Understanding Teachers' Psychological Well-Being for Sustainable Educational Development Under NEP 2020: A Qualitative Research

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Abstract:

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions an inclusive, equitable, and sustainable education system that prioritizes learner development through innovative pedagogies and skilled teaching personnel. However, the psychological well-being of teachers who are key agents in this transformation remains a critical yet underexplored dimension. This qualitative study examines the lived experiences, emotional challenges, and well-being needs of teachers in the context of contemporary educational reforms. Using semi-structured interviews with 12 teachers from higher education settings, the study identifies four major themes: emotional wellness in teaching, institutional pressures, coping mechanisms, and expectations for sustainable support systems. Findings highlight that teachers experience significant stress arising from workload, digital transition, student behavior issues, and lack of institutional recognition. Yet, resilience, peer collaboration, and personal coping strategies help them navigate challenges. The study concludes that ensuring teachers' psychological well-being is indispensable for the successful implementation of NEP 2020 and sustainable educational development. Recommendations include structured well-being programs, mental health support, and institutional reforms aligned with NEP's emphasis on equity, excellence, and sustainability.

Keywords: *Psychological well-being, NEP 2020, Teachers, Qualitative research, Sustainability, Emotional health, Education.*

Introduction:

India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a transformative shift toward an inclusive, holistic, and learner-centered education system that envisions equitable access, Technological integration, and competency based learning across all levels of education. Central to the policy is the recognition that quality education cannot be achieved merely through structural reforms, curriculum redesign, or digital expansion; it requires empowered, motivated, and psychologically healthy teachers who serve as the primary drivers of educational innovation. Psychological well-being, as conceptualized by Ryff (1989), encompasses emotional stability, resilience, autonomy, environmental mastery, meaningful relationships, and a sense of purpose dimensions that are deeply intertwined with teachers' ability to function effectively in dynamic and demanding educational contexts. In the rapidly changing post-pandemic environment, teachers in India have been experiencing unprecedented challenges: navigating online and hybrid teaching formats, adapting to new pedagogical expectations, managing heavy documentation burdens, addressing the diverse needs of learners,

and fulfilling institutional demands for innovation and accountability. These pressures have heightened emotional fatigue, stress, and role overload, thereby influencing not only teachers' personal well-being but also their professional identity, motivation, and instructional quality.

Although NEP 2020 underscores the importance of continuous professional development, competency enhancement, and teacher autonomy, the policy offers limited direct emphasis on psychological well-being an aspect that significantly shapes teachers' readiness to engage in instructional reforms. Teachers are now expected to demonstrate technological proficiency, embrace multidisciplinary teaching, conduct competency-based assessments, and integrate socio emotional learning strategies, all while maintaining a supportive classroom climate. Without adequate psychological support, these expanding responsibilities may lead to burnout, reduced creativity, and diminished engagement, creating potential barriers to sustainable educational development. Global literature consistently shows that teachers with compromised well-being are less able to innovate, manage classroom challenges effectively, or build strong learner relationships (Kyriacou, 2011; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Conversely, emotionally healthy teachers tend to exhibit higher resilience, greater professional commitment, and stronger capacity to adapt to educational transitions qualities essential for achieving NEP's long-term vision of quality, equity, and excellence.

In the Indian context, the post-pandemic shift toward digitalization and hyper connectivity has intensified teachers' vulnerabilities. While online platforms have expanded learning opportunities, they have also created digital stress, extended working hours, and blurred work-life boundaries for teachers. At the same time, limited institutional recognition, inadequate mental health support, and growing administrative responsibilities have contributed to emotional exhaustion. These issues highlight a critical gap: teachers' psychological experiences remain under-investigated, especially in the context of NEP- driven reforms. Existing research focuses largely on teacher preparedness, training, and technological competence, but significantly less attention is given to how teachers feel, cope, and navigate the emotional challenges that accompany policy implementation. Understanding these lived experiences is essential for creating sustainable support systems that align with NEP's emphasis on inclusive and humanistic education.

Given this backdrop, the present qualitative inquiry explores teachers' psychological well- being as a crucial dimension of educational sustainability under NEP 2020. By capturing the voices, emotions, and coping strategies of teachers across higher education and school settings, the study aims to illuminate the hidden emotional landscape underlying policy enactment. It seeks to understand how institutional pressures, personal beliefs, digital expectations, and professional identities intersect to shape teachers' well-being. The study argues that unless psychological well-being becomes an integral part of teacher support frameworks, the ambitious goals of NEP 2020 such as innovative pedagogy, skill-based learning, digital literacy, and learner-centered reforms may not be sustainably realized. Therefore, placing teachers' emotional and psychological health at the center of educational transformation is not merely supportive but essential for building resilient, future-ready institutions and achieving long-term educational development in India.

