

Development of a strategic plan for the sport of futsal in Iraq

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to develop a strategic plan for the sport of futsal in Iraq. This research is descriptive in nature. A qualitative study was conducted in the form of a survey. The sample of this study was composed of managers and experts of the Iraqi Ministry of Sports and the General Directorate of Sports of the Education Ministry, heads and vice presidents of Iraqi futsal, Iraqi futsal coaches, referees and elite athletes, and futsal veterans. The sample size for the present study was 23. The findings of the study revealed that Iraqi futsal has 16 strengths (S), 14 weaknesses (W), 14 opportunities (O) and 16 and threats (T). Considering these results, it is suggested that futsal in Iraq focuses more on strengths in the field of internal factors and try to solve the existing weaknesses.

KEYWORDS

Strategic Plan; Strengths; Weaknesses; Opportunities; Threats; Futsal; Iraq

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 20th century, sport has gained a special place and is still gaining momentum at slow pace (Forrest & Perez, 2019). A lot of sports related activities have been initiated by opening sports clubs for general public. Various health stations have been developed at public places like parks and sidewalks in order to promote fitness and healthcare. As per the statistics, the average time devoted the people in part time sports activities have increased to a significant extent. People pay more attention to mental and physical health in the age of industrialization (Vamplew, 2020; Weiss & Norden, 2021). On the other hand, sport is one of the issues that have been discussed under different titles in the world and many groups deal with it in different ways. Along with the economic, social, cultural and even political development of countries, progress in the field of sports has become one

of the strategic priorities of planners across the world (Belfiore et al., 2019). Strategic planning is defined as "a systematic and disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions about what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why" (Bryson, 2011). In line with this definition, Strategic planning is an approach that is becoming increasingly common in governments around the world (Nafrosti et al., 2016). A strategic plan can be applied to organizations or parts of the organization. Strategic planning includes Intra-organizational functions like financial resources or human resources and Inter-organizational networks or targeted collaborations designed to perform specific tasks, such as transportation, health, education, or emergency services, etc. (Bryson, 2011; Alrashid, 2020).

Researchers in the value chain analysis in Brazilian sports reported that the systemic structure indicates the economic participation of sport (football) in GDP as a central variable (Sener et al., 2015). Additionally, appropriate use of information technology may help the youngsters to reveal their talents at state and national level teams. Strategic thinking makes managers famous for their competence and power. This feature is a human-centered innovation process that emphasizes on observation, collaboration, rapid learning, visualization of ideas, and simultaneous business analysis (Chou, 2010). The main strategic function is to create a vision that determines the desired direction of the organization and directs the movement of the organization. It also unites and motivates the organization as a common ideal. Hence the wide impact of sports as an effective tool cannot be denied and it should be well acknowledged (Raffée et al., 1994).

Football and futsal is one of the most popular sports in Iraq and in many countries in the world. Football is so famous that five continents have included it in their national sports (Dehghan Ghahfarrokhi et al., 2010). Futsal is equally popular as football game. Unlike other games, it has highest number of athletes (Hesami et al., 2014).

Khaled Amin (2018) conducted a study entitled *Obstacles to the Development of Futsal in Sulaimaniyah Province, Iraq*. Followed by, compilation of the mission statement, vision statement core values and key areas of performance 5 major goals were set for the development of futsal in Sulaimaniyah. Ahmad Alvayed (2018) conducted a study entitled "Designing a model for the development of Iraqi football clubs". They concluded that the factors for the development of Iraqi football in terms of priority include; income sources, physical infrastructure, legal-political issues, human resources, Socio-cultural issues and Technology of classified Information.15. Rinwar Jalal Abdul Qader (2016) in a study entitled "Strategic Situation Analysis of Sports in Iraqi Kurdistan state and designing Development Strategies", based on SWOT analysis, concluded that a total of 26 SO Strategies, 6 ST Strategies, 6 WO Strategies and 5 WT Strategies, were suggested for the

