



Factors Affecting the Access of Football Teams in Zanjan Province to Higher Levels of National Leagues

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to clarify and analyze the factors affecting the access of Zanjan province football teams to higher Levels of national leagues in Iran. The method of this study was mixed. The research population consisted of 193 coaches and 18 members selected from chairpersons and secretaries of Zanjan province football associations. The sampling was purposive at the interview stage, but at the stage of distributing the questionnaire, given the limited number of first, second, and third class coaches and also the limited number of chairpersons and secretaries of football associations, the samples were selected through total sampling approach and in the case of class 4 coaches, 108 subjects were chosen according to Morgan table. Research tool was only a questionnaire. Validity of the questionnaire was approved by 12 experts and its reliability was found to be 0.94 according to Cronbach's alpha. For data analysis, Kolmogorov-Smirnov, Binomial and Friedman tests were used. The results of the research showed that among the general factors except for the research and education, the effect of other factors including: economic, technical, facilities and equipment, managerial, psychological, social and cultural, and among the minor factors, 22 out of 29 factors are significantly higher than the average. Considering the explained factors and investment on these factors can help the football teams in Zanjan province to promote to the higher Levels of national leagues in Iran.

Introduction

Among all sports, football has had the widest reach and diffusion in the twentieth century (Polly, 2010). Football is the most popular sport in the world with more than 240 million players, one million and 400 thousand teams and 300 thousand clubs worldwide (Cup, 2013). The world without football is unthinkable. So that the number of FIFA members (207 countries) are more than the UN member

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states (192 countries). Considering the World Cup 2002 in Asia, 2006 in Europe, 2010 in Africa and 2014 in the United States, it is believed that the level of interest of the world's population in football is increasing. Nowadays, with the great importance of this sport in the world, it can be deduced that countries which for some reasons are unable to manage the different aspects of this popular sport will also be deprived of its benefits (Darvishi, 2014). In different countries, the organization of football has been formed from several levels, football teams and clubs usually start their activities from the amateur level and with proper planning try to get to higher levels of professionalism. In this process, some football teams and clubs can move to championship level with attention and emphasis on factors which affect success and progress to higher levels, and some do not succeed in this process (Seifpanahi Shabani & Hamidi, 2017).

Researchers have conducted lots of researches on the factors that affect the progress and success in sports. Some of these factors are shared among scholars and some others are different. Brouwers et al. (2015) consider the following factors to be effective in achieving sports success: financial support, coherent organization and structure, the number of participants in sport, the discovery and development of talents, support for athletes during work and retirement, training and coaching classes, providing opportunities for competition, training facilities, and scientific studies (Brouwers, Sotiriadou, & De Bosscher, 2015). Truyens et al. (2014) consider the following factors as being essential for the success of sports organizations: competitive and training facilities, supporting the athletic profession, the discovery and development of talents, youth participation, government and organizational support, financial support, sports environment, academic support, competing opportunities, training and equipping coaches (Truyens, De Bosscher, Heyndels, & Westerbeek, 2014). Sotiriadou and Shilbury (2009) point to the importance of the role of economic, cultural and scientific factors in training the elite athletes. They also believe that some factors like: discovering enthusiastic and talented individuals, developing long-term strategies for achieving success, fundraising and achieving a good social status are effective ways for attracting people to sports, and ultimately educating elite athletes (Sotiriadou & Shilbury, 2009). De Boucher et al. (2009) consider the following 9 Basic pillars to be effective in sports success: financial supports, organization and structure of sporting policies (Comprehensive Approach to Advancement Policy), establishment and participation in sport, an identification system of developing talents, support for athletes and champions, training facilities, holding coaching courses and promoting them, holding national and international competitions, and finally the scientific researches (De Bosscher, De Knop, Van Bottenburg, Shibli, & Bingham, 2009). Gilbertson (2000) considers seven crucial factors in the success of a team or organization as follows: leadership, group motivation, financial resources, goals, creativity, structure and skills (Gilbertson, 2000). Eydipour et al. (2015) believe that the most important challenges and barriers to the development of football in the western provinces of Iran are the lack of long-term planning, disruption in the professional club system, management and marketing weakness (Eydipour, Ashrafkhazei, Aryan, & Gholami Torkslooye, 2015). Alidoust Ghahfarokhi et al. (2014) believe that discovering talents, budget, management and planning, hardware equipment, sports competitions and camps, coordination and communication, promotion of coaches and staff, motivation and support for staff are the most important strategies for sports development (Alidoust Ghahfarokhi, Sajjadi, Maddoddi, & Sa'ahhhan, 2014). Alidoust Ghahfarokhi et al. (2014) believe that discovering talents, budget, management and planning, hardware equipment, sports competitions and camps, coordination and communication, promotion of coaches and staff, motivation and support for staff are the most important strategies for the development of Judo sport in Iran (Alidoust Ghahfarokhi et al., 2014). Asadi et al. (2013) consider the factors influencing the development of Track and Field sport from the viewpoint of the experts and find the following factors as the most crucial ones: talent identification, management, manpower, hardware, methods, education and research, and motivation (Asadi, 2013). Monazami et al. (2011) categorize the four factors affecting the development of physical education and sport as following: financial and human resources as well as technical, structural, managerial, cultural and social factors (Monazami, Alam, & Boushehri, 2011). Asl Kooti (2012) believes that the most important obstacles on the way of football progression in Khuzestan province is considered to be the equipment, management and planning factors (Asl Kooti,

