

The Governance of Sports Organizations in Morocco: the Case of the Royal Moroccan Federation of Judo and Related Martial Arts

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Abstract. Governance is crucial for effective sports organization management, particularly as sports organizations increasingly adopt business models. Research inquiries into suitable governance practices in sports have grown, reflecting the evolving landscape of sports management. This qualitative research examined the governance of the Moroccan Judo Federation through semi-structured interviews and analysis using Voyant Tools. Stakeholders, including the vice president, board members, coaches, athletes, referees, technical committee members, and financial manager, provided insights on key aspects of governance. The findings emphasized the importance of strong leadership, effective decision-making processes, transparent governance structures, stakeholder engagement, and ethical conduct. However, challenges were identified in decision-making, stakeholder engagement, conflict resolution, and financial management. Stakeholders highlighted the need for inclusive decision-making processes and transparent and accountable governance practices. By addressing these challenges, the federation can strengthen its governance, support judo's growth, and foster fairness and inclusivity.

Keywords: Governance, Organization, Sport, National Federation.

Introduction

As we delve into the realm of sports organizations, the ambiguity surrounding the concept of performance persists. Speaking specifically of sports federations, we step into a realm of strategic significance, where their pivotal role in shaping state-level sports policies cannot be overstated [1]. These federations operate on multiple fronts, extending their influence across the realms of economy, society, politics, and education. Their cohesive force manifests through a web of associations united under a federal network, granting them substantial negotiating power when engaging with public or economic authorities. They orchestrate sporting events, manage diverse athletic practices, and collaborate with the state on matters of social importance, such as education and the socialization of sports [2].

Federations are distinctive entities characterized by a medley of aims, hybrid financing methods encompassing both public and private sources [3], a composition comprising both volunteers and employees and sometimes civil servants of the state. Additionally, their adherence to national and international (International Federation, International Olympic Committee, and the like) regulatory frameworks solidifies their position.

Turning our attention to the Moroccan Sports Federations, we discover that they operate under the watchful eyes of two powers, both internal and external. The former resides in the vigilant supervision of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, while the latter manifests through the oversight of the International Federation. An interesting observation emerges—amidst their amateurish management, a delicate dance between professionalism and transgression unfolds. To establish good governance practices, transparency in management becomes paramount, accompanied by the adoption of rigorous control and accountability mechanisms. Moreover, adherence to ethical principles and the evaluation of performance serve as essential cornerstones.

The governance of sports organizations assumes an indisputable role in their stability, development, and overall performance. Operating within intricate ecosystems teeming with diverse stakeholders, these organizations must embrace effective governance to ensure transparency, accountability, and the attainment of organizational objectives. Governance encompasses a tapestry of structures, processes, and decision-making mechanisms, guiding the multifaceted operations of sports organizations. This encompasses the formulation and implementation of policies, astute financial management, safeguarding athlete welfare, and unwavering ethical considerations.

In pursuit of a greater understanding, this article endeavors to unravel the inner workings of the Royal Moroccan Federation of Judo and Related Martial Arts (RMJRMAF) by examining its organizational governance mechanisms.

The literature background of the topic

Hums [4] proposed a comprehensive vision of sports governance, which can be understood as "the exercise of power and authority within sports organizations, including the definition of political rules, with the aim of establishing the organization's mission, membership quality, eligibility, and power distribution, whether at the local, national, or international level."

In our study, we will focus on national sports federations. These federations bring together a collection of associations and sports clubs, and their members are referred to as affiliates. By analogy, federations can be seen as parent companies, while provincial structures and clubs act as subsidiaries. [5] Like a company, the parent organization has a central structure, develops a mission, operational and financial strategies, and implements control mechanisms, among other things. However, a national federation does not have a central structure but rather a central office. Nevertheless, a national federation does not have any influence over the appointment of leaders within a club and often relies on volunteers, unlike businesses.

The primary mission of these federations is to regulate a particular sport, promote it, and represent its members [6]. For example, RMJRMAF's actions are based on bringing together all associations and clubs that practice the discipline within its scope while adhering to the principles set forth by the founder of Judo, Jigorō Kanō: "mutual aid and benefit."

