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Development of Basketball in Iraq Based on the Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

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ABSTRACT

This study identified and prioritized the internal and external factors affecting basketball development in Iraq, determined its strategic position, and formulated context-appropriate development strategies. An exploratory sequential mixed-methods design was used. Documentary review, in-depth expert interviews, and a Delphi process were employed to identify the proposed vision, mission, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. A researcher-developed questionnaire was then administered to managers, specialists, basketball development and talent-identification experts, and sport-science faculty members. Data from 134 respondents were analyzed using descriptive statistics, one-sample t tests against the theoretical midpoint of 3, Friedman tests, and SWOT internal-external evaluation. Content validity was assessed using expert judgment and the content validity ratio. The final framework included 11 strengths, 11 weaknesses, 10 opportunities, and 10 threats. The main strengths were adequate basic facilities, continuous club activity across provinces, and the potential to establish specialized academies. The main weaknesses were the absence of a coherent strategic plan, inadequate support for elite players and coaches, limited budgets, and a fragmented talent pathway. Young people's interest in basketball was the leading opportunity, whereas rising equipment and maintenance costs, short-term managerial decision making, and economic pressure were major threats. The internal-external evaluation placed Iraqi basketball in the strength-threat position. Iraqi basketball possesses meaningful internal capacity but requires stronger coordination, strategic continuity, standardized talent development, stable financing, and performance monitoring. The proposed strategies should be treated as a context-specific planning framework derived from expert judgments rather than as evidence of causal effectiveness.

Keywords: basketball development; strategic planning; SWOT analysis; elite sport policy; talent identification; sport governance; Iraq

Introduction

Sustainable sport development requires more than short-term competitive results. It depends on the alignment of governance, financial resources, coaching, facilities, participation structures, talent pathways, competition opportunities, and scientific support. Strategic planning provides a structured process through which sport organizations can clarify their

mission, evaluate internal capacities, interpret environmental pressures, allocate resources, and translate long-term priorities into operational programs (Bryson, 2018).

Elite sport systems are shaped by factors operating at macro, meso, and micro levels. Although economic and demographic conditions influence national sporting outcomes, many factors that can be modified through policy are located at the meso level, including integrated policy development, financial support, talent identification, athlete support, coaching, facilities, competition structures, and sport science (De Bosscher et al., 2006; De Bosscher et al., 2009; Green, 2005). Comparative research also shows that there is no universal model for sporting success; effective configurations depend on the institutional, cultural, economic, and sport-specific context of each country (De Bosscher et al., 2016).

A resource-based perspective is useful for understanding this issue. Facilities, coaches, athletes, organizational knowledge, and financial resources do not automatically generate competitive advantage. Their value depends on how they are combined into coherent organizational capabilities and sustained development pathways (Truyens et al., 2014). Sport-specific studies likewise demonstrate that the relative importance of policy factors differs across disciplines and that culture, commercial conditions, competition systems, and coaching may shape success differently in each sport (Brouwers et al., 2015b).

Talent development is especially important in basketball because athlete progression requires coordinated access to school and club competitions, qualified coaching, age-group programs, training facilities, medical and scientific support, and transitions from grassroots participation to elite performance. Development pathways are strengthened when stakeholders understand their roles and cooperate across stages of identification, retention, transition, and high-performance preparation (Brouwers et al., 2015a; Sotiriadou, 2009). Fragmented systems may identify promising athletes but fail to retain or develop them effectively.

Governance and organizational capacity also influence whether development plans are implemented. Accountability, transparency, strategic focus, stakeholder participation, and monitoring are associated with stronger sport-governance practices and more effective elite sport policies (De Bosscher et al., 2011; Parent & Hoye, 2018). At club level, human resources, financial capacity, infrastructure, planning, external relationships, and operational systems shape the ability to provide sustainable sport opportunities (Misener & Doherty, 2009). Cooperation among federations, clubs, educational institutions, local authorities, and private partners is particularly important when public funding is unstable or limited (Sotiriadou et al., 2008).

SWOT analysis offers a practical mechanism for organizing these complex conditions into strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. It is widely used in strategic management because it links internal capacities with external environmental conditions. However, SWOT is most useful when it is combined with systematic data collection, explicit prioritization, and operational planning rather than being treated as a purely descriptive list (Helms & Nixon, 2010).

