

Developing a Management Model to Eradicate Corruption in Professional Sports

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[10.22098/rsmm.2025.17255.1469](https://doi.org/10.22098/rsmm.2025.17255.1469)**Abstract**

Purpose: This study Purpose to develop a comprehensive management model to combat corruption in this domain, addressing its multifaceted roots and systemic challenges.

Method: The target population included key stakeholders such as federation and sports club managers, professional league coaches and players, international referees, sports media professionals, championship sports experts, sports management professors, and sports law specialists. A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing purposeful and snowball sampling methods to ensure a diverse and representative participant pool. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, culminating in 18 in-depth interviews. Content analysis was applied to systematically analyze the qualitative data.

Results : The findings revealed a complex web of corruption components in Iranian championship sports, categorized into several key areas: economic factors, political context, socio-cultural environment, legal framework, structural weaknesses, material issues, behavioral problems, legal loopholes, management gaps, broker influence, and regulatory challenges. By systematically addressing each dimension of corruption, the model aims to restore integrity, fairness, and public trust in Iranian championship sports.

Conclusion: This model serves as a strategic roadmap for policymakers, sports organizations, and stakeholders to effectively combat corruption. Its comprehensive nature ensures that both immediate and long-term challenges are addressed, paving the way for a more ethical and sustainable sports ecosystem in Iran.

Keywords: Management model, Anti-corruption, Sports corruption, Championship sports, Qualitative research, Iran.

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Introduction

Sports organizations worldwide are undergoing significant changes due to commercialization. The Olympic Games, as a prominent example, have witnessed corruption manifesting in various forms within professional sports. Corruption scandals, often rooted in weak governance, have severely undermined the credibility and legitimacy of the global sports movement (Geeraert et al., 2015). Simultaneously, "political and exploitative practices" within closed groups and organizational structures have systematically excluded numerous stakeholders from institutions and decision-making processes. This exclusion, coupled with a lack of accountability and integrity, has left the sports movement vulnerable to multiple forms of corruption, including bribery, money laundering, and organized crime (Taylor & O'Sullivan, 2009; Begović, 2022).

At the macro level, beyond the realm of sports, public policy research consistently demonstrates that corruption severely undermines political stability, economic development, and administrative efficiency. Its long-term destructive effects permeate governance structures, revenue systems, and employment dynamics at the international level. Similarly, corruption extends beyond economic repercussions, inflicting profound societal and ethical damage, as extensively documented in sociological research (Ko & Samajdar, 2010; Kubbe, 2014; Rose, 2018). Studies emphasize that sports play a pivotal role in fostering and sustaining shared cultural values and identity within societies. They unite individuals from diverse social backgrounds and cultivate social capital among them (Skinner et al., 2008; Kumar et al., 2018). A wealth of research supports the notion that sports serve as a powerful tool for social and societal development. Consequently, engagement with sports—whether through participation, volunteering, or spectating—is widely believed to enhance social inclusion and

cohesion (Darcy et al., 2014). Khodaparst et al. (2021) conducted a study to examine the dimensions of corruption and malpractice in championship sports. The results showed that, given the cultural differences of individuals in each organization, some researchers have referred to the category of education to reduce the areas of corruption. Since education has been mentioned as the infrastructure of development, in fact, research shows that most moral deviations and behavioral crimes in adults are the result of lack of education and proper treatment by parents in the early stages of growth and the beginning of life. On the other hand, the role of the media in corruption is actually a two-way role that can play both a facilitator and a full-fledged fighter and whistleblower. Hence, in many countries, the media is used as watchdogs of institutions, but this is provided that the media itself does not get involved in corruption in sports or any club or organization.

Despite recognizing corruption in sports, public policies often fail to address the erosion of human capital resulting from negative sports experiences, such as corruption (Shestak & Iasiuk, 2022). At the meso level, corruption erodes organizational integrity, fostering business misconduct. However, the impact of corruption can be mitigated by the leadership style and authority exercised by organizational leaders. In the context of sports, corruption diminishes ethical participation among athletes and stakeholders, thereby reinforcing deviant behavior (Hystad et al., 2014).

