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Sports education in India: A contemporary perspective

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Abstract

The Indian Government recognised the importance of adopting sports as part of successful youth development as early as 1984 to form the National Sports Policy which made sports and physical education an integral part of the school curriculum. National Sports Policy, 2011, stresses the value of sports and physical education in developing human capital, increasing productivity, and in fostering social harmony. In the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 also, the flexibility to choose subjects from sciences and humanities with the ability to also learn fine arts and sports will give students a wide range of subjects to choose without the restrictions they faced earlier. Games and sport-based activities have formed a dominant part of the physical education curriculum with an interest in providing a meaningful and culturally situated sporting experience to students. Sport education is among the most popularly implemented and researched pedagogical model worldwide. When sports are made an integral part of the curriculum, students report healthier eating habits, better levels of cardiovascular fitness, increased parental support, and decreased levels of anxiety and depression. A national study also displayed a positive correlation between student-athletes and decline in drug, alcohol, and substance abuse.

Keywords: Sports education, national sports policy, national education policy, sports curriculum, sports university

Introduction

Sports Education is not just about performing a set routine repeatedly or a fun activity for recreation. It is also about learning essential values, life skills which is otherwise hard to teach in theory. Sports' power on an international level cannot be underrated as well. It has the capability of defining a nation's development.

Traditionally, sports have never been an integrated part of the Indian education system in general. Most of the schools and colleges in India have all faced a scenario when our beloved Physical Training classes were hijacked by the science teacher under the pretext of "syllabus completion". Also, not much support was received from the parents as well when it came to playing back at home. In the rigid society where, high percentages are a measure of intellectual capability, one can least blame them. The one who is to really blame for this situation is the rigid structure of the education system in the country. It is not that sports are not a part of the curriculum. In fact, most of the state and national boards have sports as a major subject for Class X. However, that is where its importance ends. The inclusion of sports in the syllabus is just for the sake of formality. And it all comes down to just one word – Respect. Sports is, often, viewed as an unworthy past-time activity for the pupils' recreation. Students doing well in a sport are still viewed as one of the most 'distracted' lots of the class. Till recently, the education system in India has focused more on the students' mental development while ignoring the physical growth.

Sports education and its significance from the standpoint of India

Sports play a vital role in making children strong from inside while inculcating the importance of maintaining a fit and sound body. It helps in the development of focus and concentration; in-turn assists during studies. Sports education directly impacts on maintaining the children's wellbeing as well as increasing their physical stamina. It helps in developing muscle memory, strength, and overall bodily coordination.

Sports Education is a prevalent misconception that sports only helps towards physical development. It teaches many life skills including team spirit and coordination. A well-played

game has the power of instilling such values like self-motivating spirit, discipline, leadership, taking ownership of success as well as failures. In fact, Sports teaches children to get up after losing a match, learn from the mistakes and improve their game. This indomitable, never-say-die attitude that gets imbibed in them sticks throughout life, whether they play regularly. Sports, thus, prepare children well for challenges of the life they would face in adulthood. This is exactly the reason why some of the world's most prestigious universities value excellence in sports education. Moreover, playing on a regular basis is one of the best stress busters for the students. It is a great medium to keep the mind, body, and soul synchronized with one another and to maintain a proper balance. And then, if one does well in a discipline, there is always the chance of making a career in it.

Relationship between sports and education

Globally, a sport as an industry has a unifying appeal. The sports industry boasts of a dynamic appeal that many other, even bigger industries look at with envy. It has the power to define nations. Sports offer a perfect opportunity to explore scientific concepts such as force, motion, potential energy, velocity, and torque. For many students, school-organised sports play an important role in their academic and social experiences. Every school has sports embedded in their curriculum as they understand the importance of physical health and activity. However, the importance given to sports ends there as this inclusion is just for the sake of a formality.

Khelo India scheme

Under the Khelo India scheme, the Government is supporting the development of sports at the grassroots levels through the initiative such as Khelo India School Games. This programme has been introduced to revive the sports culture in India at the grass-root levels by building a strong framework for all sports played in the country and with the aim to establish India as a great sporting country. The twelve areas have been identified under this scheme, which will impact the entire sports ecosystem including sports infrastructure, talent identification, coaching for excellence, community sports, and competition structure and sports economy. Schools and colleges are the environments where young people spend a significant amount of time. During these formative years, along with quality education an emphasis on sports and physical education framework is equally important. Educational environments need to be supportive of students being physically active.