Federations also have a significant public service mission and social responsibility, as evidenced by the RMJRMA social mission, which is to promote values such as respect, discipline, excellence, sportsmanship, equality, education, and community engagement. Additionally, in Morocco, according to Article 22 of Law 30-09, "Sports federations participate in the execution of a public service mission. They

also participate in the organization of sports training and arbitration activities related to the discipline they govern, in accordance with their statutes, and contribute to defining the content and pedagogical methods of this training."

Bayle [7] have defined good governance practices as essential conditions for success and performance in sports association federations. Therefore, it is crucial to establish the most effective governance policies possible.

However, numerous difficulties persist. Firstly, sports federations face increasingly complex governance dynamics due to the inherent dyarchy between elected officials, volunteers, and employees. Initially, the association framework was designed to be administered by volunteers, but the introduction of salaried professionals within these entities can lead to power struggles, conflicting interests, and challenges in decision-making processes. Volunteers gradually find themselves marginalized [8]. Therefore, it is essential to define the roles and missions of each individual in a context where volunteers and professionals collaborate on a daily basis [9]. Additionally, Chelladurai [10] emphasizes that professionalism includes a high degree of competence and specialization, which is not necessarily exclusive to salaried individuals.

The Royal Moroccan Federation of Judo and Related Martial Arts, abbreviated as "RMJRMAF," is a sports association founded in 1959 in Morocco. Its role is to promote judo in the Kingdom of Morocco and represent the colors of Morocco in international competitions. RMJRMAF has been affiliated with the International Judo Federation since 1962, is a founding member of the African Judo Union since 1961, and has been part of the Arab Judo Union since 1977.

The choice of the Moroccan Judo Federation as the subject of study is justified for several reasons, the Moroccan Judo Federation, established in 1959, holds a prominent position as one of the oldest sports federations in Morocco. It has a significant impact on society and enjoys a large number of affiliated sports associations compared to other federations. According to the Moroccan Ministry of Sports, judo is among the few sports that attract a substantial portion of sports licenses, comprising 20% of the federations responsible for 80% of the total licensees. This signifies the enduring influence and popularity of judo within the Moroccan sporting landscape.

Material and methods

According to Sasvári [11], qualitative research methods are particularly suitable to produce and analyze descriptive data, including written or spoken words and observations of people's behaviors. Qualitative research aims to provide in-depth and detailed knowledge, typically utilizing a relatively small sample size. Therefore, when seeking to understand the reasons or mechanisms behind a phenomenon, qualitative techniques are valuable and should align with the research objectives.

In this study, a semi-structured interview was employed as a key methodological tool to investigate the governance of the Moroccan Judo Federation. By employing a semi-structured interview approach, this research aimed to gather comprehensive and nuanced perspectives on the governance practices of the Moroccan Judo Federation, providing valuable insights into its functioning.

To guide the semi-structured interviews, an interview guide was formulated. The guide consisted of a core set of questions that addressed themes such as governance structure, decision-making processes, transparency, communication, and accountability. The interview guide was designed to strike a balance between consistency and customization, allowing for comprehensive data collection while capturing the unique perspectives of each interviewee.

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants for this study. The sample was chosen based on individuals who possessed specific knowledge, expertise, and experiences relevant to the research topic. A diverse group of key stakeholders within the federation was targeted, including the president, the vice president, board members, coaches, athletes, referees, technical committee members, administrators, and external experts. The selection criteria ensured representation from different functional areas and perspectives involved in the governance of the federation. The sample size consisted of 12 participants, aiming to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter while considering the constraints of time and resources. 12 interviews were concluded with officials from the federation, namely the vice president, secretary general, two board members, two coaches, two athletes, referee, technical director, financial manager, and external expert, It was challenging to carry out this step as most of the target population hardly accept having an interview, citing being busy or not being authorized to provide the necessary information. However, despite these difficulties, 12 interviews were successfully conducted with these key individuals associated with RMJRMAF. Two approaches were implemented to conduct interviews to ensure effective data collection, firstly, we conducted face-to-face interviews, employing a combination of recording through a Dictaphone and note-taking, secondly, we conducted telephone interviews, engaging in direct conversations with our participants while recording their responses using a Dictaphone. Throughout the process, confidentiality and discretion were maintained, with permission obtained from interviewees to record their responses.