While corruption at the micro-level undermines individual intrinsic integrity, its impact can be mitigated through supervisory strategies and transparency policies at the meso and macro levels. For instance, the implementation of clear ethical codes and effective oversight by organizational leaders can strengthen ethical behavior among individuals, thereby reducing corruption at the organizational level (Banerjee, 2016; Gachter & Schulz, 2016). Furthermore, corruption directly diminishes personal

happiness (Wu & Zhu, 2016) and erodes trust in governmental institutions (Morris & Klesner, 2010).

Corruption lacks a universally accepted definition due to its complex, context-dependent nature (Svensson, 2005; Mishra, 2005). This study adopts a hybrid "moral and efficiency" criterion, particularly suited to sports, where corruption violates ethical norms and undermines competitive fairness and effectiveness. Integrating domain-specific frameworks like IOC and FIFA ethics codes, this approach identifies corrupt behaviors such as bribery, doping, and match-fixing. Mishra defines corruption as "deviation from official duties for private interests" (2005), but a robust definition must encompass all actions deviating from implicit or explicit norms, regardless of legal or ethical implications. The "moral and efficiency" criterion captures both ethical breaches and systemic harm, ensuring contextual relevance and practicality. In sports, corruption degrades principles like impartiality, fair competition, and loyalty, while damaging reputation and trust (Kolomoiets et al., 2021). This integrated approach provides a comprehensive method for defining and identifying corruption.

Corruption severely damages the reputation of professional sports, adversely affecting multiple stakeholders. Investors in the sports industry experience reduced returns on their investments, fans suffer feelings of loss and frustration, and young athletes receive detrimental, non-educational lessons. The widespread belief that money is the sole source of corruption in sports, and that its presence

inherently undermines the ethical and educational dimensions of sports, is misguided. This study is pivotal in this context, as it recognizes that corrupt acts involve a broader spectrum of sports stakeholders beyond financial actors. To address this issue, the research employs coping strategies and strategic management approaches. Coping strategies are defined as a set of cognitive and behavioral efforts aimed at interpreting, adjusting to, and transforming stressful situations, ultimately reducing the suffering they cause. Therefore, this research seeks to answer the central question: What is the management model for effectively coping with corruption in Iran's professional sports?

Materials and Methods

The present study is exploratory and applied in nature. Given the exploratory character of the research, the theoretical gap in the concept of a management model for combating corruption in Iranian championship sports, and the necessity to deeply understand the "what" and "how" of the issue, along with elucidating the effective components and the nature of their relationships, a qualitative research design was used. Due to the transparency of coding steps and methods, the thematic analysis approach, first introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006), was utilized. This approach facilitated the development of a data-driven model through raw data coding and the extraction of categories and key concepts, framed within the researcher's theoretical perspective. Consequently, the study is classified as applied research. Figure 1 shows the stages of presenting the theory.

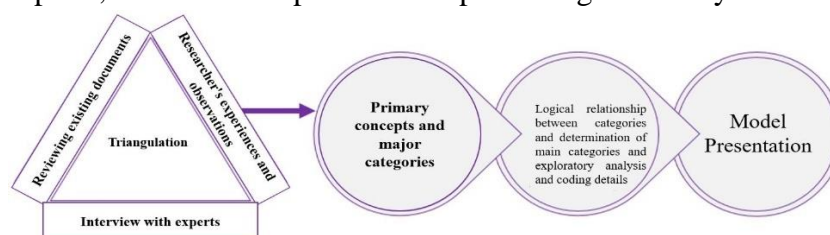


Figure 1. Stages of presenting the theory

Thematic analysis (TA) is a qualitative data analysis method designed to identify semantic patterns within a dataset. As defined by Braun

and Clarke (2006), it involves the systematic process of recognizing and organizing themes or patterns in qualitative data. They argue that

thematic analysis is an ideal starting point for qualitative researchers because it "provides core skills transferable to many other types of analysis." A key advantage of thematic analysis is its position as a method rather than a methodology. Unlike many qualitative approaches, it is not tied to a specific epistemological or theoretical framework (Clarke & Braun, 2013). This flexibility allows

researchers to apply it across diverse contexts without rigid theoretical constraints. In other words, thematic analysis grants researchers considerable autonomy, enabling them to discover emergent patterns without being bound to pre-existing theories. Figure 2 shows the data collection and analysis approach for category saturation.

