

The Evolution of Physical Education: A Policy Review in India (1947-2020)

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सारांशः

This report provides a comprehensive and critical analysis of the evolution of physical education (PE) policy in India from its post-independence foundations in 1947 to the transformative framework of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Utilizing a historical-analytical methodology, the review traces key government initiatives, committee reports, and policy documents, drawing on evidence from scholarly articles and official records. The analysis reveals a significant gap between the visionary objectives outlined in official documents and the practical realities on the ground. The NEP 2020, with its comprehensive integration of sports and physical education, presents a crucial opportunity to bridge this gap, but its success will depend on overcoming these long-standing implementation hurdles through robust monitoring, decentralized execution, and a fundamental shift in national mindset regarding the value of physical activity.

Keywords: Physical Education, khelo India Programme, Fit India Movement, National Sports Policy 2001, Tara Chand Committee, Sports Authority of India (SAI).

1. Introduction:

Prior to India's independence in 1947, the country's physical culture had undergone a period of significant degeneration. The British colonial government had banned many traditional physical activities, such as "sword fighting, dagger fight, [and] spear fight," which had been integral to Indian society (Kumar, M. 2018). While the British introduced certain Western sports, they paid little attention to physical education as a formal discipline. This neglect resulted in a fragmented landscape of physical activity, primarily limited to isolated gymnasiums and vyayamshalas (Kumar, M. 2018). Following independence, the Government of India recognized the imperative of revitalizing the nation's physical and mental well-being to foster a strong and disciplined youth. However, it lacked a coherent, nationwide policy framework to achieve this goal. This report examines how the Indian state addressed this challenge over more than seven decades, moving from a series of piecemeal initiatives to a more integrated, strategic approach. The need for a comprehensive policy review is more pressing than ever. The increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like obesity and diabetes in India, particularly among youth, underscores the critical role of physical education as a public health intervention (Acharjee, M. 2025). Concurrently, a growing body of research consistently demonstrates a strong correlation between physical activity and enhanced cognitive function, improved academic performance, and better psychological well-being in students (Acharjee, M. 2025). The analysis reveals a significant gap between the visionary objectives outlined in official documents and the practical realities on the ground. The NEP 2020, with its comprehensive integration of sports and physical education, presents a crucial opportunity to bridge this gap.

2. Objectives:

- Provide a detailed chronological review of major policies, committees, and initiatives from 1947 to 2020.
- Critically analyze the shifts in policy objectives and their underlying motivations.
- Identify and examine the persistent challenges that have hindered effective policy implementation.
- Evaluate the tangible and intangible outcomes of these policies on physical education in the Indian context.

3. Result:

By conducting this in-depth analysis, the report aims to offer understanding of the policy journey and provide a foundation for future strategies.

Objective 1: Provide a detailed chronological review of major policies, committees, and initiatives from 1947 to 2020. By conducting this in-depth analysis, the paper aims to offer understanding of the policy journey and provide a foundation for future strategies.

3.1.1 Early Post-Independence Committees and their Recommendations:

The period immediately following independence was characterized by a series of governmental efforts to address the perceived shortcomings in physical education and sports. This approach was largely reactive, with policies being formulated in response to specific events or identified needs rather than as part of a cohesive national strategy. A prime example is the Tara Chand Committee, established in 1948 to address the "deteriorated status" of physical education (Kumar, M. 2018). This committee made early recommendations, including the establishment of a central institute for physical education and recreation (Ingole, R. 2019). This initial focus on institutional development laid the groundwork for future professionalization. Building on these early efforts, the Central Advisory Board of Physical Education and Recreation (CABPER) was set up in 1950 to advise the government on all matters related to physical education. CABPER's recommendations included the "development training of leaders," the institution of scholarships for research, and providing financial assistance to physical education colleges. The Board also advised on the National Physical Efficiency Drive, a campaign launched in 1959-60 to evaluate the physical fitness of the general population and raise awareness.

