Consideration

Informants were provided with assurances regarding the voluntary nature of their participation and the confidentiality of all information shared. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all informants. Each interview was recorded for accuracy, and upon transcription, the recordings were promptly deleted to ensure privacy. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Findings

This section presents the information obtained from the informants. The information is presented mainly in four themes as: health and physical education as a discipline, teachers' competency and students' participation, position of health and physical education in curriculum and scope of health and physical education. The opinions of informants are narrated.

Health and Physical Education as a Discipline

HPE is the lifelong and life skill based education. Most of the informants had common views toward HPE as Kapil expressed, "HPE as an emerging, daily life related, and life skill-based, exhilarating, practice-based, and learning by doing subject. It helps in all-round development of students which is the demand of the day." This account reveals that teachers highly prioritized the subject and accepted it for quality life. They perceived it as an emerging and life skills based education. They emphasized as a daily life related and behavioral subject. They also focused it as a behavioral and practical subject. It is important for all round development of students. Another informant Ganesh said, "HPE provides not only crude knowledge but it also enables one for quality life. HPE is a lifelong and life skills based education.

This statement reveals that there is always a demand for HE. Shyam, another informant opined: "HPE is an emerging subject but it is dominated by public health and medical science."

This opinion reveals that it is in the shadow of public health and medical science. Medical science personnel think that HE is a part of medical science. Because of this logic, people are eager for medical treatment than preventive measures. It is opposed to the saying prevention is better than cure. Khuma, another teacher informant stated:

I am unable to advocate the importance of HPE. A few years ago the figure of students, public recognition, job opportunities of HPE graduates was high but these days, job opportunities are rare. The charm of this subject is being declined gradually.

This reveals that teachers cannot advocate the importance of HPE. In the past, it was boomed. A few years ago, HPE was accepted as an important subject. Public recognition and job opportunity after graduation was enough. It was thought that HPE was essential to making life easier. But later the motivation towards HPE is decreasing and subject is gradually declining. In this regard Mina stated, "Students are interested and regular in minor HE more than major HPE." This statement shows that the students who studied HE as a minor subject were motivated and interested. They were from other major subjects like Mathematics, Science, Nepali, and English. Though the classes were in the late hour, they attended it regularly. It shows that the curriculum and subject matter is useful. HE and PE are separate discipline but they are interdependent.

Teachers' Competency and Students' Participation

Though informants perceived HPE as a vital subject to produce and promote healthy human resource, it is declining from school's curriculum and number of students in university is decreasing. Some affiliated campuses removed HPE from the list of major subject. Teachers realized themselves for being one of the reasons. On the same issue, Mahes said, "I am not so enthusiastic, excited and updated in teaching learning activities. I am weak in English language and information technology (IT)." In this statement, the teacher accepted his weaknesses for not being enthusiastic, excited and updated in teaching learning activities. Most of the community schools shifted their medium of instruction into English but the informant was not ready to teach HPE in English medium. The informant was not ICT proficient and he was unable to handle ICT devices. A female teacher perceived it differently as:

Not only teachers but students are also a challenge. They are irregular in their study. Though HPE is theoretical and practical in nature, neither they attend theoretical nor in practical classes. Most of them are married women with children and they are also job holders.

The students do not attend their classes regularly. Because of the majority of the students are married women with children. Likewise another informant shared his experience as: "In my class, out of 18 students 15 are job holders. The number of boy's students is very few." The mentioned account reveals that almost all are already job holder in different sectors and female. They prefer self-study staying at home instead of university classes. Next teacher, Ganes expressed that both students and pedagogies are challenges for upgrading the position of HPE in teacher education. He further added:

I do not have interest in new innovation and strategies. I apply conventional methods. Even practical activities are taught inside the classroom. Students are weak in practical performance. They cannot use bandage. Teaching-learning process is just exam-oriented. Online class is useful for job holder students.

Though, many modern approaches are prescribed in the curriculum, teachers still apply conventional types of methods. Especially, "Jug and mug" approach and pedagogy is limited to the 'chalk and talks' method. They cannot apply the latest and critical pedagogies. Even a B.Ed. with HPE graduate cannot use thermometer and bandage. Practical activities are taught inside the classroom orally. Study is focused on examination. Examination system promotes rote learning staying at home. Though, students are de-motivated towards HPE, teachers and educators should advocate its vitality. They need to show ethical maturity.

