Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra1013 | SJIF Impact Factor (2025): 8.619 ISSN: 2347-4378
EPRA International Journal of Economics, Business and Management Studies (EBMS)
Volume: 12 | Issue: 10 | October 2025 -Peer-Reviewed Journal

THE ROLE OF E-LEADERSHIP IN ADDRESSING CHALLENGES IN SPORTS ACTIVITIES DEPARTMENTS IN JORDANIAN EDUCATION DIRECTORATES

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ABSTRACT

The integration of digital technologies has transformed organizational landscapes globally, compelling a shift in leadership paradigms. This research paper explores the emergent concept of e-leadership and its potential role in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by Sports Activities Departments within Jordanian Education Directorates. In a context characterized by resource constraints, bureaucratic inertia, and increasing demands for quality extracurricular programming, traditional leadership approaches have proven insufficient. This study employs a qualitative, analytical approach, synthesizing existing literature on e-leadership, public administration in Jordan, and sports management. It identifies key challenges within these departments, including limited financial and logistical resources, inadequate data management, ineffective communication channels, and insufficient professional development for staff. The paper argues that e-leadership, defined as a social influence process mediated by Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to produce change in attitudes, feelings, thinking, behavior, and performance, is not merely a technological upgrade but a strategic imperative. The findings indicate that e-leadership competencies – such as managing virtual teams, leveraging data analytics for decision-making, fostering digital culture, and utilizing digital communication platforms – can directly mitigate these challenges. E-leadership can enhance resource optimization, streamline administrative processes, improve stakeholder engagement, and facilitate remote coaching and talent identification. The study concludes with a set of targeted recommendations for the Jordanian Ministry of Education and individual directorates. These include developing a national strategic framework for digital transformation in school sports, implementing specialized e-leadership training programs for sports supervisors and principals, investing in robust and user-friendly digital infrastructure, and promoting a culture of innovation and continuous learning. This research contributes to the nascent field of e-leadership in the Arab educational and sports context, providing a foundational model for leveraging digital tools to revitalize school sports programs in Jordan and similar environments.

KEYWORDS: *E-Leadership, Sports Activities Departments, Jordanian Education, Digital Transformation, Educational Challenges, ICT in Sports, Public Administration, Jordan.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The 21st century has been marked by a digital revolution that has permeated every facet of society, including education and sports. In Jordan, a nation with a young demographic and a strategic focus on human development, the education sector is under constant pressure to modernize and improve outcomes. A critical, yet often under-resourced, component of this sector is the Department of Sports and School Activities, which operates within the Ministry of Education and its regional directorates. These departments are tasked with a vital mission: fostering physical literacy, promoting healthy lifestyles, identifying athletic talent, and instilling values of teamwork and discipline among students.

Concurrently, the concept of leadership has evolved. The rise of distributed work, global teams, and digital communication tools has given birth to "e-leadership"—a style of leadership that is enacted in a context where interactions are mediated by technology. As defined by Avolio, Kahai, & Dodge (2000), e-leadership is a "social influence process mediated by Advanced Information Technology (AIT) to produce a change in attitudes, feelings, thinking, behavior, and/or performance with individuals, groups, and/or organizations." This paradigm shift presents a unique opportunity to re-imagine how public institutions, like education directorates, can be managed.

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1.2. Problem Statement

Despite their importance, Sports Activities Departments in Jordanian education directorates face a constellation of persistent challenges that hinder their effectiveness. These include, but are not limited to, bureaucratic inefficiencies, limited and inconsistent funding, a lack of modern sports equipment and facilities, inadequate training for physical education teachers and sports supervisors, and fragmented communication between schools, directorates, and the central ministry. Traditional, hierarchical, and paper-based leadership and management approaches have been unable to effectively overcome these obstacles, leading to suboptimal sports programs that fail to fully engage the student population or achieve their developmental goals.

