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(REVIEW ARTICLE)

ALIGNING EDUCATION AND SPORT IN INDIA: NEP 2020, THE NATIONAL SPORTS GOVERNANCE ACT 2025, KHELO BHARAT NITI 2025 AND GLOBAL TRENDS: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

India has, for the first time, a coherent policy framework that places sport inside education rather than beside it. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 makes sport a curricular, credit-bearing part of learning; the National Sports Policy 2025 (Khelo Bharat Niti) names "integration with education" as one of its five pillars; and the National Sports Governance Act, 2025 provides the country's first statutory framework for how sports bodies are recognised, governed and held to account. This review examines the extent to which these three instruments are aligned, and compares them with global trends in physical education (PE) and school sport.

Using a narrative review of policy texts, legislation, budget documents, UNESCO and WHO reports, and peer-reviewed literature (2015–2026), the paper finds strong convergence at the level of intent: holistic development, fitness as a lifelong attitude, talent pathways, inclusion and athlete-centred governance. It also identifies three structural gaps. First, the governance law regulates sports federations but is largely silent on school and university sport. Second, implementation depends on PE teachers, playing space and assessment systems that remain uneven across the country. Third, India lacks a national surveillance system for school PE and student physical activity, against a global backdrop in which about 81% of adolescents are insufficiently active.

The paper proposes a joint Education–Sport coordination mechanism, a regulatory bridge between school/university sport and national federations, a national PE quality framework with measurable minimum standards, earmarked funding, and routine data reporting through UDISE+. The findings are relevant to policymakers, teacher educators, school leaders, universities and sports administrators.

Keywords: NEP 2020; National Sports Governance Act 2025; Khelo Bharat Niti 2025; Physical Education; Sports-Integrated Learning; School Sport; Sports Governance; Physical Literacy; India; Comparative Education Policy

1 INTRODUCTION

For most of India's post-independence history, sport in schools was treated as an "extra-curricular" activity: useful, but subordinate to examinations. The National Policy on Education 1986 and the National Sports Policy 2001 both referred to physical education, yet neither built a functioning bridge between the classroom and the sports system. The goals of the 2001 policy were only partly achieved, largely because of weak governance in National Sports Federations (NSFs) and limited grassroots outreach (Edunovations, 2025).

Between 2020 and 2025 this picture changed substantially. Three instruments now point in the same direction:

NEP 2020 (approved July 2020) moves sport into the curriculum through "sports-integrated learning" and links it to the Fit India Movement (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2020).

*National Sports Policy 2025 – Khelo Bharat Niti*** (approved by the Union Cabinet on 1 July 2025) replaces the 2001 policy and lists integration with NEP 2020 as one of its five pillars (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports [MYAS], 2025).

National Sports Governance Act, 2025 (introduced on 23 July 2025; passed by the Lok Sabha on 11 August and the Rajya Sabha on 12 August 2025) creates a statutory structure for sports bodies, a National Sports Board and a National Sports Tribunal (PRS Legislative Research, 2025). Select provisions came into force on 1 January 2026 (Lexology, 2026a).

These instruments arrive alongside national ambitions to host the 2030 Commonwealth Games and to bid for the 2036 Olympic Games, and at a time of global concern about youth physical inactivity (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024). The central question is therefore no longer whether India values sport in education, but whether its policy, legal and school systems are sufficiently aligned to deliver it.

1.1 Research Questions

- **RQ1.** How do NEP 2020, Khelo Bharat Niti 2025 and the National Sports Governance Act 2025 conceptualise the relationship between education and sport?
- **RQ2.** Where do these instruments converge, and where are there gaps or tensions?
- **RQ3.** How does India's approach compare with global trends in physical education and school sport?
- **RQ4.** What policy and institutional measures would strengthen alignment within the Indian education system?

1.2 Objectives

- To review the sport-related provisions of NEP 2020 and the 2025 sports policy and legislation.
- To map the alignment between the education and sports governance frameworks.
- To situate India within international evidence and practice from UNESCO, WHO and selected countries.
- To propose actionable recommendations for policymakers, institutions and researchers.

