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A Descriptive Review of Educational Courses and Professional Sport Participation in University Teams

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Abstract: *The purpose of the present descriptive study was to review educational courses and professional participation in university sports teams. This analysis was an applied research in terms of purpose, and a field study in terms of data collection. The data collection tool was a 29-item questionnaire measuring the variables of the study. The questionnaire was scored on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was validated by a group of experts, and its reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha > 0.7$). The population included all students currently studying at Azad University of Rasht. Using the Cochran formula, the sample size was determined to be 300 individuals. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) techniques was used to test the study's hypotheses. According to the results, educational performance significantly affected professional sport participation and professional sport participation significantly affected educational performance of the examined students.*

Keywords: *Educational Performance, Professional Sport Participation, Azad University*

INTRODUCTION

With the advent of Globalization, fundamental changes and transformations have been imposed on competing organizations in the field of students' professional sports. New challenges that organizations face today, have made managers prioritize strategic planning. In fact, strategic thinking and strategy-based movement empower organizations to encounter the competitive and dynamic business environment and successfully adapt to changes. In this regard, the organizations' internal educational performance and the assessment of the competitive environment in which they operate are considered two powerful tools available to managers; these tools provide managers with a more realistic recognition of their organizations' conditions and help them lead their organizations to their optimal statuses, as outlined in their vision documents (Sabeti, 2013).

Universities have always had a close relationship with the development of societies, and in most countries, the knowledge base of sport is of great importance. The theoretical models for sport participation emphasize various mechanisms, by which universities can influence growth in sport. The way to improve the level of educational effectiveness in pursuit of professional sports is one of the main challenges that managers and planners face. In this regard, various policies have been applied in which changing the mechanisms of professional sport participation is one of the most important strategies.

In Iran, few studies have been conducted to assess educational performance; however, no study has been done to investigate educational performance and professional sport participation of university students, especially those studying at Azad University of Rasht. Therefore, the present study was conducted to investigate the

relationship between educational performance and professional sport participation among athlete students studying at Azad University of Rasht.

Review of Literature

Universities and institutes of higher education, as the most important thought and knowledge production centers, play a key role in promoting science and stimulating the intellectual, religious, sporting, cultural and political movements via the helps of thinkers, researchers, scholars and students. In order to carry out their duties and improve their dynamics and quality, universities need a suitable model for assessing and assuring the efficacy of their programs and graduates. On the other hand, globalization and the development of knowledge-based economy have led to major changes in the structure of education throughout the world. In the knowledge-based economy, higher education institutions, as centers for human resource development, play an important role in the economic growth and development of countries.

Universities have always been closely related to the development of societies, and in most countries, the knowledge base of sport is of great importance. The theoretical models for sport participation has put emphasis on various mechanisms, by which universities can influence growth in sport. The way to improve the level of educational effectiveness in pursuit of professional sports is one of the main challenges that managers and planners face. In this regard, various strategies have been applied; among those strategies, changing the mechanisms of supply and allocation of resources is of great importance.

The development of national professional sports is an essential part of national economic development. The pervasiveness of professional sports increases social well-being and national productivity, and the promotion of championship sports brings worldwide fame to the victorious nations. National pride is a factor enlivening nations; hence, the positive outcomes of developing national professional sports are many-sided and lead to economic and social prosperity. Therefore, considering sports and physical activities as the most important issues leading to the training of healthy human resources, the development of professional sports leads to the achievement of healthy societies and significantly enhances life quality of people living within those societies. Furthermore, considering the transnational function of professional sports, the development of professional national sports can lead the Iranians to become the first-ranked athletes in the southwest Asia, Asia and even in the world.

On the other hand, evidences have confirmed that the development of professional sports can be a very effective, efficient, and low-cost tool for achieving development-related goals. The United Nations Secretary-General established an executive committee to investigate activities such as sports within the United Nations System. The purpose of that executive committee was to promote more systematic and coherent use of sports in the development-related activities, especially at community level, and to provide wider support for such activities among governments and sports organizations (Bahrami, 2013).

Like any other social domain, sport must be developed and its aspects and dimensions must become more extended and strengthened. Professional sports came into being as a result of physical education development; little by little, people paid more attention to the issue of professional sports and considered it as an industry or a profession that could generate income. Professional sporting refers to an organized set of physical activities, which are done in a goal-oriented manner to generate income for the development of economic and social values. Mole (2015) believed that the natural result of championship sporting is a level of sport collaboration that is called 'professional sporting'; professional sport is at the top of the sport hierarchy, where competent people compete with each other and business people do marketing activities to gain financial resources; there is a strong management process at professional sports level. Elite sport is an approach focusing on the development and growth of elite athletes.

