

THE TRANSFORMATION OF SPORTS CULTURE AMONG INDIAN SCHOOL CHILDREN THROUGH THE KHELO INDIA SCHEME

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Abstract

The Indian educational framework consigns physical education to a superficial role, rarely recognizing it as a important professional pathway. The implementation of the Khelo India scheme has systematically disturbed this old process of development. This paper evaluates how the initiative is restructuring the sporting culture in boundaries of Indian schools. By filtering government data, policy evaluations, and academic literature, the analysis traces the transition from informal recreational play to formalized talent pipelines. The findings demonstrate measurable improvements in student engagement, infrastructural development, and parental perceptions of athletics. Furthermore, this study delineates the operational friction points that continue to implementation the program, providing actionable insights to optimize future execution.

Keywords: Khelo India, Grassroots Sports, Physical Education, Youth Athletics, Sports Scholarships, Indian School Sports.

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Introduction

Academics had been priority in long dominated Indian scholastic education environment. Consequently, sports were frequently perceived as a high-risk diversion rather than a developmental necessity. Youth exhibiting genuine athletic potential routinely encountered systemic barriers, including underfunded facilities, a lack of qualified coaching, and non-existent financial support.

The Government of India introduced the Khelo India scheme—initially launched as the Khelo India School Games in 2018—to dismantle these structural limitations. The initiative operates on a dual mandate: expanding mass participation while simultaneously fostering elite performance. By targeting youth and providing them with national competitive platforms alongside substantial financial backing, the policy attempts to institutionalize athletic development. This paper explores how directed funding and structured competitive frameworks are actively redefining India's athletic culture at the scholastic level.

Objectives of the Study

This research focuses on four primary objectives:

- Evaluate the scheme's influence on student and institutional attitudes toward physical education.
- Analyze the relation between long-term financial scholarships and grassroots participation rates.
- Assess the socio-psychological adaptations observed in participating youth athletes.
- Identify administrative and infrastructural bottlenecks limiting the program's overall efficacy.

Review of Literature

The Status Quo of Physical Education Historically, physical education in India lacked measurable performance metrics. Khatri (2025) outlines how, prior to comprehensive policies like Khelo India, schools rarely invested in specialized coaching or infrastructure due to the absence of formal tracking and competitive stakes.

The Incentive Factor Talent identification protocols frequently stall without robust financial scaffolding. Singh et al. (2023) demonstrated that when tangible rewards—such as multi-year funding and subsequent employment eligibility—are integrated into the development pipeline, grassroots participation spikes significantly.

Cultural Shifts in Athletics The systemic integration of sports into the educational ecosystem creates a highly visible pathway for youth. Parmar and Sahu (2023) highlight that the Khelo India ecosystem fosters an "aspirational contagion." When student-athletes compete on national broadcast platforms and secure substantial scholarships, athletics rapidly acquires significant social currency within scholastic environments.

Methodology

This research utilizes a descriptive-analytical framework. Secondary data was synthesized from multiple authoritative sources, including the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports operational guidelines (MoYAS, 2021) and third-party evaluations conducted by the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP, 2026). By juxtaposing official policy mandates against empirical implementation reports, this study evaluates the tangible impact of the scheme on school-aged demographics.

Analysis

Redefining Physical Education The Khelo India framework compelled academic institutions to formalize fitness assessments. The deployment of the Khelo India Mobile App enabled physical education instructors to map and track the physiological parameters of a massive student demographic. Consequently, sports are transitioning from an extracurricular afterthought to a core co-curricular requirement, driving an unprecedented institutional demand for upgraded equipment and certified coaching personnel.

The Financial Catalyst Athletic potential requires sustained financial investment to translate into elite performance. The scheme's foundational mechanism is its scholarship model, which allocates ₹5 lakh annually for eight years to identified elite talent. This financial security fundamentally alters parental risk assessment. Rather than diverting youth away from athletics to focus strictly on academics, parents increasingly support rigorous training regimes, recognizing a legitimate, funded developmental pathway.

Breaking Gender Barriers The initiative is actively catalyzing a demographic shift in female athletic participation. Historically, cultural constraints and inadequate infrastructure severely limited female engagement in sports. By mandating dedicated support structures and equitable competitive brackets, the policy has begun to neutralize these barriers. States that have deeply integrated the Khelo India framework report consistent increases in female athletic registration, indicating that when safe, structured opportunities are provided, participation naturally follows.

Reviving Indigenous Sports The program extends beyond standard Olympic disciplines by formally integrating traditional regional sports such as Gatka, Kalaripayattu, Thang-Ta, and Mallakhamba. This inclusion serves a dual purpose: it preserves regional athletic heritage and provides rural youth a formalized route to national competition. As Pitts et al. (2025) observed in

rural empowerment models, providing centralized platforms for localized sports fosters profound community pride and engagement.

Psychological and Social Growth Immersion in high-stakes competitive environments accelerates socio-psychological maturation. Youth integrated into the Khelo India pipeline are exposed to rigorous travel, diverse competitor pools, and intense performance pressure. Adapting to this environment cultivates resilience, teamwork, and a specialized self-efficacy that translates directly into their broader academic and personal lives.

Challenges in Implementation

Despite these systemic advancements, several operational frictions persist:

- **The Coaching Deficit:** A critical shortage of technically trained physical education instructors remains, particularly within rural and semi-urban districts.
- **Infrastructure Gaps:** Capital distribution is geographically uneven. While certain regions have developed world-class training hubs, others continue to struggle with severely degraded schoolyard facilities.
- **Information Bottlenecks:** Administrative inefficiencies continue to plague the system. A notable percentage of athletes report delayed allowance disbursements or possess an incomplete understanding of the longitudinal performance criteria required to maintain their scholarship status.

Conclusion

The Khelo India scheme is successfully restructuring the foundational architecture of Indian sports culture. By elevating physical education from a neglected requirement to a highly incentivized pursuit, the initiative provides a structured pathway for youth talent. The strategic combination of long-term athlete funding, scholastic facility upgrades, and the integration of indigenous sports is establishing a sustainable developmental ecosystem.

While the momentum is undeniable, the program's ultimate success hinges on administrative refinement. Resolving disbursement delays and aggressively decentralizing infrastructure funds into rural educational sectors will be imperative if India is to transition from merely participating in global sports to achieving sustained international competitiveness.

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