2 METHODOLOGY OF THE REVIEW

This study is a narrative (integrative) policy review combining document analysis of primary policy texts with a thematic synthesis of secondary literature.

- **Sources.** Primary sources comprised the NEP 2020 text; the National Sports Governance Act, 2025 and its PRS bill summary; official communications on Khelo Bharat Niti 2025; Union Budget 2026–27 documents; and UDISE+ 2024–25. International sources comprised UNESCO's Quality Physical Education (QPE) materials and the 2024 Global State of Play report, the WHO physical activity fact sheet, and official releases from China and Japan. Secondary sources comprised peer-reviewed articles, legal commentaries and policy analyses.
- **Search strategy.** Searches were conducted in Google Scholar, government portals (PIB, PRS, MYAS, MoE), UNESDOC and publisher databases, using terms such as "NEP 2020 sports", "sports-integrated learning", "National Sports Governance Act 2025", "Khelo Bharat Niti", "quality physical education", "school sport policy" and "physical activity adolescents".
- **Inclusion criteria.** Documents published between 2015 and September 2026, in English, directly addressing PE, school or university sport, sports governance or youth physical activity. Commentary pieces were used only to corroborate primary sources.
- **Analysis.** Provisions were coded under six themes: (1) curriculum and pedagogy; (2) teachers and coaches; (3) infrastructure and finance; (4) talent pathways and competition; (5) governance, ethics and athlete welfare; and (6) inclusion and equity. The instruments were then compared theme by theme (Section 5).

3 SPORT AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN NEP 2020

NEP 2020 changes the status of sport from an add-on to an integral part of learning. Four features are especially significant.

3.1 Sports-Integrated Learning (Paragraph 4.8)

The policy describes sports-integration as a cross-curricular pedagogical approach that uses physical activities, including indigenous sports, to develop collaboration, self-initiative, self-direction, self-discipline, teamwork, responsibility and citizenship. It links this to helping students adopt fitness as a lifelong attitude, at the levels of fitness envisaged in the Fit India Movement (MoE, 2020, para. 4.8). Sport is thus framed as a method of teaching and not merely as a subject.

3.2 Removing the Curricular/Extra-Curricular Divide

NEP's fundamental principles call for no hard separation between curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular areas, and its list of essential skills explicitly includes physical education, fitness, wellness and sports (MoE, 2020). Researchers note the break with earlier policies, in which sport was treated only as an extra-curricular activity, and the new expectation that sport will be graded and counted in a child's education (Educreator Research Journal, n.d.).

3.3 Credit and Recognition

Following NEP, the Ministry of Education announced that the National Credit Framework (NCrF) would give due weightage to sports, and that academic credit for sporting activity would act as a catalyst for participation (ThePrint, 2022). The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023 carries this forward by treating Physical Education and Well-being as a curricular area across school stages.

3.4 Other Relevant Provisions

The 5+3+3+4 structure (ages 3–8, 8–11, 11–14 and 14–18) supports play-based and activity-based learning in the foundational stage.

Indian Knowledge Systems, including traditional games and yoga, are to be integrated into sport and physical activity (IJEBAS, 2025).

Higher education is to become holistic and multidisciplinary, creating room for sport, fitness and wellness within degree programmes.

3.5 Implementation Challenges Identified in the Literature

Studies report constraints in infrastructure and resources, competing academic priorities, resistance to change, teacher training needs, inclusivity, safety, evaluation complexity, sustainability and cultural perceptions of sport (Educreator Research Journal, n.d.). The policy intent is clear; the delivery system is still catching up.

4 THE NATIONAL SPORTS GOVERNANCE ACT 2025 AND KHELO BHARAT NITI 2025

The 2025 reforms comprise two complementary parts: a policy that sets direction (Khelo Bharat Niti) and a law that sets binding rules for sports bodies (the National Sports Governance Act, hereafter NSGA). Together they constitute India's new khel vidhi, or legal and policy framework for sport.