There is a critical gap in both research and practice regarding the application of modern leadership theories to address these specific issues. This paper posits that the challenges are not solely resource-based but are fundamentally managerial and leadership-oriented. Therefore, the core problem this research addresses is: **How can the principles and practices of e-leadership be leveraged to diagnose and address the systemic challenges plaguing Sports Activities Departments in Jordanian Education Directorates?**

1.3. Research Objectives and Questions

This research aims to:

1. Identify and analyze the key operational and strategic challenges facing Sports Activities Departments in Jordanian Education Directorates.
2. Explore the theoretical and practical dimensions of e-leadership.
3. Propose a conceptual framework for applying e-leadership competencies to mitigate the identified challenges.
4. Provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and practitioners.

To achieve these objectives, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the predominant administrative, financial, and human resource challenges within these departments?
- How can e-leadership competencies transform the planning, communication, and evaluation processes of school sports activities?
- What strategic steps are necessary to cultivate a culture of e-leadership within the Jordanian public education sports sector?

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several stakeholders. For the **Jordanian Ministry of Education**, it provides a roadmap for digital transformation that can lead to more efficient use of scarce resources and improved program outcomes. For **sports supervisors and physical education teachers**, it highlights new tools and strategies for enhancing their professional practice and impact. For **academics and researchers**, it contributes to the under-explored intersection of e-leadership, educational administration, and sports management within a Middle Eastern context. Ultimately, for **Jordanian students**, the successful implementation of these ideas promises a more vibrant, inclusive, and effective school sports experience.

1.5. Structure of the Paper

This paper is structured to systematically build the argument for e-leadership. Following this introduction, a comprehensive literature review establishes the theoretical foundations of e-leadership and the contextual reality of Jordanian education. The methodology section outlines the research approach. The subsequent findings section details the specific challenges, which are then addressed through an e-leadership framework in the application section. A discussion synthesizes these insights, leading to concrete recommendations and a concluding summary.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Evolution and Conceptualization of E-Leadership

E-leadership emerged as a field of study with the advent of the internet and the proliferation of virtual teams in corporate settings. Early works by Avolio et al. (2000) and Cascio & Shurygalio (2003) laid the groundwork, arguing that while the fundamental goals of leadership remain unchanged—to influence and motivate—the methods must adapt to technologically mediated environments.

Key competencies of e-leaders include:

- **Digital Fluency:** Proficiency in using and understanding digital tools (Zaccaro & Bader, 2003).

- **Communication Proficiency in Mediated Contexts:** The ability to communicate clearly, build trust, and convey empathy without the benefit of physical cues, relying on email, video conferencing, and collaborative platforms (Purvanova & Bono, 2009).
- **Managing Virtual Teams:** Skills in coordinating tasks, monitoring progress, and fostering cohesion among geographically dispersed team members (Malhotra, Majchrzak, & Rosen, 2007).
- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Leveraging data analytics from various digital sources to inform strategic choices (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014).
- **Fostering a Digital Culture:** Creating an organizational environment that embraces innovation, collaboration, and continuous learning through technology (Kane, Palmer, Phillips, Kiron, & Buckley, 2016).

E-leadership is not about the leader's technical skills alone; it is about their ability to wield technology as a strategic tool to achieve organizational objectives.

2.2. The Context of Jordanian Education Directorates

The Jordanian education system is centralized, with the Ministry of Education in Amman setting national policies, which are then implemented through regional education directorates. These directorates are responsible for all educational affairs in their governorates, including the management of school sports and activities. Research on Jordanian public administration often highlights challenges such as centralization, bureaucratic red tape, and resistance to change (Al-Husban & Nusair, 2021). While Jordan has made significant strides in its national ICT and e-government initiatives (e.g., the "Jordan Vision 2025" document), the trickle-down effect to specific departmental functions, like sports, has been slow and inconsistent.

