

## Evaluating the Performance of the Refereeing Department of the Football Federation from the Perspective of the Referees Using a Balanced Scorecard

Received: 2022-02-16

Accepted: 2022-05-01

Vol. 3, No.2. Spring. 2022, 13-22

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** This study aimed to evaluate the performance of the refereeing department of the Football Federation from the perspective of referees using a balanced scorecard.

**Methods:** The present study was a descriptive survey in terms of practical purpose and type of study, the information of which was collected in the field. The statistical population included all referees and assistant referees of the Iranian Premier League and the First Division, whose number was announced as 152 according to the website of the Refereeing Committee of the Iran Football Federation (N=n). In order to collect data, a performance evaluation questionnaire using the balanced scorecard (Kaplan and Norton, 1996) was used. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the research data. SPSS version 23 and LISREL 8/80 software were used to analyze the data.

**Results:** The results showed that the mean score of performance evaluation and all its components indicate a favorable relative status and there is a significant difference between the mean performance evaluation and its components with the hypothetical average. Also, it was found that there is a significant priority among the performance evaluation components, according to which, the most important priority is related to the "financial" and "internal processes", "growth and learning" and "customer" are in the second to fourth. Finally, it was found that the structural equation model of the research has a significant fit.

**Conclusion:** According to the findings, it can be said that the refereeing department should pay special attention to the financial issues related to referees and always support them in this regard, as well as strengthen other aspects.

**Keywords:** Balanced Scorecard, Football, Performance Evaluation, Refereeing.

## Introduction

Football is a sport with many spectators and excitement, and its refereeing, due to the presence of these factors, brings a lot of sensitivity and psychological pressure. Researchers believe that the presence of fans and spectators causes anxiety and stress in referees. The same thing, in some cases, leads to wrong decisions by the referees (Taylor et al, 1990). It has also been shown that the presence of spectators has a significant and exciting effect on the referees' decisions. The referees, observing the protests and the noise of the spectators, are hesitant to announce minor fouls compared to the spectators who are silent (Neville et al., 2002). Judging a football competition is also challenging in terms of the need for quick decisions, especially when decisions have to be made in front of large spectators. This is because if the presence of fans and spectators increases anxiety, it can make decision-making more difficult, in which case if the referees cannot moderate the pressure and anxiety created, they will face more complex problems (Weinberg and Arichardson, 2002). Professional football referees are exposed to a lot of external and internal pressures and are in the spotlight due to the sensitivity of their decisions and the speed of decision-making (Di Corrado et al., 2011). In sports psychology, a lot of research has been done on coaches and players, but not enough has been done on referees, especially football referees. During the match, the referee must do his job in the best possible way, which is to make timely and quick decisions regarding the observance of the rules during the game, and at the same time must overcome the pressures caused by individual mistakes, players, colleagues, coaches, press, spectators, mental and physical fatigue (Anshel et al., 2013; Voight, 2009).

In situations of uncertainty in the environment, decision-making will often be associated with stress and anxiety. Referees of sports competitions (such as football) are among the people who are in this situation more than others. Usually, more attention is paid to the performance of the football referee on the field than to the players. Players make mistakes several times during the game but they are not

criticized much, but when a decision is made during the judging a match, this mistake is seen quickly and is attacked by criticism. These criticisms may come from players, technical staff of teams and coaches, managers of teams and sports clubs, match observers, news media and colleagues and spectators. The direct target of these social pressures in football is, without a doubt, none other than the refereeing team. These pressures are undoubtedly an integral part of the refereeing job at all levels. The referee's method of coping with these pressures, physical quality, in addition to psychological and cognitive abilities are among the most important factors determining the success and failure of the referee (Salehi and Mohseni, 2017). By review of research can classify the potential anxiety and stressors that referees in various disciplines are constantly exposed to into four groups (Goldsmith & Williams, 1992; Taylor et al., 1990): Factors associated with fear of failure in refereeing and making wrong decisions, factors related to time constraints in decision making, physical injury, aggression, and verbal attacks, especially by players, spectators and coaches, and conflict with colleagues about decisions made during the game.