Basketball in Iraq has clubs, provincial structures, coaches, young athletes, and a substantial potential audience. At the same time, economic volatility, rising equipment costs, fragmented talent identification, short-term decision making, and limited coordination may constrain long-term development. An integrated assessment of these factors is required to establish strategic priorities. Therefore, this study aimed to identify and prioritize the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats affecting basketball development in Iraq, determine its strategic position, and formulate development strategies based on the resulting SWOT framework.

Methodology

Study Design

The study used an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design. The qualitative phase generated the proposed vision, mission, and SWOT factors through documentary review, open-ended inquiry, expert interviews, and a Delphi process. The quantitative phase evaluated and prioritized the resulting factors using a researcher-developed questionnaire. The qualitative findings therefore served as the direct basis for the quantitative instrument and strategic matrix (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Participants and Sampling

The target population comprised 154 managers and experts from Iraqi basketball clubs, specialists in basketball development and sport talent identification, and faculty members in physical education and sport sciences. The questionnaire was completed by 134 respondents, corresponding to an overall response rate of 87.0%. The analysis did not include stakeholder-group comparisons or a formal nonresponse analysis.

Qualitative Phase and Instrument Development

The qualitative phase combined documentary analysis, in-depth interviews, and Delphi review. Interview questions addressed the preferred vision and mission for Iraqi basketball, current strengths and weaknesses, external opportunities and threats, and potential strategic and operational responses. Overlapping statements were consolidated into a structured item pool and reviewed iteratively before questionnaire construction. This iterative consolidation followed the general logic of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The resulting questionnaire used a five-point Likert response format ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Separate sections assessed the vision, mission, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Face validity was reviewed by five sport-management academics. Content validity was assessed using Lawshe's content validity ratio, and items falling below the threshold corresponding to the number of experts were removed (Lawshe, 1975).

Quantitative Analysis

Descriptive statistics were calculated for each item. One-sample t tests compared item means with the theoretical midpoint of 3, and Friedman tests examined relative priority within each SWOT category. Because individual Likert items are ordinal, the t-test findings were interpreted cautiously as approximate evidence that average expert ratings exceeded the scale midpoint; the Friedman results provided the principal nonparametric evidence for within-category prioritization. The internal and external factors were then combined in the SWOT evaluation to determine the strategic position of Iraqi basketball. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

Research Findings

SWOT Factors

The final framework contained 11 strengths, 11 weaknesses, 10 opportunities, and 10 threats. All retained factors had mean scores above the theoretical midpoint. Tables 1-4 present the available factor-level descriptive statistics. The priority statements were based on the Friedman rankings rather than solely on arithmetic means.

Table 1. Strengths affecting basketball development in Iraq

Strength	Mean	SD
Specialized basketball talent-identification centers	4.34	0.92
Program-oriented approach to elite basketball development	4.15	0.79
High technical competence of basketball coaches	4.40	0.73
Adequate club facilities and equipment	4.62	0.80
Continuous club activity across provinces	4.54	0.77
Substantial human-resource capacity	4.32	0.86
Talented young players and successful role models	4.40	0.85
Scientifically oriented fundamental training in clubs	4.20	1.11
Quantitative and qualitative development of provincial coaches	4.13	1.04
Geographical planning for talent identification	3.97	1.01
Potential to establish specialized provincial academies	4.47	0.72

Note. n = 134. All one-sample t tests against the midpoint of 3 were significant at $p < .001$.

Table 2. Weaknesses affecting basketball development in Iraq

Weakness	Mean	SD
Insufficient education and development of specialist personnel	4.19	1.09
Absence of a defined athlete-development pathway	4.08	1.16
Insufficient advanced hardware and software equipment	4.21	1.02
Absence of a coherent strategic plan	4.36	1.09
Absence of a comprehensive support system for elite athletes and coaches	4.41	0.93
Insufficient club budgets for technical and operational development	4.43	0.84
Symbolic rather than operational commitment to talent identification	4.16	0.96
Lack of common procedures and coordination among clubs	4.08	1.08
Absence of regular monitoring and performance evaluation	4.22	1.04
Absence of an integrated club-based talent-identification system	4.13	0.95
Inefficient and non-systematic current talent-identification process	4.08	—

Note. n = 134. The standard deviation for the final item was unavailable and is indicated by an em dash.

