Identifying and Validating the Components of Good Governance in the Gymnastics Federation

Rohollah Asgarigandomani[1]* iD
Amir Rahimi[1]
Samad Goodarzi[2]

[1] Assistant Professor of Sport Management, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran
[2] Phd of Sport Management, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran

*Correspondence:
Rohollah Asgarigandomani,
Assistant Professor of Sport Management, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran
Email: r.asgari@ut.ac.ir
ORCID : 0000-0001-6819-6239
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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to systematically identify and empirically validate the core components of good governance within the context of the Gymnastics Federation.

Methods: The inquiry employed a mixed-methods paradigm, integrating both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. The qualitative population of this study included all relevant experts in sport management with familiarity with gymnastics from both executive and academic spheres. For the qualitative segment, snowball sampling techniques were employed, with theoretical saturation achieved after conducting interviews with 20 deliberately selected participants. In the initial phase, data were collected through comprehensive interviews. Subsequent to the processes of coding and identifying principal themes and indicators, a questionnaire was formulated to validate the derived components. Thematic analysis was employed for the qualitative data, whereas second-order confirmatory factor analysis was utilized in the quantitative phase, employing SPSS version 22 and Smart PLS version 3 software.

Results: The results of the investigation illuminated ten pivotal components of good governance considered imperative for the efficient functioning of the Gymnastics Federation. These components encompass: transparency, accountability, assessment and appraisal, education and culturalism, financial and structural independence, appropriate organizational structure, the rule of law, sustainability, collective wisdom, and objective management. The outcomes of the confirmatory factor analysis corroborated the model's validity and the relevance of the proposed components.

Conclusion: Collectively, the Iranian Gymnastics Federation should prioritize implementing targeted strategies based on the ten identified governance components, these elements furnish a framework aimed at enhancing performance and accountability within the federation.

Keywords: Good Governance, Gymnastics Federation, Second-Order Factor Analysis.

Introduction

Good governance is a foundational concept in public administration, emphasizing core values such as transparency, accountability, equity, integrity, and adherence to the rule of law (Hendar et al., 2023). Though originally rooted in Western political and economic discourse, the concept has been widely adopted across sectors—including sports—where effective governance is increasingly seen as essential for organizational legitimacy and success (Council of the European Union, 2013).

In contrast to government, which refers to formal structures and authorities, governance encompasses broader mechanisms and interactions among governmental, non-governmental, and private entities (Alvani, 2009). Within the context of sport, good governance has gained prominence due to growing concerns over ethical violations, mismanagement, and declining public trust. These concerns have led major institutions such as the International Olympic Committee and the United Nations to advocate for governance reforms grounded in principles like participation, responsiveness, and accountability (UN, 2012). Numerous studies underline the importance of effective governance in sports organizations. Deficiencies such as unclear structures, limited oversight, and internal conflicts can severely undermine performance, reduce funding, and damage reputations (Freeburn, 2010; Sport England, 2011). Theories including agency theory, stakeholder theory, and stewardship theory offer frameworks to understand governance in nonprofit sports entities, many of which rely on elected officials with varying levels of experience (Clarke, 2006; Enjoras & Waldahl, 2010).

One prominent example of poor governance is the case of Russia's state-sponsored doping program, which led to major international sanctions. Iran, too, has faced challenges within its sports sector, including doping, bribery, and governance-related conflicts (Asgarigandomani et al., 2020). These issues highlight the urgent need for effective governance structures tailored to national and sport-specific contexts. Although general governance frameworks exist, their direct application to sport—particularly in developing countries—can be problematic due to contextual differences. Gymnastics (54 medals), despite offering fewer medals than athletics (144 medals) or swimming (111 medals), plays a central role in international competitions such as the Olympics and Asian Games. Yet, governance within gymnastics federations often remains underdeveloped compared to their strategic significance.

In the case of Iran, the Gymnastics Federation faces a dual challenge: aligning with international governance standards while incorporating localized principles that reflect the country's unique cultural, administrative, and structural realities. The frequent disputes among stakeholders and publicized controversies underscore the urgency of designing an appropriate governance model.

