



## Policies on physical education in Vietnamese higher education: A quantitative survey

DAU Le Van

Faculty of Basic Sciences, Ho Chi Minh City Campus, University of Transport and Communications, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

### Abstract

This scientific article focuses on analyzing policies on physical education (PE) in Vietnamese higher education, from the perspective of educational management and approaching the public policy system. Based on an overview and classification of current policies, the article conducts a mixed research with qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews with 9 experts) and quantitative methods (survey of 117 students, teachers, and managers). The results show three main issues: (i) awareness and assessment of the role of PE; (ii) policy synchronization and implementation; (3) policy space and innovation proposals. Based on the data analyzed and compared with international studies, the article proposes policy implications and reform recommendations to improve the quality and effectiveness of physical education in the context of digital transformation and innovation in higher education today.

**Keywords:** Policy, physical education, higher education, quantitative survey, vietnam

### Introduction

In the context of globalization and strong digital transformation today, higher education not only aims to train high-quality human resources in professional knowledge but also must ensure comprehensive physical and mental development for students. Physical education, as a component of the university training program, plays an important role in improving health, training physical strength, developing personality, and at the same time contributing to forming a healthy and active lifestyle for the young generation. In Vietnam, physical education is one of the compulsory contents in the university training program according to the provisions of the Law on Education and sub-law documents. However, the implementation and enforcement of policies related to physical education still have many shortcomings, from policy awareness to implementation mechanisms and resource assurance.

According to statistics from the Ministry of Education and Training (2022) <sup>[10]</sup>, the rate of students regularly participating in sports activities in universities has not met expectations. In many cases, physical education is considered a secondary subject, studied to qualify for graduation instead of an important content to develop physical capacity. In addition, the policy on physical education at the university level has not really been recognized as a strategic part of comprehensive educational development.

In the world, many countries have built national strategies on physical development and integrated physical education into sustainable educational development policies. For example, Japan, Korea, and Finland all have comprehensive physical education programs, linking formal teaching and extracurricular activities, and at the same time have mechanisms to invest in facilities and develop a team of physical education teachers professionally. In Vietnam, the current policy system related to physical education in higher education includes documents such as: Law on Education 2019; Law on Physical Education and Sports amended 2018; Decision No. 1076/QD-TTg approving the overall

project on physical development and stature of Vietnamese people; Decision No. 53/2008/QĐ-BGDĐT promulgating the compulsory physical education program in non-specialized schools; and related circulars and instructions.

However, these documents are still scattered, unsystematic and there is no specific national policy dedicated to physical education in higher education. This leads to uneven implementation among schools, a lack of effective assessment mechanisms, and failure to mobilize social resources in physical development for students.

Based on this reality, the paper raises three main research questions: What are the perceptions and assessments of stakeholders (students, lecturers, managers) on the role of physical education in higher education today? What are the strengths, weaknesses and challenges of the current policy on physical education in higher education in terms of organization and implementation? What policy orientations and reforms should be proposed to improve the effectiveness of physical education in Vietnamese universities in the context of digital transformation and comprehensive educational innovation?

From the above three questions, the paper aims to identify policy gaps, assess the implementation status and propose some appropriate reform implications. The obtained results will contribute theoretically to educational policy research and have practical value for training institutions, policy makers and higher education management agencies.

### Research Methods

To clarify the research questions, the paper uses mixed methods to combine the depth of qualitative analysis and the breadth of quantitative data. The integration of the two methods helps to objectively reflect the perception, implementation status and policy recommendations related to physical education in higher education.

#### 1. Qualitative research: Semi-structured interviews

The qualitative research part was conducted through semi-structured interviews with 9 participants including: 03

lecturers in charge of teaching physical education at universities (coded: GV1 - GV3); 03 education managers at training departments, student affairs departments (coded: QL1 - QL3); 03 experts in research or development of physical education policies at the ministerial or departmental level (coded: CM1 - CM3).

