

Saudi Sports Management: Challenges, Implementation Gaps, and Future Directions

Saad Mojeb M Alshahrani ^{1*}, Hanan Falah S Alqahtani ²

¹ Researcher, Department of Management, Deakin University, Australia

² Department of Management, Deakin University, Australia

*Corresponding Author Email: saadmoj1@live.com

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 12 Mar 2025 Revised: 07 May 2025 Accepted: 15 May 2025	<p>Saudi Arabia's performance in international sports competitions has remained sub-optimal compared to its ambitions and investments in the sector. Strengthening sports management, in line with Saudi Vision 2030, is a key pathway for improvement. This study explores the current status, implementation challenges, and strategic possibilities in Saudi sports management through semi-structured interviews with 15 stakeholders, including sports organization leaders, government policymakers, and grassroots practitioners/coaches. Thematic analysis of their responses revealed that existing policies and strategies are only partially successful due to persistent implementation gaps, cultural barriers (including those limiting female participation), and resource constraints. The findings highlight the need for more effective policy implementation, professional capacity-building, stakeholder engagement, and targeted support for underrepresented groups. Addressing these challenges, Saudi Arabia holds significant potential to enhance its international sports performance by executing its policies and strategies in a more inclusive and efficient manner.</p> <p>Keywords: Saudi Arabia, sports management, Islamic socio-culture, female participation.</p>

INTRODUCTION

Sports management includes the business and operational aspects of managing sports entities, including teams, leagues, athletes, events, and facilities. It may involve planning, organising, marketing, and managing various aspects of the sports industry, from athlete representation and securing sponsorships to ensuring financial and operational efficiency (Saati, 2023; Alardani, 2023). It consists of planning, organising, marketing and sales, sportsperson representation, event management, financial management, legal and ethical issues and media relations.

The sports management industry in Saudi Arabia is experiencing rapid growth, particularly driven by the "Vision 2030" plan, which emphasises sports as a key sector for economic and social development (Alshuraymi & Hastie, 2025; Svoboda et al., 2024). This attracts investments and initiatives that expand sports infrastructure, leagues, and events (Ma'mun et al., 2024; Hassan, Alibrahim & Alhumaid, 2024). Data analytics is increasingly being used to improve sports management, helping with athlete performance analysis, fan engagement, and overall operational efficiency (Hassan, Alibrahim & Alhumaid, 2024; Ahmed & Hassan, 2022). Football is a major sport, alongside others like motorsport, cricket, basketball, and esports. The country also hosts international competitions, including the World Combat Games and the World Weightlifting Championships. Other sports, such as volleyball, gymnastics, and swimming, are also gaining popularity (Gryshuk, 2024).

Despite such rapid growth and use of technology, the performance of Saudi Arabia in international events is not up to the mark, except in football (FIFA ranking 49th). Saudi Arabia is ranked 120th in the Olympics with two silver and two bronze medals since it started participation in the 1972 Munich Olympics. It has not won any medals in the Winter Games so far. Saudi Arabia has one silver medal each in athletics and karate and two bronze medals in equestrian at the 2000 Sydney Olympics (Saati, 2023).

This study aims to identify the issues related to such poor performance and ways to enhance sports management in Saudi Arabia so that the country can improve its performance in international sports and games.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Saudi sports activities are administered and controlled by the General Presidency of Youth Welfare (GPYW), established in 1974. This body has initiated many active programmes to develop sports in educational institutions. Alardani (2023) found sports management in Saudi Arabia to be in its nascent stage. Especially the Islamic cultural and social restrictions, which do not permit women to participate in sports and physical activities, are major obstacles to improved performance. Positive attitudes of male and female university students are affected by the lack of facilities, opportunities, and programmes. A lack of effective interventions by adequate security mechanisms and agencies backed by appropriate regulations can lead to stadium riots. Not attending to serious injuries to sportspeople can incapacitate them lifelong.

Knowledge management in sports organisations is essential to develop them and bring them to a height that touches the aspirations of their fans, especially since sports has become one of the yardsticks to measure the progress of nations and the progress of people. A SWOT analysis was performed by Saati (2023) on the Saudi sports organisations. The main strengths were a passionate youth and sports leadership, the existence of a specialised national cadres, an officially approved organisation to provide detailed strategy, strategies to increase revenue, availability of giant sports facilities, an increasing number of sports practitioners and fans, reputed sports clubs, active social responsibility, sports as a speciality in some universities, enhanced governance systems and regulations, government support, and the role of media and social media. Certain areas present opportunities for further development, such as enhancing the implementation of regulations, broadening the range of professional experiences, and increasing the presence of nutritionists in clubs. There is also potential to expand the involvement of specialised analysts for pre- and post-match assessments, as well as to strengthen capacity development training. Improvements in administrative systems and optimisation of existing competencies may further elevate performance. Continued progress in privatisation, strategic planning, and clearer game specialisation within clubs could yield positive outcomes. Advances in governance practices, vision clarity regarding finance and management, and reinforcement of financial and other resources would benefit overall stability. Efforts to manage spending, streamline subsidy processes, and refine income distribution can also support sustainable growth. Additionally, further development of club websites, more effective social media engagement, and increased integration of technology may enhance outreach and operational efficiency. These weaknesses lead to some risks. They are delays and hesitation in making decisions, the tendency among youngsters to prefer video games and the internet rather than sports, external pressures affecting sports activities, rising costs, investors' reluctance to sponsor sports events and the negative impact of social media in some instances. Some methods to solve these issues may be emulating international clubs for organisation, strategies, governance, finance and technology. Immediate privatisation strategies, recognition of distinguished Saudi sports talents, increased motivation for youth to practise and follow-up sports activities, expansion of sports activities, greater role of sports media, supporting the Ministry of Sports to implement governance, investing in club headquarters, increasing sponsorships, investing in media and sports tourism, specialised sports channels, pages and websites.