Review of Related Literature:

Psychological well-being has emerged as a central focus in contemporary educational research, particularly due to its strong influence on teachers' professional functioning, resilience, and adaptability to reforms. Ryff's (1989) multidimensional model conceptualizes psychological well-being through constructs such as autonomy, personal

Growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, positive relationships, and self-acceptance. These dimensions collectively highlight that well-being extends beyond the absence of stress and encompasses meaning, fulfilment, and emotional balance qualities essential for teachers navigating evolving educational landscapes. Seligman's (2011) PERMA framework further contributes to this discourse by emphasizing positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment as foundational elements of flourishing, offering a lens to understand teachers' emotional needs in demanding workplaces.

Internationally, teacher well-being has been explored within the context of occupational stress, burnout, and workplace demands. Kyriacou (2011) identifies teaching as an inherently stressful profession due to workload, classroom management challenges, limited autonomy, and high accountability pressures. Maslach and Leiter (2016) describe burnout among teachers as a multidimensional syndrome marked by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Research indicates that teachers experiencing prolonged stress often exhibit lowered motivation, diminished instructional quality, and decreased willingness to engage in innovative pedagogy. Conversely, teachers with higher well-being tend to demonstrate stronger classroom engagement, better student relationships, and greater professional commitment (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020).

Studies from Europe and the Asia-Pacific emphasize that rapid educational reforms, particularly digital transitions, have intensified emotional strain among educators. Increased documentation, continuous digital connectivity, and high parental and institutional expectations have contributed to feelings of overload and emotional fatigue (OECD, 2021). Research also suggests that supportive school environments, recognition, and opportunities for professional growth significantly enhance psychological well-being (Day & Gu, 2014). Peer collaboration, mentoring, and autonomy in instructional decision- making are repeatedly identified as protective factors that help teachers manage work- related stress.

In the Indian context, teacher well-being research has gained momentum, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic and the release of NEP 2020. Sudarshan (2021) emphasizes that

The policy requires teachers to become technologically competent, flexible, and multidisciplinary in their approach. However, these expectations often increase psychological burden, particularly when digital infrastructure or institutional support is inadequate. Recent studies by Sharma & Singh (2022) and Raina (2020) report that teachers in India frequently experience stress due to workload, administrative tasks, hybrid teaching responsibilities, and lack of institutional recognition. Teachers also cite digital burnout as a growing concern, with prolonged screen time, online assessments, and constant connectivity affecting emotional well-being.

The relationship between teacher well-being and student outcomes has also been well- established. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) argue that teachers' emotional states directly influence classroom climate, student behavior, and the quality of teacher-student interactions. A teacher with high psychological well-being is more likely to demonstrate patience, empathy, and effective classroom management, contributing to improved academic outcomes and positive student experiences. With NEP 2020 emphasizing holistic and socio-emotional learning, teacher well-being becomes an even more critical factor in ensuring that classrooms model the values of empathy, critical thinking, and emotional intelligence.

Despite growing interest, a significant gap remains in qualitative research that captures teachers' lived experiences of psychological well-being within the context of NEP 2020. Most existing studies rely on quantitative assessments or focus on general stress factors without deeply exploring how teachers interpret, cope with, and navigate the emotional demands of policy implementation. This highlights the need for phenomenological studies that foreground teachers' voices, emotional narratives, and contextual experiences.

Thus, the present study contributes to the existing body of literature by examining how teachers understand and experience psychological well-being amid ongoing educational reforms and digital transformation. It extends the discourse by linking teacher well-being directly with sustainability goals under NEP 2020, providing insights that can inform policy, institutional practices, and teacher support systems.

Rationale of the Study:

Teachers are expected to demonstrate creativity, emotional intelligence, technological competence, and continuous professional growth under NEP 2020. However, these expectations must align with supportive

institutional environments. Understanding teachers' psychological well-being is essential to ensure sustainable educational practices and skill-based curriculum reforms. This study explores teachers' inner experiences to illuminate systemic gaps and opportunities.

Objectives of the Study:

- To explore teachers' lived experiences related to psychological well-being in the context of NEP 2020.

- To identify emotional, professional, and institutional factors influencing their well- being.