The interviews lasted an average of 35–50 minutes, were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed inductively to identify key themes related to: (1) the perceived role of physical education in universities, (2) the relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency of current policies, (3) barriers and recommendations for policy reform.

Interview data were coded into topic groups using NVivo 12 software to ensure consistency and objectivity in the processing.

**2. Questionnaire survey**

The survey was conducted on 117 people, including students, lecturers and managers working or studying at 5 large public universities representing the three regions of North, Central and South. The objective of the survey was to measure the level of assessment and awareness of current physical education policies.

The survey consists of 18 items, divided into three content groups: Perception and assessment of the role of physical education (6 items); Relevance and implementation of

current policies (6 items); Recommendations and space for innovative policies (6 items).

A 5-point Likert scale was used (1 = Completely disagree; 5 = Completely agree). Data were processed using SPSS 25 software with descriptive statistical techniques (frequency, percentage, mean) and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to test reliability and content grouping.

**3. Quality control and research ethics**

The survey and interview process was preliminarily tested at a unit to adjust the language and format of the tool. All participants were guaranteed anonymity, voluntary consent and the right to withdraw at any time.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative helps the article not only capture the general cognitive trends but also deeply analyze professional and policy perspectives, thereby proposing feasible reform proposals that are suitable for the practical context of Vietnamese higher education.

**Research Results**

**1. Perception and assessment of the role of physical education in higher education**

The survey results from 117 participants (including students, lecturers and administrators) show that the perception and assessment of the role of physical education in the university environment have many positive signals. However, inconsistencies still exist between target groups.

**Table 1:** Perception and assessment of the role of physical education in higher education (n = 117)

Content survey	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
Physical education helps improve students' health and fitness	0	2	9	41	65	4.43
Physical education contributes to the development of soft skills, especially team spirit and personal discipline	1	4	13	48	51	4.24
Physical education has a positive impact on students' learning efficiency and morale	1	6	17	51	42	4.09
The role of physical education in the training program is not properly recognized	4	9	35	46	23	3.57
Physical education needs to be integrated as a strategic part of the comprehensive development of students	0	2	12	39	64	4.41
Students today still underestimate the importance of physical education	3	6	31	45	32	3.78

The results show that the majority of survey participants strongly agree that physical education plays an important role in developing physical fitness (Mean = 4.43) and soft skills such as discipline and team spirit (Mean = 4.24). About 92.30% of respondents believe that physical education plays a positive role in health and learning. However, the question about physical education “not being properly recognized” also resulted in a fairly high average score (3.57), indicating that there is still a gap in awareness, especially between managers and students.

The data also reflect a common reality: students still do not really take the role of this subject seriously (Mean = 3.78),

which requires a communication policy and innovation in teaching methods to raise comprehensive awareness.

**2. Current status of policies and implementation**

Analysis from survey results and expert interviews shows a series of prominent issues in the promulgation, implementation and evaluation of physical education policies at the university level. Below are the data collected from the survey of 117 participants.

**Table 2:** Assessment of current status of policies and implementation of physical education in higher education (n = 117)

Content survey	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
Current physical education policies lack consistency among management levels	2	7	24	43	41	3.95
The implementation of physical education is still formal and has not been seriously invested	1	6	25	47	38	3.99
Physical education facilities and equipment are still lacking and degraded	0	5	18	42	52	4.20
There is no mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of physical education implementation at the school level	3	9	26	44	35	3.84
Physical education lecturers lack the conditions to update and improve modern expertise	2	6	22	49	38	4.00
Physical education has not been effectively integrated into the comprehensive university education development strategy	1	5	28	48	35	3.92

The survey results show systemic limitations in the implementation of current physical education policies. The investment target for physical education facilities is a clear

weakness, with the highest average score (4.20) and nearly 80% of participants choosing a high level of agreement. This is completely consistent with expert interviews (CM1,

GV2), when many lecturers said they do not have enough playgrounds and minimal training equipment to organize effective activities. In addition, about 74.35% of survey participants said that physical education policies lack consistency between management levels. The situation of "prescribing above, implementing below in form" is still common, especially in schools without a specialized physical education department. The policy evaluation mechanism is also not clearly defined; there are no specific criteria for output, quality indicators, or physical standards in student output standards. This is a shortcoming that causes physical education to remain in a "supportive" position in the training system.

