



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Designing a Framework of Stakeholders' Participation in School Sport Decisions

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## ABSTRACT

**Background.** Stakeholders in school sport are individuals and groups whose role is to promote the success of sport programs, activities and events in schools. Understanding stakeholders' interests and behaviors can play a constructive role in the performance of schools. In this regard, their participation in the process of planning, implementing, and monitoring school sports is the best way to develop school sports. **Objectives.** The aim of this study was to identify and classify stakeholders to provide a framework for stakeholders' participation in school sport decisions. **Methods.** The present study employed a descriptive-survey research method. The research population consisted of all experts of the physical education department and health of education ministry, general offices of provinces, cities and towns, as well as physical education teachers. The data were collected in two steps: first the systematic interviewing technique was conducted with 16 specialists in the field of school sport to identify the stakeholders. Then, a researcher-made questionnaire in line with Freeman's Classification method (2007) and Mitchell's et al. stakeholder salience model with confirmed reliability and validity was distributed among the samples for stakeholders' categorization. **Results.** The results of the study suggested that students, teachers, and physical education and health department are the most important and primary stakeholders, followed by parents and governmental organizations. **Conclusion.** The results of the study revealed that the effective relationship between primary and secondary stakeholders and their participation in decision-making are the most significant factors for the proper performance of schools' sport.

**KEY WORDS:** *Schools' Sport, Stakeholders, Participation, Decision Making.*

## INTRODUCTION

Schools are the foundation of the evolution and developmental pathway of adolescents, youth and society and play an important role in the educational system of societies. In political, media, and scientific environments, there is no doubt about the potential of school sports in solving many social, psychological, and educational problems of students (1, 2). According to most education experts and the results of numerous studies, the recognition of stakeholders and their participation in the process of planning, implementing and monitoring school sports is the

best solution for the development of school sports (3). Freeman (1999) believes that "stakeholders are individuals or groups who are essential to the success and survival of the organization" (4). School sport stakeholders are individuals or groups belonging to sport organizations whose role is to promote the school's programs, activities, and events (5). Parents, coaches, and teachers as stakeholders have a huge role in developing schools sport and providing sport experiences as well as sport opportunities for students in schools sport (6). The primary stakeholders are individuals,

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groups, or organizations that directly affect school performance or are affected by it and are essential for the implementation of school sports programs and activities. Secondary stakeholders are individuals, groups, or organizations that indirectly affect school performance or are affected by the school performance. Sport managers have several reasons for managing stakeholders including support, communication, access to information, and access to new and diverse resources. The resources of schools are limited, and communication with stakeholders can be the key to obtaining and maintaining resources in school sports and encouraging sport managers to engage with stakeholders (7).

Mutter and Pawlowski (2014) stated that increased participation of students in schools sport is affected by stakeholders such as peers, parents, teachers, coaches, and sport characters (8). Several studies on sports management have used stakeholder theory to understand the role of key sectors in sport. Most of these studies have focused on professional sport, while schools sport has remained understudied (4, 9). Friedman et al. (2004) examined professional sport and schools sport to discover how stakeholder theory could be applied to the issues surrounding the sport environment. They concluded that managers needed a proactive, consistent, and sustainable approach to managing stakeholder relationships (10). In the United States, school sports stakeholders include governments, coaches and physical education teachers, school administrators, students, school graduates, as well as community and schools sport boosters (7). School sports stakeholders in South Africa also include school management (manager and school board), physical education teachers, parents, local sports clubs, community, ministry of education, and the ministry of sports and youth (11). Mackintosh (2014) stated that schools' sport stakeholders include the sport federations and clubs, higher education institutions, health professionals, government (at all levels of the national, provincial, and regional), community, private sector, sport characters, peers, parents, teachers, coaches, and the family. All these stakeholders must participate in the development of schools sport and take on their responsibilities and provide sufficient opportunities for students to participate in schools sport and physical activity (12). Mandic et al. (2012) argued that the best way to develop schools sport is to provide more stakeholder

participating in schools sport. The schools with established effective communication with their stakeholders are likely to be successful because, in addition to supporting their stakeholders, they will have the support of specialists and community experts from their plans (13). According to Hutchinson and Bennett (2012), one of the most difficult aspects of school management, especially schools sport, is to strive to retain all stakeholders in schools' sport programs. If schools sport management works in line with the school's core values and mission, it will focus on stakeholder participation in schools sport which has a positive impact (14). It is clear that stakeholder group membership influences what is most valuable to that group. For example, a factor such as education would be most important to teachers while winning would be most important to students (15). According to the results of the study by Marsh et al. (2015) in relation to sport stakeholders, identifying and classifying schools' sport stakeholders helps to understand the different backgrounds and organizational concerns for incorporating sport in educational environments and to resolve problems in this regard (16).