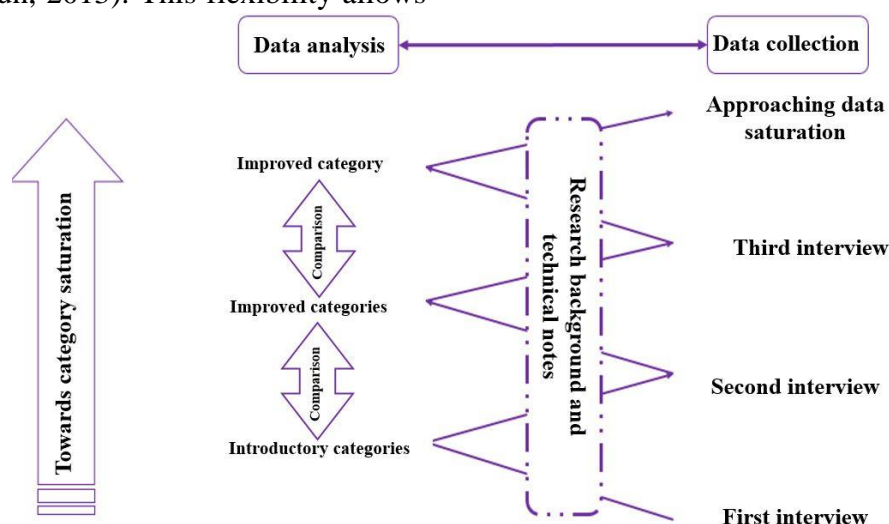


Figure 2. Zigzag approach to data collection and analysis for category saturation (Source: Bazargan, 2008)

The statistical population of this study comprised managers of sports federations and clubs, coaches and players from professional league clubs, international referees, media professionals active in championship sports, sports experts in the championship sector, sports management professors, and specialists in sports law. A qualitative sampling approach was employed, utilizing purposeful sampling, snowball sampling, and the principle of theoretical saturation. In purposeful sampling, key experts were identified and interviewed. Snowball sampling involved asking initial participants to recommend other individuals with relevant expertise, who were then interviewed. The data collection process employed a "zigzag approach" (Bazargan, 2008), involving iterative cycles of interviewing and analysis. This process continued until "**Theoretical saturation**" was achieved, defined as the point at which no new themes or insights emerged from additional interviews. In total, 18 interviews were

conducted. Saturation was determined through "code repetition analysis", where the emergence of new codes significantly diminished after the 15th interview, and subsequent interviews yielded only repetitive information. For example, after the 12th interview, the theme of "**The impact of supervision on ethical behavior**" was fully developed, and later interviews reinforced this theme without adding new dimensions. This systematic approach ensured that the data collection was both comprehensive and efficient. To conduct the study, general questions were developed, and an interview protocol was established. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews. To ensure anonymity, participants' names and identifying information were removed during the analysis and reporting stages, and replaced with coded identifiers. Given the sensitive nature of the topic of corruption, participants were assured that their responses would be used exclusively for

research purposes. In-depth interviews were then carried out with the selected experts. Following each interview, the content was transcribed in full, and initial coding of the data was performed to extract preliminary concepts. Once theoretical saturation was reached, a deeper examination of theoretical foundations and prior research was conducted. Data were analyzed by two independent coders. Inter-rater reliability was confirmed by the kappa coefficient (0.85). These insights were integrated with the researcher's observations and expert opinions to design the initial model.

