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Identification and Evaluation of a Model for Succession in Football Pro League of Iran Based on the Grounded Theory Approach

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ABSTRACT

Although the succession planning literature focuses more on managerial and staffing levels in organizations, it can also be used for players in clubs and sport teams. The purpose of the research was to identify and evaluate a model of player succession in Iranian football premier League. The research method was mixed (qualitative and quantitative). The statistical population of this research in the qualitative section includes 16 specialists and experts in football, and in the quantitative part of the research, all managers, athletes, coaches and football referees in the Premier League in 2020, and finally 286 subjects were studied through stratified random sampling in quantitative phase. Research hypotheses were examined using correlations and structural equations modelling. A total of 189 primary codes (concepts) were extracted in the coding process, which after validation, 33 primary codes (concepts) were compiled. In the model, causal conditions included binding or motivating factors as well as the process of replacing players. Underlying conditions involved networking to develop a player replacement program, interacting with other organizations, formulating binding strategies, and setting a budget to promote win-win thinking in the football club succession program in Iran.

Introduction

The performance of a sports club is related to what extent that club has been able to achieve the goals and strategies which has formulated in various fields such as winning championships in different leagues, the amount of player development, the amount of income and other things (Farvardin et al., 2020). Of course, resources have a great impact on achieving optimal performance. These resources include financial and non-financial (Olayo, 2019). Different factors can affect performance in organizations and sports clubs. Player substitution, which is a sport development activity to ensure the continuation of qualified and efficient players in the club, is one of the most important factors

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(Doherty & Cuskelly, 2020). Extensive and rapid changes that occur at the level of sports clubs have caused a significant shortage of skilled, effective and efficient players for various positions in all sports, especially team sports such as volleyball, football, handball and basketball (Honary & Khazaei, 2020). Therefore, the importance of player development in sports clubs as a fundamental and vital factor should be related to the strategic goals of sports federations and should be taken as the most important strategies of the federation or the club. Substitution breeding should directly involve all club managers and coaches. Training effective and efficient players is the most important and priority issue that sports clubs face with. The fact is that the performance of a sports club or sports organization is measured depending on the type of club or organization, the type of board of directors, the philosophy and mission of that club or sports organization, environmental conditions and countless other factors. (Pilgrim et al. 2018). Therefore, various indicators and criteria are used to evaluate the performance of a sports club. Researchers in the study of the performance of commercial and championship sports have used various components to measure the performance of organizations, especially sports clubs. A number of researchers have grouped and named components of performance that are more closely related to each other in one group. For example, Klein (2016) places performance components into three categories: profitability, market share growth, and effectiveness in the community system. Performance is the process of explaining the quality of effectiveness and efficiency of past actions. One of the factors affecting the performance of sports clubs could be programs to identify, attract, train and retain players of the club. Lack of suitable substitutes for players in clubs, especially basketball teams, in competitions and training exercises causes the following problems: Group training is challenged due to the lack of a suitable player, and also performing the team tactics desired by the coaches is failed due to the lack of players. Then qualified, coordinated and talented players, which are the key to success in competitions, will get into trouble (Poornima et al., 2019). Studies show that sports clubs' dependence on top players and lack of suitable alternatives, creates a suitable platform for illegal actions such as doping or other cases such as extorting players from club managers in order to win and succeed in competitions and evasion of the moral charter and disobedience to the rules. Abuse of capable and talented players who are embedded in the structure of sports teams and know that if they are not in team, the team will not be able to perform properly and winning the tournament depends on their existence, is increasing (Raw et al. 2019). The results of the study show that the possibility of embezzlement and misuse of clubs' financial resources in concluding contracts and buying and selling players is very high in cases where clubs are in a tight spot to get scoring players. Existence of substitution system motivates talented athletes to be promoted and join high-level clubs (Frawley et al., 2018). Planning is used to identify, attract, nurture, and retain players in clubs and sports teams, especially team sports teams such as football, volleyball, and basketball at all levels, from beginners to champions. All important aspects of the club add their performance are impressive (Téccíé & dlade dddidddddddaggigg to replace players in championship sports includes various stages, including methods of identification and recruitment based on the indicators set in each sport and for each game post, and various methods of preparing athletes and screening for team membership in the future for the replacement of current players (Fogaca et al., 2019). Obviously, planning for potential alternatives is done through a process called talent management. It is through these management processes that individuals' athletic and motor talents are identified for membership in sports teams for years to come, and through a variety of educational and training programs and scientific management practices, they are gradually prepared to join higher-level teams. In clubs, it is assumed that all applicants have talents and competencies, but due to some generally managerial limitations, they can only make large investments in those people who have top talent and index and are well-known (Tucker, 2020). The principles of player development tell us that many sports skills are acquired, so it is necessary to know the basically qualified people and then train them, and to cultivate so clubs should teach the basic indicators and world standards in various disciplines that are effective. Talent identification is also the first step in a player substitution program, and substitution training requires a regular and systematic program, and includes identification and recruitment, retention, and promotion. In order to achieve player development programs, one must have a coherent plan and a strong will (Ritchie,