Table 3. Opportunities affecting basketball development in Iraq

Opportunity	Mean	SD
Widespread interest of young people in competitive basketball	4.28	0.69
Positive support from senior national authorities	4.07	1.06
Willingness of cities and districts to cooperate with basketball centers	4.09	0.91

Opportunity to learn from successful international basketball systems	4.19	1.07
Favorable geographical conditions for basketball planning	4.22	0.93
Use of facilities and capacities of other organizations	3.93	1.15
Private-sector interest in talent identification and club development	3.81	1.32
Managers' willingness to formulate provincial strategic plans	4.16	0.99
Media capacity to promote elite basketball	4.02	1.18
Cooperation with the education system in talent identification	4.07	1.17

Note. n = 134. All one-sample t tests against the midpoint of 3 were significant at $p < .001$.

Table 4. Threats affecting basketball development in Iraq

Threat	Mean	SD
Excessive emphasis on immediate results rather than development processes	4.63	0.57
Short-term managerial thinking and preference for rapid-return projects	4.48	0.67
Subjective decision making overriding strategic programs	4.27	0.98
Restrictions on private investment in talent development	4.13	1.05
Preference for rapid and unstable growth over gradual development	4.40	0.77
Weak coordination among clubs, associations, and provincial bodies	4.11	0.84
Inflation and increasing relative poverty	4.50	0.67
Failure of officials to implement comprehensive player-development plans	4.31	0.75
Rising equipment prices and maintenance costs	4.60	0.71
Negative social conditions, unemployment, and compulsory military service	4.30	0.86

Note. n = 134. All one-sample t tests against the midpoint of 3 were significant at $p < .001$.

Priority Differences and Strategic Position

Friedman tests indicated significant differences in priority within the four SWOT categories: strengths, $\chi^2(10) = 135.62$, $p < .001$; weaknesses, $\chi^2(10) = 53.57$, $p < .001$; opportunities, $\chi^2(9) = 39.07$, $p < .001$; and threats, $\chi^2(9) = 103.70$, $p < .001$. Priority statements were interpreted according to the Friedman mean ranks, whereas Tables 1-4 report item-level means and standard deviations.

Table 5. Strategic interpretation of the SWOT findings

Dimension	Principal interpretation
Strengths	Facilities and equipment; provincial club activity; academy potential; qualified coaches and young talent
Weaknesses	No coherent strategic plan; limited elite support; insufficient budgets; fragmented talent pathway and monitoring
Opportunities	Youth interest; managerial support; international learning; education-system cooperation; media and private-sector potential
Threats	Rising equipment costs; inflation; short-term result orientation; subjective decisions; weak coordination and investment constraints

The internal-external evaluation placed Iraqi basketball in the strength-threat (ST) position. This position indicates that meaningful internal resources coexist with substantial external economic and managerial pressures. Accordingly, existing capacities should be used systematically to reduce exposure to external threats.

Proposed Strategic Directions

The ST strategies were formulated by matching the identified internal strengths with the principal external threats and translating these combinations into operational directions.

Table 6. Principal strength-threat strategies

Code	Strategic direction
ST1	Implement a long-term national basketball development plan with defined responsibilities, budgets, timelines, and performance indicators.
ST2	Establish an integrated pathway for identifying, recruiting, developing, supporting, and retaining talented players.
ST3	Convert selected provincial clubs into standardized academies linked to schools and age-group competitions.
ST4	Use centralized procurement, maintenance planning, and shared facilities to reduce the impact of equipment-price inflation.
ST5	Develop continuous coach education and accreditation aligned with athlete-development stages.

ST6	Create a permanent monitoring committee within the federation to evaluate annual implementation and club performance.
ST7	Expand private-sector participation through transparent partnership models, incentives, and sponsorship frameworks.
ST8	Strengthen coordination among the federation, clubs, provincial associations, schools, universities, media, and talent-identification centers.

Discussion

The study indicates that Iraqi basketball possesses several useful resources, including clubs, provincial activity, coaches, young athletes, and basic infrastructure. The central challenge identified by respondents was converting these dispersed resources into an integrated capability. This interpretation is consistent with the resource-based view of elite sport, which emphasizes not only resource possession but also the coordination and configuration of resources into higher-order capabilities (Truyens et al., 2014). Comparative evaluation of organizational capacity also shows that the same resource categories may be configured differently across national systems (Truyens et al., 2016).

The coexistence of facilities as a strength and insufficient advanced equipment as a weakness is not necessarily contradictory. Basic infrastructure may exist while remaining unevenly distributed, technologically outdated, poorly maintained, or unsuitable for comprehensive high-performance development. Similar international evidence shows that sport-specific success depends on the quality and organization of facilities, coaching, competition, and commercial environments rather than on the presence of isolated inputs alone (Brouwers et al., 2015b).