Recent research further emphasizes that enhancing governance can have tangible effects—not only on administrative efficiency but also on athlete performance, particularly through improved anxiety management and decision-making in high-stress environments (Smits et al., 2022; Firmansyah et al., 2024). Hence, governance in sport is not merely an administrative concern but a performance determinant.

This study seeks to identify and validate context-specific components of good governance tailored to the needs and realities of the Iranian Gymnastics Federation. By bridging global standards with local nuances, this research contributes to the development of a comprehensive, evidence-based governance framework aimed at improving organizational effectiveness, public accountability, and competitive excellence in gymnastics.

Materials and Methods

This study employed an exploratory mixed-methods approach. During the qualitative phase, the Islamic Republic of Iran's Gymnastics federation used thematic analysis to identify significant themes related to good governance. In order to evaluate the model fits among the target population, which consists of the stakeholders in the gymnastics community, second-order confirmatory factor analysis was carried out during the quantitative phase using SPSS (version 22) and Smart PLS (version 3). The qualitative sample consisted of managers with experience in the field and university professors with research or real-world experience who were experts in sport governance. Participants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques, and interviews continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. In this study, data saturation was achieved after 20 interviews. To ensure the validity and reliability of the qualitative findings, audit strategies were employed throughout the research process. Instead of relying solely on the opinions of others, interview reliability was evaluated using a test-retest methodology. A week later, the researcher used this technique to re-code a few selected interviews. A test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.74, above the 0.60 threshold and indicating an acceptable degree of dependability, was obtained from the consistent acceptance of 19 of the 51 codes identified in the first round in the second round.

The thematic analysis was conducted using the six-phase framework created by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarizing oneself with the data, generating preliminary codes, searching for themes, assessing sub-themes, identifying and labeling primary themes, and producing the final report. After final coding, the data were categorized into key topics and theme clusters. About 720 gymnastics stakeholders, including coaches, athletes, referees, and According to data from the Gymnastics Federation, the statistical population in the quantitative phase consisted of approximately 720 gymnastics stakeholders, including coaches, athletes, referees, and federation staff. According to Krejcie and Morgan's sampling table, 256 was an appropriate sample size. In order to account for the possibility of inaccurate or incomplete responses, all 290 study authors were present when the questionnaires were distributed during national athletics competitions. In the end, 260 completed surveys were gathered and examined. The questionnaire was examined and updated in response to input from subject-matter experts in order to determine its face validity and content. Following that, a preliminary study was conducted using SPSS (version 22) to evaluate reliability using Cronbach's alpha for each component.

Results

Table 1 provides a thorough description of each participant in the study's qualitative phase, particularly those who were interviewed. The data presented in the table can be used to support the appropriateness and diversity of the research sample, guaranteeing both representativeness and relevance to the study's goals.

Table 1. Interview Phase Participant Details

Variables	Amount	
Educational attainment	2	Bachelor's degree
	5	Master's degree
	8	PhD
Experience in executive-level sports management	13	YES

		2	NO
Formal education in sports management		10	YES
		5	NO
Current area of professional engagement		8	University
		5	Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs
		2	Federation Manager
		15	Total

In the thematic analysis and coding phase, a total of 48 final codes were identified. These codes were subsequently organized into 10 sub-themes, which were further categorized under a single overarching (main) theme. The results of the interview coding process are presented in **Table 2**, which outlines the main theme, associated sub-themes, and the extracted codes.