In this regard, considering the importance of the refereeing issue and the need to pay attention to the referees, it seems necessary to evaluate the performance of these people during the competition season and the decisions they make. Monitoring and evaluating performance make the system intelligent and the main part of organizational policy formulation and implementation and can be very helpful in leading systems to the correct and efficient use of resources (Asmild et al., 2009). However, most of the country's sports organizations do not have a proper performance evaluation system, and their evaluation is done in a traditional way and they use financial and retrospective indicators to evaluate the performance. Relying solely on financial performance metrics has detrimental consequences and may lead to job stress and mistrust of supervisors. All public and private organizations need a performance evaluation system for the development, growth, and sustainability of today's competitive environment in which they can measure the

efficiency and effectiveness of their organization's programs, processes, and human resources. Efficient organizations are not content to collect and analyze data, but use this data to improve the organization and fulfill missions and strategies. In other words, instead of evaluating performance, they manage performance (Amiri, 2006).

Performance evaluation is a process that seems necessary in all organizations and this evaluation is in fact a protection of the organization against leading pests (Parker, 2000). On the other hand, there have always been problems with evaluating the performance of sports organizations that have made it almost impossible to make accurate and reliable evaluations. Existence of many and in many cases hidden criteria and indicators has made evaluation a complex problem that has also prevented mathematical algorithms from providing appropriate solutions to build an efficient evaluation model (Delurgio, 1998).

In order to understand the concept of performance and its operational application in the study of organization and management, it is necessary to use a comprehensive model so that it can show different angles of performance. Kaplan and Norton (2006) in the late twentieth century introduced a tool for evaluating performance in organizations called the Balanced Scorecard. After evolving, this tool went beyond an evaluation tool and provided a framework for implementing the goals and strategies of the organization (Niven, 2006). Today, in the country's sports organizations, different models have been used to evaluate performance, in each of which the environment has been analyzed with a different approach. One of these strategic models is the balanced scorecard model in which all aspects of an organization are examined in a balanced way (Mehregan and Dehghan Nayeri, 2009). In this study, a balanced scorecard model has been selected from among the various models presented for performance evaluation. Emphasizing four key aspects of growth and learning, internal processes, financial and customer processes, this model provides the criteria and indicators needed to evaluate the performance of the organization (Amiri, 2006).

For example, Karroubi et al. (2022) evaluated the performance of the Sports Tourism Association using the balanced scorecard method and found that there is a significant priority among the studied components and none of the components was in a favorable condition. Gohar Rostami et al. (2019), analyzing the performance dimensions of the General Directorate of Sports and Youth of Guilan Province based on the balanced scorecard model, stated that the performance evaluation model of the General Directorate of Sports and Youth of Guilan Province has 4 factors, 12 dimensions and 55 indicators. There is a significant relationship between the dimensions of internal processes and the customer and sports results, between the financial dimensions and internal processes, as well as between the dimensions of growth and learning and internal processes. Hamidi et al. (2012), by formulating the strategy map of the Student Sports Federation with a balanced scorecard approach, stated that the final model shows how the relationship between strategic goals and facilitates the implementation of strategies at four levels and four perspectives of growth and learning, internal processes, productivity and customer, which has 27 strategic goals, 27 metrics and 77 actions and initiatives. It can be concluded that the proposed model due to the relationship between vision and strategies with the strategic goals, metrics and initiatives of the federation in different perspectives can be used in creating the executive context of the strategic plan. Keshavarz et al. (2015), by developing perspectives and strategic plan for the development of Iranian gymnastics with a balanced scorecard approach, found that the Iranian Gymnastics Federation has four perspectives: financial, customer, internal processes, learning and growth, and 34 strategic goals. Also, in the strategic plan developed for the Gymnastics Federation, there are cause-and-effect relationships between strategic perspectives and goals. Abtahinia et al. (2014), using the BSC approach to evaluate the performance of physical education departments of the country's universities, concluded that in the financial dimension of attracting government resources, in the customer dimension of