In fact, the issue of development plays a central role in championship/professional sports. In the process of championship/professional sports development, the role of sports has been highlighted in the lives of people living within communities. In some resources, it is believed that sports in the Eastern Bloc countries were as such (Ehsani, 2015). Professional sports, i.e., sporting to earn money, have been a major part of the sports

industry. If people become interested in a specific sport, its athletes would receive high salaries. These high salaries are usually provided through selling tickets, broadcasting rights and companies' financial supports. It is estimated that more than half of the gross income earned by a sport team is paid to its professional athletes. Earnings of professional sports teams in advanced industrial countries are also paid to their owners, managers, executives and coaches. Today, the number of professional and multinational sports teams has increased in various countries. Members of professional sports teams are bought and sold on a global scale; in fact, professional athletes are considered goods in the global markets. In recent decades, professional sports have been increasingly developed and no slowdown has been observed in their rates of development. Professional sports are also supported by governments because of the large amount of money they earn. Taxes that governments receive from athletes and professional sports' owners are the major part of government revenue from professional sports (Hosseini, 2013).

In Iran, few studies have been conducted to assess the effect of professional sports and its magnitude; however, no study has been done to examine the effect of professional sports on educational performance, especially in academic settings. Therefore, the present study was conducted to examine the relationship between educational courses and professional sport participation in university teams.

As a result, the purpose of this study was to answer the research question "are educational courses related to professional participation in university sports teams?", and to describe the relationship between educational courses and rate of professional sport participation in a university setting.

Without evaluation and feedback provision, education will be pointless and unproductive. Universities are the main centers for providing the society with knowledge services. Given the limited valuable educational resources in the country, proper allocation of resources, scientific management and proper planning are important steps toward achieving the goals of the scientific system. The results of this study suggested that participation in professional sports teams along with having comprehensive planning and proper monitoring systems can improve educational performance (Sadeghi and Zare, 2009). Most of the authorities believed that the most important problem of universities to improve the quality of education, meet the educational needs, make changes in the university system, etc. is "the lack of financial resources" (Naderi, 2011). Quality is a complex and multidimensional concept in university settings; it refers to changes that occur in students' behaviors (Doherty, 2008). The issue of academic achievement and factors affecting it has been considered by experts and university professors since many years ago. Given the importance of academic achievement in today's world, the investigation and identification of factors affecting it are of great importance. Empirical studies have identified psychological and environmental factors that predict academic achievement. Among the identified factors, resources and facilities (e.g. financial resources and human resources) have been especially considered. It is important to consider resources because university directors have allocated a lot of financial resources to their universities, but the results have not met their expectations (especially in terms of the quality of education and the rate of students' professional sport participation). Therefore, several studies have been conducted on policy-making in universities and other research institutes, and various scholars, such as Hanushek (2006), have evaluated their results in meta-analysis studies. The results of Hanushek's meta-analysis indicated that the allocated resources do not have a significant positive relationship with educational performance. Such findings have led to the emergence of new and more important research questions in two related areas, namely, educational performance and professional sport participation. In Iran, a few studies have been conducted on educational performance and professional sport participation; however, no study has been conducted to examine the effects and importance of educational performance and professional sport participation, especially in Azad University of Rasht.

In a study, entitled 'designing and developing a comprehensive professional sport system', Ehsani, Amiri and Gharehkhani (2015) showed that professional sports are in critical conditions in terms of various soft and hard support systems' components. Considering that their research was designed to identify various internal and external factors affecting professional sports, its findings could be applied for the improvement of

