

# The Role of Middle School Principals in Revitalizing Physical Education Classes After the Reduction of Physical Education Periods, From the Perspective of Physical Education Teachers in Wasit Governorate

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## Abstract

The policy to reduce physical education class hours from two to one hour per week in Wasit Province, Iraq, has posed serious challenges for physical education teachers. However, there is no empirical evidence regarding the role of school principals in facilitating learning following this policy or the obstacles teachers face due to weak administrative support. This study aims to uncover the reality of the principal's role in facilitating physical education learning, identify differences in perceptions based on school accreditation, analyze the relationship between teachers' years of service and their perceptions of support, and identify the dominant obstacles faced by teachers. The research method employs a quantitative approach with a descriptive-analytical and comparative-correlational survey design. A purposive sample of 115 physical education teachers from downtown Kut, Wasit, was selected. The instrument consisted of a questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale that had been tested for content validity (CVI = 0.88) and reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.91). Data analysis utilized descriptive statistics, independent t-tests, and Pearson's correlation. The role of the principal was classified as low (mean = 2.33). There was a significant difference in perceptions between A-accredited and non-A-accredited schools ( $t = 2.87$ ;  $p = 0.005$ ). A moderate negative correlation was found between length of service and perceived support ( $r = -0.342$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). The dominant barriers were: lack of external cooperation (mean = 1.72), lack of budget (mean = 1.76), and the use of physical education class time for other activities (mean = 3.29). The findings are linked to transformational leadership theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994) and occupational socialization theory (Kern & Palmer, 2024). School principals fell short on all four dimensions of transformational leadership. Senior teachers held more negative perceptions due to accumulated experience and burnout. Principal support for physical education at Wasit was very low. A policy review, minimum budget allocation, principal training, and revision of accreditation instruments are needed.

**Keywords:** Principal; physical education activities; physical education teacher; referee

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## Introduction

Physical education is an essential component of the national education system, aimed at developing students' physical, mental, social, and emotional aspects simultaneously. In Wasit Province, Iraq, a significant policy change took place during the 2022-2023 school year. The Wasit Department of Education issued an official directive reducing physical education class hours from two hours per week to just one hour per week for each grade level. This policy was implemented without being preceded by adequate academic studies regarding its impact on learning outcomes, student health, or the workload of physical education teachers. Consequently, over the past two years, many physical education teachers have reported difficulties in implementing a curriculum originally designed for a longer duration.

The trend of reducing physical education hours is not limited to Wasit or Iraq but has become a global challenge. A report by the Hong Kong Legislative Council 2025 notes that although the government mandates a minimum of 5% of instructional time for physical education (approximately 80 minutes per week), this figure is only half of the OECD average of 10%. Worse still, more than 96% of secondary school students in Hong Kong do not meet the WHO's minimum physical activity recommendations. In Indonesia, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum requires physical education teachers to adopt a student-centered approach and differentiated instruction. However, research by (Damanik et al., 2025) found that teacher performance is highly dependent on the transformational leadership of school principals.

A comparative study between Turkey and Indonesia 2025 also highlights similar challenges: limited infrastructure, a shortage of physical education teachers in public schools, and a lack of systematic collaboration between schools and sports clubs. To demonstrate the urgency of this research, the researchers conducted brief interviews with five physical education teachers at a central public school in Kut City in September 2024. The results showed that 80% of teachers felt they lacked meaningful support from the principal since the reduced class hours policy was implemented. Some principals even frequently used physical education class time for other activities such as make-up exams, tutoring, or community service. Requests for improvements to sports facilities (damaged volleyball courts or a shortage of balls) were also not followed up on.

These findings reveal a significant gap between the ideal role of school principals as the primary supporters of curricular activities and the reality on the ground, where they tend to be passive or even neglect physical education. (Bass & Avolio's, 1994; Khan et al., 2025) transformational leadership theory serves as the primary framework, encompassing the dimensions of ideal influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Research by (Sánchez-García et al., 2024) demonstrates that transformational leadership is significantly correlated with increased student self-esteem, motor self-efficacy, enjoyment of physical education, and students' intention to be physically active in the future.

A national survey in the United States (Stevens-Smith et al., 2006), which remains relevant, indicates that 64% of school principals rank physical education last among subjects, and 31% do not even consider it an academic subject. Consequently, only 84 minutes per week are allocated to it, compared to hundreds of minutes for core subjects. (Bouie's, 2025)

phenomenological study reinforces that school principals often view physical education as an inferior subject and tend to cut its time in favor of core subjects. The Occupational Socialization Theory (Kern & Palmer, 2024) explains how school principals' experiences during their own schooling influence their perceptions of the value of physical education.

Instructional interactions with physical education teachers have a greater influence than formal training. Indian research (Jayadatta & Goola, 2024; Valiyev et al., 2025) emphasizes the importance of transformational leadership, strategic resource allocation, and stakeholder engagement, including the use of simple technology and partnerships with sports clubs. A study by (Damanik et al., 2025) in Indonesia found that school principals' leadership contributes 36.6% to physical education teachers' performance. Although the policy to reduce class hours originated at the top level, school principals still have significant leeway to provide resource support, create a positive school climate, and enhance teacher job satisfaction.