Studies by Al-Shboul & Al-Zoubi (2020) indicate that schools and directorates often lack the digital infrastructure and, more importantly, the digital literacy among staff to fully capitalize on available technologies. This creates a context where the potential for e-leadership is high, but the foundational readiness is often low.

2.3. Sports Activities Departments: Mandates and Inherent Challenges

The mandate of Sports Activities Departments is broad, encompassing intra-school competitions, inter-school tournaments, talent identification, teacher training, and promoting physical activity for all students. However, literature and official reports consistently identify several barriers:

- **Financial Constraints:** Sports programs are often the first to suffer budget cuts. Funds for equipment, transportation, and event organization are scarce and unevenly distributed (Al-Ma'aitah, 2019).
- **Administrative Inefficiency:** Heavy reliance on paper-based reports, manual registration for events, and slow, hierarchical communication channels delay decision-making and implementation (Haddad, 2018).
- **Human Resource Issues:** Physical education teachers are frequently assigned non-specialist duties, and professional development opportunities focused on modern sports pedagogy or management are rare (Obeidat, 2022).
- **Stakeholder Disconnect:** Communication with parents, local communities, and potential sponsors is often weak, missing opportunities for support and engagement.

2.4. The Intersection: E-Leadership as a Potential Solution

The existing literature reveals a clear disconnect. While the challenges of Jordanian sports departments are well-documented, and the theory of e-leadership is well-established in business and IT literature, there is a scarcity of research connecting the two. This paper seeks to fill this void. It posits that the challenges are not insurmountable with traditional methods alone but require a new leadership approach that is agile, data-informed, and leverages technology to overcome geographical and resource limitations. The following sections will build this argument by analyzing the challenges through an e-leadership lens.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a **qualitative research design** based on a comprehensive and analytical review of literature. This approach is deemed appropriate for developing a conceptual framework and generating in-depth understanding in an area where primary empirical data is limited (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.1. Research Design

The design is descriptive and analytical, aiming to synthesize existing knowledge to construct a novel argument and propose a theoretical model. It involves systematically identifying, evaluating, and interpreting available

research and documents related to the study's core variables: e-leadership, sports management, and Jordanian educational administration.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis Approach

Data was collected from a wide range of secondary sources, including:

- Peer-reviewed academic journals in the fields of leadership, educational technology, sports science, and public administration.
- Official reports and strategy documents from the Jordanian Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship, and related NGOs.
- Doctoral dissertations and conference proceedings focusing on the Jordanian and Middle Eastern context.
- News articles and analyses from reputable sources discussing Jordan's education and digital transformation efforts.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the collected literature. Key themes were identified related to challenges (e.g., "funding," "communication," "training") and e-leadership solutions (e.g., "virtual collaboration," "data analytics," "digital communication"). These themes were then cross-referenced to establish logical connections and build the proposed framework.

3.3. Limitations of the Study

The primary limitation of this study is its reliance on secondary data. It does not present new empirical findings from interviews or surveys with current sports directors or teachers in Jordan. Therefore, the findings and recommendations are conceptual and require validation through future primary research. However, the strength of this approach lies in its ability to integrate diverse sources of information to form a cohesive and foundational argument that can guide future empirical work.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS: CHALLENGES IN JORDANIAN SPORTS ACTIVITIES DEPARTMENTS

The synthesis of literature reveals four interconnected categories of challenges.

4.1. Administrative and Logistical Challenges

The administration of school sports is plagued by inefficiency. Organizing a single inter-school tournament involves massive paperwork: manual entry of participant lists, paper-based permission slips, and physical transportation of results to the central directorate. This leads to errors, delays in scheduling, and difficulties in tracking student participation over time. Supervisors spend an inordinate amount of time on clerical tasks rather than on pedagogical supervision or strategic planning. The lack of a centralized digital database for student athletes, their performances, or equipment inventories makes strategic management nearly impossible.

