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## Role conflict and professional challenges of physical educators in school curriculum

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### Abstract

Within contemporary educational frameworks, physical education teachers increasingly perceive dual responsibilities as educators and coaches, creating layered and often conflicting professional expectations. The study examines the dynamics of teacher-coach role conflict experienced by secondary physical education teachers in Tripura, India, emphasizing its consequences for curriculum adherence, professional self-conception and pedagogical efficacy. A total of 20 physical education teachers of various secondary schools of West Tripura were participated in the study. Person by person a semi-structured interview with specific focus was conducted to collect the data. Thematic interpretation of the data identified four principal categories such as role overload compounded by temporal conflict (100%), the elevation of coaching duties over instructional imperatives (80%), insufficient administrative backing (70%) and adaptive strategies employed to mitigate occupational strain. However, 65% of physical educators used peer support and intrinsic motivation to cope, while 15% showed signs of burnout. Results indicate that practitioners frequently encounter conflicting schedules and indistinct role discriminations, particularly during inter-school competitions. Instructional quality is routinely sacrificed to coaching agendas, a tendency reinforced by institutional benchmarks that prioritize sporting success. In Tripura, these difficulties are intensified by inadequate facilities, a sense of professional marginality and the persistent marginalization of physical education. Despite these impairments, many educators demonstrate challenging personal dedication, leveraging collegial networks and intrinsic motivation to sustain professional obligations. The study reveals an urgent need for thoughtfully designed policy measures that clarify professional roles, enhance workplace environments and expand opportunities for on-going professional growth. Bolstering institutional support and explicitly recognizing the distinctive roles that physical educators play are essential to mitigating the sources of role conflict and to fostering the comprehensive development of all students.

**Keywords:** Role conflict, physical educators, teacher-coach duality, curriculum implementation, professional challenges

### Introduction

In contemporary educational settings marked by escalating demands, physical education (PE) teachers consistently undertake various roles. As PE teachers, they must assume the roles of pedagogues, trainers, coaches, advisors, disciplinarians, and occasionally, surrogate administrators. These responsibilities create a unique set of challenges that influence their professional identity, job satisfaction, and the quality of teaching.

Central to this pattern of difficulties is the phenomenon of role conflict, especially the tension between instructional and coaching obligations. Such conflict manifests when the normative expectations of one domain influence upon another, generating stress, operational inefficiency, and professional burnout (O'Connor & MacDonald, 2002) <sup>[7]</sup>. The historical acceptance of dual service, teaching physical education during school hours and coaching sports teams after school has been common in many secondary schools for a long time. Studies from the USA, Australia, Turkey, and Ireland demonstrate teacher-coach role conflict through various methodologies (Fakazlı & İlhan, 2021; Konukman *et al.*, 2010; O'Connor & MacDonald, 2002) <sup>[1, 5, 7]</sup>. However, one Australian case study with five teacher-coaches found that educators successfully managed role inconsistencies, creating positive work experiences rather than conflict (Johnson *et al.*, 2024) <sup>[4]</sup>.

The evidence suggests role conflict varies significantly by individual and contextual factors. Physical educators routinely contend with compressed schedules, physical fatigue, timetable clashes, and a persistent undervaluation of their extracurricular investments. These challenges become exacerbated when institutions neglect to furnish sufficient support or to delineate role

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expectations for teacher-coaches (Richards & Templin, 2012)<sup>[9]</sup>. As a result, practitioners find themselves overextended, attempting to fulfil both curricular and extracurricular obligations without institutional guidance.

The integration of a constructivist, student-centered curriculum designed to promote lifelong fitness and inclusive participation increases the professional responsibilities of physical educators (Zhu *et al.*, 2011)<sup>[11]</sup>. Although teachers are charged with meeting educational outcomes, they are simultaneously compelled to cultivate competitive squads and represent the school in interscholastic contexts (Iannucci & MacPhail, 2018)<sup>[2]</sup>. In school setting, coaching becomes dominant role for PE teacher. More interestingly, PE teacher supposed to be coaching expert of all games and sports. School authority supposed to privileges athletic achievement over pedagogical objectives. Such role misalignment can attenuate the educational integrity of physical education, relegating it to a subordinate position relative to the imperatives of athletic performance. This conflict transcends the logistics of time and schedules, implicating deeper, historically entrenched, and culturally embedded perceptions of physical education within the broader educational hierarchy (Iannucci & Richards, 2022)<sup>[3]</sup>.

