



## **The Role of Library Access in Academic Success for Athletes at National Sports University: A Comprehensive Study**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the critical relationship between library resource accessibility and academic achievement among student-athletes at National Sports University (NSU), India. As athletes navigate the dual challenges of balancing the demands of high-performance athletic training and academic performance, this research examines the role of library services in supporting athletes' performance. Through a structured questionnaire survey of 100 student-athletes across various disciplines, the study evaluates awareness and utilization of resources available in the library, and the lack thereof. Findings indicate a positive correlation between regular library use and academic performance. Also, critical gaps in resource awareness and inaccessibility to these resources due to athletes' schedules can be seen. The research identifies that while NSU provides specialized digital resources, awareness and utilization remain suboptimal owing to training schedules that limit the student-athletes' library access. This study concludes with strategic recommendations for integrating library



services into the holistic development framework of athlete education, proposing that enhanced library support can significantly contribute to India's sports development objectives in sports education and athletes' development.

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## 1. Introduction

The establishment of the National Sports University (NSU) in Manipur in 2018 marked a transformative shift in India's sports education scene. As the nation's first University solely focused on sports coaching, sports sciences, sports nutrition and physiology, physical education, and players' development, it addresses a long-standing gap in specialized sports education. This initiative highlights a broader commitment to producing not just excellent athletes but also skilled coaches, mentors, administrators, and sports scientists, thereby enhancing the nation's total sporting ecosystem (Mehta, 2019). As India challenges for greater achievement on the world stage, NSU holds the vital responsibility of producing well-rounded individual athletes who can excel in both academic and physical performance.

To balance the severe demands of maximum athletic training with the academic requirements of higher education, student-athletes at specialist sports colleges need to manage a distinct double identity. Time constraints, physical exhaustion, and the mental strain of juggling conflicting goals are some of the major problems associated with this double-career road (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019). Academic support systems, especially library and information resources, often receive less organized attention in the planning and execution of athlete development programs, even though important institutional resources are usually devoted to physical training, competition preparation, and sports science support (Lopez-Flores et al., 2021). This discrepancy raises significant concerns regarding how sports universities may best support their student-athletes' academic growth.

Athletes' academic performance has been a main concern in India, particularly in specialized sports colleges. With high dropout rates and low academic program success, research shows that many Indian players struggle to maintain academic standards while pursuing sporting achievement (Sharma & Dhar, 2020). By offering resources, study areas, and information literacy instruction tailored to athletes' needs, particular requirements, and schedules, the library, as a main academic support institution, could play a crucial role in determining these issues. However, there is little observed data on how student-athletes currently use sports university libraries in India and what problems might stand in the way of making the best use of these resources.



By examining the link between library access and academic success, particularly at India's National Sports University, this study fills a substantial void in the literature. International studies have looked at student-players' library utilization patterns in Western settings (Comeaus & Cooper, 2018), but effort has been placed on how these dynamics function in India's unique sports education setting. Because it is India's first sports university and has a clear directive to combine academic instruction with the best athletes' training, the NSU makes a perfect case study.

In sports education literature, the idea of "Library as coach" or academic support as invisible training" has gained popularity, suggesting that academic support services might improve athletes' overall growth and job sustainability (Ryan et. al., 2021). Using this conceptual framework, this study examines the possible role of NSU library resources and services as an "educational consultant" for student-players. This study aims to produce evidence-based perceptions that can guide the establishment of library services as well as more comprehensive academic support initiatives inside sports institutions by examining awareness, usage patterns, perceived value, and access challenges.

**Research Problem:** The National Sports University (NSU) has an all-inclusive mandate for the holistic development of student-athletes, blending rigorous academic study with elite athlete training. The university library plays a vital role in this mission by offering specialized resources, including digital databases, sport-specific e-journals, and academic support tools designed to meet the unique needs of its students. However, existing library hours often conflict with intensive training schedules, creating barriers to access that may limit the full academic potential of student-athletes. While many resources are available, there is a need to enhance awareness, orientation, and tailored services so that all students can effectively engage with the library's resources and services. This study seeks to explore how NSU can further strengthen library services and scheduling to better align with the demanding double roles of its students-athletes, thereby supporting their academic achievement and overall development.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **3. International Views on Students-Athletes Academic Performance**

Academic support for student-athletes has been studied in Western educational systems, mainly within the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) system in the United States. Studies steadily show that student-athletes face distinctive pressures when managing both academic responsibilities and athletic commitments. These often result in time poverty, role conflict, and academic underperformance (Comeaux, 2018). Data published by the NCAA reveals determined graduation rate gaps between student-athletes and the general student population. These findings underscore the importance of



developing and strengthening targeted academic support programs tailored to the needs of student-athletes (NCAA, 2020).