A different, more direct approach to sports excellence was seen with the Rajkumari Coaching Scheme in 1953, which aimed to train athletes and sportsmen, notably employing celebrated players like Major Dhyan Chand. Concurrently, the All-India Council of Sports (AICS) was formed in the same year to establish a link between the central government and various sports federations, facilitating financial assistance and monitoring fund utilization. The reactive nature of policy-making during this era is further highlighted by the formation of the Adhoc Inquiry Committee in 1958. This body was a direct response to India's "poor performance and downward slide in Olympic games". It was tasked with suggesting ways to improve the standards of Indian competitions, focusing on aspects like appropriate training and special diets

for players. The proliferation of multiple, distinct bodies and committees in quick succession, often with overlapping mandates, without a singular, unified national plan, points to a fragmented, trial-and-error approach. The early government was seemingly focused on immediate, event-driven solutions for sports performance rather than a foundational, integrated strategy for physical education.

Despite the fragmented policy approach, this period was crucial for creating the institutional backbone of India's physical education and sports ecosystem. The most significant development was the establishment of the Lakshmibai College of Physical Education (LNCPE) in Gwalior in 1957. The institution began by offering a three-year degree course in physical education, and its growing importance was recognized through a series of re-naming and status upgrades: it was renamed Lakshmibai National College of Physical Education in 1973, given 'Autonomous College' status in 1982, and finally made a 'Deemed to be University' in 1995, becoming the Lakshmibai National Institute of Physical Education (LNIPE). Simultaneously, the National Institute of Sports (NIS) was established in 1961, with a focus on providing specialized training in specific games to professionalize sports coaching. The NIS later became part of the Sports Authority of India (SAI) in 1987, consolidating institutions under one centralized body. The progression of LNCPE from a college to a deemed university is a clear example of the gradual formal recognition of physical education as a legitimate academic and professional field, a development that laid the groundwork for future policy.

3. 1.2 The Kothari Commission and the First National Education Policy (1968)

A major conceptual shift in India's education policy occurred with the Kothari Commission report (1964-66). This was a landmark initiative that comprehensively examined all aspects of the educational sector. Its report, submitted in 1966, was foundational for India's first National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1968. The commission recommended that physical education be an integral part of the school curriculum, placing it alongside other subjects like work experience, social service, and education in moral values. This was a departure from viewing physical activity as a separate, optional pursuit. For the first time, a major national policy document formally enshrined physical education within the academic framework, providing a philosophical foundation for future policies. The 1968 NPE, based on these recommendations, called for a "radical restructuring" of education and aimed for compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14.

This period represents the initial, crucial transition from a reactive approach to a more conceptual, integrated vision for physical education. However, as the analysis on implementation challenges will show, the vision of the Kothari Commission and the 1968 NPE remained largely theoretical, with significant gaps in on-the-ground implementation that persisted for decades.

3.1.3 The Era of Formalization: Policy and Institutional Integration (1986-2000)

The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 and Programme of Action (PoA) 1992

The National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1986 marked a pivotal moment, shifting the focus from general principles to specific, actionable plans for the education sector. It emphasized a "child-centred approach" and explicitly called for the "removal of disparities" to equalize educational opportunities, particularly for women, Scheduled Tribes, and Scheduled Castes. A key provision was the explicit statement that sports and physical education should be an integrated part of the learning process and included in performance evaluation. The subsequent Programme of Action (PoA) of 1992 modified the 1986 policy, providing even more granular details for implementation. This program introduced the concept of decentralized educational management and community participation, empowering local bodies to manage schools and educational policies. To address infrastructural deficiencies, the PoA advocated for a "school complex model," where schools within a designated area would share resources such as libraries and sports facilities. The policy also laid out specific, quantitative targets, mandating a minimum of ten physical education periods per week for lower primary schools and specifying minimum annual budgets for sports equipment. It also stipulated that new colleges should not be established without adequate playfield facilities and that four to five acres of land in urban plans should be earmarked as common playgrounds. These detailed provisions indicate a new level of sophistication and a genuine attempt to bridge the gap between policy and practice. The move to a decentralized model reflects an emerging understanding that a top-down approach is insufficient for a diverse country. However, these ambitious targets were frequently not met on the ground.

