

# National Sports Policy and Challenges Towards Its Implementation in the Indian Schools Curriculum

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## Abstract

Embedding sports and physical education within the Indian school curriculum stands as a cornerstone of the National Sports Policy, aiming to foster holistic student development and cultivate a lifelong culture of fitness and athletic participation. which aims to foster a culture of fitness, inclusivity, and early talent development across the country. While initiatives such as Khelo India and the Fit India Movement have laid a foundation for promoting sports among school children, their effective implementation faces significant challenges. These include inadequate infrastructure, lack of trained physical education teachers, academic pressures, budget constraints, and socio-cultural barriers—especially in rural and underprivileged areas. Furthermore, inconsistent enforcement across states and low awareness among educators hinder progress. This paper examines these obstacles and proposes actionable recommendations such as capacity building, infrastructure investment, and policy alignment with the National Education Policy 2020. It emphasizes that meaningful integration of sports into the school system is vital not only for student well-being and national fitness.

**KEYWORDS** *India; sport policy; schools' curriculum; sport development also, challenges for positioning India as a competitive sporting nation globally.*

## Introduction

In India, where over 250 million children are enrolled in schools, education is not only a tool for academic growth but also a platform for holistic development. The role of sports and physical education within this ecosystem is critical — it promotes health, discipline, teamwork, and even academic performance. The National Sports Policy of India, along with initiatives like Khelo India and the Fit India Movement, recognizes the importance of integrating sports into the school curriculum. However, translating policy objectives into action at the school level presents multiple challenges. India, home to over 1.2 billion people—nearly one-sixth of the global population (World Bank, 2022)—is the world's largest democracy. Comprising 29 states and seven union territories, the nation is marked by remarkable diversity in religion, culture, language, and ethnicity. (Chelladurai et al. 2011, Nicholson et al. 2011, Chelladurai and Nair 2017, Chelladurai and Patil 2020) spite being a nation of over 1.4 billion people, India often falls short in international sports competitions. This disparity is not merely a consequence of population but a reflection of the country's sports investment. A comparison of sports budgets between the United States, China, and India highlights significant differences, underscoring India's need to rethink its sports approach. Sports and academics are both essential pillars in the comprehensive development of students. However, balancing these two spheres often presents significant challenges for student-athletes, especially when new educational models are introduced. This article delves into the specific hurdles faced by sports students in adapting to evolving academic expectations, with the goal of identifying actionable strategies to support their growth. The implementation of the New Education Policy (NEP) and the expansion of sports education infrastructure in higher education institutions are pivotal in addressing these challenges. The NEP, with its

focus on holistic learning, acknowledges the vital role of sports in shaping well-rounded individuals. It actively promotes the integration of sports into the academic framework by encouraging universities and colleges to develop and enhance their sports facilities. Such initiatives aim to foster an environment where students are empowered to pursue athletic excellence without compromising their educational achievements (Mohrman et al., 2008; Sonu & Sandeep, 2021). In 2017, the Government of India established an expert committee to draft the National Code for Good Governance in Sports (NCGGS 2017), aiming to bring transparency, accountability, and integrity to the administration of sports in the country. However, the proposed Code remains stalled due to ongoing disagreements among key stakeholders over its core provisions. Three contentious issues lie at the heart of the debate: a proposed ban on politicians holding board positions in national sports federations (NSFs), an age cap of 70 years for board members, and a mandatory four-year cooling-off period after serving two consecutive terms. While the Indian Olympic Association (IOA), several NSFs, and certain political figures have voiced strong opposition—arguing that these measures are impractical, discriminatory, or counterproductive—others including athletes, legal experts, sports reform advocates, and some lawmakers contend that such reforms are essential for ensuring fair governance and curbing entrenched power structures within Indian sports administration. (1 July 2020 Author: Joshua McLeod, Shaun Star).

The interconnection between physical and mental health has been emphasized since ancient times, as seen in the timeless ideal of "a sound mind in a sound body," attributed to early thinkers like the Greek philosopher Thales and the Roman poet Juvenal. This principle remains highly relevant today, especially in the context of youth development. Sports play a fundamental role in shaping not only physical fitness but also in laying the groundwork for cognitive, emotional, and social growth. During childhood, participation in sports helps develop essential motor skills, coordination, and physical competence—key foundations for maintaining an active and healthy lifestyle into adulthood.

