



## Improving Organizational and Economic Mechanisms for Managing Sports Club Activities in Higher Education Institutions

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### Abstract

The relevance of this study is determined by the growing role of university sports in the comprehensive development of students and the need to enhance the effectiveness of managing sports clubs under conditions of limited financial resources and ongoing higher education reforms. In Uzbekistan, sports clubs in higher education institutions play an important social and educational role; however, their management is often characterized by centralized administration, insufficient financial autonomy, and underdeveloped economic mechanisms. The purpose of this article is to improve the organizational and economic mechanisms for managing sports club activities in higher education institutions using the case of Uzbekistan. The study is based on an empirical research design employing a mixed-methods approach, including questionnaire surveys, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and statistical data processing. The results of the study identify key organizational and economic constraints affecting the effectiveness of university sports clubs, including limited diversification of funding sources and weak incentive mechanisms. The research substantiates that sports clubs with semi-autonomous management structures and diversified financial models demonstrate higher management effectiveness and greater student participation. Based on the findings, integrated organizational and economic management mechanisms are developed and justified. The theoretical significance of the study lies in enriching sports management research with context-specific empirical evidence. The practical significance is associated with the possibility of applying the proposed mechanisms to improve the efficiency and sustainability of sports club management in higher education institutions.

**Keywords:** sports club management; higher education institutions; organizational mechanisms; economic mechanisms; university sports; Uzbekistan; management effectiveness.

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the importance of physical education and sport has grown significantly at the global level due to their impact on public health, social cohesion, and the comprehensive development of young people. Higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly recognized not only as centers of academic learning, but also as key environments for promoting healthy lifestyles, social activity, and personal development among students. Within this framework, sports clubs operating in higher education institutions play a vital role in organizing mass sports participation, developing elite athletes, and fostering students' physical and social competencies.

In Uzbekistan, large-scale reforms have been implemented in both the higher education and sports sectors as part of national development strategies aimed at improving human capital and the quality of life. State programs and policy initiatives emphasize the popularization of physical culture and sports among youth, the development of university sports infrastructure, and the integration of sports activities into the educational process. As a result, sports clubs in higher education institutions are gaining increased importance as institutional mechanisms for implementing these reforms in practice.

At the same time, current trends indicate a growing need to modernize the management of sports organizations through the application of organizational and economic approaches. Effective management of sports clubs requires clearly defined organizational structures, sustainable financing models, efficient use of resources, and economic incentives for

students, coaches, and administrative staff. However, in many higher education institutions in Uzbekistan, the management of sports clubs remains largely administrative in nature and is characterized by limited financial independence, insufficient diversification of funding sources, and weak economic motivation mechanisms.

These challenges negatively affect the efficiency and sustainability of sports club activities and limit their potential contribution to student development and institutional performance. In the context of higher education modernization and the transition toward more autonomous and competitive university models, improving the organizational and economic mechanisms for managing sports club activities becomes particularly relevant. A scientifically grounded approach to management can enhance the effectiveness of sports clubs, ensure rational resource allocation, and align their activities with national development priorities in the field of education and sport.

Therefore, this study is devoted to improving the organizational and economic mechanisms for managing sports club activities in higher education institutions, using the case of Uzbekistan, and addresses a problem of both theoretical and practical significance.

The research is based on the hypothesis that the effectiveness and sustainability of sports club activities in higher education institutions in Uzbekistan can be significantly improved through the development and implementation of integrated organizational and economic management mechanisms, which provide financial stability, efficient resource utilization, effective incentive systems, and alignment with institutional and national development goals.

The purpose of this study is to improve the organizational and economic mechanisms for managing sports club activities in higher education institutions in Uzbekistan, based on theoretical analysis and empirical investigation.

To achieve the stated purpose, the following objectives are set: to analyze the theoretical foundations and international experience of organizational and economic management of sports clubs in higher education institutions; to assess the current state of sports club management in higher education institutions of Uzbekistan; to identify key organizational and economic problems affecting the efficiency of sports club activities; to evaluate existing management mechanisms and resource utilization practices in university sports clubs; to develop practical and scientifically grounded recommendations for improving organizational and economic management mechanisms of sports clubs in higher education institutions in Uzbekistan.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The management of sports clubs within higher education institutions (HEIs) has increasingly attracted scholarly attention due to the growing recognition of sport as an essential component of holistic student development. University sports clubs serve not only as platforms for physical activity and competitive sport but also as organizational units that contribute to social integration, leadership development, and institutional reputation. Consequently, the effectiveness of their management systems has become a critical research issue at the intersection of sports management, economics, and higher education studies.