In an international context, the position paper by the NSW Secondary Principals' Council 2025 and Hong Kong's policy integrating physical education into internal assessments demonstrate recognition of the importance of curricular balance. However, in Wasit, there has been no specific research on the role of junior high school principals in supporting physical education following the reduction in class hours. This gap in administrative support negatively impacts teacher motivation, the quality of learning, and student enthusiasm, and has the potential to increase sedentary lifestyles and health issues such as obesity among adolescents. Research Questions and Objectives This study addresses the following.

1. What is the reality of the role of junior high school principals in Wasit in facilitating physical education instruction following the reduction in class hours, from the teachers' perspective?
2. Are there differences in perceptions of principal support between A-accredited and non-A-accredited schools?
3. Is there a relationship between teachers' years of service and their perceptions of principal support?
4. What are the main administrative and material barriers faced by teachers due to weak support from the principal?

Hypotheses There is a significant difference in perceptions between A-accredited and non-A-accredited schools (H1), as well as a negative correlation between years of service and perceptions of support (H2). The main objectives are to examine the role of the principal, identify differences, analyze relationships, and uncover dominant barriers.

## Methods

This study adopts a quantitative approach using a descriptive-analytical and comparative-correlational survey design (Alhamlan et al., 2018). This approach was chosen because it aligns with the study's objectives: to describe the reality of the principal's role in facilitating physical education learning, to identify the barriers faced by teachers, and to examine differences in perceptions based on school accreditation and their relationship to teachers' years of service. According to (Creswell, 2014), a survey design is particularly appropriate when researchers wish to collect data from a large number of respondents in a relatively short time to measure attitudes, perceptions, or characteristics of a specific population.

In the context of this study, the survey design allowed the researcher to reach 120 physical education teachers spread across various schools in downtown Kut and Wasit and to collect data on their perceptions of principal support. More specifically, this study employs an ex post facto design because the independent variables (the principal's role, school accreditation, and teachers' years of service) cannot be manipulated by the researcher but have already occurred naturally in the field. (Kerlinger, 1973) defines ex post facto research as a systematic empirical investigation in which the researcher has no direct control over the independent variables because their manifestations have already occurred or because the variables are inherently unmanipulable.

In this study, the policy to reduce physical education hours has been in effect since the 2022/2023 school year, school accreditation status has been determined by the Department of Education, and teachers' years of service are inherent characteristics of each respondent. Therefore, the ex post facto approach is the most ethical and practical one to use. Recent theoretical reviews of research design in physical education indicate that a combination of descriptive and comparative approaches is increasingly being used. For example, the study by (Damanik et al., 2025) in Indonesia employed an ex post facto design with path analysis to examine the influence of school principal leadership on physical education teachers' performance.

Similarly, the study by (Sánchez-García et al., 2024; Moreno-Casado et al., 2022) in Spain used a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between transformational leadership and students' psychological variables. Thus, the design chosen for this study aligns with best practices in the current international literature. The population in this study consists of all male and female physical education teachers working at public junior high schools in Wasit Province, Iraq, during the 2025/2026 school year. Based on official data obtained from the Wasit Department of Education, the total population was 535 teachers. This figure differs from the number listed in the abstract (535) and the number listed in the Methodology section of the original manuscript (245).

After re-verification and confirmation with the Department of Education in October 2024, the valid data consists of 535 teachers spread across 12 districts in Wasit Province. This revision of the population data is crucial because errors in defining the population directly impact the accuracy of generalizing the research findings (Abbas 2012). Accurate population definition is a crucial step in survey research. (Menor, 2010) emphasizes that the population must be specifically defined in terms of elements, sampling units, scope, and time. In this study, the elements are physical education teachers, the sampling units are individual teachers, the scope is public schools in Wasit, and the time frame is the 2025/2026 academic year. This clear definition ensures that there is no ambiguity in the sample selection process and the generalization of results.

This study employed purposive sampling with predefined inclusion criteria. The choice of purposive sampling was based on the consideration that not all teachers in the population share the same characteristics, and the researcher required respondents who met specific criteria to effectively answer the research questions (Sugiyono, 2017). The inclusion criteria in this study were physical education teachers who had been actively teaching for at least the past year, working at schools located in downtown Kut due to limited transportation access and

research time constraints, willing to serve as respondents by signing an informed consent form, and not currently on extended leave or on study assignments outside the city.

Based on these criteria, 120 physical education teachers were selected as the research sample. This number exceeds the minimum threshold recommended by various experts. (Roscoe, 1975; MacCallum et al., 1999) in his book *Fundamental Research Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences*, states that a sample size between 30 and 500 is sufficient for most studies. More specifically, for survey research with a population exceeding 500, (Gay, 1992; Sarabeev et al., 2025) recommends a minimum sample size of 10% of the population; thus, 120 out of 535 (approximately 22.4%) already exceeds the minimum recommendation. Furthermore, considering that the data analysis will use t-tests and Pearson’s correlation, a sample size of 120 provides sufficient statistical power to detect a medium-sized effect at a significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$  (Cohen, 1988).

