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Strategies and Consequences of Promoting Futsal Club Competition; A Case Study in the Iraqi Premier League

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Abstract

The growth and development of sports in societies and the move towards professional sports in most countries have become an important issue. Therefore, the overall goal of this research was to identify the strategies and consequences of promoting futsal club competitions. In this qualitative research, the grounded theory method based on the Glasery approach was used to build a conceptual model. The participants of this research were university professors in the field of sports management, sports marketers, heads and vice heads of sports organizations, managers, coaches, veterans and experts in Iraqi sports, and line and staff managers of sports federations. The sampling method was purposeful and accessible. In the present study, theoretical saturation was achieved after conducting 18 interviews. The tool of the present research was in-depth interviews. Based on the results of qualitative data analysis, the strategies for promoting competitions included: sustainable development, evaluation and formulation of rules, improvement of education and talent acquisition, and promotion of sports marketing, and the consequences of promoting competitions included: improvement of service delivery, improvement of performance, and economic and environmental improvement. Given the importance of promoting marketing in futsal clubs, it is suggested that Iraqi Football Federation officials use incentive laws and regulations, such as tax exemptions, to lead to a more prominent presence of sports sponsors.

Introduction

Today, sports are one of the most essential needs and fundamental issues of human societies. So that it is rare to find a country that does not have a sports organization (Sadri-Cheragh Tape and Jalali-Farahani, 2020). In many advanced societies today, the place of physical education and sports for advancing the major goals of each country is clear and obvious. What distinguishes sports science from other contemporary sciences is its huge audience all over the world (Filo & Kunkel, 2018). The development of sports in each country is the prerequisite for achieving success in global and Olympic competitions. Today, countries have realized that the development of sports and the benefit of its direct and indirect benefits are not possible without appropriate planning and policymaking (Zuhair Hussein, 2022)(Fadhel & Abdul, 2025). Futsal is no exception to this rule. Futsal is a sport that is played worldwide at amateur, semi-professional and professional levels. The sport has a long history, dating back to the 1930s in South America. It is clear that futsal is growing as a sport. This growth has led to an increased demand for information about futsal so that people can better understand the sport and its characteristics and complexities. There is a particular desire among coaches, players, sports scientists and managers to improve their knowledge of futsal to help them and contribute to the development of the sport in their respective countries (Moore, et al. 2014)(Jaafar, 2021). Recently, prestigious leagues and the promotion of sports competitions have been examined as an indicator of the development of sports in countries (Rouzbahani and Ebadi, 2022). While the growth and development of sports in societies and the move towards professional sports in most countries has become an important issue (Khoshbakhti et al., 2021); sports development has become more important today than ever before, and sports development is one of the important issues in national development. Development in sports, like other fields, occurs in various axes (Saber, 2017)(Abdulkreem, 2016). Winning titles in major and international sports events, which are the focus of attention of many countries, can affect the economic, cultural, and social conditions of a society, so many countries are trying to prepare and send athletes to competitions by planning to ensure their success in major events (Van Der Roset et al, 2022). Accordingly, governments are more inclined to ensure the success of their elite athletes in the international arena by investing heavily in them, which has led to the expansion and development of organizations, national sports leagues, holding more and better competitions, and systems related to the training and development of elite athletes in the dimension of championship sports (Jones et al., 2017). Due to its diverse nature, sport is effective in all aspects, especially in individual and group development and in the development

of its organization and structure. The concept of sport development may be moving towards new initiatives and the importance of paying attention to various arguments in sports unions, but the work mostly involves the management and organization of sport at the level of national and international competitions (Rezaei et al., 2019)(Naji & Aseel, 2024). The issue of sport development at different levels of sport is of great importance. What is clear in the sport system is the strong interest in success and the willingness of researchers and policymakers to examine and explain these successes, which has made the performance of sports teams in competitions more prominent (Shariati-Feizabadi, 2019). In view of this, many studies have been conducted since the end of the twentieth century on the policies of different countries regarding the development of sports. Given that explaining sports success and finding the reasons for success is a prerequisite and a basis for future successes, the importance of looking at this issue is quite tangible (Ha et al., 2015).