3.1.4 The Role and Impact of the Sports Authority of India (SAI)

The establishment of the Sports Authority of India (SAI) in 1984 marked a significant institutional drive to professionalize and centralize elite sports development. SAI was created to carry forward the legacy of the 1982 Asian Games and was entrusted with promoting sports

and achieving "sporting excellence at the national and international level". A key milestone was the merger of the Society for National Institute of Physical Education and Sports (SNIPES) with SAI in 1987, which brought prestigious institutions like the Netaji Subhas National Institute of Sports (NSNIS) in Patiala and the LNCPE in Thiruvananthapuram under a single umbrella. This consolidation operationalized the recommendations of earlier committees by creating a structured framework for talent identification, coaching, and athlete support. The creation of this vast network of sports academies and training centers signaled a clear distinction between two policy streams: one focused on mass education (the NPE) and the other on elite sports performance (SAI).

3.1.5 The Modern Era: Towards a Holistic and Mass-based Approach (2001-2020)

The National Sports Policy (NSP) of 2001 codified a new, dual mandate for physical activity in India: "Broad-basing" of sports and "Achieving Excellence" at the national and international levels. This represented a significant evolution from the reactive, elite-focused policies of the past. The NSP 2001 explicitly aimed to "integrate more effectively" sports and physical education with the education curriculum, making it a compulsory subject up to the secondary school level. It also addressed the need for infrastructure development in rural areas and the identification of athletic talent from remote regions, including archers in tribal areas and swimmers in coastal regions. The policy's focus on a more inclusive vision for physical education began to bridge the long-standing gap between national sports bodies and the educational system, recognizing that a broad base of participation is necessary to identify and develop elite talent.

3.1.6 The Khelo India Programme (2017-18)

The Khelo India Programme, launched in 2017-18, represents the operationalization of the twin-objective policy set out in the NSP 2001. It is the first comprehensive scheme to provide a clear, nationwide framework for linking grassroots participation with elite talent development. The program aims to improve India's sports culture at the "grass-root level through organized talent identification, structured sporting competitions and infrastructure development". Its major components include the creation and upgrading of sports infrastructure, structured competitions like the Khelo India Youth Games and University Games, and the establishment of Khelo India Centres and sports academies. This multi-tiered strategy aims to create a continuous pipeline for athletic talent. The program's innovative

financial model, which leverages corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds, public-private partnerships (PPP), and District Mineral Funds, signals a departure from purely government-funded initiatives.

3.1.7 The Fit India Movement (2019)

Launched in 2019, the Fit India Movement is a nationwide campaign that moves beyond institutional and curricular mandates to a public cultural change initiative. Its core mission is to bring about "behavioural changes and move towards a more physically active lifestyle" by making fitness an integral part of daily life. The movement's objectives include encouraging indigenous sports and extending its reach to "every school, college/university, panchayat/village". This initiative is recognition that promoting physical activity requires a fundamental societal shift in mindset, not just government directives. The campaign's focus on daily physical activity, rather than just competitive sports, adds a crucial public health dimension to the national policy discourse.

3.1.8 The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents the culmination of this policy evolution. It is a comprehensive framework that fully integrates physical education and sports into the mainstream curriculum, a paradigm shift that aims to make it a subject for learning, not just an extracurricular activity. The policy views physical education as an "integral component of holistic education," emphasizing its equality with academic subjects. By advocating for PE to be integrated into the school curriculum at all levels, the NEP 2020 seeks to ensure regular physical activity for all students. This approach, in theory, addresses the long-standing cultural bias against physical activity by making it a core component of a child's overall development.