development of sports in the Kurdistan state. Considering the identified strategic position of sports in Kurdistan province in the region, it was suggested that the sports management in this province has taken a conservative approach for the crisis management and to improve development indicators. Amongst the Arab countries in the Middle East, Iraq has the most cultural, social and sports interaction with Iran. Like Iraqi players, Iranian players are also equally talented. But unfortunate circumstances like wars and other political conflicts prevented them from growing in this field. Despite all this, Iraq has been far more successful than the other countries in the Middle East in the past 10 years. But now they have distanced themselves from the wars and conflicts and have shifted their focus towards their game. In addition to the appropriate and talented manpower they have also given considerable attention to hardware aspects in this field.

Government of Iraq has allocated limited budget to sports. Hence, it is worth for small and large sports organizations to develop a comprehensive plan to make optimal use of the available funds in order to achieve their predetermined goals. The development of futsal in Iraq requires a long-term perspective. Consequently, it requires a strategic and comprehensive planning, given the situation of football in this country and the current growing trend in this field to achieve its real and potential position. Therefore, the present study seeks to answer the question of how to formulate a strategic plan for futsal in Iraq.

2. METHODS

2.1. Design and participants

This research is descriptive in nature. A qualitative study was conducted in the form of a survey. The sample of this study was composed of managers and experts of the Iraqi Ministry of Sports and the General Directorate of Sports of the Education Ministry, heads and vice presidents of Iraqi futsal, Iraqi futsal coaches, referees and elite athletes, and futsal veterans. The sample size for the present study was 23.

2.2. Procedures and analyses

In the present study, sample selection was done using non-random, purposive sampling method. Survey was conducted using open ended and close ended questionnaires and interviews, with the aim of obtaining the mission, vision, core values, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats by applying Delphi method.

3. RESULTS

The demographic information of the studied samples is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of the sample

Variables	Categories	Frequency
Age	Less than 30 years	2
	31-40 years	9
	41-50 years	8
	Over 50 years	4
Education	Masters	11
	P.H.D	12
Career background	Less than 10 years	2
	11-20 years	9
	21-30 years	11
	Over 31 years	1
Expertise	Managers and experts of the Iraqi Ministry of Sports	4
	Managers and experts of the General Directorate of Sports department of Education Ministry	4
	President and Vice President of the Iraqi Futsal Federation	2
	Coaches	3
	Referees	3
	Elite players	3
	Veterans of futsal	4
	Total	

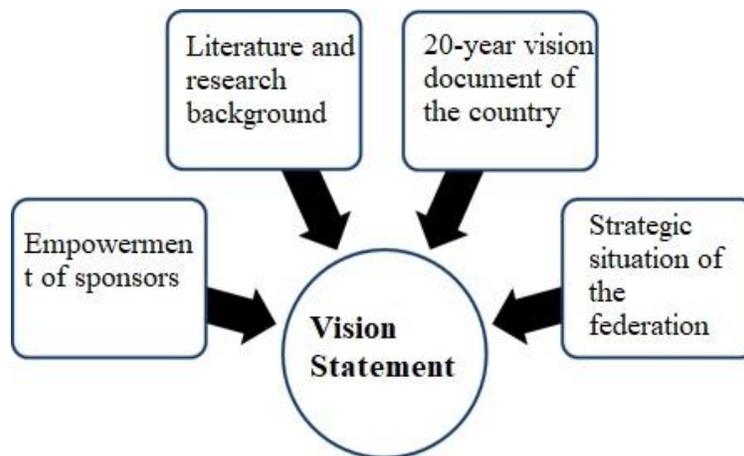


Figure 1. The Vision of the futsal sport in Iraq

Development and deepening of futsal sports among different sections of society by using the national media, reviving and developing the country's futsal teams, as well as establishing extensive relations with scientific and research centers, was developed as the vision of the Futsal Federation.