The model was then presented to experts for feedback, and their suggestions regarding the categorization and conceptual framework were incorporated. Finally, the refined management model for combating corruption in Iranian championship sports was developed. Content analysis was employed as the primary method for data analysis.

Results

To collect data, 18 expert interviews were conducted. The demographic characteristics of the participants are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Interviewees

No.	Position/Expertise	Education	Experience	Interview Duration
E1	Sports Club Manager	PhD	14 years	35 minutes
E2	Professional Volleyball Player	Bachelor's	8 years	25 minutes
E3	Sports Law Specialist	PhD	22 years	30 minutes
E4	Football Presenter/Commentator	Master's	25 years	50 minutes
E5	International Football Referee	Master's	10 years	25 minutes
E6	Football Player Manager	Master's	8 years	30 minutes
E7	Sports Management Academic	PhD	16 years	30 minutes
E8	Sports Expert	Master's	20 years	25 minutes
E9	Professional Football Player	Master's	10 years	30 minutes
E10	Sports Club Manager	PhD	10 years	45 minutes
E11	Sports Club Manager	PhD student	14 years	25 minutes
E12	International Sports Relations Expert	PhD student	7 years	20 minutes
E13	Football Player Program Manager	PhD student	6 years	35 minutes
E14	Sports Management Professor	Specialized doctorate	12 years	30 minutes
E15	Sports Club Manager	PhD student	11 years	25 minutes
E16	Former Federation President	Specialized doctorate	20 years	25 minutes
E17	Sports Management Professor	Specialized doctorate	10 years	20 minutes
E18	International Football Referee	Master's degree	14 years	30 minutes

To conduct qualitative analyses, first an attempt was made to obtain a general understanding of the phrases and concepts in the text by reading the interview texts several times. Then, through open coding, 77 open codes were discovered and marked in the interview texts. The codes were converted into 11 themes, each of which dealt with a specific topic, in other words, they referred to a specific area. It is worth noting that both the observable and tangible aspects of

the text content and the hidden content of the text were considered in the classifications. According to the aforementioned materials, the effects of the central category emerged after the coding of the twelfth interview and continued until 18 interviews until the data reached theoretical saturation. Figure 3 shows the theoretical saturation diagram of the data.

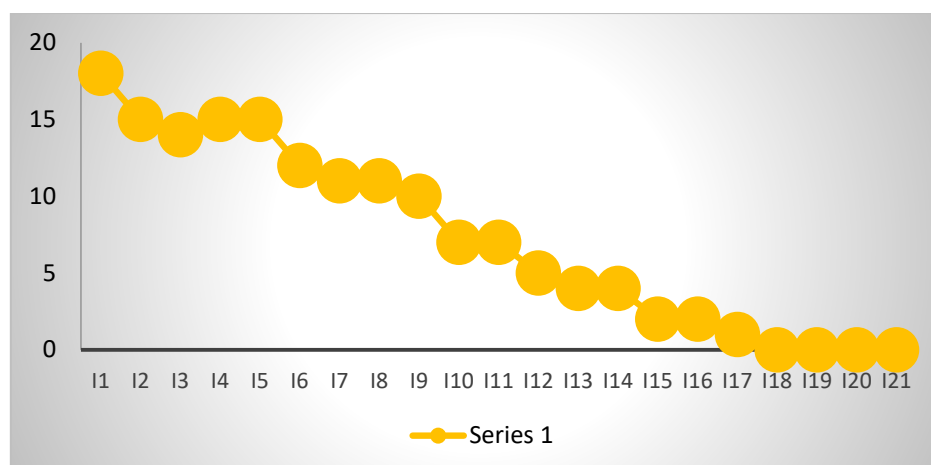


Figure 3. Theoretical saturation diagram

To reduce the codes to themes, the inductive approach of Clarke and Braun (2014) was used. First, the codes were grouped based on conceptual similarities. Then, by analyzing the relationships between the groups, the main themes were extracted. For example, the codes related to E4, E10, E14 (negative impact of

political decisions) were placed under the theme of political interventions in sport. This process was carried out in consultation with two independent coders and repeated data review. Which is shown in Table 1 in the following open coding with the people who mentioned these codes.