executive programs for customer participation, in the dimension of internal management and planning processes and in Growth and learning dimension of growth criteria had a higher coefficient. In a study entitled Referee as a Teacher: Qualitative Evaluation of Referee-Player Interactions in Youth Handball Tournaments, Płoszaj et al. (2020) found that qualitative evaluation of the referee's educational impact on players was neither influenced by the referee's experience nor by the match results. The quality of referee-player interactions was reported to be moderate in five of the six dimensions studied, while the positive atmosphere was reported to be poor. Nieplowicz (2015), using the Balanced Scorecard in the implementation of the strategy to support the development of sports and leisure in the city of Lublin, realized the need to use the backward and leading indicators as well as quantitative and qualitative, financial and non-financial. Hosseini (2011), in a study, showed that financial and economic indicators have the greatest impact on the performance of clubs and clubs need cost management and more ways to generate revenue to improve performance. Mir Fakhreddin et al. (2013) also showed in a study that the General Department of Physical Education of Yazd province had a good performance in two factors of internal processes and growth and learning and did not perform well in both customer and financial factors. Also, Delaney (2008), during research, concluded that when the university implemented the performance evaluation system of the university sports department using a balanced scorecard, it achieved 3 goals in financial factors, customer and growth and learning, and 4 goals in internal processes. The profitability of this sector and the tendency of students to engage in sports activities, especially championship sports, increased.

Now, considering the mentioned cases and the importance of refereeing in sports events, especially football, as well as the importance of evaluating the performance of these people in order to improve their refereeing status, in the present study, a balanced scorecard method is used to evaluate the performance of the used to analyze the research data. Descriptive statistics were used to classify raw scores,

refereeing department. From the point of view of the referees, while identifying the weaknesses and strengths of this department in different dimensions of the balanced scorecard, appropriate solutions can be provided to this department in order to improve the refereeing status of the country.

### Materials and Methods

The present study is applied in terms of purpose and the method used in this research is descriptive-survey in which the data were collected in the field. The statistical population of the present study included all referees and assistant referees of the Premier League and the First Division of the country, whose number was announced according to the website of the Football Federation Referees Committee. (N=n) After distributing and collecting the questionnaires, 140 complete and flawless questionnaires were selected and entered the analysis process. Then, after obtaining the necessary permits and referring them to the Football Federation, the questionnaires were distributed in person and online by the researcher among the sample and collected after completion. In order to collect data in this study, a performance evaluation questionnaire using the balanced scorecard method (Kaplan and Norton, 1996) was used, which has 32 items and 4 components of growth and learning (items 1 to 10), financial component (items 11 to 14), customer component (items 15 to 24) and the internal processes component (items 25 to 32) and was adjusted based on the 5 Likert scales. In this study, to ensure the content validity of the research tool, experts and researchers (10 professors of sports management) were asked to point out the possible problems of the questionnaire in front of each item and question. In addition, Cronbach's alpha test was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. The reliability of each factor varies from 0.75 to 0.89 and shows the existence of a moderate to relatively high relationship between the items of each factor. Descriptive and inferential statistics were

calculate frequencies, and calculate scattering

indices such as mean and standard deviation. In the inferential statistics section, first the Skewness and kurtosis test for how to distribute the data and after confirming the normality of data distribution from one-sample t-tests to determine the importance of the variable and its components from the referees' point of view, W. Kendall test for component prioritization and confirmatory factor analysis (second stage) was used. In the present study, SPSS 23 and LISREL 80/8 software programs were used to analyze the data.