Table 2. Values of the Iraqi Futsal Federation

Factors	Ranking
Development of futsal with a focus on economic growth and national productivity	1
Commitment and work conscience of managers and employees regarding individual and organizational performance	2
Observance of ethical principles and attention to high human values in order to achieve organizational goals	3
Adherence to the values of Iraq in all the activities of the organizations in charge of futsal	4
Preserving national unity and refraining from ethnic, religious and racial prejudices and ...	5
Prioritize job creation in the community in the field of futsal	6

Table 2 describes the ranking of items from the point of view of the Strategic Council. It reflects the factors of "development of futsal with a focus on economic growth and national productivity" and "commitment and work conscience of managers and employees regarding Individual and organizational performance" are in priority. These values will help the Futsal Federation to create a sublime, responsible and social position in the society.

Table 3. Long-term goals of the Iraqi Futsal Federation

Factors	Ranking
Strengthen the cultural, social, economic and political position of futsal	1
Strengthen the position of the Futsal Federation among other sports in the country	2
Strengthening employees of different levels and organizations in terms of science and technology	3
Development of executive activities of marketing and public relations of organizations affecting futsal	4
Supporting women's futsal, which makes up 50 percent of the community and is an important part of raising children	5
Assignment of activities to the private sector	6
Use of technology to develop futsal sports	7
Attraction of tourists and spectators to events	8
Development of professional and championship sports	9

Table 3 describes the ranking of items from the point of view of the Strategic Council. It shows the higher priority of the criteria of "strengthening the cultural, social, economic and political position of futsal" and "strengthening the position of the Futsal Federation among other sports". With

the aim to achieve the objectives of the research, the researcher has conducted several meetings, reviewed high level documents. The researchers have analyzed and extracted the key areas of futsal in Iraq (Figure 2). The following items were selected as key areas of performance: 1) Strengthening the position of futsal in all cultural, social, economic and political dimensions. 2) Strengthening the use of the private sector. 3) Development of sports marketing and public relations activities. 4) Entrepreneurship development and job creation. 5) Development of media communication.

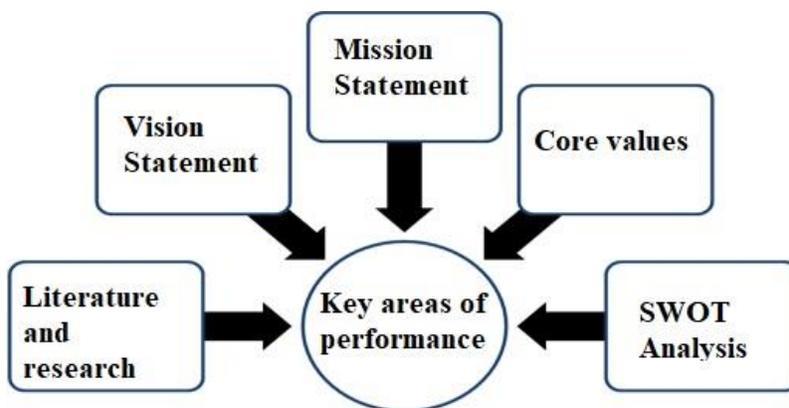


Figure 2. Key areas of performance of Iraqi futsal

Table 4 describes the final score of the internal matrix of the Futsal Federation. It was calculated to be 2.165.

Table 4. Matrix of evaluation of internal factors of Futsal Federation

Internal factors	Code	Factors	Coefficient of significance (Weight)	Intensity Factor	Score
Strengths	S1	Use competent, capable and educated managers	0.043	4	0.172
	S2	Use qualified, capable and educated staff	0.042	4	0.168
	S3	Succeed in international competitions	0.036	3	0.108
	S4	Transfer of knowledge among coaches, referees and athletes	0.01	3	0.03
	S5	Creating conditions for improving human resources skills by holding training courses	0.037	4	0.148
	S6	Hold regular national events and competitions	0.03	4	0.12
	S7	Take advantage of sports marketing and marketing through sports	0.0395	4	0.158
	S8	Recognition of the Futsal Federation as a reputable national organizational brand	0.0375	4	0.15

