

Identification of Factors Influencing the Institutionalization of Sports Law in Schools

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Abstract

Purpose: The lack of sufficient awareness among teachers and school administrators regarding sports law, along with the absence of a systematic framework, has led to an increase in legal disputes and the creation of an unsafe environment. Therefore, this study aimed to identify the key factors influencing the institutionalization of sports law in Iranian schools.

Methods: The research employed a grounded theory approach based on the systematic design of Strauss and Corbin. The statistical population consisted of experts and specialists in the fields of sports law, sports management, and education. Using purposive sampling combined with the snowball technique and based on theoretical saturation, 13 participants were selected as the final sample. Data were collected through semi structured interviews, which were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding. During open coding, 107 initial concepts were extracted from the data. MAXQDA software (version 2020) was used to manage and facilitate the coding process.

Results: Qualitative data analysis led to the identification of six main categories: education and empowerment, policymaking and responsibility, governance and operational efficiency, infrastructure and technology core, good governance factors, and the cultural and social synergy core.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that institutionalizing sports law in schools is a dynamic and multidimensional process that requires simultaneous attention to structural, cultural, and educational dimensions. Ultimately, it can be concluded that although major challenges such as insufficient training, weak regulations, and lack of infrastructure appear common across sports contexts, operational strategies and priorities for institutionalization are highly dependent on the specific setting (e.g., schools versus professional clubs). Success therefore hinges on understanding these nuances and adopting a coordinated, multidimensional approach.

Keywords: Civil liability, Physical education teachers, Qualitative model.

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Introduction

Today, sport and the emphasis on physical education are regarded as essential components of modern life (Wicker & Breuer, 2014). As a significant aspect of social life and a fundamental method for educating children and adolescents, sport is inherently associated with risks and responsibilities (Yousefi Sadeghlou & Nasir, 2018). Sporting activities may involve hazardous incidents that can threaten the health, life, property, dignity, reputation, and other legal rights of individuals present within the sports environment (Aghaeinia, 2014). Since sporting operations can result in criminal or civil liability, experts widely agree that increasing the public's legal awareness is among the most effective ways to reduce legal violations in society. Many public issues stem from insufficient understanding of legal matters; individuals often encounter legal misconduct or offenses simply because they are unaware of relevant rules and regulations. Therefore, enhancing legal literacy is considered one of the primary methods for preventing such problems (Karimnia et al., 2022).

Sports law, as a relatively new concept, is considered an interdisciplinary field combining elements of private international law, international commercial law, and contract law (David, 2020). Its purpose is to clarify the legal rights and duties of athletes, clubs, federations, and confederations. Sports law encompasses all regulations governing sports activities, including the conduct of athletes, technical managers, spectators, administrative staff, sports physicians, equipment manufacturers and sellers, as well as employees of sports organizations. Its subject matter includes all violations occurring in the sports arena that may infringe upon the rights of others, categorized under legal concepts such as crimes, quasi crimes, and intentional or unintentional misconduct (Dashkouka et al., 2021).

Sports settings such as stadiums, clubs, and schools are not merely physical environments for activity; rather, they are dynamic arenas where education, organizational linkages, and creativity interact (Cohé & Callison, 2018). Schools in particular represent the first structured environment in which students experience organized sporting activities (Mostahfizian et al., 2018). Inevitably, the environments in which sports activities occur are vulnerable to unpredictable incidents. Evidence shows that students' lack of awareness and negligence often increase injuries during school based physical activities (Feiz, 2018). Considering the inseparable nature of risk from sports and the prevalence of sports injuries, familiarity with legal principles is essential for preventing incidents or minimizing liability when they occur (Feiz, 2018). Alarming, 65% of teachers lack adequate knowledge of civil liability laws (Article 328 of the Islamic Penal Code). As ignorance of the law excuses no one, teachers may still be convicted in courts even when unaware of specific regulations (Abbasi et al., 2021). Therefore, one of the fundamental necessities in the field of sports law is increasing teachers' and school administrators' awareness of relevant laws and regulations. Such knowledge not only helps prevent legal complications but also clarifies their duties and responsibilities. Sports law in schools contributes to maintaining students' physical and mental well being and fosters a safe environment essential for their personal development (Morari & Price, 2023).

