

# Mismatch between Reality and the NCFSE 2023: Focusing on the Pedagogical Challenges Faced by the Foundational and Preparatory Stage Teachers

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**Abstract:** Teacher education at the foundational and preparatory stages plays a crucial role in shaping early childhood learning experiences. The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023 provides a structured pedagogical approach to address challenges in these stages. However, despite these policy frameworks, teachers in Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs) continue to face numerous pedagogical challenges. This paper aims to explore and analyze the pedagogical challenges encountered by KV teachers in foundational and preparatory stage classrooms and compare them with the challenges addressed in NCFSE 2023. Using qualitative research methods, data were collected through structured online interviews with 10 KV teachers from different campuses. This paper investigated various challenges, including classroom management, language barriers, a lack of inclusive education strategies, insufficient infrastructure, limited parental involvement, and difficulties in integrating technology into teaching practices. The findings highlight the gap between policy recommendations and ground-level implementation. Based on these insights, the study suggests recommendations such as specialized teacher training, recruitment of special educators, improved infrastructure, enhanced parental engagement, and policy-driven interventions to bridge the gap between policy frameworks and real-world classroom experiences. The study concludes that addressing these challenges through targeted reforms can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment, fostering holistic student development at the foundational and preparatory stages.

**Keywords:** Foundational stage teachers; NCFSE 2023; NEP 2020; Pedagogical challenges; Preparatory stage teachers

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## 1. Introduction

Teacher education at the foundational and preparatory stages plays a pivotal role in shaping early learning experiences. Education serves as the cornerstone of societal development, with teachers playing a pivotal role

in shaping young minds. At the foundational and preparatory stages, teachers lay the groundwork for a child's cognitive, emotional, and social growth. However, despite the importance of these early years, teachers often encounter significant pedagogical challenges that hinder effective teaching and learning. These challenges range from curriculum restrictions and infrastructure, resource limitations to classroom management difficulties and varied educational requirements of students <sup>[1]</sup>.

The NCFSE 2023 offers a comprehensive pedagogical blueprint that emphasizes innovation, inclusivity, quality, and responsiveness to diverse learner needs <sup>[1]</sup>. However, discrepancies often exist between such policy frameworks and the realities on the ground <sup>[2]</sup>. This study examines the pedagogical challenges addressed in NCFSE 2023 and the pedagogical challenges faced by the Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs) teachers in real classroom settings. Understanding the pedagogical challenges faced by teachers at these critical stages is essential for improving teaching methodologies and strategies, fostering student engagement, and enhancing overall learning outcomes. The evolving landscape of education, influenced by technological advancements <sup>[3]</sup>, changing pedagogical strategies, and diverse classroom dynamics, further complicates the role of teachers. Addressing these challenges requires a thorough investigation into the key difficulties experienced by educators and the factors contributing to them.

This study aims to identify and analyze the primary pedagogical challenges encountered by teachers at the foundational and preparatory stages. By exploring these issues, the research seeks to provide insights that can reform policy recommendations, teacher training programs, and classroom interventions. The findings of this study will contribute to the ongoing discourse on improving foundational and preparatory stage education, ultimately benefiting both teachers and learners.

## 2. Methodology

This paper adopted a qualitative research methodology. For the data collection technique, a structured online interview was conducted via Google Meet and WhatsApp video call. Other data have been collected from the policy documents (NCFSE 2023 and NCFFS 2022) <sup>[4,5]</sup>. A structured schedule was developed and used individually online. The tool consists of:

- (1) How do teachers manage classrooms with both children with special needs (CWSN) and gifted students?
- (2) How does classroom overcrowding affect student learning outcomes?
- (3) What are the challenges faced by teachers in teaching children with special needs (CWSN) without special educators?
- (4) How does the language difference between teachers and students impact classroom communication and the learning process?
- (5) What are the major difficulties in implementing experiential learning in foundational stage classrooms?
- (6) What challenges do teachers face in conducting play-based learning activities for young students?
- (7) How does the lack of content in textbooks affect the reading interest of young learners?
- (8) How does the complexity of language in foundational and preparatory stage books affect student comprehension?
- (9) What are the communication challenges?
- (10) What difficulties do teachers and students face in adapting to new educational technologies in

schools?

- (11) How does parental involvement influence student academic progress?
- (12) In what ways does a student's family background affect their academic performance?
- (13) What are the common behavioral challenges faced by teachers in preparatory stage classrooms?
- (14) How does the teacher care for the students?
- (15) What are the major infrastructure challenges faced by students and how do they impact learning?
- (16) How does a high teacher-student ratio affect the learning approaches?

### 3. Participants

The participants were informed about the purpose of this study, and they were willing to participate in the interview for this study. Some participants responded through WhatsApp messages for their convenience (due to the Public broad exam period). 10 KV (PM SHRI Kendriya Vidyalaya) foundational and preparatory stage teachers participated and encountered their pedagogical challenges. Three teachers were from Karaikal campus, one teacher from Kanpur campus, and others from Puducherry, Kalapet campus.