2012). Agdasi & Abdavi Bafatani (2011) believe that the most important factor in the development of championship sports is the facilities and equipment (Agdasi, 2011). Taghipour and Tehrani (2007) consider the following factors as being essential in the development of Iranian women's national Taekwondo Team: Psychological fitness, the use of bodybuilding coach for national team athletes, greater presence in cross-border competitions, use of foreign coach and the promotion of scientific and technical knowledge of domestic coaches (Taghipour, 2007). Amirtash (2008) also considers the following factors as being important in improving handball at the university level: holding more competitions, improving facilities, using more efficient coaches, raising budgets and motivational factors (Amirtash, 2008). Tondnevis and Ghasemi (2007) believe that the following factors have effected Iran's gymnastics to a great extent: Improvement in the level of scientific and technical knowledge of instructors, controlling the activities of coaches, talent identification of apprentices through a technical and scientific method, the development of gymnasium facilities and exclusive Gymnastics halls, equipping the gymnasium with specialized facilities and educational assistance (Tondnevis & Ghassemi, 2007). Farahani and Abdou Baftani (2007) state that the selection of experienced managers to attract expert and experienced people, regular programs and better utilization of the championship sport base in order to discover talents can help to develop championship sports (Farahani, 2007). New Zealand football Federation (2007), believe that the club's unsatisfactory structure, lack of funding and budget, marketing weaknesses, lack of media support, not hiring expert coaches, and inefficient football officials are the main obstacles to the development of football. And finally, Habibi et al. (2011) believe that the most important barriers to football progress in Khuzestan province are considered to be some factors including equipment, management, and planning.

As it is clear, researchers have pointed to various factors affecting development of sports, some of which are similar and some of which are different, but which one can help improve football in Zanzan province. Like many countries, Football is also the most popular sport in Iran. Currently, Iran's football operates at five levels: Premier League, Azadegan League, League Two, Third Division, and Provincial Leagues. Some provinces in Iran have several teams in Premier and Azadegan League and some other provinces do not have any teams in these leagues. The Premier and Azadegan Leagues have always been in the center of attention since the sports and football departments of various provinces in Iran try to participate in these leagues and take advantage of their direct and indirect benefits. Zanzan province, as one of the most popular football provinces in Iran, has not been able to have a team in the Premier or Azadegan League, which have the first and second ranking among the leagues in Iran. These teams have always tried to progress to the top national leagues over the past years, but unfortunately they have not been able to have a good performance and reach the top leagues in Iran. Therefore, in the present study the researcher is trying to explain the factors affecting the access of football teams of Zanzan province to the higher levels of national leagues of Iran.

Methodology

A mix study (qualitative-quantitative) was conducted to fulfill the research objectives. In order to identify the factors influencing the promotion of Zanzan football teams to higher levels of national leagues, some theoretical studies and a semi-structured interviews were used. The interviews were conducted purposefully in 2019. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the subjects. The findings of the interviews along with the information gained from library studies were used in the next stage to prepare a questionnaire and examine the importance of factors affecting the development of football teams in Zanzan province and their promotion to the higher levels of national leagues. Also, this study is considered to have a practical application.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the interviewees

Post	Chairman of the Board	Secretary of the Board	1st degree coach	2nd degree coach	3rd degree coach
frequency	2	2	2	3	6
Gender	Man	Man	Man	Man	Man
Age (years)	40, 46	35, 41	40, 51	38, 40, 40,	30, 33, 35, 40, 42, 44
Education	Bachelor: 1 MA: 1	MA: 2	MA: 1 P.H.D: 1	Bachelor: 1 MA: 2	Undergraduate: 1 Bachelor: 3 MA: 2