Sport, as a factor that has a very important effect on the individual and social life of human, is the focus of attention of various sectors of society and, at the macro level, the government (Mohammadhassan et al., 2023). The need to expand sport at the community level has increased the need for further studies in this regard. The discussion of sports development can be examined in different dimensions, and researchers in the field of sports are expected to devote part of their continuous research to examining strategies for promoting sports competitions. The quantitative and qualitative expansion of sports, along with the appropriate use of its positive functions, can be considered as sports development (Haj Hassani and Norouzi Seyedhosseini, 2010)(Hikmat, 2023). Therefore, sports development is of interest as long as sports institutions, such as the Ministry of Sports and Youth, the National Olympic Committee, federations, clubs' unions, executive bodies, municipalities, and other organizations in charge of sports, can make efforts with diverse planning to improve the quantity and quality of their sports program at the level of sports competitions and benefit from the positive functions of sports in the best possible way (Batavani et al., 2022). Extensive planning and effort in this matter will cause various effective tools and methods in sports development to receive more attention, the above-mentioned cases are important in the national arena (Oxford & Spaaij, 2020). Today, exercise is of great importance throughout life, and many of the undesirable effects of the social, economic, family, heredity, and other factors can be reduced or even eliminated completely through exercise (Karimabadi et al., 2022)(Muhanna, 2023). As individuals' participation in exercise leads to improved physical condition, mental health, and optimal enjoyment of individuals (Musavi and Khoshnavaz, 2019).

Futsal is one of the indoor sports in which Iraq is always among the top countries in Asia and among the top 10 countries in the Asian ranking and the 45th rank in the world. The Iraqi national team has a history of participating in eleven Asian Futsal Championships, and one of the best honors of the Iraqi national team in these games was fourth place in 2018. The Iraqi national futsal team also has a history of participating in three Arab Futsal Cup competitions, and in 2022, it was able to win the runner-up position in this competition. Futsal is very popular in Iraq, especially in the field of amateur sports, and is one of the most popular sports in most sports halls. Although this sport is not included in the Olympics, Asian Games, and Universiade, the Futsal World Cup is very popular and has been able to gain significant popularity at the club level among different segments of society. On the other hand, the high similarity of futsal to football, despite the difference in the place where they are played, has caused this sport to become popular very quickly. Futsal has recently been discussed as a replacement for futsal in the Olympic Games, which has drawn more and more attention to this discipline. In general, this discipline is growing in Iraq and the world in both competitive and public approaches, and requires an efficient system for managing and developing competitions at the club and national levels. Therefore, the main question of the present study is: What are the solutions and consequences of promoting the competitions of Iraqi Premier League futsal clubs?

Materials and methods

The overall objective of this research is to design a model for promoting the Iraqi Premier League futsal club competitions. In this qualitative research, the grounded theory method based on the Strauss and Corbin method was used to build a conceptual model. The participants of this research were university professors in the field of sports management, sports marketers, heads and vice heads of sports organizations, managers, coaches, veterans and experts in Iraqi sports, and line and staff managers of sports federations. The present research tool was in-depth interviews. The interview questions were open-ended in order to clarify the topic from the interviewees' words. The research sampling method was also purposive-snowball. Considering these materials, the interview began with a purposeful selection of people who were knowledgeable and knowledgeable about the research topic, and in addition to the research questions, they were asked to introduce other knowledgeable people in this field. Therefore, among the first few people who were directly selected by the researcher based on the desired criteria, other experts were also selected by other experts in addition to expert criteria. During

a 3-month process and interviews with 18 people, the researcher felt that he had reached the point of theoretical saturation. Also, in relation to the research process, after conducting interviews with 16 people, the researcher felt that the results were becoming repetitive. Therefore, to ensure the similarity of the findings, 2 new interviews were conducted, and according to the findings, no new information was extracted, so theoretical saturation was determined with 18 interviews. Of course, in relation to the questions asked of the interviewees, it should be noted that a general question (What is the model for promoting the Iraqi Premier League futsal club competitions?) was raised and then the interview continued with other questions (such as what are the strategies and consequences of promoting the Iraqi Premier League futsal club competitions?) that assess the why and how of a factor. The current interview questions have been raised in the interview session in such a way that they lead to the promotion of a positive and effective interaction in terms of dynamics.

