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Management Guidelines for Cheerleading Sport at Guangdong University of Science and Technology, Dongguan, Guangdong Province, People's Republic of China

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Abstract

Background and Aims: Cheerleading is an increasingly visible university sport in China, supporting student participation, performance development, and institutional identity. Sustainable progress, however, depends on systematic management to ensure safety, training quality, and stable program operations. This study aimed to examine current practices and develop management guidelines for cheerleading at Guangdong University of Science and Technology, Dongguan City, Guangdong Province, People's Republic of China, structured around core management functions.

Methodology: A qualitative design with purposive sampling was applied. Key informants comprised current/former cheerleading association presidents/executives with at least four years of experience (n = 3), university administrators with at least four years of management experience (n = 3), coaches with at least five years of experience (n = 5), champion athletes with at least five years of experience (n = 5), and current athletes (n = 3), totaling 19 experts. Data were collected through POIC-guided interviews (planning, organizing, implementing, controlling). Instrument content validity was verified using the Index of Item–Objective Congruence (IOC) with five experts. Expert agreement on guideline items was summarized using the median (Mdn) and interquartile range (IQR), and the final model was confirmed through a focus group of ten experts.

Results: A POIC-based guideline set comprising 40 items was finalized: Planning (9 items), Organizing (10 items), Implementing (11 items), and Controlling (10 items). Planning emphasized policy and strategic planning, team development, accident prevention, training program planning, SWOT analysis, TOWS matrix application, and TGT program planning. Organizing addressed team structure, dance program design, pre-/post-testing, athlete development, venue preparation, welfare, safety systems, budget management, and TGT structure. Implementation focused on progressive instruction, demonstration of skill difficulty, emotional expression, continuous routines, team and individual performance, acrobatic elements (including throws and somersaults), and TGT implementation. Controlling included safety control, physical assessment

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(pre/post), assessment of dangerous movements, evaluation of implementation and platform-based presentation, progress monitoring, budget control, and TGT program evaluation.

Conclusion: The resulting framework provides practical, safety-oriented guidance to strengthen cheerleading operations and support sustainable development at the university level.

Keywords: Cheerleading; Management Guidelines; SWOT; Guangdong University

Introduction

Cheerleading has evolved from a sideline crowd-support activity into a competitive, year-round sport characterized by complex routines that combine dance, jumps, tumbling, throws, pyramids, and partner stunts. This evolution has increased both performance demands and safety risks, particularly in stunt and tumbling components that require precise coordination, progressive skill development, and competent supervision (LaBella et al., 2012; Xu et al., 2022). Contemporary cheerleading most closely resembles gymnastics in its biomechanical loading and injury patterns, while the added stunt/toss elements introduce distinct catastrophic-injury risks—making systematic safety governance and structured program oversight essential (LaBella et al., 2012; Xu et al., 2022). In China, cheerleading has expanded notably within university settings and organized competitions, supported by growing attention to curriculum development and rule systems that guide participation and standardization (Li et al., 2026; Zhang, 2015). Within educational contexts, cheerleading participation may also contribute to students' psychological and social development. Regular physical activity is consistently associated with mental-health benefits, including improved well-being and reductions in symptoms of anxiety and depression (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024). Evidence syntheses further indicate meaningful links between physical activity and positive psychological outcomes such as happiness and positive emotions, especially among children and adolescents when programs are structured and engaging (Li et al., 2022; Zhang & Chen, 2018). Because cheerleading is inherently team-based, it can additionally support teamwork-related learning and cooperative skill development when instructional systems are intentionally designed (Wen, 2019).

Despite its growth and potential benefits, cheerleading programs in higher education frequently face operational constraints, including fragmented organizational structures, inconsistent coaching development, uneven resource allocation, and variable safety procedures. Addressing these constraints requires a coherent management approach that integrates both organizational administration and instructional delivery. Sport management scholarship emphasizes that sustainable program quality depends on aligned functions such as planning (setting goals and policies), organizing (structuring roles and resources), leading/implementing (delivering instruction and directing performance), and controlling/evaluating (monitoring safety,

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outcomes, and continuous improvement) (Chelladurai, 2014; Hoye et al., 2015). Applying these management functions to cheerleading is especially critical because performance excellence and injury prevention depend on reliable systems for progression standards, facility readiness, role clarity, monitoring, and feedback loops (LaBella et al., 2012; Xu et al., 2022).