With regards to understanding the concerns of students, teachers, and parents on the one hand and governments on the other about the factors affecting stakeholder participation in school sports, there is a significant gap in scientific studies in this field. Stakeholders have an impact on the growth and development of school sport, and as school administrators, they play an important role in promoting and helping schools to manage and coordinate schools sport. Further, since their role is to ensure that students are motivated to attend schools sport activities, identification of stakeholders in schools sport should be prioritized. Indeed, one should consider how to manage their relationships and their participation in schools sport decisions. The present research is innovative in terms of stakeholder concepts in the field of school sport and provides a framework for identifying stakeholders and participating in schools sport decisions. Therefore, the aim of this study is to identify and classify stakeholders to provide a framework for stakeholders' participation in school sport decisions.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**Research Design.** The present study employed a descriptive-survey research method.

**Participants.** The research population consisted of all experts of the physical education department and health of education ministry, general offices of provinces, cities and towns as well as physical education teachers. The research sample (249 people) was selected using purposive and accessible method.

**Methodology.** Since the school sport has several stakeholder groups, in the first phase, the theoretical foundations of the study were carefully and comprehensively studied, whereby all stakeholder groups of school sport were identified. Then, semi-guided interviews were conducted with 16 specialists in the field of schools sport, where the initial questionnaire of the research including 10 groups of main stakeholders in schools sport was extracted from the interview results. In the second phase, according to the survey of the research community, and based on Freeman's prioritization method (2007) and Mitchell's stakeholders salience model, often used to classify the stakeholders, the stakeholders were classified into two primary and secondary groups.

**Instruments.** The research instrument included interviews with experts for identifying stakeholders of school sport followed by a researcher-made questionnaire (25 questions) extracted from the interviews with school sport experts to identify primary and secondary stakeholders. The questionnaire was divided into two parts: descriptive characteristics (5 questions) to determine the demographic characteristics of the research and the specialized questions including two main components of primary and

secondary stakeholders (20 questions) on the 5 Likert scale (very low = 1, low = 2, mean = 3, high = 4, and very high = 5) to classify stakeholders in both the primary and secondary stakeholders. A total of 325 questionnaires were distributed among sample members and 249 questionnaires were collected. To assess the validity of the questionnaire, the views of 12 sport management experts were used. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. The reliability of the components of primary and secondary stakeholders was  $\alpha = 0.73$  and  $\alpha = 0.84$ , respectively.

**Statistical Analysis.** SPSS software was used for analyzing the data. To determine the primary and secondary stakeholders based on the opinions of the statistical sample, the binomial test was utilized to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics were also used to describe the data, plotting, and drawing tables.

## RESULTS

Describing the individual characteristics of the research sample in terms of the place of employment, the highest frequency was related to teachers (33.7%), while the lowest frequency was associated to the physical education department and health of education ministry (4.8%). In terms of gender, 56% were male and 42% were female. Also, most sample members had a master's degree (54.2%), as presented in Table 1.

The primary and secondary stakeholders of school sport were identified based on the sample views of the research using the binomial test, as reported in Tables 2 and 3.

**Table 1. Descriptive findings**

Descriptive findings		Number	Percentage	Total
<b>Gender</b>	Male	110	44.2	249
	Female	139	55.8	
<b>Level of Education</b>	Associate Degree	3	1.2	249
	Bachelor's degree	62	24.9	
	Master's degree	135	54.2	
	PhD student	37	14.9	
	PhD	12	4.8	
<b>Organizational Position</b>	Experts of the physical education department and health of education ministry	21	8.4	249
	Physical education experts of the departments of education of the provinces	23	9.3	
	Physical education experts of the city	58	23.3	
	Student sports federation	63	25.3	
	physical education teachers	84	33.7	

Table 2. The primary and secondary stakeholders of schools' sport

Title	Category	Groups	N	Observed prop.	Test prop	p
Physical education and health department	Primary Secondary	Group 1	178	71.5	0.5	0.001
		Group 2	71	28.5		
		Total	249	1		
Physical education teachers	Primary Secondary	Group 1	185	74.3	0.5	0.001
		Group 2	64	25.7		
		Total	249	1		
Students	Primary Secondary	Group 1	223	89.6	0.5	0.001
		Group 2	26	10.4		
		Total	249	1		
Principals/superintendents of school	Primary Secondary	Group 1	175	70.3	0.5	0.001
		Group 2	74	29.7		
		Total	249	1		
Governing organizations	Primary Secondary	Group 1	66	26.5	0.5	0.001
		Group 2	183	73.5		
		Total	249	1		
Community	Primary Secondary	Group 1	114	45.8	0.5	0.205
		Group 2	135	54.2		
		Total	249	1		
Student sports federation	Primary Secondary	Group 1	160	64.3	0.5	0.001
		Group 2	89	35.7		
		Total	249	1		
School board	Primary Secondary	Group 1	61	24.5	0.5	0.001
		Group 2	188	75.5		
		Total	249	1		
Parents	Primary Secondary	Group 1	122	49	0.5	0.128
		Group 2	127	51		
		Total	249	1		
Media	Primary Secondary	Group 1	68	27.3	0.5	0.001
		Group 2	181	72.7		
		Total	249	1		