After data collection and typing the answers of the interviews in Word, qualitative data then were analyzed by Voyant tools, where word clouds, terms berry, and relevant other types of graphic display methods all contributed to the textual analysis of the results.

Results and discussion

The analysis followed the order of the originally defined question topics. The first question was “Can you provide an overview of the governance structure of the Moroccan Judo Federation?” Results are illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Can you provide an overview of the governance structure of the Moroccan Judo Federation? World Cloud of responses overview of the governance of the Moroccan Judo Federation.

Source: Formulated by Author using Voyant Tools (2023)

The analysis of the replies using the Voyant tool revealed that the corpus, consisting of 623 words and 237 unique word forms, showcased a relatively diverse vocabulary. The replies demonstrated a moderate level of complexity, as indicated by the readability index of 18.769. The average words per sentence stood at 18.3, suggesting that the information shared was detailed and substantial. The most frequent words in all responses, such as judo (22); board (17); directors (15); structure (13); president (13). The frequency of words like "board," "directors," and "structure" suggests that the respondents extensively discussed the organizational framework and hierarchical setup of the federation, including the roles and responsibilities of the board members and directors. The frequent occurrence of words such as "president" indicates a strong focus on the leadership position and decision-making processes within the federation. This suggests that the respondents paid attention to the influence, authority, and decision-making powers of the president in shaping the federation's direction.

The second question was “How are decisions made within the federation, particularly in matters related to policies, rules, and strategic direction?”, Results are illustrated in Figure 2.

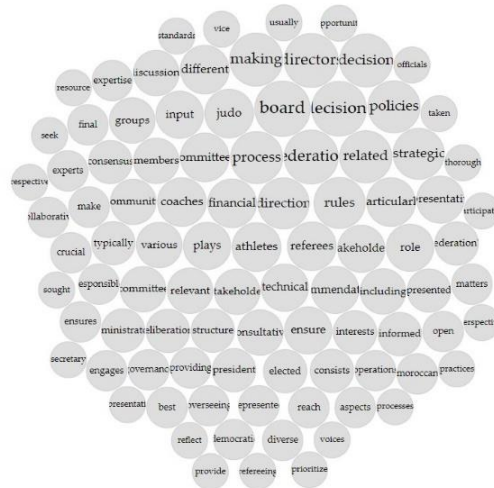


Figure 2: Terms berry summarizing responses about the decisions of the federation.

Source: Formulated by Author using Voyant Tools (2023)

According to the analysis using the Voyant tool, the corpus consisted of 664 words and 278 unique word forms, indicating a reasonably varied vocabulary. The readability index of 20.339 suggested that the replies exhibited a relatively high level of complexity. Additionally, the average words per sentence stood at 17.0, indicating that the information shared was concise and informative. The most frequently occurring words in the corpus are board (13); decisions (12); federation (11); directors (11); making (10). The presence of words such as "decisions" and "making" in the frequent word list indicates that the respondents placed significant emphasis on the process of decision-making within the organization. This suggests that the discussions revolved around how decisions are made, the factors influencing those decisions, and their overall impact on the organization. The frequent occurrence of words like "board" and "directors" suggests that the participants recognized the importance of the board in the governance of the organization. This indicates that the discussions focused on the responsibilities, authority, and decision-making powers vested in the board members, as well as their role in guiding the organization's direction.

The third question was “How does the federation ensure transparency and accountability in its governance processes?”, Results are illustrated in Figure 3.

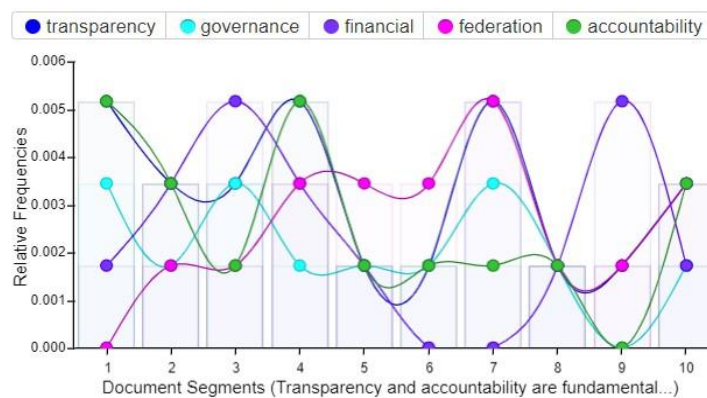


Figure 3: Trend tool summarizing responses- Transparency and accountability in the Moroccan judo federation.