Table 2 .Open coding findings

Final Code	Source Code
Low income of individuals in the management bodies of sports organizations	E1,E5,E9,E13,E16
Most sports organizations and clubs are state-owned	E2, E4, E6, E10,E12, E14,E17
Possibility of circumventing laws and regulations	E3,E4,E5,E16,E17
Negative effects of political decisions on championship sports	E4,E10,E14
People's lack of trust in the country's sports officials	E2,E5,E9,E13,E15
Lack of judicial independence in the country's professional sports environment	E4,E11,E12,E17,E18
Lack of independent and unbiased media in the country	E1, E5,E7, E2
Changing cultural characteristics of society	E1,E4,E6,E13
Promoting a culture of circumventing the law in the country	E5,E10,E15
The prevalence of materialism in championship sports	E3,E8,E13,E16, E18
Lack of specific laws and regulations for sports federations	E1,E4,E10,11
Lack of transparency in contracts	E8,E9,E11,E12
Weakness and corruption in the performance evaluation system	E10,E14,E16
Inter-organizational and club collusion to gain more benefits	E2,E3,E13,E8,E15
Unequal distribution of facilities between sports clubs	E5,E12,E4
Lack of financing for stakeholders in the country's sports	E2,E6,E9,E14, E16
Easy movement of large sums of money by front-line and headquarters employees of sports organizations	E3,E5,E13,E14,E15
Replacing strong anti-values instead of values and ethical principles in sports organizations	E3,E4,E12,E14
Problems in implementing laws and exercising taste	E3,E10,E17
Insufficient punishment for economic offenders and corruptors in sports	E8,E15,E16,E2
Excessive authority of high-ranking managers and officials	E7,E11,E13
Irresponsibility of employees Sports organizations	E2,E3,E14,E16,E1
Not requiring sports organizations, especially clubs, to provide transparent financial statements	E1,E6,E9,E17
Great power of speculators in professional sports and player transfers	E4,E10,E16
Iranian Broadcasting Corporation's monopoly on sports television	E3,E7,E17,E5