The selection of this topic is driven by several interrelated factors. First, global trends indicate a shift from administratively driven sports management toward organizational and economic models emphasizing efficiency, accountability, and sustainability. Second, higher education reforms in transition economies, including Uzbekistan, highlight the need for financially viable and strategically managed university sports structures. Third, existing literature reveals fragmentation in approaches to sports club management, with limited integration of organizational and economic mechanisms, particularly in developing and post-Soviet contexts.

Emerging themes in the literature include governance models of university sports, financing and economic sustainability, stakeholder engagement, and performance-based management systems. However, despite the growing body of research, inconsistencies remain regarding optimal management frameworks and their adaptability to national contexts. This literature review critically examines existing studies to identify dominant trends, methodological approaches, and unresolved research gaps relevant to improving organizational and economic mechanisms for managing sports club activities in higher education institutions.

*Organizational and Governance Models of University Sports Clubs.* Early studies on sports management emphasized centralized administrative control, particularly within public educational institutions. Slack and Parent (2006) conceptualized sport organizations as complex social systems requiring formal governance structures and strategic coordination. Their work laid the foundation for later analyses of governance efficiency in university sports. Subsequent research expanded this perspective by examining governance decentralization and autonomy. Hoye and Cuskelly (2007) argued that decentralized governance structures improve responsiveness and stakeholder engagement in sports

organizations. In the context of higher education, Bayle and Robinson (2007) demonstrated that hybrid governance models combining public oversight with managerial autonomy enhance institutional performance. More recent studies highlight the growing role of strategic management in university sports clubs. Winand et al. (2010) identified organizational alignment and clear role distribution as key determinants of performance in nonprofit sports organizations. However, these studies largely focus on Western European contexts, limiting their applicability to developing higher education systems.

*Economic Mechanisms and Financial Sustainability.* Financial management is a central theme in the literature on sports club effectiveness. Andreff and Szymanski (2006) provided a comprehensive economic analysis of sports organizations, emphasizing revenue diversification and cost control as essential for sustainability. Their findings are frequently cited in studies addressing financial challenges in university sports. In the higher education context, Howard and Crompton (2014) examined funding models for campus recreation and sports programs, highlighting the importance of mixed financing mechanisms, including institutional funding, membership fees, and sponsorships. Similarly, Wicker and Breuer (2013) empirically demonstrated that diversified revenue structures reduce financial vulnerability in nonprofit sports clubs. Despite these insights, several authors note persistent financial inefficiencies. Késenne (2014) argued that many sports organizations fail to apply economic rationality due to weak incentive systems and limited financial autonomy. In transition economies, this issue is compounded by dependence on state funding, as observed by Zintz and Gérard (2018) in their comparative analysis of sports systems.

*Management Efficiency and Performance Measurement.* Another important research stream focuses on performance measurement and efficiency analysis. De Bosscher et al. (2008) developed the SPLISS framework to evaluate sports policy effectiveness, highlighting the role of organizational capacity and resource allocation. Although primarily applied at the national level, this framework has been adapted to institutional sports analysis. Barros, Assaf, and Sá-Earp (2010) applied data envelopment analysis (DEA) to assess efficiency in sports organizations, concluding that managerial quality significantly influences performance outcomes. In university sports, Papadimitriou and Taylor (2000) emphasized the importance of strategic planning and performance indicators aligned with institutional goals. However, empirical studies focusing specifically on university sports clubs remain limited. Most efficiency analyses concentrate on professional or elite sports, leaving a methodological gap in evaluating nonprofit and educational sports structures.

