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# Integrating Physical Education and Language Across the Curriculum in the Indian Education System: A Holistic Pedagogical Framework

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**Abstract:**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 marks a transformative shift in India's educational landscape by emphasising holistic, multidisciplinary, and experiential learning. This article explores the integration of Physical Education (PE) and Language Across the Curriculum (LAC) as a synergistic pedagogical approach within the Indian education system. Drawing upon the principles of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), sports-integrated pedagogy, and the multilingual ethos of NEP 2020, the paper argues that PE provides a dynamic context for authentic language use, while LAC enhances the cognitive and communicative dimensions of physical activity. Through conceptual mapping and a multi-layered framework, the study elucidates how movement-based learning, indigenous games, and multilingual instructional strategies can simultaneously foster physical fitness, academic language proficiency, socio-emotional skills, and cultural awareness. Challenges related to teacher preparedness, infrastructure, and assessment are examined, and practical recommendations are offered for curriculum designers, teacher educators, and policymakers. The article concludes that the PE–LAC nexus aligns with the vision of NEP 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023, contributing to the development of well-rounded, competent, and confident learners.

**Keywords:** Physical Education; Language Across the Curriculum; Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL); National Education Policy 2020; Indian Education System; Sports-Integrated Pedagogy; Holistic Education; Multilingualism

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## 1. Introduction

Education in the twenty-first century demands approaches that transcend traditional subject boundaries and nurture the whole child—physically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally. In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 articulates this vision with unprecedented clarity, calling for the removal of hard separations between curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular domains, and positioning physical education, fitness, wellness, and sports as essential components of school education (Ministry of Education, 2020). Parallel to this, the policy strongly advocates multilingualism, mother-tongue-based instruction in the early years, and the flexible three-language formula, thereby reinforcing the centrality of language in learning.

Language Across the Curriculum (LAC) is an educational philosophy and pedagogical approach that recognises language as the primary medium through which knowledge is constructed, shared, and assessed in every subject. Rather than confining language learning to language classrooms, LAC asserts that every teacher is a language teacher and that every subject offers unique opportunities for language development (Corson, 1990; Mohan, 1986). When applied to Physical Education, LAC intersects with Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) frameworks that deliberately plan dual-focused lessons in which movement skills and communicative competence develop together.

This article examines the theoretical and practical possibilities of integrating PE and LAC within the Indian education system. It presents major concept maps and a multi-layered conceptual framework, discusses implementation challenges in the Indian context, and offers recommendations aligned with NEP 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023.

## 2. Conceptual Foundations of Language Across the Curriculum

Language Across the Curriculum emerged from the recognition that language is not merely a subject but the principal tool of thought and learning across the entire curriculum. Key tenets of LAC include: (a) language is learned most effectively when used for authentic purposes; (b) subject-specific discourses (academic language) must be explicitly taught; (c) reading, writing, speaking, and listening are interconnected processes that support content mastery; and (d) multilingual learners benefit from opportunities to draw upon their full linguistic repertoire (Cummins, 2000; Gibbons, 2015).

In the Indian context, LAC gains additional significance because of the country's linguistic diversity. NEP 2020's emphasis on mother-tongue/local language as the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, coupled with the three-language formula, creates a natural environment for translanguaging practices in which students move fluidly between languages while engaging with content. Physical Education classrooms, characterised by high interaction, collaborative tasks, and immediate feedback, offer particularly rich contexts for such language use.

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Figure 1: Concept Map of Language Across the Curriculum (LAC)