The leading weaknesses point to governance and implementation problems. A strategic plan has limited value when responsibilities, budgets, timelines, and monitoring indicators are not defined. Sport-governance research emphasizes accountability, strategic focus, stakeholder participation, and evaluation as conditions that can improve organizational practice (Parent & Hoye, 2018). The findings therefore support the creation of a permanent implementation and monitoring structure rather than another stand-alone planning document.

Talent development emerged as a cross-cutting issue. The results identified talented young players and academy potential as strengths, youth interest as an opportunity, and fragmented talent identification and insufficient support as weaknesses. This combination suggests that the principal gap lies between attraction and sustained progression. Athlete pathways require coordination among schools, clubs, coaches, provincial organizations, and the national federation, with clear transitions across participation and performance stages (Brouwers et al., 2015a; Sotiriadou et al., 2008).

The strong interest of young people provides a social foundation for increasing participation and expanding the talent pool. However, interest must be converted into accessible school competitions, age-group leagues, qualified coaching, safe facilities, and visible progression routes. Evidence concerning the sport pyramid also cautions against assuming that elite success automatically generates broad participation; deliberate participation policies and accessible development structures remain necessary (De Bosscher et al., 2013).

Economic pressure was a major external threat. Rising equipment and maintenance costs, inflation, and restrictions on private investment can reduce the capacity of clubs to sustain long-term programs. In such circumstances, interorganizational cooperation, shared infrastructure, diversified revenue, and private partnerships become particularly important. Research on sport systems shows that stakeholders often respond to financial instability through collaboration and alternative resource arrangements (Sotiriadou, 2009).

Short-term result orientation was another prominent threat. Pressure for immediate competitive outcomes may redirect resources away from foundational coaching, youth competitions, academy development, and scientific support. Comparative elite sport research shows that sustainable success is normally associated with coordinated policy systems rather than

isolated short-term initiatives (De Bosscher et al., 2009; De Bosscher et al., 2015). The ST position therefore calls for protecting long-term development programs from changes in leadership and annual performance pressure.

The findings should be interpreted with several limitations. The quantitative data were based on expert perceptions rather than objective financial, participation, facility, or performance indicators. The study was cross-sectional and reflected a particular institutional and economic period. The analysis did not include stakeholder subgroup comparisons, longitudinal validation, or implementation testing. In addition, SWOT analysis simplifies complex and interdependent conditions. The framework therefore represents a context-specific planning proposal rather than evidence that the recommended actions will directly improve basketball performance.

Practical Implications

- The Iraqi Basketball Federation should establish a permanent strategic implementation committee and publish annual indicators for every priority.
- A national talent pathway should link schools, local clubs, provincial academies, age-group leagues, and elite teams.
- Coach education should be standardized and connected to the developmental needs of different age and performance stages.
- Centralized procurement and shared maintenance systems should be considered to reduce equipment costs.
- Private-sector partnerships should use transparent contracts, defined performance obligations, and safeguards for long-term development.
- Monitoring should include participation, retention, athlete progression, coach qualifications, facility standards, financial execution, and competitive outcomes.

Conclusion

The study positioned Iraqi basketball in the strength-threat quadrant, indicating meaningful internal capacity alongside substantial external economic and managerial pressures. The resulting priorities emphasize long-term planning, an integrated talent pathway, standardized academies and equipment, stable financing, private-sector participation, and continuous monitoring. These recommendations provide an expert-informed strategic framework whose feasibility and effectiveness should be examined through implementation indicators and longitudinal performance outcomes.

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Authors' Contributions

Ahmed Hamzah Chichan Jooqaly: Conceptualization, investigation, data collection, and writing—original draft. Nasrin Azizian Kohan: Supervision, methodology, validation, and writing—review and editing. Mehrdad Moharramzadeh: Conceptual supervision, interpretation, and critical revision. Farzad Nobakht: Methodological consultation, interpretation, and critical revision. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

AI use statement

Generative artificial intelligence was used only for English-language translation, academic editing, structural organization, reference verification, and document formatting. It was not used to create participant responses, statistical results, SWOT factors, or strategic findings. The authors remain responsible for the accuracy and integrity of the manuscript.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in the expert interviews, Delphi process, and questionnaire phase was voluntary. Respondents were informed of the study purpose, provided consent to participate, and were assured that their responses would remain confidential and be analyzed in aggregate form.

Transparency of Data

The de-identified questionnaire data, qualitative coding materials, and strategic evaluation files may be available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to institutional and confidentiality requirements.

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