Objective 2: Critically analyze the shifts in policy objectives and their underlying motivations. Despite the clear and progressive evolution of policy, a significant gap has persisted between the visionary goals outlined in official documents and the practical realities on the ground. A comprehensive analysis of policy implementation reveals several chronic, systemic challenges.

3.2.1 Infrastructural Deficiencies and Resource Allocation Gaps

A primary hindrance to effective implementation is the widespread lack of adequate sports infrastructure and equipment, particularly in rural schools. Despite policies like the NPE 1986 mandating the provision of playgrounds and the Khelo India scheme focusing on

infrastructure development, funding for physical education is often "minimal," with the majority of budgets allocated to academic subjects.

The "2022 India Report Card on Physical Activity for Children & Adolescents" provides a quantitative illustration of this gap. The report gave the "School—Infrastructure, Policies and Programs" indicator a grade of C, noting that while schools mandate physical education classes, there is limited access to facilities outside of these classes. The data reveals that approximately 44% of students in urban and rural Pune had access to activity areas during school hours, but only 9% reported having access to gym areas before or after school. This highlights a failure to operationalize a true culture of physical activity beyond mandatory class hours, restricting opportunities for physical activity accumulation.

Table 1: Quantitative Data on Physical Education Infrastructure & Access (2022)

Indicator	Access Type	Access Level
School Infrastructure & Policies	Overall Grade	C
Access to Activity Areas	Between school hours	44%
Access to Outdoor Areas	Between classes	63%
Access to Physical Activity Equipment	Throughout school day	85%
Access to Gym Areas	Before/after school	9%
Access to Outdoor Facilities	Before/after school	55%
Allowed to use equipment	Before/after school	35%

Source: The 2022 India Report Card on Physical Activity for Children & Adolescents.

3.2.2 The Human Element: Teacher Training, Status, and Staffing

The quality and availability of the teaching workforce represent another significant challenge. Many schools, particularly in rural areas, lack "qualified Physical Education teachers". A case study from Kerala indicated a teacher-to-student ratio as high as 1:500 in some areas, making individual attention and effective training nearly impossible. PE teachers often face low salaries, job insecurity, and are "overburdened with non-sports duties". These responsibilities, such as discipline duty and administrative work, reduce the time and focus they can dedicate to coaching and physical education.

The persistent challenges related to PE teachers demonstrate that policy formulation often overlooks the human capital required for implementation. A policy that mandates physical education is rendered meaningless without a skilled, well-compensated, and respected teaching force. The low status and poor working conditions of PE teachers directly reflect a persistent societal devaluation of the subject, creating a cycle where a lack of qualified teachers reinforces the perception that physical education is unimportant.

3.2.3 Socio-cultural Barriers and Prioritization of Academics

A pervasive "cultural attitude" in India prioritizes academic achievement over physical education. This mindset is deeply embedded in the education system and society, with parents often pushing students to focus on academic subjects and viewing sports careers as financially uncertain. This issue is not merely a matter of individual choice but can be a source of significant public controversy. The Kerala government's initiative to introduce Zumba classes in public schools faced fierce backlash from religious and cultural groups who accused the state of promoting "immorality". This incident demonstrates that even progressive policies can be met with strong, deep-seated resistance. The cultural bias against physical education, coupled with the intense academic pressure on Indian students, creates a fundamental barrier that no government policy can overcome without a corresponding, grassroots shift in societal values. The success of the NEP 2020 and other such initiatives will ultimately depend on its ability to change this public perception.

Objective 3: Identify and examine the persistent challenges that have hindered effective policy implementation.