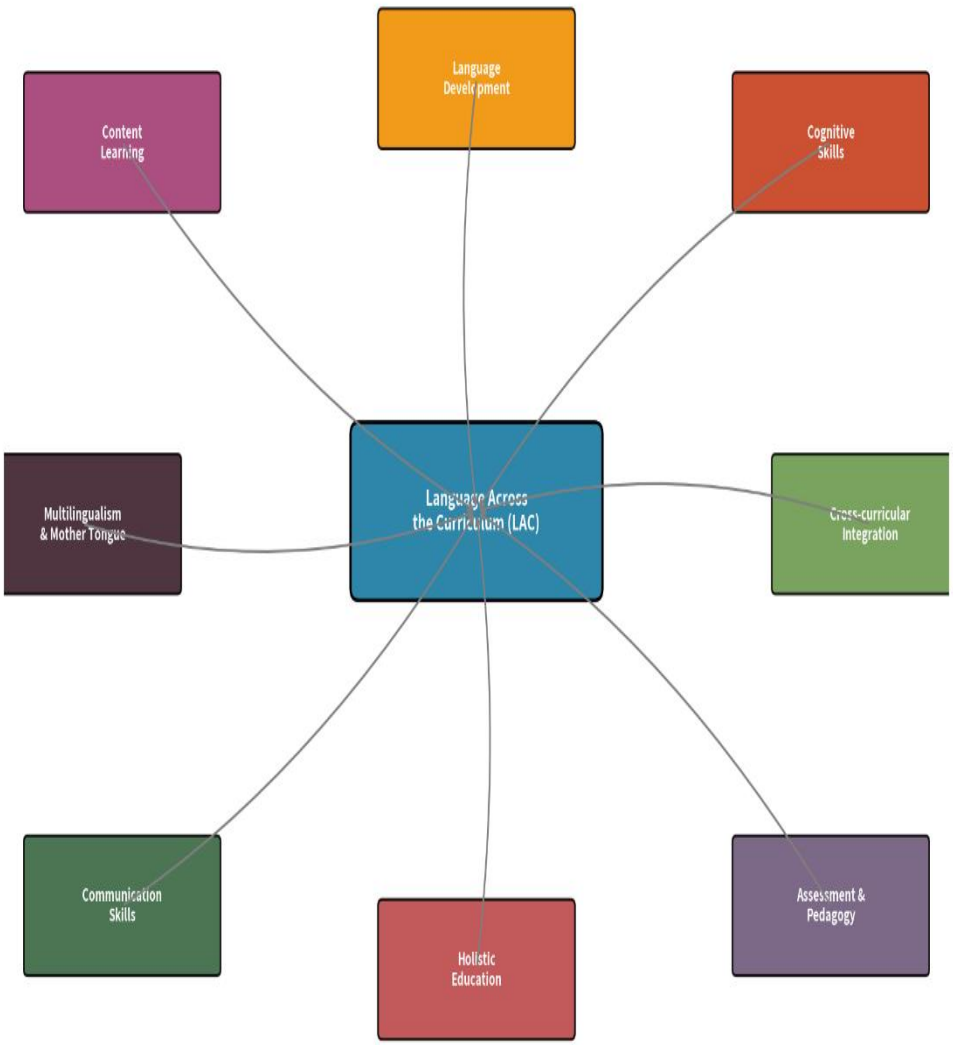


*Figure 1. Concept Map of Language Across the Curriculum (LAC)*

**3. Physical Education in the Indian Education System**

Historically, Physical Education in Indian schools occupied a marginal status, often treated as a non-academic or purely recreational activity. The Kothari Commission (1964–66) had already underscored the importance of PE, yet implementation remained uneven. NEP 2020 represents a decisive break from this tradition. Paragraph 4.8 explicitly promotes sports-integration as a cross-curricular pedagogical approach that utilises physical activities, including indigenous sports, to develop collaboration, self-initiative, self-direction, self-discipline, teamwork, responsibility, and citizenship. The policy further advocates that there should be no hard separation between curricular and co-curricular areas, and that physical education, fitness, wellness, and sports should be integrated throughout the school years.

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023 operationalises these principles by designating Physical Education and Well-being as a compulsory curricular area from Grades 3 to 10, with specific learning standards, pedagogical recommendations, and assessment guidelines. NCERT has subsequently developed textbooks and teacher resources to support this shift. Concurrently, initiatives such as the Fit India Movement and the National Sports Policy reinforce the national commitment to physical literacy and sports culture.

**4. The Nexus of Physical Education and Language Across the Curriculum**

Integrating LAC into PE, or adopting a CLIL approach within PE lessons, rests on several pedagogical arguments. First, physical activity generates authentic communicative needs: students must give and follow instructions, negotiate rules, describe techniques, evaluate performance, and reflect on strategies. These functions map directly onto cognitive discourse functions (categorise, define, describe, evaluate, explain, explore, report) that are central to academic language development (Dalton-Puffer, 2016).