A survey of 392 employees from the student activities departments of Saudi universities by Sayyd (2024) showed the change management level among the directors of these departments to be average. Change management level was significantly correlated with the development of sports activities in Saudi universities. The author recommended the implementation of change management dimensions, training programmes for directors of student activities departments on change management strategies, monitoring and adaptation of all changes in the organisation and application of change management strategies when required.

To increase Saudi student participation in sports, there is a need to increase financial support, human resources, sports policies, sports programs, social culture, sports facilities, and sports tools, according to the results of a survey of 643 university students by Hassan, Alibrahim, and Alhumaid (2024).

A comparison of Qatar and Saudi Arabia on their strategies to enhance their international image by Gryshuk (2024) showed that Qatar emphasises hosting high-profile events, developing sponsorships and partnerships, and investing in international sports entities, while Saudi Arabia focuses on attracting renowned athletes to its domestic league and using their image and fanbase. Both Qatar and Saudi Arabia have significantly enhanced their reputation and image by hosting the FIFA World Cup and attracting famous athletes. Increasing global interest in the intersection of sports and national branding is evident. Qatar and Saudi Arabia actively invest in sports as part of their broader strategy to enhance their international image and promote cultural exchange. Collaborating with non-state actors, introducing progressive regulations, and engaging in constructive media campaigns are among the approaches proposed to further advance transparent and positive representations of these countries through sports. A survey of 643 undergraduate students from 25 Saudi universities by Sayyd, Asnaldi, Zainuddin, and Nahary (2022) showed that the lack of facilities and equipment was affecting the students' participation in sports and physical activities, while the students agreed that it was important to improve the availability and accessibility of sports facilities and equipment in their institutions.

A systematic review of 58 papers by Sayyd, Zainuddin, Ghan, and Altowerqi (2020) revealed that the barriers to the success of physical and sports activities among male students at Saudi universities were a lack of energy, motivation, self-confidence, and time. In the case of female students, the barriers were a lack of social support and resources.

A survey of 40 sports journalists and 387 sports audiences in Riyadh by Al-Nsour (2020) showed that sports sponsorship has a significant positive effect on brand equity in the minds of the Saudi sports audience. However, there were no statistical differences in sponsorships.

Six in-service male physical education teachers from five all-boys middle schools in Saudi Arabia implemented sports education seasons of handball or soccer. Data were collected over one academic semester and included daily critical incident reports as well as interviews. The content analysis of the data by Alshuraymi and Hastie (2025) helped to identify some themes. The main themes focused on motivation and learning, emphasising subthemes of enthusiasm and enjoyment. A negative theme identified was the traditional culture of physical education, highlighting challenges faced by teachers related to student tardiness, absences, and not bringing appropriate PE attire. Another negative aspect was disputes and a refusal to accept decisions during the initial phases of training. The teachers expressed happiness regarding the students' enthusiasm, learning, commitment, achievements, and development of personal and social responsibility, all positively influenced by the sports education season, both inside and outside the gym. Despite this being their first experience with the model, the teachers felt confident in its approach. The model demonstrated the potential for fostering engagement in physical activity and sports in alignment with Saudi Vision 2030.

Women in Saudi Arabia have recently experienced remarkable socio-cultural shifts in their lifestyles and well-being due to new policies empowering females. One notable change is the growing societal acceptance of women's involvement in sports and physical activities. Nevertheless, because of the limited opportunities for engaging in sports and physical activities in prior years, Saudi women may still face significant barriers that hinder their participation. From a survey conducted with 866 female respondents, Fakehy, Alfadhil, Hassan, and Alotaibi (2023) found that most utilised their homes as venues for participation, with notable variations in intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints based on geographical location and an overall elevated score in structural constraints. It was determined that Saudi women's capacity to engage in sports and physical activities is heavily restricted by numerous factors requiring policymakers' and investors' attention.

A survey of 228 individuals from 25 sports institutions by Abouzeid, Amira, and Hassan (2023) showed that investments in human resources in Saudi sports organisations are currently low. The authors noted an absence of effective planning in human resources management, inadequate mechanisms for training staff, and a deficiency of successful methods for developing administrative and organisational policies. Additionally, there is minimal assessment and follow-up to evaluate the practicality of organisational and economic financing, investment, and marketing, making it difficult for a sports institution to stand out among its competitors. There is no scientifically based system for evaluating this issue for any employees within the institution. The lack of transparency and

objectivity in evaluations results in employee dissatisfaction, along with insufficient involvement from employees when it comes to voicing their opinions on the negative evaluation process in the organisation.

