# Challenges of Non-systematic Approaches of Talent Identification and Elitismin Sport of Iran

Saeid Tabesh<sup>1</sup>, Rasool Nazari<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Sport Science, University of Mazandaran, <sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Islamic Azad University, Naein Branch, Islamic Azad University, Naein B

### **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to identify the challenges and intervening threats in the process of talent identification system and elitismin sport of Iran. The research method is a mixed type and actually is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The population at the qualitative stage included 20 managers, coaches, athletes and university professors who are active in the talent identification and elitism of sport. The descriptive-analytical method is used for the quantitative section of the research. In this part, the identified challenges were ranked. Considering that the number of population was not identified, so the maximum sample in the quantitative section including 384 experts and sports trainers were randomly selected. Instruments included a six-part questionnaire of objectives, structure, leadership, communications, reward and facilitative mechanisms that were obtained from the qualitative analysis. These questions are classified in six sections of objectives, structures, leadership, communications, reward and facilitative mechanisms. Face and content validity of the questionnaire was approved by the panel of experts in sport management and its reliability was calculated through Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ =0.79). After collecting the questionnaires, data were analyzed in two descriptive and inferential sectionsincluding Friedman Test by usingSPSS 22 software. The results showed that the most important challenges of the non-systematic model of talent identification and elitism of sport in Iran that includecommunications, leadership, reward, facilitative mechanisms, structure and objectives were prioritized. Generally, it can be stated that non-systematic approaches do not show the nature and reality of sport in Iran and by investment on a limited number of people, sport performance of the country will be involved in fluctuations.

Key words: Challenges, Talent identification, Non-systematic model, Elitism

# INTRODUCTION

In the achievement of success and beneficial use and preventing the loss of material and spiritual assets in all aspects of life, talent identification with the aim of identifying and developing elites has been one of the most important foundations and secrets of civilizations forhuman being (Sajadi et al., 2010). Identification of talents through exercise, art, and education is a big business that researchers in all fields are trying to find a way to identify their best options (Malec et al., 2015). Identification of capabilities, determining the role of different effective sections in prediction and guidingproper sport skills are important

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Month of Submission : 05-2017 Month of Peer Review : 06-2017 Month of Acceptance : 07-2017 Month of Publishing : 07-2017 in talent identification, because talent programs are used to identify competent athletes and success at global level. Moreover, talent identification in sport can be an efficient instrument to increase participation within a society and presents a desired relationship between sport, talents, and personal preferences as well as non-professional level (Faber et al., 2012).

According to the scientists of sport sciences, talent identification in sportis logical, short, and affordable for successful participation of athletes in international events. This process requires identification and selection of talented people who have necessary skills and physical and behavioral conditions for success in specific fields. As far as elite athletes are concerned, work and time of the coach should be spent for those who have potential capabilities. Otherwise, talent, time, and energy of the coach are wasted or the best condition is that an ordinary athlete will be created (Vezin et al., 2011). In this relationship, creation of interaction and alignment of institutions and organizations such as the education system that has an important role in

Corresponding Author: Rasool Nazari, Associate Professor, Islamic Azad University, Naein Branch, Isfahan, Iran. Phone: 09133680240. E-mail: nazarirassol@yahoo.com,

this issue are very important. However, the emphasis of the education system on physical education and exercise in the Transformation Document should be studied deeply (Mozafari et al., 2009).

The main mission is to manage human resource talents of organizations employing people who have the highest level of potential and to educate people who have the greatest level of development in sport or art (Adamsen et al., 2016). Also, talent identification and elitism in sport means to discover and activate potential capabilities specific to the person and guiding them on the right path. Talent identification and elitism extend to scope and range of talented people who have sufficient opportunity to develop sport skills and the main responsibility of coaches and talent discovery consultants is to determine the levels and identify individual differences in various talents. Therefore, it seems that managers should be aware of the individual talents before instruction to guide them toward different fields using different tests in which they may have the highest level of success. This technical job avoids wasting time, human resource, facilities, and unnecessary costs (Khodayari et al., 2012). Talented people are defined as those who have access to the results higher than the average level in different fields and activities such as science, leadership, art, and sport and according to the contemporary model of brilliant talents, they are a basis for the development of talent or a high level of performance in sport (Malec et al., 2015).