Table 2. Main Theme, Sub-Themes, and Discovered Codes of the Study

Main Theme	Sub-thems	Statement Code	Statement
Good Governance	Transparency	S1	**Establishment of a transparent electronic system for the federation's activities.**
		S2	**Clear and well-defined processes for decision-making and policy development.**
		S3	*Public disclosure of financial information.*
		S4	*Publication of annual and periodic performance reports.*
		S5	*Transparency in financial transactions and contractual agreements.*
		S6	*Declaration of assets by executives and key personnel*
	Accountability	S7	*Existence of accountability mechanisms toward stakeholders.*
		S8	*Establishment of communication channels for receiving complaints and suggestions.*
		S9	*Strengthening the role of the media in enhancing the federation's accountability and transparency.*
		S10	*Development of a transparent and equitable mechanism for addressing stakeholder complaints.*
	Assessment and appraisal	S11	*Establishment of mechanisms for public oversight.*
		S12	*Existence of mechanisms for evaluating individual and organizational performance.*
		S13	*Ongoing performance evaluation of the federation's staff and management.*
		S14	*Conducting periodic stakeholder surveys to assess the federation's performance and gather suggestions.*
	Education and culturalismd	S15	*Training federation managers in sports management, leadership, and good governance.*
		S16	*Organizing regular training programs on sports ethics and anti-corruption for all federation members.*
		S17	*Developing a code of ethics for federation staff and managers.*
		S18	*Fostering a culture of reporting misconduct and abuse of power.*
		S19	*Providing protection and support for whistleblowers who report misconduct and abuse of authority.*
		S20	*Promoting a culture of legal compliance within the organization.*
		S21	*Drafting and publishing the organization's code of ethics.*
	structural	S22	*Strengthening the federation's financial independence through the*

		acquisition of sustainable funding sources.
	S23	*Ensuring the federation's decision-making autonomy.*
	S24	*Maintaining the federation's political independence in accordance with the Olympic Charter.*
	S25	*Preventing political interference.*
Appropriate organizational structure	S26	*Enhancing communication between the federation, provincial boards, clubs, and other stakeholders.*
	S27	*Ensuring the full independence of statutory auditors.*
	S28	*Providing statutory auditors with unrestricted access to the federation's information and documents.*
	S29	*Strengthening the role of the General Assembly as the federation's highest decision-making body.*
	S30	*Establishing an independent and impartial dispute resolution mechanism.*
	S31	*Empowering independent oversight bodies to monitor federation activities and prevent misconduct.*
	S32	*Establishing an independent ethics and disciplinary committee composed of qualified and impartial individuals.*
The rule of law	S33	*Development of clear and transparent regulations and guidelines governing elections, budget allocation, contracts, and other federation activities.*
	S34	*Full compliance with national and international sports-related laws and regulations.*
	S35	*Engaging legal counsel to ensure that all activities are in alignment with applicable laws.*
	S36	*Cooperation with anti-corruption agencies and institutions.*
	S37	*Preventing manipulation or engineering of provincial board elections.*
Sustainability	S38	*Formulation of gender equality policies across all levels of the federation.*
	S39	*Promotion of gymnastics in underprivileged and underserved regions.*
	S40	*Achieving sustainable revenue generation.*
	S41	*Preventing energy waste.*
	S42	*Incorporating environmentally friendly (green) practices within the federation.*
Collective wisdom	S43	*Holding public meetings with the participation of stakeholders.*
	S44	*Consultation with experts in relevant fields.*
	S45	*Utilizing constructive and unbiased criticism from critics.*
Objective management	S46	*Employing modern technologies in management practices.*
	S47	*Appointment and promotion of individuals based on defined processes and their performance.*
	S48	*Data-driven decision-making.*