Based on the analysis of published documents, Imawan, Zuliansyah, and Surwandono (2024) concluded that Saudi Arabia's approach to empowering women in sports has effectively encouraged their participation in both recreational and competitive activities. This observation contradicts many others.

A literature review by Ma'mun, Ilmi, Malihah, Meilania, and Nafidz (2024) indicated that although Saudi Arabia's considerable financial investments could swiftly boost the international recognition of its league, the long-term effects depend on effective economic oversight. To achieve enduring economic advantages, it is essential to have not only significant financial investments but also a comprehensive strategy that involves nurturing local talent, creating independent revenue channels, ensuring financial stability, and promoting an authentic football culture. By focusing on these elements, Saudi Arabia can improve the sustainability of its league and align its football investments with the overarching economic diversification objectives outlined in Vision 2030.

Digital transformation has improved the performance of sports teams, clubs, facilities, and institutions, as well as fans' participation, along with the high financial efficiency of those sports institutions and facilities. Furthermore, digital transformation in sports has significantly accelerated multiple aspects of management, training, and more. Based on a survey of 220 Saudi sports officials, Ahmed and Hassan (2022) noted the level of digital management of sports facilities as 0.66. The level of productive performance was 0.63. The level of competitive performance was 0.66. These results show a lack of digital transformation, poor planning, poor production capacity, poor control of production processes and poor competitive performance in Saudi sports facilities.

A survey of 250 Saudi male and female athletes by Muthuswamy and Ghouri (2023) showed a mediating effect of frequent sports training on the relationship between physical and psychological characteristics and performance. An extensive field study consisting of interviews with stakeholders led Svoboda, et al. (2024) to identify the activities of state authorities in Saudi Arabia, specifically the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Sports, and informal practices influenced by broader cultural changes oscillating between the traditional views and contemporary demands as the two main enablers/obstacles to Saudi sports development aligned with Vision 2030. Gender is a crucial factor. Stakeholders are using formal and informal legitimization practices to achieve or even surpass Vision 2030 sports goals.

A survey of 430 participants by Hassan, et al. (2024) showed the usefulness of business incubators to enhance innovative performance of investments and privatisation in Saudi sports clubs. The challenges and barriers to its implementation were a lack of awareness, insufficient logistical support, limited resources, a shortage of skilled individuals and the absence of regulations governing incubator operations.

The above review of 17 papers shows that Saudi Arabia can perform well in international sports and games. All the policies and strategies for this are in place. However, it falters in the implementation of these policies and strategies. This study aims to identify and solve these problems.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore and enhance sports management practices in Saudi Arabia. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 participants drawn from three key stakeholder groups within the national sports landscape. This approach allowed for in-depth exploration of experiences, perceptions, and recommendations regarding sports management in the country.

Participant Selection

Participants were purposively sampled from the following three groups to capture a comprehensive range of insights.

Sports Organisation Leaders and Administrators:

This group included directors, managers, and decision-makers from national sports federations, professional sports clubs (e.g., football and basketball), and members of the Saudi Olympic Committee. These participants were selected due to their central roles in sports operations, strategy implementation, and policy adaptation.

Government Officials and Policymakers:

This group was composed of officials from the Ministry of Sports, representatives affiliated with the Vision 2030 program as it relates to sports, and leaders from regional sports councils. Their perspectives were considered vital, as they are directly involved in policy development, regulatory frameworks, and the strategic vision for sports in Saudi Arabia.

Coaches, Athletes, and Grassroots Practitioners:

The third group included coaches from a variety of sports disciplines, both male and female professional athletes and administrative staff from youth academies and community sports programs. These individuals offered practical insights into the implementation and effects of management practices at both elite and grassroots levels.

A total of 15 participants were interviewed, with five individuals representing each group. Selection was based on their roles, experience, and relevance to sports management in Saudi Arabia.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were utilised to allow for both consistency and flexibility in data collection. An interview guide was developed, focusing on themes such as current sports management practices, barriers and challenges, leadership styles, policy impacts, stakeholder collaboration, and recommendations for improvement. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was conducted either in person or via secure online platforms, depending on participant availability and preference. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participant's consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

Transcribed interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. This involved coding the data to identify common patterns, key themes, and unique insights within and across participant groups.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was gathered from all participants, who were assured of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their participation. Personal identifiers were removed from transcripts to preserve anonymity.

RESULTS

Out of five questions asked to each group, the first question was on the background and role of the participant. The thematic Analysis was done on the remaining four questions.