These analyses show the urgent need to develop a set of

synchronous policies with a clear implementation roadmap and especially the need for periodic monitoring and evaluation at the training institution level.

### 3. Policy space and innovation proposals

From the quantitative and qualitative data collected, the study clearly shows that there is an untapped policy space for innovation in physical education at the university level. The reform proposals received from experts and learners are summarized and quantified as follows

**Table 3:** Level of consensus with proposals for innovation in physical education policy in higher education (n = 117)

Content survey	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
It is necessary to issue a separate policy on physical education at the university level in the direction of modern integration	0	3	10	38	66	4.42
Physical education should be integrated with health education, fitness, and life skills in the university program	0	1	12	36	68	4.45
Physical education policy should be linked to the digital transformation strategy and the application of technology in physical fitness assessment	1	2	11	39	64	4.40
It is necessary to build a mechanism for periodic assessment and standardization of physical fitness output for university students	2	4	18	44	49	4.16
Increase investment from socialized sources for the development of physical education facilities and equipment	1	5	20	38	53	4.16
Develop a training roadmap and digital competency standards for physical education lecturers	1	2	17	40	57	4.20

Most of the respondents expressed a very high level of consensus with the reform orientations. The two contents with the highest average scores were integrating physical education with health education and life skills (Mean = 4.45) and issuing separate policies for university physical education (Mean = 4.42). This demonstrates the social need to establish the strategic position of physical education in university training.

Notably, the contents on digital transformation and standardization of student physical output were also highly appreciated (Mean = 4.40 and 4.16). These contents are in line with the Vietnamese Government's digital transformation strategy for education in the 2021-2030 period, which emphasizes the digitalization of teaching content, management and assessment of learners' capacity.

Interview data also reinforces this trend: CM2 and GV3 believe that an "interdisciplinary" policy between the Ministry of Education and Training and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism is needed to develop physical education in a sustainable direction. At the same time, QL1 emphasizes the need for a roadmap to improve digital capacity for physical education lecturers to keep up with modern educational requirements.

The survey results clearly establish an open policy space, while proposing an interdisciplinary, integrated and technologized approach to physical education in Vietnamese higher education.

### Discussion

The discussion section aims to analyze in depth the research results obtained, compare with relevant international research and policies, thereby clarifying the strengths, weaknesses, contributions and reform implications for the current physical education policy system in Vietnamese higher education.

#### 1. Perceptions and strategic role of physical education in higher education

The survey and interview results show a high consensus on the positive role of physical education in students' health, spirit and life skills. This is consistent with international studies such as Bailey *et al.* (2009) [2], which emphasize that physical education is not only a physical subject but also an important tool in personality development, socialization and learning capacity. However, as the results show, physical education is still not fully recognized in the Vietnamese higher education system.

According to research by Hardman (2011) and Green (2014), many countries have developed separate national policies for university physical education, linked to national physical development and school population strategies. Vietnam still lacks such a comprehensive policy. The results of this study show that physical education needs to be elevated to a strategic position – on par with other pillars of education such as science, foreign languages and technology.

#### 2. Limitations in the organization, implementation and monitoring of physical education policies

A prominent issue reflected in the survey is the lack of uniformity in the organization, implementation of physical education policies in universities. This is consistent with the observation of Haerens *et al.* (2013), who pointed out that the implementation of physical education policies often faces difficulties in academic environments that emphasize theory.

In Vietnam, current regulations such as Decision No. 53/2008/QĐ-BGDĐT are still framework-based, without a clear system of output assessment criteria. This leads to difficulties in monitoring teaching effectiveness, leading to a situation of "learning for the sake of it", and not being able to measure students' physical progress. Meanwhile, countries like Singapore and South Korea have integrated

physical fitness assessment systems into graduation standards.