After the conceptual model was created, the study tested and validated the suggested model with Gymnastics Federation stakeholders, such as athletes, coaches, referees, and federation employees. The research yielded model constructs that were organized on two levels: formative in nature and reflective in the first order. Thus, the variance-based program Smart PLS (version 3) was used to perform second-order confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in order to validate the model. Figures 1 and 2 display the findings, which include factor loadings (associated with the reflective constructs), component weights (associated with the formative constructs), and significance coefficients.
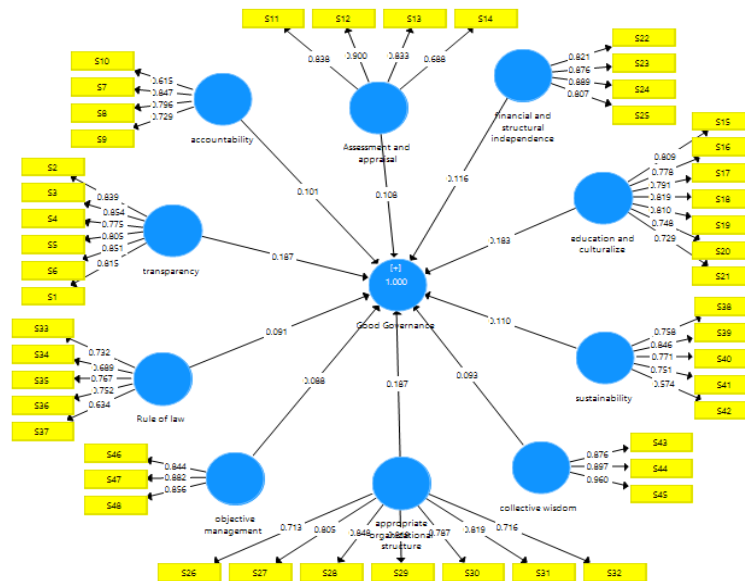
Figure 1. The Good Governance Model in the Gymnastics Federation (Standardized Estimation Mode)
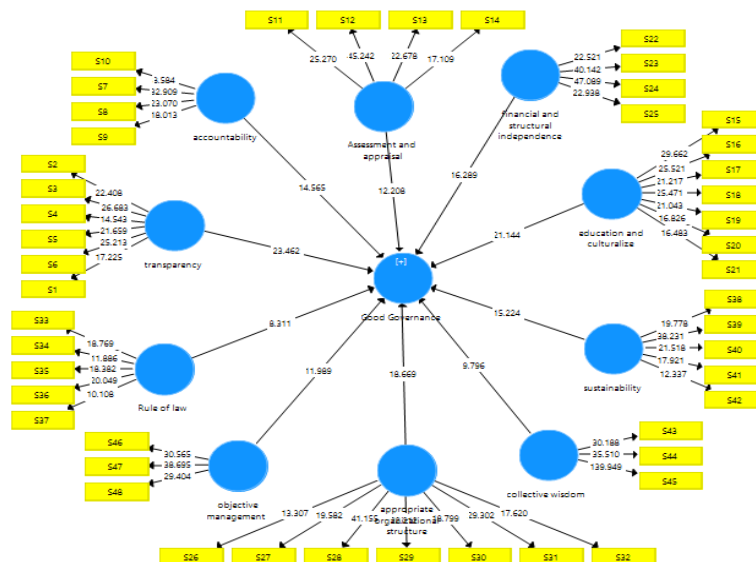

Figure 2. The Good Governance Model in the Gymnastics Federation (Significance of Coefficients Mode)

To assess the goodness of fit for the measurement model at the first-order construct level, since the constructs are reflective, in addition to evaluating the factor loadings (greater than 0.4) and significance coefficients (greater than 1.96), three criteria—reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity—are employed.

To evaluate the model's reliability, both composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha were examined. For convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) index was utilized. The AVE criterion indicates the extent to which a construct is correlated with its own indicators, with higher correlation implying better fit (Danaee-Fard, Alvani, & Azar, 2015).

Table 3. The results of these three criteria are presented.

Main-Variables	Sub-Variables	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient ($\alpha \geq 0.7$)	Composite Reliability Coefficient (CR ≥ 0.7)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE ≥ 0.5)

Good Governance	transparency	0.765	0.798	0.553
	accountability	0.743	0.783	0.656
	assessment and appraisal	0.821	0.882	0.590
	education and culturalism	0.709	0.759	0.586
	financial and structural independence	0.788	0.816	0.734
	appropriate organizational structure	0.761	0.808	0.703
	the rule of law	0.845	0.924	0.561
	sustainability	0.866	0.937	0.748
	collective wisdom	0.758	0.810	0.663
	objective management	0.814	0.893	0.597

As shown in Table 3, the composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha coefficient for all variables are greater than 0.7. Therefore, the results of the present study regarding these two criteria confirm the appropriate fit of the model. Furthermore, based on the results, the average variance extracted (AVE) for all constructs is greater than 0.5, confirming the model's convergent validity and the adequacy of the measurement model's fit.