Methodology:

The present study employed a qualitative, phenomenological research design to explore teachers' psychological well-being within the framework of NEP 2020. Phenomenology was chosen as it allows an in-depth understanding of teachers' lived experiences, emotional states, and subjective interpretations of institutional and policy expectations. A purposive sampling technique was used to select twelve teachers, including seven from higher education institutions and five from schools, representing diverse disciplines, experience levels, and work environments. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews lasting 20–30 minutes, conducted both online and offline depending on participant convenience. The interview guide included open-ended questions focusing on emotional challenges, professional stressors, coping strategies, digital transition experiences, institutional support, and perceived expectations arising from NEP 2020. All interviews were audio-recorded with prior consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw were strictly maintained throughout the study. The qualitative nature of the study enabled the researcher to capture rich emotional narratives and nuanced insights Into teachers' psychological well-being, providing a holistic understanding of how educators navigate the changing educational context shaped by NEP 2020.

Data Analysis:

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, which involved six systematic steps: familiarization with the transcripts, generating initial codes, identifying potential themes, reviewing and refining themes, naming and defining each theme, and synthesizing the findings into a coherent narrative. The analysis resulted in four major themes—Emotional Wellness and Professional Identity, Institutional Challenges, Coping Mechanisms and Resilience, and Need for Sustainable Support Systems under NEP 2020. Coding allowed the identification of recurring emotional patterns, professional stressors, and adaptive strategies across participants. Frequency checks were used for descriptive purposes to understand the most common stressors and preferred support mechanisms. The emerging themes highlight how workload, digital demands, and lack of recognition impair teachers' well-being, while resilience, peer support, and personal coping strategies help sustain their motivation. The following tables summarize the key institutional stressors and teachers' recommendations for NEP-aligned support systems.

Table 1: Key Institutional Stressors Identified by Teachers

Stressor	Frequency (out of 12)
Digital overload	10
Documentation burden	8
Student behavioural issues	7
Lack of recognition	6

Table 2: Teachers' Suggestions for NEP-Aligned Support System

Suggested Support	Description
Counselling Services	Regular mental health sessions
Reduced Workload	Balanced administrative responsibilities
Digital Training	Continuous EdTech skill development
Recognition Practices.	Appreciation for innovative teaching

Findings and Discussion:

The thematic analysis revealed four major themes that together illustrate the complex psychological landscape experienced by teachers under NEP 2020. The first theme, Emotional Wellness and Professional Identity, shows that teachers derive deep meaning, fulfilment, and a sense of purpose from their profession, yet simultaneously experience emotional fatigue due to increased responsibilities and evolving expectations. Many expressed that while teaching remains a source of joy, the emotional labour involved— ranging from managing diverse learners to adapting to new pedagogical practices—often becomes overwhelming. The second theme, Institutional Challenges and Pressures, highlights structural stressors such as administrative workload, documentation requirements, digital overload, and student behaviour issues, all of which significantly strain teachers' mental health. The frequency patterns indicate that digital overload (10/12) and documentation (8/12) were the most common concerns, suggesting a mismatch between NEP driven demands and institutional readiness. The third theme, Coping Mechanisms and Resilience, demonstrates that teachers adopt multiple strategies including emotional regulation, spiritual practices, maintaining work–life boundaries, and seeking peer support, which act as protective factors against stress and burnout. Finally, the fourth theme, Need for Sustainable Support Systems, reflects teachers' expectations for counselling services, reduced workload, structured digital training, and recognition mechanisms aligned with NEP 2020. These findings emphasise that while teachers show resilience and commitment, inadequate institutional support and digital transitions negatively impact their well-being; thus, addressing these gaps is essential for ensuring sustainable, high quality educational development envisioned by NEP 2020.

Conclusion:

The present qualitative inquiry demonstrates that teachers' psychological well-being is a foundational element for realizing the transformative goals of NEP 2020. Although teachers display strong professional commitment, resilience, and adaptability, their well-being is significantly challenged by increased workload, digital demands, administrative pressures, and limited institutional recognition. These stressors not only affect their emotional health but also influence their motivation, instructional quality, and ability to engage in innovative pedagogical practices envisioned under NEP 2020. The findings make it evident that sustainable educational development cannot be achieved unless teachers' emotional and psychological needs are acknowledged, prioritized, and effectively addressed. Strengthening institutional support through mental health services, workload rationalization, structured digital training, and recognition systems is essential for fostering teacher empowerment and long-term professional sustainability. By placing teachers' well- being at the centre of educational reforms, policymakers and institutions can create more humane, equitable, and future-ready learning environments that truly reflect the spirit of NEP 2020.

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