S9	Proper geographical distribution of futsal venues and equipment in the country	0.024	4	0.096	
S10	Creation and increasing development of futsal clubs and schools in the private sector	0.0295	4	0.118	
S11	Development of interactions with international institutions	0.041	4	0.164	
S12	Annual planning and its continuous implementation in the provincial delegations	0.016	3	0.048	
S13	Flexible organizational structure of federations and boards	0.0165	3	0.0495	
S14	Sports boards revenue generation approach	0.0305	4	0.122	
S15	Attracting the participation of different sections of society in the sport of futsal	0.032	4	0.128	
S16	Informing in various ways, especially the specialized social channels	0.0355	4	0.1065	
W1	Inadequacy or non-implementation of research and development system	0.0255	1	0.0255	
W2	Organizational barriers to the development of marketing and revenue generation activities	0.0495	2	0.099	
W3	Lack of communication with scientific centers in order to solve futsal sports issues	0.046	2	0.092	
W4	Improper use of income generation opportunities and sustainable income	0.036	1	0.036	
W5	Neglect and lack of proper planning for the development of entrepreneurship and innovation	0.04	1	0.04	
W6	Dependence of sports delegations on governmental and non-governmental budgets	0.0345	1	0.0345	
Weaknesses	W7	Weak and inefficient public relations in the organization	0.049	2	0.098
W8	Weakness in holding international futsal events inside the country	0.048	1	0.048	
W9	Weakness of the integrated communication system with the target community	0.037	1	0.037	
W10	Lack of updating or lack of strategic plan for the development of futsal	0.0265	1	0.0265	
W11	Weak monitoring system on private clubs and sports schools	0.02	1	0.02	
W12	Weak quantitative and qualitative weakness of specialized futsal programs in the national media	0.0245	1	0.0245	

W13	Lack of capacity of sponsors in the national budget	0.0295	1	0.0295
W14	Do not use reputable personal brands in the field of futsal	0.034	1	0.034
The sum of the coefficients of significance of internal factors		$\Sigma=1$		$\Sigma=2/165$

Table 5 describes the final score for the development of the strategic plan of the Futsal Federation. The score was found to be 2.1518. Hence, authors have interpreted that the opportunities ahead will overcome its threats to some extent.

Table 5. Evaluation matrix of external factors of the Futsal Federation

External factors	Code	Factors	Coefficient of significance (Weight)	Intensity Factor	Score
Opportunity	O1	Increasing the level of education and information in the field of sports management and marketing and making young people skilled in working in various influential organizations in the field of futsal	0.026	3	0.078
	O2	Extensive media and television coverage of futsal competitions, events and news	0.057	4	0.228
	O3	Social, cultural and economic capacity to generate income through the sport of futsal	0.054	4	0.216
	O4	Use of sports management specialists in the organizational chart of the Futsal Federation	0.046	4	0.184
	O5	The tendency of various media (social messengers, newspapers and magazines, radio, etc.) to reflect activities related to the sport of futsal	0.032	3	0.096
	O6	Diverse and attractive geographical climate capacity for the development of futsal events, camps and tourism	0.019	3	0.057
	O7	Scientific and technological capabilities available in the country for the development of futsal	0.039	4	0.156
	O8	Capacity to attract foreign and domestic sports tourists	0.045	4	0.18
	O9	Development and deepening of the market of products related to futsal (goods and services)	0.008	3	0.024
	O10	Improving the level of science and knowledge of the community, managers and employees in sports science	0.034	4	0.136
	O11	Extensive target community, talented and interested in participating in the sport of futsal	0.049	4	0.196

