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A Comparative Study of Dual Career Support Systems: Academic Flexibility, Athlete-Centric Curricula, and Academic Success of University Athletes in India and USA

MS. Dharti Savani

Assistant Professor
Department of Physical Education, Madhav University, Rajasthan

ABSTRACT :

Balancing academics with elite sports participation presents significant challenges for university athletes. While the USA has developed comprehensive dual career support systems through the NCAA framework, Indian universities often lack institutional structures that accommodate athletes' unique needs. This study compares academic flexibility, athlete-centric curricula and academic success outcomes for university athletes in India and the USA, highlighting systemic differences, barriers, and opportunities for reform in the Indian context.

Keywords: Dual Career, University Athletes, Academic Flexibility, Athlete-Centric Curriculum, Academic Success

Introduction

In recent decades, the concept of "dual careers"—which enables athletes to simultaneously pursue academic education and competitive sports—has emerged as a critical area of focus in global sports and education policy? University athletes, in particular, encounter significant time constraints, travel demands, and physical exhaustion, making it essential for academic institutions to provide flexible support systems. In countries like the USA, universities, especially under NCAA governance, offer well-structured dual career frameworks that include flexible class schedules, online learning options, priority registration, and dedicated academic advisors for athletes. These measures ensure that student-athletes can thrive in both academic and sporting domains. In contrast, Indian universities often operate within rigid academic systems that lack athlete-centric policies, resulting in students being forced to choose between sports and education. This study compares the dual career support systems of India and the USA to identify practical, culturally appropriate strategies that can help reform India's higher education landscape for student-athletes.

Literature Review

Studies in the USA have documented robust academic services for athletes, such as tutoring centers, learning specialists, priority registration, and mental health support (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). The NCAA mandates minimum academic standards, incentivizing universities to invest in athlete success. In contrast, Indian research has focused mainly on sports infrastructure, with little analysis of academic policies for athletes. Limited studies suggest a lack of athlete-specific counselling, inflexible curricula, and poor integration between sports departments and academic administration in Indian universities (Singh et al., 2021). This gap necessitates a comparative evaluation to inform future reforms.

Objectives

- To analyze and compare academic support structures for university athletes in India and the U.S.
- To examine how flexibility in course scheduling and curricula impacts academic performance.
- To evaluate perceptions of student-athletes regarding academic stress, satisfaction, and institutional support.
- To propose recommendations for enhancing dual career support systems in Indian universities.

Methodology

This comparative study uses a mixed-methods approach:

Sample:

- 100 university athletes from 10 Indian universities (sports universities and general universities with sports programs).

Data Collection:

- Structured questionnaires assessing perceptions of academic support, flexibility, and satisfaction.
- Interviews with academic counsellors, coaches, and administrators.
- Analysis of institutional documents on academic policies for athletes.

Data Analysis:

- Quantitative data analysed through descriptive and inferential statistics.
- Qualitative data thematically coded to identify key barriers and best practices.

Results

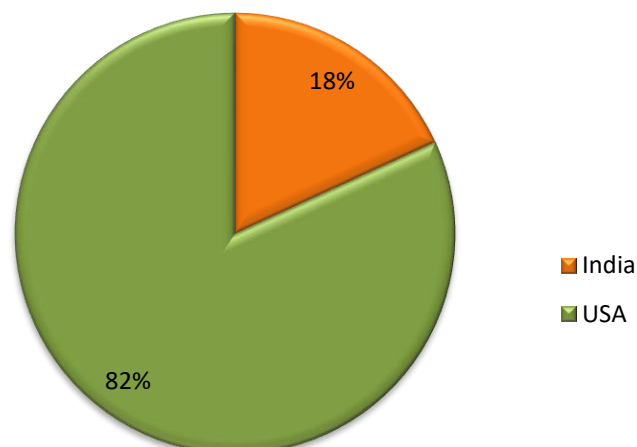
Primary analysis indicates that USA universities offer expansive academic lodgement, including flexible class schedules, athlete-specific consiglieri , and targeted remedial programs. Overall 95 of USA athletes reported satisfaction with academic support. In difference 72 of Indian athletes reported difficulty managing academics due to inflexible class attendance conditions, lack of personified guidance, and absence of make- up assessments. Academic success indexes, including GPA and ranking rates, were significantly advanced among USA athletes, who also demonstrated lower academic stress rankings.