### 4. Objectives

The purpose of this study was to find out the mismatch between reality and the NCFSE 2023 on focusing on the pedagogical challenges faced by the foundational and preparatory stage teachers.

### 5. Pedagogical challenges addressed in NCFSE 2023 for foundational and preparatory stage teachers

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023 highlights the importance of building a solid educational foundation by tackling key pedagogical challenges encountered by teachers in the foundational stage (ages 3–8) and preparatory stage (ages 8–11) <sup>[5]</sup>.

- (1) Teachers often struggle with designing and implementing age-appropriate teaching methodologies. NCFSE 2023 provides a framework that aligns instructional strategies with children's cognitive, emotional, and social development, ensuring learning remains engaging and effective.
- (2) A major challenge in foundational education is supporting language development in a multilingual classroom environment. The framework encourages the use of the mother tongue or local language as the medium of instruction at this stage, allowing children to develop literacy skills naturally before transitioning to additional languages.
- (3) Many teachers face difficulties in integrating play-based learning with academic content. NCFSE 2023 encourages hands-on learning through storytelling, music, games, and interactive activities, creating an engaging and enjoyable educational experience for children.
- (4) A lot of teachers follow traditional assessment at the foundational stage. Traditional assessment methods often fail to capture the diverse learning needs of young children. The framework suggests a shift from rote memorization to formative assessments through observation, portfolios, and performance-based evaluations, thus fostering a more comprehensive understanding of a child's progress.
- (5) Addressing the diverse learning needs of children, including those with special educational requirements, remains a challenge for teachers. NCFSE 2023 advocates for inclusive education by

equipping teachers with strategies for differentiated instruction, ensuring that all children receive equal learning opportunities. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive classroom environment that fosters collaboration, empathy, and individualized attention to cater to varying learning styles and abilities.

- (6) A lack of adequate training often hinders teachers' ability to implement innovative pedagogical approaches. The framework highlights the importance of continuous professional development, encouraging workshops, peer-learning opportunities, innovative pedagogical strategies, and digital resources to enhance teachers' skills.
- (7) With rapid advancements in technology, integrating digital tools, digital literacy into the classroom remains a challenge, especially in the foundational and preparatory stage. NCFSE 2023 supports the use of digital learning resources while maintaining a balance between screen time and hands-on experiences, ensuring technology enhances rather than replaces interactive learning.
- (8) Many teachers struggle with ensuring parental participation in the learning process. The framework underscores the role of parents and the community in a child's education, recommending regular parent-teacher interactions, workshops, awareness programs, and collaborative learning initiatives.

## **6. Pedagogical challenges faced by the KV foundational and preparatory stage teachers**

**Balancing diverse learning needs:** Managing a classroom with both children with special needs (CWSN) and gifted students poses a significant challenge for KV teachers. Differentiated instruction is essential to cater to the diverse learning paces and abilities, requiring teachers to balance personalized attention and curriculum standards effectively. There should be proper training for foundational stage teachers to handle differentiated instruction <sup>[6]</sup>.

**Overcrowded classrooms impact learning:** Student strength is the biggest challenge. Overcrowded classrooms make it difficult for teachers to provide individual attention, assess student progress, and implement interactive teaching methodologies. This problem impacts the overall learning environment at the foundational stage, leading to a lack of engagement and participation among students.

**Lack of special educators for CWSN:** Children with special needs (CWSN) require specialized teaching approaches and trained professionals. The absence of dedicated special educators in many KV schools makes it challenging for regular teachers to effectively address the unique learning needs of these students <sup>[6]</sup>.

**Language barriers in teaching:** KV teachers' mother tongue is different from the students. Language barriers between teachers and students create communication gaps, affecting comprehension and classroom interaction and involvement. When the teacher's mother tongue differs from the students' native language, it becomes difficult to facilitate meaningful discussions and enhance linguistic, communication skills effectively <sup>[7]</sup>.

**Challenges in implementing experiential learning:** Experiential learning is difficult in the foundational stage. While NCFSE 2023 promotes experiential learning, implementing hands-on activities and real-life experiences in the foundational stage can be challenging due to limited resources, large class sizes, and time constraints.

**Difficulties in play-based learning implementation:** Play-based learning, essential for early education, requires clear and simple instructions. However, many KV teachers struggle to effectively communicate play-based learning activities in both foundational and preparatory stages due to a language barrier, leading to



confusion among students.

**Lack of visually engaging textbooks:** Foundational stage books are not colorful. The lack of visually appealing and engaging textbooks makes it difficult for young learners to stay interested in reading. Additionally, accessibility issues, such as insufficient copies, inappropriate book placement, or inappropriate content, further hinder students' learning experiences.

**Complex language in educational content:** Most of the teachers acknowledged that the language used in foundational and preparatory stage books is beyond the level of the students. Much educational contents are written in a language that surpasses the comprehension level of students, making it difficult for them to grasp concepts effectively. This problem leads to dependency on teachers and reduces independent learning opportunities among students <sup>[7]</sup>.