At Guangdong University of Science and Technology (Dongguan City, Guangdong Province, China), stakeholders have similarly reported practical challenges consistent with these broader concerns, particularly regarding coordination across management principles, teaching practices, facility and equipment readiness, and stakeholder involvement. Accordingly, this study aimed to examine the management problems and to develop practical management guidelines for cheerleading at Guangdong University of Science and Technology to strengthen safety, effectiveness, and sustainable program development.

Objectives

1. To examine and describe the current cheerleading management approach at Guangdong University of Science and Technology, Dongguan City, Guangdong Province, People's Republic of China.

2. To develop and propose an evidence-informed management model/guidelines for cheerleading at Guangdong University of Science and Technology, Dongguan City, Guangdong Province, People's Republic of China.

Literature Review

Cheerleading is a high-skill, high-coordination sport that combines dance, tumbling, acrobatics, throws, and partner stunts. Because performance quality and athlete safety depend on precision, teamwork, and structured preparation, cheerleading programs benefit from applying management-function concepts alongside sport-science principles and rigorous guideline-development methods.

1. Theory of Management Function concepts for cheerleading (POIC)

A practical way to systematize cheerleading operations is through the management functions of Planning, Organizing, Implementing, and Controlling (POIC), treated as a continuous cycle rather than isolated tasks. Classical management theory provides the foundation for functional approaches to management; Fayol's work is widely cited as an origin point for function-based management models (Fayol, 1949). Building on classical foundations, modern interpretations emphasize that management functions remain relevant but should be applied flexibly to match contemporary organizational environments (McNamara, 2009). In cheerleading, Planning should define program direction and standards (e.g., policies, seasonal goals, safety protocols, accident

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prevention, training schedules, and resource requirements). Because cheerleading includes high-risk stunt and tumbling components, planning must explicitly incorporate risk management, including progression rules, spotting standards, emergency procedures, and facility readiness. These priorities align with injury-prevention recommendations for cheerleading, which emphasize structured supervision, safe environments, and prevention-oriented policies (LaBella et al., 2012). Organizing structures roles (e.g., coaches, captains, safety officers), team positions, facilities, equipment, and budgets so resources match performance and safety demands (Fayol, 1949). Implementing focuses on execution through progressive instruction, routine construction, rehearsal methods, and team-process management (e.g., communication and cohesion). Controlling ensures standards are met using monitoring and evaluation mechanisms such as safety checks, injury tracking, attendance monitoring, progression criteria, performance assessment, hazard identification, and budget oversight (McNamara, 2009). In sport settings, controlling is best conceptualized as developmental feedback is used to refine training systems and strengthen athlete protection while sustaining performance outcomes.

2. Physical fitness and muscle strength for cheerleading

Cheerleading performance is underpinned by core stability, muscular strength, power, balance, mobility, and anaerobic capacity. Core strength is central because it stabilizes the trunk during tumbling, lifts, catches, and landing mechanics; it also supports posture, alignment, and efficient force transfer in dynamic athletic tasks (Hibbs et al., 2008). Conditioning should also develop lower-body power (e.g., jumps and takeoffs), upper-body and shoulder strength (particularly for bases and back spots), and grip strength for secure holds during stunts. From an injury-prevention perspective, structured conditioning and progressive preparation are essential because injury severity is associated with stunt exposure and unsafe practice conditions, reinforcing the need for systematic preparation and supervision (LaBella et al., 2012). Evidence from applied training studies indicates that targeted trunk-focused programs can improve core stability outcomes, supporting the rationale for structured conditioning within cheerleading programs (Stanton et al., 2004). Importantly, such training should be integrated with sport-specific technique instruction and progression standards rather than treated as a standalone solution.

3. Model Building Methods and POLC Theory

When developing usable management guidelines in complex, practice-driven domains such as cheerleading, the Delphi technique is an appropriate consensus-building method. Delphi is a structured process that gathers expert judgement over multiple rounds while reducing social pressure through anonymity, controlled feedback, and iterative refinement (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963; Hsu & Sandford, 2007). Typically, guideline items are drafted from literature and field problems, then refined through sequential rounds until agreement stabilizes. Consensus is

