

Strategies for the Effective Development of Talent in Iranian Football Players by Foreign Coaches and Legionnaires

İranlı Futbolcuların Yeteneklerinin Yabancı Antrenörler ve Lejyonerler Tarafından Etkili Bir Şekilde Geliştirilmesi Stratejileri

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Abstract

Coaches are the central axis and essential pillar of sport development, including talent hunt and development. The Role of coaches in sports is a very familiar and well-discussed topic in academia. However, the effectiveness of foreign coaches is not a very popular topic in academia. Therefore, this study explored the possible benefits of foreign coaches and legionnaires in talent development. The current research focused on the importance and necessity of foreign coaches and legionnaires in Iranian Football. A qualitative study was established to answer the research question. The final sample is comprised of 13 experts on Iranian football. The study results are based on two scenarios: pre-arrival and post-arrival of coach and legionnaires. Pre-arrival is a strategy to become best prepared for hiring foreign coaches, while post-arrival discussed the benefits of hiring foreign coaches and legionnaires. Each strategy is further discussed in detail.

Keywords: Talent identification, foreign player, football, legionnaires, foreign coaches

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Öz

Antrenörler, yetenek keşfi ve gelişimi konusu dahil olmak üzere sporun gelişiminde ana eksen ve temel direk olarak kabul edilmektedir. Antrenörlerin spordaki rolü, akademik çevrelerde tanıdık ve sıkça tartışılan bir konu olmasına rağmen, yabancı antrenörlerin etkinliği akademik camiada pek fazla ilgi görmemektedir. Bu nedenle, bu çalışmanın amacı, yabancı antrenörlerin ve yabancı oyuncuların, yetenek gelişimine olabilecek potansiyel faydalarını incelemektir. Mevcut araştırma, İran futbolunda yabancı antrenörlerin ve yabancı oyuncuların varlığının önemine ve gerekliliğine odaklanmaktadır. Araştırma sorusuna yanıt bulmak için nitel bir çalışma tasarlanmış ve nihai örneklem İran futbolu konusunda 13 uzmandan oluşmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın sonuçları iki senaryoya dayanmaktadır: biri antrenörlerin ve yabancı oyuncuların gelmeden önceki dönemi, diğeri ise geldikten sonraki dönemi incelemektedir. Gelmeden önceki dönem, yabancı antrenörlerin daha iyi bir şekilde işe alınabilmesi için stratejilere odaklanırken, geldikten sonraki dönem ise yabancı antrenörlerin ve yabancı oyuncuların faydalarını ele almaktadır. Her bir strateji de ayrıntılı bir şekilde incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yetenek tespiti, yabancı oyuncu, futbol, lejyonerler, yabancı teknik direktörler

INTRODUCTION

Coaches are undeniably the central and indispensable pillars of sports development. They play a pivotal role in advancing team progress, honing technical skills, and shaping athletes' social and cultural behaviors (Cushion, 2010). The success of athletes is often attributed to their coaches, and when progress falters, it can result in coaching changes (Farrow et al., 2013). The role of coaches holds particularly true in sports like soccer, where high-performance coaches are considered paramount for success (Mallett & Côté, 2006; Kristiansen & Roberts, 2010; Cassidy, 2010; Gillham et al., 2013). Coaches in football, in particular, wield considerable influence over a team's performance and the development of athletes' sporting talents (Wolfe et al., 2005).

Sporting talent, as defined by Cobley et al. (2012), refers to qualities identified in athletes at an early stage that propel them to future success. In football, numerous internal and external factors influence an athlete's journey to success, including personality traits, physical attributes, training methods, and socio-cultural factors (Farrow et al., 2013). The development of talented young athletes is a multifaceted process marked by dynamic changes and uncertainty (Bjørndal & Ronglan, 2021). Consequently, talent identification programs encompass a range of assessments, from physiological tests to technical-tactical evaluations and considerations of biological and genetic traits for talent development (Mustafovic et al., 2020).

The talent development process involves two distinct phases: identification and cultivation (Unnithan et al., 2012). Coaches are instrumental in both phases, with talent scouts and trainers relying heavily on their expertise in identifying and nurturing talented players (Williams & Reilly, 2000). Close relationships between coaches and athletes are crucial for unlocking the potential of young athletes (Gaedicke et al., 2021).