The statistical population of the study consisted of 193 first, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th class football coaches in Zanjan province (8 coaches had top ranking, 15 had second class degree, 20 third-class, and 150 fourth class), as well as 18 members selected from chairpersons and secretaries of football association of Zanjan province (9 chairpersons and 9 secretaries). The sampling was purposive at the interview stage and 15 interviews were conducted to reach the theoretical saturation stage. At the stage of distributing the questionnaire, given the low number of first, second, and third class coaches and also the low number of chairpersons and secretaries of football associations, the numbers of samples in this case were equal to the population and chosen as a total number. In the case of fourth class coaches, with using Morgan table, 108 people were randomly selected. Out of 211 people who were the statistical population of the study, 169 subjects were selected as the sample in the distribution phase of the questionnaire. It is worth mentioning that the researcher distributed 120 questionnaires among 4th class instructors in order to fill in for the questionnaires that the first, second and third class instructors failed to complete and also completely analyze the total number of 169 questionnaires.

Data collection was carried out through library studies (review of articles, books, documents and related websites), and field operations (semi-structured in-depth individual interviews and questionnaires). The validity of the questionnaire was verified by 12 university professors in the field of sports science and its reliability was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha test with a coefficient of 0.94. All factors affecting the Zanjan province football teams' promotion to the national league that were identified through the investigator's studies and interviews were used to prepare a questionnaire. The final factors were selected and used in preparing the final draft of the questionnaire, and then the questionnaire was distributed among statistical sample of research to identify the importance of each factor. Finally, by the use of Kolmogorov Smirnov, Binomial and Friedman statistical tests and SPSS software the gathered data were analyzed.

Results

In **table 2**, the mean and standard deviation of the overall factors affecting the progression of Zanjan football teams to the higher levels of national league have been shown. As it is shown, the highest mean is for the economic factor and the lowest mean is for the research and educational factor.

Table 2. The mean and standard deviation of factors affecting the progression of football teams in Zanjan province to higher levels of national national leagues

Factors	Mean	Standard Deviation	Lowest	Highest
Managerial	3/93	0/75	2	5
Facilities and equipment	4/03	0/67	2/50	5
Economical	4/24	0/57	3/00	5
Social and cultural	3/70	0/71	2/67	5
Technical	4/14	0/56	2/75	5
Psychological	3/82	0/62	2/57	5
Research and Educational	3/52	0/96	1/50	5

In **Table 3**, the results of Friedman test have been shown to rank the overall factors affecting the progression of Zanjan province football teams to higher national leagues. As outlined in the table, the most important factors in order of importance are economic, technical, facilities and equipment, managerial, psychological, social and cultural, research and educational. Considering the significance level (P value), the difference in the ranking of the factors is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Table 3. Friedman test results

Factors	Average rating	Rating	X ²	DF	P	N
Economical	5/39	1	280/183	6	0/001	169
Technical	4/86	2				
Facilities and equipment	4/54	3				
Managerial	4/35	4				
Psychological	3/42	5				
Social and cultural	2/83	6				
Research and Educational	2/61	7				

The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that the distribution of data on all general and minor factors affecting the progression of Zanjan football teams to higher levels of national leagues was not normal ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, a binomial test was used to examine the significance of each factor affecting the progression of Zanjan football teams to the higher levels of national leagues in Iran. As shown in Table 4, among the overall factors except for the research and education, the importance of other factors is significantly higher than the average. In the case of minor factors, the significance of 22 factors out of 29 is higher than the average. (Given the fact that the questionnaire was designed according to the 5 point Likert scale, the average is 3).

Table 4. Binomial test results

Overall and minor factors affecting the progression of Zanjan province football teams to higher national leagues	Lower or equal to 3	Higher than 3	Lower or equal to 3 (Percentage)	Higher than 3 (percentage)	Sig
Research and Educational Factors	72	97	43	57	*0/065
1. Football related research programs at sports departments and Football Associations	96	73	57	43	*0/090
2. Football related training programs in sports departments and Football Associations	89	80	53	47	*0/538
Facility and equipment factors	23	146	14	86	0/001

