

Taekwondo in Malaysia: Corporate Governance Catastrophes and Legal Breaches

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Abstract

Corporate governance structures are very important in the management of sports organisations, which must be very strong to sustain the integrity of the respective organisations. Nevertheless, Taekwondo in Malaysia has continued to face a series of leadership wrangles, financial mismanagement, as well as lack of unity. The paper will discuss the corporate governance failures in corporate Taekwondo in Malaysia based on accountability, transparency, disregard for the stakeholders, and oversight. Based on document analysis, media reports, and interviews with stakeholders, the paper explains how failures in governance have resulted in competing associations seeking recognition, court battles, rehabilitation of the sport, and development channels of athletes. This paper highlights the need to carry out rigorous governance reforms to rebuild the trust the public has in Taekwondo and to make sure that Taekwondo is managed properly in Malaysia.

Keywords: Taekwondo Governance, Legal Compliance, Logo and Emblem Infringement

1. Introduction

Sport is not just a domain of a physical competition, but also an essential one of organisational and governing sites, which requires transparency, accountability, and good exemplary leadership. Globally, the use of corporate governance principles in sports administration is becoming common, to guarantee the integrity of organisations, safeguard athletes, and maintain the trust of the masses. But the situation in Malaysian Taekwondo has become a result study of how disorganised governance can even cause a stable, popular sport to collapse. Today, sport governance has been raised on the agenda of scholarly and institutional concerns, and different instruments have been designed to evaluate integrity, transparency, and accountability in sport federations (Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2013; Geeraert, 2018).

In the last 20 years, the Taekwondo world in Malaysia has been marred with leadership wrangles, claims of mismanagement, parallel bodies demanding recognition, and cases which have ended up in courts, opening the veneration to legal wrangles as well. Such governance malpractices have not only separated athletes and coaches but also affected the competitiveness of the country in global and regional apices. In other instances, actors have found themselves stranded among warring organisations, not being able to determine which authority controls the sport, putting at risk the entry of events and funding. Researchers have highlighted that governance models play a vital role in upholding transparency, accountability, and competitive ascendancy in international sports organisations (Forster, 2006; Jensen & Turner, 2019; Houlihan & Green, 2007).

This paper examines the collapse of corporate governance in Taekwondo in Malaysia. It looks at the causes of these breakdowns of governance, how stakeholders are affected, and what loopholes in the system have

enabled such failures to thrive. This paper attempts to draw a critical understanding of how to make governance like a booster or a saboteur of the sports development process and will be done by examining historical documents, regulations, media, and interviews of major stakeholders within the Malaysian sports ecosystem. Finally, the paper recommends increased governance improvements to secure the future of Taekwondo in Malaysia. The present study is grounded in two key theoretical frameworks: Corporate Governance Theory and Regulatory Compliance Theory. The corporate Governance Theory offers a window through which the transparency, accountability, stakeholders' involvement, and ethical leadership comprising the systems of sports bodies can be assessed (Forster, 2006; Parent & Hoye, 2018). In the meantime, Regulatory Compliance Theory dwells on organisations adaptation to legal frameworks and statutes of governing bodies and emphasizes the dangers of non-compliance, both nationally and internationally (Anderson, 2010; Duval & Van Rompuy, 2016). A combination of these theories can provide a holistic way of evaluating governance failures, legal violations, and organizational culture within taekwondo in Malaysia and its overall relationship to sport governance and athlete development.

2. Problem Statement

Despite being an Olympic sport, with global control under World Taekwondo (WT) standards and Kukkiwon standards, Taekwondo in Malaysia has achieved little in the last 20 years to produce Olympic-level athletes and sustainable athlete development practices. Rather, there are signs of deep-rooted failures of governance involving authoritarian leadership, factions, bans, and firing of dissidents, and monopolization of membership. The most outstanding one is the move by the Malaysian Sports Council (MSN) to remove Taekwondo in Malaysia as one of its official sports after failing to achieve the desired results and constant internal wrangles, such as monopoly in the sport, barring skilled performers of other Taekwondo associations against participation at national events, including the Malaysia Games (Sukma) (Borneo Post, 2022). Such acts are against the inclusivity and development of the players' principle and can cause considerable damage to sport recognition and international competitiveness.

Instead, evidence suggests entrenched governance failures characterized by:

- a. authoritarian leadership styles,
- b. suspension and termination of dissenting members,
- c. unauthorized use of WT logos,
- d. issuance of locally produced, unrecognized grading certificates,
- e. and the manipulation of Malaysia's educational ecosystem by circulating certificates lacking international endorsement.

These acts contravene WT regulations, Kukkiwon policies, and possibly corporate and intellectual property legislation of Malaysia. The repercussions cost the integrity of Malaysia within the Taekwondo international circle, reduce the avenues of athletes, and erode the trust of the people towards the sports administration.

3. Objectives

- To examine how corporate governance failures have hindered the development of Olympic-level Taekwondo athletes in Malaysia over the past 20 years.
- To analyse the organisational culture fostering authoritarian control and fear within Taekwondo in Malaysia.

- To identify breaches of WT statutes and Kukkiwon guidelines by the Malaysian organisation regarding logos, emblems, grading, and certifications.
- To evaluate the legality of financial practices, including the collection of grading levies, under Malaysian law.
- To compare governance practices of the Malaysian organisation against WT and Kukkiwon standards.
- To propose governance reforms for Taekwondo in Malaysia.

4. Theoretical Framework

In this study, there are two main theories being used: Corporate Governance Theory and Regulatory Compliance Theory, to study the failure of governance and illegalities in Taekwondo in Malaysia. The focus of the Corporate Governance Theory is on the aspect of transparency, accountability, stakeholder involvement, and ethical governance within organisational practices (Forster, 2006; Parent & Hoyer, 2018). This theoretical approach is essential when analysing TM concerns related to autocratic management, monopolising the decision-making process, voicelessness of the stakeholders, and public-trust-jeopardizing governance behaviors. This paper aims to analyse the importance of the structure of governance in advancing or moving towards sustainable sport development ethics using Corporate Governance Theory. Regulatory Compliance Theory concentrates on laws and regulations that organisations should follow to ensure their legitimacy to avoid legal charges (Anderson, 2010; Duval & Van Rompuy, 2016). The theory is quite applicable to study the compliance of the practices followed by TM about official regulations and laws, such as the World Taekwondo (WT) Statutes (2025), Kukkiwon guidelines, the Malaysian Trademarks Act 2019, the Sports Development Act 1997, and the Consumer Protection Act 1999. It allows learning more about the legal consequences of the unlawful issuance of certifications, inappropriate use of logos, and possible financial crimes. Combine these theoretical approaches, and we have a comprehensive picture of the structure and governance breakdowns in the not-so-structured Malaysian Taekwondo as well as the legal hazards underlying this environment. It also locates this research in the context of more general debates on the topics of governance, ethics, and compliance with law in the field of international sport administration.