4.1 Khelo Bharat Niti – National Sports Policy 2025

Approved by the Union Cabinet in July 2025, the policy replaces the 2001 National Sports Policy and aims to position India as a global sporting power and a strong contender at international events, including the 2036 Olympic Games (IAS Gyan, 2025). Its five pillars are:

- **Excellence on the global stage** – talent identification, world-class coaching, sports science and stronger NSFs.
- **Sports for economic development** – sports tourism, manufacturing, sports-technology start-ups, and financing through public–private partnerships (PPP) and corporate social responsibility (CSR).
- **Sports for social development** – inclusion of women, tribal communities and persons with disabilities, and promotion of traditional games.
- **Sports as a people's movement** – mass participation through Fit India and Khelo India, and fitness indices for schools and workplaces.

- **Integration with education (NEP 2020)** – embedding sport in school curricula and training physical education teachers (National Medical Commission, 2025; Edunovations, 2025).

The Physical Education Foundation of India describes the fifth pillar as elevating PE to a mainstream academic discipline with structured assessment, and recognising PE teachers as central to talent identification and community wellness (PEFI, 2025). The policy also envisages teacher training, sports psychology and mental wellness in education (Usthadian Academy, 2025).

4.2 The National Sports Governance Act, 2025

The NSGA regulates who runs sport and how. Its principal provisions, as summarised by PRS Legislative Research (2025), are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Principal provisions of the National Sports Governance Act, 2025

Area	Key provision
Recognised bodies	One National Olympic Committee, one National Paralympic Committee, and National and Regional Sports Federations for each designated sport, with affiliate units at state and district levels
Executive committee	Up to 15 members, including at least two sportspersons of outstanding merit and four women
Age and tenure	Members aged 25–70 years (up to 75 where international rules permit); office-bearers limited to three consecutive terms
Internal systems	Mandatory committees, a code of ethics and a grievance redressal mechanism
National Sports Board (NSB)	Grants, suspends and cancels recognition; only recognised bodies receive central funds; inquires into athlete welfare and misuse of funds; may constitute ad hoc administrative bodies
National Sports Tribunal	Chaired by a sitting or former Supreme Court judge or High Court Chief Justice, with two expert members; powers of a civil court; appeals to the Supreme Court unless international rules require the Court of Arbitration for Sport
Elections	National panel of electoral officers to oversee elections of national sports bodies
Central government powers	May exempt a body from any provision in the public interest

Commentators highlight the mandatory Athletes, Safe Sport and Ethics committees and the requirement for safe-sport policies against harassment and abuse (Lukmaan IAS, 2025). Legal analysts note that civil courts are excluded from disputes the Tribunal is empowered to hear, and that a National Sports Board Fund will finance the Board's operations (Lexology, 2026b).

- **Implementation status.** Provisions relating to national sports bodies, the NSB, compliance requirements, the Tribunal and rule-making powers came into force on 1 January 2026, and the National Sports Board (Search-cum-Selection Committee) Rules were notified on 8 January 2026 (Lexology, 2026a).
- **Critiques.** Analysts caution that centralised control combined with selective transparency, including a narrowed application of the Right to Information Act, could create new accountability blind spots unless offset by strong disclosure rules and independent oversight (Lukmaan IAS, 2025). The broad central power to grant exemptions is a further concern.

4.3 Financing

The Union Budget 2026–27 allocated ₹4,479.88 crore to the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, up from ₹3,346.54 crore (Revised Estimate) in 2025–26, and announced a ten-year Khelo India Mission (Press Information Bureau [PIB], 2026). Within this, Khelo India received ₹924.35 crore and the Sports Authority of India ₹917.38 crore (The Bridge, 2026). These are sports-ministry funds; school PE is financed separately through education budgets such as Samagra Shiksha, which is itself an alignment issue.