There are four criteria (acceptability, transferability, confirmability, and reliability) for qualitative research, and its criteria are linked to four conventional criteria in quantitative research (internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity), which were examined and confirmed in the present study (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). For this purpose, to validate the existing sources, the interview transcripts, extracted codes were sent to some of the participants in the study, and their opinions were used. For transferability, through documentation for other researchers, demographic reports, sample experiences, and research environment reports were used. Also, for the confirmability of the study, the opinions of several professors of the sports management department who were outside the interview process were used, and their opinions were applied. Finally, for reliability, the percentage of agreement between the two coders was used, and the percentage of agreement was reported as 83% according to the table below.

$$\text{Percentage of reliability} = \frac{\text{Number of agreements} \times 2}{\text{Total number of codes}} \times 100$$

Table 1. Results of the reliability check between two coders

Interview title	Total number of codes	Number of agreements	Number of disagreements	Test-retest reliability
P1	24	10	4	83%
P9	22	9	4	86%

P14	21	9	3	86%
Total	67	28	11	83%

The results obtained from Table (1) indicate that the total number of the three selected interviews (interviews 1, 9, and 14) that the researcher recorded in the interviews in the above table is 67, the total number of agreements between codes is 28, and the total number of disagreements is 11. Also, the inter-coder reliability for the interviews conducted in this study using the aforementioned formula was 83 percent. As a result, the reliability of the codings in this study is confirmed.

Results

In this section, the characteristics of the research samples are presented in the form of position, field of study, education, and field of activity.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the people participating in the study

Source	Gender	Education level	Position	Field of activity
P1	Male	Ph.D.	University professor	Executive-University
P2	Male	Ph.D.	University professor	Executive-University
P3	Female	Ph.D.	University professor	Executive-University
P4	Female	Ph.D.	University professor	Executive-University
P5	Male	Ph.D.	University professor	Executive-University

P6	Male	Ph.D. student	University professor	Executive- University
P7	Male	Master of Art	University professor	Executive- University
P8	Male	Ph.D.	University professor	Executive- University
P9	Male	Master of Art	The head of the federation	Executive
P10	Male	Master of Art	Football Federation Secretary	Executive
P11	Male	Ph.D.	Vice President of the Federation	Executive
P12	Male	Master of Art	Iraqi Ministry of Sports Director	Executive
P13	Female	Master of Art	Iraqi Ministry of Sports Director	Executive
P14	Male	Master of Art	Futsal Expert	Executive
P15	Male	Master of Art	Sports marketer	Executive
P16	Male	Master of Art	Premier League futsal coach	Executive
P17	Female	Master of Art	Premier League Futsal Manager	Executive
P18	Male	Master of Art	Futsal Veteran	Executive

Also, the results of the interviews conducted in the majority of open, central, and selective codes can be seen in the table below:

Table 3. Open codes and central coding

Selective coding (main categories)	Central coding (subcategories)	Open coding (concepts)
Sustainable development	Sports Infrastructure Development	Availability of standard sports facilities in sports clubs Specialized facilities and training camps for teams Standardization of sports field dimensions Observing safety and welfare issues in halls Observing health and hygiene issues in specific time periods Proper lighting and access to natural light
	Green Construction and Equipment	Modeling global standards and criteria for sports venues and spaces Paying attention to the architecture and climate of the region in the design and construction of sports halls Paying attention to the possibility of developing and renovating sports venues and spaces in light of population growth Feasibility assessment, building layout, and implementing green criteria on construction plans

Evaluation and development of rules	Monitoring and Evaluation	Developing evaluation indicators for the Futsal Premier League competitions Evaluating the current and desired status of the Futsal Premier League competitions Training evaluators and quality experts for Futsal Premier League competitions Inviting evaluators to decision-making meetings and benefiting from their reports in improving the league competitions
	Development and Implementation of Development Laws	Providing mandatory rules for clubs to have specialized and equipped academies Providing supporting rules and performance frameworks for signing contracts with sports sponsors Applying FIFA and AFC regulations and statutes in relation to club ownership and competition implementation Paying attention to the regulations and approvals of the Iraqi Football Federation in the field of club ownership