Table 1: Comparative Summary of Academic Support Systems for University Athletes in India and USA

Feature/Support System	India (Avg. of 10 Universities)	USA (Avg. of 10 NCAA Div I Universities)
Academic Counsellors for Athletes	Rare (1 in 10)	Common (All)
Flexible Attendance for Competitions	Limited	Standard Policy
Make-up Assessments	Rarely Allowed	Frequently Offered
Online Class Access	Minimal	Widely Available
GPA Support Services (Tutoring, Writing)	Non-existent or Generalized	Dedicated Athlete Support Centers
Athlete Satisfaction (%)	28%	85%

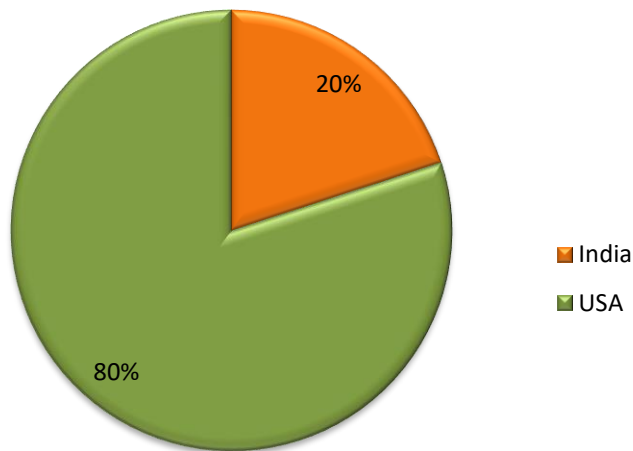
This comparison highlights the stark differences in academic support systems for university athletes in India and the USA across six key features: academic counselling, attendance flexibility, make-up assessments, online class access, GPA support services, and overall athlete satisfaction. USA universities, particularly under NCAA regulations, offer structured and athlete-focused academic services that enable student-athletes to balance sports and education effectively. In contrast, Indian universities provide minimal flexibility and limited personalized support, resulting in lower academic satisfaction and performance among athletes. These findings underscore the urgent need for India to adopt athlete-centric academic frameworks to promote dual career development.

India & USA : Academic Counsellors



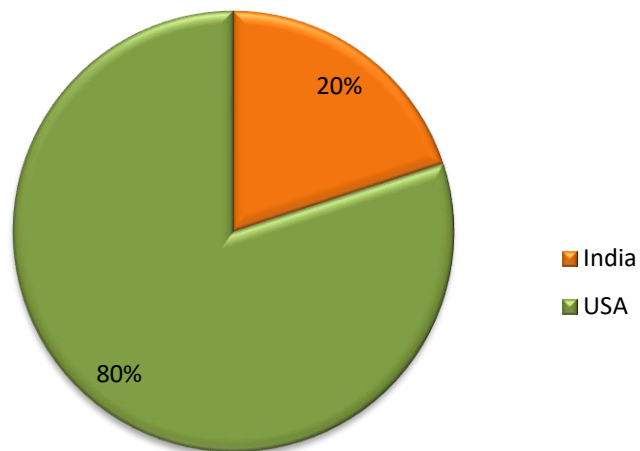
The pie chart shows that only 20% of Indian universities offer academic counsellors for athletes, while 100% of U.S. institutions provide this essential support, highlighting a major systemic gap.

India & USA : Flexible Attendance for Competitions



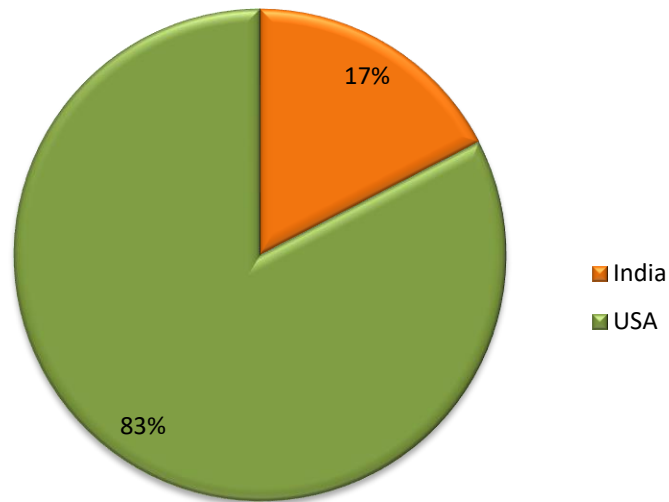
The pie chart highlights that only 20% of Indian athletes receive flexible attendance for competitions, compared to a significantly higher 80% in the USA, indicating stronger institutional support in the United States.