Source: Formulated by Author using Voyant Tools (2023)

The analysis using the Voyant tool revealed that the corpus consisted of 631 words and 202 unique word forms, indicating a relatively diverse vocabulary. The high vocabulary density of 0.320 suggested the usage of a broad range of terms. The readability index of 21.086 indicated a moderate level of complexity in the responses. The average words per sentence were 14.7, indicating that the information provided was concise and to the point. The most frequent words in the corpus, such as transparency (19); federation (16); financial (15); accountability (15); governance (12), emphasized the significance of these aspects in the context of the Moroccan Judo Federation.

The frequent occurrence of the word "transparency" suggests that the respondents placed a strong emphasis on the concept of openness and clarity within the Moroccan Judo Federation. This indicates discussions about transparent decision-making processes, financial transparency, and the need for transparent governance practices. The presence of words such as "financial" and "accountability" suggests that the respondents discussed the financial practices and responsibilities within the federation. This could indicate the need for proper financial accountability measures.

The fourth question was "How would you describe the relationship between the federation's leadership (e.g., president, board) and its members, such as coaches, athletes, and referees?", Results are illustrated in Figure 4.

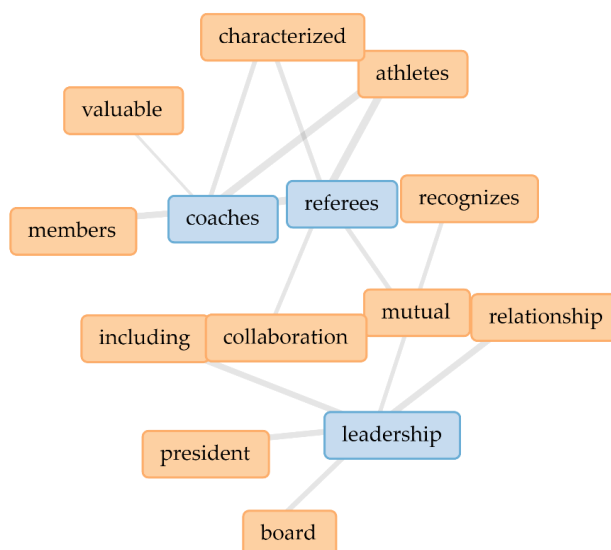


Figure 4: Collocates graph summarizing responses- Relationship between the federation's leadership and its members.

Source: Formulated by Author using Voyant Tools (2023)

According to the analysis of the corpus using the Voyant tool, the corpus consisted of 655 words and 366 unique word forms, the vocabulary density of 0.559 suggested that there were a variety of terms used to discuss the subject matter. The readability index of 18.439 indicated that the document's text was relatively easy to comprehend. The average words per sentence were 23.4, suggesting that the responses provided detailed information and elaboration on the topics discussed. The most frequent words in the corpus, including leadership (17); referees (16); coaches (14); relationship (13); members (13) highlighted the importance of these stakeholders within the context of the Moroccan Judo Federation. The frequent occurrence of the word "leadership" indicates that the respondents recognized



Figure 6: Terms berry summarizing responses about the communication of the federation internally and externally.

Source: Formulated by Author using Voyant Tools (2023)

Voyant's tool analysis of all responses, which contained a total of 585 words and 265 different word forms, determined a vocabulary density of 0.452. The relatively high readability index of 22.609 indicated that the text was fairly easy to understand. With an average of 16.3 words per sentence, the responses were concise and conveyed information effectively. The most frequent words in the corpus, are communication (27); federation (15); channels (13); stakeholders (10); members (10).