2020). Succession planning in the field of championship sports is a step towards continuing to replace players and build talent to enable sports clubs to provide the players they need at the lowest cost with the planned wisdom and insight (Farvardin et al., 2016). Therefore, based on the existing research in this field, it can be assumed that succession programs affect other dimensions of sports clubs, including the performance of that club. Studies show that those clubs that are prone to decline and dissolution, do not have a plan to meet the needs of themselves and the players, and therefore leave matters to chance and time, and do not act based on commitment strategies in the face of problems; and are known as futuristic clubs. Some clubs identify, attract, train and use talented and capable players to meet their needs. The change in the management of sports clubs from government to privatization and most importantly the reduction of government budgets and increasing inflation and the entry of clubs into the field of economic and advertising activities, sports management alarm bells at least for sports clubs participating in premier leagues in all Sports, especially basketball, have few sponsors. As mentioned before, in such situations, one of the ways for the club to succeed and earn money is to have a strategic plan in identifying and nurturing effective and efficient players to achieve multi-purpose goals such as reducing costs, selling players and earning money and developing sports (Sotiriadou et al., 2014). However, clubs may not be very successful in the short term and may take very high risks. There are a small number of clubs that, in order to maintain and improve themselves, carry out their activities and plans based on identifying and cultivating sports talents in the area of their activity. If this strategy is slow to pay off, but such clubs that seek to build the future and are futuristic and are leading clubs, are very famous. Such clubs seek to design and implement regular talent acquisition and replacement training. The issue of replacing talented and effective players in sports clubs is of great importance because the results of the clubs' substitution programs in national teams and even international teams leads earning a lot of money (by selling players to other teams and even the top leagues of European countries) (Tóth & Dávid).

Of course, there are many models for succession breeding, each with its own characteristics. But in most of the past models, the main focus of the clubs, instead of cultivating capabilities and abilities, was on the issue of substitution, so that they only provided a list of ready-made replacements for playing positions. Pilgrim et al. (2018) reported important factors and characteristics for effective and superior performance in basketball, body type, morphology, genetic predisposition, functional and motor abilities, specific technical and tactical abilities, psychological and sociological characteristics and abilities. The complexity of a basketball player and the combination of all the above must be considered in the process of talent identification and preparation of basketball players. Nowadays, succession management in many sports is done through the process of identifying talents in different ways and with global indicators and standards for each field, and with supportive rules and with appropriate, continuous and planned training and training programs. They are gradually being prepared to join adult teams and clubs.

In such a club, whenever professional and caring managers with knowledgeable coaches know that as soon as a player is injured or leaves the club, which is common in championship sports, there are immediate replacements and thus there will be no disruption in achieving the club's goals. Given the current situation in sports clubs, a coherent plan is needed to replace players in all playing positions and to find and nurture human talents. Poornima et al. (2019) reported that the Los Angeles Lakers earned more than \$ 300 million a year in player development and sales. Ritchie (2020) reported that there is a positive and significant correlation between succession programs and organizational learning ability, it means the organization that scores high in succession planning scores also scores high in organizational learning. Despite the importance of succession in sports, there is little research in this area. Fogaca et al. (2019) in her research on succession planning and talent management had recommendations to reduce staff erosion and prepare for the aging of employees in all organizations. These recommendations include identifying, evaluating and developing people with high potential in sports clubs and for real players. Although the issue of substitution has always been raised in sports, in recent decades it has received much attention from clubs in all sports, including football. Experience has shown that in an optimistic state and in the presence of all conditions and the absence

of common injuries, the maximum survival of an athlete in the field of sports competitions is between five to eight years, so upgrade the scientific level and obtain the necessary information again. Indicators and characteristics of substitution breeding are necessary considering the global developments and the activities of regional and global rivals in the clubs that create the structures of the national teams of the countries. However, little scientific research has been done in the field of substitution of football players and more research is needed. Bridgette (2017) believes that talent identification is the first step in the process of planning, programming and fulfilling the steps of selecting and training players in basketball. The selection criteria are multi-disciplinary and must cover all the characteristics of a football players. According to the theoretical foundations and the results of research conducted in non-sports organizations, the researcher intends to identify the characteristics and features of the processes and indicators of substitution of players in football clubs to enable decision makers to be able to manage the club in such a way that they will never experience the vacuum of an efficient, worthy and effective player.