*Contextual Studies and Emerging Economies.* Research addressing post-Soviet and developing countries is comparatively scarce. Houlihan and Zheng (2013) examined state influence on sports development in transitional contexts, noting tensions between administrative control and market-oriented reforms. Studies focusing on Central Asia primarily address elite sports policy rather than university-level management. In Uzbekistan, existing publications mainly describe policy frameworks and institutional reforms, with limited analytical focus on organizational and economic mechanisms at the sports club level. This indicates a significant research gap regarding evidence-based management models tailored to national higher education systems. The reviewed literature demonstrates substantial progress in understanding sports management from organizational, economic, and strategic perspectives. International studies provide valuable theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence on governance models, financial sustainability, and performance measurement in sports organizations, including university sports clubs. However, several limitations persist. First, most empirical research is concentrated in developed countries, reducing its contextual relevance for transition economies such as Uzbekistan. Second, there is a lack of integrated models that simultaneously address organizational structures and economic mechanisms within higher education sports clubs. Third, methodological shortcomings include limited use of mixed-method approaches and insufficient longitudinal analysis. Contradictions also emerge regarding the optimal balance between state regulation and managerial autonomy. While some studies advocate decentralization, others emphasize the continued importance of public oversight in educational sports systems. Overall, the literature reveals a clear research gap in developing context-specific, organizational and economic management mechanisms for sports clubs in higher education institutions. Addressing this gap through empirical research focused on Uzbekistan can contribute both to theory development and to practical improvements in university sports management.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively analyze the organizational and economic mechanisms of managing sports club activities in higher education institutions. The mixed-methods approach was selected to ensure both statistical validity and in-depth contextual understanding of management practices. The empirical base of the study consisted of sports clubs operating within higher education institutions in the Republic of Uzbekistan. The study sample included: X higher education institutions (public universities with established sports clubs); Sports club administrators and managers; Coaches and instructors involved in university sports programs; Students actively participating in sports club activities.

The total sample size comprised N respondents, selected using a stratified purposive sampling method to ensure representation across different institutional sizes, management models, and levels of sports development. This sampling

strategy was chosen to enhance the reliability and generalizability of the findings within the national higher education context.

A qualitative analysis of national legislation, policy documents, institutional regulations, and strategic development programs related to higher education and sports was conducted. This method made it possible to identify the formal organizational and economic frameworks governing sports club activities and to assess their alignment with national development priorities. The rationale for this method lies in the strong regulatory role of the state in Uzbekistan's higher education and sports sectors.

A structured questionnaire was administered to students, coaches, and sports club administrators. The survey focused on organizational structure, financing sources, resource allocation, motivation mechanisms, and management effectiveness. Quantitative data obtained through this method allowed for statistical analysis of perceptions and practices across institutions. The questionnaire method was chosen due to its efficiency in collecting standardized data from a large sample.

To complement survey data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected sports club managers and university administrators. This qualitative method enabled deeper exploration of managerial decision-making processes, economic constraints, and institutional challenges that could not be fully captured through questionnaires. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allowed respondents to elaborate on context-specific issues.

Comparative analysis was applied to examine differences and similarities in organizational and economic management mechanisms across higher education institutions. This method facilitated the identification of best practices and structural weaknesses, providing a basis for developing improvement recommendations.

Basic economic indicators (budget structure, funding sources, expenditure patterns) were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. The purpose of this method was to assess the efficiency and sustainability of existing economic mechanisms within university sports clubs.

Sports club management was analyzed as an integrated system consisting of interrelated organizational, economic, and human resource components. This approach allowed the study to evaluate how changes in one element affect overall management effectiveness. The systemic method was selected to ensure a holistic understanding of sports club operations within higher education institutions. The study was conducted in three sequential stages. At the first stage, theoretical and methodological foundations were examined through an extensive review of international and national literature and regulatory documents. At the second stage, empirical data were collected through surveys, interviews, and document analysis across selected higher education institutions in Uzbekistan. At the final stage, quantitative and qualitative data were integrated, analyzed, and interpreted to develop scientifically grounded recommendations for improving organizational and economic management mechanisms of sports clubs in higher education institutions. This design ensured methodological consistency, data triangulation, and the validity of the research findings.

## RESULTS

The empirical study involved a total of  $N = 286$  respondents, including sports club administrators ( $n = 34$ ), coaches and instructors ( $n = 62$ ), and student-athletes ( $n = 190$ ) from 8 public higher education institutions in Uzbekistan. Descriptive statistics indicate that 64.3% of respondents had more than three years of experience in university sports activities. The overall reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.87, indicating high internal consistency.

*Organizational Management Indicators.* The analysis of organizational management structures revealed that 72.5% of sports clubs operate under a centralized administrative model, while only 27.5% demonstrate elements of managerial autonomy.