## Results

In this section, first the demographic characteristics of the referees are presented (Table 1). The highest and lowest frequencies based on age status with 58.6% and 15.0%, respectively; belong to the age group "31 to 40 years" and "over 41 years". The highest and lowest frequencies based on education level with 44.3% and 2.1% are related to "bachelor" and "diploma" degrees, respectively. The highest and lowest frequencies based on the refereeing experience with 40.0% and 2.1% are related to "16 to 20 years" and "less than 5 years", respectively. And, the highest and lowest frequencies based on the refereeing degree with 49.3% and 2.1% are related to "national" and "Degree 2", respectively.

*Table 1.* Demographic characteristics of research participants

Demographic variables	frequency	percentage
<b>Age</b>		
20 to 30	37	26.4
31 to 40	82	58.6
Over 41	21	15.0
Total	140	100
<b>Education</b>		
Diploma	3	2.1
Associate Degree	19	13.6
Bachelor	62	44.3
MA	51	36.4
Ph.D.	5	3.6
Total	140	100
<b>Refereeing Experience</b>		
Less than 5 Years	3	2.1
6 to 10 Years	28	20.0
11 to 15 Years	47	33.6
16 to 20 Years	56	40.0
Over 21 Years	6	4.3
Total	140	100
<b>Refereeing Degree</b>		
Degree 2	3	2.1
Degree 1	57	40.7
National	69	49.3
International	11	7.9
Total	140	100

Skewness and Kurtosis coefficients were used for normal data distribution. Considering that the mentioned indicators were in the range of 2 to -2, so we can say

that the data have normal conditions and parametric statistical methods can be used.

**Table 2.** Normality of the variables

	Growth and Learning	Financial	Customer	Internal Processes	Performance Evaluation
<b>Skewness</b>	0.56	0.87	-0.41	0.96	-0.62
<b>Kurtosis</b>	-0.90	-0.83	-0.04	-0.52	-0.32

In the following, due to the normality of data distribution to determine the status of the studied components, the results of the one-sample t-test are reported as follows. As can be seen in Table 3, the average score of performance evaluation and all its components indicates a favorable relative status, so that their average score was more

than 3. Also, considering the significant levels, all of which are less than 0.01, it can be said that there is a significant difference between the mean of performance evaluation and its components with the hypothetical evaluation (3).

**Table 3.** One-sample t-test to determine the role of performance evaluation score and its components in the sample group

Variable	Mean	T Statistic	P-value
<b>Growth and Learning</b>	3.64	16.207	0.001
<b>Financial</b>	3.98	21.069	0.001
<b>Customer</b>	3.45	13.316	0.001
<b>Internal Processes</b>	4.00	26.017	0.001
<b>Performance Evaluation</b>	3.77	39.799	0.001

Then, using the Kendall W test, the components of performance evaluation were prioritized (Table 4). As can be seen in Table 4, because the significance level of the Kendall W test is less than 0.01, it can be said that there is a significant priority among the components of performance evaluation. The

most important priority of the performance evaluation components is related to the "financial" component, and the "internal processes", "growth and learning" and "customer" components are in the second to fourth priorities.

**Table 4.** Mean ranks and priority of performance evaluation components

Statistic	Value	Components	Mean ranks	Priority
<b>Chi Square</b>	105.186	Financial	3.17	First
<b>Degree of freedom</b>	3	Internal Processes	2.52	Second
<b>P-value</b>	0.01	Growth and Learning	2.22	Third
		Customer	2.09	Fourth

In the following, the structural model of performance evaluation and its components

are presented (Figures 1 & 2).