Recognizing sports related legal issues is increasingly viewed as a critical need within the Ministry of Education's physical education sector. If teachers possess sufficient legal knowledge, many existing challenges would be minimized, and the number of court cases would decline. Thus, it is essential to develop and implement educational programs aimed at enhancing teachers' legal literacy (Zho & et al 2019). Teachers must fully understand their

rights and responsibilities to prevent potential misuse, as research reveals that many lawsuits stem from insufficient awareness of legal provisions. Without proper legal understanding, physical education teachers may face significant civil or criminal consequences arising from their professional duties. Sports law helps define the legal scope of responsibilities and authorities of coaches, teachers, and school administrators, and increases awareness of the legal implications of sports related violations and accidents (Mostahfizian et al., 2018).

Research by Naghipour et al. (2022) showed that while extensive studies have examined civil liability among natural persons involved in sports, research addressing the civil liability of legal entities other than sports clubs remains limited. Mostahfizian et al. (2018) found that teachers' familiarity with sports law varied: while they had relatively strong knowledge of obligations, equipment standards, and educational missions, their understanding of rights, benefits, managerial responsibility, and most critically legal regulations was lower than average. Feiz (2018) argued that although sports injuries may sometimes be considered inherent risks accepted by participants, severe outcomes such as paralysis or death impose clear civil liability based on Islamic jurisprudence, which emphasizes fault and compensation.

Legal studies indicate that 76 out of 166 school related injury cases stem directly from physical education activities (Votmr & Esslinger, cited in Shaabanimoghadam et al., 2016). Considering the dynamic and high risk nature of school sports, teachers, coaches, and administrators must be well versed in legal principles to avoid professional and financial consequences. In many schools, a lack of legal knowledge has even caused sports programs to be suspended or replaced with virtual or sedentary activities (Azami, 2018). Empirical findings from Mirsafian and Mirsalimani

(2023) confirmed low baseline legal knowledge among teachers, highlighting the need for structured training.

The Theory of Planned Behavior suggests that improving knowledge and reshaping attitudes strengthens motivation for responsible conduct. Yet statistics reveal a worrying increase in legal cases involving school sports injuries. Rostami Aghdam et al. (2024) reported that 68% of such incidents are linked to teachers' ignorance of legal and safety protocols. This lack of awareness impairs crisis management and leads to prolonged disputes over compensation. Nearly 90% of schools lack a formal "sports legal charter," exacerbating ambiguity in responsibility distribution. Equipment safety is another concern; approximately 40% of schools use outdated or non standard sports equipment. Souri (2021) identified three major structural barriers: educational (insufficient training content), legal (fragmented regulations), and human resource related (lack of specialized personnel). University curricula and teacher training programs rarely address practical aspects of sports law.

School-based sports are a fundamental component of students' physical education, health, and overall development. However, the lack of a clear and structured legal framework governing these activities poses significant risks, both for students and educators. Inadequate knowledge of sports law among teachers and administrators not only increases the likelihood of accidents and injuries but also exposes schools and educators to legal disputes, undermining their professional credibility and the quality of education provided (Mostahfizian et al., 2018). Despite the critical role of sports in schools, existing research indicates that teachers and school administrators often lack sufficient understanding of their legal responsibilities and civil liabilities. This gap contributes to frequent legal conflicts, reduced safety standards, and heightened vulnerability to lawsuits, highlighting an urgent need for

systematic interventions. Moreover, the rising incidence of litigation related to school sports injuries underscores the consequences of operating in a legal vacuum, where the absence of formal policies and institutionalized sports law leaves both students and educators inadequately protected.

Previous studies have largely examined sports law and civil liability in general terms, without addressing the specific context of schools, where legal knowledge is crucial for daily practice. The process of institutionalizing sports law within the school system ensuring that legal norms, policies, and educational practices are systematically integrated remains largely unexplored. Therefore, the present study seeks to fill this critical gap by developing a comprehensive model for institutionalizing sports law in Iranian schools. The central research question guiding this investigation is: What is the appropriate model for institutionalizing sports law in Iranian schools?