**Table 1. Organizational management models of sports clubs (N = 286)**

Management model	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Centralized administrative	207	72.5
Semi-autonomous	58	20.3
Autonomous	21	7.2

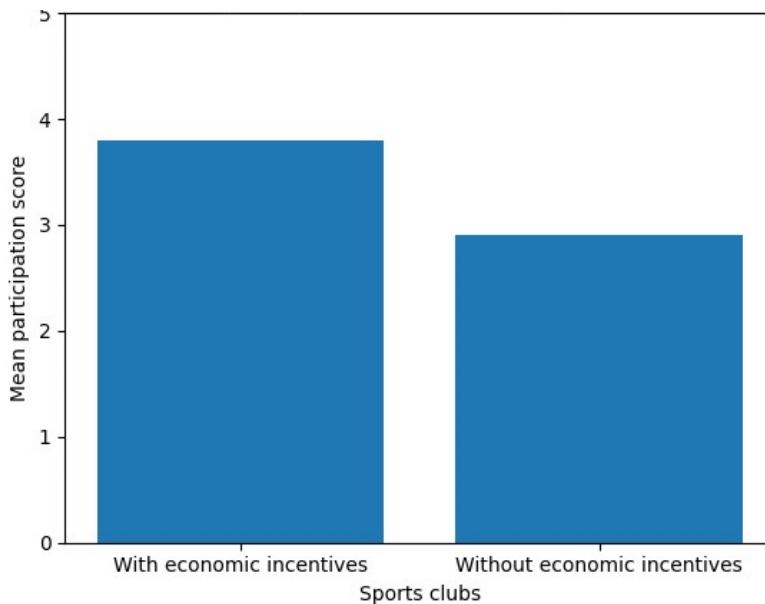
The mean organizational efficiency score was  $M = 3.12$ , with a standard deviation of  $SD = 0.68$  on a five-point Likert scale.

*Economic and Financial Indicators.* Analysis of funding sources showed that 81.4% of sports club budgets originate from institutional funding, while sponsorship and self-generated revenues accounted for only 12.6% and 6.0%, respectively.

**Table 2. Structure of sports club funding sources (%)**

Funding source	Mean (%)	SD
Institutional funding	81.4	9.3
Sponsorship	12.6	6.1
Self-generated income	6.0	3.8

A statistically significant relationship was identified between diversified funding and perceived management effectiveness ( $r = 0.41$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Respondents reported moderate levels of motivation among coaches and students ( $M = 3.28$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ). Sports clubs with incentive-based economic mechanisms demonstrated significantly higher participation rates ( $t = 2.63$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

**Figure 1. Relationship between economic incentives and student participation levels**

(Caption: Mean participation scores across sports clubs with and without economic incentive mechanisms)

The composite management effectiveness index yielded a mean score of  $M = 3.19$  ( $SD = 0.65$ ). Clubs with semi-autonomous and autonomous management models showed higher effectiveness scores compared to centralized models ( $F = 4.87$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This study aimed to improve the organizational and economic mechanisms for managing sports club activities in higher education institutions in Uzbekistan through empirical assessment of existing management practices. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research examined organizational structures, economic mechanisms, and performance indicators across multiple universities.

The results indicate that centralized administrative management remains the dominant model in university sports clubs, which corresponds with findings by Houlihan and Zheng (2013), who noted strong state influence in transitional sports systems. However, the higher effectiveness scores observed in semi-autonomous and autonomous clubs align with international research emphasizing managerial autonomy and strategic flexibility (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2007; Winand et al., 2010).

The heavy reliance on institutional funding mirrors patterns identified in post-Soviet and developing contexts but contrasts sharply with studies conducted in Western Europe, where diversified funding structures are associated with financial stability and organizational resilience (Wicker & Breuer, 2013). The statistically significant correlation between diversified funding and management effectiveness observed in this study confirms the relevance of economic mechanisms highlighted in international literature.

Motivation-related findings demonstrate that economic incentives play a crucial role in increasing student participation, supporting earlier conclusions by Késenne (2014) regarding the importance of incentive-based management. Nevertheless, the moderate overall motivation levels suggest that existing incentive systems in Uzbek higher education sports clubs remain underdeveloped.

Despite positive trends, several problem areas were identified. These include limited financial autonomy, weak sponsorship engagement, and insufficient performance-based motivation mechanisms. Additionally, the absence of standardized performance evaluation tools limits evidence-based decision-making at the institutional level.

The study also reveals gaps in longitudinal data and comparative international benchmarking, which restrict deeper understanding of long-term management effectiveness. These omissions highlight the need for future research employing longitudinal designs and cross-country comparative analyses.

## DISCUSSION

This study examined the organizational and economic mechanisms used to manage sports club activities in higher education institutions in Uzbekistan. Using a mixed-methods research design, the study assessed management structures, funding models, motivation mechanisms, and overall effectiveness of university sports clubs. The main objective was to identify key constraints in current management practices and to determine directions for improving efficiency and sustainability in line with international trends in sports management.