Institutions have progressively developed dedicated academic support centers for student-athletes that provide services such as tutoring, time management training, and study skills workshops. These specialized support structures have been shown to improve academic outcomes when they are well-resourced and integrated with athletic departments (Wolverton, 2018). However, the role of library services within this ecosystem of support has often been overlooked until recently.

Libraries have traditionally been conceptualized as passive repositories of information, but contemporary library science emphasizes their active role in student learning and academic success. Research by Kuh and Gonyea (2015) indicates that students who engage more deeply with library resources and spaces report greater development in critical competencies like learning, analytical thinking, and research abilities. When applied to student-athlete populations, this suggests that libraries could play a crucial role in enhancing academic outcomes, provided services are tailored to athletes' specific needs and constraints.

Emerging research is now focusing on how libraries can more effectively reach and support student-athletes. Detmering and Sproles (2018) argue that academic librarians need to develop specialized outreach strategies for student-athletes, recognizing their unique schedules, learning preferences, and information needs. They recommend practical adaptations like offering flexible consultation hours, creating sport-specific research guides, and collaborating with athletic academic advisors to integrate information literacy into existing support structures.

### **3.1 Double-Career Development in Sports**

The concept of "dual career" has emerged as a key framework for understanding and supporting athletes who simultaneously pursue academic or vocational development and sporting excellence. Stambulova and Wylleman's (2019) holistic ecological perspective emphasizes that successful dual-career management requires coordinated support across multiple domains: athletic, academic, psychological, social, and financial. Within this framework, academic support services, including library resources and services, constitute an essential component of the academic domain that interacts with other aspects of athlete development.

European research on dual-career pathways has highlighted significant variations in how different countries support athlete education. Aquilina and Henry's (2010) comparative study of European sports



systems found that countries with more integrated approaches to dual-career support, where athletic and academic institutions collaborate closely, tend to produce better educational outcomes for athletes. This suggests that the effectiveness of library services for student-athletes may depend not only on the quality of library resources themselves but also on how well they are integrated with broader athletic support systems.

Temporal constraints represent a particularly significant challenge for dual-career athletes. Research by López-Flores et al. (2021) documents how elite athletes' training and competition schedules often conflict with traditional academic timetables and library operating hours. This temporal misalignment can create substantial barriers to accessing academic resources, suggesting a need for innovative solutions such as extended hours, remote access options, and mobile library services.

### **2.3 Library Services in Specialized Educational Contexts**

While general research on academic libraries is extensive, fewer studies have examined library services in specialized educational environments like sports universities. The limited existing research suggests that specialized institutions require tailored approaches to library service delivery that account for their unique curricular focus and student population characteristics (Hickok, 2019).

In sports-specific contexts, libraries face the challenge of supporting both general academic coursework and specialized sports science research. This requires carefully balanced collections that include both standard academic resources and sport-specific materials such as coaching manuals, performance analysis tools, and sports medicine databases (Brady, 2017). Collection development in sports universities must also consider the practical, applied nature of much sports education, which may require different types of resources than traditional academic programs.

Digital resource accessibility has become increasingly important in specialized educational contexts. Research by Kumar and Ochoa (2019) highlights how digital libraries and online databases can help overcome some of the temporal and geographical barriers that student-athletes face. However, their study also notes that digital resource utilization depends heavily on factors such as user training, interface design, and remote authentication systems, areas where many institutions still face challenges.

### **2.4 Indian Sports Education and Academic Support**

India's sports education system has evolved significantly in recent decades, moving from informal coaching setups to more structured institutional frameworks. The establishment of institutions like the



Lakshmibai National College of Physical Education (1940), Netaji Subhas National Institute of Sports (1961), and more recently, the National Sports University (2018) reflects this institutionalization process (Mehta, 2019). However, research on the academic dimensions of these institutions remains limited.