Table 3. Classification of primary and secondary stakeholders of school sport

primary stakeholders	secondary stakeholders
Physical education department of education ministry	Parents
Physical education teachers	Community
Students	Governing Organizations
Principals/superintendents of school	School board
Student Sports federation	Media

Finally, the following conceptual framework (Figure 1) has been presented to illustrate how to manage the relationships of school sport stakeholders and their participation in decisions related to schools sport. It strives to highlight the stakeholder classification and how they participate in

schools sport decision-making. The purpose of this framework is to illustrate the complex nature of stakeholder relations around school sport and how to communicate with stakeholders and decide on school sport. It also allows us to understand the key factors that affect stakeholder management.

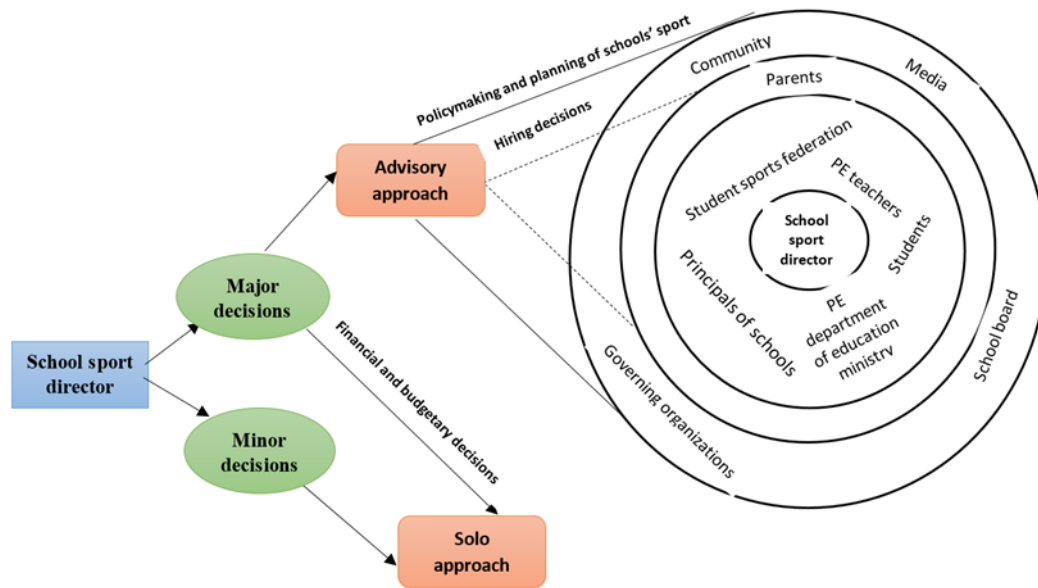


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for managing the relationships of school sport stakeholders

## DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to identify and classify schools sport stakeholders and provide a framework for stakeholder's participation in school sport decisions. According to the research goal, identifying stakeholders is the first step in managing stakeholder relationships and participating in decision-making. The second step is to classify the stakeholders and identify the primary and secondary stakeholders in schools sport. In this study, based on research results and according to Freeman et al. (2007), schools sport stakeholders were classified into two primary and secondary stakeholder groups.

The results suggested that students, physical education teachers, physical education and health department, principals/superintendents of school, and the student sports federation are the most important and primary stakeholders in schools sport, which are largely in line with the results of Freeman et al. (2007) and Zdroik (2016) (7, 17). Students and teachers are the most important primary stakeholders, since all school sport programs and activities are for students and their participation in sports. Further, all other stakeholders are trying to help students and provide quality programs and opportunities for their participation. Physical education teachers are the pathway for students to succeed and thus play an important role in teaching, guiding, and

motivating students (18, 19). Based on the results of the Zdroik study (2016), school sport director has the most interaction with school physical education teachers when planning and deciding on school sport, and they are present in all school sport decisions (7). The principals/superintendents of school are also an important stakeholder and perform the coordination and executive functions of school sport programs. In this regard, teachers and students in the conditions provided by the principals/superintendents of school can have the best efficiency and effectiveness (20, 21). The relationship between physical education and health department and schools is two-way, permanent and sustainable. In order to develop student sport, schools should implement the programs and activities of the physical education and health department properly. The student sports federation is also an important stakeholder in the school sport, and clearly the federation's cooperation with the physical education and health department and schools will contribute to the further development of school sport.

