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## The Reality of Women's Empowerment in Leadership Positions within Sports Institutions

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#### Abstract

The purpose of the study is to uncover the reality of women empowerment in leadership positions in Iraqi sport institutions by identifying the most significant inhibitors and contributors driving participation. They employed descriptive survey and sampled 211 female employees at the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Olympic Committee, as well as sports federations. It was discovered that cultural and social constrains are still the greatest obstacle (80%) for women's empowerment, weak support from institution along with no genderfriendly organizational environments restrained their progress. Additionally, a dearth of Iraqi sports institutions necessitates an all-inclusive process that increases social awareness, develops better institutional policies and amplifies the role of media in supporting women to assume leadership roles.

**Keywords**: women empowerment, leadership positions, sports institutions.

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#### Introduction

Empowerment of women has been identified as a hot issue in the last few decades at national and international levels, which is considered pre-requisite for sustainable development, equity and justice. Countries and institutions have also started taking other steps to improve the overall inclusion of women — including in leadership positions that were traditionally held by men. This is an evidence of the growing awareness on the importance and contribution of Gender-Balance to sustainable Performance-Optimisation and standout organisations.

Society & Sports Recognized as a powerful weapon to promote community coherence and conduct competitive social environment creation, The Role of moing Women in the country's sporting circles has attracted the keen interest from one side the sports world as media advances towards gender parity. It's not only a physical activity but also the social vehicle for creating society, culture and economy. As such, being the change as it relates to women in sports organisations is seen as essential so that both those changes required are happening and so an inclusive culture permeates.

Yet for all that progress in addressing gender, women still face no shortage of barriers to breaking the glass ceiling when it comes to positions of power in sports. They do so in under cultural, social and institutional inhibiting conditions that either absorb their advances or fulfill some aspects of their aspiration. Women can produce amazing values as long as they have opportunities and are empowered, meanwhile lots of success stories demonstrate that. Creating opportunities for women to hold leadership positions within sports organizations is one of the litmus tests of how advanced a society has become in terms of moving towards justice and equality of opportunity (Abdul Karim 2022).

The aim of this study is to reveal how much challenges and opportunities have women when they are in leadership position on sport institutions and the impacts of them on their performances in sport sector was examined.

The significance of the work is to provide a comprehensive view of gender in leadership position sport institutions, which social, economical and cultural dimension make transcendent. Their work helps create an opportunity to observe the current fault lines in policies and practices that would help prevent women from empowerment, and it sheds light into how women can/should be empowered within sport – for progress'sake, for sustainable development.

Moreover, such research could support decision-makers and sport bodies in implementing strategies that better enable the empowerment of women along sports development process by showcasing successful leadership role models to inspire other women while overcoming barriers.



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#### **Problem Statement**

Even though a lot has changed in the Iraqi society, and there are other countries that have been trying to improve women role in the sports generally speaking and to come up with regulations that support their participation in the profession of sport, yet, this same profession is facing obstacles regarding issues related with economic status, security problems as well as social traditions that work on negatively affecting improving for women career. Limited number of studies and data that can make the picture clear as to how women occupy leadership positions in sports in Iraq make this problem not well understood, which further complicates its solutions.

This situation is the result of a combination of different elements that overlap and contribute to building this scenario: social values, policies that fall short in supporting women's empowerment, on the one hand, and lack of suitable capacity-building tools for women—both in terms of skills development and enabling environment created to take part in leadership positions—on the other. In addition, most of the sports institutions are not equipped with efficient policies of reaching gender balance and there is an obvious deficit in investment in feminine competencies in this field".

As such, the problem of this research stems from the necessity to thoroughly grasp the fact that Iraqi women empowerment in sports organizations is really taking place, on identifying or analyzing barriers encountered by them, as well as reasons behind empowering them and how far these affect so that eventually a sustainable development can be achieved in sports.

Questions: What is the actual situation of women's empowerment to ascend leadership positions at sport institutions in Iraq? What are the key barriers to their empowerment? What can be done to further strengthen their leadership in this space?.

#### **Research Objectives**

- 1. Designing a questionnaire to measure the level of women's empowerment in this sector.
- 2. Analyzing the reality of women's empowerment in leadership positions within Iraqi sports institutions.