Second, the embodied nature of PE supports multimodal meaning-making. Gestures, demonstrations, spatial arrangements, and peer modelling scaffold language comprehension, particularly for learners who are still developing proficiency in the medium of instruction. Third, collaborative games and team sports naturally promote interactional language—turn-taking, clarification requests, encouragement, and conflict resolution—skills that transfer to other academic and social contexts.

In the Indian multilingual classroom, PE sessions can deliberately incorporate indigenous games (such as kho-kho, kabaddi, gilli-danda, or regional variants) whose terminology, rules, and cultural narratives are rich in local linguistic and cultural knowledge. Teachers can plan dual-focused objectives: a motor skill goal (e.g., improving agility in kho-kho) paired with a language goal (e.g., using sequential connectors to explain a game strategy in the regional language and in English).

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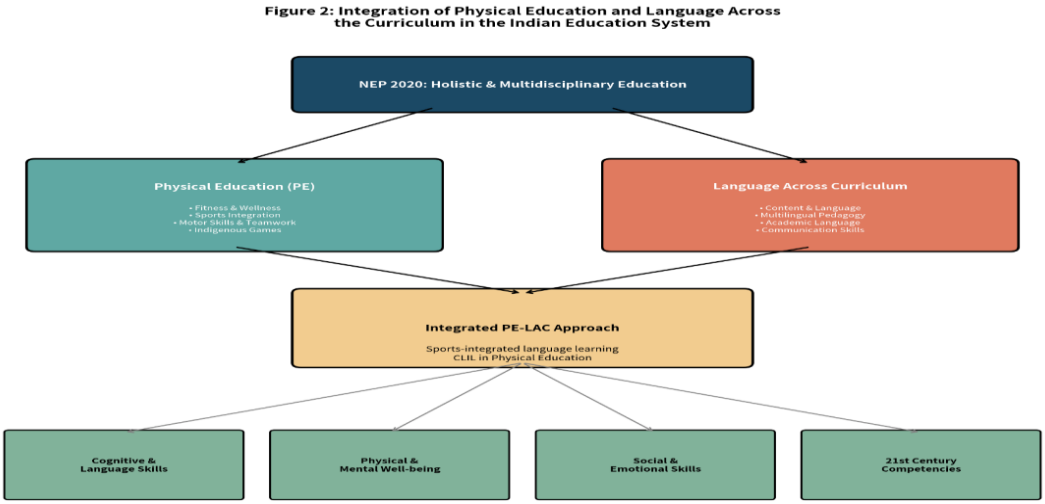


*Figure 2. Integration of Physical Education and Language Across the Curriculum in the Indian Education System*

**5. A Multi-Layered Conceptual Framework**

Drawing upon the preceding discussion, a multi-layered conceptual framework for PE–LAC integration in Indian schools is proposed (see Figure 3). The framework comprises five interdependent layers:

1. **Policy Layer:** NEP 2020, NCF-SE 2023, the three-language formula, Fit India Movement, and related national and state policies that legitimise and resource the integration.
2. **Pedagogical Layer:** Sports-integrated pedagogy, CLIL/LAC principles, experiential and play-based learning, and translanguaging practices.
3. **Classroom Layer:** Concrete lesson designs that combine movement tasks with language objectives, use of indigenous games, multilingual instructions and feedback, and peer scaffolding.
4. **Learner Outcomes Layer:** Physical fitness and motor competence; academic and communicative language proficiency; socio-emotional skills (teamwork, resilience, empathy); critical thinking and problem-solving; and cultural awareness and pride in indigenous knowledge systems.
5. **Support Systems Layer:** Pre-service and in-service teacher education that builds dual competence in PE pedagogy and language-aware teaching; adequate infrastructure and equipment; dual-purpose assessment rubrics; and engagement with parents and local communities.