Group1 results

The thematic analysis results of Group 1 (Sports Organisations Leaders and Administrators) are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Group 1 thematic analysis results

Theme	Subtheme	Group 1
Management systems	Current status	Working hard to upgrade our management systems. Traditionally, decisions were centralised, but now, there's an emphasis on transparency and performance evaluation. We're gradually moving to a system where departments are measured against KPIs, and we've started incorporating new technologies in operations. Despite this, change is slow; entrenched attitudes often oppose these new initiatives.
	Focus	Our focus is on holistic athlete development—skills and health—as well as academic and post-career planning. We're moving toward data-driven management. For example, we invest in software to track athlete performance and injury prevention.
	Current status and issues	There has been real progress in encouraging collaboration and providing leadership training. However, bureaucratic inertia and organisational silos can impede urgent decision-making. Sometimes, individual sports federations are protective of their autonomy, which slows down cross-sport initiatives.
	Challenges	Balancing tradition with innovation is tough. Fans and some senior members value long-standing customs, while younger staff push for modern systems. Financial management has become more complex due to increased scrutiny and requirements from sponsors and the government.
	Current status	Developing talent pipelines, ensuring equitable funding across regions, and improving grassroots participation. We are also trying to professionalise our administrative processes—moving from paper to digital and benchmarking against FIVB standards.
Sports management in operation.	Challenges	Skills gaps are a huge issue. Many staff and even managers haven't received formal training in sports administration. Moreover, with the push for digital transformation, we struggle to find people with both technical and sports expertise. Resistance to change, especially among older staff who are used to legacy systems, is another barrier.
	Challenges	Recruiting and retaining top talent, both players and admin staff. Budget constraints require us to be creative, but sometimes, this leads to overwork and burnout.
	Inclusion of inputs from athletes and staff in management.	Athlete committees have been invaluable—meeting regularly to communicate needs directly to us, from support staff to facilities. This helps us stay connected to the realities faced on the ground.
	Barriers	Getting consistent buy-in for new systems. Some regional coordinators are resistant to digital tools, preferring face-to-

Theme	Subtheme	Group 1
		face or manual methods. There's also the issue of limited access to international best practices in administration.
	Challenges	Balancing tradition with innovation is tough. Fans and some senior members value long-standing customs, while younger staff push for modern systems. Financial management has become more complex due to increased scrutiny and requirements from sponsors and the government.
Stakeholders	Consultations	Now, we hold consultation sessions with club representatives, coaching staff, and sometimes athletes. These have highlighted issues, such as player development pathways and resource allocation, that weren't clear from a management perspective.
	Collaboration	As a private club, sponsors are our main partners, but we also work closely with parents, local schools, and the regional sports council. They provide critical feedback and additional support.
	National policies affecting the Olympic Committee's mission	Policies under Vision 2030 have opened new opportunities for women, youth, and community sports, making our mission broader. However, funding can be somewhat volatile, dependent on national priorities.
	Addressing regional needs	We are piloting regional advisory boards, which provide feedback on investment priorities and technical support needs. It is early, but it is making decision-making more responsive.
	Stakeholder involvement	We have regular meetings with players and coaching staff for feedback. Recently, we established a fan advisory panel, which has improved our community relations and given us new perspectives.
Recommendations	To enhance sports management in KSA	Provide continuous education for all staff. Partnerships with global football bodies help with knowledge transfer. Above all, we need to foster a culture where accountability is taken seriously and innovation is rewarded.
	To improve sports management in KSA	More professional training for managers and coaches, clearer long-term government support, and better digital tools for club operations. I would also like to see more cross-sport partnerships for sharing best practices.
	Advice to enhance sports management in KSA	Invest in leadership development for all sports administrators. Encourage a more entrepreneurial mindset, and break down silos through joint projects and shared incentives across sports.
	Enhancing Sports Management in KSA	Ongoing education and knowledge exchange, especially with successful volleyball countries. More autonomy for grassroots clubs in administration would accelerate their growth.
	Enhancing Sports Management in KSA	Build stronger links between leading clubs and smaller ones, share knowledge, and invest in administrative talent just as

Theme	Subtheme	Group 1
		much as in players. Continuous professional development is key.

The four themes identified from the interview responses were the current management system, sports management in operation, stakeholders and recommendations. Within the theme of the current management system, current focus, status, issues and challenges were identified as subthemes. In this theme, the participants stressed the need to move away from traditional systems towards a professional management system with the use of technology. This change will help the holistic development of athletes. Collaborations between different national and international sports organisations and academic institutions have become an essential element of this change. However, bureaucratic inertia delays decisions. Overenthusiastic protection of autonomy by some large organisations can affect collaborations seriously. As fans and some senior members are more traditional, balancing tradition with innovation is difficult. Along with these, talent development, equitable funding, and improved grassroots participation are also important.

In the actual operation of sports management, there are challenges and barriers. The challenges include a lack of expertise and experience in sports administration. The use of digital technologies introduces technological skill gaps. Recruitment of talents in sports and administration is a solution for this but is affected by budget constraints, leading to overwork and burnout of the current staff. New technologies are resisted even by some regional coordinators. Another problem is the limited access to international best practices in administration. Increasing scrutiny from sponsors and the government has made financial management difficult. Some organisations have set up athlete committees to improve administration.