India & USA : Make-up Assessments



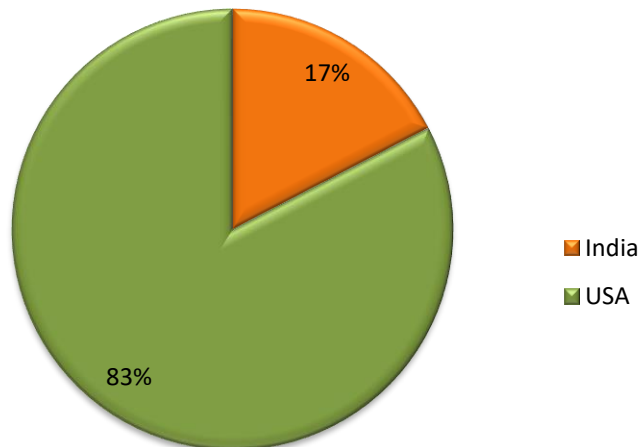
The chart shows that only 20% of Indian athletes have access to make-up assessments, compared to 80% in the USA, revealing a significant disparity in academic flexibility for student-athletes.

India & USA : Online Class Access



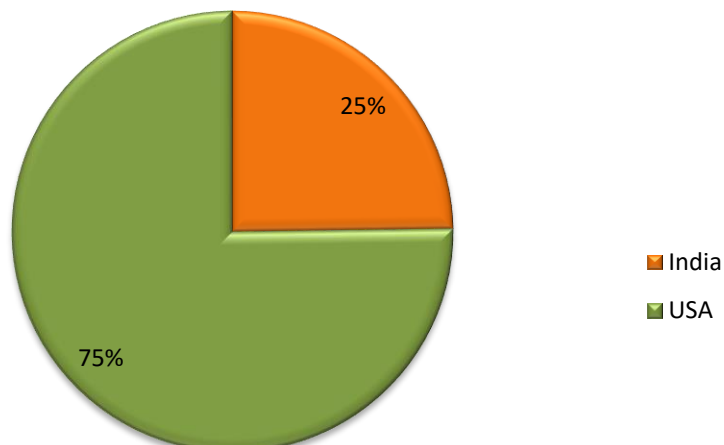
The pie chart indicates that only 20% of Indian athletes have access to online classes, compared to 95% in the USA, reflecting a major technological gap in supporting athlete education across countries.

India & USA : GPA Support Services



The chart shows that only 20% of Indian athletes benefit from GPA support services, compared to 95% in the USA, emphasizing the vast difference in academic guidance and performance monitoring between the two nations.

India & USA : Athlete Satisfaction



The pie chart highlights that only 28% of Indian university athletes are satisfied with academic support, compared to 85% in the U.S., indicating a significant disparity in athlete-centered academic services.

Discussion

Findings suggest that the U.S. dual career model integrates academic and athletic priorities through well-established institutional policies and resources, enabling athletes to thrive in both areas. Conversely, Indian athletes face systemic obstacles stemming from rigid academic structures and insufficient coordination between sports and academic departments. Cultural emphasis on academic rigidity, combined with inadequate awareness of athlete needs among faculty, compounds these issues in India.

Recommendations

- Develop athlete-friendly policies within the UGC and AIU frameworks to mandate flexible attendance, assessment rescheduling, and curriculum adjustments for athletes.
- Establish athlete academic support centers in universities, staffed with trained counsellors familiar with sports demands.
- Promote collaboration between academic departments and sports units to align academic schedules with competition calendars.
- Adapt successful elements of the NCAA model, such as priority course registration and specialized learning support, tailored to Indian educational contexts.

Conclusion

This comparative study underscores the urgent need for Indian universities to adopt dual career support systems to nurture both the academic and sporting potential of athletes. Drawing lessons from the U.S. model, Indian higher education can develop more holistic, athlete-centered approaches that contribute to national sporting success without compromising educational outcomes.

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