Moreover, sports foster discipline, resilience, teamwork, and leadership—qualities that are increasingly recognized as crucial for success in life beyond the playing field. Evidence suggests that regular engagement in physical activity can significantly enhance mental health by reducing stress, anxiety, and depression, while also improving mood and concentration. For young people, involvement in sports can lead to a more positive self-concept, stronger interpersonal relationships, and a heightened sense of purpose.

At a societal level, promoting sports from an early age can yield long-term benefits such as reduced healthcare costs, higher productivity, and greater social cohesion. Furthermore, by embedding sports into daily routines and educational systems, the pathway for nurturing future athletes and sports professionals becomes more accessible. Thus, sports are not merely extracurricular activities—they are powerful tools for holistic development and nation-building.

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Sports and games are fundamental to the development of human potential and play a critical role in shaping a nation's human resources. Recognizing this, the Government of India places strong emphasis on both 'sports for development' and 'sports for excellence.' It remains a consistent priority for the government to establish clear and effective coordination among various bodies engaged in sports promotion. Through this collaborative approach, efforts are made to provide athletes with the necessary infrastructure, quality training, and comprehensive support systems to help them achieve excellence, particularly on international platforms. (Source: Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, <https://yas.nic.in/sites/>)

## **National Sports Policy: An Overview**

The National Sports Policy (NSP) of India serves as a foundational framework to promote sports and physical education across the country. Its purpose is to provide strategic direction for the development of a sports culture that ensures mass participation, fosters excellence, and promotes inclusivity at all levels — from grassroots to elite. Over the decades, India has updated and expanded its sports policy in response to changing national priorities, global competitiveness, and social needs.

### **Historical Background**

#### **National Sports Policy, 1984 India's first formal sports policy.**

Aimed to create awareness about the importance of sports. Focused primarily on mass participation and talent identification. Faced limited success due to weak implementation mechanisms and lack of infrastructure. The 1984 National Sports Policy in India was the first major step towards creating a structured framework for promoting sports and raising its standards in the country. It aimed to enhance infrastructure, improve training and talent identification, and foster the integration of sports with education. The policy also envisioned the establishment of a national sports federation.

#### **Key aspects of the 1984 National Sports Policy:**

**Focus on Raising Sports Standards:** The policy's primary goal was to improve the overall level of sports in India.

**Infrastructure Development:** It emphasized the need for better infrastructure, including sports facilities and equipment.

**Integration of Sports and Education:** The policy recognized the importance of incorporating sports into the education system.

**Talent Identification and Training:** It stressed the need for identifying and developing talented athletes through specialized training programs.

**National Sports Federation:** The policy aimed to create a strong and effective national sports federation to oversee and coordinate sports activities.

**Review and Revision:** The policy also included a provision for reviewing its implementation every five years to make necessary adjustments.

**Separation of Physical Education and Sport:** India's early sport policy in 1984 separated physical education and sport as distinct areas of focus.

**Government and SAI Involvement:** The policy assigned the union government and the Sports Authority of India (SAI), in collaboration with the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and recognized National Sports Federations (NSFs), to promote excellence at national and international levels.

### **National Sports Policy, 2001**

Replaced the 1984 version with more concrete objectives and actionable goals.

In terms of the National Sports Policy, 2001, the Central Government, in conjunction with the State Government, the Olympic Association (IOA) and the National Sports Federation will concertedly pursue the twin objectives of "Broad-basing" of Sports and "Achieving Excellence in Sports at the National and International levels". To harness the nation's inherent strengths and competitive edge in specific sports disciplines, focused efforts are required to promote these activities more vigorously. A key strategy in this regard is the effective integration of sports and physical education within the formal education curriculum. While the primary responsibility for broadening the sports base lies with the State Governments, the Union Government will play a supportive and complementary role—especially in identifying and nurturing untapped talent from rural and tribal regions. In pursuit of excellence at both national and international

platforms, the Union Government, along with the Sports Authority of India (SAI), will collaborate closely with the Indian Olympic Association and various National Sports Federations to implement targeted initiatives and high-performance programs. Focus areas: Broad-basing of sports and promotion of excellence. Integration of sports in the education system. Development of infrastructure and human resources. Support to women, rural youth, and persons with disabilities. Emphasized public-private partnerships and creation of the National Sports Development Fund (NSDF). Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. (2001). National Sports Policy, 2001. The National Sports Code of 2011 serves as a cornerstone in the governance and regulation of sports in India. Designed to bring about systemic reform, the Code establishes clear guidelines aimed at enhancing transparency, accountability, and integrity within sports administration. It plays a foundational role in shaping how sports bodies operate—emphasizing good governance, structured management, and the equitable treatment of athletes. By advocating for fair selection processes, term limits, and greater oversight, the Code seeks to foster a sporting environment rooted in meritocracy and inclusiveness. Moreover, it has contributed significantly to professionalizing sports governance in India, enabling institutions to better support athlete development and prepare them for success on both domestic and global platforms.