professional sports. In this regard, Padash (2013) mentioned that, according to the law of the fourth development plan, all executive activities to provide professional sports resources must be delegated to the private sectors. However, a review of the types of Iranian professional sports teams' ownership shows that most of them are owned by the government. In a study, entitled 'analysis of the relationship between sport activities and educational performance in Tehran's educational areas', Naderi (2010) showed that 1) in primary schools, financial resources per capita, teachers' salary and education level, and the ratios of teachers to students and female to male teachers positively affect the quality of educational performance, while the school size negatively affect educational performance; 2) in guidance schools, none of the examined variables, except for teachers' education level, have a positive impact on educational performance; and 3) in high schools, the impacts of the examined variables are not consistent with the theoretical foundations of the study. His results also suggested that the optimal use of resources and facilities decreases in higher education levels and that the surplus of educational human resources (i.e., teachers) -resulting from the decision-making systems, is the main reason for the inefficiency of sport allocation in Tehran's educational areas. Driskel et al. (2016) studied the relationship between sport activities and students' performance using the data of the year 2014 provided by the California Department of Education. After controlling the effects of students' individual characteristics and environmental factors, they found that sport activities possibly limit the students' academic performance, and that such activities have the greatest impact on academic performance of average students. Sotiriadou and Shilbury (2015) showed that the development of championship-professional sports requires interested groups' collaboration, planned strategies and the availability of sponsors, participants, audiences, and supporters. Bulk and Robinson (2014) stated that the existence of a supportive environment increases the probability of athletes' international success. They also reported that services of a professional sport system include the availability of talent-finding processes, sports achievement paths, scientific support of sports, educational systems for coaches, sport facilities and equipment, anti-drug approaches, non-athletic life support, and competitive structures.

Methodology

The present study was an applied research in terms of purpose, a descriptive study in terms of methodology, and an effective research in terms of type and analysis. It was an applied research since its results as concerned with educational performance and sports participation could be used by sports clubs and universities; and it was descriptive since it dealt with the existing and visible processes and detected the relationships between variables.

The population included all students studying physical education at Azad University of Rasht during the educational year 2017-2018 ($n=1300$). Since the statistical population was finite and the data were quantitative, the Cochran formula was used to determine the sample size. The questionnaires were distributed among 10% more than the sample size calculated via the Cochran formula ($n=319$). Ultimately, 300 questionnaires were collected for further analysis.

In this study, the internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire's items was measured with Cronbach's alpha and combined reliability coefficients, which were calculated via Smart PLS 3 software for the sum of questions related to each variable. The Reliability of questions related to each variable was determined using Cronbach's alpha and combined reliability coefficients.

Results

The descriptive statistics of the research variables (i.e., mean, SD, median, minimum, maximum, etc.) have been presented in table (1).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of research variables

Variables	Educational Performance	Sport Participation
Number	300	300
Mean	4.28	4.34
Median	4.50	4.50
Standard Deviation	0.68	0.55
Skewness	-1.93	-2.45
Kurtosis	4.45	7.71
Minimum	1.25	1.50
Maximum	5.00	5.00

H₁: Educational performance has a significant effect on the level of professional sport participation in Azad University of Rasht.

According to the results presented in table (2), the path coefficient of 0.912 and the t-statistics of 12.41 indicated that educational performance had a direct impact on the level of professional sport participation in Azad University of Rasht. Thus, the first hypothesis of the present study was confirmed.

Table 2. Results of testing H₁

Hypothesis	Path coefficient	t-statistic	SD	Result
H ₁	0.912	12.41	0.045	CONFIRMED

H₂: The level of professional sport participation has a significant effect on Educational performance in Azad University of Rasht.

According to the results presented in table (3), the path coefficient of 0.765 and the t-statistics of 9.56 indicated that the level of professional sport participation had a direct impact on educational performance in Azad University of Rasht. Thus, the second hypothesis of the present study was also confirmed.

Table 3. Results of testing H₂

Hypothesis	Path coefficient	t-statistic	SD	Result
H ₂	0.765	9.56	0.074	CONFIRMED

Conclusions

In this study, the relationship between educational performance and level of professional sport participation among the student athletes studying at Azad University of Rasht was examined. In other words, the main domains and factors affecting education-participation of students for professional sports were studied.

Due to various demographic, economic, familial, cultural, social, etc. issues, the level of sport participation varies from one country to another. In fact, low levels of students' sport participation are significantly rooted in cultural, social and economic factors that are reproduced in educational systems and textbooks.

The development of professional sports activities in the society and pushing people to participate in such activities may have positive effects on various society-related matters and improve individual's behavior towards other members of the society. However, such changes depend on the culture, common values and people's social personalities.

Recommendations

- Considering that the examined students mentioned the lack of facilities as an important reason for not participating in professional sports, improving sport facilities and increasing sport spaces,

especially building special spaces for training, will encourage them to participate more in professional sports.

- It is recommended to invest in professional educational courses, create sport facilities for students, hold competitions and invite guest student athletes at different occasions.

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