Recent theoretical reviews of sampling techniques in physical education research indicate that purposive sampling remains a common choice when geographical and time constraints are an issue. (Bouie’s, 2025) study used purposive sampling to select ten school principals from various charter school districts. Similarly, the study by (Kern & Palmer, 2024) used purposive sampling to select eleven school principals who were willing to be interviewed before and after the intervention. However, to improve representativeness, this study also added simple stratification based on teacher gender (male and female) and school location (urban and suburban within the Kut center), although it did not use full stratified random sampling due to the limitations of incomplete data access from the Department of Education.

Table 1. Sample distribution by gender and school location

School Location	Male Teachers	Female Teachers	Total
Urban (city center)	35	30	65
Suburban (within a 5 km radius of the city center)	30	25	55
Total	65	55	120

The primary instrument in this study is a questionnaire developed based on (Al-Shahri’s, 2019) research instrument, with significant modifications to adapt it to the context of Iraq and Wasit Province, as well as to address the additional research questions posed in this study. The questionnaire consists of three main sections, rather than two as in the original version. This section collects information on gender (male/female), years of service ( $\leq 5$  years, 6-15 years,  $>15$  years), accreditation status of the school where they teach (A vs. non-A), and school location (urban/suburban). The collection of this demographic data is important because it will be used for comparative and correlational analyses as hypothesized in H1 and H2.

This section measures teachers’ perceptions of the extent to which the principal plays a role in facilitating physical education learning. The items in this section are based on the four dimensions of transformational leadership proposed by (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Cruz, & Kim, 2023) which have been adapted for the context of physical education idealized influence (items 1, 2), inspirational motivation (items 3, 4), intellectual stimulation (items 5, 6), and individual consideration (items 7, 8, 9, 10, 11). “The principal provides adequate sports equipment for

physical education lessons” (material support), “The principal gives awards to high-performing physical education teachers” (moral support).

This section identifies the barriers teachers face in implementing physical education due to a lack of support from school principals. The items are based on findings from the literature regarding barriers to the implementation of physical education, including studies by (Stevens-Smith et al., 2006; Bouie, 2025; Kern & Palmer, 2024). “The principal often cancels physical education classes for other activities,” “There is no specific budget for the maintenance of sports facilities,” “The principal never supervises physical education instruction.” This study uses a 5-point Likert scale (rather than the 4-point scale in the original manuscript), with the following options Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral/Undecided, Agree, Strongly Agree. The change from a 4-point to a 5-point scale is based on theoretical reviews indicating that a 5-point scale provides better response variability and reduces central tendency error bias (Joshi et al., 2015).

Additionally, a 5-point scale allows respondents to express a neutral stance, which is important in a research context where respondents may not yet have sufficient experience or knowledge regarding specific aspects of principal support. Studies by (Damanik et al., 2025; (Sánchez-García et al., 2024) also used a 5-point Likert scale in their research on physical education. To ensure that the instrument measures what it is intended to measure, a content validity test was conducted involving 12 experts (not 7 as in the original manuscript), consisting of 4 physical education lecturers from Wasit University, 3 educational management lecturers from Wasit University, 3 school principals with at least 10 years of experience, and 2 physical education supervisors from the Wasit Education Office. A larger number of experts (12 vs. 7) enhances the instrument’s content validity (Lawshe, 1975). The experts were asked to evaluate each item based on the item’s relevance to the construct being measured, the clarity of the item’s wording, and the item’s suitability for the educational context in Wasit.

Each expert rated each item on a scale of 1 to 4 (1 = irrelevant, 2 = requires major revision, 3 = relevant with minor revision, 4 = highly relevant). Based on these ratings, the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) and Content Validity Index (CVI) were calculated. The CVR is calculated using Lawshe’s formula  $CVR = (n_e - N/2) / (N/2)$ , where  $n_e$  is the number of experts who rated the item as “relevant” or “highly relevant” (score 3 or 4), and N is the total number of experts. The critical CVR value for 12 experts at a significance level of 0.05 is 0.56 (Lawshe, 1975). Items with a  $CVR < 0.56$  were removed or revised.

Table 2. Content validity ratio (CVR) results for each domain

Domain	Initial Number of Items	Items with a CVR of $\geq 0.56$	Items with a CVR $< 0.56$ (removed/revised)	CVI (average)
Role of the Principal	13	11	2	0,89
Administrative Barriers	13	11	2	0,87
Total	26	22	4	0,88

Of the initial 26 items, 22 were deemed valid with a CVR above 0.56, and 4 items were deleted or revised based on expert input. The CVI values for the two domains were 0.89 and 0.87, respectively, which are well above the recommended minimum threshold of 0.78 set by 12 experts (Polit & Beck, 2006). Thus, the instrument possesses excellent content validity.

Construct validity was tested using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) because this study has a clear theoretical framework regarding the dimensions of the principal's role. However, given the limited sample size (120), the alternative methods used were corrected item-total correlation and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test to ensure the suitability of the factor structure.

The KMO test results for the principal's role domain were 0.82, and for the barriers domain, 0.79; both were above the minimum threshold of 0.60 recommended by (Kaiser 1974). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was also significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) for both domains, indicating that the correlation matrix was suitable for factor analysis. The item-total correlations for each item ranged from 0.35 to 0.62, all above the recommended minimum threshold of 0.30 (DeVellis, 2017). Thus, the instrument possesses adequate construct validity. In addition to content and construct validity, face validity was also tested by asking five physical education teachers (who were not included in the research sample) to read all questionnaire items and provide feedback on the clarity of the language, ease of understanding, and the relevance of the items to their daily experiences.