While the role of coaches in talent development and motivation is extensively studied, there is a limited exploration of the comparative impact of foreign coaches versus local ones (Razali et al., 2018). Foreign coaches often bring unique experiences and knowledge, expanding the horizons of local athletes (Irwin et al., 2004). Unlike many local coaches who may have limited exposure to diverse training

methodologies, foreign coaches introduce innovative approaches and specialized knowledge gained from international experience, potentially filling gaps in local coaching expertise (Razali et al., 2018). This contrast emphasizes the unique value foreign coaches can add in areas that local coaches may not address as effectively. Coaches with international experience, who have engaged in professional activities in other cultures, often possess a higher ability to transfer specialized knowledge, resulting in improved outcomes (Borges et al., 2023). Therefore, countries and organizations frequently enlist foreign coaches and athletes to enhance their chances of sporting success, as seen in China's approach during the 2016 Rio Olympic Games (Tao et al., 2019). The migration of sports coaches contributes to the remarkable growth of a sports team's knowledge. It enhances the knowledge and experience of the coaches themselves, fostering a synergistic development of sports expertise (Borges et al., 2023). Nevertheless, this migration of coaches may pose challenges due to cultural differences and communication issues (Park & Seo, 2019). Understanding local culture is vital for foreign coaches to succeed in a new environment (Behr & Kuhn, 2018). In this vein, Behr and Kuhn (2018) noted that foreign coaches reacted with a shared understanding of local culture due to a need to know the country's sports system and social structures.

In light of these considerations, this study seeks to explore the potential benefits of foreign coaches and legionnaires (foreign players who are recruited to bring their experience and skills to the host country's teams) in the context of talent development, with a specific focus on Iranian football. Iran boasts a strong football tradition, with numerous successful players at both the domestic and international levels. With a substantial young population, the country has considerable untapped talent potential (Zolfaghari et al., 2021). This research aims to investigate the impact and components of foreign and legionnaire head coaches on the development of Iranian players' talents, shedding light on their potential benefits in a unique context that has yet to be extensively explored due to international sanctions. These sanctions affect nearly every aspect of sports, including event hosting, sponsorship opportunities, player training programs, and international competitions, thus limiting the country's engagement on a global scale (Khosravi et al., 2024). Consequently, foreign coaches' arrival in Iran brings added significance, as their expertise and diverse perspectives are rare resources that can fill the gap created by these restrictions, offering valuable insights and development opportunities otherwise constrained by the ban (Alavi et al., 2021).

In examining the dynamics of talent development in Iranian football, this study aims to investigate the impact of foreign coaches and legionnaires on identifying and nurturing young talents. The research seeks to uncover the intricate steps taken before their arrival that can optimize their contributions. Furthermore, it endeavors to shed light on the significant role played by these coaches in fostering talent within the Iranian football context. The study aims to offer a nuanced perspective on how foreign expertise can influence and shape the talent identification and development landscape in a nation with a rich football tradition. Thus, the study proposes research questions:

RQ1: How can optimization be achieved regarding foreign coaches and legionnaires' impact on Iranian football talent development?

RQ2: What advantages do foreign coaches and legionnaires bring to talent identification and development in Iranian football?

METHODS

The present qualitative research employed Glaser's Grounded Theory approach (Glaser, 1998). Grounded theory constitutes a systematic methodology for theory development within social contexts, relying on inductive methods that are particularly suited for studies with a primary emphasis on theory construction. Furthermore, the research inquiries and the literature review played a pivotal role in guiding and reinforcing the conceptualization and theory formulation process, as opposed to the empirical testing of pre-established theories. This study aligns itself with an inductive, theory-building paradigm in accordance with the foundational principles articulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

Data Collection & Participants

The study employed purposive convenience sampling and developed a semi-structured interview guide based on Patton's guidelines (2002). Iranian football experts were chosen as the study's participants using a snowball sampling technique. Ultimately, the sample comprised 13 experts, and online interviews were conducted by one of the authors until theoretical saturation was attained. All interviews were meticulously recorded in audio format and subsequently transcribed verbatim to facilitate the analysis of codes and themes. The duration of each interview ranged from 35 to 60 minutes. All individuals were presented with a voluntary participation form delineating the study's objectives and obtaining their informed consent. In order to safeguard the anonymity of the participants, unique identification codes (e.g., A, B, C) were assigned to each interviewee for publication.