5. Methodology

The approach used in the present study is a qualitative research study to address corporate governance failures and law violations in Taekwondo in Malaysia. This study utilised document analysis to obtain data such as World Taekwondo (WT) statutes, Kukkiwon regulations, and Malaysian laws (e.g., Trademarks Act 2019, Sports Development Act 1997, Consumer Protection Act 1999), as well as relevant court documents. The media coverage, press releases, and statements published by sports institutions were analyzed to draw a background and support for the problem of governance. Not only did key stakeholders involved in Malaysian Taekwondo such as athletes, coaches, sports administrators and legal experts complete semi-structured interviews to provide firsthand accounts of the governance practice, organizational culture and legal compliance of Taekwondo in Malaysia but they also participated in a third round of research which involved the use of the survey research method. The thematic analysis was carried out to determine pattern constancies, legal implications, and governance challenges. This qualitative method allows maximum knowledge of complicated organisational processes and regulatory issues that cannot be appropriately described using a quantitative approach.

6. Gaps in Athlete Development and WT Compliance

Taekwondo in Malaysia has failed to sustain success in creating Taekwondo talent that can compete at the Olympic Games and win medals in the past 20 or more years despite Taekwondo being a part of the Olympics since the Sydney 2000 Games (World Taekwondo Statutes, 2019, Art. 2.3(a)-(b); World Taekwondo Statutes, 2025, Art. 2.3(a)-(b), Art. 16.2). This is seemingly in contradiction with goals mentioned in the World Taekwondo (WT) Statutes. Particularly, 2025 WT Statutes Article 2.3(a) stipulates that WT and its Member National Associations (MNAs) shall “promote, expand and enhance the practice of Taekwondo and develop a healthy society.” Moreover, Article 2.3(b) adds to the obligations of MNAs to focus on supporting the practice of Taekwondo on youth and elite levels and develop world-class athletes to participate in the Olympic Games and other international competitions (World Taekwondo Statutes, 2025, Art. 2.3(a)-(b)).

There is evidence in the form of testimonies by the national sports federations, academic studies, and records of performance by athletes that point to poor structures in the development of juniors in Malaysia and a lack of any system of identifying talent. Such gaps have the potential of compromising the capacity of Malaysia to fulfil Article 16.2 of the WT Statutes (2025) which stipulates the necessity of establishing and maintaining proper administrative and technical structures to be able to promote and develop Taekwondo by MNAs (World Taekwondo Statutes, 2025, Art. 16.2). These gaps can erode the ability of Malaysia to compete in the International arena as per the standards that have been set out by the World Taekwondo as shall be witnessed in the strategic vision of “Taekwondo for All” as enshrined in the various Articles under the WT Statutes specifically under Article 2.1 and 2.3 (World Taekwondo Statutes, 2025, Art. 2.1, Art. 2.3). The failure of Malaysia to produce Olympic standard Taekwondo players in the last twenty years is a symptom of structural issues. Malaysian Sports Council (MSN) openly removed Taekwondo Malaysia (TM) as one of its core sports based on its internal power wrangles, narrowness of inclusivity, and monopoly under the guise of which members of other associations are not allowed to compete in major events in the country like Malaysia Games (Sukma). Documented by the Borneo Post (2022), this ruling demonstrates the operational impact of government failures to provide athlete pathways, limiting the chances of elite participation and overall compromising Malaysia's capacity to adhere to the World Taekwondo tenet to promote inclusive athlete development (World Taekwondo Statutes, 2025, Art. 2.3(b)).

Table 1: Absence of Athlete Development Pathways

Document	Clause / Article	Description
WT Statutes (2025)	Art. 2.3(b)	WT’s mission includes youth development and elite athlete pathways.
WT Statutes (2025)	Art. 2.1.6	Emphasises the principle of “Taekwondo for All,” promoting inclusivity and structured development.
WT Asia Statutes (2019)	Art. 2.2. B	Regional bodies must promote youth development, fair play, and educational programs.
Kukkiwon Articles	Art. 4.2(2)	Requires systematic training and development of instructors and examiners to uphold global standards.

Document	Clause / Article	Description
Sports Development Act 1997 (Act 576)	Sec. 3	Mandates national guidelines for sports development; emphasizes athlete pathways and compliance with international rules.

7. Certification Irregularities and Legal Implications in Malaysian Taekwondo

The literature base and regulatory regimes have highlighted the importance of coherent athlete development policies towards achieving success in a nationwide sports program. According to the World Taekwondo (WT) Statutes (2025), it is strongly emphasised that the Member National Associations (MNAs) are obliged to develop and sustain powerful systems of grassroots and elite growth, based on global standards (World Taekwondo Statutes, 2025, Art. 2.3; Art. 16.2). According to the reports and analyses, organisational priorities, in the Malaysian case, might have been oriented more to administrative integration but not on the design of coaching curricula aligned with WT needs or the international standards devised by Kukkiwon on how to qualify as an instructor and examiner (Kukkiwon Regulations on Dan/Poom Promotion Tests., 2018; Kim et al., 2020). This can be among the factors that have led to difficulties in developing the national athletes to be internationally competitive.

One of the major questions of regulation involves a national Taekwondo organization putting forth their own Dan or Poom level certificates, not officially approved by either World Taekwondo (WT) or Kukkiwon or utilising WT logos and emblems on the various activities in grading, instructor seminars, examiner certifications, and promotional activities. According to the WT Statutes 2025, (Art. 16.2), Member National Associations (MNAs) must be bound by the administrative and technical regulations of WT, including the governance to operate within known international certification pathways. An additional layer of ensuring intellectual property protection is defined in WT Statutes {2025, Art. 25}, according to which all WT logos, emblems, and marks remain exclusive to WT and their use without prior permission is prohibited (World Taekwondo, 2025, Art. 25).