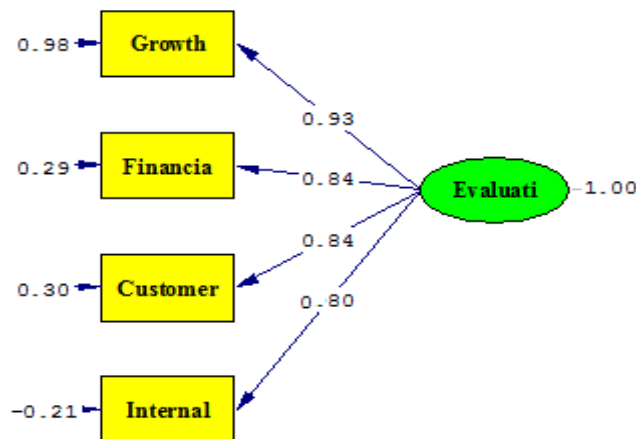


Figure 1. Structural Equation Model of the performance evaluation of referees in standard mode

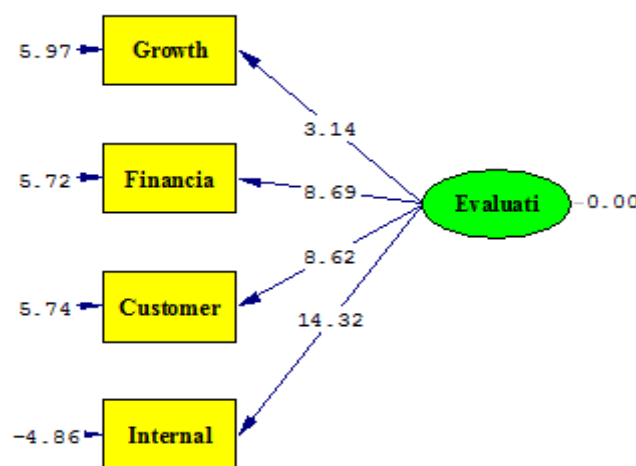


Figure 2. Structural Equation Model of the performance evaluation of referees in T-value mode  
 The results of the model fit indices in Table 5 show that the fit indices have an acceptable value and the fit indices (GFI, NFI, AGFI) are at the desired level and higher than 0.9, so the research model confirms.

Table 5. Fit Indicators of the referees' performance evaluation model

Fit Indicators	Values	Acceptable values	Interpretation
Chi Square	89.24	-	-
DF	34	-	-
$\chi^2/df$	2.62	Between 1 to 3	Desired
RMSEA	0.069	Less than 0.1	Desired
AGFI	0.91	More than 0.9	Desired
GFI	0.93	More than 0.9	Desired
NFI	0.94	More than 0.9	Desired

**Discussion**

Based on the results of the study, it was clear that the average score of performance appraisal and all its components indicate a favorable relative status, so that their average score was more than 3. Also, considering the significant levels, all of which are less than 0.01, it can be said that there

is a significant difference between the mean of performance evaluation and its components with the hypothetical average, which is consistent with the result of research by Hamidi et al (2012), Keshavarz et al. (2015), Abtahinia et al. (2014) and Nieplowicz (2015) and is not consistent with the results of Karroubi et al.

(2022) and Salehi Sadati (2004).

In this regard, Salehi Sadati (2004) evaluated the performance of selected sports associations of the country's universities from the perspective of association officials, students and sports coaches of Tehran universities and experts and concluded that the performance of selected sports associations was not favorable. Also, Karroubi et al (2022), by evaluating the performance of the Sports Tourism Association using the balanced scorecard method found that none of the components was in a favorable condition. The reason for this discrepancy can be in the difference between the statistical sample of these studies and the present study and that in the present study, the performance of the refereeing department was evaluated by the country's football referees who are the stakeholders of this department.

On the other hand, Hamidi et al. (2012), stated that the relationship between strategic goals and facilitates the implementation of strategies at four levels and four perspectives of growth and learning, internal processes, productivity and customer, which has 27 strategic goals, 27 metrics and 77 actions and initiatives. Keshavarz et al. (2015), resulted that the Iranian Gymnastics Federation has four perspectives including financial, customer, internal processes, learning and growth, and 34 strategic goals. Also, Abtahinia et al. (2014), concluded that in the financial dimension of attracting government resources, in the customer dimension of executive programs for customer participation, in the dimension of internal management and planning processes and in Growth and learning dimension of growth criteria had a higher coefficient. Nieplowicz (2015), realized the need to use the backward and leading indicators as well as quantitative and qualitative, financial and non-financial.