A study of sports managers revealed that policy implementation is further hampered by issues of governance and corruption. "Corruption and poor governance" were identified as the most significant hindrances, with 88% and 80% of respondents, respectively, citing them as major issues. The lack of effective "monitoring and evaluation mechanisms" was also cited as a major challenge by 64% of respondents. This evidence points to a foundational weakness in the policy ecosystem: the execution framework is often compromised. The existence of a policy on paper does not guarantee its implementation, particularly in the absence of accountability and transparency. This issue, mentioned as early as the Adhoc Inquiry Committee's purpose in 1958, appears to be a chronic problem that has persisted despite decades of policy revisions and new schemes.

Objective 4: Evaluate the tangible and intangible outcomes of these policies on physical education in the Indian context.

3.3.1 The Link between Physical Education, Physical Fitness, and Academic Performance

A growing body of scholarly work provides a compelling counter-narrative to the cultural bias that prioritizes academics over physical education. Multiple studies have established a positive correlation between physical fitness and academic achievement in Indian children. Research indicates that physical activity improves cognitive functions like memory, attention, and problem-solving, creating a brain environment more receptive to learning. A study involving 190 Indian children found a positive correlation between academic achievement and physical fitness ($r=0.74$, $P<0.05$). The evidence indicates that physical education is not a zero-sum game with academics but a complementary and beneficial activity that contributes to better learning outcomes.

3.3.2 Physical Education as a Tool for Public Health

Beyond academic benefits, physical education is a crucial intervention for combating the rising tide of childhood obesity and related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in India. Studies have shown that structured physical education programs can lower body mass index (BMI) and promote lifelong active behaviors. While India's Ministry of Health has a National Programme for Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases (NP-NCD), a dedicated "National Physical Activity policy" is still needed to promote physical activity across the population. The lack of a cohesive, branded policy framework to address physical inactivity as a public health issue represents a significant gap in India's public health landscape, which one study argues is crucial to address the NCD threat.

3.3.3 Psychological and Social Benefits

Physical education offers significant psychological and social benefits that are often overlooked in the debate over academic performance. Regular physical activity has been shown to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression by releasing endorphins and lowering cortisol levels. It also fosters a sense of discipline and boosts self-esteem. Team sports and group activities promote social connections, teamwork, and communication skills, which are vital for mental well-being and a sense of belonging. This dimension positions physical education not just as a health or sports tool but as a vital component of mental and emotional resilience, preparing students to navigate the pressures of modern life.

4. Discussion and Recommendations

The evolution of physical education policy in India since 1947 can be synthesized as a journey from reactive institutionalism to a holistic, well-articulated policy framework. The Foundational Era was marked by fragmented, event-driven responses to poor sports performance. The Era of Formalization saw the first concerted efforts to integrate PE into the educational curriculum with concrete, albeit ambitious, plans. The Modern Era, which culminated with the NEP 2020, institutionalized a sophisticated, dual-pronged approach targeting both mass participation and elite excellence. The most significant success is the creation of a robust institutional framework, including the Sports Authority of India (SAI) and the National Institutes of Sports (NIS), which has professionalized sports development. Policies like the NPE 1986 and NEP 2020 have also succeeded in formally integrating physical education into the national educational discourse. The launch of large-scale grassroots schemes like the Khelo India Programme and the Fit India Movement has created a nationwide platform for promoting physical activity. The overarching failure is the persistent and wide-ranging gap between policy and practice. The comprehensive review of physical education in India in terms of key policies, committees, and initiatives from 1947 to 2020 can be summarized as:

Table 2: Evolution of Physical Education and Sports Policy in India (1947-2020)

Era/Period	Policy/ Initiative	Year	Key Objectives/Provisions
Foundational Era	Tara Chand Committee	1948	To address the deteriorated status of physical education and recommend a central institute for its development.
	Central Advisory Board of Physical Education and Recreation (CABPER)	1950	To advise the government on PE matters, recommend training leaders and conducting a national physical efficiency drive.