Despite the significant potential for professional growth, there remains on-going scepticism about the bookish and pedagogical validity of PE. Within this marginalizing context, the effectiveness of a PE teacher is assessed based on the school's sports achievements. The skills of PE teachers are rarely examined in terms of classroom management or subject expertise. Consequently, PE faculty often find their pedagogical expertise eclipsed by their athletic personality, undermining the coherence of their professional development and contributing to pronounced ambivalence regarding their dual occupational identity. Dislocated vision of practice and institutional marginalization converge to undermine self-efficacy, leading some educators to report diminished satisfaction when negotiating their overlapping roles (Sakallı & Şenel, 2025)<sup>[10]</sup>. Nonetheless, a subset of practitioners negotiates the tension with relative success, a condition attributed to specific personal dispositions intersecting with enabling ecological variables that include collegial networks, administrative advocacy, and a supportive institutional ethos (O'Connor & MacDonald, 2002)<sup>[7]</sup>. However, the prevailing discourse continues to echo a clarion call for macro-level reform, advocating for structural adjustments that include distinct role delineation, pedagogically circumscribed teaching loads, concerted efforts to equilibrate work-life demands, and evidence-based policy frameworks.

Informed by this literature, the present study investigates the role conflict experienced by physical educators. The conflict has significant consequences for curricular integrity, pedagogical efficacy, and the formation of professional identity. Through a critical review of applicable scholarship accompanied by qualitative field observations and a thematic coding of interview data, this investigation seeks to illuminate the layered conflicts and pressures confronting PE instructors within contemporary Tripura school contexts. The analysis subsequently advances actionable strategies for policy makers, school leaders, and teacher educators, enabling physical educators to harmonise their instructional and quasi-administrative responsibilities, thereby promoting curricular efficacy alongside career satisfaction.

## Materials and Methods

**Study design:** A qualitative observational methodology was employed to examine the lived experiences of PE instructors

contending with role strain and systemic pressures. The design privileges to collect participant voice through semi-structured interviews and focused observations.

**Participants:** The study comprised twenty physical education teachers (14 male, 6 female) purposively recruited from twenty secondary schools situated across semi-urban and rural locales in West Tripura, India. All participants were currently responsible for delivering the physical education curriculum in addition to coaching students in competitive extracurricular contexts, thereby inhabiting the dual and frequently conflicting roles that this study interrogates. Only the teachers who completed at least three years of teaching and coaching experience within the school system were selected for the study.

**Data collection:** A qualitative research framework was employed to investigate the role conflict and professional challenges faced by physical education teachers in school contexts. Data were gathered through two complementary techniques: systematic non-participant observations and semi-structured interviews. Over a two-month interval, the researchers conducted non-participant observations across a set of secondary schools, attending PE classes, coaching sessions, and relevant staff meetings. Field notes were meticulously recorded to capture temporally-conflicted duties, overlapping responsibilities, overt signs of stress, scheduling obstacles, discrepancies in resource distribution, and the character of interactions with students and administrators. These observations rendered rich contextual input concerning the practical circumstances teachers encountered daily. Following the observations, semi-structured interviews were completed with the same teachers, each lasting 25 to 30 minutes. An interview guide was employed to elicit information about role expectations, workload distribution, the prioritization of teaching versus coaching, availability of institutional backing, and coping tactics for reconciling dual duties. All interviews were audio-recorded, with participants' informed consent, and transcribed verbatim to safeguard precision. The combined use of observations and interviews facilitated a layered understanding of overt conduct and subjective interpretation, thereby augmenting the validity and richness of the findings.