It seems that talent identification in sport in most of developed countries regarding schools and clubs should be defined as the main center to identify talented children and teenagers. In these centers and after physical and physiological tests as well as examinations, individuals enter the next level that is a center in which they can professionally work in the field of interest (Dooster et al., 2014). Therefore, it seems that sport talent identification in schools should be performed by coaches and experts through investigation. Identification of talents, instruction, and improvement should be taken into consideration and to achieve the results, they should consider different components that are necessary for any instruction (Veladet et al., 2015). In this regard, it seems that talent identification in sport is faced by challenges such as non-systematic production of athletes in federation, the way sport managers and authorities look at schools, the activities of championship bases and talent identification centers, the presence of the private sector in talent identification, lack of a comprehensive system to support athletes and coaches, lack of a uniform plan in talent identification, livelihood situation of talented families, and suitable facilities for talent identification (Hoseini et al., 2014).

It can be stated that non-systematic method instructs athletes from the very beginning to prepare them for championship. In developed countries, instead of mechanical patterns, it is concentrated on organic growth of sport in the society. The foundations of this model are based on creating suitable infrastructures both in software and hardware, so that by creating numerous sport environments, a large population enter championship sports cycle and experts complement this process. Nowadays, sport talent identification and elite development is one of the most important concerns of sport society and managers have crucial roles in this regard. In previous studies, the importance of talent identification in clubs and federations as well as elimination of challenges and lack of facilities have been pointed out as important aspects (Minkrsy et al., 2015). Also, studies point to the lack of software and hardware, strategic program, and ambiguity of policies and orientations, lack of supervision and governance, dependence on government financial resources, lack of investments by the private section, undesirable sport structures, undesirable talent identification system, and lack of medium term, tactical, and operational plan (Milisted et al., 2013). Finally, most of studies state that the best time to identify sport elites is at young age in schools and point to its relationship with the education system as the most important organization to achieve success. However, talent identification in Iran has not significantly progressed in this context (Kubilus et al., 2015).

In Iran, there is no defined talent identification system and no institute has taken full responsibilities for that and the only criterion for talent identification is the results of sport competitions and since the number of competitions is low and there is lack of suitable criteria to select talented people, the talent identification process is less ambitious (Ehsani et al., 2013). So far, necessary planning has not been performed regarding championships and talented individuals have been ignored or are selected traditionally relying on personal experiences of coaches and some families of children and teenagers (Kajbafnejad, 2015). Therefore, Iran's sport achievements at the global level are rooted in the method that is known as non-systematic method. This method is based on the model that was prevalent in the East for years. Iran's sport is managed based on non-systematic method and single world and Olympic medals hide the weak points in selecting athletes and sometimes it increases people's expectations and hides realities (Javadipour et al., 2015). Having both structure and results is very difficult and this has encouraged federations to concentrate on non-systematic method, but when it was decided to transfer this method to the club, this reality emerged that clubs lack such capacity. Also, it can be said that in schools and universities, no predetermined planning has been performed for this purpose and the federation functions as the university and selects most talented individuals. These are the result of attempts that are formed in an artificial environment. Therefore, it should be emphasized that the non-systematicmethod may be fruitful, but it cannot lead to a deep transformation in infrastructure.

According to the development process speed in developed countries, it can be argued that Iran has long way ahead regarding talent identification and elitism and in some cases, it is at elementary stages and this requires a serious will at all management levels to identify factors that prevent an efficient system to increase the speed of talent identification at organizational level. In non-systematic model, no significant talent identification can be observed despite numerous progresses. Since talent identification and person's tendency toward specific fields can determine his future life, it is very important. It is crucial to select a method that has the highest efficiency. As pointed out, in Iran, this is based on the non-systematic method. Scientists and experts can advance this issue technically and for this reason, they should be selected considering all required aspects. By selecting the non-systematic method for talent identification, most of talented people will be ignored. Also, it should be discussed that why most of athletes emerge in specific periods of time. Most of people, despite having talents in specific fields, cannot progress because they may not be identified. The best talent identification methods can pave the way for this purpose. In this study, it has been attempted to identify challenges against talent identification and by interviews and solutions provided by experts, talented athletes can be identified and efficient results will be obtained. Now, the role of federations and clubs in talent identification and elite development is very important and significant, so that it can be stated that lack of talent identification is better than misidentification and guiding the person toward a path that may damage the person both physically and spiritually. Accordingly, working on a specific field in Iran is based on traditions and interests that results in the popularity of that field, pressures by the parents, and expertise of coaches. Therefore, the main research question is to investigate this issue that what challenges are against structure, objectives, leadership conditions, communications, rewards, and talent identification?