Although much of what the school sport director does focuses around the primary stakeholders, there are other stakeholders who influence schools sport. Secondary stakeholders have a purposeful relationship with school sport director; the purpose of these relationships is to

promote school sport and ultimately students, and to improve the quality of school sport programs. These stakeholders contribute to decisions with the utmost importance as well as necessity and usefulness to both parties (10). According to the results, although parents are not primary stakeholders, according to Zdroik (2016) they are often involved in decisions about school sport. Parents support programs, activities, and school sport plans. The school board is another stakeholder that can play a role in approving school sports programs, funding them, and monitoring implementation of school sport programs (22). Community is also an important stakeholder in schools sport. According to the results of the Coalter study (2010), the community of individuals, groups, and organizations located in the vicinity of the school has both a direct and indirect effect on school sport (23). Governing organizations can also contribute to school sport in many ways and at different levels. The Ministry of Sport and Youth along with the Ministry of Health and other organizations can benefit from school sport while also influencing school sport activities and plans (24). Further, media as the last group of secondary stakeholders play a key role in promoting schools sport. Broadcast of sport competitions of schools in the media has very beneficial effects on student's willingness to participate in sports activities.

The large circle on the right side of the framework is based on the work of Freeman (2007) on the classification of stakeholders in the school s sport environment. However, it changed based on the results of the research and other theoretical foundations (Figure 1). Since the focus of this study was on the management of school sport stakeholders, therefore, they have been represented as the center of the circle. The closest circle to the school sport director is the primary stakeholders including students, physical education teachers, physical education department and health of education ministry, principals/superintendents of school, and the student sports federation. These were considered primary stakeholders to participants in this study as school sport director were most concerned with them in their decision-making and had the most contact with these stakeholders. The next circle outwards contains parents. Although parents would be considered a secondary stakeholder,

their partnership and communication with the students and schools make them a higher priority than the rest of the secondary stakeholders. The outermost circle contains the rest of the secondary stakeholders: the community, media, school board, and governing organizations. This framework identifies the stakeholders, classified them and determines their importance. It also specifies their participation in school sport decision-making according to their status.

School sport director uses two distinct methods based on the importance of the decision. The importance of the decision was a critical variable when deciding on engaging in which the decision-making process. Some school sport director decisions are routine and do not require much attention, while some decisions require attention and participation from other stakeholders (4). Minor decisions, including the schedule of teachers, and the management of classes and hours of training are done by school sport director and alone. The main difference deals with how to make major decisions. The formation of school sport teams, use of high quality and qualified physical education teachers as well as high-level coaches for school sport teams, the place for physical education classes, and the purchase of sport facilities and equipment are major decisions. According to the results of Lingard et al. (2013), some school sport directors make major decisions, such as financial and budget decisions alone (25). For this reason, within the framework an arrow has been drawn from major decisions toward solo approach. On the other hand, based on the Linton study (2013), some school sport directors tend to have stakeholder participation when making major decisions (26). Stakeholders' participation in this process often begins with primary stakeholders (the inner most circle) which then works its way to the outer most circle of stakeholders, depending on the decision. In Figure 1, the solid line represents that the decision-making committee on the location of physical education classes as well as the purchase of sport facilities and equipment are often smaller with the primary stakeholders being involved in these decisions. On the other hand, the decisions made to change the school's sporting policies are depicted with a dotted line and include primary and secondary stakeholders (physical education teachers, students, principals/superintendents of school,

parents and school board). The reason is that the impact of these decisions is important for all stakeholders, and they all participate in major decisions. This decision-making method for school sport director was similar to that of Reynolds et al (27).

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the results of the research suggested that stakeholders who are most important have the most interaction and communication with school sport director. With students being at the school sport center, physical education teachers are responsible for conducting schools sport programs. Further, the principals/superintendents of school are responsible for coordinating and helping the school sport director. Several factors also influence the school sport director decision-making process. In particular, the importance of the decision is important to school sport directors in choosing their decision-making process of advisory approach or adopting the solo decision approach. This research demonstrated an approach to stakeholder management and decision-making with their participation, both in identifying stakeholders and participating in

decision making. In particular, decisions made with advisory approach often first engage primary, internal stakeholders, and then secondary, external stakeholders are involved if the decision may impact them.

## APPLICABLE REMARKS

- School sport directors should identify their stakeholders in order to better manage stakeholder relationships and raise stakeholder participation in school sport. Indeed, depending on the importance of each stakeholder, they will participate in school sport decisions.
- School sport stakeholders should participate in schools sport decision-making and planning, in accordance with their participation goals and in line with the school sport programs and activities.

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