In a similar way, the Articles of the Kukkiwon (Art. 4, subparagraph 2) are specific in authorizing Kukkiwon to organize Taekwondo Dan and Poom promotion tests and to lead international certification programs. This makes it clear that Kukkiwon is the only organization authorized to release Dan or Poom certificates that are valid internationally. Inter-administration in Taekwondo is considered a breach of international norms prohibiting the use of national organisations by not authorising the Kukkiwon to award such certificates internationally, as enforced further by Hanmadang Contest Regulations (2018, Art. 11.1.2), which mandates that all participants and officials can carry only valid Kukkiwon certifications.

From a legal standpoint, such actions may constitute multiple offences:

- a) **Breach of MNA Agreement:** Under WT Statutes, Article 3.1, the Statutes are binding and universal, and no private arrangement or practice may override these provisions (*World Taekwondo Statutes*, 2025, Art. 3.1). An MNA unilaterally issuing certificates or using protected WT symbols breaches its agreement with WT and violates its obligations under the Kukkiwon World Agreement (March 11, 2022 - Ref. No. COP-22/042).
- b) **Trademark Infringement:** World Taekwondo (WT) has already registered trademark protection in Malaysia with Application No. TM2024013981, including its name and its distinctive coloured logo, is registered in various classes, such as martial arts uniforms and protective gear, organisation of

martial arts events, publication, and instruction in martial arts (WT Trademark TM2024013981, MyIPO, 2025). At the time of writing, the application status is “Provisional Refusal (Objected)” where MyIPO has posted objections which WT needs to overcome to be granted the full registration. However, according to the trademark law of Malaysia, Section 56(1)(b), infringement of a registered trademark or a famous mark yet to be fully registered is said to be infringement of a trademark when used without the consent of the trademark owner. Possible consequences of this offence are fines amounting to RM1 million or a five-year jail sentence, or both (Malaysian Trademarks Act 2019 (Act 815), s. 56(1)(b)). Consequently, the selling of the locally issued copy of WT grading certificates, instructor licenses and advert materials incorporating the WT logos without the formal approval of WT can, in such cases where these elements are reasonably likely to misrepresent facts to the general population in the belief that they have been produced by WT can result in the national association facing the legal challenge on grounds of intellectual property laws in Malaysia.

- c) **Consumer Protection Violations:** The issuance of certificates that are purported to legitimately have international recognition can be characterised as false or misleading representations under Section 10 of Consumer Protection Act 1999 (Act 599) of Malaysia. The section disapproves of the statements that suggest some official sponsorship, endorsement, or qualities of the goods or services that they lack. This behaviour subjects the organisation to possible civil suits for damages and in some instances, criminal offences against deceptive trade practices (Malaysia Consumer Protection Act 1999, s. 10).
- d) **Breach of Sports Development Act 1997 (Act 576):** The Sports Commissioner of Malaysia may under Section 17(1)(a) and (b) of the Sports Development Act 1997 investigate and cancel the registration of any sports body that is being operated under national sports policy, or which acts or conducts itself in a manner that is not in keeping with its legal objectives, misrepresents itself as regards to its affiliations or does not practice proper governance. Where a national Taekwondo body involves issuance of certificates falsely suggesting international recognition or employing the governance in a manner involving an element inconsistent with the democratic process, such actions could amount to the regulation that should be meted out based on this section (Malaysia Sports Development Act 1997, s. 17(1)).

7.1 Taekwondo in Malaysia’s Alleged Breach of WT Trademark Rules

An in-depth analysis of Taekwondo in Malaysia recent practices shows that there is a possibility of infringing Article 23 WTF Rules and Regulations (Feb 3, 2009). In this provision it is clearly provided that all attributes of the WT emblem, flag, motto and other identifications are the exclusive right of WT and that their use whether in the form of any commercial or promotional decisions such must be prior manned and based on the fee charged by WT. In this regard, it is vital to mention that all the state-level championships where the WT logos were displayed, as well as the letters of permissions or no-objections granted by Taekwondo in Malaysia to affiliate states without the written approval of WT or the payment of the designated fees, are violative of Article 23, as well as the WTF Trademark Bylaws. In addition, none of these rules and regulations allocated to WT offices or officials can be over-ruled by any letter issued by an official, and anyone who writes such a letter without following the law is subject to Article 5.3 under the Trademark Bylaws of WTF. The article gives WT the authority to sanction individuals or organizations up to USD 10,000 per offence whilst it also gives the organization the right to take additional legal measures against the perpetrators including claiming damages or injunctive relief.

8. Authoritarian Governance in Malaysian Taekwondo

Report and analysis with reference to Malaysian Taekwondo governance have raised the issues of a highly centralised form of leadership where case uses suspension or withdrawal and termination of voting members has allegedly been created to define and maintain a concentrated power control as well as an influence of dynamics. In the case that such practices are proven beyond a reasonable doubt, considerable concerns may arise regarding the World Taekwondo Asia Statutes, especially Article 16, which acknowledges the rights and the obligations of Member National Associations (MNAs) and requires them to adhere to the principles of democracy and Article 17, which endorses the notion of equal protection and non-discrimination applicable to all members (WT Asia, WT Asia Statutes, 2019, Art. 16-17).

Moreover, it has been alleged that certain members might have been repressed or discouraged from raising the voice of dissent by being threatened to be suspended or other disciplinary measures, which might lead to the culture of fear instead of democratic practices within the organisation. There are situations where parallel organisations or administrative structures have been created as a way of targeting people or groups that are seen as disobedient voices thereby calling into question the actions about the democratic governance requirement stipulated in Art. 16.3 of the WT Statutes (2025) requires that MNAs be governed democratically and allow the equal involvement of all stakeholders (World Taekwondo Statutes, 2025, Art. 16.3).