# **METHODOLOGY**

In terms of purpose and data collection, the present study is applied and descriptive-analytical, respectively. Therefore, the present study employs mixed research method that is composed of qualitative and quantitative methods. At the qualitative stage, through semi-structured interviews, challenges were identified. The population at the qualitative

stage consisted of 20 managers, coaches, athletes, and university professors. The identified categories at the qualitative stage through semi-structured interviews include three elements of complexity, formality, and concentration. The goal is to express the expected results including measurable work within a specific limit with a certain cost. Communication refers to the transmission of information, concepts, and meaning between managers, supervisors, and staff and includes events, theories, feelings, and emotions in written and oral forms with and without mediator. Reward is one of the effective categories in maintaining the staff and helps people through satisfying their needs and creating motivation and commitment. Leadership is the process to penetrate into individual or group activities to achieve a certain goal in specific condition. Also, facilitative mechanisms include technologies, ideas, and attempts for planning to unify and improve affairs to optimize goal achievement.

In quantitative section, the research is descriptive-analytical. Here, the identified challenges will be classified. The population in quantitative section includes 282 of sport experts who were classified randomly. A questionnaire was used to collect information. These questions were classified at six sections of objectives, structure, leadership, communication, reward and facilitative mechanisms. Face validity and content validity were confirmed by the panel of experts in sport management. The reliability of questionnaires was coded and estimated by split-half method and Cronbach's alpha. The data were analyzed by SPSS 22. Also, descriptive statistics including means, minimum, maximum, frequency, percentage, and standard deviation were used to describe variables. At inferential statistics level, for the challenges of the non-systematic model that were identified at the qualitative stage, Friedman statistical technique was used. At the qualitative section and based on intuitive judgments based on strategic thinking, the main talent identification issues were identified and the macro strategies as well as the most important measures for talent identification suitable for the identified challenges of the non-systematic model were proposed. Data were analyzed using SPSS 22 in two descriptive and inferential sections.

# **RESULTS**

According to the results of descriptive statistics, about 0.5% of the subjects had BA, 0.5% had MA, and 0.5% had Ph.D. Also, 50% of subjects were male and 50% were female. In inferential statistics, to investigate normal distribution of the sample, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used and for variance homogeneity, Levene's test was used. According to the results, the sample had normal distribution and research variables enjoyed from variance homogeneity. According

to the intuitive judgments based on strategic thinking, the main talent identification issue is to identify and present the most important and integrated measures for talent identification consistent with the identified challenges of the non-systematic model for sport in Iran. In this section 44 components were identified that were presented in six sections of purposes, structure, leadership, communication, reward, and facilitative mechanisms and were classified based on Friedman test.

As can be seen in Table (1), according to the average rating of internal components of objectives, talent identification of federations was performed based on non-systematic method with the average rating of 7.42. Also, the consistency of objectives with facilities and hardware conditions of the federation about talent identification showed the average rating of 2.55. Moreover, maximum and minimum means are internal components about the non-systematic method challenges of talent identification.

According to the findings of Table (2), it is observed that according to the average rating of internal components

Table 1: Prioritization of objectives in talent identification challenges

Internal components of the structure section	Mean	Rank
Talent identification as cross-sectional based on non-systematic method	7/42	1
Ambiguity in objectives in sport federations about talent identification	5/81	2
Lack of programs to identify talented athletes	5/10	3
Lack of proper implementation of educational programs, encouraging sport activities, and avoiding continuous activities	4/45	4
Lack of proper and integrated planning for talent identification in federations	4/08	5
Lack of planning for talent identification based on people's knowledge and expertise	3/61	6
Lack of systematic process from the moment when talented individuals are identified until championship	2/97	7
Consistency between objectives and facilities and hardware condition of the federation about talent identification	2/55	8

Table 2: Prioritization of the structure section in talent identification challenges

Internal components of the structure section	Mean	Rank
Dependence on the government with the goal of gaining medal in a short-term period	7/22	1
Facilitating the progress of people by diving the responsibilities	6/99	2
Talent identification based on experience	5/59	3
Special attention to the future and identifying talented individuals	3/80	4
Sufficient attention of federations to talent identification	3/49	5
Sport talent identification based on standards	3/08	6
Sport talent identification based on expertise	3/04	7
Familiarity with modern methods to foster talents	2/80	8

in structure section, dependence on the government with the aim of gaining medal in short-term period shows the mean of 7.22. Also, familiarity with modern talent fostering methods shows the mean of 2.80. Moreover, maximum and minimum means of ranks are related to the internal components in the structure section in talent identification challenges.

The results of Table (3) show that generally, according to the average rating of internal components in leadership section, dependence on the government and powerful and continuous supervision on talent identification shows the means of 4.76 and 0.50, respectively. Also, maximum and minimum means of internal components are in leadership section of challenges related to the non-systematic method.