(Source:

<https://www.g-spr.com/post/an-analysis-of-the-national-sports-code-2011-and-its-implementation-part-1>)

## **Statement of Purpose**

### **Sport as a National Priority**

Sports development has been recognized as a national priority in India due to its multifaceted benefits. It plays a crucial role in promoting an active and healthy lifestyle, fostering child and youth development, enhancing social inclusion, generating employment, and contributing to peace and community development. Most importantly, it instils a deep sense of national pride and belonging among citizens.

### **Sport as a Public Good**

At the national policy level, sport is viewed on par with public education and public health. Like these essential services, sport is considered a public good, and its development is acknowledged as a core public function that contributes to the broader objectives of nation-building.

### **Policy Implementation and Governance**

In line with this vision, following the adoption of the National Sports Policy in 2001, the Government of India issued revised Guidelines for Assistance to National Sports Federations (NSFs) in August 2001. These were supplemented with further guidelines over time. These directives are legally binding on both the National Olympic Committee (Indian Olympic Association - IOA) and the NSFs, provided they wish to continue regulating and managing sports activities within the country. This framework aims to ensure accountability, transparency, and the systematic governance of sports in India.

## **Integration with Education:**

### **Integration of Sports and Physical Education in the Academic Framework**

The Government of India is committed to the systematic integration of Sports and Physical Education into the school curriculum, making it a mandatory subject up to the secondary school level. This includes incorporating sports into the student evaluation system, thereby recognizing it as an essential component of overall education. To support this initiative, a National Fitness Programme will be launched in schools across the country. In parallel, efforts will be made to enhance infrastructure availability, such as playfields and sports equipment, and to ensure the presence of qualified Physical Education teachers. This will

involve the training of selected educators in physical education and sports-related disciplines. Additionally, the establishment of Specialized Sports Schools will be considered to nurture athletic talent from an early stage. A structured competition framework will also be developed, encompassing inter-school, inter-college, and inter-university events at the national, state, and district levels, ensuring regular and inclusive participation in organized sports activities.

**Importance of Sports in the School Curriculum Physical and Mental Health:** Regular physical activity reduces obesity, improves concentration, and enhances mental health.

**Character Building:** Sports instil values such as discipline, teamwork, leadership, and resilience.

**Academic Correlation:** Studies suggest that physically active students often perform better academically due to improved brain function.

**Early Talent Identification:** Schools are ideal places to spot and nurture athletic talent from a young age.

**Inclusivity and Social Cohesion:** Sports bridge social gaps and promote gender equality, especially in diverse classrooms.

### **Government Initiatives Related to School Sports:**

1. Khelo India Program, launched in 2018 to strengthen the sports ecosystem.

Includes Khelo India School Games for under-17 athletes. Funds school-level infrastructure, talent scouting, and training.

2. Fit India Movement, launched in 2019 to promote fitness and well-being through daily physical activity in schools.

Schools are graded based on their fitness programs.

3. CBSE Guidelines, The Central Board of Secondary Education mandates Physical Education periods in school schedules. Recent reforms encourage participation in structured games, yoga, and fitness programs. <http://yas.nic.in>

**Contemporary Initiatives Supporting the Policy:** While the 2001 policy remains the core document, several programs and reforms have been introduced since then to align with and support its objectives: 1. Khelo India Scheme (2018–Present) A flagship program aimed at strengthening the sports ecosystem. Key components: Khelo India Youth Games (KIYG) Sports infrastructure development

Talent identification and development, Training of coaches and sports science personnel: Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. (2018). Khelo India Programme. <https://kheloindia.gov.in>

### **Fit India Movement (2019–Present)**

Launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India on 29th August 2019, the Fit India Movement aims to make physical fitness an integral part of daily life. This nationwide initiative seeks to inspire a shift in behaviour—from a sedentary lifestyle to one that embraces regular physical activity and well-being. The success of this movement depends on its transformation into a mass people's movement, where every individual actively participates and becomes a catalyst for change.