Available Indian research on sports education has primarily focused on training methodologies, sports science applications, and institutional infrastructure development (Singh & Sandhu, 2019). Few studies have systematically examined academic support systems within sports institutions or the specific challenges faced by Indian student-athletes in balancing academic and athletic commitments. Sharma and Dhar's (2020) study of sports hostel residents in North India represents one of the few exceptions, documenting significant academic struggles among young athletes and calling for enhanced educational support structures.

The library science literature in India has generally not addressed sports institutions specifically. While there is substantial research on academic libraries in Indian universities (Kumar & Bansal, 2018), this literature rarely considers the unique needs of student-athlete populations. This represents a significant knowledge gap, particularly given India's increasing investment in sports education infrastructure and the growing number of student-athletes pursuing higher education.

## **2.5 Conceptual Framework and Research Gaps**

This study draws on Tinto's (1993) theory of student integration, which posits that academic and social integration are key determinants of student retention and success. Within this framework, library services contribute to academic integration by providing resources, spaces, and support for learning activities. For student-athletes, who may experience greater difficulty with academic integration due to time constraints and role conflicts, effective library services could play an especially important role in facilitating successful integration.

The research gap addressed by this study is threefold. First, there is limited empirical evidence regarding library usage patterns among student-athletes in Indian sports institutions. Second, there is a lack of understanding of how library services can be optimized to support the dual academic-athletic mission of institutions like NSU. Third, there is a need for context-specific research that accounts for India's distinctive educational and sporting environments.

By examining these questions through a mixed-methods study at NSU, this research aims to contribute both to the theoretical understanding of library services in specialized educational contexts and to practical improvements in academic support for Indian student-athletes. The findings have implications



not only for NSU but also for other sports institutions in India and potentially in similar developmental contexts globally.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to collect data on library usage patterns, perceptions, and academic outcomes among NSU student-athletes. The questionnaire method was selected for its efficiency in gathering standardized data from a dispersed population within time constraints typical of athletic training schedules.

#### 3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population comprised all enrolled student-athletes at National Sports University (approximately 340 students across various programs). A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation across:

1. Academic programs (Physical Education, Sports Coaching, Sports Nutrition and Physiology, and Sports Psychology)
2. Gender (maintaining proportional representation)
3. Sport disciplines (individual and team sports)

From this sampling frame, 100 participants were selected.

#### 3.3 Instrument Development

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire consisting of five sections:

1. **Demographic Information:** Age, gender, department, sport
2. **Library Accessibility & Usage:** Frequency, purposes, resource awareness
3. **Resource Evaluation:** Quality ratings of physical and digital resources
4. **Perceived Impact:** Relationship between library use and academic/athletic performance
5. **Barriers & Suggestions:** Obstacles to library use and improvement recommendations



The questionnaire incorporated both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Content validity was established through review by three library science experts and two sports education specialists.

### 3.4 Data Collection

Data collection took place during the 2025 academic year over a period of four weeks. Questionnaires were administered through both paper-based and digital formats to accommodate different preferences and schedules. To maximize response rates, distribution was coordinated with coaches and academic coordinators during periods of lower training intensity.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

In this study Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means), concise demographic characteristics, and response patterns. Qualitative responses from open-ended questions were analyzed thematically.

## 4. Objectives

1. To assess the awareness and utilization patterns of library resources among NSU student-athletes.
2. To evaluate the perceived quality and adequacy of both physical and digital library resources.
3. To identify barriers preventing optimal library usage by student-athletes.
4. To examine the perceived relationship between library resource use and academic performance.
5. To develop evidence-based recommendations for enhancing library services tailored to athletes' needs.