**Delimitation:** The scope of the study was deliberately confined to twenty secondary physical education teachers from the West Tripura District, all of whom undertook combined teaching and coaching roles. Exclusively qualitative methods were utilized; quantitative instruments were not employed. Only secondary-level educators were studied; experiences of primary physical education teachers were not included. Data collection was conducted over a two-month timeframe, which restricts the capacity to observe longitudinal or seasonally contingent developments of role conflict.

**Limitation:** As the inquiry is qualitative and specific to Tripura's educational context, its results should not be extrapolated statistically. Rather, they are intended to furnish a situated understanding of role conflict and the specific challenges encountered by these practitioners. Future inquiries would achieve greater robustness through mixed-

methods frameworks that enrol larger samples distributed across varied geographic contexts.

**Ethical considerations:** Approval for the research design was granted by the departmental research advisory board of ICAFI University Tripura. Participants were briefed on the study's objectives and reassured that their identities would remain private and data confidential. Consents were acquired in written form, and individuals retained the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any penalty.

**Statistical analysis:** Thematic data analysis was conducted in accordance with Braun and Clarke. Interviews and observation memos were coded inductively through manual processes. Cross-verification of observational data with interview responses was employed to bolster the study's credibility and reliability. To further augment trustworthiness, concise summaries of the analytic outcomes were circulated to a select group of participants, permitting them to verify the accuracy of interpretations and to provide clarifying feedback.

## Results

The findings from both observational data and semi-structured interviews revealed recurring patterns of role conflict and professional challenges among PE teachers.

**Table 1:** Summary of major findings

Theme	Key Findings	Frequency (%)
Role Overloads and Time Conflict	Difficulty managing dual duties; coaching impacts lesson preparation	100%
Prioritization of Coaching Duties	Coaching prioritized during tournaments; teaching side lined	80%
Lack of Administrative Support	Inadequate resources and recognition from management	70%
Coping Strategies and Professional Identity	Peer support, intrinsic motivation, stress but meaningful impact	65% (positive), 15% (burnout risk)

**Role overloads and time conflict:** All participants reported experiencing difficulty in balancing instructional and coaching duties. Teachers indicated they were frequently required to prepare lesson plans, conduct physical education classes, and simultaneously manage sports team practices and competitions. "Most of my evenings are spent coaching school teams, which leave me with little time for preparing PE theory lessons. It's like having two full-time jobs." This observation confirmed that coaching responsibilities often led to irregular or hurried academic PE sessions. Time conflict was most evident during tournament seasons and school events.

**Prioritization of coaching duties over teaching:** Approximately 80% of the participants admitted that during sports events, coaching took precedence over academic teaching. This shift was often supported by school management due to the emphasis on winning trophies and gaining recognition. "Teaching theory is often pushed aside when we have to prepare students for state-level matches. The management wants results in sports more than classroom outcomes." This observation data showed multiple instances where PE periods were converted into team practice sessions, affecting regular curriculum delivery.

**Lack of administrative support and recognition:** Nearly 70% of teachers felt undervalued by school leadership, especially in relation to other subject teachers. There were complaints about insufficient resources (like equipment and space), lack of substitutes when teachers were away for tournaments, and limited recognition in school meetings or decision-making processes. "Unlike math or science teachers, we are rarely asked for our input. We are seen as second-tier staff even though we spend more time with students outside regular hours." This perceived neglect contributed to feelings of professional marginalization and decreased morale.

**Coping Strategies and Identity Management:** Despite these challenges, many participants developed informal coping strategies such as peer support networks, scheduling adjustments, and aligning personal passion with their dual roles. Some teachers emphasized the intrinsic rewards of mentoring student-athletes and building long-term relationships with students. "It's exhausting, but watching a student grow in both skills and confidence makes it worthwhile." However, a small portion (15%) reported considering a job shift due to burnout and a lack of career progression opportunities.

## Discussion

This study identifies the pervasive and pressing professional difficulties that physical educators in Tripura encounter as a result of competing role demands, especially the need to juggle instructional duties with the expectations of coaching. While the specific circumstances in Tripura, including regional, cultural, and administrative influences, inevitably colour these experiences, the pattern of difficulty is nevertheless globally observable, as documented in earlier research (Konukman *et al.*, 2010; Richards, 2015) [5, 8]. The Tripura case thus serves as a particular manifestation of a broader, transnational educational issue.