Improving education and talent identification	Special Basic Futsal Training	Empowering grassroots futsal coaching and refereeing instructors Professional development of grassroots futsal special coaches in accordance with FIFA and AFC standards Talent management of grassroots futsal coaches Developing technical, managerial and specialized productivity of basic futsal
	Specialized Training and Talent identification	Training and educating players using methods from famous European academies Creating and developing futsal development plans in the club organizational chart Relaunching the Iraqi National Futsal Academy Creating academies in different parts of the country to improve team performance
Improving sports marketing	Club Marketing Rethink	Using the club brand and prominent players in marketing and revenue generation Revenue generation through training and transferring elite athletes to foreign clubs Creating a suitable platform based on communication marketing Developing advertising through the media in connection with basic futsal

A Transformation in Service Delivery	Creating in-person incentives for fans with seasonal and attractive offers
	Creating ceremonial (VIP) positions for host and guest teams
Long-term fan relationships	Establishing facilities such as restaurants, shopping and entertainment centers in sports halls
	Holding conferences and training courses focused on promoting futsal and sports marketing
Improving service delivery	Effective identification of futsal fans
	Managing relationships with club fans
Fan satisfaction and engagement	Establishing long-term relationships with club fans
	Establishing loyalty in practice with club fans
	Increasing the positive image and reputation of top league clubs
	Increasing the quantity and quality of sports services
	Creating security and safety at the level of top league competitions
	Providing up-to-date and modern halls
	Improving welfare services at the level of halls in the country

	Increased revenue generation	Increasing advertising revenues
		Generating revenue at the level of sports halls
		Increasing revenues from player transfers
		Increasing revenues from broadcasting and media rights
Performance improvement	Improving the image and credibility of the Iraqi Premier League	Promoting sports enthusiasm
		Increasing the competitive ability of teams
		Raising the level of Premier League competitions
	Talent Management	Improving the quality of the Premier Futsal League
		Professional display of sports competitions at the Asian level
		Training and nurturing top futsal talents
Economic and environmental improvement	Economic prosperity	Developing grassroots futsal academies in clubs
		Creating a professional space for showcasing talents
		Showing the importance of talents at the club, league and futsal sport levels
		Improving futsal-related jobs
		Economic prosperity of public businesses
		Creating new jobs around the halls

Environmental protection	Reducing waste production and environmental damage Reducing consumption of non-renewable energy resources Disseminating and promoting a culture of sustainable development in sports and non-sports organizations
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Based on the results of the central coding and the common concepts between the categories, 15 categories were categorized as media, sports infrastructure development, green construction and equipment, monitoring and evaluation, formulation and implementation of development laws, special basic futsal training, specialized training and talent acquisition, club marketing review, transformation in service provision, long-term relationships with fans, fan satisfaction and participation, increasing revenue generation, improving the image and reputation of the Iraqi Premier League, talent management, economic prosperity, and environmental protection in identifying solutions and consequences for promoting futsal club competitions.

In the following, the central codes are combined together based on logic and connecting it with other categories, leading to the creation of selective codes. In this section, the central codings were combined and the content of each of them was placed in the form of selective codes. The theoretical coding method is as described in Table (4).

Table 4. Theoretical coding

Selective coding	Central coding (subcategories)	Selective coding (main categories)	Source
Strategies		Sports infrastructure development	
		Green construction and equipment	
	Sustainable Development	Development and implementation of	
	Evaluation and Regulation	development laws	P1-P3-P4-P6-P7-
	Improving Education and Talent Acquisition	Monitoring and evaluation	P6-P2-P6-P14-P5-P12-P8-P15-P9-
		Specialized basic futsal training	P10-P16
	Improving Sports Marketing	Specialized training and talent acquisition	
		Review of club marketing	
		Transformation in service delivery	

