



## Factors Affecting the Development of Championship Swimming (Case Study: Yazd province, Iran)

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to identify the factors affecting the development of championship swimming in Yazd, Iran from the perspective of coaches, experts, and managers. 123 experts in the field of swimming were randomly selected as the research sample, and a researcher-developed questionnaire was used for data collection. Data analysis was performed using one-way analysis of variance and the Kruskal-Wallis test. The results showed that all coaches, experts, and managers had a consensus on improving the level of scientific and technical knowledge of coaches, controlling and monitoring the activities of coaches, finding talent using scientific and specialized methods, and establishing the swimming schools, facilities, and equipment. Therefore, these factors were found to be the most important and effective factors in developing the championship swimming in Yazd province.

## Introduction

Today, a variety of sports is observed in human communities including educational, public and recreational, championship, and professional sports. The development of physical education and sports as a basis for the supply and training of fit and healthy human resources is considered a part of national development programs (Jamali Gharakhan Lou, Kashif, & Abdavi, 2021). Championship sports are competitive and organized sports that are performed according to specific rules and regulations to improve sports records and earn a rank or medal. The goals of championship sports are increasing the number of championship athletes, improving the quality and winning medals in international arenas, increasing the number of people entering the Olympic Games, maintaining and improving the position of national teams in the rankings (Sajadi, Rahmati, Hamidi, & Khabiri, 2022). Championship sports are considered competitive and organized sports in which skilled athletes

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participate according to the standards set by sports organizations and to earn championship ranks and medals. Active participants in championship sports seek to excel and maximize their physical and sports performance, which is also known as the victory index (Rezaei, Gharakhan Lou, & Soleimani Moghadam, 2019). The development of championship sports is management planning and specialized grounding, which takes place under the supervision of the sports organization of each country to achieve success in the world and Olympic competitions. In the detailed document of the comprehensive system for the development of physical education and sport of the country, the general goal of developing championship sports is to improve the status of the country's sports in the regional and global arenas. This goal includes the qualitative goal of promoting national honors (Deniz & Yenel, 2013).

Examining the development indicators of championship sports in the provinces of the country, knowing the position of the provinces in championship sports, and characterizing the extent of their development can indicate the general conditions of championship sports in the country. Social settings and organizations are among the general conditions in championship sports that provide a platform for athletes to pass different sports levels and reach the peak or the utmost level of a sport and become an elite athlete (Khoshbakhti, nasseh, & nakhzari moghadam, 2021). Meanwhile, different countries of the world focus on those sports that can win more medals in sports competitions. Among these sports, swimming should be mentioned.

Swimming is one of the entertaining sports that have always been of interest because of the role it plays in saving humans in the aquatic sphere (Rezakhani Taleghani, Khodayari, Ghasemi, & Kohandel, 2020). Also, it is known as a basic sport and its learning is highly recommended in the religion of Islam (Shabani & Moradi, 2019). Swimming has attracted the attention of many spectators in important competitions; also, having 20 distance events and 108 Olympic medals in various divisions, it is considered one of the most medal-rich sports in the Olympics. Indeed, considering the history of the Olympics, it is revealed that the countries that have been successful in this field have somehow caused the success of their country's sports caravans in the same competitions (America and Australia, 2020). In this vein, many countries of the world have continuously adopted a practical outlook on this sport, trying to make it progress by providing the facilities in their country. Nonetheless, considering this, haplessly, on no occasion has our country Iran been able to succeed in this sport. One of the reasons for the success of celebrated countries in swimming is the development of this field in the cities and provinces. Statistics in Iran have shown that half of the country's provinces have not been successful in the development of swimming (Ghahremantabrizi, Rahimi, & Razavi, 2017).

Given the sports indicators in Iran, it appears that sports facilities are not equally distributed in all provinces so that their full capacities for the development of sports in the provinces and hence, the country have not been exploited. Apart from inequalities caused by economic imbalance and the lack of proper distribution of resources, an important issue in the divergences of sports development is the existence of a specific structure of the planning system in Iran country (Shirzadi, Razavi, Amirnejad, & Mohammadi, 2020). Thus, it is necessary to examine the current situation in the country and provinces and the growth trend of championship sports and identify the effective factors in its progress.

The review of literature has also shown the existence of research on the same challenges and issues, so that in Iran, Sajadi et al. (2022), Mallaei et al. (2018), Sharbatzadeh et al. (2021), Jamali Gharakhanlou et al. (2021), Shirzadi et al. (2019), Kashef et al. (2018), Maleki et al. (2022), and in foreign countries, Asslestine and Edwards (2019), MacIntosh et al. (2022) and Tan et al. (2019), Darnell, Field, & Kidd (2019), have conducted studies on championship sports and attained diverse results.