International literature identifies role overload, time conflict, and lack of recognition as persistent challenges for physical educators (Richards & Templin, 2012; Sakallı & Şenel, 2025) [10, 9]. Our study in Tripura corroborates this body of work. PE teachers in the state routinely extend their obligations beyond scheduled lessons, encompassing coaching duties, event coordination, and the supervision of extracurricular activities. The resultant merging of pedagogical and coaching functions produces the well-documented teacher-coach role conflict. In Tripura, these tensions are intensified by systemic deficiencies, including insufficient staffing, scarce resources, and underdeveloped sports infrastructure, particularly in rural and tribal schools. Whereas staff in metropolitan districts may rely on specialist coaching assistants, PE teachers in Tripura seldom have colleagues to distribute the dual burdens of physical education and competitive sports training. Administrative endorsement is also notably sporadic. Respondents indicated scarce acknowledgment from school authorities and exclusion from curriculum design and broader strategic conversations (Zhu *et al.*, 2011) [11]. This marginal positioning corroborates national analyses, yet in Tripura the issue is exacerbated by the longstanding perception of physical education as ancillary to the academic core, thereby settling into a category regarded as extracurricular, if not simply recreational.

A salient local dimension shaping physical education in Tripura arises from distinctly valued cultural and communal norms. The state's diverse societies widely prize bodily health and traditional sports, yet systematic physical education remains comparatively embryonic. Educators take



legitimate pride in fostering overall fitness and coaching regional specialties such as thang-ta and dami, yet they observe an enduring absence of formal curricular embedding for these culturally salient activities. However, National Curriculum Framework for school education (2023), promotes the integration of indigenous games with Physical education curriculum to reinforce cultural identity and enhance student participation (NCF 2023, 2023). The geographic dispersion creates conditions of professional isolation. Many educators are stationed in remote localities where infrastructural barriers curtail mobility. This severely limits access to in-service training, workshops, and professional peer networks. Their urban colleagues may draw upon a wider range of continual professional development and collaborative resource.

Under these circumstances, the educators cultivate adaptive routines deployed to reinforce their professional identity and collective well-being in the face of systemic marginalisation. Many PE teachers involved their blended responsibilities as a chance to nurture the whole child, believing that structured physical activity could encourage discipline, promote health and foster a sense of belonging, particularly for those from the poorest households. Contrasted with other regions of India, PE teachers in Tripura endure heavier teaching and coaching loads and greater professional solitude. On-going expansion of education in the state's remote tribal areas therefore needs to be matched by policies that explicitly enhance the status, training and acknowledgement of PE teachers.

This study highlights an immediate necessity for systemic restructuring to mitigate the role conflict experienced by physical education instructors. Policymakers ought to contemplate the deployment of personnel exclusively tasked with either coaching or teaching responsibilities to alleviate cumulative workload pressures. In jurisdictions such as Tripura, where the scarcity of resources is markedly acute, concerted investment is imperative across teacher education, infrastructural development and coherent curriculum scaffolding. Educational authorities must elevate physical education to the status of a foundational subject by securing its strategic placement within the timetable and by allotting sufficient periods for lesson planning and reflective practice. The formulation of a supportive policy framework that transparently recognises the distinctive exigencies of PE specialists will contribute to improved pedagogical quality, teacher retention and the holistic advancement of student learning.

## Conclusion

The study concluded that physical education teachers encounter pronounced role conflict and professional strain. In Tripura, these tensions are magnified by insufficient infrastructure, chronic shortfalls in staffing and scant institutional back-up. Although role conflict among PE teachers is recognized worldwide, its particular manifestation in Tripura is influenced by the state's geographic marginality, distinct cultural factors and a pronounced scarcity of sustained professional development. Despite significant obstacles, the educators in the study demonstrate remarkable resilience and civic involvement to foster students' overall well-being and physical literacy. A policy for establishing a coherent professional identity for PE teachers is likely to enhance job satisfaction. This increase in satisfaction will facilitate the pedagogical implementation of physical education programs in the broader school curriculum.

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