5 ALIGNMENT ANALYSIS: CONVERGENCE AND GAPS

The three instruments agree on why sport matters but divide responsibility for how it is delivered. NEP 2020 and Khelo Bharat Niti are closely aligned, whereas the NSGA operates on a separate track focused on federations (Table 2).

Table 2: Thematic comparison of NEP 2020, Khelo Bharat Niti 2025 and NSGA 2025

Theme	NEP 2020	Khelo Bharat Niti 2025	NSGA 2025	Alignment
Curriculum and pedagogy	Sports-integrated learning; no hard curricular/extra-curricular divide	Sport embedded in school curricula (Pillar 5)	Not addressed	Strong in policy; absent in law
Teachers and coaches	Holistic teacher preparation	Training for PE teachers; coach development	Codes of ethics for coaches within NSFs	Partial
Assessment and credit	Grading of sport; credit via NCrF	Structured PE assessment; school fitness indices	Not addressed	Moderate
Talent pathways	Holistic development; not elite-focused	Grassroots-to-elite pipeline	Recognition of NSFs and state/district affiliates	Weak school–federation link
Governance and ethics	Institutional autonomy and accountability	Stronger NSF regulation	Statutory NSB, Tribunal, elections, term limits	Strong for federations only
Athlete welfare and safe sport	Student well-being and mental health	Sports psychology; mental wellness	Athletes, Safe Sport and Ethics committees	Good in principle; no school-level statute
Inclusion and equity	Focus on socio-economically disadvantaged groups	Women, tribal communities, persons with disabilities	Minimum four women on executive committees	Strong
Indigenous games	Part of sports-integration and IKS	Promotion of traditional games	Not addressed	Strong in policy

5.1 Points of Convergence

- **Holistic development.** Both policies treat sport as a vehicle for life skills, health and character, not only for medals.
- **Fitness as a lifelong habit.** NEP's link to the Fit India Movement is echoed in the policy's "people's movement" pillar.
- **Inclusion.** Gender, disability and tribal inclusion appear across all three instruments, including a statutory minimum of women on executive committees.
- **Accountability.** NEP's emphasis on transparent institutions is matched by the NSGA's governance rules.

5.2 Gaps and Tensions

- **The school–federation gap.** The NSGA governs NSFs and their affiliates but does not define how school sport bodies (such as the School Games Federation of India) or university sport (the Association of Indian Universities) relate to the new system. A child's pathway from a school team to a national federation is therefore not legally mapped.
- **Two ministries, two budgets.** School PE sits with the Ministry of Education, while Khelo India and the NSB sit with the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. Neither policy establishes a standing joint mechanism.
- **Assessment versus participation.** Grading sport can raise its status, but international experience (Section 6) shows that it can also turn PE into another examination subject.
- **Safe sport in schools.** Safe-sport duties bind federations under the NSGA, but coaching in schools and private academies is governed only by general child-protection law.

- **Data.** No instrument sets a national indicator for student physical activity or PE time, so progress cannot be measured.

6 GLOBAL TRENDS IN SPORT–EDUCATION INTEGRATION

Worldwide, the direction of travel mirrors India's: PE is becoming compulsory and more central, while countries struggle with funding, teacher supply and declining activity levels.

6.1 The Global Inactivity Challenge

WHO estimates that 81% of adolescents aged 11–17 years are physically inactive, and that 31% of adults did not meet recommended activity levels in 2022, an increase of five percentage points since 2010 (WHO, 2024). Among school-going adolescents, girls are less active than boys (85% versus 78%) (Guthold et al., 2020). The underlying analysis pooled 298 school-based surveys covering 1.6 million students in 146 countries (Guthold et al., 2020).

6.2 International Frameworks

- **UNESCO International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport (2015)** and the **Quality Physical Education (QPE) Guidelines for Policy-makers (2015)** place physical literacy at the centre of PE (UNESCO, 2015a, 2015b).
- **The Kazan Action Plan (MINEPS VI, 2017)** links sport policy to the Sustainable Development Goals, and **MINEPS VII (2023)** launched the Fit for Life alliance (UNESCO, 2017; GoPE! Research Group, 2025).
- **The WHO Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018–2030** promotes a whole-of-school approach and physical literacy (WHO, 2018).
- **UNESCO's Global State of Play report (2024)**, drawing on 117 countries and 2,455 PE teachers, reports that countries with a prescribed national PE curriculum rose from 79% in 2013 to 83% in 2024, yet 63.8% of countries spend less than 2% of their education budget on PE (UNESCO, 2024).