Research Methodology

In this study, the qualitative and quantitative research method has been used from the perspective of the approach in order to formulate and evaluate the pattern of substitution of players and the impact on the performance of Iranian Super League football clubs. The statistical population of the qualitative part of the present study includes professors of sports management familiar with the subject of sports talent identification and replacement, national football team coaches, referees working in the football Super league, club managers and also players of the national football team. The professors were identified based on their published articles and books. Sampling in this section was purposeful and continued until theoretical saturation. For this purpose, 16 people were interviewed. The statistical population of the quantitative part of the research was selected from a total of 206 players working in the Super Football League. The data collection tool in the quantitative part was two questionnaires of the researcher from the interviews, the specifications of which are given in Table 1.

Research findings

Descriptive findings related to the statistical samples of the present study are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Qualitative Statistical Sample

Number	Position	Education levels
8	Coaches	Masters and PhD
4	Referee	Masters and PhD
6	Athletes	Bachelor and Master
3	Club manager	Masters and PhD
2	Staff	Masters and PhD
2	spectator	Masters and PhD

Qualitative research data were analyzed through coding process. Data analysis steps are performed through open coding, axial coding (Strauss and Corbin paradigm model) and selective coding (selecting a central category as the main category and determining the relationship between each of the central categories) and provide a logical paradigm or visual image. Then it ended with an evolving theory. The results of 16 interviews that continued to the point of theoretical saturation and were done through content analysis and open, pivotal and selective coding in the form of five general components: causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, main phenomenon, actions and consequences. Table 2 shows the results of the qualitative section. Qualitative research data were analyzed through coding process. Data analysis steps are performed through open coding,

axial coding (Strauss and Corbin paradigm model) and selective coding (selecting a central category as the main category and determining the relationship between each of the central categories) and provide a logical paradigm or visual image. It ended with an evolving theory.

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Part of the research analysis is the use of open coding. After the interviews, the open coding process begins, the codes of the interviews conducted with 16 open-ended people were extracted, and in the next step, these common codes, along with the important codes from the researcher's point of view, were identified as the final codes. In order to accurately classify concepts between categories, each concept must be labeled and separated, and the raw data must be conceptualized by carefully examining the text of the interviews and the background notes. An example of open coding is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Initial Coding of Interviews (Third Interview)

Basic codes	Spoken evidence	Row
Setting a goal	Achieving sustainable development goals requires three factors. First, coherent goal setting in the form of a short-term plan. Medium and long term at least five years in which the player development program is a priority and all clubs are required to comply with the program according to the conditions and capabilities	1
Creating specialized organizations to discover talents	Creating an organization that fits the goals that that organization specifically follows the ways to achieve the goals. For example, football schools and academies should be included in the club chart along with talent centers. Also have organizational and managerial support	2
Skilled coaches	Third, the existence of skilled, capable and specialized human resources that can achieve the goals, such as skilled and efficient training instructors whose sole job is to teach basic skills to beginners and applicants, and to introduce top talents for membership in higher-level teams.	3
Sports development	One of the important characteristics of sports organizations and clubs should be the development of sports at all levels. In fact, the main mission of these organizations is the development of sports in all aspects of championship, entertainment and education. The National Olympic Committee, sports federations, the Ministry of Sports and various sports delegations have been created solely for this purpose: to develop sports, especially public and grassroots sports, and to identify sports talents.	4
Development of public and basic sports	To achieve this goal, there must be conditions and prerequisites, and that is to have a coherent plan for talent identification and replacement of players.	5
Having a codified program for talent identification and replacement of players	To achieve this goal, there must be conditions and prerequisites, and that is to have a coherent plan for talent identification and replacement of players.	6
Athletes	Manpower in sports is summarized in these people: athletes, coaches, referees and staff of sports organizations and clubs	7
Coaches	who must have the necessary cooperation and coordination in the process of replacing players and finding talent.	8
Referees		9
Staff		10