The next theme is stakeholders. Consultations, working with and meeting regularly are the mechanisms used for stakeholder interactions in sports management. Policies under Vision 2030 help large-scale participation from the communities, but are constrained by funding problems. Regional advisory boards have been established on a pilot basis for funding recommendations and technical support.

The final theme is recommendations. The recommendations include providing continuous education or training to administration staff, especially on the use of technology, partnerships with global organisations for knowledge transfer, leadership development, creation of an entrepreneurial mindset, encouraging joint projects and shared incentives across different sports, more autonomy for grassroots organisations and building strong links between large and small organisations to share knowledge.

Group 2 Results

The thematic analysis of Group 2 is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Group 2 thematic analysis results

Theme	Subtheme	Group 2
Sports management	Change in sports management	Sports management is improving, definitely. Over the last five years, we've shifted from seeing sports simply as recreation to recognising their strategic importance for health, social cohesion, and even economic diversification. There's still a learning curve, especially in some regions, but more organisations are modernising their management structures.
	Change in sports management	Vision 2030 has improved sports management dramatically. There's more emphasis on professionalisation and measurable outcomes. We tie funding to KPIs, encourage international partnerships, and promote inclusivity,

Theme	Subtheme	Group 2
		particularly for women and youth. These elements are woven into the fabric of every major sports-related project now.
	Challenges	Resource allocation is tougher here than in big cities. We have fewer qualified coaches and sports managers, so capacity building is a constant concern. Transportation and logistics can also hinder children's ability to access programs in more rural areas.
	Issues	Many clubs, especially smaller ones, are unfamiliar with compliance requirements or lack admin staff who can interpret the regulations effectively. There is also occasional overlap between old and new rules as systems change rapidly.
	Concerns	Accountability and transparency. Not all recipients have strong financial controls and some lack experience with project planning. We require quarterly reports, but sometimes, the data is incomplete or not actionable.
Challenges and barriers	Barriers to sports management.	Two key issues: lack of qualified managers and inconsistent policy implementation across regions. Some local clubs simply don't have access to the same resources or expertise as those in major cities. Also, the shift to evidence-based management is still a work in progress; we need better data gathering and analysis.
	Challenges	Uniform implementation. Some regions move quickly, while others lag due to a lack of skilled professionals or infrastructure. Cultural barriers to female participation persist in some communities, though attitudes have improved.
Solutions to challenges	Solutions to challenges	We have initiated partnerships with local universities and businesses for talent development. We also subsidise transport for youth from remote areas and offer training workshops to upskill local staff.
	Solutions to challenges	We organise training seminars and provide simple guidelines. We're currently piloting a digital platform that streamlines submissions and compliance reporting for federations and clubs.
	Solutions to challenges	We offer training workshops on budgeting, reporting, and project management. We've introduced mentoring partnerships between well-established organisations and those that are newer or smaller.
Evaluation and improvement	Policy evaluation and improvement	We set clear targets, like participation rates and facility development goals, and conduct annual reviews. Feedback from clubs and federations is collected through both surveys and workshops. We are trying to introduce more flexibility into our regulations to allow for local adaptation.

Theme	Subtheme	Group 2
	Measuring programme success	We use a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures—participation surveys, health metrics, and economic data. We also solicit direct feedback from athletes and administrators, adapting programs based on their insights.
Stakeholders	Stakeholder engagement	Community forums are essential. We hold quarterly meetings with club leaders, parents, and young athletes to get feedback and shape programming. These sessions have led to adjustments, like evening training hours for children in agricultural families.
	Feedback receptiveness	Larger federations are usually proactive, but smaller ones need more personalised support. We have started appointing regional compliance officers to bridge this gap.
	Programme success stories	Yes—clubs that used to struggle now deliver well-documented programs and have increased capacity to apply for more grants. That said, others still need a lot of support, especially in rural regions.
Recommendations	Enhancing Sports Management in KSA	Continued investment in training local administrators, encouraging regional innovation, and creating platforms for regular sharing of best practices. Stronger partnerships with the private sector would also accelerate progress.
	Further changes required	More structured career paths for sports administrators, consistent professional development, and deeper integration of sports science and technology in management practices.
	Improving management structures	Decentralise more authority, so regional councils can make quicker decisions, increase funding earmarked for professional development, and use digital tools to connect isolated areas with expert resources.
	Improvements nationally	Make regulations clearer and more accessible, and pair them with capacity-building grants. Regularly update rules to reflect developments in international sport, but give clubs time and practical help to adapt.
	Innovations to enhance management effectiveness	More digital tools for tracking spending and performance expanded peer mentorship, and incentives for clubs that consistently meet or exceed accountability standards.

