

## Identification of Factors Influencing the Development of Athletics in Iraq

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** Athletics, as one of the most fundamental disciplines in sport, plays a significant role in promoting public health, identifying and nurturing talent, and enhancing countries' international standing. Nevertheless, the development of this sport in Iraq faces various challenges. The purpose of the present study was to identify the factors influencing the development of athletics in Iraq.

**Method:** This research employed a qualitative approach, using qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis techniques. Participants included coaches, federation officials, and university faculty members who were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and theoretical saturation was achieved after conducting 20 interviews. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, criteria such as credibility, transferability, confirmability, and test-retest reliability were applied.

**Results:** The data analysis process yielded 82 open codes, which were subsequently organized into 17 sub-themes and ultimately classified into seven overarching themes. These major themes included: managerial and organizational structure factors; financial and economic factors; infrastructural and technical factors; human resources and training factors; support and talent identification factors; cultural and social factors; and environmental and demographic factors.

**Conclusion:** The findings indicated that each of these factors can play a decisive role in either advancing or constraining the development of athletics in Iraq. Accordingly, it is recommended that sport policymakers adopt strategies such as restructuring managerial systems, improving financial provision mechanisms, investing in infrastructure, strengthening talent identification systems, and promoting the culture of fundamental sports to facilitate the sustainable development of athletics in Iraq.

**Keywords:** Athletics, Sport Development, Sport Infrastructure, Human Capital, Talent Identification

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## Introduction

Athletics is regarded as one of the oldest and most fundamental sport disciplines worldwide. With its diverse range of events including sprints, endurance running, jumps, and throws—it plays a central role in fostering both elite and mass sport development (Coakley, 2014). Athletics also provides a unique platform for talent identification, the enhancement of physical and mental health, and the promotion of social cohesion. Owing to its minimal requirements for complex equipment and its adaptability to various environments, athletics offers an exceptional opportunity for sport development in developing countries, including Iraq (Acquah-Sam, 2021).

With a predominantly young population and considerable geographical diversity, Iraq possesses substantial potential for the advancement of athletics. The country's population of over 40 million nearly 60 percent of whom are under the age of 25—constitutes a fertile ground for nurturing athletic talent. In such a context, athletics can contribute to strengthening national identity, increasing youth participation, and supporting the country's social and cultural development amid ongoing political and economic challenges (Alfahham & Asefi, 2025). However, multiple barriers have hindered the full realization of this potential. These obstacles can be broadly classified into three main categories: managerial and financial challenges; infrastructural and human-resource challenges; and socio-cultural challenges (Plenderleith, 2013). This typology provides a useful framework for conducting a comprehensive assessment of the current situation and identifying pathways for development.

In the domain of management and financial resources, weak sport governance and inefficient resource allocation represent some of the most critical barriers to the development of athletics in Iraq. These issues are further exacerbated by the absence of effective talent identification programs and the lack of

sustainable financial support (Mthombeni et al., 2024). Heavy reliance on government funding combined with international economic sanctions and currency fluctuations has made the procurement of modern equipment and engagement in international collaborations increasingly difficult (Elbargathi & Al-Assaf, 2019). Political and security instability has also negatively affected the financial and managerial landscape of sport by increasing the risks associated with hosting sport events and disrupting training camps and international competitions (Darnell, 2023). These conditions have significantly constrained long-term planning and the sustainable implementation of development initiatives.

In the domain of infrastructure and human resources, the scarcity of standard tracks, professional training facilities, modern equipment, and specialized educational centers has severely constrained the development of elite athletes and the organization of high-quality competitions (Mthombeni et al., 2024). Such limitations are commonly observed in many developing countries, and Iraq is no exception. The shortage of qualified coaches and the absence of continuous training programs have further hindered the cultivation of an effective human-resource base (Shadmehr, 2012). The lack of standardized coaching education systems has resulted in many current coaches lacking up-to-date knowledge and the competencies required to train athletes for international-level performance. Moreover, insufficient attention to youth categories and the absence of school-based talent identification programs have left a substantial portion of Iraq's young population's athletic potential untapped.

From a socio-cultural perspective, the relatively low status of athletics compared with team sports—particularly football—has reduced public participation and diminished the interest of media outlets and sponsors (Shadmehr, 2012). Limited media coverage and the public's

insufficient awareness of the benefits of athletics have further restricted opportunities for growth and development (Acquah-Sam, 2021). The concentration of sport facilities and training centers in major cities has eliminated equal opportunities for athletes in disadvantaged or peripheral regions, thereby intensifying regional inequalities. Additionally, the absence of a robust sport marketing culture has impeded the attraction of private-sector sponsorship and reinforced dependence on government funding (Shane et al., 2014). These socio-cultural conditions have posed significant challenges to the sustainable development of athletics. Restricted media visibility not only limits public recognition of athletics champions but also diminishes young people's motivation to engage in the sport (Moscoso Sanchez et al., 2018).

Athletics is among the earliest sport disciplines to have been featured in both the ancient and modern Olympic Games and has consistently held a central position in international competitions (Goetz, 2014). Consequently, the development of this discipline carries not only athletic significance but also symbolic and cultural dimensions at the global level. Successful participation in international athletics events can contribute to enhancing a country's standing on the world stage. At the regional level as well, countries such as Iran and Qatar have improved their competitive status and earned valuable medals through sustained investment in infrastructure and the implementation of systematic talent development programs. Despite its young population and diverse geographical and climatic conditions, Iraq has not yet succeeded in fully leveraging these opportunities. Regional experiences suggest that with strategic planning and targeted investment, achieving international success is attainable.