In terms of discriminant validity, the correlation of each construct with its own indicators is compared with its correlation with other constructs. The results of the discriminant validity of the model are presented in Table 4. As shown in the table, the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each variable in the present study exceeds the correlations between that variable and others. Thus, it can be concluded that, in the present study, the constructs have a stronger interaction with their own indicators than with other constructs. In other words, the model demonstrates adequate discriminant validity.

Table 4. Correlations between Variables and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) Values

Sub-Variables	transparency	accountability	assessment and appraisal	education and culturalism	financial and structural independence	appropriate organizational structure	the rule of law	sustainability	collective wisdom	objective management
transparency	0.743									
accountability	0.542	0.809								
assessment and appraisal	0.614	0.568	0.768							
education and culturalism	0.478	0.572	0.508	0.765						
financial and structural independence	0.432	0.608	0.757	0.581	0.856					
appropriate organizational structure	0.521	0.562	0.593	0.527	0.573	0.838				
the rule of law	0.488	0.741	0.687	0.482	0.680	0.630	0.748			
sustainability	0.432	0.482	0.731	0.544	0.747	0.626	0.712	0.862		
collective wisdom	0.376	0.526	0.701	0.579	0.648	0.673	0.611	0.583	0.814	
objective management	0.459	0.492	0.691	0.670	0.501	0.735	0.587	0.621	0.713	0.772

To assess the goodness of fit for the second-order construct measurement model, since the constructs are formative, three criteria—factor weights, significance coefficients, and variance inflation factor (VIF)—are employed. The results for all three criteria are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. The results for all three criteria—factor (weights, significance coefficients, and variance inflation factor (VIF))

Variables	Factor Load	Significance Coefficient (T-value ≥ 1.96)	Variance Inflation Factor (VIF ≤ 5)
Transparency-Good Governance	0.187	23.462	**3.314**
accountability-Good Governance	0.101	14.565	**2.980**
assessment and appraisal-Good Governance	0.108	12.208	**4.015**

Variables	Factor Load	Significance Coefficient (T-value ≥ 1.96)	Variance Inflation Factor (VIF ≤ 5)
education and culturalism-Good Governance	0.116	21.144	**2.263**
financial and structural independence-Good Governance	0.183	16.209	**3.378**
appropriate organizational structure-Good Governance	0.187	18.669	**1.697**
the rule of law-Good Governance	0.091	8.311	**2.057**
sustainability-Good Governance	0.110	15.244	**3.726**
collective wisdom-Good Governance	0.093	9.796	**1.093**
objective management-Good Governance	0.088	11.989	**3.643**

As shown in Table 6, the significance coefficients for all second-order formative constructs are greater than 1.96, and the variance inflation factor (VIF) for all constructs is less than 5. This indicates that there is no multicollinearity between the constructs, and the model demonstrates a good fit.

For the overall model fit, the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) index was used. Since the SRMR value for this model is 0.078, and values below 0.08 are considered acceptable for this index, it can be concluded that the obtained model has a good fit.

Discussion

This study sought to identify and validate the components of good governance within the Iranian Gymnastics Federation using an exploratory mixed-methods design. The analysis led to the identification of ten interconnected components, each of which demonstrated a statistically significant relationship with the core concept of good governance. These components collectively represent a localized model of governance tailored to the structural, cultural, and organizational context of Iranian sport.

The first and most frequently cited component was transparency, defined as the unrestricted access to information and openness in decision-making. Participants emphasized that transparency serves not only as a procedural necessity but also as a moral obligation of the federation. This finding resonates with Chappelet and Mrkonjic (2013) and aligns with the IOC's 2001 declaration on transparency in sports governance. More notably, transparency was linked to gender inclusivity, with participants advocating for more equitable representation of women, echoing the findings of Araujo & Tejido-Romero (2018) on the positive correlation between gender balance and transparency.