Materials and Methods

This study was conducted with the aim of developing a model for institutionalizing sports law in schools, using a qualitative approach and the grounded theory strategy based on the systematic design of Strauss and Corbin. The statistical population consisted of experts and specialists in the fields of sports law, sports management, and education. Through

purposive sampling with a snowball technique and based on the criterion of theoretical saturation, 13 participants were selected.

The primary data collection instrument was semi structured interviews, which were recorded, transcribed, and subsequently analyzed. Data analysis followed the three coding stages of grounded theory: open coding (identifying 107 initial codes), axial coding (organizing codes into categories and subcategories), and selective coding (integrating categories around a core category and developing the paradigmatic model). The analytical process was facilitated using MAXQDA 20 software.

To ensure the trustworthiness and reliability of the findings, Guba and Lincoln's four criteria credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were applied. Operational strategies included member checking, data triangulation, comprehensive documentation of the analytical process, and inter coder agreement (with an agreement rate above 80%). Ethical considerations such as informed consent and data confidentiality were also strictly observed.

Results

In this section, the characteristics of the research participants including their positions, academic disciplines, educational levels, and fields of activity are presented.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Participant	Position	Education	Field / Specialization	Executive	Academic
P1	University Professor	PhD	Sport Management	*	*
P2	University Professor	PhD	Sport Management	*	*
P3	Physical Education Teacher	PhD	Sports Law Expert	*	
P4	Physical Education Teacher	PhD	Sports Law Expert	*	
P5	Deputy of Physical Education, Department of Education	PhD	Sport Management	*	*
P6	Member of the Legal Committee of the Federation	PhD	Private Law	*	

P7	University Professor	PhD	Private Law		*
P8	University Professor	PhD	Private Law		*
P9	University Professor	PhD	Public Law		*
P10	Physical Education Teacher	PhD	National School Team Coach	*	
P11	Physical Education Teacher	PhD	Head of Sports Association	*	
P12	Member of the Sports Law Association	PhD	Private Law	*	
P13	Member of the Sports Law Association	PhD	Sport Management	*	*

Open Coding

The first stage in grounded theory analysis is open coding. Open coding may be carried out line by line, phrase by phrase, or paragraph by paragraph, depending on the analytical unit. When the analytical unit is a line or sentence, each unit is assigned a concept or code. These codes must capture the maximum semantic and conceptual meaning contained in the data (Krueger & Neuman, 2006).

Based on the first stage of coding known as

open coding and through careful review of the interviews conducted with experts, 107 open codes were identified. Once all data were coded and the initial concepts were generated, the next stage, axial coding, began.

Axial Coding

The second stage of coding, axial coding, involves connecting open codes into a network of relationships. The axial coding process and categories derived from the open codes are presented below.

Table 2. Open Codes and Axial Coding

Concepts	Subcategories	Main Category	Core Category
Inclusion of sports law in the curriculum content	Curriculum	Education and Empowerment in Sports Law	Institutionalization of Sports Law in Schools
Development of specialized course units			
Implementation of sports law educational syllabi			
Applied research and studies in the field of school sports law			
Curriculum and extracurricular planning for institutionalizing sports law			
Sports programs for students with special needs			
Holding training courses for teachers and educational staff on sports law	Teacher Training		
Developing teaching skills of teachers			

in sports law			
Teachers' awareness of the importance of sports law in school activities			
Teachers' adequate understanding of sports law and human rights in sport			
Teaching communication skills to students	Student Education		
Teaching conflict resolution and problem solving methods in sport			
Students' awareness of their rights in sport			
Educational programs to enhance students' understanding and respect for sports law			
Providing books, academic articles, and digital resources to expand students' knowledge			
Holding workshops for students and teachers to increase awareness	Workshops and Seminars		
Holding specialized seminars by inviting experts			
Using videos, articles, and digital content for education			
Organizing sports competitions to familiarize students with their rights and responsibilities	Planning		
Designing a comprehensive and structured plan for institutionalizing sports law in schools			
Employing successful managers in sports law			
Proper implementation of sports law programs and policies in schools			
Using global models and successful international experiences			
Passing regulations related to sports law in schools	National Regulations	Policy making and Responsibility in Sports Law	
Identifying responsible bodies for monitoring the implementation of these laws at various levels			
Defining limits and authorities of			