Moreover, athletics can serve as an effective platform for increasing women's participation in sport and promoting gender equality (Schulenkorf, 2012). In societies where cultural

and social barriers restrict women's involvement in sport, the individual nature of athletics and the variety of its events can offer suitable opportunities for women to engage. Such participation not only contributes to strengthening social capital but also provides positive role models for future generations. Additionally, due to its inclusive nature and relatively low cost, athletics holds considerable potential for improving physical and mental health and fostering economic development through attracting investment and sport tourism (Acquah-Sam, 2021). In a country like Iraq, which faces multiple social and economic challenges, athletics can serve as an effective tool for enhancing national cohesion and improving overall quality of life.

A review of the existing literature indicates that numerous international and regional studies have examined various dimensions of athletics development. At the global level, Acquah-Sam (2024) emphasized that sustainable sport development in developing countries requires continuous investment, strong institutions, and effective governance. These findings align with the results of Al-Zubaidi et al. (2024) in Iraq, who identified weak managerial structures and resource shortages as critical obstacles. Regarding infrastructure, the study by Wang et al. (2024) demonstrated that uneven development of sport facilities has a direct impact on overall sport advancement, highlighting the need to address geographical disparities and strengthen standardized infrastructure. From the perspective of education and human resources, Alkhafaji et al. (2022) found that standardized training programs have a significant positive effect on coaches' performance. Likewise, Thomas et al. (2019) reported that early supportive environments and strong social support networks are influential in the development of elite athletics athletes.

At the national level, Jabry et al. (2024) underscored the importance of scenario-based planning for professional sport development in

Iraq. Their study identified financial restructuring, maintaining gender equity, and strengthening infrastructure as core components. In a similar vein, Al-Zaidawi et al. (2025) proposed a five-dimension model for the development of student sport in Iraq, emphasizing the role of diverse stakeholders and developmental processes. Collectively, these studies indicate that sport development in Iraq requires a multidimensional approach and the active engagement of multiple stakeholders. However, the existing literature reveals a clear research gap: there is a notable shortage of qualitative studies specifically examining the factors influencing athletics development in Iraq. Most prior research has focused on general aspects of sport or macro-level managerial issues, with limited attention given to the interplay among managerial, infrastructural, and socio-cultural factors in the specific context of athletics.

This study distinguishes itself by simultaneously focusing on three major domains—management and financial resources, infrastructure and human resources, and socio-cultural factors—and by analyzing their interactions within a localized and qualitative framework. Moreover, through the use of thematic analysis, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding athletics development in the unique context of Iraq. Thus, conducting research that adopts an in-depth, data-driven approach to present a realistic portrayal of the current situation constitutes both a scientific and practical necessity. The findings of this study can serve as a basis for formulating national-level athletics development policies, designing effective talent identification programs, improving coach education initiatives, and enhancing international collaborations. They can also assist policymakers and sport managers in making more informed decisions by offering clearer insight into existing barriers and opportunities. In this way, the study not only addresses the

existing academic gap but also offers a conceptual framework for evidence-based decision-making within Iraq's sport sector. In line with these considerations, the primary aim of this research is to identify the factors influencing the development of athletics in Iraq using a qualitative approach and thematic analysis.

### Materials and Methods

This study was designed to identify the factors influencing the development of athletics in Iraq. In terms of its nature, the research is qualitative, and in terms of its purpose, it is exploratory. Given the characteristics of the research topic, the qualitative approach enabled an in-depth exploration of stakeholders' experiences, perceptions, and understandings. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data. The research population included athletics coaches, officials and experts from the Iraqi Athletics Federation, university faculty members in physical education and sport sciences, and international athletics referees. These individuals were identified as key informants due to their direct experience and specialized knowledge regarding athletics in Iraq. A purposive, criterion-based sampling method was used, and the sampling process continued until theoretical saturation was reached. In this study, theoretical saturation occurred after 18 interviews, meaning that no new codes or themes emerged in the final interviews, and the information provided by participants overlapped with previously collected data. To ensure data adequacy, two additional interviews were conducted, resulting in a total of 20 participants. The inclusion criteria for participation were as follows: (1) a minimum of five years of professional experience in athletics; (2) possession of an academic degree in physical education and sport sciences or a recognized coaching certification in athletics; (3) sufficient expertise and in-depth knowledge relevant to the research topic; and (4) willingness and informed consent to voluntarily participate in the study. The final

sample consisted of eight athletics coaches (four youth-level coaches and four national team coaches), five officials and experts from the Iraqi Athletics Federation, four university faculty members in physical education and sport sciences, and three international athletics referees. This diversity within the sample enabled the collection of comprehensive and multi-perspective insights.

The primary data collection instrument was the semi-structured interview. Prior to conducting the interviews, an interview guide consisting of key and central questions was developed. These questions were designed based on a review of the relevant literature, the objectives of the study, and consultations with the supervisory and advisory faculty members. To ensure content validity, the interview guide was reviewed by five experts in sport management and qualitative methodology. These experts included two university faculty members specializing in sport management, one qualitative methodology specialist, and two professionals from the Iraqi Athletics Federation. After receiving their feedback and incorporating the recommended revisions, the final version of the interview guide was completed. Examples of the core interview questions included: How do you assess the current state of athletics infrastructure in Iraq? What is the role of media and advertising in the development of athletics in Iraq? What are the major managerial and financial challenges in advancing athletics in the country? How do cultural and social factors influence the development of this sport? These questions served as guiding prompts, and during the interviews, follow-up and probing questions were asked in accordance with participants' responses. Before each interview, the study's objectives and procedures were explained clearly to the participants. Oral informed consent was obtained from all interviewees for their voluntary participation and for audio recording of the sessions. Participants were assured that they could withdraw from the

study at any time without any consequences. To protect confidentiality and privacy, all identifying information was replaced with numerical codes, and no names were mentioned in any reports. The audio files were securely stored and accessible only to the research team. Participants were also informed of their right to access the final research findings. These ethical considerations enhanced participant trust and improved the quality of the collected data. The interviews were conducted in person between April and September 2025 at locations agreed upon by the participants, including office settings, universities, the Athletics Federation, and training facilities. Each interview began with the researcher's introduction, an explanation of the study's objectives, and the collection of demographic information. Subsequently, the core questions were posed, and each session concluded with an open-ended question such as: "Is there any important point that has not been addressed?" The duration of each interview ranged from 20 to 35 minutes. To ensure accurate data capture, all interviews were audio-recorded with prior consent, and concurrent note-taking was performed. After data collection, the analysis process followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework. MAXQDA software was used to facilitate the analysis and organization of the qualitative data. This software provided robust tools for code management, theme development, and systematic qualitative analysis.

To ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the findings, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluative framework was employed. This framework encompasses three key criteria: credibility, transferability, and dependability. Multiple strategies were implemented to enhance the credibility of the findings. To assess the reliability of the data analysis, the inter-coder agreement method was applied. For this purpose, a doctoral student in statistics with experience in qualitative data analysis was invited to serve as the second coder. After



training this research collaborator in coding procedures and techniques, three interviews were randomly selected (Interviews 4, 9, and 16) and independently analyzed by both coders. In this approach, codes identified by both

coders were classified as “agreements,” whereas codes that differed were categorized as “disagreements.” The level of agreement between the two coders was calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Reliability percentage} = (2 \times \text{number of agreements} / \text{total number of codes}) \times 100$$

**Table 1.** Results of Inter-Coder Reliability

| Interview Number | Total Codes | Number of Agreements | Number of Disagreements | Reliability Percentage |
|------------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 4                | 15          | 7                    | 3                       | 93.33                  |
| 9                | 13          | 6                    | 3                       | 92.30                  |
| 16               | 17          | 7                    | 4                       | 82.35                  |
| Total            | 45          | 20                   | 10                      | 89.32                  |

As shown in Table 1, the total number of codes identified by both coders was 45, with 20 agreements and 10 disagreements. The overall reliability exceeded 89 percent. Given that this value is above the 60 percent threshold, the

dependability and stability of the coding process were confirmed and deemed acceptable. This result indicates that the data analysis was conducted with a satisfactory level of precision and consistency.

## Results

Table 2 provides a brief description of the demographic characteristics of the participants, including age, gender, and

professional role. The sample consisted of 20 experts in the field of athletics in Iraq, selected from various stakeholder groups.

**Table 2.** Participant Characteristics

| No. | Gender | Age | Role  |
|-----|--------|-----|---|
| 1   | Male   | 45  | Athletics Coach   |
| 2   | Male   | 42  | Athletics Coach   |
| 3   | Female | 38  | Athletics Coach   |
| 4   | Male   | 40  | Athletics Coach   |
| 5   | Male   | 35  | Athletics Coach   |
| 6   | Female | 32  | Athletics Coach   |
| 7   | Male   | 36  | Athletics Coach   |
| 8   | Male   | 34  | Athletics Coach   |
| 9   | Male   | 50  | Director of Athlete Training and Development, Federation  |
| 10  | Female | 48  | Director of Competitions and Planning, Federation         |
| 11  | Male   | 46  | Secretary of Talent Identification Committee, Federation  |
| 12  | Male   | 44  | Expert in Infrastructure and Development, Federation      |
| 13  | Female | 42  | Coordinator of Leagues and Youth Competitions, Federation |
| 14  | Male   | 55  | University Faculty Member                                 |
| 15  | Female | 55  | University Faculty Member                                 |
| 16  | Male   | 48  | University Faculty Member                                 |
| 17  | Male   | 52  | University Faculty Member                                 |
| 18  | Male   | 40  | International Athletics Referee                           |
| 19  | Female | 38  | International Athletics Referee                           |
| 20  | Male   | 41  | International Athletics Referee                           |

During the data analysis process using thematic analysis, the research identified 80 open codes, which were subsequently organized into 15 sub-themes. These sub-themes were ultimately grouped into four main themes: 1) economic and

infrastructural factors, 2) educational and talent development factors, 3) socio-cultural factors, and 4) managerial and policy-related factors. Notably, the sub-themes were derived directly from the interview transcripts through repeated reviews by the

researchers, while the main themes were formed based on the thematic and

conceptual relationships among the sub-themes.

**Table 3. Sample Coding Derived from One of the Interviews**

| Interview Excerpt   | Identified Codes   |
|---|--|
| “The presence of standard tracks and adequate training equipment, along with easy access to sports halls and athletic facilities across different regions, can accelerate the development of athletics and foster talent.”              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Level of infrastructure standardization</li> <li>– Accessibility of training facilities</li> <li>– Geographic distribution of sports facilities</li> </ul>                    |
| “Continuous educational programs for coaches and referees, supported by the transfer of knowledge and experience across different levels, play a critical role in enhancing instructional quality and advancing athletics development.” | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Quality of coaching and referee training</li> <li>– Effectiveness of continuous education programs</li> <li>– Knowledge and experience transfer across generations</li> </ul> |

As demonstrated above, initial coding was conducted by identifying key factors influencing the development of athletics directly from the interview texts. This approach aligned closely with the primary aim of the study.

Using the thematic analysis approach, the study generated 82 open codes, which—after organizing and consolidating similar codes—were classified into 17 sub-themes. These sub-themes were ultimately grouped

into 7 overarching main themes. It is noteworthy that the sub-themes were extracted directly from the interview transcripts after multiple rounds of review by the researchers, whereas the main themes were developed based on the conceptual and thematic relationships among the sub-themes. Table 4 provides a comprehensive overview of the open codes, sub-themes, and main themes.