At the heart of this initiative is the belief that "How to Live" should be the first pillar of formal education. This means cultivating habits of daily health care and physical activity from an early age. Schools, after the home, are envisioned as the first formal institutions responsible for imparting knowledge and instilling practices related to physical fitness.

In line with this vision, the Fit India Mission encourages schools across the country to observe Fit India School Week during the months of November and December. To further institutionalize fitness in the education system, the mission has developed a Fit India School Certification, featuring simple and achievable criteria that schools can adopt to promote fitness culture effectively. A national campaign to encourage fitness through daily physical activity. Encourages schools, colleges, and workplaces to adopt fitness routines.: Government of India. (2019). Fit India Movement. <https://fitindia.gov.in>

### **Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)**

Aimed at supporting India's elite athletes to win medals in the Olympics and other major international events. Offers financial support, expert coaching, and international exposure.

: Sports Authority of India. (2020). Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS). <https://sportsauthorityofindia.nic.in>

### **Key Policy Goals:**

**Mass Participation:** Encourage every citizen, particularly youth, to take part in sports. **Excellence in Sports:** Provide elite athletes with the resources and support to compete at the highest levels. **Integration with Education:** Incorporate sports into school curricula to identify and nurture talent early. **Infrastructure Development:** Build and upgrade sports facilities at the village, district, and national levels. **Inclusivity:** Promote equal opportunities in sports for women, differently-abled persons, and marginalized communities. **Capacity Building:** Improve the quality of coaches, trainers, and sports scientists.

### **Key Challenges in Implementation:**

Despite progressive goals, implementation faces several hurdles: Unequal access to infrastructure across states and rural areas. Inadequate funding or misallocation of resources. Lack of trained coaches and physical education professionals. Academic pressure crowding out physical activity in schools. Social stigma, especially against female participation in sports. Despite supportive policies and programs, several obstacles hinder effective implementation in the school curriculum:

1. **Lack of Infrastructure.** Many government and rural schools lack basic facilities like playgrounds, sports equipment, and indoor activity spaces.
2. **Shortage of Trained Physical Education Teachers,** Schools often appoint unqualified personnel or burden other subject teachers with sports responsibilities, compromising quality.
3. **Academic Pressure and Marginalization of Sports,** Emphasis on academics and exam performance often sidelines physical education. Sports periods are frequently sacrificed for extra classes or exam preparation.
4. **Inadequate Budget Allocation,** Schools, especially public ones, operate under tight budgets and often prioritize textbooks and classroom infrastructure over sports.
5. **Social and Cultural Barriers,** In conservative regions, girls face restrictions in participation due to gender stereotypes or lack of separate facilities. Socio-economic conditions may force students to focus on income-generating activities instead of extracurricular engagement.
6. **Inconsistent Implementation Across States,** Education is a concurrent subject in India, leading to variation in how states prioritize and implement sports education policies.
7. **Low Awareness and Policy Disconnect,** many school administrators and parents are unaware of national sports policy goals. There is often a disconnect between policymakers and the ground realities of school infrastructure and culture.

### **Here's a more detailed look at the more challenges:**

#### **1. Resource Allocation and Funding: Inadequate Infrastructure:**

Many schools, particularly in rural areas, lack basic sports facilities like well-maintained playgrounds, equipment, and even dedicated physical education (PE) rooms. **Lack of Funding:** Insufficient funding for sports programs at the grassroots level limits the opportunity for talented athletes to develop their skills. **Misallocation and Lack of Transparency:** There's a need for better resource allocation and transparency in how government funds are spent on sports.

## **2. Human Resource and Training: Lack of Qualified PE Teachers:**

There is a shortage of adequately trained and qualified PE teachers, especially in government schools and rural areas. Limited Teacher Training: Existing training programs for PE teachers may not be comprehensive or updated, hindering their ability to effectively implement the sports policy. Inadequate Support for Women's Sports: There's a need for more support and resources to promote women's participation in sports, including addressing gender biases and ensuring equitable access to facilities and opportunities.

## **3. Societal Attitudes and Cultural Factors: Priority on Academics:**

There's a prevalent societal attitude that prioritizes academic achievement over physical education and sports, leading to less emphasis on sports in the school curriculum. Lack of Awareness and Support: Many parents and educators may not fully understand the benefits of sports for holistic development, hindering the implementation of the policy.