responsible institutions			
Providing legal protection for students against violations of sports law			
Integrating sports law into macro level educational policies	Policies		
Developing coordinated national policies			
Formulating clear policies on sports law in schools			
Developing operational guidelines for implementing sports law in schools			
Ensuring equitable access to facilities			
Developing local policies to meet specific needs			
Formulating regulations to protect student athletes' sports rights	Supportive		
Developing regulations to prevent discrimination in school sports			
Establishing independent judiciary bodies and clear procedures for addressing violations			
Creating equal opportunities for all students			
Developing gender equality policies and supporting students with diverse abilities			
Legislation to prevent violence and harassment in sports environments			
Defining complaint channels and accountability systems	Accountability		
Identifying mechanisms for students to express grievances			
Creating systems with clearly defined responsibilities in case of rights violations			
Designing operational mechanisms to handle violations of sports law			
Forming sports committees in schools	Organizational and Managerial Structure	Governance System and Operational Efficiency in School Sports	
Centralized management in educational organizations			

Clear division of tasks between executive team members			
Comprehensive sports planning in schools with emphasis on sports law	Executive Structure		
Developing standards for sports planning with a focus on sports law			
Formulating internal sports regulations for schools			
Special budgeting for sports activities	Financial Structure		
Allocating adequate budget for infrastructure development and sports law programs			
Attracting investors and securing financial resources			
Establishing support funds for sports activities in deprived areas			
Establishing independent monitoring bodies for evaluating schools' performance in sports law	Evaluation and Monitoring Structure		
Implementing reporting and continuous monitoring systems			
Collecting feedback from students regarding sports law compliance			
Publishing reports and evaluation results			
Providing clear and continuous information to students and parents about their sports rights	Information Structure		
Organizing training courses for students, teachers, and parents			
Communicating evaluation results and monitoring reports			
Cooperation between Ministry of Education and Ministry of Sport	Inter organizational Cooperation Structure		
Partnership with NGOs and local communities			
Establishing national level specialized task forces			
Cooperation with civil organizations for promoting sports law			
Conducting awareness raising campaigns on sports law			

Cooperation with various organizations to create supportive and informative networks			
Cooperation with sports federations and associations			
Providing appropriate, standard, and accessible sports spaces	Sports Facilities and Equipment	Infrastructure, Safety, and Technological Development Core	
Adequate and appropriate sports equipment			
Investment in sports infrastructure to ensure equal opportunities			
Sports spaces for students with special needs			
Providing running tracks and walkways			
School green spaces for group sports			
Hygienic and sanitation systems in sports halls	Health and Safety		
Adherence to safety standards in design and construction of sports areas			
Securing sports facilities and equipment			
Using technology to enhance sports safety			
Using technology in sports law education and awareness	ICT		
Creating online platforms for information sharing			
Sports information management systems			
Online sports websites and educational resources			
Educational equipment and software			
Using health monitoring devices			
Establishing independent bodies or committees overseeing sports law implementation	Transparency in Implementation	Good Governance Factors	
Transparency in sports law procedures in schools			
Providing transparent public reports			

on sports law compliance			
Creating data collection systems for accurate information on sports law status	Evidence based Decision making		
Analyzing and using data for decisions related to school sports law			
Reporting and analyzing outcomes to improve conditions			
Including students' and teachers' perspectives in policy making	Participatory Governance		
Establishing advisory councils with different stakeholders			
Transparency in resource allocation and decisions			
Establishing independent school sports institutions	Institutional Autonomy		
Delegating authority to schools for sports law related decisions			
Supporting school self regulation			
Teaching social skills through sport	Cultural Education and Awareness	Cultural and Social Synergy Core in Sports Law	
Cultural campaigns and awareness raising about sports law			
Media and sports culture promotion			
Promoting a rights based culture in schools			
Promoting sports ethics	Respect Culture		
Encouraging PE teachers and coaches to create respectful and inclusive environments			
Organizing joyful and appropriate sports events			
Active parent and family participation in school sports	Social Support and Family Participation		
Building effective relationships with local communities			
Increasing women's participation in sports			
Enhancing community involvement and educational synergy			
Cooperation with local and national			

sports bodies			
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Selective Coding