6.3 Country Models

Table 3: Selected national approaches to sport in education

Country	Model	Recent development	Lesson for India
China	State-mandated PE with examination weight	From 2025, at least two hours of daily physical activity for primary and middle school students; two 30-minute activity sessions a day; minimum 144 PE class hours in undergraduate programmes (State Council of the PRC, 2025). PE is weighted in the zhongkao; Yunnan raised it to 100 marks (China Daily Asia, 2020)	Clear time mandates work, but examination weighting risks making PE exam-focused (Sixth Tone, 2023)
Japan	School clubs (bukatsu) moving to community clubs	MEXT designated 2026–2031 as the reform implementation period for transferring club activities to community organisations; practice capped at about two hours on weekdays	Teacher workload limits require community and federation partners
United States	Collegiate sport linked to scholarships	Title IX (1972) mandates gender equity in education programmes, including athletics; college sport is a primary Olympic pathway	Universities can serve as a high-performance tier
United Kingdom	Ring-fenced school funding	PE and Sport Premium provides dedicated funding to primary schools to improve PE and sport (Department for Education, 2024)	Earmarked school-level grants improve delivery
Finland	Whole-school activity	Finnish Schools on the Move promotes physical activity throughout the school day, not only in PE lessons (Finnish National Agency for Education, n.d.)	Activity beyond the PE period

6.4 Emerging Trends

- **Physical literacy** – competence, confidence and motivation to move for life – rather than sport skills alone.
- **Minimum daily activity time** set in national policy rather than left to individual schools.
- **School–community partnerships**, driven by teacher workload (as in Japan) and facility sharing.
- **Safeguarding and athlete voice** in governance, mirroring the NSGA's athlete committees.

- **Surveillance systems** such as the Global Observatory for Physical Education (GoPE!) to track PE quality across countries (GoPE! Research Group, 2025).

7 THE INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM: STATUS, CHALLENGES AND GAPS

The scale of India's school system makes any PE reform primarily a problem of scale. UDISE+ 2024–25 reports about 14.7 lakh schools and 24.69 crore students, with the number of teachers crossing one crore (1,01,22,420) for the first time (PIB, 2025; Careers360, 2025).

7.1 Structural Constraints

- **Small schools.** About 57.8% of schools have fewer than 100 students, and over one lakh are single-teacher schools (Mehta, 2025). A dedicated PE teacher is unrealistic in most of them; school clusters or shared coaches are needed.
- **Teacher distribution.** Primary education accounts for 49.6% of enrolment but only 23.4% of teachers (Mehta, 2025), although the foundational years are when fundamental movement skills develop.
- **Playing space.** UDISE+ reports only marginal gains in playground availability, and urban schools in particular lack open ground.
- **Examination culture.** Board-examination pressure in Classes 10–12 continues to crowd out PE time, even where it is timetabled.
- **Status of PE teachers.** PE teachers are often few in number, on contract, or assigned non-teaching duties; Khelo Bharat Niti's emphasis on training and certification addresses this only in part.

7.2 Enablers Already in Place

- **Khelo India** (since 2017) provides Khelo India centres, Youth and University Games and athlete scholarships.
- **Fit India Movement** (2019) runs school fitness certification and the Fit India Quiz.
- **FIFA Football for Schools** has reached over 1.53 lakh schools, with more than 9.26 lakh footballs distributed (Believers IAS Academy, 2025).
- **National Sports University, Manipur**, and university departments of physical education supply trained professionals.
- **The National Credit Framework** allows academic credit for sporting achievement.