The related national laws including Section 17(1)(b) of sports development act 1997 of Malaysia that provides the Sports Commissioner with the powers to investigate and initiate legal steps against sports bodies that act in a manner that is not democratic or act in a way that undermines good governance as a whole (Malaysia, Section 17(1)(b) of sports development act 1997) may also interact with such dynamics of governance. The problems of governance in sport are also reported elsewhere, where power concentrated in the hands of a few and transparency may profoundly affect both organisational integrity and stakeholder loyalty (Pielke, 2013; Parent & Hoye, 2018).

8.1 Judicial Confirmation of Governance Failures

The governance failures within Malaysian Taekwondo were not merely theoretical but have been the subject of direct judicial scrutiny. In Chandran Manogaran (suing as President of PROSPORT Taekwondo Club) v. Tunku Tan Sri Imran & Ors [High Court of Malaya, 23NCVC-33-03/2012], the court declared that a suspension letter issued by Taekwondo Malaysia's leadership against Prosports Club was "invalid and unlawful." The court further found that senior figures within the organisation had engaged in a conspiracy to tarnish the reputation of Prosports Club and its president. The Defendants were ordered to pay RM100,000 in damages for defamation and an additional RM100,000 for conspiracy. This case stands as a stark legal precedent highlighting:

- The abuse of disciplinary measures for political purposes.
- Lack of adherence to democratic governance and fair procedures.
- How governance failures can escalate into civil liability for defamation and conspiracy.

The case reinforces criticisms regarding authoritarian governance and suppression of dissent in Malaysian Taekwondo administration, confirming that governance disputes have crossed into the realm of significant legal and financial consequences. This judicial finding provides concrete evidence of the risks posed when national sports associations disregard the principles of due process and democratic participation mandated under World Taekwondo statutes (Art. 16.3) and Malaysia's Sports Development Act 1997 (Act 576, s. 17(1)(b)).

8.2 Allegations of a Coup d'État: The Selangor Lawsuit and Governance Tensions in Malaysian Taekwondo

Governance controversies in Malaysian Taekwondo have continued well beyond earlier judicial cases such as Chandran Manogaran v. Tunku Tan Sri Imran & Ors (2015). A recent example is the dispute reported by Scoop.my (2023) involving the Taekwondo Selangor (TNS), which filed a lawsuit to block a leadership overhaul within Taekwondo in Malaysia. The association described the leadership change as a “coup d'état,” alleging procedural irregularities and a lack of democratic process in the attempts to restructure TM's administration (Scoop.my, 2023). The legal action underscores persistent governance tensions and perceptions of authoritarian control within Taekwondo in Malaysia. TNS's allegations suggest that political manoeuvring rather than transparent, democratic elections may be influencing leadership changes. Such accusations directly implicate principles set forth under:

- Article 16.3 of the World Taekwondo Statutes (2025), which requires MNAs to be governed democratically, ensuring equal participation of members.
- Section 17(1)(b) of Malaysia's Sports Development Act 1997 (Act 576), mandating democratic operation of sports bodies and allows regulatory intervention where governance fails.
- The World Taekwondo Ethics Code (2025, Sec. 1.4), prohibits coercion, abuse of power, and undemocratic practices.

The TNS lawsuit, coupled with prior legal judgments, strengthens the view that Taekwondo in Malaysia faces systemic governance weaknesses, power centralisation, and possible breaches of both Malaysian law and WT statutes. Such ongoing disputes risk further eroding stakeholder confidence, alienating athletes, and damaging Malaysia's international reputation in the sport.

Table 2: Dictatorial Governance & Suppression of Members

Document	Clause / Article	Description
WT Statutes (2025)	Art. 16.3	MNAs must operate democratically, ensuring equal rights and participation for members.
WT Statutes (2025)	Art. 2.2.6	Prohibits discrimination, requires integrity, and democratic governance.
WT Ethics Code (2025)	Sec. 1.4	Prohibits intimidation, coercion, and abuse of power within MNAs.
WT Asia Statutes (2019)	Art. 17 – Equal Protection	Guarantees equal rights and protections for all MNA members.
Sports Development Act 1997 (Act 576)	Sec. 17(1)(b)	Requires democratic operation of registered sports bodies; allows intervention if governance fails.

9. Intimidation and Ethical Breaches in Taekwondo Governance

Various reports and analyses concerning governance in Malaysian Taekwondo suggest the existence of organizational practices sometimes described as fostering a “**culture of fear**,” where threats, intimidation, or undue influence are allegedly employed to control voting delegates, suppress dissent, and maintain political dominance within the national federation. Such practices, if proven, stand in direct conflict with

multiple provisions under both international and Malaysian legal frameworks governing sports ethics and good governance.

According to the Ethics Code of World Taekwondo (WT); Section 1.4 (WT Statutes, 2025), all WT Member National Associations (MNAs), officials, the associated organisations are mandated to apply principles of integrity, respect, non-coercion, and ethical conduct both administratively and in competitive environments. The Code also forbids acts that amount to intimidation, harassment or abuse of authority in personal or political interests. Moreover, WT Statutes, 2025 (Article 16.3) require MNAs to provide democratic procedures, equality among members, and the defence of fundamental rights in their governance systems. Breach of these principles may result in disciplinary action such as suspension or cancellation of MNA status according to WT Statutes 2025 (Article 15).

In the ongoing of Malaysian legal scene, various statutory provisions could be brought about by such actions. Act 576 allows the Sports Commissioner of Malaysia, under Section 17(1) under (a) and (b) of the Sports Development Act 1997 (Act 576) to look into the situation of cancelling the registration of any sports body as a result of acting against national policy, or of a sports body in other activities that may be going against democratic principles, or may be operating against its legal objectives. Intimidation, threats or suppression of the rights of members may be considered to flout the purpose of the Act in furthering integrity and transparency and democratic governance in the game of sports in the country.

Also, criminal intimidation in Malaysia is covered in the Penal Code (Act 574) in Section 503, according to which non-aggravated criminal intimidation is a criminal act engaging one in face-to-face transactions or transactions related to threats that might cause alarm to an individual or compel a person to do what he/she does not wish to do legally. This kind of behavior may be enticing criminal responsibility when there is intimidation or influence to withhold votes, quash opinions, or manipulate the conclusion of an organisation in sports bodies.