**Table 4: Open Codes, Sub-Themes, and Main Themes**

| Open Codes  | Sub-Themes                             | Main Themes                                     |
|---|--|---|
| 1. Quality of federation performance                      | Managerial structure and efficiency    | Managerial and Organizational Structure Factors |
| 2. Financial and administrative transparency              |  |   |
| 3. Management accountability and transparency             |  |   |
| 4. Level of expertise in sports management                |  |   |
| 5. Coordination among sports institutions                 |  |   |
| 6. Quality of strategic planning                          | Institutional support and policymaking |   |
| 7. Stability of federation policies                       |  |   |
| 8. Attention from the Ministry of Youth and Sports        |  |   |
| 9. Level of governmental support for individual sports    |  |   |
| 10. Existence of performance indicators                   |  |   |
| 11. Influence of national policies on sports              | Financial resources and budgeting      | Financial and Economic Factors                  |
| 12. Adequacy of financial resources                       |  |   |
| 13. Budget allocated to athletics                         |  |   |
| 14. Resource distribution among different sports          |  |   |
| 15. Dependency on governmental funding                    |  |   |
| 16. Diversification of funding sources                    | Provision of equipment and resources   |   |
| 17. Planning for sustainable financing                    |  |   |
| 18. Timely provision of equipment                         |  |   |
| 19. Access to modern equipment                            |  |   |
| 20. Influence of economic conditions on equipment imports |  |   |
| 21. Cost of specialized equipment                         | Marketing and sponsorship              |   |
| 22. Domestic production of sports equipment               |  |   |
| 23. Private-sector investment                             |  |   |
| 24. Development of sports marketing culture               |  |   |
| 25. Sponsor acquisition programs                          |  |   |
| 26. Revenue generation from competitions                  | Physical infrastructure                |   |
| 27. Adequacy of standard tracks                           |  |   |
| 28. Quality of sports facilities                          |  |   |

|  |  |  |                                       |  |
|--|--|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| 29. Access to indoor halls                               | Equipment and technology                   | Geographic distribution of facilities            | Human Resources and Training Factors  |  |
| 30. Availability of specialized training centers         |  |  |                                       |  |
| 31. Maintenance of facilities                            |  |  |                                       |  |
| 32. Access to modern training equipment                  |  |  |                                       |  |
| 33. Access to advanced sports technologies               |  |  |                                       |  |
| 34. Performance analysis systems                         |  |  |                                       |  |
| 35. Precision measurement equipment                      |  |  |                                       |  |
| 36. Balanced distribution of facilities                  |  |  |                                       |  |
| 37. Access to facilities in peripheral areas             |  |  |                                       |  |
| 38. Geographic coverage of tracks                        |  |  |                                       |  |
| 39. Equity in resource distribution                      |  |  |                                       |  |
| 40. Number of qualified coaches                          | Human capital and technical expertise      | Quality of training systems                      |                                       | Support for human resources            |
| 41. Technical and tactical knowledge of coaches          |  |  |                                       |  |
| 42. International experience of referees                 |  |  |                                       |  |
| 43. Number of specialists within the federation          |  |  |                                       |  |
| 44. Retention of elite coaches and experts               |  |  |                                       |  |
| 45. Continuous training programs                         |  |  |                                       |  |
| 46. Specialized professional training                    |  |  |                                       |  |
| 47. Access to international courses                      |  |  |                                       |  |
| 48. Knowledge and experience transfer across generations |  |  |                                       |  |
| 49. Practical workshops for coaches                      |  |  |                                       |  |
| 50. Level of support for coaches                         | Support for human resources                | Talent identification and grassroots development |                                       | Talent and Support Development Factors |
| 51. Salaries and incentives for coaches                  |  |  |                                       |  |
| 52. Integrated support for athletes                      |  |  |                                       |  |
| 53. Sports medicine services                             |  |  |                                       |  |
| 54. Psychological support                                |  |  |                                       |  |
| 55. Sports nutrition programs                            |  |  |                                       |  |
| 56. Stable employment opportunities                      |  |  |                                       |  |
| 57. School talent identification programs                |  |  |                                       |  |
| 58. Attention to school sports                           |  |  |                                       |  |
| 59. Specialized training centers for youth               | Competitive opportunities and interactions |  | Cultural factors and public awareness |  |
| 60. Attention to various age groups                      |  |  |                                       |  |
| 61. Level of expertise among physical education teachers |  |  |                                       |  |
| 62. Regular domestic competitions                        |  |  |                                       |  |
| 63. Talent discovery tournaments                         |  |  |                                       |  |
| 64. Collaboration with international federations         |  |  |                                       |  |
| 65. Participation in international competitions          |  |  |                                       |  |
| 66. Friendly matches with neighboring countries          |  |  |                                       |  |
| 67. Public awareness of athletics                        |  |  |                                       |  |
| 68. Status of individual sports in public culture        | Role of media and social support           | Environmental and climatic factors               |                                       | Environmental and Demographic Factors  |
| 69. Public attention distribution across sports          |  |  |                                       |  |
| 70. Promotion of foundational sports                     |  |  |                                       |  |
| 71. Media coverage of athletics competitions             |  |  |                                       |  |
| 72. Media advertising                                    |  |  |                                       |  |
| 73. Social support for athletics                         |  |  |                                       |  |
| 74. Successful media role models                         |  |  |                                       |  |
| 75. Live broadcasting of competitions                    |  |  |                                       |  |
| 76. Climatic conditions for outdoor training             |  |  |                                       |  |
| 77. Infrastructure adaptation to climate                 |  |  |                                       |  |
| 78. Impact of temperature on training                    |  |  |                                       |  |
| 79. Youth population potential                           | Demographic and motivational potential     |  |                                       |  |
| 80. Athlete motivation                                   |  |  |                                       |  |
| 81. Local coaches' motivation for talent discovery       |  |  |                                       |  |
| 82. Women's participation in athletics                   |  |  |                                       |  |