Consequences		Long-term relationships with fans	
		Fan satisfaction and participation	
	Improving Service Delivery	Increase in revenue generation	P12-P7 P4-P6-P8- P9-P10-P12-P3-P-
	Improving Performance	Improving the image and reputation of the Iraqi Premier League	P6-P1-P11-P3-P16- P14-P15
	Improving the Economy and the Environment	Talent management	
		Economic prosperity	
		Environmental protection	

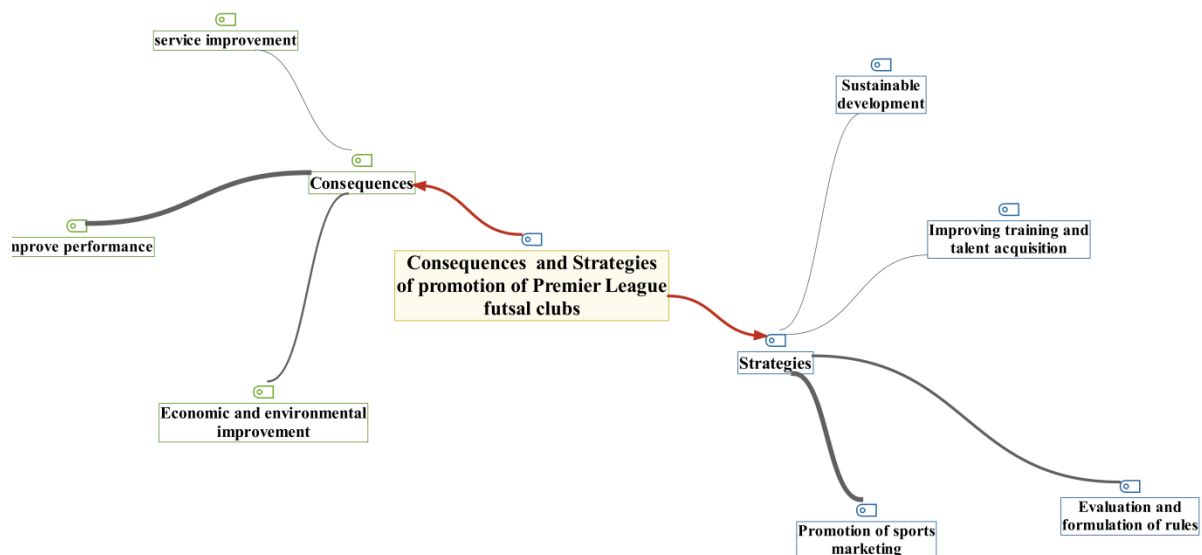


Figure 1. Strategies and consequences of promoting futsal club competitions (case study in the Iraqi Premier League)

Discussion

The overall objective of this study was to identify strategies and outcomes for promoting futsal club competitions. Based on the results of qualitative data analysis from the interviews, the final model was presented, including: strategies (sustainable development, evaluation and regulation, improvement of training and talent acquisition, and promotion of sports marketing) and outcomes (improvement of service delivery, improvement of performance, and economic and environmental improvement) for promoting futsal club competitions. The results are consistent with the findings of Ahmed Ameen Altaee (2023); Obaid & Kumar (2022); Travassos et al. (2018); Reihani & Abdi (2023); Shynkaruk et al. (2021); Gumez et al. (2021); Seifpanahi et al. (2021); Zuhair Hussein and Heidari pour et al. (2020).

The strategies identified in this study consist of four main categories: sustainable development, evaluation and formulation of rules, improvement of training and talent acquisition, and promotion of sports marketing, which include subcategories; development of sports infrastructure, construction and equipping of green areas, development and implementation of development rules, monitoring and evaluation, special basic futsal training, specialized training and talent acquisition, club marketing review, and transformation in service provision. In this regard, Reihani and Abdi (2023) stated in a study; The most important strategy obtained in the development of championship sports is the development of guidance and support programs in the path of athlete growth from beginner to advanced. In a study, Travassos et al. (2018) showed that future sports players give themselves this opportunity for personal development by developing psychological skills. In addition, Obaid & Kumar (2022) stated in a study; The development of social media tools is very important for futsal teams to succeed in their sports marketing strategy, improve the level of sports competitions, and establish professional relationships with their fans. Heidari pour et al. (2020) acknowledged in a study; Hardware, software, and environmental factors affect the quality of holding sports competitions. Also, in another study (2022), Zuhair Hussein stated in an article; Sports have recently witnessed developments in economic aspects, including the concepts of investment, professionalism, marketing and financing, and digital technology in sports arts, media, and communications in sports. Also, Seif Panahi et al. (2021) in a study showed that players, technical staff, venues and equipment, club academy, training camps and competitions, support from spectators, fans, local people and the government, training, effective and efficient management play a role in