The themes of Group 2 are sports management, challenges and barriers, solutions to challenges, evaluation and improvement, stakeholders and recommendations. The subthemes in sports management are changes, challenges, issues, and concerns. In the sports management theme, the participants opined that Vision 2030 has improved sports management practices, emphasising professionalism and measurable outcomes. Unlike in big cities, in other areas, resources, qualified coaches, and sports managers are in short supply. Without transportation, children from rural areas are unable to participate. In these regions, regulatory compliance is at a low level due to unawareness and a shortage of competent staff. The main concerns are accountability, transparency, financial controls, and a lack of knowledge of project planning and proper preparation of reports. In the challenges and barriers theme, the lack of

quality managers and inconsistent policy implementation across different regions are two key concerns. Though attitudes have changed, there are still some communities which do not accept female participation in sports. In the solutions to challenges theme, some solutions offered by the participants were partnerships with local universities and businesses for talent development, training seminars and sessions on budgeting, reporting and project management, digital platforms, mentoring partnerships between large organisations and small ones. Under the theme, the subthemes are policy evaluation and improvement and measuring the success of programs. For policy evaluation and improvement, clear targets like participation rates and facility development are set. Feedback from clubs and federations is collected through surveys and workshops. Both qualitative and quantitative measures are used for evaluation. Direct feedback from athletes and administrators is also used for evaluation and improvement. Under the stakeholders theme, the subthemes are stakeholder engagement, feedback receptiveness and program success stories. For this theme, the participants reported quarterly meetings with stakeholders, appointing regional compliance officers to help smaller organisations comply with regulatory requirements and well-documented programme success stories. Under the theme recommendations, the subthemes were enhancing sports management, requiring further changes, improving management structures, improving nationally, and promoting innovations to enhance management effectiveness. The participants recommended training, encouragement of local innovations, platforms to share best practices, partnerships with the private sector, structured career path for administrators, consistent professional development, integration of science and technology, decentralisation to give more autonomy to regional councils, clearer and more accessible regulations, linking compliance with grants, expansion of mentorships, tracking spending and performance and incentives to clubs meeting or exceeding standards.

Group 3 Results

The Group 3 results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Thematic analysis results of Group 3 responses

Theme	Subtheme	Group 3
Current status of sports management	Current status and issues	Management aspects related to scheduling practices and hiring part-time coaches, to managing equipment inventory and player registrations. Communication and organisation are key, especially as we are growing quickly, and expectations from parents and club management keep rising.
Challenges	Challenges	Facilities are sometimes lacking compared to men's teams, and we have to work harder to attract sponsors or media attention. Cultural attitudes are shifting, but some families still hesitate to let daughters play competitively. Recruiting capable female coaches and managers is another persistent challenge.
	Challenges	Communication and planning. Sometimes, club management does not give us enough input into our training, travel, or rest schedules. There are also times when management changes bring disruptions or uncertainty.
	Limitations	Facilities can be a real limitation, especially for women or people with disabilities. We also deal with a lack of coaches and fluctuating volunteer support. Funding is a constant challenge as sponsorship is rare at the community level.
	Limitations	Finding places and times to practice, we often have to work around men's team schedules. There is not always enough equipment or trained coaches for girls' teams. Sometimes,

Theme	Subtheme	Group 3
		even getting information about competitions or requirements is not easy.
	Challenges	Managing limited resources is always a challenge—we often have to make do with shared facilities or outdated equipment. There's also pressure to focus on winning, which can conflict with prioritising long-term athlete development.
Solutions to challenges	Solutions to challenges	We try to create an inclusive, supportive team culture. I maintain close contact with parents to build trust and demonstrate the program's benefits for their daughters' confidence and health. We're also partnering with other women's clubs for joint training camps and tournaments.
	Whether the voice is heard by coaches and club leaders	It is starting to happen. I have seen more player committees and feedback sessions in recent seasons. When management actually listens, we feel more invested and perform better.
	Solutions to challenges	We make partnerships with local schools and businesses to share spaces and resources. Sometimes, local clubs donate old equipment. We use social media to promote events and recruit volunteers.
	How athletes want to create changes.	We speak up at community meetings, share our stories on social media, and directly contact local leaders to ask for support. Sometimes, we organise our own small tournaments to raise awareness.
	Support of club leadership and sports authorities	Our club is generally supportive, but sometimes management is slow to act on our requests, especially for new equipment or extra staff. More direct communication with regional authorities for funding or resources would go a long way.
	Support of local authorities and national bodies	There is more support than in the past, with targeted funding and competitions, but it is still catching up with men's sports. Having female representation in decision-making positions would help address some lingering issues.
	Improving athlete experience	Transparent communication, consistent policies about contracts and benefits, and programs to help us plan for life after football. More psychological support would also help handle the pressures of professional sports.
	Relationship with municipal and regional authorities	They are supportive but stretched thin. We often wait for months for decisions or funding, so we have learned to be patient and creative.
	Support of organisations and authorities	Support is growing, but slowly. When we get attention from local authorities, it's usually after persistent effort. Some organisations have started to offer small grants or coaching clinics for girls' teams.