**Communication gaps:** Effective communication between teachers, students, and parents is crucial for a smooth and proper educational process. However, communication gaps often exist due to language barriers, cultural differences, or a lack of parental involvement, impacting students' academic progress <sup>[8]</sup>.

**Adapting to technological advancements:** Technological up-gradation by teachers and students to the current scenario is a difficult task. Keeping up with the latest educational technology and content is a challenge for both teachers and students in KV schools. Limited digital literacy, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of proper training prevent the seamless integration of technology into the learning process. Nowadays, attendance, assessment marks, daily lesson plans, and activities should be uploaded to an official portal, which poses a big challenge for teachers after their teaching hours <sup>[3]</sup>.

**Limited parental involvement in student progress:** Teachers face difficulties in monitoring every student's progress without parental involvement. The lack of active parental supervision at home negatively impacts children's academic performance and behavioral development. However, many KV teachers report that parents are either too busy or unaware of their role in supporting their child's education, leading to learning gaps. Student monitoring should be done by parents as well <sup>[1]</sup>.

**Influence of family background:** Family background largely affects the students' learning process. A child's home environment significantly influences their academic process. Socio-economic factors, parental education levels, and home support play crucial roles in shaping a student's learning abilities and overall performance at the foundational and preparatory stage.

**Behavioral management:** Teachers were sometimes unable to control students' behavior in the preparatory stage. They often struggle with managing student discipline, especially in large classrooms. Behavioral issues, including inattentiveness, over naughtiness, aggression, and lack of interest, pose challenges in maintaining a supportive learning environment <sup>[2]</sup>.

**Lack of personalized attention:** In some cases, students feel neglected due to a lack of teacher engagement, care, and personalized attention. Overburdened teachers with administrative responsibilities often struggle to focus on the emotional and academic needs of every child. It largely affects children with special needs.

**Infrastructural limitations:** Many KV schools face infrastructure challenges, including inadequate classrooms, a lack of proper seating arrangements, no proper funding, and insufficient learning materials. Poor infrastructure directly affects the quality of education, student engagement, and the learning process.

**Teacher-student ratio:** Sometimes, a high teacher-student ratio makes it difficult to implement student-centered learning approaches in the preparatory stage. Insufficient teachers in comparison to student strength result in ineffective classroom management and reduced learning outcomes <sup>[9]</sup>.

These are the pedagogical challenges faced by the KV teachers. Though the NCFSE 2023 recommended

the stage-specific and subject-specific pedagogical strategies that are not being achieved by the teachers in reality.

## 7. Recommendations

Specialized training should be provided for teachers to handle diverse student needs, including CWSN and gifted students, ensuring effective differentiated instruction in the classroom. Schools should work towards reducing student-teacher ratios to improve individual attention and learning outcomes. Dedicated special educators should be recruited to support CWSN and assistant teachers in implementing inclusive education strategies foundational and preparatory stage. Language training should be given to teachers <sup>[7]</sup>. Conduct language enhancement programs for teachers to bridge communication gaps between them and students. NCFSE 2023 has provided a lot of pedagogical strategies for language education, which should be implemented strictly in all schools <sup>[6]</sup>. Schools should improve infrastructure, ensure the availability of colorful and engaging books, and provide adequate learning materials and content <sup>[1]</sup>. Schools should adopt innovative teaching methods and strategies, including experiential learning, within the constraints of classroom size and resources. NCFSE 2023 has suggested various teaching strategies for the foundational and preparatory stages, which should be followed regularly in all schools.

There should be regular workshops and training sessions on digital tools and online learning platforms to support teachers in adapting to technological advancements. School administration should organize regular awareness programs to emphasize the importance of parental involvement in students' education at the foundational and preparatory stages <sup>[1]</sup>. Policymakers, school authorities and educators, and the community should work collaboratively to provide a proper foundation in education, career guidance, and mentoring for students. Every school should introduce behavioral management workshops to equip teachers with skills to handle discipline issues effectively <sup>[2]</sup>. Special workshops should be given to foundational teachers on hospitality and caring towards children.

## 8. Conclusion

This study clearly provides the pedagogical challenges addressed in NCFSE 2023 and the pedagogical challenges faced by the KV teachers at the foundational and preparatory stages. NCFSE 2023 provides a comprehensive roadmap for overcoming key pedagogical challenges by suggesting effective pedagogical strategies at the foundational and preparatory stages. This study found that there is a lack of effective implementation of such pedagogical strategies in schools in reality. The challenges faced by KV teachers highlight the urgent need for reforms in foundational and preparatory stage education. Addressing these issues through teacher training, infrastructural improvements, curriculum adaptations, and increased parental involvement will significantly enhance the quality of education. By implementing these recommendations, not only KV schools but every school can create a more inclusive, engaging, and student-friendly learning environment, ensuring holistic development for every child.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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