Considering the above, it can be said that the situation of the studied components is relatively favorable from the point of view of the country's football referees and these people are generally satisfied with their condition, but of course they are looking for a more suitable condition to be more relaxed and satisfied and continuing their activities so that they can judge league football games more carefully.

Also, the results showed that there is a significant priority among the performance evaluation components, thus, the most important priority is related to the "financial" component and the components "internal processes", "growth and learning" and "customer" are in the second to fourth priorities and these findings are not in line with the findings of Mir Fakhreddin et al. (2013) and Sayyad et al (2018), but are in line with the findings of Hosseini (2011), Keshavarz et al. (2015), Nieplowicz (2015) and Karroubi et al. (2022).

In this regard, Mir Fakhreddin et al. (2013) also showed that the General Department of Physical Education of Yazd province did not perform well in financial factors. Sayyad et al. (2018), concluded that there is a significant priority between the performance evaluation components and the most important priority is related to "growth and learning" and the components of "customer", "Internal processes" and "financial", are in the second to fourth priorities.

On the other hand, Hosseini (2011), in a study, showed that financial and economic indicators have the greatest impact on the performance of clubs and clubs need cost management and more ways to generate revenue to improve performance. Keshavarz et al. (2015), Nieplowicz (2015) and Karroubi et al. (2022), all came to the conclusion that the financial component is very important and special emphasis should be placed on strengthening it.

Accordingly, the refereeing department of the country's football federation can be advised to pay fixed fees to the referees on a monthly basis and even after retirement in order to improve the performance and productivity of referees, as well as to cooperate with international organizations abroad for making money, use domestic markets to offset the costs of the refereeing department (attracting internal sponsors), and by using the opinions of referees across the country, increase the revenue of this department and thus, can give them better amounts to judge the games.

And finally, the findings of this study showed that the structural equations model of the research has a significant fit that this finding is consistent with the findings of Hamidi et al.



(2012), Gohar Rostami et al. (2016) and Kumar (2014).

In this regard, Gohar Rostami et al. (2016), in a study entitled structural equation modeling for the performance evaluation indicators of the Iranian Judo Federation, found that the Judo Federation should pay attention to four BSC perspectives to evaluate its performance, because these dimensions have causal relationships and in order to plan its performance and management, they must consider the dimensions and indicators studied in the research in order to provide the necessary ground for the progress of the federation. Hamidi et al. (2012) by evaluating the dimensions of performance of national coaches found that in their confirmation model, the relationships between each factor, the effective factor loads between the factors and the structural equations of the model were obtained. Also, Kumar (2014), by evaluating the effectiveness of the balanced scorecard in the organization's perspective using the structural equation model, concluded that there is a significant relationship between the vision and orientation of the organization with the effectiveness of the balanced scorecard.

### Conclusion

According to the above, it can be said that in the present study, 4 factors of growth and learning, financial, customer and internal processes have been fitted, all of which have been confirmed and the goodness indicators of the model fit have also been confirmed. Therefore, the performance of the refereeing department has been evaluated correctly using the balanced scorecard method. It is also recommended that this department direct all its efforts towards identifying and meeting the basic needs of referees. Establishing a reward system is one of the strategies that this department can use to attract and satisfy referees and motivate them. Also, creating appropriate personal and job security for these people should be on the agenda of this department in order to lead to the growing growth and development of this profession. Finally, paying attention to cultural problems and creating a suitable atmosphere in the stadiums can help the referees' peace of mind.

### Acknowledgement

We would like to thank all the respected officials of the Refereeing Department of the Football Federation of Iran and the referees who helped the research team in conducting this research.

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