## **4. Policy Implementation and Monitoring: Lack of Flexibility in the Curriculum:**

The current academic curriculum may not be flexible enough to accommodate sports students, making it difficult for them to pursue their athletic goals while maintaining academic performance.

Inadequate Monitoring and Evaluation: There's a need for robust mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the implementation of sports programs and ensure that they are meeting the intended goals.

Lack of Policyholder Intervention: There's a need for more active involvement and support from policyholders at various levels to ensure the successful implementation of the sports policy.

**5. Other Challenges:** Focus on Popular Sports: The overwhelming focus on cricket in India often overshadows other sports, leading to a lack of resources and attention for other disciplines.

Lack of Transparency and Accountability: Athletic federations and organizations need to be more transparent and accountable in their operations.

Corruption: Corruption in sports can also hinder the effective implementation of policies and the allocation of resources.

## **Recommendations and Way Forward:**

To bridge the gap between policy and practice, India must take the following steps:

1. Infrastructure Development at the Grassroots, Invest in multi-purpose sports grounds and equipment in every school, especially in rural and tribal areas. Collaborate with private entities and NGOs through CSR funding.
2. Dedicated Physical Education Teachers, ensure every school has qualified and trained physical education teachers. Include PE training as a part of teacher education programs (B.PEd., M.Ped D.Ed.).
3. Time Allocation and Policy Enforcement, strictly enforce daily or weekly sports periods as part of the curriculum. Include physical activity as part of internal assessment and grades.
4. Inclusion and Gender Sensitivity, Design sports programs that are inclusive of girls, children with disabilities, and underprivileged students. Provide separate changing rooms and uniforms where needed.
5. Monitoring and Evaluation, Establish a nationwide school sports monitoring system under the Ministry of Education and Sports Authority of India. Use performance data to refine and target initiatives.
6. Awareness Campaigns, Educate school management, parents, and students on the importance of sports through media and school workshops. Promote role models and local sports heroes to inspire students.
7. Policy Synchronization, Align the objectives of the National Education Policy 2020 (which supports experiential learning and physical education) with the National Sports Policy.

Implementing the National Sports Policy in Indian school curricula faces several challenges, including lack of funding, infrastructure deficits, and inadequate training for teachers. Furthermore, societal attitudes that prioritize academics over sports, limited support for women's sports, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms hinder effective implementation.

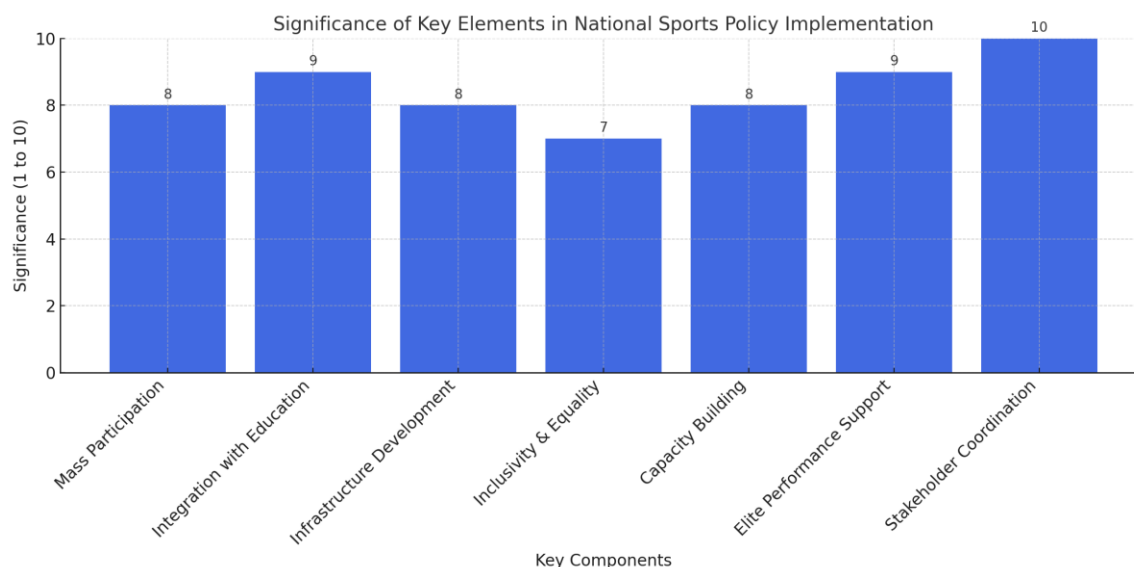
### **Key Shortcomings in Athlete Development Systems:**