The importance of adopting sports and education for the success of youth development has been recognised by the Indian Government as early as 1984 when the National Sports Policy recommended making sports and physical education an integral part of the school curriculum. National Sports Policy, 2011 stresses on the point that sports and physical education play an important role in developing human capital, increase productivity and foster social harmony. Typically, School athletic activities provide enjoyable, supervised activities for youth. Student-athletes report healthier eating habits, higher levels of cardiovascular fitness, increased parental support and decreased anxiety and depression. Furthermore, a national study from 2014 showed a positive association between participating in school sports and lower rates of tobacco, drug, and alcohol use. The Youth who participate in sports were also more likely to disapprove of their peers' substance abuse. One also notices an interesting shift in the mindset of parents; they are now aware and understand the importance of a

physically fit body. The realisation of the negative impact that today's lifestyle brings on their children, has made parents become proactive in their search for options for their child's fitness, they now encourage their children to take up some form of sports or physical activity along with their studies. Way forward a change in the mindset of the community will play a major role to ensure success in this direction. Moreover, campaigns focused on sports and education integration can cut across the diversity of our country making people more cognizant of the benefits of sports in education. According to a survey conducted in 2017, close to 60 per cent of the respondents strongly agree that more emphasis is given to education than to sports in India. The education sector should play a crucial role in promoting sports in India. Sports education not only builds physical stamina but also instils qualities such as obedience, determination, willpower, and discipline. Some of the positive effects of education in sports are:

- Children are introduced to the benefits of a healthy lifestyle early in their lives by instilling the habit and culture of taking up outdoor activities
- Introduction of sports curriculum at an early stage can act as building blocks for future sportspersons
- It can develop a strong ecosystem, along with other stakeholders such as authorities, federations, sports clubs, etc
- It will generate employment opportunities for people such as coaches, physical trainers, and sports facility operators
- It will provide educational opportunities through scholarships for underprivileged talent.

Schools in India are gradually beginning to realise the importance of sports in the overall development of children, and how vital it is to encourage them to take up sports. The growing awareness of how sports contribute to the growth of children in terms of life skills, has led parents and school authorities to encourage children to take up sports, whereas previously the focus was entirely on academics. The realisation that sports help in the development of teamwork, trust, sharing responsibilities and working together towards a common goal has led to a spurt in the sports activities in schools. Slowly, educationalists and government departments have realised the importance of sports' and are planning for inclusions in the curriculum which is an essential part of the present-day school education. If the government and educationalist initiatives are properly laid down, one can see a different face of the students in the future ^[1].

India's recent initiatives in sports education

The Indian Government recognised the importance of adopting sports as part of successful youth development as early as 1984 to form the National Sports Policy which made sports and physical education an integral part of the school curriculum. National Sports Policy, 2011 stresses the value of sports and physical education in developing human capital, increasing productivity, and in fostering social harmony. Games and sport-based activities have formed a dominant part of the physical education curriculum with an interest in providing a meaningful and culturally situated sporting experience to students. Sport education is among the most popularly implemented and researched pedagogical model worldwide.

Young people spend a large portion of their time at schools and colleges. A significant amount of learning takes place in

these institutes. Along with quality education, it is vital that sports and physical education are made an accessible and regular part of learning during these formative years. This naturally makes organised sports a vital component of social and academic experiences for many students. Activities that encourage physical movement and exercise in students create an enjoyable experience for students in schools and colleges. When sports are made an integral part of the curriculum, students report healthier eating habits, better levels of cardiovascular fitness, increased parental support, and decreased levels of anxiety and depression. A national study also displayed a positive correlation between student-athletes and decline in drug, alcohol, and substance abuse. Some other benefits of sports education include:

- Introducing young people to the importance of a healthy lifestyle early in their lives by instilling the habit and culture of taking up outdoor activities
- Introduction of a sports curriculum at an early stage so that it can serve as a building block for future sportspersons and other professionals in the sports industry.
- It can develop a strong ecosystem, along with other stakeholders such as authorities, federations, sports clubs, etc
- Availability of educational opportunities through scholarships for underprivileged talent.