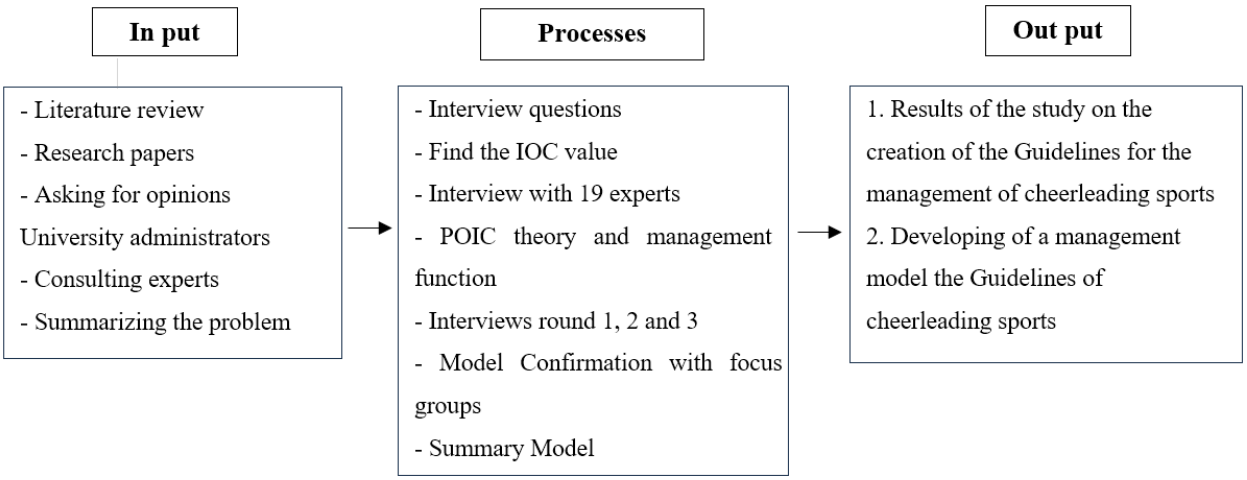
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commonly summarized using the median (Mdn) to represent central agreement and the interquartile range (IQR) to represent dispersion; smaller IQR values indicate stronger consensus stability (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). Delphi strengthens publication quality by providing transparent evidence of expert validation and producing guidelines that are both theoretically grounded and operationally feasible (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this research on management guidelines for cheerleading sport at Guangdong University of Science and Technology, Dongguan City, Guangdong Province, People's Republic of China, was developed based on input from 19 experts and guided by the management functions theory of Bridges and Roquerre (2004), encompassing planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling, as reflected in the following practices.



Figures 1 Conceptual framework

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design to examine the current management of cheerleading and to develop management guidelines for cheerleading at Guangdong University of Science and Technology, Dongguan City, Guangdong Province, People's Republic of China. The research procedures were guided by the management functions framework of Bridges and Roquemore (2004), structured around four functions: Planning, Organizing, Implementing, and Controlling (POIC).

Population and Sample

The population comprised individuals with substantial experience in cheerleading management and university-level sport operations, including: (1) current or former cheerleading

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association presidents/executives with at least 4 years of experience, (2) institutional administrators responsible for educational/sport management with at least 4 years of management experience, (3) cheerleading coaches/instructors with at least 5 years of coaching/teaching experience, (4) cheerleading champion athletes with at least 5 years of experience, and (5) current cheerleading athletes. A purposive sampling strategy was used to ensure that participants had direct expertise relevant to guideline development. The final sample included 19 experts, distributed across five groups: 3 association presidents/executives, 3 institutional administrators, 5 coaches/instructors, 5 champion athletes, and 3 current athletes.

Experts for Instrument Validation

Before data collection, the research instruments were reviewed for content relevance and alignment with the study objectives using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) procedure. For publication-level clarity and methodological correctness, the IOC panel consisted of five experts representing complementary expertise areas: (1) cheerleading management, (2) cheerleading coaching, (3) champion athlete representation, (4) statistics, and (5) language/writing. The IOC review was used to refine item wording, ensure conceptual alignment with POIC, and strengthen the validity of the interview and evaluation content.

Trustworthiness and Research Rigor

To strengthen qualitative trustworthiness, the study applied the following procedures: 1) Credibility: Triangulation of expert roles (administrators, coaches, champions, and athletes) ensured that guideline content reflected multiple stakeholder perspectives. Iterative review across rounds functioned as expert checking of accuracy and feasibility. 2) Dependability: A structured protocol (Round 1 interviews ⟶ Round 2 ratings ⟶ Round 3 revision when needed ⟶ focus group confirmation) was consistently applied. An audit trail was maintained through the item-tracking log and versioned guideline drafts. 3) Confirmability: Decisions to retain, revise, or remove items were grounded in documented expert feedback and consensus statistics (Mdn/IQR), reducing researcher bias in item selection. 4) Transferability: Participant selection criteria (years of experience and role relevance) and contextual description of the university setting were documented to allow readers to judge applicability to other institutions.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in sequential stages consistent with an expert-consensus development approach. **1)** Round 1 (Structured interviews): The study first conducted structured interviews with the 19 experts using POIC as the organizing framework to elicit real-world practices, issues, and recommended management actions for cheerleading operations. **2)** Round 2 (Rating/evaluation): Findings from Round 1 were converted into guideline statements and evaluated by the experts using a 5-point rating scale to assess appropriateness and practical