Theme	Subtheme	Group 3
	Improvements to enhance effectiveness	More professional development opportunities for coaches, better integration of academic and sport training, and modernised facilities. Some kind of shared digital platform for communication with parents and staff would streamline admin work.
Recommendations	Recommendations	Invest in coach education—especially for women. Increase promotion of women’s competitions and ensure equal access to facilities and equipment.
	Recommendations	Foster open dialogue between players and management; provide leadership training for both coaches and captains, and make clubs accountable for athlete welfare beyond just performance.
	Biggest impact on local sports management	Dedicated funding streams for community initiatives, recognition for volunteer coaches, and government incentives for businesses to support local sport.
	The real difference for increased female participation	Guarantee equal access to local pitches, provide more female coaches and role models, and host more inclusive community events. Public campaigns showing successful Saudi sportswomen would motivate families to get their daughters involved.

The themes from Group 3 responses were the current status of sports management, with only one theme: the current status and issues. The theme, challenges, had two subthemes: challenges and limitations. The theme, solutions to challenges, had the subthemes of solutions to challenges, whether the voice is heard by coaches and club leaders, how athletes want to create changes, support of the club leadership and sports authorities, support of the local authorities and national bodies, improving athlete experience, relationships with municipal and regional authorities, support of organisations and authorities and improvements to enhance effectiveness. Under the theme of the current status of sports management, the participants listed the management practices as scheduling practices, hiring part-time coaches, equipment inventory and player registration. The theme and subtheme, challenges, included a lack of facilities for female athletes and those with disabilities compared to male athletes, female athletes' need to work harder to get media attention, a need for better communication and organisation, inadequate input to training, travel or rest schedules, a lack of coaches, funding problems as sponsorship is rare at the community level, finding places and time for female athletes, need to adjust to men’s schedules, lack of or outdated equipment and coaches for women, the difficulty of getting information on competitions and requirements and pressure on winning affecting long-term development of athletes. The solutions offered were an inclusive and supportive team culture, close contact with parents of the female athletes, partnership with other women’s clubs for joint training camps and tournaments, the female voice started to be heard, partnerships with local schools and businesses to share space and facilities, local clubs donate old equipment, athletes speak up at community meetings to create changes, share stories in social media to promote events, directly contact local leaders for support, small tournaments to raise awareness, now there is more support with targeted funding and competitions for female athletes, athlete experience can be improved by transparent communications, consistent policies about contracts and benefits, help to plan life after sports, psychological support, municipal and regional authorities support with late decisions and funding, small grants for coaching clinics for girls, better interaction with academics sports training and modern facilities. The participants offered recommendations like investing in (female) coach education, increasing women’s competitions, ensuring equal access to facilities and equipment, fostering open dialogue between players and management, leadership training for coaches and captains, making clubs accountable for welfare beyond performance, dedicated funds for

community initiatives, recognition of volunteer coaches, government incentives to sponsors, female role models, inclusive community events and success stories of sportswomen to motivate more women enter sports.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The interview responses of the three groups show that all the policies and strategies to enhance sports management in Saudi Arabia are only partially successful. This is due to many challenges at the implementation level. The above-reviewed literature also shows these problems. Despite many reforms, the Islamic socio-cultural restrictions on female participation persist (Alardani, 2023). Recent developments have increasingly provided women with opportunities to participate in sports, and there is growing attention to further enhancing access to facilities, spaces, and funding to ensure greater parity with men (Fakehy et al., 2023). Lack of funds, facilities, and opportunities affects the participation of both men and women in sports. Although the need to use technology in sports management was stressed by many participants, its use for knowledge management (Saati, 2023) was not considered by any of them. Change management in sports organisations for performance improvement (Sayyd, 2024) has only partially succeeded. Hassan et al. (2024) highlighted the need for more funds, adequately skilled human resources, equipment, facilities, policies and programs, and a positive social culture for the performance improvement of Saudi athletes. The transnational efforts of Saudi Arabia are aimed only at improving its image and not at improving sports performance (Gryshuk, 2024). These problems lead Saudi athletes to demotivation, a lack of interest and energy, self-confidence and time (Sayyd et al., 2020). Sports sponsorship by businesses has not increased to adequate levels to make any significant impact on Saudi sports (Al-Nsour, 2020). According to Alshuraymi and Hastie (2025), school-level efforts motivate students to learn sports enthusiastically and enjoy them. However, traditional culture leads to tardiness, laziness, and not bringing sports gear when they come to school. They tend to argue and do not accept decisions easily. The improvements possible by digitalisation, training and the use of business incubators have been shown by Ahmed and Hassan (2022), Muthuswamy and Ghouri (2023) and Hassan et al. (2024), respectively.

From all the above discussions, it can be concluded that Saudi Arabia has the potential to improve its performance in international competitions if it can efficiently implement the policies and strategies fully and effectively.