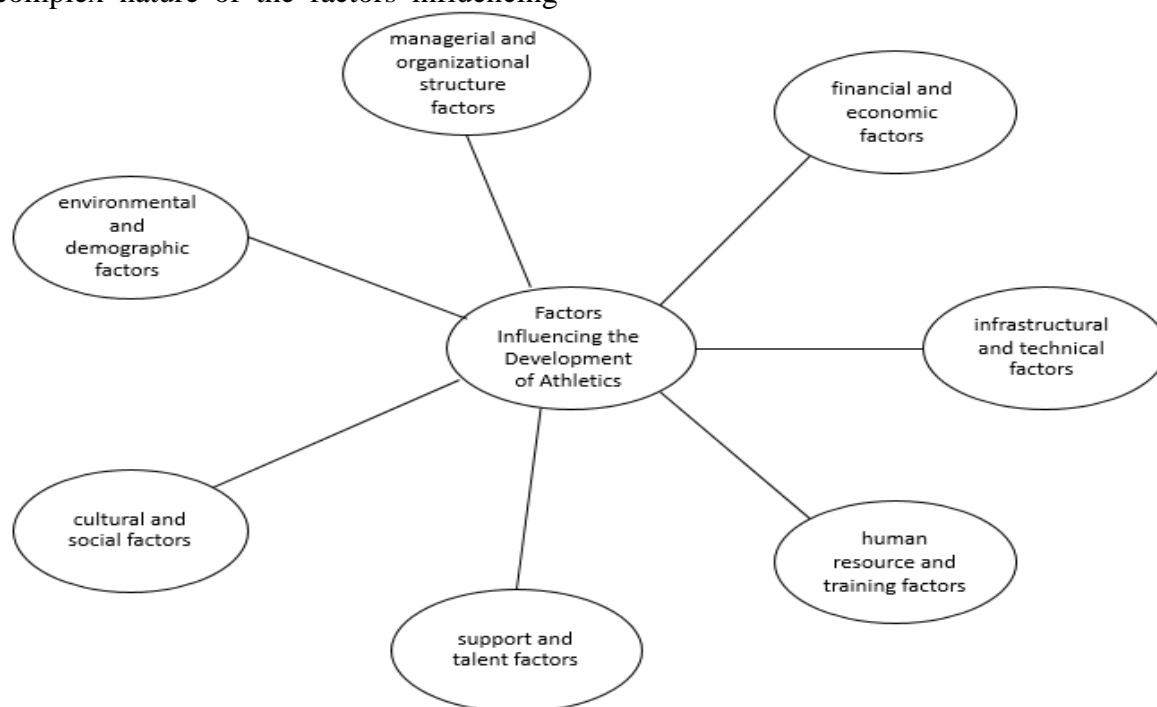
As illustrated, the factors affecting the development of athletics in Iraq are



categorized into seven main themes: managerial and organizational structure factors, financial and economic factors, infrastructural and technical factors, human resource and training factors, support and talent development factors, cultural and social factors, and environmental and demographic factors. These themes are supported by 17 sub-themes and 82 open codes, reflecting the multifaceted and complex nature of the factors influencing

athletics development in Iraq.

Figure 1 presents the final model of the study, in which the central category—factors influencing athletics development—is positioned at the core, surrounded radially by the seven main themes. This model illustrates the conceptual interrelationships among the various dimensions affecting athletics development in the Iraqi context.



**Figure 1. Factors Influencing the Development of Athletics in Iraq**

To enhance the clarity of the findings, each main theme is presented below along with illustrative participant quotations.

The results indicated that the quality of management and organizational structures plays a fundamental role in the development of athletics. Many participants emphasized the importance of transparency, managerial expertise, and policy stability. As one federation official noted: “When we do not have clear and stable programs, we cannot expect long-term support from investors” (Participant 9). This perspective was echoed by one of the coaches, who stated: “When we do not know what budget we will have next year, we cannot plan effectively” (Participant 2). A faculty member also stressed: “The level of managerial expertise and transparency in

decision-making can attract trust from the private sector” (Participant 14). In addition, the degree of institutional support from the Ministry of Youth and Sports was identified as a key factor in resource allocation and in increasing attention to individual sports.

Financial resources and budget distribution were also identified as critical determinants in the development of athletics. One federation expert remarked: “The budget allocated to athletics is significantly lower compared to team sports” (Participant 12). This concern was reinforced by a coach who explained: “Sometimes we wait months for even a simple piece of equipment to be provided” (Participant 5). A faculty member highlighted the need for diversified financial sources, noting:

“Heavy reliance on government funding means that when budgets are reduced, all programs come to a halt” (Participant 16). The level of development of sport marketing and the ability to attract sponsors were further recognized as influential factors in diversifying financial resources. As one federation manager emphasized: “Sponsorship programs and revenue generation from competitions can greatly contribute to our financial independence” (Participant 10).

The quality and adequacy of physical infrastructure—including tracks, halls, and equipment—play a highly significant role in the development of athletics. One coach stated: “Our track quality is not sufficient to prepare athletes for international competitions” (Participant 1). This issue was consistent with the view of a federation expert, who noted: “Access to indoor facilities during Iraq’s extremely hot summers is essential” (Participant 12). An international referee further highlighted geographic disparities: “Most facilities are concentrated in major cities, and other regions lack access” (Participant 18). Moreover, access to modern technologies and performance-analysis systems was identified as a facilitating factor in athlete training and development. The security of training camps and competitions was also recognized as an influential factor in the optimal use of these infrastructures.