Today, the world nations have realized that the development of championship sports and taking advantage of their direct and indirect benefits are not possible without proper planning and policies; in this vein, advancement in the championship sports, like any other system, needs the development of macro-goals, strategies and practical plans for the future, so that while informing the direction of movement, it can prevent redundancy and disorientation as well as wasting financial, human, physical and informational resources (Bhan, Bhadra, Rao, Yore, & Raj, 2020). Therefore, the expansion of championship sports as a major part of the country's sports system requires that a comprehensive, strategic, and codified system govern it. Due to the fact that rulers mostly consider sports as a

dimension of social development, they make large investments in it for economic, political, cultural, and social exploitations. In addition, with the establishment of relevant ministries and organizations at the national level and institutions and associations at the international level, national governments and international assemblies pay special attention to sports and make good use of their role and position in the direction of development.

Accordingly, based on the literature review, the overall structure of sport has often been composed of four principles including: training sport, sport for all and recreation, championship sport, and professional sport. Considering this structure is critical in the process of sport management and developing different aspects of sport. Nowadays, sport organizations in any country should be unified and specified. Also, there should be a rationale behind their ongoing and follow-up activities and objectives. In the structure and organization of a country's sport plans, the importance rate of activities, objectives, plans and organizations must be clear. Given the mentioned cases, for a regular and systematic planning for sport in any country, all aspects of sport should be considered and emphasized (Moradi & Shabani, 2020).

In fact, the main reason for attracting attention and importance can be found in the impressiveness of sports, where public consideration and interest towards sports, and more precisely, their public popularity, has made them appear significant and effective wherever they exist. However, the unfortunate fact is that there is no accurate prioritization in championship sports, and sports systems across the world have leaned towards getting more professional after the increase in the international rivalries at the end of the 19th century (Salimi, 2020). Besides, the spread and popularity of championship sports have intensified the competitions held to select male and female elite athletes in various sports fields as well as the competitions between the companies on a global scale to achieve prominent positions (Arian & Ghaderi, 2021). Considering the multi-faceted importance of the development of championship sports for the country and the province, the current research aimed to investigate and identify the effective factors in the development of championship sports in Yazd province in Iran, and prioritize the factors from the point of view of experts in these sports.

## Methodology

This current study was a descriptive, survey type research that was conducted as a field study. The statistical population included all coaches, experts, and managers of the physical training organization in the field of swimming in Yazd province. Based on the statistics of the General Department of physical training of the province and the swimming board, the total population was 194. 123 subjects was found to be a proper sample based on Morgan's table, and then by stratified sampling, 71 coaches, 32 experts, and 20 managers were selected. The reason for choosing these individuals was their experimental background and research study in the relevant fields, assisting a deeper and more comprehensive investigation of the research. After attending the meetings of the physical education organization of the province, the researcher distributed the questionnaires among the managers and experts of the physical education departments. Meanwhile, the questionnaires were distributed among the coaches in the provincial swimming league competitions and were collected after completion. It is noted that given the significance of truth and accuracy in answering the questions, the participants were asked to answer the questions at an appropriate time.

Measurement instrument: Incompatibility with the questionnaire in the (Tondnevis & Ghasemi, 2006) study, the data measurement instrument in this research was set at  $\alpha = 0.89$ , using the formula for Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and its reliability in the present research was estimated  $\alpha = 0.91$ . This questionnaire has 35 items on the effective factors for the development of the province's championship swimming based on a five-point Likert scale. In each item, the very low alternative is characterized by 1, low 2, average 3, high 4, and very high 5 scores.

Each subject received eight separate scores, seven related to each group of the research questionnaire variables and one score from the total scores of 35 items. Also, the subjects' demographic characteristics including gender, age, educational background and work experience were collected.

Using factor analysis, the main variables of this questionnaire were divided into 7 main groups, as shown below in Table 1.

**Table1.** Seven groups of variables in the development of championship swimming

Variables	Content	Item No.
Group 1	Recruiting a foreign coach, bodybuilding coach, nutritionist, and psychologist and increasing the hours and number of training sessions	2,12,14,15,22
Group 2	Spiritual support for coaches and athletes, using specialized and educated people in the field of physical education, expanding communication with the world federation and celebrated countries, setting up a research committee, planning, presence of a skilled and experienced manager	5,7,16,31,32,34
Group 3	Improving the level of scientific and technical knowledge of coaches, controlling and monitoring the activities of coaches, finding talent in a scientific and specialized way, establishing swimming schools, facilities and equipment	1,3,8,23,25,28
Group 4	Support of physical training organization and National Olympic Committee, financial support of coaches, athletes and attracting financial sponsors	4,6,33,35
Group 5	The integrated education system, development of swimming in kindergartens and schools, federation budgeting and advertising	21,24,27,30
Group 6	Placement, providing future employment and housing, conditions for athletes to continue their studies	9,10,11,12
Group 7	Matches, camps and goals alignment	29,17,18,19,20

In the current questionnaire, due to the variety of questions in each group, the researcher did not specify a name for each group, and so the research variables were called seven groups according to the type/nature of the questions. Also, in the current research, the reliability was investigated through preliminary studies and Cronbach's alpha test ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ).