1. Football and futsal fields for practice and holding matches	48	121	28	72	0/001
2. Sports equipment for training and holding matches	44	125	26	74	0/001
Management factors	26	143	15	85	0/001
1. Administrative and organizational structure of Sports and Youth Departments and Football Associations	60	109	36	64	0/001
2. Directors of Sports and Youth Departments and Provincial Football Associations	64	105	38	62	0/002
3. Strategic and operational planning of sport departments, associations and football teams	63	105	38	62	0/002
4. The stability of the management of Sports and Youth Departments and football associations	40	129	24	76	0/001
Psychological factors	24	145	14	86	0/001
1. The perseverance and willpower of the players and the technical staff of the football teams	58	111	34	66	0/001
2. The confidence of the players and the technical staff	77	92	46	54	*0/28 1
3. Commitment of the technical staff and football players	49	120	29	71	0/001
4. The stress of the players and the technical staff	70	99	41	59	0/031
5. Unity and cooperation of players and technical staff	57	112	34	66	0/001
6. The motivation of the players and the technical staff	48	121	28	72	0/001
7 Mutual respect between football players and technical staff	65	104	38	62	0/003
Social and cultural factors	46	123	27	73	0/001
1. Streaming the provincial football teams' matches from media	93	76	55	45	*0/21 8
2. Audience and fans that support the football teams	90	79	53	47	*0/44 2
3. Encouraging adolescents and youth to play football	89	80	53	47	*0/53 8
4. The club for the fans of football teams	72	97	43	57	*0/06 5
5. The position and image of football in the province	56	113	33	67	0/001
6. Charity support for football teams and associations	39	130	23	77	0/001
Technical factors	13	156	8	92	0/001
1. Identifying talents in football	23	146	14	86	0/001
2. Paying attention to basic football teams	46	123	27	73	0/001
3. Coaches of football teams	31	138	18	82	0/001
4. Paying attention to football schools	47	122	28	72	0/001
Economic factors	7	162	4	96	0/001
1. The budget of the football associations	41	128	24	76	0/001
2. Income generation of football associations and teams	23	146	14	86	0/001
3. The financial situation of players and football coaches	15	154	9	91	0/001

4. Sponsor support for teams and football associations	32	137	19	81	0/001
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* There is no significant difference in these factors or it is below average impact rate.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the results, among the seven factors explained and emphasized by experts to be effective in the progression of Zanjan province football teams to the higher levels of national of Iran, the only factor that has a sub-average impact is research and education and the impact of the remaining factors include of economical (The budget of the football associations, Income generation of football associations and teams, The financial situation of players and football coaches, Sponsor support for teams and football associations), technical (Identifying talents in football, Paying attention to basic football teams, Coaches of football teams, Paying attention to football schools), facilities and equipment (Football and futsal fields for practice and holding matches, Sports equipment for training and holding matches), managerial (Administrative and organizational structure of Sports and Youth Departments and Football Associations, Directors of Sports and Youth Departments and Provincial Football Associations, Strategic and operational planning of sport departments, associations and football teams, The stability of the management of Sports and Youth Departments and football associations), psychological (The perseverance and willpower of the players and the technical staff of the football teams, The confidence of the players and the technical staff, Commitment of the technical staff and football players, The stress of the players and the technical staff, Unity and cooperation of players and technical staff, The motivation of the players and the technical staff, Mutual respect between football players and technical staff) and social and cultural (Streaming the provincial football teams' matches from media, Audience and fans that support the football teams, Encouraging adolescents and youth to play football, The club for the fans of football teams, The position and image of football in the province, Charity support for football teams and associations) is higher than average. Figure 1 shows six major factors affecting the progression of football teams in Zanjan province to higher levels of national leagues.