The number and quality of skilled human resources were found to be key factors in athletics development. One coach stated: “We need continuous training programs to become familiar with new methods” (Participant 7). This need was supported by a faculty member who noted: “The technical and tactical knowledge of coaches has a direct impact on athlete development” (Participant 15). A federation manager also pointed to the challenge of retaining talent: “Unfortunately, many experienced coaches and experts migrate due to poor working conditions” (Participant 11). Additionally, the level of support for coaches—including salaries, benefits, insurance, and job

security—was identified as a major factor influencing the recruitment and retention of high-quality personnel. As one coach emphasized: “If we have appropriate salaries and job security, we can focus more on our work” (Participant 4).

Comprehensive athlete support and the quality of talent identification programs were identified as decisive factors in cultivating the next generation of athletes. One coach stated: “Sports medicine services and recovery programs can prevent athlete injuries” (Participant 8). A federation member highlighted the importance of school-based talent identification: “If we implement regular talent identification programs in schools, we can discover many gifted individuals” (Participant 13). This view aligned with the perspective of a faculty member who noted: “The level of expertise among physical education teachers in schools plays an important role in the early identification of talent” (Participant 17). Furthermore, the organization of regular domestic competitions and participation in international events were recognized as competitive opportunities that foster athlete development. As one referee explained: “Continuous engagement with international federations can increase our access to competitions and training courses” (Participant 19).

The cultural status of athletics and the extent of media coverage were also identified as influential factors in the development of the sport. One coach remarked: “The status of individual sports in our public culture is low, and all the attention is directed toward football” (Participant 3). This reality was confirmed by a federation member who stated: “Media coverage of athletics competitions is extremely limited, and the public does not know our champions” (Participant 10). A faculty member emphasized the importance of cultural promotion: “Raising awareness about the benefits of athletics and promoting grassroots participation can increase engagement” (Participant 14). In

addition, live broadcasting of competitions and showcasing successful role models in the media were cited as factors that can attract broader public attention. Social support for athletics and the general level of public awareness were also identified within this theme.

Climatic conditions and demographic potential were further recognized as key factors influencing the development of athletics. One coach referred to environmental constraints: “Extremely high temperatures in the summer make outdoor training very difficult” (Participant 6). This challenge was consistent with the view of a federation expert, who noted: “Adapting

### Discussion

This study was conducted with the aim of identifying the factors influencing the development of athletics in Iraq. The findings revealed that within the domain of managerial factors and organizational structure, elements such as the quality of federation performance, the level of financial and administrative transparency, managerial expertise in sport administration, consistency across governing bodies, policy stability, and the degree of institutional support constitute fundamental determinants of athletics development in Iraq. The results indicate that weaknesses in managerial structures not only directly affect the quality of planning but also sequentially constrain the capacity to attract private-sector support and long-term investment. The absence of clear performance indicators and insufficient managerial accountability have diminished public and institutional trust, resulting in fragmented resources and uncoordinated efforts. These findings are fully aligned with the results of Al-Zubaidi et al. (2024), who identified weak managerial structures and limited resources as critical barriers to sports development in Iraq. Similarly, Rostamichaijan et al. (2025), in their assessment of the sports landscape in Iran, found that professionalization in sport remains dependent on the government and that

infrastructure to climatic conditions and providing cooling systems is essential” (Participant 12). Conversely, demographic potential was identified as an opportunity for development. A faculty member stated: “Leveraging the potential of the young population can serve as a major source for talent identification” (Participant 16). Additionally, the motivation levels of athletes and coaches to explore talent were identified as important drivers. A federation manager emphasized: “Increasing women’s participation in athletics can double our talent identification capacity” (Participant 9).

policy conflicts among sports organizations require resolution. In the same vein, Saboonchi et al. (2022) demonstrated that political stability is essential for fostering sports development and investment. The consistency between the present study and previous research can be attributed to structural similarities and governance challenges across countries in the region, all of which face issues related to managerial inefficiencies and fragile organizational systems. The primary innovation of this section lies in identifying the direct relationship between managerial transparency and the capacity to attract private-sector support within the specific socio-political context of Iraq. Unlike most previous studies, which examined managerial factors in isolation, the present research shows that the quality of strategic planning, the presence of performance indicators, and the stability of policies collectively shape the effectiveness of sports management. Accordingly, several measures are recommended to improve the current situation: establishing a strategic council for athletics development comprising representatives from all key stakeholders; implementing an integrated sports information system to enhance transparency and performance monitoring; formulating explicit performance indicators for the annual evaluation of managers; and creating coordination mechanisms among

various sports-related institutions.

The findings of the study showed that the adequacy of financial resources, the amount of allocated budget, the distribution of resources across different sports, the degree of dependence on government funding, the diversification of financial sources, timely provision of equipment, and the development of a sport marketing culture are all decisive factors in the advancement of athletics. The analysis indicates that the heavy reliance on government budgets and the lack of financial diversification increase financial vulnerability and hinder long-term planning. The uneven distribution of resources in favor of team sports particularly football has deprived athletics of essential development opportunities. These results are fully consistent with Costa et al. (2024), who reported that countries with strong financial support systems experienced a 35 percent increase in the number of medal-winning athletes. Similarly, Li et al. (2025) found that targeted incentives for attracting private investment can significantly enhance the capacity for financing resilient sports infrastructure. In the same vein, Zbiljić and Isaković (2025) emphasized the need for collaborative efforts among governments, private-sector actors, and sports organizations. Additionally, Rija and Abed (2024), in their assessment of the economic landscape of sports in Iraq, underscored the need for investment in sports clubs to improve financial returns and attract private-sector support. The alignment between this study's findings and international research reflects the global importance of diversifying financial resources and reducing reliance on government budgets as foundations for sustainable sports development. The innovation of the present study lies in identifying the relationship between weak sport marketing culture and financial constraints in the Iraqi context. The study demonstrated that insufficient attention to sport marketing and the absence of systematic sponsorship programs not only

limit financial resources but also intensify reliance on government funding. Therefore, to improve the situation, several measures are essential: adopting tax incentive legislation for companies sponsoring athletics; establishing a Sports Development Fund through joint government-private sector participation; creating a dedicated sport marketing unit within the federation to manage broadcasting rights and attract sponsors; and designing public-private partnership models for financing infrastructure projects.