The frequent occurrence of words such as "communication" and "channels" suggests that the respondents recognized the importance of establishing efficient means of communication within the Moroccan Judo Federation, this indicates the need for clear and open lines of communication, effective communication strategies, and utilizing appropriate platforms to engage with stakeholders and members. The prominence of words like "stakeholders" and "members" indicates that the respondents acknowledged the significance of involving and engaging these individuals within the governance processes of the federation, considering the perspectives and needs of stakeholders and members, valuing their input, and ensuring their voices are heard in decision-making processes.

The seventh question was “How does the federation handle conflicts of interest and ensure ethical conduct among its governing members?”, Results are illustrated in Figure 7.

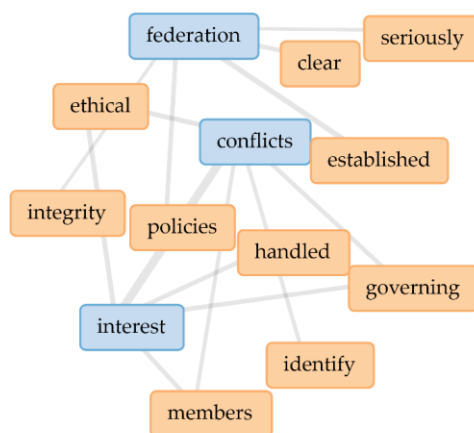


Figure 7: Collocates graph summarizing responses- How does the federation handle conflicts of interest.

Source: Formulated by Author using Voyant Tools (2023)

According to the analysis of the responses using the Voyant tool, the corpus consisted of 567 words and 260 unique word forms, indicating a reasonable variety of vocabulary. The vocabulary density of 0.38 suggests that the document covered a range of topics related to conflicts of interest, ethical conduct, and the federation. The readability index of 17.718 suggests that the text was relatively easy to read and comprehend. With an average of 19.6 words per sentence, the responses offered detailed explanations and insights into the governance practices concerning conflicts of interest and ethical conduct within the Moroccan Judo Federation. The prominence of words such as conflicts (20); interest (18); federation (15); ethical (15); conduct (11) highlights the significance of addressing conflicts of interest and ensuring ethical behavior among the federation's governing members.

The presence of the words "conflicts" and "interest" in the frequent word list suggests that the respondents recognized the importance of addressing conflicts of interest within the Moroccan Judo Federation. This indicates discussions about identifying and managing situations where personal interests could potentially interfere with the objective decision-making process, and the need to establish policies and guidelines to mitigate such conflicts.

The subsequent question was "Can you discuss any recent governance reforms or initiatives undertaken by the federation to improve its governance practices?". Results are illustrated in Figure 8.



Figure 8: Trend tool summarizing responses- recent governance reforms undertaken by the federation to improve its governance.

Source: Formulated by Author using Voyant Tools (2022)

The analysis of responses using the Voyant tool reveals that the corpus consists of 516 words and 246 unique word forms, indicating a relatively diverse vocabulary. The vocabulary density of 0.476 suggests that the document explores various aspects related to governance practices. With a readability index of 21.309, the text is considered quite readable and accessible. The average of 23.5 words per sentence indicates that the document provides detailed and informative insights into governance practices, particularly focusing on topics such as reforms, federation, and undertaken initiatives. The frequent appearance of words such as governance (24); practices (14); reforms (13); federation (10); undertaken (9) underscores the significance of improving and refining governance practices within the Moroccan Judo Federation.

The occurrence of the word "reforms" in the frequent word list indicates that the discussions revolved around the changes and improvements in the governance practices of the Moroccan Judo Federation.

This involves considering and implementing reforms to address any identified weaknesses or to align with evolving standards and best practices. The presence of the words "undertaken" and "initiatives" suggests that the respondents discussed specific actions and projects implemented to enhance governance practices within the federation. This includes initiatives aimed at improving transparency, strengthening decision-making processes, or fostering greater stakeholder engagement.

Before the last question was "In your opinion, what are the main strengths and weaknesses of the current governance system within the Moroccan Judo Federation?". Results are illustrated in Figure 9.



Figure 9: Collocates graph summarizing responses- Opinion on the main strengths and weaknesses of the current governance system within the Moroccan Judo Federation.