1. **Imbalance Between Competition and Training**  
Young and developing athletes are often subjected to excessive competition with insufficient emphasis on structured, long-term training.
2. **Inappropriate Training Models**  
Adult-level training and competition frameworks are frequently applied to youth athletes, disregarding their unique developmental needs.
3. **Gender-Inappropriate Program Design**  
Training and competition formats tailored for male athletes are often imposed on female athletes, failing to address physiological and psychological differences.
4. **Short-Term Success Over Long-Term Growth**  
Athletic preparation is often focused on immediate results rather than nurturing long-term athlete development.
5. **Chronological vs. Developmental Age**  
Training programs are typically based on an athlete's chronological age rather than their developmental stage, leading to mismatches in readiness and performance capacity.
6. **Neglect of Sensitive Developmental Periods**  
Many coaches overlook critical windows of accelerated development (sensitive periods) when athletes are most receptive to gains in speed, strength, stamina, skills, and flexibility.
7. **Poor Instruction in Fundamental Skills**  
Basic movement and sport-specific skills are often not taught effectively at the early stages, compromising future performance potential.
8. **Coaching Quality Disparity**  
The most experienced and knowledgeable coaches are concentrated at the elite level, while beginner athletes are often coached by underqualified or volunteer coaches—precisely where quality coaching is most crucial.
9. **Lack of Parental Education**  
Parents are generally not educated on principles of long-term athlete development, limiting their ability to support their children effectively.
10. **Inadequate Support for Athletes with Disabilities**  
The unique developmental training needs of athletes with disabilities are poorly understood and insufficiently addressed.
11. **Competition Structures That Hinder Development**  
In many sports, existing competition systems are not aligned with athlete development goals and often obstruct progress.
12. **Absence of Talent Identification (TID) Systems**  
Structured and consistent talent identification and development frameworks are missing in most sports disciplines.
13. **Lack of Program Integration**  
There is minimal coordination between school physical education, community-based recreational programs, and elite competitive pathways.



#### 14. Premature Specialization

Many sports promote early specialization in an attempt to boost participation, which can lead to burnout, overuse injuries, and hinder overall athletic growth.



Here is the bar chart illustrating the significance of key components in the implementation of the National Sports Policy, based on the article. Each component is rated on a scale from 1 to 10 for its impact and importance in achieving policy goals.

#### Conclusion

India's National Sports Policy sets a visionary foundation for nurturing a sporting culture. However, its success depends heavily on integration into the school education system, where habits are formed and talents are born. By overcoming infrastructural, administrative, and socio-cultural barriers, and by enforcing and financing its sports initiatives more effectively, India can build a generation that is not only academically competent but also physically fit, mentally strong, and ready to represent the nation on global platforms. The National Sports Policy provides a visionary framework to make sports an integral part of Indian society. While progress has been made through flagship schemes like Khelo India and the Fit India Movement, successful implementation depends on addressing systemic challenges, strengthening infrastructure, and fostering a sports culture that goes beyond medals — one that values fitness, teamwork, and holistic development. For India to become a global sports powerhouse, the vision outlined in the National Sports Policy must be consistently reinforced through education, investment, and community engagement. Inconsistent inter-agency coordination and policy enforcement. Alignment with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 The NEP 2020 reinforces the importance of physical education by proposing: Integration of sports as part of the school curriculum. Holistic education focusing on cognitive, physical, and emotional development. Vocational education tracks, including sports and fitness industries.: Ministry of Education, Government of India. Sports students often encounter a range of challenges when navigating new educational frameworks. These difficulties are complex and stem from the need to balance rigorous training schedules with academic responsibilities. To effectively address these issues, it is essential for educational institutions, sports organizations, and policymakers to work collaboratively in designing comprehensive, student-centered strategies.

Key solutions should include:

- Flexible academic scheduling to accommodate training and competition demands,
- Targeted academic support systems such as tutoring or mentorship programs, and
- Formal recognition of sporting achievements within the educational assessment process.

By closing the gap between academic and athletic commitments, these efforts can create an environment that nurtures both intellectual growth and sporting excellence. This holistic approach will not only support the overall well-being of sports students but also empower them to succeed in both their educational and athletic pursuits.

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