Selective coding refers to integrating and refining axial categories by identifying the central phenomenon and assembling relationships among the major categories. In this phase the most abstract level of analysis categories were synthesized to construct the emerging theory.

Based on the axial coding results and conceptual congruence across categories, six core categories were identified:

1. Education and Empowerment in Sports Law

2. Policy Making and Responsibility in Sports Law

3. Governance System and Operational Efficiency in School Sports

4. Infrastructure, Safety, and Technological Development in School Sports

5. Good Governance Factors

6. Cultural and Social Synergy in Sports Law

The selective coding process is summarized below.

Table 3. Selective (Theoretical) Coding

Source	Axial Codes	Selective Code
P1, P6, P10	Curriculum	Education and Empowerment in Sports Law
P1, P6, P10	Teacher Education	
P1, P2, P6	Student Education	
P2, P6	Workshops & Seminars	
P1, P2, P5, P10	Planning	
P2, P5, P10	National Laws & Regulations	Policy Making and Responsibility in Sports Law
P2, P5, P7, P11, P13	Policies	
P2, P5, P7, P11, P13	Supportive Measures	
P2, P7, P8, P13	Accountability	
P3, P5, P13	Organizational Structure	Governance System and Operational Efficiency
P3, P13	Executive Structure	
P3, P5, P7, P13	Financial Structure	
P3, P13	Evaluation & Monitoring	
P8, P11	Information Structure	
P3, P5, P7, P9, P11	Inter Organizational Collaboration	
P3, P8, P9, P11, P12	Facilities	Infrastructure, Safety & Technological Development
P3, P5, P11, P12	Health & Safety	
P3, P4, P8, P12	ICT	
P4, P9, P12	Transparency	Good Governance Factors

P11, P12, P13	Evidence Based Decision Making	
P4, P12	Participatory Governance	
P4, P9, P11	Institutional Independence	
P4, P9, P12, P13	Cultural Awareness	Cultural & Social Synergy in Sports Law
P4, P12, P13	Culture of Respect	
P4, P9, P12	Social Support & Family Participation	

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the institutionalization of sports law in schools is a complex and intertwined process that requires simultaneous transformation across six dimensions: educational, policy oriented, structural, infrastructural, governance related, and socio cultural. Although many of the results align with domestic and international research reflecting the universal nature of challenges in the field of sports law the main innovation of this study lies in its specific focus on the school environment as a primary arena for legal education. Additional contributions include offering an integrated and systematic roadmap, emphasizing the active role of students as participants in policymaking and observers of implementation, and highlighting the potential of modern technologies and media in contemporary society.

In the area of education and empowerment, the study underscores the necessity of embedding sports law into school curricula, providing specialized teacher training, and increasing student awareness. These findings are consistent with studies by Souri et al. (2022), Mirsafian and Mirsalimani (2023), and Todres and Kilkelly (2025). However, the present study offers more detailed and practical recommendations such as curriculum design, workshops, and digital resources which provide concrete strategies for implementing these concepts within the school setting.

Regarding policymaking and responsibility, the emphasis on establishing clear regulations, supportive policies, and accountability

mechanisms aligns with the findings of Souri et al. (2022) and Mohammadi et al. (2022). The distinct contribution of this study, however, lies in its school centered approach, offering actionable strategies such as creating specific complaint channels for students and ensuring legal protection for them.