Schools and colleges in India are slowly but steadily starting to realise the value of sports in the overall development of children. There is a rise in the support and encouragement levels towards students taking up sports right from the school level. This is reflected in the deliberate inclusions of sports during curriculum planning, making it an essential part of the present-day education system. Even the government recognises these advantages and has also introduced sports programmes at the grassroots level to build a sound framework for various sports that are played all over the country. These programmes are even meant to target the entire sports ecosystem, including sports infrastructure, talent identification, coaching for excellence, and competition structure, and sports economy.

The growing awareness of the contribution of sports to the lives of children and young people with regards to life skills, personality development, and even career-propelling qualities like trust, shared responsibilities, and working together has led parents and educators to encourage children to take up sports. This is particularly relevant in the Indian context where the focus has entirely been on academics for a long time. An interesting shift has been witnessed in the mindset of parents as well, and they are more appreciative of the value of a physically fit body and the overall health benefits sports education provides. Especially with the lifestyles, we are leading today, infusing sports with education at progressive levels of education is the way forward to changing mindsets of the entire community towards sports education. There are several campaigns that are focussed on the integration of sports and education that cut across the diversity of our country to make people more cognizant of the merits of sports in education. The education sector has an important role in promoting sports in India. Sports education goes beyond building physical stamina to instil qualities such as determination, willpower, discipline, and team spirit. In recent years, sport as a discipline has expanded beyond its previously defined boundaries. It is no longer limited to only sportspersons and playing sports; several professions have

come up that combine business and sports. This phenomenon has caused an increase in the demand for dedicated, skilled professionals in the many areas associated with the business of sport.

Globally, the sports industry has a unifying appeal. This industry boasts of a dynamic appeal that most other industries worldwide are envious of. It holds the power to define nations. The sports industry offers the perfect opportunity to generate employment and revenue and the potential for its growth in our country is fuelled by our recent transition from a single sport nation to a multi-sport country. Sports business and as a consequence the education in proliferating at an unprecedented rate this is only expected to grow in the years to come^[2].

Understanding its importance in the betterment of students' overall growth, the Indian government has taken strong steps towards the development of sports education in the country. In September 2017, the Union Cabinet passed the decision of a revamped Khelo India programme at a cost of ₹ 1,756 crores over a period of four years. 2017-18 to 2019-20. The programme objectives are to the mainstream sport as a tool for individual development, community development, economic development as well as national development. The scheme aims at providing a scholarship of up to ₹ 5 lakhs to meritorious individuals demonstrating excellence in sports. In August last year, Union Minister Rajyavardhan Rathore made an announcement of making games period mandatory in schools while reducing the syllabus by 50% by next year. "We have come to a stage where a sport is not a part of education, it is education. The ministry of education is ensuring that the syllabus in schools by 2019 is reduced by 50% and there will be a sports period on a regular basis," he said. It is, thus, vital to promote sports education in India.^[3]

The Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs has already decided in favour of constituting a high-level committee for the formation of the National Sports Education Board. This committee is under discussion on how to bring the national sports education board into shape. The Ministry is also keen to have an "Olympic Museum" for the country soon. After the Union Cabinet on May 23 approved an ordinance to set up the country's first national sports university in Imphal, President Ram Nath Kovind gave his assent to the ordinance on Friday. Its objective is to establish and incorporate a National Sports University in the State of Manipur, a specialized University first of its kind, to promote sports education in the areas of sports sciences, sports technology, sports management and sports coaching besides functioning as the national training centre for select sports disciplines by adopting best international practices.

Development and implementation of sports education curriculum in India

Active involvement of key stakeholders in the curriculum design process will translate into evolving a national standards framework in sports education across the country. The key result areas to achieve the monumental task of drafting, approving and implementing sports education curriculum across India depends on these components:^[4]

- Formulation of Standards: Finalize at least 5 key standards which encompass the learning outcomes related to sports skills, physical health and activity, access to competitions, building essential psychosocial values and fundamental skills
- Definitive timeframe for creation and adoption of sports curriculum standards: By 2018, the draft national sports

education standards must be brought out for public and expert discussions. By 2019, the final guidelines for sports standards and other allied information to be finalised and made ready to be implemented.

- To have a clear understanding that SE curriculum is not a replacement of PE curriculum but a vital tool to achieve the PE objectives in children, while broad basing various sports amongst them that could possibly lead to identification & development of potential high performance talent in sports.
- Promote creation of focus position papers, data & feedback collection, sports committees overlooking the curriculum drafting process. Also, to sanction research grants upon milestone completion to approved group.
- Complete support from federations and education boards in terms of upgrading their own structure and quality to up-skilling of the existing workforce to align with the futuristic requirements of SE.
- The 'Khelo India' scheme formulated by the Government is a national programme for development of sports. Similar schemes incorporating need of sports education in schools are needed.