#### **Research Areas**

- Human Domain: Working women in the sports sector, including the Ministry of Youth, the Olympic Committee, and federations.
- Temporal Domain: From (November 15, 2024) to (April 20, 2025).



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• Spatial Domain: Baghdad.

#### Methodology

The researchers employed a descriptive methodology utilizing a survey approach, as it is more suitable for the nature of their study.

#### **Research Community**

The purpose of the study was to investigate a particular phenomenon in one community. The study population was all working women in sports institutions; including sport federations, sport clubs, and related governmental sectors on Sports. The national Olympic committee is an important component aspect for appreciating the status of women's empowerment at managerial level in sports organizations as it embodies a real setting and applicable administrative processes (Mahmoud,2023). Table 1 show the research community and sample.

**Table 1.** Distribution of the Research Population and Sample

No	Research Population	Research Sample	Pilot Sample	Construction Sample	Application Sample	Excluded
1	400	211	10	110	90	1

#### **Research Tools and Instruments**

- Arabic and foreign sources.
- The electronic international information network (the Internet).
- A questionnaire form specifically designed to measure the reality of women's empowerment in sports institutions.
- Personal interviews.
- Data extraction form.

#### Devices and Equipment Used:

- One laptop computer of the type (Dell).
- One handheld calculator of the type (Kenko).
- One watch of the type (Casio).

#### **Field Research Procedures**



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#### **Face Validity**

Steps to verify the apparent validity in this study:

- 1. The questionnaire was presented to seven experts specializing in sports management and the science of testing and measurement in sports.
  - 2. We requested the experts to evaluate the items in terms of:
    - Their clarity and ease of understanding.
    - Their alignment with the concept of women's empowerment in sports institutions.
    - Their comprehensiveness across the four domains.

The agreement rate among the experts was 85% or higher, indicating that the questionnaire possesses a high level of apparent validity.

#### **Internal Validity**

Internal validity is order to calculate internal validity we obtain person correlation coefficient for all item with its corresponding domain (a value of over 0.6 is considered scientifically acceptable). The internal validity can be estimated as falow:

- 1. Collect the responses of participants for each item.
- 2. Calculate the correlation coefficient between each item and its overall domain.
- 3. If the correlation values are high and statistically significant (p < 0.05), this indicates that the items measure what they were intended to measure.

#### Validity of the reviewer

The questionnaire was presented to a group of experts, totaling seven individuals, and their responses are detailed in the table below. Four domains were approved, while the other domains were excluded.

Domains of Women's Empowerment in Leadership Positions within Sports Institutions, with results as shown in Table (2).



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**Table 2.** Experts' Agreement on the Domains of the Study

No	. Domain	Agree	Disagree Notes
1	Cultural and Social Challenges	5	2
2	Institutional Support	7	0
3	Personal Capabilities and Leadership Skills	6	1
4	Legal and Legislative Environment	0	7
5	Media and Marketing Role	5	2
6	Financial and Administrative Challenges	2	5
7	Women's Leadership Role and Its Impact on the Institution	1	6
8	Psychological and Social Challenges for Women Leaders	3	4

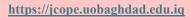
 Table 3. Internal Validity (Pearson Correlation Coefficient for Each Item with Its Corresponding Domain Total)

Domain	Item No.	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance Level (p)	Internal Validity
Cultural and Social Challenges	1	0.78	0.002	High
Cultural and Social Challenges	2	0.72	0.005	High
Cultural and Social Challenges	3	0.69	0.007	Moderate
Cultural and Social Challenges	4	0.81	0.001	High
Cultural and Social Challenges	5	0.75	0.004	High
Institutional Support	1	0.84	0.000	High
Institutional Support	2	0.63	0.012	Moderate
Institutional Support	3	0.79	0.003	High
Institutional Support	4	0.74	0.005	High
Institutional Support	5	0.68	0.009	Moderate
Personal Capabilities and Leadership Skills	1	0.79	0.002	High
Personal Capabilities and Leadership Skills	2	0.76	0.003	High
Personal Capabilities and Leadership Skills	3	0.71	0.006	Moderate



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Personal Capabilities and Leadership Skills	4	0.83	0.000	High
Personal Capabilities and Leadership Skills	5	0.69	0.008	Moderate
Media and Marketing Role	1	0.71	0.006	Moderate
Media and Marketing Role	2	0.83	0.000	High
Media and Marketing Role	3	0.77	0.002	High
Media and Marketing Role	4	0.66	0.010	Moderate
Media and Marketing Role	5	0.79	0.003	High

All items exhibit a correlation coefficient greater than 0.60, indicating an acceptable to high level of internal validity. Most items are statistically significant at p < 0.05, suggesting that their association with the domain is not due to chance.