broadcasting	
Failure to establish good governance indicators in sports management	E1,E10,E12,E6
Creating injustice in the incomes of athletes and stakeholders	E5,E8,E11,E13,E8
Creating monopolies in various sectors of the sports industry	E3,E10,E13,E17
Tax evasion activities (players, coaches, etc.)	E11,E15, E2, E12
Possibility of abuse of power in the country's professional sports management body	E5,E12,E14,E15,E17
Insufficient will of officials to deal with economic corruption in the country	E4,E6,E15,E16
Existence of behind-the-scenes hands in the country's sports and their influence	E3,E17,E13
Politics of those fighting corruption in sports	E2, E8, E12,E15,E16, E17
Stubbornness in dealing with corrupt people in the country and unconventional compromises	E1,E5,E8, E2
Existence of unscrupulous individuals among the country's sports officials	E7,E8,E11,E15,E2
Lack of transparency in the country's professional sports laws and regulations	E2,E4,E7,E10,E18
Low legal literacy of the country's sports stakeholders	E9,E12,E16,E4
Weakness in monitoring the professional sports environment	E6,E7,E18,E11
Lack of meritocracy in appointing and selecting officials	E2,E8,E12,E13
Existence of informal communication networks in the country's professional sports	E4,E5,E18, E7
Weakness in external monitoring of sports organizations Country	E2,E7,E15, E8
Short professional life of players and turning to marginal issues	E8,E11,E17,E2
Diminished conscience and work ethics	E4,E13,E16
Existence of scattered laws in the structure of professional sports	E2,E4,E7,E8,E14
Contradictions in laws and preparation for circumvention of laws by corrupt officials	E11,E18, E13
Lack of transparency and accountability	E5,E7,E10,E13,E16
Lack of meritocracy and incitement of individuals to work immorally	E3,E4,E10,E14, E17
Threats and dismissal of individuals who expose corruption in sports	E11,E16
Extreme money laundering of managers	E3,E6,E15
Egregious differences in incomes of various sports professions	E2,E5,E12
Sports not being a priority for governance	E1,E8,E13
Misfunction of media in the field of sports	E5,E7,E10,E11,E12
Variable economic situation of the country	E10,E13
Lack of financial and income transparency	E2,E3,E18, E10
Non-competitiveness of the professional sports structure in the country	E2,E14
Media problems in broadcasting accurate news without bias	E10,E15
Systematic corruption throughout the country and its spread to championship sports	E2,E6,E16
Lack of independent groups in the management body of the country's professional sports	E11,E18,E1
Normalization of immoral issues and many wrong paradigms for the people	E1,E6,E13,E15
Existence of relationalism in the management of sports in the country	E4,E10
Decline in the moral level of athletes' behavior	E12,E16, E1
Contradictions in some domestic laws with international sports laws	E2,E7,E12,E11, E14
Various caveats in players' contracts	E11,E16
Lack of media disclosure Corrupters	E5,E2
Lack of transparency in processes and procedures	E3,E15,E18
Lack of accountability system in clubs, officials and administrators of sports affairs in the country	E1,E11,E18
Lack of public access to sports information in the country	E3,E12
Dissatisfaction of various individuals in sports with the income of professional sports	E5,E17
Normalization of administrative corruption in sports organizations	E7,E9
Lack of serious dealing with economic corruptors in the country's sports	E1,E13,E15,E18

Lack of specialized sports lawyers	E3, E14
Frequent management changes	E10, E16
Monopolization and administrative consent	E21, E11
Contracting expensive contracts outside the norm	E12, E2
The collusion of brokers with high-ranking individuals	E17, E20, E24
The dominance of a culture of desire for early and immediate success in society	E11, E16
Political currents seeking participation in sports	E8, E14

After open coding, the strategies to combat corruption in Iranian championship sports were presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Strategies to combat corruption in Iranian championship sports

Countermeasure strategies for each component	Components of Corruption in Iranian Championship Sports
1. Fair distribution of income in sports organizations	Faulty Economy
2. Privatization of sports clubs	
3. Creating an open and free economy in the country's professional sports	
4. Requiring clubs to accurately record contracts	
5. Preventing political decisions in the country's professional sports	Political Context
6. Independence of the country's sports decisions from political trends	
7. Clarifying the scope of decisions and power of the country's sports officials	
8. Exposing corrupt people in the country's professional sports and punishing them	
9. Creating correct paradigms based on value principles in society	Socio-Cultural Context
10. Preventing relationalism and emphasizing individual qualifications in assuming sports jobs	
11. Developing ethics committees in clubs and sports organizations	Legal Context
12. Providing laws to support corruption reporters in professional sports	
13. Unifying domestic sports laws with international sports laws	
14. Drafting a law requiring clubs to be financially transparent	
15. Intensifying and increasing penalties	Structural Weakness
16. Clear definition of corrupt practices in different sectors of sports	
17. Media management in sports	
18. Unifying club facilities Sports organizations and federations	
19. Implementing the Law on Free Access to Information	Material Problems
20. Strengthening the private sector and sports NGOs	
21. Justice in the rights and benefits of sports players	Behavioral Problems
22. Reducing the level of income disparity between different sports professions	
23. Increasing the sensitivity of employees, managers and the public to corruption and its reporting	Legal Gaps
24. Promoting a culture of ethics among sports stakeholders	
25. Using experienced lawyers in clubs to prevent possible abuses and money laundering	
26. Training and scholarships for individuals for specialized sports law courses	
27. Hiring lawyers in sports organizations and clubs	Management Gaps
28. Holding anti-corruption training courses for managers, employees and players	
29. Reducing management changes and requiring comprehensive accountability of sports managers	
30. Giving sports managers specific powers in the field of laws	
31. Creating an integrated system for concluding and registering contracts	Power of Brokers
32. Requirement for training and obtaining a certificate for program managers	
33. Preventing the entry and influence of brokers in professional sports	
34. Launching an integrated management system in organizations Sports	
35. Strengthening the country's sports management supervisory system	Supervisory Problems
36. Evaluating the short-term and long-term performance of sports officials at different levels	