The second identified dimension was accountability, a cornerstone of governance theories including agency and stewardship theory. Stakeholders viewed accountability as a dual process: upwards to the government and sports authorities, and downwards to athletes and the broader sports community. This reflects the shift from hierarchical models of control toward more participatory and ethical models of governance.
The third component, assessment and appraisal, was heavily emphasized by participants due to

historical governance failures in managerial appointments. The absence of performance-based evaluations in the federation's operations has eroded trust. This finding is congruent with the UK Sports Council (2004), which emphasized that regular evaluations are instrumental in ensuring accountability and organizational learning.

The fourth component, education and culturalism, plays a foundational role in enabling and sustaining governance reforms. According to the participants, promoting an internal culture of governance literacy is necessary for long-term improvement. In line with OECD recommendations, education in ethical and procedural governance can reduce malpractice and foster stakeholder engagement.

The fifth and sixth components—financial and structural independence and appropriate organizational structure—were closely related. Stakeholders noted that external political or financial interference undermines the federation's objectivity. Meanwhile, ineffective or ambiguous structural arrangements hinder communication and strategic coordination. These components correspond with Garmamo et al. (2024), who highlight the synergistic relationship between structural coherence and good governance in sports federations.

The rule of law, the seventh component, was described as a prerequisite for justice and fairness. Participants argued that adherence to legal standards must be universal and non-negotiable, especially in contexts prone to favoritism or informal influence. This finding is supported by studies such as Makarychev & Yatsyk (2018) and Asgarigandomani et al. (2021), both of which emphasized the legal dimensions of sport governance reform.

The eighth component, sustainability, was conceptualized not merely in environmental terms, but as the federation's capacity to maintain operational resilience and long-term development. This aligns with UNDP's multidimensional framework of governance sustainability, stressing continuity, adaptability, and institutional memory.

Collective wisdom, the ninth dimension, was framed as a participatory mechanism for enhancing legitimacy and trust. Drawing on models from the IOC and National Olympic Committees, stakeholders recommended institutionalizing mechanisms for input from athletes, coaches, and sponsors. This aligns with stakeholder theory and democratic governance models.

Lastly, objective management emerged as a forward-looking component, tied to data-driven governance and strategic decision-making. With the integration of digital tools, participants emphasized the necessity of shifting from subjective or politicized management styles to evidence-based approaches. This perspective is supported by Badri Foolad & Nasr Esfahani (2021), who highlight strategic planning as key to gymnastics development.

In sum, the study's proposed model underscores that good governance in sport—particularly within federations such as gymnastics—requires a contextually grounded, multi-component framework that reflects both global standards and local realities. The ten components outlined here offer a practical and evidence-based roadmap for policymakers, managers, and stakeholders aiming to implement sustainable governance reforms.

Conclusion

To bring the insights of this study into practice, the Iranian Gymnastics Federation should take deliberate steps to integrate the ten key components of good governance into its policies and operations. Increasing transparency through accessible information, open communication, and regular reporting can strengthen public trust. Promoting gender balance and diverse representation in decision-making will enhance fairness and credibility.

Accountability can be institutionalized through independent monitoring bodies and routine evaluations. Implementing structured performance reviews will help ensure that appointments and decisions are based on merit, not personal ties. Building a culture of ethical leadership through education and awareness programs will lay the foundation for long-term integrity and professionalism. Financial independence, supported by diverse funding sources, along with a clear and agile organizational structure, will improve both resilience and responsiveness. Ensuring adherence to the rule of law through consistent enforcement and fair procedures will increase legitimacy. Developing sustainable strategies that emphasize continuity and adaptability will support the federation's future growth. Encouraging the participation of athletes, coaches, and stakeholders in decision-making will foster trust and shared ownership. Finally, embracing data and digital tools for planning and management will enable the federation to respond wisely and effectively to emerging challenges. These steps, taken together, offer a practical path toward building a more ethical, inclusive, and future-ready federation.

Acknowledgement

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