Moreover, the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) Act 2009 (Act 694), Section 23, makes abuse of position to gain gratification, such as to retain power or influence positions of authority, a criminal act which is punishable by substantial fines and terms of imprisonment. Although the main agenda of the MACC Act must deal with financial corruption, intimidating factors related to financial corruption due to negligence in handling funds or even political influence may attract attention under this act where personal gain or misuse of government funds is perceived.

Together, these legal frameworks reaffirm the notion that sports governance, both in Malaysia and worldwide, is determined by notions of ethical leadership, democratic decision-making, and respect for human rights. These allegations of the existence of a culture of intimidation in Malaysian Taekwondo, in case they are proved, could thus subject the organisation to the sanctions of WT, besides facing huge legal implications on the organisation under civil and criminal law of Malaysian laws.

10. Trademark Violations in Malaysian Taekwondo Governance

Questions of illegitimate application of the logos and symbols of World Taekwondo (WT) and Kukkiwon are questions asked about some national-level Taekwondo organisations in Malaysia. It is reported that these logos have been used in grading certificates, advertisements and even when organising championships and tournaments. These might serve to violate the intellectual property rights that are stipulated in both international and national laws. In WT Statutes (2025), specifically Article 25, it is noticeable that all intellectual property, such as logos, emblems, and trademarks, exclusively belong to WT and that no one may utilise them without prior, formal request (World Taekwondo, World Taekwondo

Statutes, 2025, Art. 25). Likewise, the WT Asia Statutes (2019) also strengthen the regional protection of these IP rights (WT Asia Statutes, 2019, Art. 25).

The global governing body of Taekwondo, which goes by the name of World Taekwondo (WT), has sought trademarks in Malaysia under application no TM2024013981 that includes its name and the graphic mark across various classes, including martial arts materials, attire, event organization, and teaching courses. Even though the application has the status right now as the Provisional Refusal (Objected), meaning that the Intellectual Property Corporation of Malaysia (MyIPO) has encountered certain objections that WT will still have to clear to gain the complete registration, the application still proves the intent to secure the exclusive rights to the trademark under the Malaysian Trademarks Act 2019 (Act 815) of Malaysia (Act 815) clear as day.

In the Malaysian legal framework, any unauthorized activation of registered trademarks is considered an infringement under the stewardship of Section 56 (1) (b) of the Malaysian Trademarks Act 2019 (Act 815), which states that infringement is punishable subject to fines amounting to RM1 million, imprisoning the perpetrator not more than five years, or both (Malaysia Malaysian Trademarks Act 2019 (Act 815) 2019). Notably, this legal security does not only give protection to full registration marks but also to the marks that have acquired a reputation in the Malaysian law, i.e. well-known marks, which should imply that illegal use of the not yet formally registered mark may also create an offence if the mark has gained a reasonable amount of recognition in the market. Parallel phenomena can be observed in the application of trademark and branding protection in European sports law as well, where this kind of protection is essential to ensuring that sports structures are not compromised by third parties (Duval & Van Rompuy, 2016; Weatherill, 2011). Taking into consideration the Taekwondo administration sphere, the legal and ethical issues that such unauthorized use raises can be outlined from the perspective of the overlap between international sports administration and national intellectual property legislation. When a national Taekwondo association in Malaysia incorporates the logos or symbols of WT on locally-issued certificates of Dan or Poom, instructor licenses, and other promotional media and grading paperwork without the express authorization of WT, then this action can amount to trademark infringement under Malaysian laws and potentially violate the rules and codes of ethics of WT itself as well, leading to substantial legal and regulatory consequences on the offending association.

Therefore, in incidents whereby the Taekwondo in Malaysia, acting in the capacity as a WT Member national association (MNA), has adopted the use of the WT logo on Dan or Poom certificate issued locally without any necessary authorization of the WT or Kukkiwon officials and has had the audacity to claim that this sort of certificate is of international character, that sort of behavior is potentially in violation of the trademark laws in Malaysia, as well as the Consumer Protection Act 1999, Section 10, which states that no false or misleading statements shall be Even though the national Taekwondo association of Malaysia is a recognized member of WT, the association has limited powers to utilize WT intellectual property to the activities and certifications that are actually sanctioned by WT. The upshot is that any variance especially one that leads to misunderstanding on the part of the consumer, schools or the government agencies may hold the national Taekwondo association of Malaysia liable to legal action in accordance to the Malaysian domestic laws, which goes to show that the need to adhere diligently to the rules of governance of the international federation as well as national statutory provisions has to be perfectly followed.

Table 3: Unauthorized Use of Logos and Emblems

Document	Clause / Article	Description
WT Statutes (2025)	Art. 19 Intellectual Property	WT owns all intellectual property, including emblems and logos; unauthorised use is prohibited.
WT Statutes (2025)	Art. 2.1.6	MNAs must protect WT's reputation and ensure proper use of branding.
Kukkiwon Articles	Art. 4.2	Kukkiwon exclusively controls Poom/Dan promotions and related branding; unauthorized use is prohibited.
Sports Development Act 1997 (Act 576)	Sec. 17(1)(b)	Misrepresentation or conduct harmful to governance integrity can trigger regulatory action.
Malaysian Trademarks Act 2019 (Act 815)	Sec. 56(1)(b)	Unauthorized use of registered trademarks is punishable by fines up to RM 1 million or imprisonment.

11. WT Recognition of Kukkiwon Certifications and Malaysian Non-Compliance

An important regulatory maxim in international governance of Taekwondo is that World Taekwondo (WT) recognizes only Dan and Poom certificates granted by Kukkiwon as valid credentials allowing one to compete or participate in WT-related competitions and official affairs. This directive is institutionalized in the WT Competition Rules and further supported in the WT Statutes (2025), Art. 16.2, that ensure that all Member National Associations (MNAs) must comply with the WT technical and administrative regulations including those regulating the black belt certifications authenticity (World Taekwondo Statutes, 2025, Art. 16.2). Moreover, WT Competition Rules (2025) in Article 4.2 explicitly mention that all the athletes competing at the events under WT promotion or sanctioning terms must possess a valid Dan certificate issued by Kukkiwon. This appointment affirms that Kukkiwon is the only recognised organisation in the world to certify Dan ranks that are valid in WT competitions (WT Competition Rules, 2025, Art. 4.2).