Descriptive statistics was used to describe the research variables. In order to compare the perspectives of the studied groups, inferential statistics, including comparing mean rank, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov, and the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis tests were used. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software version 20.

## Results

In Table 2, the average age of managers (38.60), the average age of experts (34.38), and the average age of coaches (34.94) are presented of which 64 (52%) were men and 59 (48%) were women and also the position of each group in this statistical sample, which includes 20 managers (16.3%), 32 experts (26%) and 71 coaches (57.7%).

**Table2.** Demographic statistics of the research sample (Age, Position)

Participants	Number	Minimum age	Maximum age	Average Age	
				Percentage	
<b>Managers</b>	20	27	54	<b>38.60</b>	<b>16.3</b>
<b>Experts</b>	32	26	47	<b>34.38</b>	<b>26.0</b>
<b>Coaches</b>	71	23	70	<b>34.94</b>	<b>57.7</b>
<b>Total</b>	123	23	70	<b>35.93</b>	<b>100</b>

Regarding the inferential statistics, using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the normality of the data distribution was investigated from the common point of view of the three commenting groups (managers, experts, and coaches) and separating them. The results indicated that the data distribution was not normal ( $P \geq 0.05$ ), (Table 3), hence the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was used to check the equality of the mean of the seven variables affecting the development of championship swimming.

**Table3.** Checking the normality of the sub-variables

Participants	Kolmogorov-Smirnov test	Level of significance
<b>Managers</b>	1.56	<b>0.01</b>
<b>Experts</b>	0.59	<b>0.01</b>
<b>Coaches</b>	2.21	<b>0.00</b>
<b>Total</b>	2.57	<b>0.00</b>

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test in Table 4 present the mean difference between the seven effective groups in the development of championship swimming from the common point of view of three commenting groups (managers, experts, and coaches) and their separation.

**Table 4.** Examination of the effective groups on the development of swimming from a general and disaggregated perspective (managers, experts, and coaches)

Participants	Chi- square ( $X^2$ )	Degree of freedom	Level of significance
<b>Managers</b>	15.09	6	<b>0.02</b>
<b>Experts</b>	12.03	6	<b>0.06</b>
<b>Coaches</b>	27.01	6	<b>0.00</b>
<b>Total</b>	49.79	6	<b>0.00</b>

Considering that P is less than 0.05 at the significance level of 95%, the mean of the variables affecting the development of swimming is not the same from the perspective of managers and coaches and the common (general) view of the three commenting groups; in other words, there is a significant difference between the seven groups; however, this mean is the same at  $P = 0.05$  from the perspective of experts.

Having reduced the level of confidence, it can be said that P is less than 0.1 at the significance level of 90% and the assumption of the equality of the mean of the seven variables of swimming development is rejected. Now, using the mean ranks, the seven groups can be prioritized from the perspective of the commentators (Table 5).

**Table5.** The mean ranks of the seven variables from perspective of managers, experts and coaches

<b>Position Group</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Managers</b>	80.38	71.30	87.88	79.53	58.35	70.10	<b>45.98</b>
<b>Experts</b>	131.41	109.63	139.44	123.14	110.00	104.89	<b>87.00</b>
<b>Coaches</b>	259.63	263.09	291.44	189.86	208.13	222.33	<b>208.51</b>
<b>Total</b>	452.97	440.92	520.62	491.24	374.80	396.41	<b>340.03</b>

As the comparison of the mean ranks in Table 5 indicates, from the general perspective, the third, fourth, and first groups; from the managers' perspective, the third, first and fourth groups; from the experts' perspective, the third, fourth and first groups, and from the coaches' perspective, the third, fourth and second groups of the research variables are more effective in the development of championship swimming in Yazd province.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to the factors affecting the development of championship swimming in Yazd province.

The findings of the research showed that among the seven groups of the research variables, all three groups of coaches, experts, and managers, recognized the variables of the third group variables as the most important factors in the development of championship swimming which include improving the level of scientific and technical knowledge of coaches, controlling and monitoring the activities of coaches, finding talent using a scientific and specialized method as well as the establishment of swimming schools, facilities and equipment.