4.2. Financial and Resource-Based Challenges

Funding is a perennial issue. Budgets are often insufficient and determined by historical allocations rather than strategic need or performance. There is a significant disparity in resources between urban and rural directorates. The process for requesting additional funds is bureaucratic and slow. Furthermore, these departments lack the mechanisms and skills to engage in modern fundraising, such as crowd funding or applying for grants from international sports bodies, which often require a sophisticated digital presence and proposal submission.

4.3. Human Capital and Professional Development Challenges

Physical education teachers and sports supervisors often report feeling isolated and undervalued. Professional development is infrequent and, when it occurs, often relies on traditional, one-off workshops that may not be relevant or sustainable. There is no system for ongoing, peer-to-peer learning or mentorship. The knowledge and best practices of a talented coach in one school remain confined to that school, with no digital platform to share success stories, training drills, or innovative activity ideas across the kingdom.

4.4. Communication and Stakeholder Engagement Challenges

Communication flows are predominantly top-down (from ministry to directorate to school) and one-way. There is minimal effective feedback from schools to the directorate. Engagement with parents is typically limited to mandatory permission forms, missing the opportunity to build a community of support. Potential partnerships with local sports clubs, businesses, or alumni for sponsorship or facility sharing are underdeveloped due to a lack of proactive, professional outreach, which in the digital age, is often conducted through social media and professional networks.

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5. THE APPLICATION OF E-LEADERSHIP: A FRAMEWORK FOR SOLUTIONS

This section maps e-leadership competencies directly onto the identified challenges.

5.1. E-Leadership for Administrative Efficiency and Data Management

An e-leader in the sports department would champion the development and adoption of a **Centralized Sports Management Portal**. This cloud-based platform could:

- **Automate Registrations:** Schools register teams for tournaments online, with automated eligibility checks.
- **Digitalize Reporting:** Supervisors submit activity reports, budgets, and equipment requests through the portal, streamlining approval processes.
- **Data Analytics for Talent ID:** Create a database of student athletes' performances, allowing for data-driven talent identification and tracking progress over years.
- **Resource Scheduling:** Allow schools to book shared resources (e.g., regional sports facilities) online.

The e-leader's role is to secure buy-in, manage the implementation, and ensure staff are trained, thus transforming administration from a burden into a strategic asset.

5.2. E-Leadership for Resource Optimization and Fundraising

E-leaders can use digital tools to do more with less and attract new resources.

- **Virtual Collaboration for Cost Reduction:** Use video conferencing (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams) for regular meetings between directorates, saving time and travel costs.
- **Crowdfunding and Digital Marketing:** Train staff or collaborate with communications teams to run targeted social media campaigns to raise funds for specific needs (e.g., new equipment for a rural school). Platforms like Patreon or local equivalents (e.g., Zoomal) can be utilized.
- **Grant Writing and Proposals:** Use online grant databases and collaborative software (e.g., Google Docs) to collaboratively write and submit compelling proposals to international organizations like FIFA's Forward Programme or the IOC's Olympic Solidarity.

5.3. E-Leadership for Virtual Team Management and Capacity Building

E-leadership redefines professional development through creating **Virtual Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)**.

- **Online Workshops and Webinars:** Bring in international experts for virtual training sessions accessible to all teachers across all governorates.
- **Peer-to-Peer Sharing Platforms:** Create a dedicated forum or social media group where teachers can share videos of successful drills, discuss challenges, and mentor each other.
- **Micro-learning:** Implement a system of short, online modules on topics like sports nutrition, injury prevention, or motivational techniques that teachers can complete at their own pace.

The e-leader fosters a culture of continuous, collaborative learning, breaking down the walls of individual schools.

5.4. E-Leadership for Enhanced Communication and Community Building

An e-leader uses technology to create a two-way, engaging communication ecosystem.