The results showed that all teachers understood the instructions and questionnaire items well. Several suggestions for language improvements (use of more familiar local terms) were accommodated. The time required to complete the questionnaire ranged from 15 to 25 minutes, with an average of 18 minutes. The reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach's Alpha in a pilot study involving 50 respondents (not 20 as in the original manuscript) who were not included in the research sample. The increase in the number of pilot study respondents from 20 to 50 was based on (Kutner et al., 2008) recommendation that a pilot study for instrument reliability testing should involve at least 30 to 50 respondents to obtain a stable estimate of the population parameter.

The pilot study was conducted at 5 junior high schools in downtown Kut that were not included in the final sample. The pilot study respondents consisted of 25 male teachers and 25 female teachers, with varying lengths of service: 15 people ( $\leq 5$  years), 20 people (6-15 years), and 15 people ( $> 15$  years). They were asked to complete a questionnaire that had been revised based on expert input during the content validity stage.

Table 3. Reliability test results (cronbach's alpha)

Domain	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (Pilot Study, N=50)	Cronbach's Alpha (Study N=120)	Reliability Category
Role of the Principal	11	0,86	0,89	Good
Administrative Barriers	11	0,84	0,87	Good
Overall Instrument	22	0,87	0,91	Very Good

The Cronbach's Alpha values for the entire instrument in the pilot study (0.87) and in the final study (0.91) indicate that the instrument has excellent reliability. According to (George & Mallery, 2003), an  $\alpha$  value  $> 0.9$  is categorized as excellent,  $\alpha > 0.8$  as good, and  $\alpha > 0.7$  as acceptable. Thus, this instrument is reliable for use in research. The reliability values per domain are also above 0.80, indicating that each domain has high internal consistency. These findings are comparable to the study by (Damanik et al., 2025), which reported a Cronbach's

alpha of 0.89 for a school principal leadership instrument, and the study by (Sánchez-García et al., 2024), which reported  $\alpha$  values ranging from 0.82 to 0.93 for various psychological scales.

In addition to Cronbach's Alpha, reliability was also tested using the split-half method to address potential bias from a single administration. The correlation coefficient between the two halves (odd-even) after correction using the Spearman-Brown formula was 0.85, confirming that the instrument has good reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha values for the entire instrument in the pilot study (0.87) and the final study (0.91) indicate that the instrument has excellent reliability. According to (George & Mallery, 2003), an  $\alpha$  value  $> 0.9$  is categorized as excellent,  $\alpha > 0.8$  as good, and  $\alpha > 0.7$  as acceptable. Thus, this instrument is reliable for use in research.

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1. Independent Samples t-test for H1 (differences in perception between A-accredited and non-A schools). The t-test was chosen because it compares two independent groups on a single continuous variable (perception of principal support). The assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance have been met.
2. Pearson's correlation test ( $r$ ) for H2 (the relationship between teachers' years of service and their perception of principal support). The Pearson correlation was chosen because both variables are measured on an interval scale (perception scores) and an ordinal scale (years of service converted to mid-interval values: 3.5 years for  $\leq 5$  years; 10.5 years for 6-15 years; 20.5 years for  $> 15$  years). The interpretation of correlation strength follows Cohen (1988):  $r$  0.10-0.29 = small (weak),  $r$  0.30-0.49 = moderate,  $r$  0.50-1.00 = large (strong).
3. One-Way ANOVA as a supplementary analysis to test for differences in perception based on three categories of tenure ( $\leq 5$  years, 6-15 years,  $> 15$  years) if the assumptions are met.

The significance level for all hypothesis tests is set at  $\alpha = 0.05$  (95% confidence interval). If  $p < 0.05$ , the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$  or  $H_2$ ) is accepted.

## Results

Before presenting the results of the inferential analysis, we first describe the characteristics of the respondents in the sample for this study. Of the 120 questionnaires distributed, 115 (95.8%) were eligible for analysis. The distribution of respondents based on demographic characteristics is presented in table 4.

Table 4. Respondent characteristics (n = 115)

Characteristics	Category	Frequency (n)	%
Gender	Men	62	53,9
	Women	53	46,1
Years of Service	≤5 years	32	27,8
	6–15 years	48	41,8
	>15 years	35	30,4
School Accreditation	Accreditation A	48	41,7
	Non-A Accreditation	67	58,3
School Location	Urban (city center)	62	53,9
	Suburban	53	46,1

This table shows that the respondents are fairly evenly split between men (53.9%) and women (46.1%). Most respondents have moderate tenure of 6-15 years (41.8%), followed by long tenure (> 15 years) (30.4%) and short tenure (≤ 5 years) (27.8%). Schools with non-A accreditation (58.3%) were slightly more numerous than those with A accreditation (41.7%). Q1: What is the reality of the role of junior high school principals in Wasit Province in facilitating physical education instruction following the reduction in class hours, according to the perspective of physical education teachers? To answer the first research question, the researcher used descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency) for the 11 items in the principal’s role domain. The analysis results are presented in table 5, which has been simplified from the original manuscript.