Considering the identification of factors affecting the occurrence of corruption and

strategies to combat them, a thematic relationship between the identified concepts was drawn in Figure 4. This theoretical model

shows the relationship between the various identified concepts and helps identify patterns in the data.



Figure 4. Network of themes extracted from qualitative data

Discussion

Findings indicate that a flawed economy is a significant driver of corruption in Iranian championship sports. Proposed countermeasures include equitable income distribution within sports organizations, privatization of clubs, promotion of a free-market economy in professional sports, and mandatory accurate contract recording. These issues stem from unequal resource allocation, lack of financial transparency, and insufficient funding, which can perpetuate financial corruption and mismanagement across the sports sector. Reducing resource inequalities and increasing transparency are crucial measures in the fight against corruption. Also, the privatization of sports clubs is proposed as an effective solution to improve transparency and reduce corruption in this area. These measures not only help strengthen good governance, but also pave the way for the sustainable and equitable development of sports (Agu et al, 2024).

The political context emerges as another critical factor driving corruption in Iranian championship sports. Proposed strategies to address this include preventing political interference in sports governance, ensuring the autonomy of sports decision-making, and clearly defining the authority of sports officials. Political meddling in sports administration is identified as a major obstacle to corruption

reduction. Blackwell et al. (2021) emphasize the separation of duties between sports and political officials as a strategic anti-corruption measure. These findings highlight the importance of establishing clear boundaries between sports and politics to foster integrity in the sector.

The socio-cultural context is identified as a significant driver of corruption in Iranian championship sports, rooted in improper relationships, flawed selection processes for managers and players, and the absence of effective monitoring systems. To combat this, proposed strategies include publicly exposing and sanctioning corrupt individuals, fostering a value-based culture in society, prioritizing merit-based appointments, and establishing ethics committees within sports organizations. Philippou (2019) emphasizes that to create a unified anti-bribery framework in sports management, it is essential to institutionalize ethical frameworks and promote a value-based culture. This approach, with an emphasis on transparency and accountability, will help reduce corruption and raise standards in international sport. Additionally, Parker and Knight (2022) highlight the effectiveness of ethics committees in preventing corruption across various countries. Clear identification and punishment of corrupt actors are also crucial to deter future misconduct.

The legal context is identified as a critical

factor contributing to corruption in Iranian championship sports, primarily due to the absence of protective legislation and transparency in legal frameworks. Proposed countermeasures include enacting whistleblower protection laws, aligning domestic sports laws with international standards, mandating financial transparency for sports clubs, increasing penalties for corrupt practices, and clearly defining corrupt behaviors. Transparency of rules and alignment with international norms, especially in international sport, are essential to reduce corruption and promote sustainable development. Chappelet (2018) emphasizes the importance of effective regulation, which includes setting clear rules, enforcing them, and aligning them with global standards and values. Additionally, Kendall and Clark (2021) highlight the effectiveness of whistleblower protection laws in curbing corruption in developed countries. Implementing such measures can enhance transparency and strengthen monitoring within Iran's sports sector.

Structural weaknesses are identified as a significant driver of corruption in Iranian championship sports, stemming from issues such as non-standardized sports facilities and uncoordinated media management. Proposed countermeasures include effective media management to promote transparency, standardization of facilities across clubs and federations, and enforcement of laws ensuring free access to information. Existing structural problems are critical obstacles to the integrity of sport. Ensuring integrity in sports infrastructure can reduce corruption at the root. Using the media as a tool for transparency and accountability plays a key role in addressing these structural shortcomings. This not only helps rebuild public trust, but also strengthens the public's relationship with sport ().