Position of Health and Physical Education in Curriculum

The curriculum is overloaded because of the integration of HPE. According to the nature of curriculum, blended mode is appropriate. Showing anxiety about the curriculum, Mahes said, "Curriculum is instable, sometimes it is integrated and sometimes separated."

School curriculum is also instable. HPE is an integrated subject in school curriculum (grade 1-5), separated in grade 6-8 and optional at the secondary level. The situation is the same in B.Ed. as in school grades. Showing confusion about the provision of major and minor subjects in B.Ed., Khuma raised a question as, "What is the role and value of minor subjects, in the sense of job opportunity?" Teacher Service Commission and Public Service Commission of Nepal do not recognize the minor subject. Most of the informants had common views about curriculum as Mina said, "Curriculum is changed according to experts desire not students and nation's needs."

Fundamentally, curriculum is developed by students' needs and interests but the statement shows that the curriculum is developed by experts. National goals and objectives should be considered and fulfill the emerging thrust areas while designing curriculum. It should be based on special need, competence, value and employability factors. It should be revised based on feedback from parents, teachers, students, alumni and national and international models.

Scope of Health and Physical Education

Public recognition and job opportunities of HPE graduates are also challenges. In this sense, most of the informants had common experiences as Khuma emphasized, "There are no posts for HPE teachers in schools and NGOs do not prefer HPE graduates. Learning is not incorporated with a livelihood." This statement reveals that job opportunity for HPE graduates in schools is rare. No post is created in schools. NGOs/ INGOs also do not recognize HPE. They prefer graduates of public health than HPE. Most of the graduates are unemployed. Learning is detached from real life situation.

Though HPE is life skills-based education and it helps to gain quality of life, students are not motivated towards it because of the limited job opportunities. Students and parents choose job oriented subjects. Though HPE is not only for job but it is also for preparation of life, it is taken as a main challenge to be motivated

towards HPE. Another informant, Shyam added, "TSC does not announce the vacancies of HPE teachers. Most of the affiliated colleges removed it from the options of major subject." The statement shows the grievances with TSC which does not announce the vacancies for HPE graduates. They have to apply for other subjects like social studies. These are the burning issues and challenge which are responsible for decline of this subject.

Discussion

TE programs have a crucial role in improving the standards of the TE system by preparing competent and effective teachers. FoE under TU has offered many programs as TE, PhD, MPhil, M.Ed., four year B.Ed., Postgraduate Diploma in Educaino (PGDE) and Teacher Preparation Course (TPC). Under four year B.Ed., eleven subjects as major and twelve subjects minor are offered (FoE, 2020). HPE is major subject in B.Ed.; at this juncture it refers to teacher education.

HPE is basically related with lifelong and life skills-based education which promotes an understanding for maintaining personal, family, and community health. HE aims to bring positive influence on the health behavior of individuals, community as well as the living and working conditions that influence their health. It provides essential health skills necessary to adopt the practice and maintain health-enhancing behaviors. HE is not only for a specialization but also beneficial for general education to the teachers and students to enhance their competencies for teaching school health (Vamos et al., 2020). So, HPE is essential in TE program and it is always emerging, dynamic, and daily life-related subject but the policymakers and politicians pay less attention to the subject's acceptability and sustainability. It helps to produce students with all round growth and development by enhancing hidden potentialities. It is not only job oriented, but also for the preparation of quality life. It helps to eliminate myths and misinformation related to health on the basis of scientific proofs and evidences. Despite having a number of life related benefits of the subject, the results reveal that the number of student enrolment in HPE is reducing every day.

HPE plays a vital role to develop a positive attitude, and shaping healthy behavior. It provides scientific and evidence based information. HE helps to bring positive change in individual, family, and community. But, the policymakers are not paying attention of this aspect. Now, HPE is declining from schools and universities. Unfortunately, prevention is replaced by cure. The account reveals that HPE is a need to the nation but the great issue is its degrading position both in schools and universities.