Basic codes	Spoken evidence	Row
Acquisition of knowledge	Therefore, until the sports clubs do not have the proper knowledge to advance the goals and methods of substitution, we cannot expect the clubs to achieve their goals, which is to substitute players for the success of the club and the national team and ultimately the excellence of sport. Achieve knowledge is therefore essential for sports clubs	11
Special financial resources	Certainly, there should be sufficient financial resources at the disposal of sports clubs in order to provide the grounds for advancing the very difficult and relatively long-term goals of succession breeding.	12
Sports culture	On the other hand, a culture of substitution for player development must be institutionalized within the community and in clubs and sports organizations.	13
Win-win thinking	Win-win thinking should prevail among sports clubs. In order to implement the program of replacing players in clubs. In this case, we can hope for the development of sports ethics and norms in sports environments and competitions. Team interests take precedence over individual interests.	14
Development of sports ethics		
Sympathy		15
Alternative breeding tools	Regarding the implementation and development of succession programs, club managers as well as coaches must be equipped with special tools (skills). Including having a long-term vision, being strategy-oriented, being forward-thinking and willing to implement a player development program	16
Long-term attitude		17
Being strategy oriented		18
Being forward-looking		19
The first priority for talent development	The priority of sports clubs should be based on the development of sports talents in basketball. Somehow, all members of society (disabled, children, adolescents in the men's and women's sections) can participate in the activities of the football substitution program. And be supported	20
Regular and organized sports talent search		21
Observance of the Olympic Charter	In fact, in all matters, especially the issue of succession, the spirit of the Olympic Charter should prevail in all sports organizations and clubs in all sports, including football, at the professional level, as well as at the level of amateurs and even entertainment.	22
Real factors in measuring club performance	To measure the performance of a football club, four factors must be considered. The first is the success rate in domestic competitions. Second, the success rate in international competitions. Third, the use of the club's own trained players and fourth, the club's profitability	23
Organizational communication with education and training centers	Football clubs must maintain contact with other organizations, especially education, if they are to succeed in the succession program. In this way, to communicate continuously and effectively with the parents of the players	24
Pay attention to appearance	The most important factor in choosing a future and successful football player is her physical characteristics such as height, physical strength and motor intelligence.	25
Mental and motivational status	Also, the mental state and concentration of football is very important, especially in sensitive matches, and high motivational power for face-to-face conflicts.	26

Basic codes	Spoken evidence	Row
High motor intelligence	Depending on the type of modern football game, the player must have high motor intelligence to succeed	27
Having a spirit of effort	Most importantly, he loves football and strives to achieve high success	28
Networking	This connection should also exist with decision-making bodies such as the National Olympic Committee, the Ministry of Sports and Youth, and the Ministry of Education and universities. In our country, there are many organizations in the field of sports, the Ministry of Sports and Youth, the National Olympic Committee, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Science, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, the Armed Forces, etc. Therefore, conditions must be created. To prevent parallel work in the field of sports policy. Establishing talent identification centers in football with the help of sports delegations in a systematic and permanent manner should be on the agenda and priority. It is also necessary to establish basketball schools with the permission of the football Federation and with the necessary support and updating rules.	29
Communication with government institutions		30
Communication with volunteer organizations		31
Avoid parallel work Establish permanent talent search centers Establish basketball schools		32
Lack of win-lose thinking	In order to realize the player development program, the view of the club's board of directors should not be just to conclude and win matches at any cost. That is, the win-lose thinking should not dominate the club and be part of the performance appraisal by injecting players from the base teams to the higher level.	33

A total of 189 primary codes (concepts) were extracted in the coding process, which after validation, 33 primary codes (concepts) were compiled.

Selective coding

Selective coding uses the results of previous coding steps, selects the main categories, links them systematically to other categories, validates the connections, and categorizes the categories that need to be closed and developed. (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The paradigm model of this research was designed based on the paradigm model of Strauss and Corbin. In this model, causal conditions, binding or motivating factors, and the process of replacing players are shown. Also, the background conditions are networking for the development of player substitution programs, interaction with other organizations (education and kindergartens), formulation of binding strategies and budgeting to promote win-win thinking in the substitution program of basketball clubs in Iran. Such conditions need to be considered for better success in the implementation of this process. These conditions do not have specific positive or negative effects on the execution of processes. If the intervening conditions have a positive or negative effect on the performance process and can disrupt, facilitate and also accelerate its implementation.