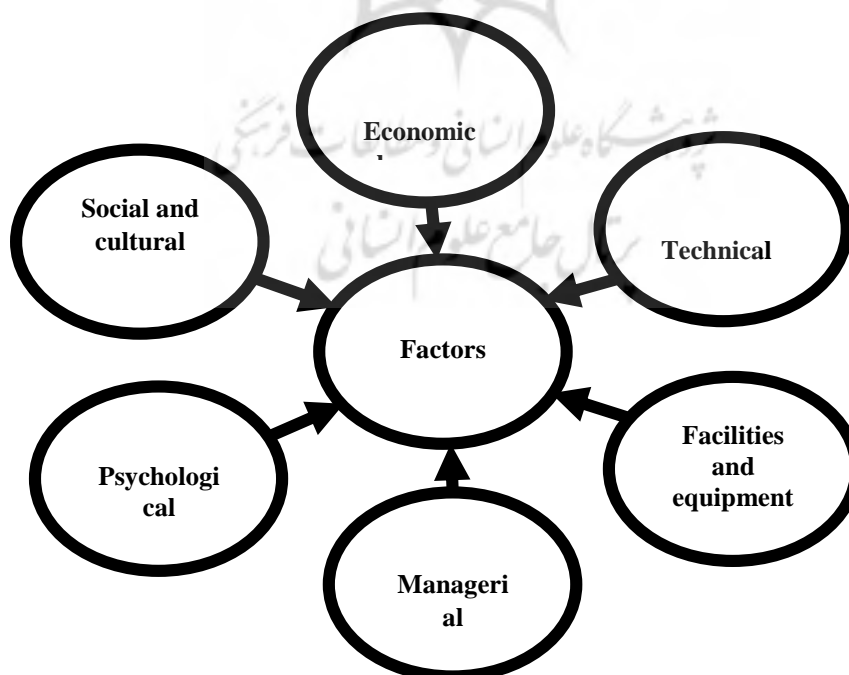


Figure 1. Factors affecting the progression of football teams in Zanjan province to higher levels of national leagues

The most important factor affecting the progression of Zanjan football teams to the higher levels of national league is economic factor. This finding is supported by Pawlowski et al. (2014), Aoyagi et al. (2013), Brouwers et al. (2015), Truyens et al. (2014), Sotiriadou & Shilbury (2009), De Bosscher et al. (2009), Alidoust Ghahfarokhi et al. (2014), Hashemi (2014), Eydipour et al. (2015), Monazami et al. (2011)(Alidoust Ghahfarokhi et al., 2014; Aoyagi et al., 2013; Brouwers et al., 2015; De Bosscher et al., 2009; Eydipour et al., 2015; Hashemi, 2014; Monazami et al., 2011; Pawlowski, Downward, & Rasciute, 2014; Sotiriadou & Shilbury, 2009; Truyens et al., 2014). All the aforementioned researchers have somehow pointed out the role of economic factors, such as proper financial budget, marketing and money making, sponsorship, and the support of organizations in the advancement and success of sports. As the management texts refer to financial resources as the engine of any organization, all sports organizations including clubs and football teams need a bulk of financial resources due to their high costs and expenses. The revenues of football clubs come from three main ways: broadcasting and media rights, business income, and match day revenues, each of which uses different ways to earn money. Given the fact that the football teams of Zanjan province are not professional, it will be even more difficult to earn money. But provincial football clubs can get governmental aids, funding from relevant organizations, and possibly occasional sponsors to solve some of their economic problems.

The second factor affecting the Zanjan province football teams' access to higher levels of national leagues is a technical factor. This finding is supported by Eydipour et al. (2015), Brouwers et al. (2015), Truyens et al. (2014), Sotiriadou & Shilbury (2009), De Bosscher et al. (2009), Monazami et al. (2011), Ghahremantabrizi et al (2017), Ramzani Nejad et al (2010), Ghofrani (2010)(Brouwers et al., 2015; De Bosscher et al., 2009; Eydipour et al., 2015; Ghahremantabrizi, Rahimi, & Razavi, 2017; Ghofrani et al., 2010; Monazami et al., 2011; Ramzani Nejad, Hosseini, Benar, & Mohades, 2010; Sotiriadou & Shilbury, 2009; Truyens et al., 2014). These researchers have also referred to the role of technical factors such as talent identification and development, ready and skilled players, skilled and experienced mentors. So, using high quality coaches and players seems to be a quick way for improving the level of Zanjan province football teams. In order to achieve this goal, native athletes and coaches should be trained to meet the high quality standards, otherwise, non-native athletes and coaches should be used in Zanjan province football teams. Provincial sports officials can provide a significant contribution to the progression of football teams in the coming years through more long-term planning, paying attention to football schools, identifying the province's football talents and forming basic teams.

The third factor affecting Zanjan province football teams' access to the higher levels of national leagues is the facility and equipment. The findings of this study are supported by Aoyagi et al. (2013), Gholami Torkesaluye et al. (2013), Corseuil & et al (2011), Eydipour et al. (2015), Khodayari et al. (2014), Monazami et al. (2011), Ghofrani (2010)(Aoyagi et al., 2013; Corseuil et al., 2011; Eydipour et al., 2015; Ghofrani et al., 2010; Gholami Torkesaluye, Nagafi TirehShabankareh, Fatemi, & Rastgari, 2013; Khodayari, Ghsami, Babaei Jafari, Asgari, & Babaei Jafari, 2014; Monazami et al., 2011). These researchers point to the role of facility and equipment factors such as suitable place for exercising and holding matches, and exercise equipment. Undoubtedly, the most urgent need of any team and football club is having a grass field and a standard stadium since without having a suitable football field and a stadium, no football team will be able to practice and compete with other teams. The construction of new stadiums, the reconstruction of current stadiums, preparing facilities for the well-being of the audience, not only address the basic needs of Zanjan province football teams, but also can significantly help to increase club revenues. For the establishment of new stadiums, clubs can get help from banks and private investors. Nowadays, in various countries of the world including Italy and England, clubs are building modern stadiums by borrowing large loans. Clubs can redeem

their loans through current revenues, especially earnings on the day of the tournament, and ultimately become the owner of the modern stadium.