The reports about Taekwondo in Malaysia having their own Dan and Poom certificates and not having them issued by Kukkiwon is a direct violation of these WT Statutes and competition rules. This is further aggravated by news that such national organisations are reportedly incorporating WT logos and symbols in certificates issued locally and which may mislead athletes, parents, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Malaysia, and the general populace to think that such documents are of international validity. These actions are in contradiction to Article 25 of WT Statutes (2025) under which it claims its exclusive intellectual property rights and usage of marks and emblems of WT is barred (World Taekwondo Statutes, 2025, Art. 25).

Regulatory wise, the issuance of unrecognised certificates, mishandling WT intellectual property may become the grounds to administrative action of Article 29.1 of the WT Statutes (2025), which enables WT to take sanctions: suspension, expulsion, or other disciplinary measures against MNAs that contravene the WT statutes, competition regulations, or ethical standards (World Taekwondo Statutes, 2025, Art. 29.1). On its part, WT has every reason to inquire about such practices in Malaysia and, where need be, sanctions of the same to safeguard the integrity of global governance of WT and ensure that athletes and stakeholders

are not cast into confusion or misrepresented. These measures are necessary not only to keep the standards set by the WT Statutes and the Kukkiwon World Agreement but also in preserving the integrity of the international competitive system of Taekwondo. Adherence to these provisions is always essential in protecting athlete pathways and sporting integrity in general.

11.1 Trademark Violations in Malaysian Taekwondo Governance

Being the keeper of the sport internationally, World Taekwondo (WT) has listed a trademark application in Malaysia to obtain the exclusive rights under application no. TM2024013981, where it aims to register both its trademark and striking logo under various classes, such as martial-arts equipment, apparel, event management, and educational courses. Even though the application is still in a provisional refusal (objection) status, this is an indication concerning the determination of WT to have its intellectual-property rights implemented under the Malaysian Trademarks Act 2019 (Act 815). This determination is strengthened by the fact that WT tightly manages its marks, which is clearly stipulated in its Statutes and Bylaws that were issued in 2009 and 2015 that define all the corresponding rules regarding authorized use of WT logos and prohibitions of unauthorized reproduction (World Taekwondo Federation. (2015). WTF trademark bylaws).

However, in recent times it has been confirmed that Taekwondo in Malaysia and its affiliate organizations have often flaunted these protections. This has been seen as evidence to imply that some federations have been unauthorizedly using the WT logo on certifications and Other promotional materials, issuing certifications that falsely claim to be endorsed by WT, and charging unapproved grading fees associated with the illegitimate credentials. This will not only infringe the WT Rules and Bylaws but also go against statutes in Malaysia, which can put the violating parties at a risk of having to pay up to USD 10,000 per breach and other legal action. Such acts also amount to potential trademark infringement, misrepresentation and at least penalties, imprisonment and civil damages under the Trade Descriptions Act 2011. To greater extent, the scheme of unauthorized liberalization rather impairs the integrity of Malaysia Taekwondo governance in addition to exposing the malefactor organizations to both local and international liability levels that are bound by the strategic plans that are managed by both the WT and Kukkiwon.

11.2 Legal Framework and Penalties for Trademark Violations in Taekwondo Governance

The 2009 WT Rules and Regulations, promulgated by order of World Taekwondo Federation (WTF), delegates specific ownership of the WT emblem, flag, motto, symbols and other identifiers to the WTF itself. Article 23.2 also prevents their unauthorized use and requires them to be an authorized use of the WTF, that commercial use should be done with the payment of fees. Any violation might initiate penalties, such as expulsion, suspension, or otherwise disciplinary action in accordance with Article 23.4. Further provisions are laid down in the 2015 WTF Trademark Bylaws. Article 2.3 prohibits the authorization or sub-licensing of trademarks by WT to Member National Associations (MNAs) unless they have the written approval of the WTF. In the Article 4.1 of the Bylaws, the Bylaws have limited using the trademarks to general promotion and have not allowed using the trademarks on a commercial base. Infringement penalties are defined in Article 5.3, which follows remedies of financial penalties up to USD 10,000 per infringement to termination or suspension of any license, legal proceedings and damages, or injunctive relief, and mandate indemnification of WTF in case of incurred losses as result of the unauthorized use. These protections are also solidified in Malaysian law. The Trade Descriptions Act 2011 establishes that either in the context of physical or digital marketing, false or misleading trade descriptions (Section 5(1)) falsely asserting a connection with approved medicines (Section 29) and typical penalties

(Section 30) are prohibited in 2011. The penalties involve fines of not more than RM 500,000 (for corporations) or not more than RM 250,000 and up to five years imprisonment (for individuals) in case of a first-time offence, and greater penalties on subsequent infringements. They also enable a court that prosecutes a defendant to seize or destroy the infringing products or materials. Taekwondo in Malaysia might be having a honeymoon with the apparent immunity; however, when the concerned stakeholders, namely, the authorities, government departments, ministries, schools and parents realise the number of offenses already reported, at that point they will get exposed to massive legal and regulatory liabilities under Malaysian Statutory system and also under the regulations of World Taekwondo and Kukkiwon.

Table 4: Issuing Unrecognised Certificates

Document	Clause / Article	Description
WT Statutes (2025)	Art. 16.2	MNAs must comply with WT technical and administrative rules, including certification standards.
WT Statutes (2025)	Art. 3.1	WT Statutes are the fundamental governance document; no private arrangement overrides them.
Kukkiwon Articles	Art. 4.2(2)	Only Kukkiwon issues official Dan/Poom certificates worldwide; national bodies may only facilitate applications.
Hanmadang Rules (2018)	Art. 11.1.2	Competitors and officials must hold Kukkiwon-issued Dan/Poom certificates.
Sports Development Act 1997 (Act 576)	Sec. 17(1)(a)	The Commissioner can act against false representations of authority or affiliations.
Consumer Protection Act 1999	Sec. 10	Misleading representations about goods or services (including certificates) is an offence.
WT Rules and Regulations (2009)	Art. 23, Art. 23.2 & Art. 23.4	The foundational rules governing World Taekwondo's global operations, governance, and the exclusive rights over its emblems, symbols, and trademarks as of February 3, 2009.
WTF Trademark Bylaws (2015)	Art 2.3, Art. 4.1 & Art. 5.3	Detailed bylaws under the WT Statutes regulating the use, licensing, and protection of WT's trademarks and logos, including penalties for unauthorized use.
Malaysian Trade Descriptions Act 2011	Sec. (5.1), Sec. 29 & Sec. 30	Malaysian law prohibiting false or misleading descriptions about goods or services, including false claims of affiliation or approval.