Table 4. Reliability Using the Test-Retest Method

Questionnaire Domains	First Application (Mean)	First Application (SD)	Second Application (Mean)	Second Application (SD)	Reliability Coefficient (r)	Validity (√Reliability)
Cultural and Social Challenges	85.4	4.2	84.8	4.1	0.991	0.995
Institutional Support	87.2	3.9	86.5	3.8	0.991	0.995
Personal Capabilities and Leadership Skills	83.7	4.5	82.9	4.3	0.991	0.995
Media and Marketing Role	86.1	4.1	85.3	4.0	0.991	0.995

It was conducted on a group of working women in sports institutions, including clubs, federations, and the Olympic Committee, on February 20, 2025, The SPSS software package was utilized.



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## Results

 Table 5. Distribution of Responses According to Domains and Items

No.	Domain	Item	Agreement (%)	Disagreement (%)
1		Women face difficulty obtaining leadership opportunities in sports institutions due to social customs and traditions.	%82	%18
2		There is weak societal acceptance of women's participation in administrative and supervisory roles within sports institutions.	%79	%21
3	Cultural and Social Challenges	Women face a conservative vision which belies them in the decision process of sport institutions.	%81	%19
4		The absence of the family and community support directly influences the low willingness among women for working in sports.	%76	%24
5		In sports organizations, women experience a struggle in reconciling family obligations and work requirements.	%74	%26
6		The academy offers education and career- development training programs for women seeking to excel in sport leadership.	%60	%40
7		The center is dedicated to the development of policies that provide equal opportunity for men and women in hiring and promotion.	%58	%42
8	Institutional Support	The institution supports women's participation in committees, administrative bodies, and sports-related decision-making.	%55	%45
9		The institution provides a safe and motivating work environment that encourages women to continue and advance in the sports field.	%62	%38
10		The institution allocates budgets and programs to support and develop female leadership in the sports sector.	%53	%47



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%32	
%34	
%30	
%35	
%37	
%43	
%20	
%41	
%45	
%27	
	%43 %20 %41

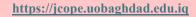
## Discussion

## **Cultural and Social Challenges**



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The highest rated problems by a sample of 80% or more indicated that customs and traditions prevent women from reaching leadership levels. These statistics suggest that cultural barriers are still the biggest barrier for women to gain empowerment in sports organizations.

#### **Institutional Support**

The institutional support for women is lacking (the approval rate of policies on equal opportunities and empowering them was not over 60%, while the disapproval rate reached 45% in a couple of questions). (It should be noted that this is apparently normal, at which it probably reasonable to conclude that law offices don't offer an even playing field for the hiring and promotion of women and men.

#### Personal Capabilities and Leadership Skills

There is a relative consensus that women have the ability to lead, with between 63% and 70% (depending on presidency) expressing such approval: this means that the lack of leadership positions cannot be attributed to personal incompetence but rather obstacles.

#### **Media and Marketing Role**

80% of respondents agreed that women are covered insufficiently in the media when compared with men and this has a negative affect on improving their representation and involvement within sports. This proves that the media is not playing its part in effectively supporting women's empowerment!

In view of these findings, it is clear that the cultural and social obstacles are identified as the foremost of barriers to women's participation and development of position in sports institutions. In spite of women holding excellent leadership capabilities and competence, there exists a lack of institutional support, inadequate media coverage as well as equal opportunities to promotion and hiring preventing them from breaking through to senior management.

The results of the study reveal women's realities in sport organizations with regard to empowerment, and present four important dimensions:

- 1. Cultural and social challenges.
- 2. Institutional support.
- 3. Personal capabilities and leadership skills.



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#### 4. The media and marketing role.

The relevance of discussing these results within the theoretical framework and objectives that guided the research to build a questionnaire to measure, in this field, the factual state of women's empowerment is emphasized.