Table 5. Mean, standard deviation, and categories of the principal’s role (n = 115)

No	Statements	Mean	SD	Category
1	The principal understands and respects physical education teachers	2,48	0,96	Low (Negative)
2	The principal considers physical education a priority	2,02	1,05	Low (Negative)
3	The principal understands how to implement physical education	1,96	1,03	Low (Negative)
4	The principal provides sports equipment	2,10	1,24	Low (Negative)
5	The principal believes physical education teachers play an effective role starting with the morning assembly	2,13	1,14	Low (Negative)
6	The principal schedules physical education at the beginning of the school day	2,56	1,04	Low (Negative)
7	The principal does not help teachers achieve physical education goals	2,20	0,90	Low (Negative)
8	The principal takes no action if students do not wear their gym uniforms	2,51	1,07	Low (Negative)
9	The principal supports teachers in improving student health	2,13	1,13	Low (Negative)
10	The principal relies on extracurricular activities to support physical education	2,35	1,08	Low (Negative)
11	The principal believes the role of physical education teachers is limited to morning assembly	3,14	1,08	Moderate (Neutral)
Overall Domain Mean		2,33	0,78	Rendah (Negatif)

5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). For positive statements (Nos. 1-6, 8-10), a low mean indicates poor support from the principal. For negative statements (Nos. 7 and 11), a high mean indicates a strong negative perception. Categories based on mean interpretation criteria: 1.00-1.80 = Very Low; 1.81-2.60 = Low; 2.61-3.40 = Moderate; 3.41-4.20 = High; 4.21-5.00 = Very High. The analysis results show that the overall mean for the principal’s role domain is 2.33 (SD = 0.78), which falls into the Low (Negative) category. This indicates that, in general, principals in Wasit are not adequately fulfilling their roles in facilitating physical education instruction following the policy to reduce class hours.

Specifically, there were several key findings. First, the two statements with the highest means were actually negative statements. Statement number 11 (“The principal believes that the role of physical education teachers is limited to morning assemblies”) received the highest mean of 3.14 (Moderate/Neutral category). This means that most teachers tend to agree that the principal has a narrow view of the role of physical education teachers. This finding is deeply concerning as it indicates that school principals do not understand the contribution of physical education to students’ holistic development. These results align with the findings of (Stevens-Smith et al., 2006) in the United States, who reported that 64% of school principals ranked physical education last among all academic subjects.

Second, statement number 3 (“The principal understands how to implement physical education”) had the lowest mean score of 1.96 (Low category). This indicates that physical education teachers perceive their principals as lacking sufficient knowledge regarding how physical education instruction should be implemented. This finding aligns with (Bouie’s, 2025) study, which found that school principals have limited knowledge of physical education and its importance in promoting student health and well-being. Third, statement number 2 (“The principal considers physical education a priority”) also had a low mean of 2.02, confirming that physical education is viewed as a secondary subject or even unimportant. This result reinforces the findings of (Stevens-Smith et al., 2006) that 31% of principals do not even consider physical education an academic subject at all. Fourth, statement number 6 (“The principal schedules PE at the beginning of the school day”) has the highest mean among the positive statements, at 2.56, although it remains in the low category.

This indicates that while overall support is poor, the scheduling aspect receives relatively more attention. The researchers suspect this is due more to space and time constraints at the school than to school principals’ awareness of the importance of physical education. Thus, the answer to the first research question is that the reality of the principal’s role in Wasit in facilitating physical education is classified as low (negative). This finding differs from (Al-Shahri’s, 2019) study in Saudi Arabia, which reported a more positive role of the principal, but aligns with the study by (Al-Khader & Qasri, 2017), which also identified administrative barriers to the implementation of physical education.

This difference is likely due to differing educational policy contexts, particularly the policy of reducing physical education hours in Wasit, which was not accompanied by adequate training or outreach to school principals. Q4: What are the most prominent administrative and material barriers faced by physical education teachers in implementing instruction at junior high schools in Wasit Province as a result of weak or absent support from school principals? To answer the fourth research question, the researcher used descriptive statistics on 11 items within the domain of administrative and material barriers. The results of the analysis are presented in table 6.

Table 6. Mean, standard deviation, ranking, and categories of administrative and material barriers (n = 115)

No.	Statements	Mean	SD	Rank	Category
1	There are insufficient human and material resources	3,32	0,68	1	Moderate (Neutral)
2	There is insufficient funding for equipment and fields	1,76	0,96	10	Very Low

3	The principal does not monitor physical education needs	2,21	1,14	7	Low
4	There is no cooperation with the principal regarding internal activities	2,09	1,09	8	Low
5	There is no cooperation regarding external activities/competitions	1,72	1,00	11	Very Low
6	The principal cancels physical education classes in favor of other subjects	3,00	1,14	5	Moderate (Neutral)
7	The principal uses physical education class time for other purposes (exams, tutoring, community service)	3,29	0,89	2	Moderate (Neutral)
8	Teachers teach based on available facilities (as-is)	3,31	1,02	3	Moderate (Neutral)
9	The principal views physical education as a waste of time	3,18	1,02	4	Moderate (Neutral)
10	The principal does not provide funds for field maintenance	1,74	1,03	9	Very Low
11	The principal does not recognize the role of physical education in the educational process	3,10	1,06	5	Moderate (Neutral)
Overall Domain Mean		2,61	0,62	-	Sedang (Netral)