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suitability. **3)** Round 3 (Revision, if necessary): A third round was conducted only when Round 2 feedback indicated that clarification, modification, or unresolved issues remained. If experts indicated no further comments in Round 2, Round 3 was not required. **4)** Focus group confirmation: A focus group process was then used to confirm the coherence, feasibility, and contextual fit of the proposed guideline/model before finalizing the output.

Data Analysis

Data analysis combined qualitative and descriptive statistical techniques.

Qualitative analysis: Interview data from the 19 experts and the focus group discussion were analyzed using content analysis to identify themes and extract guideline components aligned with POIC functions.

Consensus statistics: For Round 2 (and Round 3 where applicable), expert ratings were summarized using the median (Mdn) to represent central tendency and interquartile range (IQR) to represent the level of consensus. These indicators supported decisions about retaining, revising, or confirming guideline statements.

Results

This study aimed to develop and confirm management guidelines for cheerleading at Guangdong University of Science and Technology, Dongguan City, Guangdong Province, People's Republic of China. The results are presented in five parts: Part 1: Expert Panel Characteristics, Part 2: Round 1 Expert Interviews and Screening Criteria, Part 3: Round 2 Suitability Assessment, Part 4: Focus Group Confirmation, and Part 5: Finalized Management Guidelines.

Part 1: Expert Panel Characteristics

A total of 19 experts were purposively selected to ensure direct experience relevant to cheerleading management and programme operations. The panel included 3 current/former cheerleading association presidents/executives (≥4 years' experience), 3 university administrators (≥4 years' experience), 5 cheerleading coaches/instructors (≥5 years' experience), 5 cheerleading champions (≥5 years' experience), and 3 current athletes. This composition ensured balanced input across strategic leadership, operational coordination, technical training, and athlete performance/safety.

Part 2: Round 1 Expert Interviews and Screening Criteria

Round 1 consisted of structured expert interviews organised using the POIC management functions (Planning, Organizing, Implementing, and Controlling). The interview findings were transformed into draft guideline items and assessed using consensus criteria applied throughout Chapter 4: median (Mdn) ≥ 3.50 and interquartile range (IQR) ≤ 1.50. Round 1 screening produced a draft set of guideline components across POIC domains as follows: 1) Planning: 9 items met the

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criteria. 2) Organizing: 10 items met the criteria. 3) Implementing: 11 items met the criteria. 4) Controlling: 10 items met the criteria. These results established the initial POIC structure and item pool for expert confirmation in Round 2.

Part 3: Round 2 Suitability Assessment

In Round 2, the draft guideline items derived from Round 1 were presented back to the same expert panel for suitability assessment using a 5-point rating scale. Items were retained based on the same consensus thresholds (Mdn ≥ 3.50; IQR ≤ 1.50). The analysis confirmed the guideline structure and retained item counts in each domain, resulting in **Planning: 9 items, Organizing: 10 items, Implementing: 11 items, and Controlling: 10 items.** The Round 2 results indicated stable agreement on the content and structure of the guideline set, with no substantive restructuring required.

Part 4: Focus Group Confirmation

Following Round 2, a focus group of 10 experts was convened to confirm the consistency, clarity, feasibility, and contextual fit of the proposed POIC-based management guidelines for university cheerleading. The focus group affirmed that the POIC framework was coherent and that the guideline components were practically applicable to university operations, particularly in relation to programme planning, organisational structure, implementation processes, and safety/performance control mechanisms.