#### Firstly: Cultural and Social Challenges

The findings imply that social norms and customs still remain the major barrier for women in sports institutions, with 82% of participants showing that it is difficult for women to achieve leadership opportunities due to cultural practices, whereas 81% indicated that traditional perceptions restrict women's role in decision-making. This is in line with Youssef Ibrahim's assertion that social values limit gender equality as far as leadership roles are concerned and therefore also sponsored a decrease of the number women involved in sport decision-making (Ibrahim 2024). Findings As opposed to Ibrahim, researchers assume that the results indicate one fact and that social and cultural constrains are still major obstacles against women's ability to be in leadership positions within sports. In addition, the community's low approval toward the involvement of women in sports administration at 79% indicates that more work should be done to increase societal awareness about women's contribution to this field. Animage change," affirms Nasreen Ali Al-Khamis, "will depend on the awareness and media strategies to make women's leadership role in sports more visible. Coan and Dieringer highlight the role community consciousness plays as a powerful force for "destroying stereotypes and perceptions impeding women's leadership in sports" (Ali 2023).

Second, institutional support is indicative of lack of support for women in sport organizations. The training optionsInssightful suggests that only 58% of women feel their companies are committed to implementing equal opportunities policies and 47% think in practice there is no budget allocated to support female leadership. It also agrees with Samer Jabbar who found that weak governmental regulations impede the transitioning to empower women in a sport (Jabbar, 2022). On the other hand, 60% of those surveyed agree that institutions offer training and opportunities for professional development to improve women's capacities, which is good although not enough to ensure women have access to leadership positions. As discussed by Mona Abdul Latif Abbas, training itself is not sufficient if it is not matched with appropriate policies towards women leading their career - advance in senior positions (Abdul Latif, 2024). The researchers contend that the findings signal empowerment of women in sports is more of a joint feat between policies and funding with training not enough to reach leadership positions unless it takes place in an inclusive organizational environment.



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Third, being capable and leaderly. While the results also show that women face some institutional and society challenges, they reveal that women have high leadership potential with 70% saying that effective communicators is something to describe them in their roles within their organisation and 68% say they are able to make things happen confidentally with efficiency. The results are consistent with the argument by Raed Hussein that women in sports management have enabling leadership capabilities, but are prevented from investment on it due to external constraints (Hussein, 2023). What's more, 65% said women are always evolving their leadership abilities through a continuous pursuit of learning, demonstrating a true motivation to break down barriers and progress in their careers. Fatima Abdullah, in energy catching and self-improvement by utilising their range of abilities are the main characteristic factors for women to be a leader of opportunities in sports (Abdullah, 2022). Researchers conclude that the outstanding leadership qualities and motivation of self-improvement experienced by women, are an instrument for their efforts to break through difficulties in order to reach decision-making positions within all fields related to sports.

The lack of media attention between factors that job women to the margin and deprives them from their role they can play in sports (Mustafa, 2024). Additionally, 73% respondents agreed that lack of role models in sports media is influencing women's motivation to join the profession. This was supported by Jumana Youssef Khourshid, who noted that improving visibility for female leadership in media actively contributes towards enabling women to lead in sport (Youssef, 2023).

These results are consistent with the research question, which was to assess the reality of women's empowerment inside sports institutions, based on the lack of attention and weak institutional support that would be responsible for reducing cultural and social barriers as well as differences in access despite their having great leadership potential. The findings also emphasize the need for more effective institutional policies and higher media visibility in bringing about broader female participations in various leadership roles.

The results confirm that women empowerment in sports organizations is not only about their personal ability, but also on the favorable atmosphere which can eliminate social and organizational obstacles and to enhance their presence in mass media & marketing so that opportunities between men and women will be equal within sports. The authors argue that the outcomes suggest a deficit in media coverage of women sports, and that even though women have skills and leadership capabilities to contribute significantly, they lack agency.

Reply According to the authors, women's empowerment in sport organizations faces some important obstacles mainly at cultural and social levels that appear as the most relevant impediments with such a high level of consensus. That is, deep-seated customs and norms existing



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in the society still doesn't give women chances to act as leader and a community poor in openness to their administrative activities is one of their biggest problems. The scholars assert that these factors necessitate broad reform action, including educational and awareness programmes to defy gender stereotypes of women and sports.