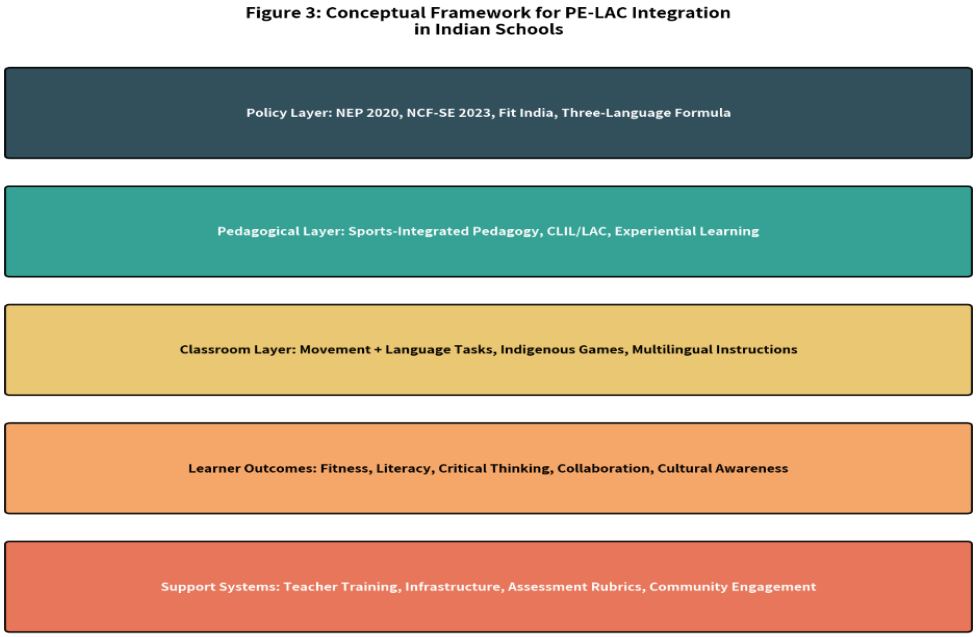


*Figure 3. Conceptual Framework for PE–LAC Integration in Indian Schools*

## 6. Challenges in the Indian Context

Despite the enabling policy environment, several challenges constrain the realisation of PE–LAC integration. First, many PE teachers have limited training in language pedagogy, while language teachers rarely receive preparation for movement-based or sports-integrated methods. Second, infrastructure and equipment deficits in government and rural schools limit the range of physical activities that can be organised. Third, high-stakes examination cultures continue to prioritise traditional academic subjects, sometimes relegating PE periods to compensatory or free-play slots. Fourth, the linguistic complexity of Indian classrooms—where students may speak different home languages and the medium of instruction may differ—requires sophisticated translanguaging strategies that many teachers feel unprepared to manage. Finally, assessment systems are still evolving; dual-focused rubrics that fairly evaluate both motor skill and language outcomes are not yet widely available or understood.

## 7. Recommendations

To advance the PE–LAC agenda, the following measures are recommended:

- Integrate modules on CLIL/LAC and sports-integrated pedagogy into both pre-service teacher education (B.Ed., B.P.Ed.) and continuous professional development programmes.
- Develop and disseminate model dual-focused lesson plans and dual-purpose assessment rubrics aligned with NCF-SE learning standards, with special attention to indigenous games and multilingual strategies.

- Strengthen school infrastructure for PE while encouraging low-cost, space-efficient activities that can be conducted in limited areas.
- Promote collaborative planning between PE teachers and language teachers within school complexes, as envisaged by NEP 2020.
- Encourage action research and documentation of local innovations so that successful PE–LAC practices can be scaled and adapted across diverse Indian contexts.
- Leverage digital tools (video feedback, simple recording apps) to support reflection on both movement performance and language use.

## 8. Conclusion

The integration of Physical Education and Language Across the Curriculum offers a powerful pathway toward the holistic, multidisciplinary, and joyful learning envisioned by NEP 2020. By treating the PE classroom as a site of authentic language use and by treating language development as an integral dimension of physical and socio-emotional growth, educators can help students become fitter, more articulate, more collaborative, and more culturally rooted learners. The concept maps and multi-layered framework presented in this article provide a conceptual scaffold for curriculum developers, teacher educators, and practising teachers. Realising this vision will require sustained investment in teacher capacity, infrastructure, and assessment reform, yet the potential benefits for India's diverse student population are substantial and fully consistent with the nation's educational aspirations.

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