Source: Formulated by Author using Voyant Tools (2022)

The analysis of the responses using the Voyant tool reveals that the corpus consists of 668 words and 359 unique word forms, indicating moderate vocabulary diversity. The vocabulary density of 0.537 suggests that the document delves into various aspects related to governance within the context of judo. With a readability index of 20.483, the text is considered relatively readable and accessible. The average of 24.7 words per sentence indicates that the document presents detailed information and analysis on topics such as governance, decision-making, judo, and transparency. The frequent occurrence of words like governance (12); making (10); judo (10); decision (10); transparency (9) emphasizes their significance within the discourse.

The occurrence of words like "making" and "decision" in the frequent word list suggests that the discussions revolved around the process of decision-making within the context of judo governance. This includes topics such as the decision-making structure, procedures, and factors considered in making decisions related to the sport. The prominence of the word "transparency" in the frequent word list suggests that the respondents recognized the importance of transparent practices within judo governance. This involves discussions about transparency in decision-making, financial accountability, and overall governance processes to ensure fairness and trust within the sport.

The final question was "Are there any specific challenges or areas of concern you have noticed in the governance of the federation? If so, how do you think they can be addressed?". (Figure 10).

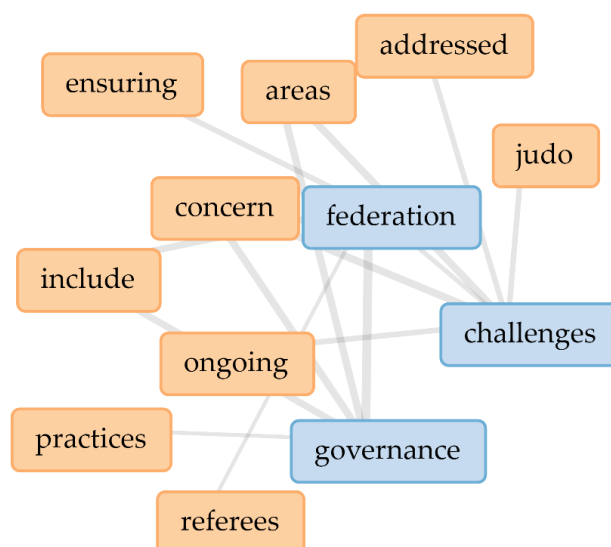


Figure 10: Collocates graph summarizing responses- The challenges in the governance of the federation.

Source: Formulated by Author using Voyant Tools (2023)

Voyant's tool analysis reveals that the corpus consists of 638 words and 319 unique word forms, indicating a relatively high vocabulary diversity with a vocabulary density of 0.5. The readability index of 20.605 suggests that the text is moderately readable. The average of 30.4 words per sentence indicates that the document presents detailed information and analysis on various aspects of governance. The frequent occurrence of words such as challenges (16); governance (13); federation (13); concern (9); specific (8) underscores their significance within the discourse.

The prominence of the word "federation" in the frequent word list suggests that the discussions revolved around the governance of the Moroccan Judo Federation and its governing body. This indicates a specific focus on the structure, operations, and decision-making processes within the federation. The occurrence of the word "specific" in the frequent word list suggests that the discussions involved providing particular and detailed information related to governance. This indicates a focus on providing precise and context-specific insights.

Conclusion

The objective of this qualitative research was to gather insights from various stakeholders of the Moroccan Judo Federation regarding its governance. The perspectives shared by the vice president, board members, coaches, athletes, referees, technical committee members, and financial manager offer valuable recommendations for improvement. Strong leadership, effective decision-making processes, and a transparent governance structure were emphasized as important factors by the vice president and board members. Stakeholder engagement and the incorporation of feedback were highlighted by coaches and athletes, while ethical conduct and conflict resolution mechanisms were stressed by referees. Recent reforms aimed at improving governance practices were discussed by the technical committee member, and financial stability and accountability were underscored by the financial manager. However, challenges were identified in decision-making, stakeholder engagement, conflict resolution, and financial management. To address these challenges, the federation should focus on

inclusive decision-making processes, managing conflicts of interest, and ensuring transparent and accountable governance practices. By capitalizing on strengths such as transparency and accountability and addressing these identified challenges, the Moroccan Judo Federation can enhance its governance practices, leading to a more effective and inclusive system. This will not only support the growth and development of judo in Morocco but also foster an environment that promotes fairness, inclusivity, and the overall success of the sport.

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