The obtained categories in Table (4) show that according to the average rating of internal components in the communication section, relationship with other organizations such as the education system shows the average rating of 7.49 and positive and constructive relationship between athletes and coaches shows the average rating of 2.34. Also, maximum and minimum average rating of internal components are in communication section of challenges in non-systematic method.

The findings of Table (5) show that according to the average rating of internal components in the reward section, internal motivations such as sense of superiority and external motivations such as financial rewards show the mean of 5.74. Also, desirable conditions of rewards

Table 3: Prioritization of leadership section in talent identification challenges

Internal components of the structure section	Mean	Rank
Dependence on the government system	4/76	1
Cooperation with the private sector	4/58	2
Frequent changes in management	4/06	3
Activity according to taste	3/72	4
Informal relationships with subordinates	2/53	5
Powerful and continuous supervision in talent	1/35	6
identification context		

Table 4: Prioritization of communication section in talent identification challenges

Internal components of the structure section	Mean	Rank
Communication with other organizations such as the education system	7/49	1
The effect on coaches on technical issues and managers as supporters of talented athletes	5/82	2
Selecting athletes based on personal preferences (personal)	5/32	3
Selecting unprofessional and inexperienced individuals (inter-personal)	5/28	4

in increasing motivation in athletes show the mean of 1.89. Moreover, maximum and minimum average ratings of internal components are in reward section of non-systematic method challenges.

According to the achievements of Table (6) and with respect to the average rating of internal components of facilitative mechanisms section, the interaction between the education system and the ministry of sport is the best facilitative factor with the mean of 5.14. Also, necessary innovation in identifying sport talents showed the mean of 1.89. Moreover, maximum and minimum average ratings of internal components are in facilitative mechanisms of non-systematic method challenges.

Prioritization of internal components in this section is performed using Friedman test.

According to the results of Table (7), it is observed that the maximum average rating of the non-systematic method challenges based on Weisbord model is related to the

Table 5: Prioritization of the reward section in talent identification challenges

Internal components of the structure section	Mean	Rank
Internal motivations such as sense of superiority and external motivations such as financial rewards	5/74	1
The most important reward for talented athletes is to solve their financial problems	5/65	2
Identification of criteria and motivations related to objectives in talented athletes	4/95	3
Motivation in talented athletes with the scientific level promotion of coaches	4/59	4
Progress of talented athletes in federations	3/05	5
Managers' attention to the needs of talented athletes	2/11	6
Desirable conditions of rewards in creating motivation in talented athletes	1/89	7

Table 6: Prioritization of facilitative mechanisms in talent identification challenges

Internal components of the structure section	Mean	Rank
Interaction between the education system and ministry of sport in facilitating talent identification	5/14	1
Instructing sport teachers by federations to identify and foster talented athletes	4/86	2
Participation of the private sector in talent identification	4/79	3
Applied planning to promote the quality level of sport	2/40	4
Following principal and logical ways based on known scientific systems at the global level	1/93	5
Necessary innovation in identifying sport talents	1/89	6

communication section with the mean of 5.45 and the minimum level is related to the objectives section with the mean of 3.82.

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The most important internal component in the objectives section is talent identification based on non-systematic method that showed the maximum average rating and consistency with facilities and hardware conditions of the federation about talent identification with minimum average rating. Implementation of the non-systematic method that is a random process for Iranian champions cannot be a guarantee for continuous presence of athletes in sport fields while non-systematic process is a method that educates athletes from the very beginning. In advance countries, instead of mechanical models, attempts are made to advance organic development of sport. The principles of this model are based on suitable infrastructures of sport in terms of software and hardware processes, so that by creating sport environments, numerous people enter the championship cycle. It seems that most of sport federations, by creating non-systematic approach for talent identification, are looking for talented individuals that from the perspective of the sample are the most important reasons for damages to the objectives of sport federations. Necessary infrastructures in clubs can provide necessary conditions for talent identification from the very beginning to deviate the concentration from single champions. The results of this study are consistent with Hoseini et al. (2014) and Milisted et al. (2013) in which talent identification in Iran was traditional without comprehensive sport plan and lacked uniform plan. Also, Kubilius et al. (2015) stated that a special framework from childhood can direct capabilities and talents from the traditional perspective toward new programs. Also, Esmaeili et al. (2013) reported that according to an organized system and using scientific methods, success may be resulted from talent identification. The most important internal component of the structure section is dependence on the government with the aim of gaining medal in short-term period that has the maximum average rating and familiarity with modern methods of talent fostering has the minimum average rating. Since the provision of sport budget is dependent on the government system, the government aims to compensate costs in this section and due to this fact, it is not possible to consider large number of people, because for this

Table 7: Mean and SD of talent identification challenges

Mechanism Facilitative	Reward	Communication	Leadership	Structure	Objectives	Dimensi	ons
4/60	4/86	5/45	5/34	3/86	3/82	Mean	Total sample
0/44	0/45	0/48	0/88	0/84	0/58	SD	

purpose, significant investments should be considered and by the presence of the private sector, some parts can be compensated. This is consistent with Javadipour (2015) and Nasrollahi et al. (2013) who stated that sport talent identification is dependent on government's financial resources. Also, this is consistent with a study by Ehsani et al. (2013) who stated that decreased government's influence on professional sport that supports the financial section and creates software support system can cause positive effect on this section.