The findings revealed that the adequacy of standard tracks, the quality of existing infrastructure, access to indoor facilities, maintenance of equipment, availability of modern training tools, adoption of advanced technologies, and the balanced geographical distribution of facilities are critical determinants in the development of athletics. The analysis indicates that the scarcity and inadequate quality of physical infrastructure not only hinder the proper preparation of athletes for international competitions but also reinforce geographical disparities due to the concentration of facilities in major cities. This imbalance restricts talent identification opportunities in peripheral and underserved regions. These results are fully consistent with Wang et al. (2024), who demonstrated that uneven development of sports infrastructure has a direct impact on overall sports development. Similarly, Fay et al. (2010) argued that indoor facilities and cooling systems can mitigate adverse climatic conditions and ensure stable training environments. Conversely, Sundararajan and Suriyagoda (2016), in their assessment of advanced economies, showed that substantial investment in state-of-the-art infrastructure can offset harsh climatic conditions. This relative inconsistency reflects the economic and financial disparities between developed and developing nations. The alignment of the present study's findings with regional research stems from shared climatic

conditions and financial constraints across Middle Eastern countries. The novelty of this part of the study lies in identifying the direct relationship between geographical inequality in the distribution of facilities and the limitation of talent identification opportunities in Iraq. The study shows that the concentration of facilities in major cities such as Baghdad and Basra has prevented the identification of potential talents in other regions. Therefore, to improve the current situation, several actions are essential: establishing at least one standard athletics complex in every province; constructing indoor facilities equipped with appropriate ventilation and cooling systems in hot regions; implementing performance analysis systems and advanced technologies in training centers; and developing a systematic maintenance and upgrading program for existing facilities.

The findings indicated that the number and quality of specialized coaches, the level of technical and tactical knowledge, the international experience of referees, the availability of continuous training programs, access to international courses, and the degree of human-resource support are among the key factors influencing the development of athletics. The analysis shows that even when adequate infrastructure is available, the absence of qualified coaches and deficiencies in technical knowledge substantially diminish the effectiveness of training programs. Moreover, the migration of elite coaches and experienced personnel—driven by low salaries and the lack of job security—has weakened the country's human-capital base. These results are fully consistent with Alkhafaji et al. (2022), who demonstrated that standardized training programs have a significant positive impact on coaches' performance. Similarly, Keliat and Al Munawar (2024) emphasized that continuous professional-development programs for coaches can considerably enhance athletes' technical proficiency. In addition, Thomas et al. (2019) found that

early supportive environments and social-support networks play a pivotal role in the development of elite athletes in track and field. The convergence between the present findings and the international literature underscores the global importance of investing in education and human-resource capacity building for sports development. The innovation of this section lies in identifying the link between weak educational systems and the migration of experts in Iraq. The study revealed that the absence of career-advancement pathways and low compensation packages have prompted experienced coaches and specialists to relocate to neighboring countries. Accordingly, improving the current situation requires establishing a national academy for coach and referee education in collaboration with international federations; implementing annual continuous-training programs with updated content; developing structured career-advancement pathways for coaches; increasing salaries and benefits for sports personnel; and strengthening collaboration with universities to design advanced academic programs in physical education and sport sciences.

The findings indicated that comprehensive athlete support, medical and psychological services, school-based talent identification programs, attention to school sports, consideration of different age categories, regular domestic competitions, and participation in international events are fundamental factors in the development of athletics. The analysis shows that the absence of an integrated support system and the lack of evidence-based talent-identification programs in schools have resulted in potential talents either remaining undiscovered or withdrawing from sport at early stages. Furthermore, limited competitive opportunities have reduced athletes' motivation and hindered their preparedness for international competitions. These results align closely with Rahmani et al. (2024), who found that athletes with stable financial support have



better access to educational resources, recovery services, and mental-health care. Mack et al. (2023) similarly emphasized that mental-health maintenance is essential for athletic performance, recommending annual screenings and continuous support. In the context of talent development, Zhao et al. (2024) showed that talent cultivation is a continuous, multi-stage process in which structured competition plays a pivotal role. Zong (2025) likewise demonstrated that increasing the number of domestic and international competitions directly enhances performance and facilitates the discovery of new talent. Conversely, Yasuda (2022) revealed that in Asian cultural contexts, intrinsic motivation and family support play a significant role. This relative divergence reflects cultural differences: while family support may be sufficient in some Asian countries, Iraq requires the establishment of institutional support systems. The innovation of this section lies in its integrated examination of the relationship between support structures, talent identification, and competitive opportunities within the Iraqi context. The study found that fragmented support mechanisms lack effectiveness, underscoring the need for a comprehensive and unified system. Accordingly, improving the current situation requires establishing an integrated athlete-support center that includes medical, psychological, nutritional, and recovery services; creating an athlete insurance fund; implementing a scientific school-based talent-identification system; developing a fixed annual calendar of domestic competitions; allocating dedicated budgets for regular international participation; and forging strategic partnerships with international federations. The findings indicated that the cultural status of athletics in society, the level of public awareness, the position of individual sports within societal culture, grassroots sport promotion, media coverage, media advertising, and the presence of successful media role models are determining factors in the development of athletics. The