The fourth factor affecting the Zanjan province football teams' access to the higher levels of national leagues is the managerial factor. This finding is supported by the studies of Ferkins (2010), Hashemi (2014), Eydipour et al. (2014), Razavi (2013), Seifpanahi Shabani and Hamidi, M. (2017), Khodayari et al. (2014), Monazami et al. (2011), and Ramzani Nejad et al. (2010)(Eydipour et al., 2015; Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010; Hashemi, 2014; Khodayari et al., 2014; Monazami et al., 2011; Ramzani Nejad et al., 2010; Razavi, Firuzi, & Farzan, 2013; Seifpanahi Shabani & Hamidi, 2017). All the aforementioned scholars in their research have somehow pointed out the role of managerial factors, such as effective management and leadership, accurate planning, appropriate use of human resources, and motivation for sport progress and achievement. There is no doubt that Zanjan province football teams and clubs need to have an efficient and effective management to improve their position. This management that includes the Sports and Youth Department of the province and also the football associations and clubs can provide the qualifications needed for the Zanjan province football teams to promote to the premier league through: providing guidance, strategic plans, policies, experienced and skilled staff, and motivating all the people who are involved in provincial football including players, coaches and chairpersons of associations.

The fifth factor affecting the progression of Zanjan province football teams to higher levels of national leagues is psychological factor. This finding is supported by the studies of Perlini & Halverson (2006), Gould et al. (2002), Hashemi (2014), Khodayari et al (2014)(Gould, Dieffenbach, & Moffett, 2002; Hashemi, 2014; Khodayari et al., 2014; Perlini & Halverson, 2006). All of these researchers have referred to psychological factors such as motivation, willpower, perseverance, commitment and accountability, team cohesion and internal control for success and progress in sports. Perhaps the best way to eliminate psychological barriers is to use a certified psychologist along with the provincial football teams and clubs. Nowadays, the importance of using psychologists along with athletes and sport teams is absolutely undeniable. In a period of time when most athletes and teams are physically fit, mental fitness for sporting success is undeniably needed.

The sixth factor affecting the Zanjan province football teams' access to the higher levels of national leagues is the social and cultural factor. This finding was also found in the research of Pawlowski et al. (2014), Hashemi (2014), Eydipour et al. (2011), and Monazami et al. (2011)(Eydipour et al., 2015; Hashemi, 2014; Monazami et al., 2011; Pawlowski et al., 2014). These researchers have also referred to the role of social and cultural factors, such as the support of the audience, the value of sport and physical activity by the people and the authorities in promoting sport development. After reviewing various sports around the world, it can be concluded that every sport in any region that has advanced to top levels owes that to universal support of the people. Fans support in football seems to be even more important than any other sport, so that without the presence of audience at the stadiums, the game of football will turn from an exciting competition to a dull game. Zanjan's football should have the full support of the people and authorities if it wants to improve its position. In this regard, all the available facilities must be utilized to promote the culture of public support for football.

Generally, six important economic, technical, equipment, managerial, psychological and socio-cultural factors were identified as the most important factors affecting the football teams of Zanjan province to reach higher levels of national leagues in Iran, respectively. According to these results, it is suggested to the football officials of Zanjan province to pay special attention to the mentioned factors, especially economic, technical, facilities and equipment, and managerial factors.

In the economic field, allocating more funds to the province's football, attracting sponsors, donating donors, covering football matches on the provincial television network, and generating revenue for sports delegations can be helpful. In the technical field, talent identification and emphasis on grassroots football, employing higher level coaches and players from other provinces will be a

good solution. In the field of facilities and equipment, repair and reconstruction of existing football fields, construction of new football fields with necessary ancillary facilities and providing the necessary equipment for the province's football teams by sports officials is vital. And in the field of football management in Zanjan province, it needs the special attention of all sports and non-sports officials of the province, so that at least it should be the first priority of the provincial sports officials.

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