REFERENCES

- [1] Abouzeid, N., Amira, M. S., & Hassan, A. K. (2023). A Proposed Vision for Human Resources Investment and its Role in Enhancing the Competitive Advantage of Sports Institutions. *Annals of Applied Sport Science*, 11(3). doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.61186/aassjournal.1184>
- [2] Ahmed, M. A., & Hassan, A. K. (2022). A System for the Management of Digital Transformation to Develop Productive and Competitive Performance in Sports Facilities. *International Journal of Human Movement and Sports Sciences*, 10(6), 1134-1157. doi:<http://doi.org/10.13189/saj.2022.100604>
- [3] Alardani, G. (2023). Quality of sports management in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal for Quality Research*, 17(3), 683-694. doi:<http://doi.org/10.24874/IJQR17.03-04>
- [4] Al-Nsour, I. A. (2020). The role of sports sponsorship in improving brand equity: A study on the Saudi audience in Riyadh. *EPRA International Journal of Economic and Business Review*, 8(2), 5-15. doi:<https://doi.org/10.36713/epra3039>
- [5] Alshuraymi, A. N., & Hastie, P. A. (2025). Teachers' perceptions of implementing sport education in Saudi middle schools. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 1-15. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2025.2477107>
- [6] Fakehy, M., Alfadhil, A., Hassan, Y. M., & Alotaibi, H. (2023). Saudi women empowerment constraints for participation in sports and physical activities. *European Online Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*, 12(1), 164-171. Retrieved April 19, 2025, from <https://european-science.com/eojnss/article/view/6694>
- [7] Gryshuk, R. (2024). Sports and international reputation: How Qatar and Saudi Arabia utilise sports to enhance their image. *Philosophy and political science in the context of modern culture*, 16(1), 164-170. doi:<http://doi.org/10.15421/352432>
- [8] Hassan, A. K., Alibrahim, M. S., & Alhumaid, M. M. (2024). Enhancing operational performance: The impact of smart algorithms in Saudi Arabian sports facilities. *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development*, 8(8),

3628. Retrieved April 19, 2025, from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sameer-Sayyd/publication/373139572_Investigation_of_Factors_Influencing_Sports_Engagement_and_Physical_Activities_of_Undergraduate_Male_Students_in_Saudi_Arabian_Context/links/64dbcf7c66foe0067d99b48f/Investigation-of-
- [9] Hassan, A. K., Amira, M. S., Abouzeid, N., Gomaa, A. A., Elseuofy, A., Ata, S. N., & Ebrahim, M. A. (2024). The Effect of Applying Business Incubators on Enhancing the Innovative Performance of Investment and Privatisation Projects in Saudi Sports Clubs. *International Journal*, 5(7), 757-772. doi:<https://doi.org/10.61707/f45ryd78>
- [10] Imawan, R., Zuliansyah, Z., & Surwandono, S. (2024). Empowering Saudi Women for Sports as Response to Saudi Vision 2030: An Analytical Study. *Journal of Islamic World and Politics*, 8(2), 167-181. doi:<https://doi.org/10.18196/jiwp.v8i2.106>
- [11] Ma'mun, M. Y., Ilmi, Z., Malihah, L., Meilania, G. T., & Nafidz, E. (2024). Strategic Investment in Football: A Comparative Global Analysis of Saudi Arabia's Approach. *At-Taradhi: Jurnal Studi Ekonomi*, 15(2), 126-136. doi:<https://doi.org/10.18592/taradhi.v15i2.15912>
- [12] Muthuswamy, V. V., & Ghouri, A. M. (2023). Physical and Psychological Factors Affecting sportsman Performance: The moderating role of sports training: A case on Saudi Arabia Athletics. *Revista de Psicología del Deporte*, 31(4), 232-241. Retrieved April 21, 2025, from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Arsalan-Ghouri-2/publication/369796135_Physical_and_Psychological_Factors_Affecting_sportsman_Performance_The_moderating_role_of_sports_training_A_case_on_Saudi_Arabia_Athletics/links/642d69e7609c170a13f7a6ca/Physical-
- [13] Saati, N. S. (2023). The Role of Knowledge Management in the Development of Sports Clubs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Advances in Computer Science and Technology*, 12(1), 20-36. doi:<https://doi.org/10.30534/ijacst/2023/0411212023>
- [14] Sayyd, S. M. (2024). Change management and its relationship to developing sports activities in Saudi universities-Kingdom Vision 2030. *Journal of Applied Sports Science*, 14(1), 24-36. doi:<https://dx.doi.org/10.21608/jass.2024.259619.1100>
- [15] Sayyd, S. M., Asnaldi, A., Zainuddin, Z. A., & Nahary, A. M. (2022). Management of sports facilities and equipment in physical activities according to Saudi Vision 2030. *Jurnal MensSana*, 7(2), 118-125. doi:<https://doi.org/10.24036/MensSana.07022022.15>
- [16] Sayyd, S. M., Zainuddin, Z. A., Ghan, D. Z., & Altowerqi, Z. M. (2020). Sports activities for undergraduate students in Saudi Arabia universities: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Human Movement and Sports Sciences*, 8(1), 1-16. doi:<https://doi.org/10.13189/saj.2020.080101>
- [17] Svoboda, A., Graeff, B., Bretherton, P., Šafaříková, S., Viacelli, D., Al Droushi, A. R., & Knijnik, J. (2024). A quest for legitimacy? An exploratory study of the new meanings of sports and physical activity in contemporary Saudi Arabia. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 59(6), 826-843. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/10126902241231818>