In this process, the main factor in creating the process of replacing the football players of the Iranian Super League, the structural dimension, the field dimension, the human resources dimension, and the ethics dimension has been considered as a central category. Although it cannot be said that this category is the most important, but it should be said that without this category, the process of replacing the football players of the Iranian Super League is not possible. The strategic factor of model, institutional culture and love of service and jihadi leadership has been considered for the succession of Iranian Super League football players, and in terms of consequences, tangible and invisible expected results of succession of Iranian Super League football players and were considered. Consequences, the manifestation of which means the emergence of the phenomenon of improving

the replacement of Iranian Super League football players. The paradigm model of the research is shown in Figure1.

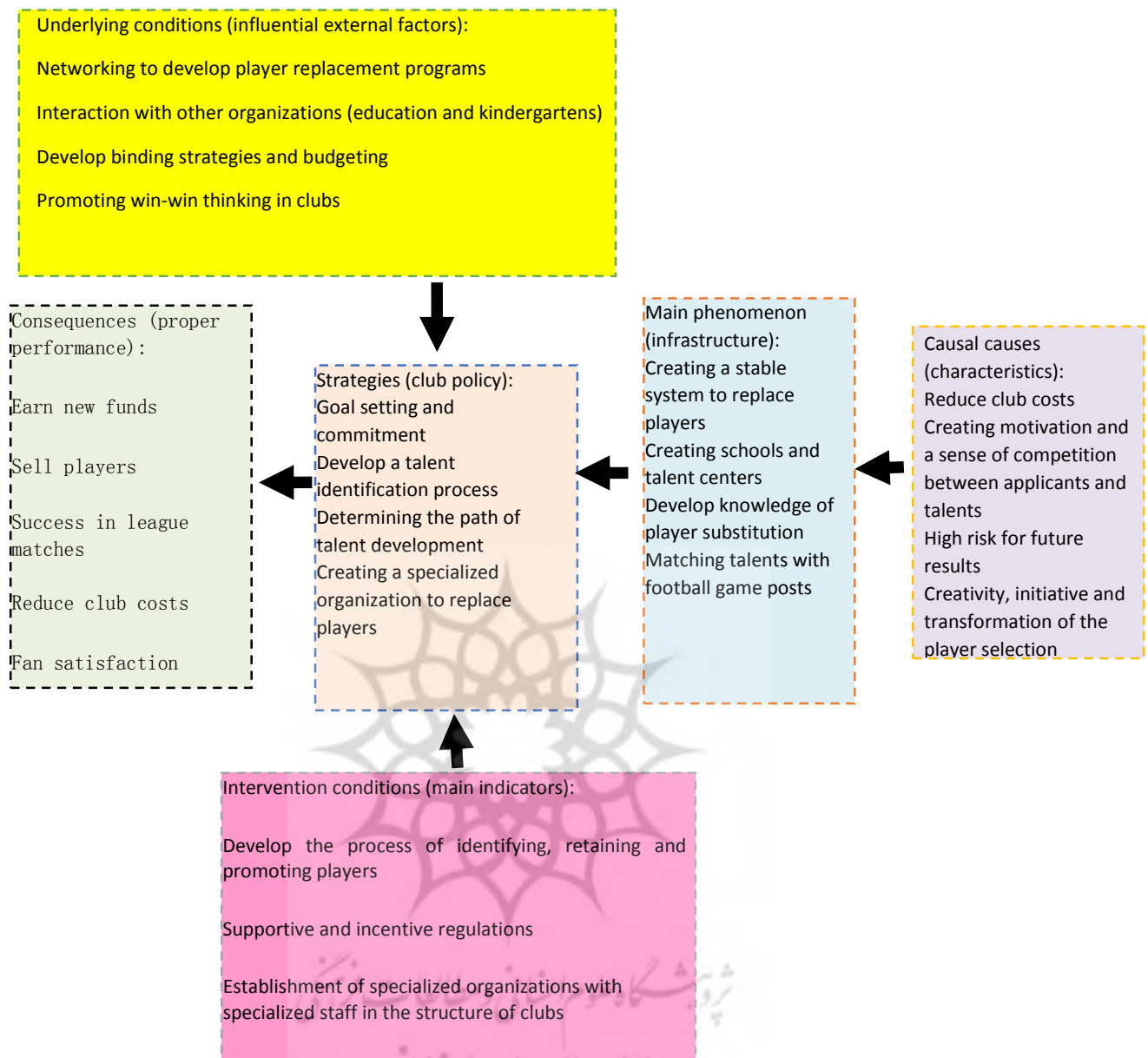


Figure1. Paradigm model of research

Quantitative research methodology

In a small part of the descriptive research method, it is of the correlation type and the field implementation method. The purpose of this stage was to develop a model and framework for modeling football players in the Iranian Super League in the qualitative stage. The statistical population of this study was all athletes and technical staff of football teams present in the Premier League in 2020. According to Morgan table 216 people were selected, as a statistical sample of the study using stratified random sampling method. In order to collect data from a researcher-made questionnaire on the performance of football clubs, which includes 27 items that have been extracted according to the theoretical foundations and according to the qualitative part of the research, and their items based on a five-point Likert scale, from completely Agree (5) to strongly disagree (1) was set

to ensure the face and content validity of the questions, the opinions of 9 football experts who performed in the field of expertise were used. Also, the construct validity of the questionnaire was assessed by Bartlett test and Kaiser-Meyer-Alkin sampling adequacy test. The results are reported in Table 3 and the reliability of the questionnaire was obtained using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The structural equation method was performed using Amos 20 and SPSS 20 software.

Table3. Results of sampling adequacy tests

Performance indicators				
KMO indicators		0.543		
Significance level = 0.002		Bartlett test		
Degree of freedom = 214	Approximate statistics = 78.598	Chi-square		
0.81	Alpha			

In order to investigate the factor structure, the framework of the model of replacing the football players of the Iranian Super League, the path analysis method was used. After calculating the relevant T value of each factor, it was found that the whole framework of the replacement model of Iranian Super League football players has a significant effect on performance. The performance of football clubs was measured in five components: success in competitions, athlete satisfaction, sports development, cost reduction and revenue. As Table 3 shows, all variables have a significant effect.

Table 4. Direct effects of variables

Research variables	Standard estimate	Standard error	Critical ratio	P	Assumptions
Effective conditions for replacing players affect the performance of football clubs	0.853	0.208	5.11	0.001	Accept