At the institutional level, findings indicate that sports institutions are not doing enough in creating supportive structures for women such as trainings and capacity-building opportunities and a direct budget line on empowerment of women. Some measures have been taken, but the statistics quoted above indicate that affirmative action guidelines have not translated into practice. Their findings illuminate the potential upside to tougher enforcement of hiring and promotion equity — and yet also just how deeply we likely have still to go, as well as some thoughtful consideration about what meaningful financial and organizational support for female leadership might look like.

With respect to personal competence, the findings suggest that women have strong leadership skills, including those of decision making and problem solving, as well as good communication devices that could translate into potential administrative role if proper atmosphere is created. The authors recommend that this positive feature should be exploited further by building up training specifically designed for women with a view to increasing their participation in sports in leading positions.

With regard to the media, lack of media exposure into the roles women play in sports is cited as one of the major barriers, because there are so few positive female role models reflected in the media that hinders a woman's ability to physically carry out her intended job. This is believed by the researchers that media can change how the society look at things and thus such grooming women leaders in sports programmes should trigger medias to play their role of sharing success stories of women in sports so as to encourage more women in both administrative and sport works.

From these findings the authors argue that obtaining "meaningful" empowerment of women in sports organizations requires attention to all four components. Although women have the necessary leadership qualities, social constraints, inadequate institutional support and poor media coverage remains a challenge for women in SA. Therefore, any future strategy to support women in sports should be holistic and target media representation as well as cur rent procedures, emphasizing the need for legal changes, change of communities attitudes regarding female spon participation, institutions support for women and increasing the role of media in pro portioning their achievement.

#### **Conclusions**



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- 1. Cultural and social obstacles cannot help women in the leadership roles: There are gender restrictions for sport leaders, concerning administrative management control or functions arising from traditional beliefs which hamper integration of the girl-child into key authoritative role in sports organization.
- 2. Lack of institutional support There is little budget and policy for empowering women We found lack of policies to support and save fund for building the potential female leader, which finally block opportunities for women inside sport organizations.
- 3. It is not enough for the individual potential of women itself: Individual ability cannot determinate all, even though they women have leadership capacity, but they lack actual opportunities and necessary system support in the sports field work place.
- 4. Media representation of women is weak: Women experience a lack of media coverage when compared to men, and are thus less likely encouraged to take up top leadership positions in sports organizations.

#### Recommendations

- 1. Increase the public awareness of the role of women in sports management: Running social marketing campaign to change the belief and facilitate greater acceptance of women's role in leadership.
- 2. Institutionalization of women rights policies for empowerment: Clearly establishing policies that guarantee gender equality in opportunities and special training programs for female leadership.
- 3. Enhancing the contribution of media to promote female athletes The role of the media in helping women play sports should be promoted through increased coverage of them involved with sports management and by showing successful women as examples for others.
- 4. Sports institutions as promoters: Establish environments conducive to work, flexible and safe, that allow women to combine family responsibilities with the demands of administrative work.

#### **Appendices**

Appendix 1 .Experts' Evaluation Form

Domain	Itom	Item Statement	Expert	Evnout	Expert	Evnort	Evnout	Evnout	Evnout
Domain	Item	Item Statement	Expert						
	No.		1	2	3	4	5	6	7



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#### Cultural and Social Challenges

1

- Women face difficulty obtaining leadership opportunities in sports institutions due to social customs and traditions.
- 2 There is weak societal acceptance of women's participation in administrative and supervisory roles within sports institutions.
- Women experience a traditional perspective that reduces their role in decision-making within sports institutions.
- 4 Lack of family and community support negatively affects women's motivation to work in the sports field.
- Women face challenges in balancing family responsibilities and job demands in sports institutions.

#### Institutional Support

1

- The academy offer training programmes along with leadership and professional development workshops to build skills for women in sports management roles.
- The bank is pledged to the policy of providing men and women with equal opportunities in recruitment and promotion.
- 3 The organization backs the women's participation in committees, administrative structures and sports decisionmaking.
- 4 The academy offers a secure and supportive workplace for women to stay in and advance through the sports sector.
- 5 The organisation invests in developing and supporting female leaders within sport through budgets and programs.



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Personal
Capabilities and
Leadership
Skills

1

Women in sports organisations are able to take bold decisions with confidence.