Part 5: Finalized Management Guidelines

After Round 2 confirmation and focus group validation, the management guidelines were finalised as a 40-item POIC model, structured as: **Planning (9 items):** Core directions for policy and strategic planning, team development, training programme planning, and preventive planning (including safety and accident prevention), supported by structured situational analysis where applicable. **Organizing (10 items):** Team structure and roles, programme and curriculum organisation, assessment systems (pre/post), facility and venue readiness, welfare, safety systems, and budget/resource management. **Implementing (11 items):** Execution processes for training and performance preparation, progressive instruction (basic to advanced), routine practice, technical elements (including acrobatics/throws where appropriate), and operational delivery mechanisms. **Controlling (10 items):** Safety control and risk monitoring, evaluation of training/performance outcomes, progress tracking, hazard management, and budget/programme evaluation for continuous improvement. (Picture 2)

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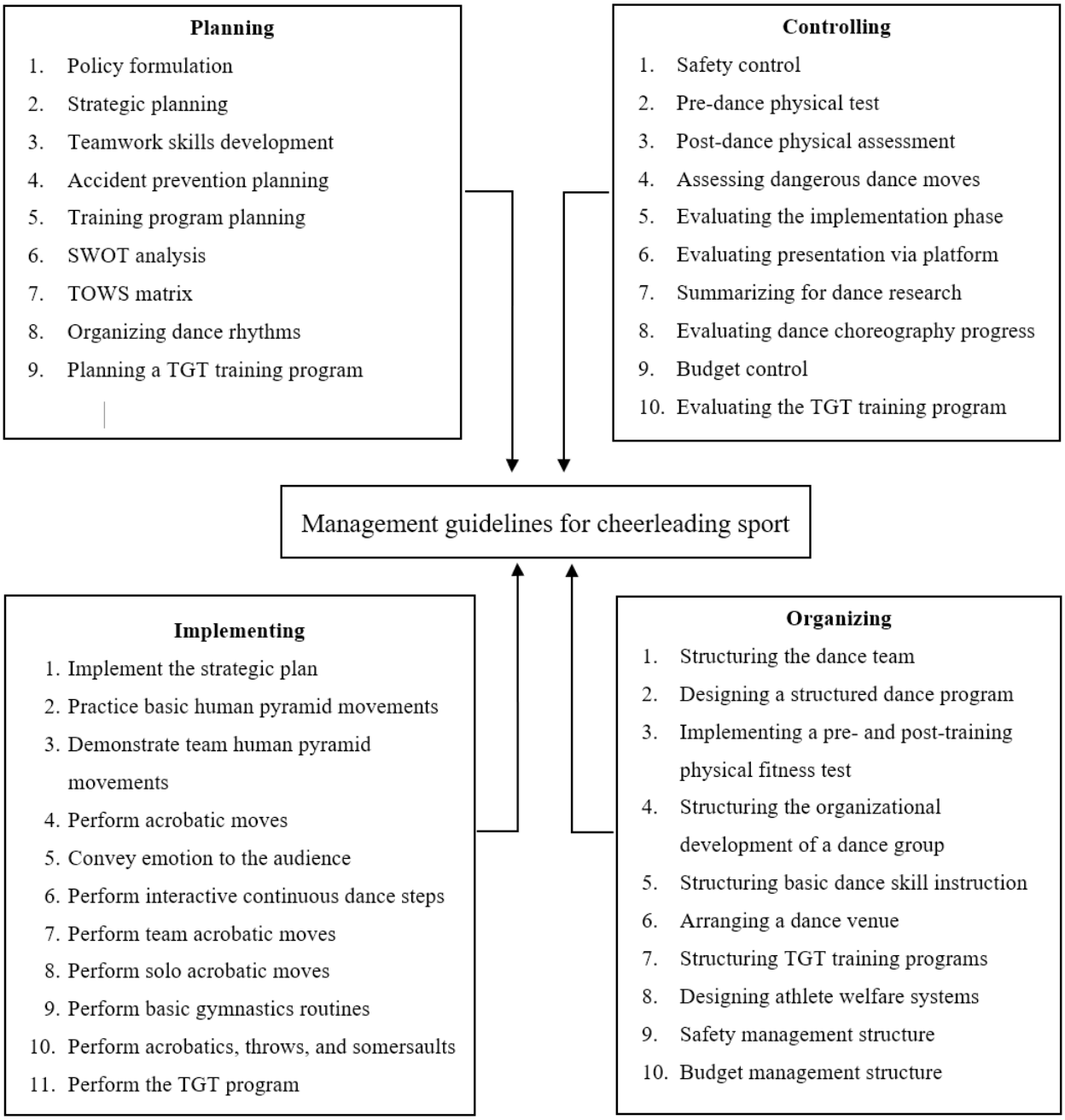


Figure 2 Management guidelines for cheerleading sport at Guangdong University

Discussion

1. Planning

The findings indicate that planning is the foundational management function for university cheerleading because it establishes program direction, performance standards, and safety boundaries. Within a management-functions framework, planning involves defining policies, goals,