analysis shows that the relatively low cultural standing of athletics compared with team sports—particularly football—and the weakness of media coverage have reduced public participation and discouraged young people from entering the sport. The uneven distribution of public and media attention has prevented athletics champions from gaining visibility and fulfilling their potential role as models for the younger generation. These results are consistent with Shamshirian and Halldorsson (2025), who emphasized that sporting success is intertwined with cultural foundations and social practices, and that effective cultural mechanisms can enhance public engagement in sport. Similarly, Sanatkhan (2021) found that sport-based socioeconomic capital indirectly influences sport-related cultural capital, thereby increasing citizens' interest in sport. In this regard, Chen et al. (2024) demonstrated that the media's role in creating role models for youth is a key factor in promoting individual sports. Anista (2023) further argued that international success can reinforce a culture of achievement and encourage greater investment. The alignment of this study's findings with prior research underscores the global importance of cultural development and media influence in advancing sport. The innovation of this section lies in its sociological examination of cultural and social determinants within the specific context of Iraq. The study revealed that without shifting public perceptions and increasing media visibility, other developmental measures will remain ineffective. Changing societal attitudes toward sport requires coordinated educational, media, and family-oriented initiatives to institutionalize sport as a social value. Accordingly, improving the current situation necessitates producing documentary programs on national athletics champions for broadcast on national media; allocating regular airtime for athletics competitions; launching active digital media channels; organizing public athletics

events in urban spaces; and integrating athletics education into school curricula.

The findings indicated that climatic conditions for training, the alignment of infrastructure with environmental conditions, the effects of ambient temperature, the utilization of the youth population, athlete and coach motivation, and women's participation are influential factors in the development of athletics. The analysis shows that Iraq's harsh climate—particularly the extremely high summer temperatures—creates significant constraints for outdoor training. Nevertheless, the country's large youth population and the potential for increased female participation represent valuable resources for talent identification, provided that they are supported through appropriate planning. These findings are consistent with Asgari Gandomani et al. (2025), who demonstrated in their examination of sports facility distribution in Iran that equitable allocation of infrastructure can generate equal opportunities for talent development. Similarly, Asefi and Ghanbarpour (2020) emphasized that equitable access is essential for enhancing physical activity and sports participation. Regarding climatic challenges, Fay et al. (2010) showed that indoor facilities equipped with cooling systems can mitigate adverse weather effects. On the other hand, Kuhn et al. (2021) found that disparities in youth sports participation often stem from barriers such as financial constraints and limited access to facilities. In addition, Krasnova (2024) demonstrated that well-developed sports infrastructure significantly enhances human capital development. The convergence of this study's findings with prior research highlights the global importance of equitable access and balanced distribution of facilities for effective talent identification. The innovation of this section lies in identifying the dual relationship between climatic challenges and demographic opportunities in the Iraqi context. The study found that although Iraq possesses substantial potential due to its

large youth population, harsh climatic conditions—when unaccompanied by appropriate infrastructure—hinder the ability to capitalize on this potential. Furthermore, the uneven distribution of facilities and limited opportunities for women's participation have left considerable resources underutilized. Accordingly, improving the current situation requires constructing indoor facilities with adequate ventilation and cooling systems in hot regions; implementing infrastructure development programs in underserved areas to promote spatial equity; establishing athletics training centers in schools; designing dedicated programs to attract and support female athletes; and scheduling outdoor training sessions during favorable hours (early morning or evening) during the summer months.

This study faced several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the purposive sampling method and the relatively small number of participants (20 individuals), given the qualitative nature of the research, may limit the generalizability of the results to the broader athletics community in Iraq. Second, restricted access to certain geographic areas due to security concerns prevented the collection of perspectives from athletes and coaches across all regions of the country. Third, the limited timeframe of the study precluded long-term tracking of changes and developments. Nevertheless, these limitations did not hinder the accurate identification of factors influencing the development of athletics in Iraq; rather, they provide clearer directions for future research.

Based on the findings of this study, a comprehensive strategy for developing athletics in Iraq involves coordinated efforts across multiple domains: establishing a Strategic Council for Athletics Development and a comprehensive sports information system to enhance management transparency and coordination; implementing financial

mechanisms such as tax incentives, a Sports Development Fund, and public-private partnerships; expanding infrastructure with standard facilities in each province, indoor arenas with cooling systems, and performance analysis technologies; investing in human resources through a National Academy, continuous professional development, and improved salaries and career pathways; enhancing athlete support and talent development via comprehensive services, school-based identification programs, and a structured competition calendar; promoting cultural awareness and media visibility through documentaries, regular broadcasts, digital channels, and public events; and addressing environmental and demographic factors by providing equitable access to facilities, special programs for female participation, and adaptation to climatic challenges. Successful execution requires phased implementation, stakeholder collaboration, and resource prioritization to ensure sustainable growth and elevate Iraq's international standing in athletics.

### Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive exploration of the key factors influencing the development of track and field in Iraq. Findings indicate that the advancement of the sport is shaped by a multifaceted interplay of managerial, financial, infrastructural, human resource, supportive, cultural, and environmental factors. Effective governance, transparent

administration, and strategic planning are foundational, while diversified financial resources and adequate infrastructure ensure sustainable athlete development. Moreover, the availability of qualified coaches, continuous training programs, and systematic talent identification are critical for nurturing future athletes. Cultural awareness, media coverage, and societal support further enhance participation, and environmental considerations, including climate and demographic potential, influence accessibility and training opportunities. Addressing these interconnected factors through coordinated policies, strategic investments, and stakeholder collaboration is essential to promote sustainable growth and enhance Iraq's competitive standing in track and field at both national and international levels.

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