- Women are capable of addressing problems in a sports work environment.
- Women are good communicators and these skills contribute to their leadership role in sports organizations.
- Women want to build their leadership capacity through learning and training opportunities.
- Women lead by example and they're capable of inspiring a sports team or an office staff towards goals.

#### Media and Marketing Role

1

That sports media have a role in remedying the situation by promoting women and their place within sports institutions.

- Women in sport are underrepresented in the media.
- Promotional activities encourage women's attendance and participation and increase their chances in the management of sports organizations.
- 4 Media and advertising campaigns sports institutions offer also increase the visibility of women in sport.
- 5 If you don't see other women succeeding in media, what motivation is there to become one



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Appendix 2. Diverse Distribution of the Number of Experts Agreeing and Disagreeing

Domain	Item No.	No. of Experts Agreeing	Agreement Percentage	No. of Experts Disagreeing	Disagreement Percentage
Cultural and Social Challenges	1	7	%100	0	%0
Cultural and Social Challenges	2	6	%85.71	1	%14.29
Cultural and Social Challenges	3	5	%71.43	2	%28.57
Cultural and Social Challenges	4	7	%100	0	%0
Cultural and Social Challenges	5	6	%85.71	1	%14.29
Institutional Support	1	7	%100	0	%0
Institutional Support	2	5	%71.43	2	%28.57
Institutional Support	3	6	%85.71	1	%14.29
Institutional Support	4	7	%100	0	%0
Institutional Support	5	6	%85.71	1	%14.29
Personal Capabilities and Leadership Skills	1	5	%71.43	2	%28.57
Personal Capabilities and Leadership Skills	2	7	%100	0	%0
Personal Capabilities and Leadership Skills	3	6	%85.71	1	%14.29
Personal Capabilities and Leadership Skills	4	5	%71.43	2	%28.57
Personal Capabilities and Leadership Skills	5	7	%100	0	%0
Media and Marketing Role	1	6	%85.71	1	%14.29
Media and Marketing Role	2	5	%71.43	2	%28.57
Media and Marketing Role	3	7	%100	0	%0
Media and Marketing Role	4	6	%85.71	1	%14.29
Media and Marketing Role	5	7	%100	0	%0



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Appendix 3. Means and Standard Deviations for Each Item

Domain	Item No.	No. of Experts Agreeing	No. of Experts Disagreeing	Mean	Standard Deviation
Cultural and Social Challenges	1	7	0	1.000	0.000
Cultural and Social Challenges	2	6	1	0.857	0.000
Cultural and Social Challenges	3	5	2	0.714	0.000
Cultural and Social Challenges	4	7	0	1.000	0.000
Cultural and Social Challenges	5	6	1	0.857	0.000
Institutional Support	1	7	0	1.000	0.000
Institutional Support	2	5	2	0.714	0.000
Institutional Support	3	6	1	0.857	0.000
Institutional Support	4	7	0	1.000	0.000
Institutional Support	5	6	1	0.857	0.000
Personal Capabilities and Leadership Skills	1	5	2	0.714	0.000
Personal Capabilities and Leadership Skills	2	7	0	1.000	0.000
Personal Capabilities and Leadership Skills	3	6	1	0.857	0.000
Personal Capabilities and Leadership Skills	4	5	2	0.714	0.000
Personal Capabilities and Leadership Skills	5	7	0	1.000	0.000
Media and Marketing Role	1	6	1	0.857	0.000
Media and Marketing Role	2	5	2	0.714	0.000
Media and Marketing Role	3	7	0	1.000	0.000
Media and Marketing Role	4	6	1	0.857	0.000
Media and Marketing Role	5	7	0	1.000	0.000

**Appendix 4.** Reliability Using the Test–Retest Method, Including Questionnaire Domains, Mean Scores for Both Applications, Reliability Coefficient, and Validity Value

Questionnaire Domains	First Application (Mean Score)	Second Application (Mean Score)	Reliability Coefficient (r)	Validity (√Reliability)
Cultural and Social Challenges	85.4	84.8	0.991	0.995



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Institutional Support	87.2	86.5	0.991	0.995
Personal Capabilities and Leadership Skills	83.7	82.9	0.991	0.995
Media and Marketing Role	86.1	85.3	0.991	0.995

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