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strategies, and procedures that guide subsequent organizational action and resource allocation (Bridges & Roquemore, 2004). For cheerleading, planning must explicitly incorporate risk-prevention priorities due to the sport's technical complexity and the potential severity of stunt- and tumbling-related injuries. International safety guidance emphasizes the importance of appropriate supervision, safe training conditions, and prevention-oriented policies in reducing injury risk (LaBella et al., 2012). A notable strength of the planning results is the inclusion of strategic tools such as SWOT and the TOWS matrix, which can help align internal capacity (e.g., coach expertise, facility readiness, athlete development pipeline, budget adequacy) with external demands (e.g., competition requirements, stakeholder expectations, institutional priorities). Such strategic alignment is consistent with sport-organization perspectives that emphasize coherent planning as a prerequisite for sustainable program delivery and quality assurance (Chelladurai, 2014). Finally, planning elements linked to team-game tournament (TGT) structures may be interpreted as mechanisms to support motivation and engagement. However, TGT should complement—not replace—technical preparation and staged progression standards required for high-risk skills (Luo et al., 2020).

2. Organizing

The organizing outcomes emphasize that cheerleading performance and safety depend on systematic structure—clear roles, coordinated team positions, resource readiness, and formal welfare/safety systems. Organizing translates plans into a workable system of responsibilities, communication lines, and resource deployment (Bridges & Roquemore, 2004). In cheerleading, organizing is particularly consequential because many tasks are interdependent; role clarity (e.g., coaches, captains, spotters, athlete roles) and controlled practice environments are essential for consistent execution and safety. Two organizing dimensions are especially defensible. First, facility and venue readiness (e.g., space zoning, equipment availability, and preparation of appropriate practice surfaces) supports both performance consistency and injury prevention. Second, the inclusion of athlete welfare and safety structures operationalizes duty-of-care by formalizing prevention procedures and response processes. These features align with cheerleading injury-prevention guidance emphasizing safe conditions, adequate supervision, and appropriate risk controls (LaBella et al., 2012). The addition of pre- and post-testing systems is also appropriate when used developmentally: fitness and readiness data should inform individualized progression, training modification, and risk management rather than functioning as administrative paperwork (Chelladurai, 2014).

3. Implementing

Implementation results center on progressive instruction, demonstration of skill difficulty, routine rehearsal, expressive performance quality, and the execution of complex elements such

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as acrobatics, throws, and somersaults. From a management-functions perspective, implementation is the stage where plans are translated into action through coaching processes, session design, coordination, and leadership behaviors (Bridges & Roquemore, 2004). In cheerleading, implementation quality is inseparable from safety because correct technique, staged progression, and disciplined rehearsal procedures reduce hazardous exposure while developing performance capability. The emphasis on basic-to-advanced progression is a key strength because it reflects a learning pathway that can reduce error under fatigue and performance pressure. Implementation should therefore include structured repetition, clear stop-rules when unsafe execution is observed, and coaching feedback loops that stabilize technique before advancing difficulty. Where TGT is used during implementation, it can strengthen engagement and accountability through structured group processes (Luo et al., 2020), but it should be integrated carefully so that it supports—rather than dilutes—technical mastery and safety discipline.

4. Controlling

The controlling results—safety control, pre/post physical assessment, assessment of dangerous movements, evaluation of implementation, platform/presentation evaluation, progress monitoring, and budget control—are consistent with the view that controlling functions as a continuous feedback mechanism. In management theory, controlling monitors outcomes against standards and supports corrective action (Bridges & Roquemore, 2004). In cheerleading, this function is essential because unsafe conditions can emerge gradually (e.g., fatigue-related technique breakdown, role confusion, insufficient readiness, facility issues) and must be detected early. The inclusion of danger assessment for difficult movements is particularly important because it operationalizes risk control at the skill level. Likewise, integrating pre/post assessments into control is appropriate when results feed back into training decisions (e.g., load modification, technique remediation, and targeted conditioning). Budget control is also a valid control element because safety and continuity depend on stable resources—especially for equipment, facility readiness, and staff development (Chelladurai, 2014). Overall, the POIC structure supported by expert consensus provides a coherent and practical framework for strengthening cheerleading program quality and safety within a university context.

Recommendation

1. The program should strengthen the development of varied cheerleading dance styles by expanding technical sequences, rhythmic patterns, and performance creativity while maintaining safety standards and progressive skill development.

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2. Model transfer and comparative validation: Future studies should test the applicability of the cheerleading-based development model across other sports and compare outcomes such as participation, motivation, skill progression, and safety indicators.

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