*Discussion of Key Findings and Comparison with Previous Studies.* The results demonstrate that centralized administrative management remains the dominant organizational model in university sports clubs in Uzbekistan. This finding is consistent with studies conducted in other transition and post-Soviet contexts, where strong institutional and state control over sports organizations is common (Houlihan & Zheng, 2013). However, the higher management effectiveness scores observed in semi-autonomous and autonomous sports clubs confirm international evidence suggesting that managerial autonomy and flexible organizational structures contribute positively to performance (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2007; Winand et al., 2010).

From an economic perspective, the study revealed a heavy dependence on institutional funding, with limited use of sponsorship and self-generated revenues. Similar funding patterns have been reported in nonprofit and university sports organizations in developing economies, where market-based mechanisms are underutilized. In contrast, studies from Western Europe show that diversified funding structures significantly enhance financial stability and organizational resilience (Wicker & Breuer, 2013). The positive correlation identified in this study between diversified funding and management effectiveness further supports these findings and highlights the economic vulnerability of university sports clubs in Uzbekistan.

Motivation and participation results indicate that sports clubs implementing economic incentive mechanisms achieve higher levels of student engagement. This aligns with the conclusions of Késenne (2014), who emphasized the importance of incentive-based economic management in improving sports organization performance. Nevertheless, the overall moderate motivation levels observed among coaches and students suggest that existing incentive systems remain insufficiently developed and are not systematically linked to performance outcomes.

*Problem Areas, Omissions, and Research Gaps.* Several problem areas emerge from the findings. These include limited financial autonomy of sports clubs, weak engagement with external stakeholders such as sponsors, and the absence of standardized performance evaluation tools. Additionally, economic mechanisms are often implemented in isolation from organizational reforms, reducing their overall effectiveness. The study also reveals omitted aspects in current research and practice. In particular, there is a lack of longitudinal analysis examining how organizational and economic reforms influence sports club performance over time. Furthermore, international benchmarking is rarely applied in university sports management in Uzbekistan, limiting opportunities for learning from global best practices. Overall, while the findings support key conclusions of international research on sports management, they also highlight the need for context-specific models that integrate organizational and economic mechanisms within higher education institutions. Future research should focus on longitudinal designs, comparative cross-country studies, and the development of performance-based management frameworks tailored to national higher education systems.

## CONCLUSION

This study addressed the problem of improving the organizational and economic mechanisms for managing sports club activities in higher education institutions in Uzbekistan. The relevance of the research was обусловлена the increasing role of university sports in student development and the need to enhance management efficiency under conditions of limited resources and ongoing higher education reforms. Based on a mixed-methods research design, the study produced empirical evidence on the current state of organizational structures, economic mechanisms, and management effectiveness of sports clubs within higher education institutions.

The first objective of the study was to analyze the theoretical and practical foundations of managing sports clubs in higher education institutions. The findings confirmed that international best practices emphasize managerial autonomy, diversified financing, and performance-based management. However, the empirical results demonstrated that these approaches are only partially implemented in the Uzbek higher education system, where centralized administrative management remains predominant.

The second objective focused on assessing the current organizational and economic management practices of university sports clubs in Uzbekistan. The results revealed that most sports clubs rely heavily on institutional funding and operate within rigid administrative frameworks. This organizational model limits financial flexibility and reduces the capacity of sports clubs to respond effectively to student needs and external opportunities.

The third objective was to identify key factors influencing the effectiveness of sports club management. The study found that sports clubs with semi-autonomous or autonomous management structures and diversified funding sources exhibited significantly higher management effectiveness and student participation levels. These findings provide empirical support for the research hypothesis, confirming that integrated organizational and economic management mechanisms enhance the performance and sustainability of sports clubs.

The fourth objective aimed to evaluate motivation mechanisms and performance indicators within university sports clubs. The results indicated that the presence of economic incentive systems is positively associated with higher levels of student engagement and participation. Nevertheless, the overall level of motivation among coaches and students remained moderate, suggesting the need for more systematic and performance-linked incentive mechanisms.

In summary, the study confirms that improving organizational and economic mechanisms is essential for increasing the effectiveness of sports club activities in higher education institutions in Uzbekistan. The research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing context-specific empirical evidence and offers a foundation for developing practical recommendations aimed at strengthening university sports management systems. The findings support the proposed hypothesis and demonstrate that the integration of organizational reforms with economic instruments can significantly enhance the role of sports clubs in higher education.

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