O12	Holding scientific level updating courses and study opportunities for managers and planners of futsal	0.028	4	0.112
O13	Increasing development of scientific and technological capacity in order to increase the quality level of products related to the field of futsal (goods and services)	0.024	3	0.072
O14	Attention of different pillars of futsal to self-sufficiency and attracting financial resources and commercialization development	0.029	4	0.116
T1	Low share of sports, especially futsal, in the household basket	0.04	1	0.04
T2	Lack of attention to revenue-generating and marketing potentials in the country's sports industry, especially futsal	0.041	2	0.082
T3	Lack of macro-managerial attitude towards revenue methods through sports marketing in special operational programs	0.029	1	0.029
T4	The impact of political and economic movements on futsal	0.048	2	0.096
T5	Weak regulatory structure and the possibility of corruption	0.046	2	0.092
T6	Restrictions on the use of financial support and branding tools in marketing	0.03	1	0.03
Threats	Cultural and structural weakness in supporting domestic production, especially products related to futsal	0.024	1	0.024
T7				
T8	Neglect and lack of preparation of the necessary platform for privatization in sports by the government	0.026	1	0.026
T9	Adverse management in attracting global and international futsal events in the country	0.024	1	0.024
T10	Loss of some international futsal seats	0.022	2	0.044
T11	Increasing the community's desire for foreign sports brands, especially in the field of futsal	0.021	1	0.021
T12	Low level of financial wealth of the community to participate in futsal	0.025	1	0.025
T13	Reduction the use of indoor futsal sports facilities in the post-corona era	0.044	1	0.044
T14	Increasing interest of the new generation in cyberspace	0.032	1	0.032

	and sedentary computer games instead of sports entertainment and physical activity			
T15	Low level of women's participation for cultural and economic reasons, etc	0.027	1	0.027
T16	Low security factor in the country for the entry of tourists and holding international competitions	0.031	1	0.031
The sum of the coefficients of significance of external factors		$\Sigma=1$		$\Sigma=2.518$

Finally, the results presented in Figure 3 indicate that the sport of futsal in Iraq is strategically located in the WO region; thus, the sport of futsal in Iraq is weak in terms of internal factors and has opportunities in terms of external factors.

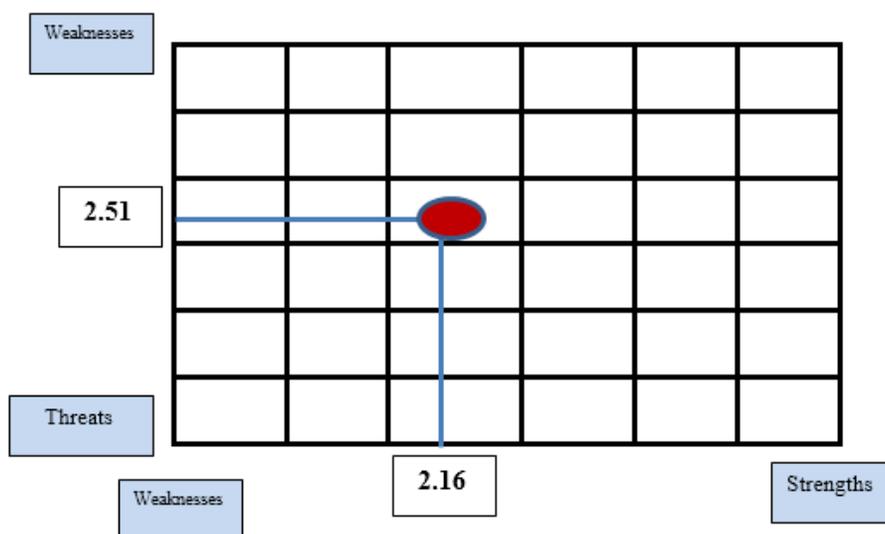


Figure 3. The main strategy of the Futsal Federation

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In order to proceed ahead, it is very important for any organization to have factual knowledge regarding the present status of the organization. Accordingly, sports organizations also require strategic planning due to their importance. Based on the ranking of items according to the Strategic Council viewpoints, the highest ranking of strength was related to the statements "use of competent, capable and educated managers" and "use of competent, capable and educated employees". A study was conducted by Abdul Amir & Shaalan (2020) and Raheem (2021) in which they pointed out the strength in line with the present study. If selection of individuals is wrong, everything else will be implemented incorrectly. Hence, selection of educated and well qualified staff in the field of futsal in

Iraq is kept at topmost priority. In order to hire and select people, a recruitment system should be set up so that more qualified and educated people in sports can be recruited for the benefit of Iraqi futsal. On the other hand, it is necessary to prepare conditions for the promotion of employees to study and work in futsal at the same time without worrying about cuts or deductions of salaries, so that knowledge transfer between coaches, staff and athletes will be ongoing flexibility in the organizational structure will meet the needs of stakeholders.