Material and behavioral issues are the primary drivers of corruption in championship sports. To combat material problems, strategies such as

strengthening the private sector and non-governmental organizations, establishing a transparent payment system for athletes, and reducing income disparities are recommended. These measures not only contribute to sustainable financial resources but also enhance fairness and transparency in resource allocation, preventing financial exploitation (Koenigstorfer, 2024). Legal loopholes and management weaknesses significantly contribute to corruption in sports. To address this issue, strategies such as recruiting experienced lawyers to sports clubs, providing legal training to managers and athletes, and establishing coherent and efficient legal systems are proposed. These measures not only help prevent legal violations, but also pave the way for transparent and accountable management (Shchokin et al, 2023). Strengthening oversight systems through periodic evaluations of sports officials is also crucial. This not only helps identify and correct potential violations, but also instills a culture of accountability and transparency in sports management (Okuna, 2024). A comprehensive model is proposed to address economic, political, socio-cultural, legal, and structural issues. Economically, it focuses on equitable resource distribution, privatization, and financial transparency. Politically, it advocates for independent decision-making and clear responsibility delineation. Socio-culturally, it emphasizes cultural reform, ethics committees, and public accountability. Legally, it promotes whistleblower protection and international legal alignment. Structurally, it strengthens media oversight and standardizes infrastructure. Additionally, it addresses financial disparities, behavioral misconduct, legal robustness, managerial stability, broker influence, and supervisory systems to foster transparency and integrity in Iranian sports.

Conclusion

The findings of this research reveal that corruption in Iranian championship sports is deeply rooted in economic, political, socio-

cultural, legal, structural, material, behavioral, and supervisory factors. Economically, unfair resource distribution and lack of financial transparency are key drivers of corruption, which can be addressed through equitable income distribution, privatization of sports clubs, and accurate contract registration. Politically, interference in sports decision-making undermines independence, necessitating clear separation of responsibilities and autonomy in sports governance. Socio-culturally, improper relationships and flawed selection processes perpetuate corruption, requiring cultural reform, establishment of ethics committees, and public accountability. Legally, the absence of protective laws and transparency fosters corruption, highlighting the need for whistleblower protection and alignment with international legal standards. Structurally, weak media management and fragmented infrastructure demand standardized facilities and enhanced media oversight. Materially, financial disparities and resource shortages can be mitigated by strengthening the private sector and ensuring fair compensation. Behaviorally, ethical misconduct among stakeholders underscores the importance of promoting integrity through training and awareness programs. Finally, supervisory weaknesses call for integrated oversight systems and periodic performance evaluations of sports officials.

This study has certain limitations that should be taken into account. Firstly, the sample size is relatively small and focuses exclusively on Iran, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader global contexts. Additionally, the snowball sampling method employed may introduce bias, as participants were recruited through personal networks. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, the study still offers valuable insights into the subject matter and can serve as a foundation for future research.

According to the findings of this study, corruption in Iranian championship sports is

influenced by economic, political, socio-cultural, legal, structural, material, behavioral, and regulatory factors. To address these challenges, it is suggested that measures such as equitable distribution of financial resources, privatization of sports clubs, transparency of contracts, separation of political responsibilities from sports management, reform of the selection processes of managers and athletes, establishment of ethics committees, strengthening laws protecting whistleblowers, standardization of sports infrastructure, effective media monitoring, empowerment of the private sector, implementation of professional ethics training programs, and establishment of integrated monitoring systems be put on the agenda. Despite limitations such as small sample size and snowball sampling method that may affect the generalizability of the results, this study has taken an important step in identifying the roots of sports corruption and providing practical solutions for reforming the Iranian sports system. By identifying the multifaceted factors of corruption in Iranian championship sports, the present study suggests structural and systemic solutions that can be used as a framework for future policymaking and further research in this area.

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