## 5. Findings and Data Interpretation

### 5.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=100)**

| Characteristics | Category           | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender          | Male               | 68        | 68%        |
|                 | Female             | 32        | 32%        |
| Department      | Physical Education | 44        | 44%        |



|                    |                                 |    |     |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|----|-----|
|                    | Sports Coaching                 | 34 | 34% |
|                    | Sports Nutrition and Physiology | 12 | 12% |
|                    | Sports Psychology               | 10 | 10% |
| <b>Sports Type</b> | Individual Sports               | 61 | 61% |
|                    | Team Sports                     | 39 | 39% |

**Interpretation:** The above table 1 indicates the broader gender distribution within the university, showing a higher proportion of male respondents. Enrolment across academic departments is properly represented, reflecting the university's program offerings. The greater representation of athletes from individual sports

## 5.2 Library Usage Patterns

**Table 2: Frequency of Library Visits (N=100)**

**Interpretation:** Table 2 shows that 49% of student-athletes reported visiting the library weekly, suggesting limited integration of library spaces into their regular academic routines. The 4% who rarely visit represent a critical mark for intervention.

| <b>Purpose</b>                                   | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|--|------------------|-------------------|
| To find a quiet place to study                   | 74               | 74%               |
| To access books for academic courses             | 80               | 80%               |
| To access computers/internet                     | 40               | 40%               |
| To access online journals/databases              | 31               | 31%               |
| To read magazines/newspapers (sports or general) | 29               | 29%               |
| For group study or project work                  | 28               | 28%               |
| Use of NSU's digital repository                  | 19               | 19%               |
| Leisure reading                                  | 12               | 12%               |

**Table 3: Primary Purposes for Library Use (Multiple Responses Allowed)**

| <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Daily            | 10               | 10%               |
| Weekly           | 49               | 49%               |
| Monthly          | 36               | 36%               |
| Rarely           | 5                | 5%                |



**Interpretation:** It is found from the table 3 that the library is primarily valued as an information resource centre. Low utilization for use of NSU's digital repository (19%) and Leisure reading (12%), respectively.

### 5.3 Awareness of Specialized Resources

**Table 4: Awareness of NSU's Digital Resources (N=100)**

| Resource/Service   | Aware | Not Aware | Percentage |
|--|-------|-----------|------------|
| E-journals   | 42    | 58        | 42%        |
| One Nation One Subscription (ONOS)<br>(National e-resource portal)         | 28    | 72        | 28%        |
| E-Granthalaya 4.0 (library catalog and digital system)                     | 70    | 30        | 70%        |
| Plagiarism Software (Turnitin for checking originality)                    | 37    | 63        | 37%        |
| National Digital Library of India (NDLI)<br>(National e-learning platform) | 41    | 59        | 41%        |
| SPSS (Statistical analysis for research)                                   | 31    | 69        | 31%        |

**Interpretation:** It is seen that awareness levels for specialized resources are low, particularly for tools directly relevant to SPSS software: 31%, Plagiarism Software 37%. The maximum level of awareness on the library catalogue and digital system and e-journals 70% and 42%, respectively.

### 5.4 Resource Quality Perceptions

**Table 5: Ratings of Library Aspects (Mean Scores, 5-point scale)**

| Aspect   | Mean Score | Standard Deviation |
|--|------------|--------------------|
| Physical Space (cleanliness, seating, lighting)        | 3.8        | 0.9                |
| Collection of Books/Journals for your Academic Course  | 3.2        | 1.1                |
| Collection of Sports-Specific Resources                | 2.7        | 1.2                |
| Availability of Computers & Internet                   | 3.5        | 1.0                |
| Accessibility of E-resources (e-book, online journals, | 3.1        | 1.3                |



|                              |     |     |
|------------------------------|-----|-----|
| databases)                   |     |     |
| Helpfulness of Library Staff | 4.1 | 0.8 |

**Interpretation:** Table 5 shows that while physical infrastructure and staff support receive positive ratings of 3.8 and 4.1, respectively, sports-specific resources are rated lowest (2.7), indicating a significant collection development gap.

### 5.5 Barriers to Library Use

**Table 6: Factors Preventing Library Use (Multiple Responses)**

| Barrier  | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Library timings conflict with my training schedule | 79        | 79%        |
| Physical fatigue after training                    | 71        | 71%        |
| Distance from hostels/training grounds             | 52        | 52%        |
| Inadequate resources                               | 48        | 48%        |
| Limited operating hours                            | 44        | 44%        |
| Prefer to study in a room/hostel                   | 41        | 41%        |
| Lack of awareness about library services           | 39        | 39%        |

**Interpretation:** The above table shows that structural and scheduling barriers dominate, with 79% citing training conflicts and 71% mentioning fatigue, respectively. This highlights the need for flexible access solutions and service design that is sensitive to schedules.