Underlying conditions for player substitution affect the performance of football clubs	0.976	0.219	5.32	0.001	Accept
The central category of player substitution breeding affects the performance of football clubs	0.709	0.211	4.97	0.002	Accept
Interfering conditions for player substitution affect the performance of football clubs	0.813	0.184	5.98	0.001	Accept
Long-term substitution programs affect the performance of football clubs	0.935	0.171	6.09	0.003	Accept

Discussion

The results showed that succession programs in football clubs affect the overall performance of clubs and also affect each of the five components of club performance and the proposed model has a suitable structure. The process of player development in clubs in the football Super League in order to increase and improve the effective performance of clubs, indicates that in the present era in today's business conditions is the most appropriate way to reduce costs and profitability of clubs and the key to long-

term success (Ehlen et al., 2018). Raw et al. (2019) found that a codified succession program improves the quality of services and increases competition in sports centers. A well-written program to replace football players can increase creativity. Liphadzi, et al. (2019) found that a codified succession program improves the quality of training and performance of sports organizations. Therefore, the management of football clubs should prioritize the use of substitution programs to be profitable and successful in competitions and reduce costs. Although the need for codified management program skills to succeed in managing a sports organization is quite clear, what is less addressed is the relationship between the codified succession program and the performance of sports clubs and teams, especially in professional football. The results of the present study showed that a codified succession program has an effect on the performance management of the club and can improve the performance components of the club such as success in domestic and foreign competitions and the satisfaction of athletes and spectators. Whelan et al. 2010 and Olayo, (2019) found that the use of trained forces by the club itself has a significant effect on improving the performance of clubs in all areas that can be extended to players and trained forces of football clubs. Ritchie (2020) also found that proper performance provides the basis for improving knowledge management and organizational knowledge transfer. Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine the factors affecting the development of performance in clubs, which is undoubtedly one of the most important factors in identifying, attracting and retaining them in the second step using logical and scientific management, and in the third step, methods of upgrading the players trained by the club to join higher level teams and introducing them to national teams and selling them to other clubs, both in the country and in foreign clubs, which can be a good source of income and stability for the clubs. However, the management of physical and sports activities and effective participation in league competitions need new and efficient management strategies to implement well-codified and strategic programs in their path and with appropriate efficiency. Therefore, applying new management strategies and strategies in the football super League can lead to the development and expansion of healthy competition and relatively sustainable development in the football Super League.

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