12. Educational Implications of Unrecognized Taekwondo Certificates

The other key issue in the governance of the Malaysian Taekwondo concerns the possible misrepresentation where certificates produced within the country are locally issued without being recognised by World Taekwondo (WT) or Kukkiwon. It has been said that certain Taekwondo in Malaysia

are issuing their respective certificates on their own, meanwhile causing other stakeholders, such as schools, parents, and students, to think that these certificates are considered valid internationally. Such a practice is questionable since under Article 16.2 of the WT Statutes (2025), Member National Associations (MNAs) are to act following the administrative and technical rules of WT and as such only those certifications, authorized by WT and Kukkiwon are issued (World Taekwondo Statutes, 2025, Art. 16.2). Besides, according to the Regulations of Kukkiwon on Dan/Poom Promotion Tests, the Kukkiwon certificate issued by Kukkiwon or Kukkiwon-approved certificate is internationally acceptable in terms of technical ranking and officiating in official tournaments (Kukkiwon Headquarters, Regulations of Dan/Poom Promotion Tests, 2018, Art. 9).

This may put educational institutions in Malaysia in a tight spot. Such locally issued Taekwondo certificates can be admitted into schools and the Ministry of Education in good faith, thinking they are following the international standards, and in the process, officially pass on the non-recognized certificates to the formative educational and extracurricular records. These practices can not only go against the global governance structure of WT, but they can also go against national policies of education that outline that any external sports certifications must be verifiable, internationally recognized, and meet established standards. Also, according to the Section 10 of the Consumer Protection Act 1999 of Malaysia, the falsification or purporting of certificates that result in misleading representations of such certificate possessing the qualities of being of international standard may create misrepresentation that brings organisations to face possible civil/criminal liabilities in terms of deceptive actions (Consumer Protection Act 1999 of Malaysia). Such situations reveal a critical sense of regulatory acknowledgement and open dialogue with educational authorities, so as to protect not only integrity of the Malaysian education system, but also integrity of national sports governance.

The modern Malaysian trend of awarding invalid Taekwondo certificates with the main emblem of World Taekwondo (WT) exhibited without the appropriate permission of WT, are being carried out with considerable educational hazards. These certificates have the potential to mislead the students, parents, and educational institutions to think that the documents are officially endorsed by WT which then means that athletes lose all chances of attending an official competition, having their results ranked correctly, as well as getting a scholarship which also requires the validity of the certificate they present. The actions are also a contravention to the exclusive rights of WT over its emblems and trademarks contained under Article 23 of 2009 Rules and Regulations and the 2015 Trademark Bylaws which grant exclusive rights over its emblems and trademarks used only by its affiliate members and prohibit such unauthorized use with heavy financial fines up to USD 10,000 and potential legal action against such use (World Taekwondo Federation, 2015). Moreover, that behaviour can be seen as the crimes under the Malaysian legislation, in particular, the Trade Descriptions Act 2011 on misrepresentation and false claims of affiliation (Trade Descriptions Act 2011).

Table 5: Deception of the National Education System

Document	Clause / Article	Description
WT Statutes (2025)	Art. 16.2	MNAs must issue only officially recognized credentials from WT or Kukkiwon.

Document	Clause / Article	Description
WT Ethics Code (2025)	Sec. 2.1	Requires honesty and integrity; prohibits misleading conduct.
Kukkiwon Articles	Art. 4.2(2)	Kukkiwon alone issues globally recognized Dan/Poom certificates.
Sports Development Act 1997 (Act 576)	Sec. 17(1)(a)	The commissioner may act against misrepresentation or false credentials.
Consumer Protection Act 1999	Sec. 10	False or misleading representations are offences under Malaysian law.

Table 6: Relevant Legal Provisions and Penalties for Unauthorized Taekwondo Certifications

Document / Law	Articles / Sections	Explanation	Penalties / Consequences
WT Rules and Regulations 2009	Art. 23.2	WT emblems, flags, mottos, symbols, and other properties cannot be used without WT's prior approval; commercial use requires fees.	Legal action by WT; sanctions including expulsion, suspension, or other disciplinary measures.
	Art. 23.4	WT may take legal action or impose sanctions against unauthorized use, including disciplinary actions.	As above.
WTF Trademark Bylaws 2015	Art. 2.3	MNAs cannot assign or sub-license WT trademarks to others without WT's prior written consent.	Fine up to USD 10,000 per breach; license suspension or termination; legal action for damages; duty to indemnify WT for losses.
	Art. 4.1	MNAs may only use WT trademarks for general promotion, not for commercial purposes, unless permission is obtained.	As above.
	Art. 5.3	Unauthorized use of trademarks can result in financial penalties and legal action.	As above.
Trade Descriptions Act 2011 (Malaysia)	Sec. 5(1)	Prohibits false or misleading trade descriptions related to goods or services.	For corporations: Fine up to RM 500,000 for first offence, RM 1 million for subsequent offences. For individuals: Fine up to RM 250,000 or imprisonment up to 5 years, or both; courts may order forfeiture or

Document / Law	Articles / Sections	Explanation	Penalties / Consequences
			destruction of infringing goods.
	Sec. 29	Addresses offences related to false claims of endorsement, approval, or affiliation.	As above.
	Sec. 30	Provides general penalty provisions for offences under the Act.	As above.

13. Challenges of Researching Governance Failures in Taekwondo in Malaysia

Exploring the failure of corporate governance in Taekwondo in Malaysia is not an easy task. First, allegations of abuse are hard to substantiate because due to restricted access to official paperwork, financial records, internal communication, and the fact that national sport agencies often consider such data confidential. Secondly, should there be a basis to discuss possible misconduct, it is faced with legal concerns because in Malaysia, one risks legal action as set against the Defamation Act 1957, thus the scholar becomes hesitant in naming a certain organization or an individual without any solid piece of evidence. Secondly, the existence of inconsistent jurisdiction between international regulations of World Taekwondo (WT) and Kukkiwon, and Malaysian laws, namely, the Malaysian Trademarks Act 2019 (Act 815), the Sports Development Act 1997, and the Consumer Protection Act 1999, is making the legal analysis over complex and time-consuming. There is also the factor of political sensitivities, which becomes a problem in reporting a national sports body linked to government departments, as this can make any form of criticism potentially hazardous to a individual's career or editorial unwillingness. Lastly, there are a few scholars who have focused their studies on Taekwondo governance in Malaysia hence, findings can hardly be contextualised within existing bodies of knowledge.