The most important internal component of the leadership section is dependence on the government system with the maximum mean and high supervision on talent identification. Also, the minimum average rating is related to internal components in leadership section of nonsystematic challenges. Perhaps, dependence on government can be lack of allocation of sufficient budget and changes on sport system as well as programs for talent identification that cause changes in management and executive section. This is consistent with Ahmadi et al. (2012), Javadipour (2015), and Hoseini et al. (2014) due to rapid replacements of managers because of dependence on the government system and lack of presence of the private sector. However, in most of European countries, the education section independently concentrates on talent identification and the government section supports the private sector.

The most important average rating of internal components of communications is the relationship with other organizations such as the education system with the maximum means and positive and constructive relationship between athletes and coaches as the minimum average rating in communication section of the non-systematic challenges. Communication can increase participation in society that causes a desirable relationship between athletes and coaches. Communications with organizations such as the education system may cause significant results in talent fostering. This is consistent with the results of Veladat and Nave Ebrahim (2011) and Vazini et al. (2011) who pointed to inactivity of the education system in talent identification and lack of instructing teachers and need for the presence of the instructional section.

The average rating of internal components of the reward section including internal motivations such as the sense of superiority and external motivations such as financial rewards showed the highest average. Also, undesirable conditions of rewards showed the lowest average in creating motivation in athletes. Perhaps, motivation in athletes can be considered as the most important factor in their progress, because mental preparedness in people and provision of external needs lead to the growth of these people. This is consistent with the study by Menkersi et al.

(2014) with the effect of factors such as lack of financial and economic facilities to foster talents and a study by Behpour et al. (2003) with the effect of psychological factors to create interest in motivation.

Average ratings of internal components of the facilitative mechanisms, the effect of the interaction between the education system, and the ministry of sport showed the maximum level and innovation to identify sport talents showed the lowest average in facilitative mechanisms of the non-systematic method challenges. Facilitative mechanisms encourage people to do valuable works. It seems that the existence of interaction between the education system and the sport section and development of education infrastructures have a positive effect on discovering talents. This is consistent with the study by Adegbesan et al. (2010) who stated that cooperation with the education system influences talent identification.

Generally, it can be stated that objectives are the most important damage in the context of talent identification, because the non-systematic model does not show the nature of sport and by investment on a limited number of people, the sport performance of the country will be involved in fluctuations, so that different periods will be experienced. Managers cannot provide a bright future with planned and regular competitions for children. About the structure, dependence on the government aims to gain medal in short-term periods. According to the results, it can be stated that talent identification in long-term is dependent on the government and the government system may not have efficient results. The leadership section showed that the most important damage in this context is dependence on the government system. Therefore, it can be concluded that sport and management and leadership system are under the influence of political decisions, so that frequent changes in management can be observed under such circumstances. The communication section showed that the most important damage is lack of relationship with other organizations such as the education system. Therefore, it can be concluded that the existence of relationships with the education system and instructing coaches and identification of talented individuals in different fields may provide the infrastructures for the emergence of numerous athletes. The most important damage in reward section is the lack of internal motivations such as the sense of superiority and external motivations such as financial rewards. Because by the presence of psychologist and creating motivation in talented athletes as well as provision of needs and financial rewards, better conditions may be provided for these individuals. Facilitative mechanisms section showed that the most important damage is the lack of interaction with the education system to help talent identification. Therefore, it can be concluded that the instructions from the very beginning can be very effective to identify talents. Therefore, it is recommended that talent identification should be accompanied by continuous and long-term process to provide the context for fostering numerous people. Sport authorities will be separated from the private sector and the infrastructure will be provided for more investments and the private sector focuses on the future of the talented individuals. Managers should decide independently and decentralize the domination of the government to implement long-term talent identification programs. Authorities and managers may create relationships with the education system to identify talented individuals, because all people who enter the sport context can be identified in schools from the very beginning and obtain better results with more accurate planning. Authorities can create motivation in talented individuals and decrease their financial concerns in the periods following championships to let them participate in various events with higher motivations.

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