This finding is consistent with the research results of Sajadi et al. (2022), Mallaei et al. (2018), Sharbatzadeh et al. (2021), Jamali GharaKhanlou et al. (2021), Shirzadi et al. (2019), Kashef et al. (2018), Maleki et al. (2022), Asslestine & Edwards (2019), MacIntosh et al. (2022), Tan et al. (2019), (Darnell, 2019), Fauzan et all. (2022), Yustres et al. (2020). A research was conducted on 31 provinces of Iran by Mallaei et al. (2018), the results showed that due to the inequity in the development of championship sports in the provinces of the country, the priority of allotting resources in prospective planning should be allocated to the borderline and peripheral provinces, so that this will promote sports in deprived provinces as much as possible (Mallaei, Ramzaninejad, yasoori, & Javadipour, 2018). In another study, Sajadi et al. (2022) showed that the deputy will be able to achieve its lofty organizational goals by using the upcoming opportunities and reducing internal weaknesses and relying on conservative strategies. Kashef et al. (2018), discovered that for the development of championship sports, plans and strategies should be carried out operationally (Kashef, Ameri, Ahmadi, & Marefat, 2018). Also, in the research of Shirzadi et al. (2018), the results showed that the route to the development of championship sports in Iran is faced with obstacles. In Maleki et al.'s research (2022), the results showed that external environmental factors, including social and cultural, economic, political and ecological factors, have a directly positive and significant effect on the development of women's championship sports, so they justified about 81% of the dependent variable (development of women's championship sports) in the study. Also, in the research conducted by Sharbatzadeh et al. (2022), the results showed that the comprehensive championship sports program of the Islamic Republic of Iran has 10 strengths, 14 weaknesses, 10 opportunities and 12 threats, and there are 21 strategies in total. In another research conducted by Jamali Gharakhanlou (2021), the results showed that the development and application of strategic plans, the implementation of the community system of talent search, the empowerment of the private sector as well as equipping and standardization of databases are among the most important strategies to pursue. Therefore, addressing and overcoming these issues can pave the way for the development of championship sports. In the research of Asselstein and Edwards (2019), the results showed that sports organizations should be able to manage their resources and achieve the desired competitive advantage with a strategic plan

aligned with the NSO (Asselstine & Edwards, 2019). Tan et al. (2019), conducted a study, The results showed that of these five factors, poor performance in important international sports events, and the desire to succeed along with the fear of falling behind the main competitors were identified as the most important factors in the research (Tan, Zheng, & Dickson, 2019). In the research of Yustres Amores et al. (2019), the results showed that Swimmers with exceptional junior performance times, or a higher rate of progress are more likely to be successful at the senior WCs (Yustres, Del Cerro, & Peyrebrune, 2020).

Considering the above-mentioned points, if we aim to develop championship sports based on the characteristics of each region, we have to equip championship sports bases in the provinces; additionally, we must pay special attention to deprived areas and places with low populations. Building sports facilities and providing suitable training facilities for these areas can enhance the process of the talent search. Also, the use of motivational tools such as providing financial rewards to the best coaches and athletes, the authorities' assistance to the provincial championship sports and their financial support for elite athletes in different regions can be effective for better performance. In addition to material support, spiritual support can also be effective in the development of championship sports. Thus, supporting athletes, champions, and medalists, providing free education conditions for champions, and honoring elite athletes and coaches in the provinces are effective for the development of championship sports and for supporting human resources related to championship sports.

Also, the authorities can provide financial support to coaches and players, grant long-term loans with low interest to clubs, increase the sports budget, hand over tasks to the private sector, invest in basic teams, develop the economic and financial capacity of clubs, privatize the clubs, and create a safe environment for investment and marketing management to expand and develop sports at the provincial level. On the other hand, the provincial mass media can be used to revive the swimming sport. In fact, it is necessary to publicize the undertakings of this basic sport at the provincial level by holding swimming competitions and inviting journalists and media from the center of the province to broadcast. In addition, the authorities should try to create basic swimming pools for training and long-distance swimming pools with various facilities for practicing swimming in the province. This can occur with continuous support from the General Department of Sports and Youth of Yazd Province and subsequently the Ministry of Sports and Youth. Furthermore, adding recreational facilities to these water pools and attracting customers to have fun can generate income, develop and improve swimming sports in Yazd province, and thus provide the necessary grounds for the growth and development of championship sports in the province. As for further research, it is suggested to investigate and elucidate the provincial challenges of the swimming sport, explore the methods of finding talent in this sport, compare the facilities in Yazd province with those of the celebrated nations, compare training and retraining of the domestic coaches in the province with the coaches of celebrated countries, and to clarify the success factors of elite swimming athletes in Iran's provinces as well as in the world's celebrated countries.

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