### 3. Policies have not kept up with digital transformation and cross-sectoral integration

Another notable finding is the lack of integration between physical education and the fields of health education, technology and life skills. In the context of digital transformation, the application of digital technology (such as AI, wearables, health apps, LMS) in physical education teaching is becoming a global trend. According to Chen *et al.* (2021), future physical education needs to be reshaped through personalized digital platforms, based on physical data and sensors.

The survey results in this study clearly reflect the desire to apply technology in physical fitness assessment and personal training, showing the potential for developing a digital physical education policy. At the same time, there is a need for an inter-sectoral coordination policy between the Ministry of Education and Training, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism to integrate physical education into a comprehensive education strategy.

### 4. Contributions and policy implications from the study

This study is one of the few works in Vietnam using a mixed method to evaluate physical education policies at the university level. Data from 117 people and 9 expert interviews provided an empirical foundation to propose the following policy implications

There is a need to develop a national physical education policy at the university level with an orientation towards integration and sustainable physical development.

Develop physical fitness output standards and integrate them into the graduate student competency framework, similar to foreign language and IT output standards.

Issue a digital competency framework for physical education lecturers, supporting schools in training, fostering and assessing modern teaching capacity.

Strengthen the application of digital transformation in teaching, learning and assessing physical education, including digital learning materials, sensor-based fitness monitoring, and integrated LMS systems.

Build a policy monitoring system from school to ministry level, ensuring periodic, public and transparent assessment of the effectiveness of physical education policy implementation.

These implications are not only derived from Vietnamese practice but also based on global trends, contributing to reorienting the role of physical education as an indispensable part of modern and sustainable university training.

### Conclusions and recommendations

This study conducted surveys and interviews to comprehensively assess the current status of policies on physical education (PE) in Vietnamese higher education, thereby proposing reform orientations suitable to the context of digital transformation and international integration. The research results shed light on three core groups of issues: Specifically:

First, regarding the awareness and role of physical education, most learners and lecturers recognize the importance of physical education for the comprehensive

development of students. However, physical education is not yet recognized as a strategic component in the training program, demonstrated by the lack of specific policies, specific output standards, and quantifiable monitoring indicators.

Second, regarding the current status of policies and implementation, the survey results point out many persistent shortcomings in the current policy system. Legal documents lack specificity and are not consistent between management levels; facilities are degraded; lecturers lack opportunities to update their expertise; and especially, there is no policy evaluation mechanism at the training institution level. These factors make it difficult for physical education to promote practical effectiveness, and it is classified as a "supportive" subject without strategic weight.

Third, in terms of policy space and innovation potential, learners and managers have shown a high willingness to integrate physical education with health education, life skills and technology. In particular, the proposal to issue a separate physical education policy for universities, integrated with digital transformation, has received a very high consensus, opening up a feasible and practical reform direction.

The article contributes to the field of educational policy science by providing empirical data from both qualitative and quantitative sources, laying the foundation for the creation of a systematic, strategic and modern physical education policy in higher education. However, the study still has some limitations: the survey sample is relatively limited in terms of geography (mainly concentrated in Southern Vietnam), and there is no in-depth analysis by type of training institution (public - non-public; university - college). In addition, due to limited resources, the study has not yet integrated specific input and output physical indicators to assess the effectiveness of physical education more accurately and quantitatively.

The next research direction should focus on expanding the nationwide survey, combining experimental physical assessment and piloting a technology-integrated physical education model at a number of universities. At the same time, it is necessary to study the possibility of building a digital competency framework for physical education lecturers and physical learning assessment tools based on digital data.

Thus, reforming physical education policies in Vietnamese higher education is an urgent requirement in the context of digital transformation and sustainable development. This study provides a theoretical and practical basis for policymakers, education managers and lecturers to refer to in the process of policy reform and improving the quality of physical education in the national higher education system.

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