	All India Council of Sports (AICS)	1953	To establish a link between the central government and sports federations to facilitate financial assistance.
	Rajkumari Coaching Scheme	1953	To provide training to athletes and sportsmen, utilizing famous players as coaches.
	Lakshmibai College of Physical Education (LNCPE)	1957	Established as a central institution to offer a three-year degree course in physical education.
	Adhoc Inquiry Committee	1958	Formed to investigate the reasons for India's poor performance in the Olympic Games and suggest improvements.
	National Institute of Sports (NIS)	1961	To provide specialized training and technical competence for sports coaches.
	Kothari Commission	1964-66	Recommended that physical education and games be an integral, compulsory part of the school curriculum.
	National Policy on Education (NPE)	1968	Called for a "radical restructuring" of the education system and aimed for compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14, based on Kothari Commission recommendations.
Formalization Era	National Policy on	1986	Stated that sports and physical education should be an integrated

	Education (NPE)		part of the learning and evaluation process.
	Sports Authority of India (SAI)	1984	Created to manage sports infrastructure and promote sports and excellence at the national and international level.
	Programme of Action (PoA)	1992	Modified the 1986 policy to include decentralized educational management and a "school complex model" for resource sharing.
Modern Era	National Sports Policy (NSP)	2001	Introduced the dual objectives of "Broad-basing" of sports and "Achieving Excellence" at national and international levels.
	Khelo India Programme	2017-18	A nationwide program to improve sports at the grassroots level through talent identification, structured competitions, and infrastructure development.
	Fit India Movement	2019	A nationwide campaign to make fitness an integral part of daily life and promote a more physically active lifestyle.
	National Education Policy (NEP)	2020	Fully integrated sports and physical education into the mainstream curriculum as a core component of "holistic education"

The analysis confirms that implementation has been the Achilles' heel of nearly every policy. This gap stems from a confluence of factors, including inadequate funding, chronic

infrastructural deficits, a lack of qualified and respected teachers, poor governance, and a deep-seated cultural bias against physical education.

Recommendations for a Future-Ready Physical Education:

Based on the analysis, the following recommendations are crucial to ensure the success of future physical education policies in India:

- **Address the Implementation Gap:** Policymakers must move beyond simply formulating visionary documents. It is imperative to establish robust, transparent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the progress and impact of policies on the ground, as recommended by a majority of sports managers surveyed in a recent study. The status and working conditions of physical education teachers must be significantly improved. This includes offering competitive salaries, ensuring job security, and providing continuous professional development opportunities to attract and retain qualified personnel.
- **Bridge the Cultural Divide:** A sustained public awareness campaign is needed to counter the cultural bias against physical education. This campaign should leverage the growing body of evidence that proves the positive correlation between physical activity and academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being.
- **Establish a National Physical Activity Policy:** While the Fit India Movement exists, a more cohesive, standalone national policy is needed to strategically promote physical activity across all age groups. Such a policy should be branded effectively and integrated with existing public health programs like the NP-NCD to create a unified framework for combating lifestyle diseases.
- **Strengthen Decentralization:** The decentralized management model proposed in the PoA 1992 should be fully empowered and implemented. This will allow for policies to be tailored to specific regional needs and foster greater community involvement and accountability.

Conclusion:

The evolution of physical education policy in India from 1947 to 2020 is a narrative of progression from a reactive, piecemeal approach to a sophisticated, holistic, and well-articulated policy framework. The journey, beginning with foundational committees and culminating in the comprehensive vision of the NEP 2020, reflects an increasing understanding

of the multi-faceted benefits of physical education. However, the report's analysis reveals that this policy evolution has not been matched by a corresponding improvement in implementation. The period closes with a visionary policy in the NEP 2020 that, in theory, addresses many of the long-standing challenges. The future of physical education in India, therefore, hinges not on the creation of more policies, but on the political will and societal commitment to overcome the chronic implementation hurdles related to infrastructure, human resources, and cultural perceptions, thereby transitioning from a policy document to a lived reality.

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