Special knowledge, attitude and skills are required to be a competent teacher. TE prepares competent teachers. Teacher needs to be competent, confident and committed regarding teaching profession (Devi, 2014). Curriculum and physical facilities are not sufficient for quality education but teacher factor is vital (Varughese, 2005). In this study teachers accepted that they are not so enthusiastic, excited and updated in information technology and English language to take class

in English medium. Conventional types of pedagogies are applied in teaching-learning activities. Pedagogies need to be critical, student-centered and participatory. But, they expressed irregular, low number of students and their interests don't allow novel practice of pedagogies. Even practical activities are taught inside the classroom applying lecture methods. Quality of students depends on quality of teachers (Prasadappa, 2017). So, teachers need to be professional.

Likewise, students are also responsible for the decline. The number of students in the class is very low. Teachers cannot use full capacity because of the small number of students. The students' irregularity demands alternative or supplementary approach to education. Irregular students can be benefited and quality can be ensured if the mode of teaching learning is shifted into blended from only face to face mode. ICT should be integrated with teaching-learning process which makes it comfortable. Students mostly fail their examinations because of language related problems. They cannot understand the questions. The medium of teaching is Nepali language but the final examination questions are set in English. At present situation, most of the schools are in English medium, the students cannot teach in English medium. Even though they have certificates in their hands, they are not confident to apply for the job. So, the informants strongly suggested that teaching needs to be in the English medium to prepare competent teachers and orientation, trainings and research opportunities are needed frequently to be updated.

In school level curriculum, HPE is integrated at the basic level and optional at the secondary level (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2020). In B.Ed. HPE is integrated as a major subject and HE and PE are separated as minor subjects. The significance of minor subjects is not clearly described for further study and job opportunity. It has raised the issues like; what is the value of minor subjects? Do they get a chance for further study? Do they get a chance to apply for a job? So, major and minor both subjects need to be of equal value and weightage. Moreover, there is an argument among the experts about the integration and separation of its curriculum in B.Ed. Though HE and PE are interrelated and interdependent, they are different (Kemparaj, 2003). In master's level, HE and PE are separated and subject committees are also separate. Basically, curriculum is developed and revised as per the need of students and nation but the grievances are that curriculum is revised by experts. It needs to be developed on the basis of special needs of nation, competence, value and employability factors. On the basis of feedbacks of parents, teachers, students, alumni and international models it should be revised timely.

Naturally students choose job oriented subject. Though HPE is life skills based education and it is for preparation of life, because of the lack of job opportunities, students are demotivated towards it. There are not posts for HPE teachers in schools though it is an integrated and optional subject at school level. Instead of providing subject teachers, non HPE teachers are teaching. The job area of B.Ed. graduates is mainly schools and other educational institutions as teachers. TSC

does not announce the vacancies for the HPE teachers (TSC, 2023), which has become the sole cause of declining of the subject.

Conclusion and Implications

Teachers perceive HPE as a subject intricately tied to daily life, emphasizing life skills, practical application, and behavioral development. Despite its potential to foster healthy citizens, HPE lacks prioritization from relevant authorities. The decline of HPE is exacerbated by contributions from both teachers and students. Teachers demonstrate a lack of enthusiasm, dependence on conventional teaching methods, limited proficiency in ICT, and weak English language skills. These challenges are possibly interconnected with socio-political factors influencing pedagogical training and the integration of technology into teaching processes. Similarly, student dedication is lacking, reflected in irregular class attendance, reliance on market notes, and examination-focused learning. HPE's absence as a compulsory, standalone subject in school curricula, and its unstable status in B.Ed. programs whether integrated or separate further exacerbates its decline. The unclear value of HPE as a minor subject in terms of future academic pursuits and job prospects compounds the issue. Misalignment between TE curricula and those of schools and the TSC further complicates matters. Additionally, limited job creation and employability prospects for HPE graduates contribute to the subject's gradual erosion from both school-level education and TE programs. If this trajectory persists, it poses a significant crisis in health promotion and disease prevention efforts. This study, albeit limited to seven teachers from a single institution and utilizing a narrative research design, underscores the need for further research involving larger participant samples, multiple institutions, and varied research methodologies. Despite its limitations, the findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, curriculum designers, educators, and students, urging reconsideration of policies and perspectives regarding HPE.

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