Based on the ranking of items according to the Strategic Council viewpoints, the highest ranking of weaknesses was related to the statements "no update or no strategic development plan for futsal" and "dependence of sports delegations on government and non-government budgets". The findings of the present study were in accordance to the study conducted by Farhan (2016); Hussein (2016) and Ibrahim et al. (2021). Lack or non-updating of the strategic plan in the organization is a sign of great weakness. one of the important steps that should be taken is to draw a vision by comparing it with the standards of the other organizations in various countries.

Existing resources are not listed in a codified way for strategic planning. Hence, management should recommend and consider listing resources on the one hand and goals on the other. Though it is also suggested that strategic futsal plan in Iraq should be developed by considering the examples of neighboring countries such as Qatar and Iran. On the other hand, in order to get out of dependence on the budgets of sports delegations and public and private bodies, it is suggested to establish relations with scientific and academic centers and make maximum use of income-generating and sustainable income opportunities. In this regard, organizational barriers must be limited so that sponsors and celebrities can enter the sport of futsal in Iraq in order to both earn money and help develop and make more young people interested in this sport.

Based on the ranking of items according to the Strategic Council viewpoints, the highest ranking of opportunities was related to the statements of "extensive media and television coverage of futsal competitions, events and news" and the second ranking was "the social, cultural and economic capacity to generate income through the sport of futsal".

In this regard, Stempel (2006) and Alrashid (2020) have conducted studies in which they pointed to the opportunities in line with the present study. Presence in the media shows that the futsal brand is alive. Futsal makes its voice heard through the media and tells the audience regarding its existence. The media is a platform that gives the organization the power to steer public opinion in the direction the organization wants. The power of media can successfully be used in the field of futsal to attract. This cannot be accomplished without employment of sports management specialists in the organizational chart of the Iraqi Futsal Federation.

Based on the ranking of items according to the Strategic Council viewpoints, the highest ranking of threat was the statement of "Impact of the country's political and economic movements on futsal" and the second rank was "weak regulatory structure and the possibility of corruption." In accordance to the findings of the current study, a research was conducted by Rezaee et al. (2020) and Gasztold & Gasztold (2020). Obstacles to the advancement of policy-making and planning of decision-making centers are important for the sport of futsal. This requires cooperation and coordination between sectoral and inter-institutional organizations in the field of futsal. Another most important threat is corruption.

The money exchange process in futsal has many hidden layers. Due to lack of efficient money monitoring systems there is money laundering, corruption and widespread violations in futsal. Hence, financial transparency in this field would be very helpful. Given the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic and the indoor nature of the futsal field, it is suggested that this threat can be turned into a suitable opportunity through the use of open spaces that meet minimum futsal standards. Creating opportunities in sports such as mini-football in Iraq can be an important step towards further developing futsal and making youth interested. A major threat is the loss of international sports seats, which can be very important for the country. The possibility of good number of international seats can be increased by upgrading coaches, players and staff through knowledge enhancement.

The sport of futsal in Iraq is strategically located in the WO region and is weak in terms of internal factors and has opportunities in terms of external factors. It is suggested to focus more on the strengths in the internal factors section and try to compensate the existing weaknesses. Opportunities in the external environment can be exploited to improve internal weaknesses. In this case, due to internal weakness, these opportunities cannot be properly exploited. Therefore, it is necessary to make appropriate use of new technologies and human resources, new and creative ideas, etc., in order to take advantage of opportunities by either limiting or completely eliminating the weaknesses.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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