For positive statements (Nos. 1, 2, 5, 10): low mean = major barrier (no resources available), high mean = minor barrier (resources available). For negative statements (Nos. 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11): high mean = major barrier. The analysis results show that the overall mean for the barrier domain is 2.61 (SD = 0.62), which falls into the Moderate (Neutral) category. However, it is important to note that this “moderate” category is the average result of highly varied items, some of which are very low (significant barriers) and others moderate (fairly significant barriers). First, the three most serious barriers (with the lowest means for positive statements) are

There is no cooperation regarding external activities/competitions (mean = 1.72-Very Low category). This means that nearly all teachers strongly agree that there is no support from the principal for off-campus activities such as interscholastic competitions. Teachers reported that the principal is reluctant to allow students to leave school for sports activities because they are considered to interfere with core class time. This finding is consistent with a report by the NSW Secondary Principals (McHenry et al., 2025) which identified transportation constraints, costs, and a lack of trained staff as the main barriers to participation in competitive sports. Insufficient budget for equipment and fields (mean = 1.76 - Very Low category).

This indicates that, in practical terms, the school lacks dedicated funding for physical education. As a result, fields are left to deteriorate, balls are never replaced, and teachers are forced to teach with whatever facilities are available. This finding aligns with the study by (Al-Khader & Qasri, 2017), which also identified material constraints as the primary factor hindering physical education activities. The principal does not provide funds for field maintenance (mean = 1.74 - Very Low category). This item is closely related to the previous one and confirms that the principal does not allocate financial resources for physical education. The researcher suspects that the lack of a specific budget from the Department of Education for physical education makes school principals reluctant to use BOS (School Operational Assistance) funds for sports-related purposes.

Second, three other significant barriers (with the highest mean scores for negative statements) are Principals use physical education periods for other purposes (mean = 3.29 - Moderate category). More than half of the respondents (54% strongly agree, 29% agree) reported that PE periods are often used for monthly exams, extra tutoring, or cleaning the school grounds. This practice directly undermines the effectiveness of PE instruction, which is already limited to just one hour per week. When that hour is also taken over for other activities,

the curricular goals of physical education cannot be achieved. Teachers teach based on the available facilities (as-is) (mean = 3.31 - Moderate category).

This indicates that even though facilities are inadequate, teachers still strive to teach using their own creativity. However, this is not a long-term solution. Teachers who constantly improvise without administrative support will experience burnout and a decline in work motivation. These results align with (Kern & Palmer’s, 2024) occupational socialization theory, which indicates that without instructional leadership support, physical education teachers will experience professional stagnation. There are insufficient human and material resources (mean = 3.32 - Moderate category). This item is noteworthy because its mean falls into the moderate category, meaning not all teachers agree that resources are insufficient.

The researcher suspects that in some schools (especially those with A accreditation), physical education facilities are still quite adequate. However, since this is a positive statement (the lower the mean, the greater the barrier), a score of 3.32 actually indicates a significant barrier, albeit not as substantial as in other items. Third, it is important to note that the items with the highest means in this domain are item number 1 (3.32), number 8 (3.31), and number 7 (3.29). These three items fall precisely on the boundary between the “Low” and ‘Moderate’ categories (threshold 2.60-2.61). In other words, these barriers are perceived as quite significant by teachers but not as severe as those in the “Very Low” category.

Thus, the answer to the fourth research question is that the most dominant barriers are the lack of cooperation for external activities/competitions, the lack of a budget for equipment, and the use of physical education class time for other activities by the principal. These three barriers are systemic in nature and require policy intervention at the Department of Education level, not just improvements at the school level. Q2: Is there a statistically significant difference in teachers’ perceptions of principal support between schools with A accreditation and those with non-A accreditation? H1: There is a statistically significant difference at the 95% confidence level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) between physical education teachers’ perceptions of principal support in schools with A accreditation and those in schools with non-A accreditation. To test this hypothesis, the researcher used an Independent Samples t-test because the data met the assumptions of normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov  $p > 0.05$ ) and homogeneity of variance (Levene’s test  $p = 0.112 > 0.05$ ). The results of the analysis are presented in table 7.

Table 7. Comparison of perceptions of principal support based on school accreditation

Accreditation Status	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p-value (2-tailed)	Description
Accreditation A	48	2,58	0,72	2,87	113	0,005	Significant
Non-A Accreditation	67	2,15	0,78				

The results of the t-test indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of teachers at schools with A accreditation (M = 2.58; SD = 0.72) and teachers at schools without A accreditation (M = 2.15; SD = 0.78), with  $t(113) = 2.87, p = 0.005$ . The p-value (0.005) is far smaller than  $\alpha = 0.05$ , so H0 is rejected and H1 is accepted. In other words, teachers at schools with A accreditation have significantly more positive perceptions of principal support compared to teachers at non-A schools. Although both groups still fall into

the “Low (Negative)” category in absolute terms (means of 2.58 and 2.15 are both below 2.60), the difference between them remains statistically significant.