Recommendations

- Aim for including sports education as part of the next National Curriculum Framework (NCF) studies and recommendations. To achieve this, it is important to have the sports curriculum framework drafted, piloted & tested in few schools, ratified accordingly with suggestions from industry experts and implemented nation-wide.
- Establish association with the authorities from countries like US, Australia, etc. involved in framing and development of curriculum. Learning from understanding the challenges and problems faced in implementation of SE curriculum in schools by these countries can help us with drafting more effective SE curriculum standard.
- Align the skill gap analysis conducted by National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) with the job requirement in SE curriculum related jobs *viz.* – sports educators, sport curriculum writers, community sports officer, Curriculum monitoring & evaluation among other profiles – to arrive at a curriculum standard that also helps skill development for the sports industry.
- Develop standards in allied work areas like:
 - National Assessment standards – defines metrics, methods, process for conducting sports assessments.
 - Curriculum monitoring & evaluation standards – assists in inspection, proper evaluation of results & teaching methods and providing corrective actions.
 - National Talent Search methods (for sports talent) and standards to increase its reach and applicability.
- The involvement of District Sports Officers (DSO), in overseeing implementation and data collection process. The National Sports Federations to be brought into scheme of things for effective implementation of curriculum framework.
- Reduce the variance in calibre, training, interest and motivation level of teachers; having a standardized framework document will ensure that minimum expected outcomes and deliverables are achieved.
- Foundation of a National Sports Education Curriculum Authority (NASECA) to oversee and inter-relate with other key stakeholders like the Sports Authority of India (SAI), state level sports authorities, national sports federations and their state units. The NASECA will

ensure inter-operability functions and make transition and implementation of sports curriculum constructive in schools.

- Request Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports (MYAS) to transfer Sports in the Concurrent list from the current listing as a State subject. This will ensure Sports and allied activities are brought under national focus for accelerated and inclusive sports development in the country.
- Promote concept of sporting culture in schools and communities whereby active participation in sports and physical activities is seen as a way of life. Offer substantial competitive opportunities at school level, community level, professional stage and as well as for amateurs.

The benefits of inclusion of sports education in the mainstream education are various, and hence development of a National SE Curriculum Standard is essential and need of the hour. The compelling reasons, factors and time for laying a roadmap for sports curriculum framework implementation are perfectly aligned with the expectation of improvement in sports performance across the country.

Proposition and Conclusion

Sports need to be put at equal footing as any academic subject. It deserves as much sincerity and attention. It is the duty of schools to recognize this importance and develop/implement a good SE curriculum that interests students and garners support from the parents. While a broad level framework is to be given by Government, the onus of practical implementation at schools will be the responsibility of the school leaders and management team.

In the National Education Policy (NEP) ^[5], 2020 also, the flexibility to choose subjects from sciences and humanities with the ability to also learn fine arts and sports will give students a wide range of subjects to choose without the restrictions they faced earlier. It advocates for a multidisciplinary and a holistic education across the sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities, and sports for a multidisciplinary world to ensure the unity and integrity of all knowledge. In all stages, experiential learning will be adopted, including hands-on learning, arts-integrated and sports-integrated education, story-telling-based pedagogy, among others, as standard pedagogy within each subject, and with explorations of relations among different subjects. Sports-integration is another cross-curricular pedagogical approach that utilizes physical activities including indigenous sports, in pedagogical practices to help in developing skills such as collaboration, self-initiative, self-direction, self-discipline, teamwork, responsibility, citizenship, etc. Sports-integrated learning will be undertaken in classroom transactions to help students adopt fitness as a lifelong attitude and to achieve the related life skills along with the levels of fitness as envisaged in the Fit India Movement. The need to integrate sports in education is well recognized as it serves to foster holistic development by promoting physical and psychological well-being while also enhancing cognitive abilities. Mandatory skills to be imbibed by all students - health, nutrition, physical education, fitness, wellness, sports. In addition- Basic training in preventive health care, mental health, first aid, personal and public hygiene will be included in the curriculum. NEP 2020 realizes the fact that only small size of schools makes it operationally and economically challenging to deploy teachers and critical physical resources

(such as library books, sports equipment). The NEP recommends grouping schools together to form a school complex.

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