14. Discussion

According to the findings presented, the governance and compliance oversights in Taekwondo in Malaysia indicate underlying structural and legal concerns. Many of the deficits of organizational integrity, as seen in the bodies governing larger forms of sport, are as a result of convoluted decision-making processes and the detachment of the stakeholders (Houlihan & Green, 2007; Forster, 2006). The issues of unrecognised Dan and Poom certificate reportedly issued by Taekwondo in Malaysia and the false use of WT logos compromise the integrity of the sporting industry both nationally and globally. As indicated by the World Taekwondo Statutes (2025), the document makes it clear that Member National Associations (MNAs) will be required to follow WT administrative and technical requirements, with Kukkiwon holding the exclusive right to provide Dan and Poom certifications. The problems of Taekwondo in Malaysia can be traced to other more general discussions regarding the interactivity of sports administration, intellectual property, and legal infrastructures observed in other parts of the globe (Anderson, 2010; Duval & Van Rompuy, 2016).

It seems that Taekwondo in Malaysia acted beyond all these structures, which indicates a strong gap between local or national practices and global rules. Further, these are intimidation procedures recorded in the organisation that are against the Ethics Code of WT, which implies integrity, respect, and absence of coercion in governance of sports. These challenges intersect with Malaysian legislation, such as the

Malaysian Trademarks Act 2019 (Act 815) and with the Consumer Protection Act 1999s, reflecting the fact that national sport governance can provoke international discipline as well as domestic lawful recourse to call into play. This reemphasises that keeping straightforward and legitimate business is not simply an ethical obligation but a business necessity to prevent legal and reputational damage. The Malaysian crisis in Taekwondo governance adds to the global evidence, which shows that indicators of good governance, as assessed in the BIBGIS scheme or with the Sports Governance Observer, are key to avoiding such debacles (Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2013; Geeraert, 2018).

15. Conclusion

The problems covered in this discussion indicate that there is a serious lack of governance in Taekwondo in Malaysia, which is characterised by the weaknesses of its structure, the lack of transparency in its financial operations, as well as its consistent failure in complying with World Taekwondo (WT) and Kukkiwon governance policies. Although the WT Statutes (2025, Art. 2.3, Art. 16.2) and Kukkiwon authority in the certification world Taekwondo, the lack of viable pathways to develop athletes, issuing of unauthorised Dan and Poom certificates and the incorrect usage of WT intellectual property further establishes a systemic indiscrimination of international norms and Malaysian law. The kind of practices threatens to compromise the integrity of Taekwondo as a sport and also the trust people have concerning national institutions involved in the development of athletes and the protection of consumers.

Further, the possible breaches in the Malaysian Trademarks Act 2019 (Act 815), the Consumer Protection Act 1999, the Income Tax Act 1967, and the Sports Development Act 1997 show that the impact of such failures of governance goes infinitely beyond the concept of a flawed internal straight politics in the world of sports, its legal liability and standing in the international community of sports figures may be threatened. Such use of WT logos and the spreading of unrecognised credentials not only threaten to mislead athletes, schools, and their respective parents, but also unnecessarily contradicts the core value of “**Taekwondo for All**” that is central to the WT mission. Considering the debasement of both sustentative, far-reaching, and moral violations, WT has the authority, under Article 29.1 of its Statutes (2025), to take disciplinary action against any Member National Association, such as investigation, suspension, or expulsion when it breaks its rules. The Malaysian Sports Commissioner also has strong legal powers under the Sports Development Act 1997 (Section 17 and Section 18) in cases where he/ she should intervene, investigate, and even deregister that organization that is not transparently and democratically functioning. The remedy to these failures is not only a form of compliance, but rather a way of safeguarding the aspirations of the Malaysian athletes and ensuring the integrity of the Malaysian education system and the rightful position in the global Taekwondo landscape. Unless decisive reforms are made based on international laws, domestic laws, and ethical governance, the Taekwondo administration of Malaysia is on the path to further alienation and the erosion of credibility necessary to sustain a sport that has been an icon in many generations. The situation requires the leadership that is transparent, law-abiding, and the spirit of the real Taekwondo, an art not only of physical excellence, but also of integrity and dignity.

16. Policy Implications

Given the findings of this study, the resultant implications of policy that should be made on governance in Malaysian Taekwondo have several policy implications. It would be good to apply principles of the working models of governance, such as the models of comparative elite sport (Houlihan & Green, 2007) to guarantee sustainable athlete development and institutional responsibility. On the one hand, Sports

Commissioner of Malaysia needs to carry out comprehensive audits of governance practices and financial management of Taekwondo in Malaysia to make sure that Taekwondo in Malaysia is complying with the Sports Development Act 1997. Secondly, there should be a strict supervision of any usage of WT or Kukkiwon logos with the Malaysian Trademarks Act 2019 (Act 815) imposed upon unauthorised applications. Comparative sports law sources indicate that strong IP laws and administrative control are important in maintaining the integrity of sports organisations (Weatherill, 2011; Anderson, 2010). Third, national sporting organisations should be mandated to Standardise all their certification procedures by ensuring that they run by WT and Kukkiwon standards in the athlete's interest and international respectability. Also, the Ministry of Youth and Sports and other government agencies must establish open reporting provisions that enable all income generated through grading levies to be taxable in line with the Income Tax Act 1967. Lastly, there is a need to incorporate training programs to instil knowledge of legal responsibility, ethical responsibility, and the right governance to sports administrators such that the sports ecosystem of Malaysia is run with integrity and accountability. Implementing the governing evaluation instruments available by Chappelet & Mrkonjic (2013) and Geeraert (2018) thereof might help to increase the transparency and accountability in the management of Malaysian Taekwondo.

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