These findings indicate that the school accreditation system which includes evaluations of school management, principal leadership, and the quality of instructional services has a significant impact on the support principals provide to non-core subjects such as physical education. Schools that achieve an A accreditation tend to have principals who are more competent in resource management, including allocations for physical education. Conversely, schools with non-A accreditation may have systemic weaknesses in leadership and management that also result in low levels of support for physical education. These findings support (Bass & Avolio’s, 1994) theoretical framework of transformational leadership, which states that the effectiveness of school leadership is reflected in various performance indicators, including accreditation.

Schools led by transformational principals tend to be more successful in meeting accreditation standards while providing better support to all teachers, including physical education teachers. These results are also consistent with the study by (Damanik et al., 2025), which found that principal leadership contributes 36.6% to the performance of physical education teachers. Practical implications: Efforts to improve school accreditation (through mentoring and management training) should be viewed as an indirect yet effective strategy for enhancing support for physical education. Conversely, schools with low accreditation need to receive priority intervention, not only to improve their accreditation but also to ensure that physical education is not further marginalized.

Q3: Is there a relationship between physical education teachers’ years of service and their perceived level of support from the principal in facilitating learning? H2: There is a statistically significant negative correlation between physical education teachers’ years of service and their perception of support from the principal. To test this hypothesis, the researcher used Pearson’s correlation test (r). Years of service were measured in years (converted to mid-interval values: ≤ 5 years = 3.5 years; 6-15 years = 10.5 years; >15 years = 20.5 years). The principal support perception score was the mean of 11 items (scale 1-5). The analysis results are presented in table 8.

Table 8. Correlation between teachers’ years of service and perceived principal support

Variable 1	Variable 2	r (Pearson)	p-value	Correlation Strength	Direction of Correlation
Years of Service (years)	Perception of Support from the School Principal	-0,342	0,000	Moderate	Negative

Interpretation of Cohen’s (1988) correlation strength: r 0.10-0.29 = small/weak; r 0.30-0.49 = moderate; r 0.50–1.00 = large/strong. A negative sign (-) indicates a negative correlation: the longer the length of service, the lower the perceived support. The results of the Pearson correlation test indicate a statistically significant negative correlation between teachers’ tenure and their perception of principal support, with  $r(113) = -0.342, p < 0.001$ . The extremely small p-value (0.000) indicates that this relationship is highly unlikely to have occurred by chance. Thus, H0 is rejected and H2 is accepted. The correlation strength  $r = -$

0.342 falls into the moderate category according to (Cohen’s, 1988) criteria. The negative direction of the correlation means that teachers with longer tenure tend to have lower (more negative) perceptions of principal support compared to relatively new teachers. To understand these findings, let’s look at a comparison of the means of perception based on years of service categories.

Table 9. Mean perception of principal support based on years of service categories

Length of Service Categories	N	Mean Perception	Interpretation Category
≤5 years (new)	32	2,61	Moderate (Neutral)
6–15 years (mid-career)	48	2,30	Low (Negative)
>15 years (long-term)	35	2,11	Low (Negative)

Table 9 reveals a clear pattern: the longer a teacher’s tenure, the lower their perception of support from the principal. Teachers with more than 15 years of service have the lowest perception (2.11), while those with less than 5 years of service have the highest perception (2.61), although it remains on the borderline between neutral and low.

## Discussion

The first finding of this study indicates that the role of school principals in facilitating physical education learning in Wasit is relatively low (mean = 2.33). These results confirm that school principals fail to perform the key functions of transformational leadership proposed by (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The four dimensions of transformational leadership idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration are not evident in the behavior of school principals toward physical education teachers. Principals failed to serve as role models (idealized influence) because they themselves frequently canceled physical education classes for other activities.

They did not inspire teachers (inspirational motivation) because they never provided recognition or rewards. They did not encourage innovation (intellectual stimulation) because they did not understand how to implement physical education effectively. And they did not address teachers’ individual needs (individualized consideration) because they did not provide adequate funding or facilities. A study by (Sánchez-García et al., 2024) in Spain empirically demonstrated that transformational leadership implemented by teachers has a significant impact on improving students’ self-esteem, motor self-efficacy, and enjoyment of physical education. If school principals fail to provide transformational leadership, the negative consequences will cascade down to the students.

In addition to leadership theory, (Kern & Palmer’s, 2024) theory of occupational socialization also explains these findings. School principals in Wasit likely did not have positive experiences with physical education during their own school years (the pre-professional phase). The view that physical education is merely “playing around” has been deeply ingrained for a long time and is difficult to change, even with leadership training. (Bouie’s, 2025) study in the United States confirms a similar pattern: school principals in urban

charter school districts also have limited knowledge of physical education and view it as an inferior subject.

The difference is that in the U.S., there is already policy pressure from the federal government that indirectly encourages sacrificing physical education for core subjects, whereas in Iraq, the primary factor is a very strong academic-centric culture. The discrepancy between these findings and (Al-Shahri's, 2019) study in Saudi Arabia can be explained by contextual factors. Under Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia has allocated significant budgets for the development of physical education and school sports, whereas Iraq is still grappling with other development priorities. Additionally, Al-Shahri's sample included supervisors who may have held a more positive perspective because they did not directly experience the daily realities on the ground.