- **Interactive Social Media Presence:** Use Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter not just to announce results, but to livestream events, highlight student athlete achievements, and run interactive Q&As with coaches.
- **Stakeholder Portals:** Provide parents with a login to the sports portal to track their child's participation, receive updates, and sign digital consent forms.
- **Partnership Outreach:** Use LinkedIn and professional email to proactively build relationships with local businesses, sports clubs, and potential sponsors, presenting a professional, digitally-savvy image of the department.

6. DISCUSSION: SYNTHESIZING A NEW PARADIGM FOR SPORTS LEADERSHIP

The analysis demonstrates that the challenges in Jordan's Sports Activities Departments are not merely a function of limited budgets but are exacerbated by outdated leadership and management models. The application of an e-leadership framework offers a paradigm shift from a reactive, bureaucratic model to a proactive, agile, and networked one.

6.1. From Traditional Bureaucracy to Agile E-Governance

The traditional model is hierarchical and slow. E-leadership flattens communication, empowers front-line teachers with information and platforms, and enables rapid, data-informed decision-making. The sports supervisor becomes less of an administrator and more of a strategic orchestrator of a digital ecosystem.

6.2. The E-Leader as a Strategic Orchestrator in Sports

The successful e-leader in this context is a hybrid professional: they understand the pedagogical goals of school sports, the administrative constraints of the public sector, and the transformative potential of digital tools. Their core function is to connect these domains—to translate sporting objectives into digital strategies and to build the capacity of their team to execute them.

6.3. Implications for Policy and Practice

This shift has profound implications. It suggests that recruiting and training for leadership positions in education must prioritize digital and strategic competencies alongside content knowledge. Performance metrics for sports departments should include digital engagement, efficiency gains from automation, and success in virtual community building.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the foregoing analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

7.1. Recommendations for the Ministry of Education

1. **Develop a National Digital Strategy for School Sports:** Integrate a specific pillar for digital transformation within the national school sports strategy, with clear goals, timelines, and budget allocations.
2. **Invest in Centralized Digital Infrastructure:** Fund the development and rollout of a nationwide Sports Management Portal, as described in section 5.1.
3. **Mandate E-Leadership Training:** Incorporate mandatory certification in e-leadership and digital management for all newly appointed and existing sports supervisors and relevant ministry staff.
4. **Foster Public-Private Partnerships:** Partner with Jordan's vibrant IT sector to co-develop and support the technological solutions required.

7.2. Recommendations for Education Directorates and School Principals

1. **Champion Digital Initiatives:** Directors and principals should actively promote and model the use of digital tools for communication and management.
2. **Establish Governorate-Level Virtual PLCs:** Create and moderate online communities of practice for all physical education teachers within their jurisdiction.
3. **Empower "Digital Champions":** Identify and support tech-savvy teachers to lead digital projects and act as peer mentors.
4. **Leverage Local Media:** Use digital tools to proactively build relationships with local media to increase the visibility and perceived value of school sports programs.

7.3. Recommendations for Future Research

1. Conduct empirical studies to quantitatively measure the correlation between e-leadership competencies and the perceived effectiveness of sports departments in Jordan.
2. Undertake case study research on Jordanian schools or directorates that have successfully implemented elements of e-leadership to document best practices and pitfalls.
3. Explore the specific barriers to adopting e-leadership from the perspective of current sports supervisors and physical education teachers in Jordan.

8. CONCLUSION

The challenges facing Sports Activities Departments in Jordanian Education Directorates are significant, but they are not immutable. This research has argued that these challenges are, in large part, a leadership and management problem amenable to a digital-age solution. E-leadership provides a robust theoretical and practical framework for transforming these departments from sluggish bureaucratic units into dynamic, efficient, and engaging hubs of student activity. By embracing digital tools for administration, communication, professional development, and resource mobilization, e-leaders can overcome geographical and financial constraints to deliver a higher quality sports education to all Jordanian students. The journey requires strategic vision, investment in infrastructure and human capital, and a cultural shift towards agility and innovation. The ball is now in the court of Jordan's educational policymakers to seize this digital opportunity and unleash the full potential of school sports.

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