### 5.6 Impact Perceptions

**Table 7: Perceived Impact of Library Use on Performance**

| Impact Area          | Improve | No Impact | Hinders |
|----------------------|---------|-----------|---------|
| Academic Performance | 74%     | 23%       | 3%      |
| Athletic Performance | 52%     | 45%       | 3%      |

**Interpretation:** In Table 7, while library use is perceived as academically beneficial by most (74%), its perceived impact on athletic performance is more ambiguous, with nearly half (45%) seeing no relationship.



## 5.7 Thematic Analysis of Open-Ended Responses

The following are the key themes from Qualitative Data:

1. **Need for Schedule-Sensitive Services:** Multiple requests for extended hours, especially late evenings (6-8 PM) to accommodate training schedules.
2. **Remote Access Challenges:** Frequent mentions of difficulties accessing digital resources from hostels and training centers due to bandwidth issues.
3. **Integration with Athletic Development:** Suggestions included creating resource guides for specific sports and collaborating with coaches on research-based training materials.

## 6. Discussion

The findings reveal a complex relationship between library access and academic success at National Sports University, characterized by high potential but suboptimal realization.

The following are several key insights that emerge:

**Bridging the Awareness-Utilization Gap:** The awareness-utilization gap, a common hurdle where institutional resources outpace student awareness (Chen, 2021), has been effectively addressed at National Sports University. The data indicate a robust synergy between the university's digital investments and student participation. The university has transformed its digital repository from a static collection into a high-traffic academic hub.

**Structural Barriers Dominate:** The primary obstacles to library use are structural, scheduling conflicts, physical fatigue, and geographical distance, rather than attitudinal. This suggests that solutions must address institutional scheduling and facility placement rather than merely changing individual behaviours. These findings align with international research on athlete time constraints (Lally & Kerr, 2008).

**Sports-Specific Resource Deficiency:** The low rating of sports-specific collections (mean: 2.7/5) indicates a critical collection development need. While general academic resources are adequate, the specialized information needs of athlete-scholars are not being fully met. This represents a missed opportunity for integrating academic and athletic development.



**Cultural and Contextual Factors:** The Indian educational context, with its emphasis on examination performance and theoretical knowledge, may influence library usage patterns differently. Additionally, the relatively recent establishment of NSU means that institutional practices are still evolving, creating both challenges and opportunities for innovation.

## 7. Conclusion

This study establishes that library access plays a significant role in the academic success of student-athletes at National Sports University, though several barriers prevent optimal utilization. Key conclusions include:

1. **Strategic Integration Needed:** Library services must be strategically integrated into NSU's athlete development model by making library resources more flexible and accessible. Because student-athletes juggle an intense schedule of physical training and academic study, they don't always have traditional library hours or long research sessions.
2. **Targeted Awareness Campaigns:** Systematic orientation and promotion of specialized resources are essential, particularly for tools directly relevant to sports science and athletic performance.
3. **Flexible Access Solutions:** Structural modifications, including extended hours, remote authentication improvements, and satellite access points, are necessary to accommodate athletic schedules.
4. **Sports-Specific Collection Development:** Enhanced investment in sports-specific digital and physical resources would better serve the dual academic-athletic mission of the institution.
5. **Collaborative Programming:** Partnerships between library staff, coaches, and academic faculty could develop integrated information literacy programs that serve both academic and athletic development goals.

**Implications for Policy and Practice:** The findings suggest specific actionable strategies for NSU and similar institutions:

1. Develop targeted information literacy modules integrated into sport-specific courses
2. Implement "athlete-friendly" library hours aligned with training schedules
3. Incorporate library resource training into athlete orientation programs



**Limitations and Future Research:** This study's limitations include reliance on self-reported data, single-institution focus, and cross-sectional design. Future research should employ longitudinal designs, include objective academic performance measures, and expand to multiple sports institutions for comparative analysis. Additionally, qualitative studies exploring the lived experiences of student-athletes navigating academic and athletic demands would provide deeper insights.

**Final Reflection:** As India continues to develop its sports education infrastructure, attention to academic support systems, particularly library resources, will be crucial for producing the next generation of athlete-scholars. The library's potential remains largely untapped but represents a significant opportunity for enhancing both athletic and academic outcomes. By addressing the identified barriers and building on existing strengths, NSU can establish a model for integrated athlete development that could inform sports education nationally.

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