In the domain of governance systems and operational efficiency, this research highlights the importance of organizational, managerial, financial, monitoring, communication, and inter organizational collaboration structures. These results correspond with the findings of Souri et al. (2021) and Basati et al. (2024). The key distinction of the present study is its integrated and systematic approach to all governance components, resulting in a more comprehensive and actionable model.

In the dimension of infrastructure and technology, the study emphasizes the provision of standard sports facilities and equipment, adherence to safety and health principles, and the use of modern technologies. These findings are consistent with Abbasi et al. (2021) and Zhou Wen'an (2016). Nevertheless, the study's innovative contribution lies in its focus on information and communication technologies, proposing novel solutions such as sports information management systems and health monitoring devices.

The present study identifies five key dimensions that are critical for effective governance and cultural development in school-based sports. Transparency emerged as a fundamental component, emphasizing the open and clear communication of policies, decisions,

and resource allocation. By fostering accountability and trust among teachers, students, and parents, transparency reduces ambiguity and potential conflicts. Although domestic literature mentions transparency only sporadically, this study systematically positions it as a cornerstone of good governance, aligning with international research highlighting its role in improving institutional performance.

Data-driven decision making highlights the importance of using evidence, such as participation rates, injury reports, and feedback, to guide policies and interventions. While rarely addressed in Iranian studies, the systematic incorporation of data-driven practices ensures that decisions are informed, effective, and aligned with both educational and legal standards. This approach echoes global trends advocating evidence-based governance to enhance both safety and program quality.

Participatory governance involves the active engagement of teachers, students, parents, and community members in decision-making. By shifting from centralized, top-down models toward school-centered and inclusive approaches, this dimension empowers stakeholders, strengthens ownership, and supports compliance with legal frameworks. Although participatory governance has been sporadically noted in previous domestic literature, presenting it as a distinct, systematic category marks a significant contribution of this study.

School autonomy refers to the ability of individual schools to independently manage curriculum, staffing, and resources. In sports governance, autonomy enables schools to tailor programs to the needs of their students while maintaining alignment with national policies. Although prior Iranian research has occasionally mentioned autonomy, integrating it with transparency and participatory governance highlights its role in improving efficiency, responsiveness, and institutional accountability.

Finally, socio-cultural synergy encompasses cultural awareness, respect, sports ethics, social support, and family participation. Consistent with findings by Ghaderpour et al. (2021) and Erdal Kaya & Yildiz (2023), this study emphasizes ethical conduct and family involvement. However, it extends previous work by highlighting the creation of joyful and dignified sports events as practical platforms for fostering a culture of respect, offering a creative and applied approach to cultural development. While this innovation demonstrates the study's practical contribution, future research could further situate these practices within international models to assess alignment or divergence with global experiences.

Together, these five dimensions illustrate a comprehensive framework for institutionalizing sports law and promoting ethical, participatory, and culturally grounded school sports programs, addressing a critical gap in both domestic research and practical governance.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this research, several practical recommendations are proposed for different stakeholders. In the area of education and capacity building, it is recommended to design and include a course on sports law within school textbooks, develop specialized training packages for teachers, implement a "Sports Law Summer School" program at the school level, and establish an online learning platform.

In the domain of policymaking and responsibility, the development of a Students' Sports Law Charter, creation of a procedural guideline for addressing sports related complaints, adoption of anti harassment regulations, and mandating the publication of transparent performance reports by schools are advised.

To improve governance and operational efficiency, it is recommended to establish a

school sports committee with representatives of students and parents, design a smart budget allocation system, form a joint inter ministerial task force, and implement a school ranking system based on sports law compliance indicators.

In the field of infrastructure and technology, implementing a program for renovating and securing sports halls, equipping schools with a basic safety equipment package, developing a sports health monitoring application, and installing smart physical fitness assessment devices are suggested.

For achieving good governance indicators, it is recommended to create a financial transparency platform, establish a student sports council, implement an independent monitoring system with parent-coach participation, and periodically publish sports law performance reports.

Finally, in the area of socio cultural synergy, it is suggested to launch a national awareness campaign, organize neighborhood level sports festivals, design sports competitions emphasizing sports ethics, and produce educational media content tailored to children and adolescents.

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