7.3 Higher Education

University sport is organised mainly through the Association of Indian Universities and the Khelo India University Games. However, most Indian universities lack professional coaches, sports science staff and flexible academic regulations for student-athletes. Unlike the collegiate model in the United States, university sport in India is not yet a recognised high-performance tier linked to national federations. Private and state universities with dedicated centres of physical education and sports sciences are well placed to pilot such a model.

8 DISCUSSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

India's policy design is now broadly consistent with global best practice; the remaining gap lies in institutional mechanisms. Measured against UNESCO's QPE model, India performs well on vision, inclusion and governance reform, and less well on time mandates, teacher supply, funding earmarks and data. The following recommendations follow from Sections 5 to 7.

- **R1. Joint Education–Sport Council.** Establish a standing Ministry of Education–MYAS mechanism, mirrored at state level, with a shared results framework for school and university sport, to address the two-ministry gap.
- **R2. Bridge school and university sport to the NSGA.** Through NSB rules or guidelines, require NSFs to recognise school and university competitions within their talent pathways, and bring school sport bodies under minimum governance and safe-sport standards.
- **R3. National PE Quality Framework with minimum standards.** Specify daily physical activity time by stage (for example, a 60-minute daily target consistent with WHO guidance), PE teacher ratios for school clusters and minimum facility norms. China's two-hour mandate demonstrates the value of clear targets.
- **R4. Assess participation and physical literacy, not only performance.** Include physical literacy and participation in NEP's holistic progress cards, and avoid turning PE into a high-stakes examination, given China's experience of exam-driven PE.
- **R5. PE teacher and coach workforce plan.** Expand certified PE teacher posts, permit cluster-level sharing in small schools, and create bridge courses for retired athletes to coach in schools.

- **R6. Shared facilities.** Open Khelo India centres and SAI facilities to nearby schools during school hours, and school grounds to communities after hours, following Japan's community-club approach.
- **R7. Earmarked funding.** Ring-fence a share of Samagra Shiksha and state education budgets for PE and school sport, in line with UNESCO's finding that most countries underinvest.
- **R8. Safe sport for all minors.** Extend NSGA-style safe-sport policies, background checks and grievance systems to schools, academies and school sport bodies.
- **R9. Data and research.** Add PE time, PE teacher posts, playground access and student fitness indicators to UDISE+, publish them annually, and participate in global surveillance initiatives such as GoPE!.
- **R10. Equity focus.** Target girls, rural and tribal students, and students with disabilities, given that 85% of adolescent girls globally are insufficiently active.

9 CONCLUSION

Between 2020 and 2025, India built a coherent policy architecture for sport in education: NEP 2020 brought sport into the curriculum, Khelo Bharat Niti 2025 made education a pillar of sports policy, and the National Sports Governance Act 2025 gave sports administration a statutory foundation. In terms of intent, India now matches the global frameworks promoted by UNESCO and WHO.

The principal risk is fragmentation. The governance law stops at the federation level; school PE depends on teachers and grounds that many schools lack; and there is no national measure of whether children are actually becoming more active. Closing these gaps through a joint coordination mechanism, a PE quality framework with minimum standards, a regulatory bridge between school sport and federations, and routine data collection will determine whether the 2025 reforms change children's daily lives or remain confined to elite sport.

9.1 Limitations

This is a narrative rather than a systematic review. The NSGA is in phased implementation, so outcome evidence is not yet available, and some international comparisons rely on government releases and secondary reporting.

9.2 Directions for Future Research

- Empirical studies of sports-integrated learning in Indian classrooms and its effects on learning outcomes and fitness.
- Evaluation of the National Sports Board and National Sports Tribunal after full notification.
- State-level comparisons of PE time, PE teacher posts and facilities using UDISE+ data.
- Studies of girls' participation in school sport and the barriers they face.
- Cost-effectiveness studies of shared-facility and school-cluster PE models.

STATEMENTS ON COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

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The author declares no conflict of interest.

Data availability

All sources analysed are publicly available and are listed in the references.

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