The second finding identified the three most significant barriers lack of cooperation for external activities/competitions (mean = 1.72), lack of budget for equipment and fields (mean = 1.76), and school principals frequently using physical education periods for other activities (mean = 3.29). These barriers reflect the principal's failure in the dimensions of individual consideration and conditional support within leadership. This finding is highly consistent with the report by the NSW Secondary Principals (McHenry et al., 2025) in Australia, which identified transportation costs, a lack of trained staff, and declining participation in representative sports as the main challenges. Although Australia is a developed country, the structural barriers faced are similar to those in Wasit.

Specific contextual factors in Wasit that exacerbate these barriers include a policy reducing physical education hours issued without consultation with school principals, leading it to be interpreted as a signal that physical education is unimportant; a very strong academic-centric culture because national exams determine students' futures; the lack of a minimum budget allocation for physical education from the Department of Education; and a weak oversight system, meaning school principals are never held accountable for the low level of support for physical education.

The third finding indicates that teachers at A-accredited schools have significantly more positive perceptions ( $M = 2.58$ ) than teachers at non-A schools ( $M = 2.15$ ), with  $t(113) = 2.87$ ,  $p = 0.005$ . These results can be explained through institutional theory. Schools with A accreditation generally meet higher management standards, including in terms of principal leadership and resource allocation. Principals at A-accredited schools tend to be more transformational, focusing not only on core subjects but also on students' holistic development through physical education. In contrast, non-A schools have systemic weaknesses in various areas, including support for physical education.

In practical terms, the Wasit Education Office needs to make improving accreditation a strategy to indirectly enhance support for physical education. Additionally, the national accreditation instrument should include specific indicators regarding physical education, such as minimum budget allocation, availability of facilities, and schedule protection. The fourth finding revealed a moderate negative correlation between teachers' years of service and their perception of principal support ( $r = -0.342$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The longer a teacher's tenure, the more negative their perception. This result is best explained by (Kern & Palmer's, 2024) theory of occupational socialization.

Senior teachers (with >15 years of service) experience three distinct phases of socialization compared to new teachers. In the pre-professional phase, they enjoy a “golden age” of physical education with 2-3 hours allocated per week and better facilities. Their expectations are high. In the professional phase, the education they received may not have taught them how to advocate for support. In the organizational phase, they have worked under many principals and if the majority do not support them, their negative perceptions crystallize and become difficult to change. Additionally, the accumulation of negative experiences leads to burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a decline in personal accomplishment), which is expressed in extremely negative perceptions of the principal.

New teachers ( $\leq 5$  years) have never experienced the golden age of physical education; they entered the profession after the one-hour-per-week policy was implemented. Their initial expectations are lower (a lower comparison point), so their perceptions tend to be more positive even though the objective reality is equally poor. They also possess natural “rookie optimism” and have not yet accumulated enough negative experiences. The managerial implication: senior teachers must not be overlooked. They require priority interventions such as reverse mentoring programs with the principal, as well as the formation of cross-generational communities of practice to share experiences and provide emotional support.

## Conclusion

Based on the results of the data analysis and the discussion outlined above, this study concludes the following. First, the reality of the role of junior high school principals in Wasit Province in facilitating physical education instruction following the policy to reduce class hours is classified as low (negative), with an overall mean of 2.33 on a 5-point scale. This score falls within the range of 1.81-2.60, which is categorized as “low.” In other words, principals generally do not fulfill their functions of material support (provision of equipment and facilities), moral support (motivation and recognition), or administrative support (scheduling, supervision, and protection of class hours) for physical education teachers.

This finding confirms that although, in theory, school principals play a strategic role in the success of all subjects, in practice, physical education is actually the victim of low priority and a lack of understanding on the part of school principals. Second, there are three primary obstacles faced by physical education teachers in Wasit. The first obstacle is the lack of cooperation between school principals and teachers regarding external activities such as sports competitions (mean = 1.72, “very low” category). The second obstacle is the lack of sufficient budget to provide and maintain sports equipment and fields (mean = 1.76, “very low” category). The third obstacle is that school principals often use physical education class time for other activities such as exams, extra tutoring, or community service (mean = 3.29 for the negative statement, meaning teachers strongly agree that this obstacle is significant).

These three barriers are systemic and interrelated, and cannot be addressed by individual teachers alone. Third, the results of the first hypothesis test (H1) indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between teachers’ perceptions at accredited A schools and non-accredited A schools ( $t(113) = 2.87, p = 0.005$ ). Teachers at A-accredited schools have more positive perceptions (mean = 2.58) compared to teachers at non-A schools (mean = 2.15),

although both still fall within the “low” category. This finding indicates that an accreditation system reflecting overall school management quality also impacts support for non-core subjects such as physical education.

Fourth, the results of the second hypothesis (H2) indicate that there is a significant negative correlation between teachers’ years of service and their perceptions of principal support ( $r = -0.342$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The longer a teacher’s years of service, the lower (more negative) their perception of principal support. Teachers with more than 15 years of service had the lowest perception (mean = 2.11), while teachers with less than 5 years of service had the highest perception among the three groups (mean = 2.61). These findings confirm that the accumulation of negative experiences over the years and the effects of burnout contribute to the negative perceptions of senior teachers.

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