the performance and success of clubs. In addition, Gumez et al. (2021) stated in a study that a critical organizational decision to change coaches may be a fundamental driver for the team's future success at the elite level. In explaining the research findings, it should be stated; The indicators of improving sports competitions constitute the professional environment of the Iraqi Futsal Premier League competitions, so in order to find the appropriate tools and make these changes, strategic planning should be studied in order to shorten the time and budget. In explaining the research findings, it should be stated that one of the most important solutions identified from the perspective of research experts is having a developmental perspective in sports. Having financial challenges in any country and region is a novel thing, but having a plan for each activity and measuring its aspects can be a way to progress, so sports teams in the Iraqi Premier League can focus on grassroots futsal and developing players in club academies, which can be a way to transfer players to foreign clubs and generate income for the club. On the other hand, officials from the Iraqi Football Federation and the Ministry of Sports can, with the help of experts in the field of sports construction, such as the Ministry of Planning and private companies, work on the best way to rebuild, renovate, and design sports halls; For example, by assessing the feasibility, locating the building and implementing green criteria on construction plans, modeling global standards and criteria for sports venues and spaces, one can be fruitful in the field of environmental protection. Also, Iraqi sports authorities can think of appropriate measures to improve the performance of teams by developing the professional skills of basic futsal coaches in accordance with FIFA and AFC standards, relaunching the Iraqi National Futsal Academy, and establishing academies in different parts of the country. In addition, it should be noted that the Premier League futsal competitions should also be monitored and reviewed in order to be aware of the current situation, opportunities, and challenges.

The outcomes identified in this study consist of three main categories: service improvement, performance improvement, and economic and environmental improvement, which include subcategories; long-term relationships with fans, fan satisfaction and participation, increased revenue generation, improved image and reputation of the Iraqi Premier League, talent management, economic prosperity, and environmental protection. In this regard, Ahmed Ameen Altaee (2023) stated in a study; Sports teams continued to develop sports and were able to achieve good results in their sports field at the Iraqi level. At the beginning of this century, government support increased and the teams, like other Iraqi teams, received annual government financial assistance, which increased competition between them and other Iraqi

provinces. In explaining the findings of the research, it should be stated that the promotion of futsal sports competitions can lead to the birth of numerous businesses in the stadium environment, in addition, sports-related economies such as hotels, transportation, food and clothing can grow and expand, which in addition to generating income can lead to effective recognition of futsal fans, managing communication with club fans and establishing long-term relationships with club fans. In addition, new sports venues that are built through environmentally conservative techniques and welfare services can create social support and lead to increased attendance at sports fields. Also, the promotion of sports competitions through the presented solutions can lead to the development of grassroots futsal academies in clubs and the creation of a professional space for showcasing talents, the results of which are nothing but the training and development of top futsal talents.

According to the results of the research, it is suggested to the managers of the Iraqi sports organizations, especially the Football Federation, to create a system of brainstorming sessions with the presence of past and current officials and organizers of the Premier League competitions to transfer and share knowledge about holding competitions. Given the importance of promoting marketing in futsal clubs, it is suggested to the officials of the Iraqi Football Federation to lead to a more prominent presence of sports sponsors with the help of incentive laws and regulations such as tax exemptions. In addition, by focusing on building sports halls and places with methods compatible with the environment and the country's culture and tradition, they lead to displaying values and encouraging sports lovers. It is also suggested to the managers of futsal clubs that by creating talent camps and training and employing talented young forces, they lead to motivating teenagers and young people to participate in the main team and be invited to the national team .

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