Table 1. Demography of Research's Participant

No	Participant	Age	Gender	Position	Experience
1	A	44	Male	President of National Football Center	Super League Coach
2	B	50	Male	Youth Committee Chief	National Coach
3	C	41	Male	Football Training Dept. Chief	National Football player (Retired)
4	D	51	Male	National Football Coach	Former FIFA Coach
5	E	70	Male	Sports University Professor	Sport Teacher
6	F	34	Male	Sports University Professor	Sport Teacher
7	G	58	Male	Sports University Professor	Sport Teacher
8	H	43	Male	Sports University Professor	Sport Teacher
9	I	46	Male	Sports University Professor	Sport Teacher
10	J	67	Male	Former President of Football Federation	National Football player (Retired)
11	K	54	Male	Esteghlal F.C. Academy Manager	Retired Football Player
12	L	53	Male	Technical Committee Member	Retired Football Player
13	M	42	Male	Coach of Youth National Football Team	International Coach

Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved several interconnected stages, following the completion of data collection and transcription of the recorded interviews onto paper. The process commences with open coding, involving a meticulous review of interview responses until a comprehensive understanding of the data is achieved. At this stage, primary categories naturally emerge from the data, establishing a foundational structure for subsequent analysis. Selective coding followed, focusing on refining and limiting coding to variables directly related to the central variable, as advocated by Holton (2007). This phase involved a strategic narrowing down of codes to those deemed most relevant, enhancing the overall coherence of the analysis. The subsequent axial coding phase involved categorizing the data notes to create a structured framework. This pivotal step laid the groundwork for formulating the theoretical framework, which would be presented to others. Theoretical coding was the subsequent step, where a relational model was developed to elucidate how all substantive codes and categories were interconnected, emphasizing their relationship to the core category, following the guidance of Corbin and Strauss (2008). This phase aimed to weave together fragmented concepts and conceptualize the relationships between codes in a manner that facilitated theoretical integration. Ultimately, the foundational data theory emerged when various categories and the central variable were interconnected, paving the way for the presentation of the research results.

Validity & Reliability

The retest method, known for its ability to bolster the reliability of qualitative research, as emphasized by Lewis (2009), was employed to ensure research reliability. Additionally, retesting contributes to refining researchers' interpretations of the same qualitative data, as noted by Kangas et al. (2015). For the retest procedure, an experienced expert was selected. Three interviews were randomly chosen, and both the researchers and the selected expert independently performed the coding process. Subsequently, the codes from each interview were compared, with matching codes labeled as "Agreement" and differing ones as "Disagreement." The results were tabulated using a specified formula.

$$\text{Retest Reliability Percentage} = \frac{2 * \text{Agreements}}{\text{Total Number of Codes}} * 100$$

Table 2. Retest Reliability

Row	Total codes	Number of Agreements	Number of Disagreements	Retest Reliability
1	22	8	5	72.7%
2	27	11	3	81.5%
3	16	6	3	75.0%
Total	65	25	11	76.4%

Based on the obtained data, the reliability of the conducted interviews was determined to be 76.4%, surpassing the 60% threshold denoting an average level of reliability, as stipulated by Cutrona et al. (1994). This affirmed the reliability of the research coding.

RESULTS

The study's findings, derived from interviews, are delineated below. The research outcomes are structured around two distinct scenarios: pre-arrival and post-arrival of foreign coaches and legionnaires. The pre-arrival phase primarily revolves around strategies for optimal preparedness for recruiting foreign coaches. In contrast, the post-arrival phase delves into the advantages of hiring foreign coaches and legionnaires. The pre-arrival phase encompasses several thematic elements, including strategic planning and integration, cultural and administrative support, athlete and team preparation, and conflict resolution and communication. These facets collectively contribute to the comprehensive strategy for effectively onboarding foreign coaches.

On the other hand, the post-arrival phase accentuates various themes that elucidate the benefits of foreign coaches and legionnaires. These themes include legionnaires' role (patterning, knowledge transfer), foreign coaches' benefits for athletes (technical development, motivating, strategic planning, scouting network, cultural exchange), and foreign coaches' benefits for local coaches (professionalism, technical cooperation, global interaction). The results are presented below.

Strategic planning and integration: In the context of this study, "strategic planning and integration" refers to the systematic process of developing and implementing a well-thought-out strategy for the arrival and integration of foreign coaches into the Iranian sports system, such as clearly defined objectives, budget allocation, monitoring, and adoption.

Strategic planning and integration represent the blueprint for foreign coaches' success in Iran. It involves meticulous planning, aligning coaching philosophies with local strategies, and identifying clear objectives. This construct ensures that foreign coaches are well-prepared to navigate Iran's unique sporting landscape and contribute effectively to the development of Iranian sports [H].

Cultural and Administrative Support refers to providing assistance, guidance, and resources by Iranian sports organizations and administrative bodies to help foreign coaches adapt to the local culture and navigate the administrative processes effectively. This process is effective, as one of our participants mentioned that:

Cultural and administrative support is the backbone of foreign coaches' adaptation and impact in Iran. It encompasses creating an inclusive and welcoming environment that respects cultural nuances. Adequate administrative backing regarding paperwork, logistics, and resources is crucial. This construct recognizes that when foreign coaches feel embraced and have the necessary support systems, they can channel their expertise more effectively into elevating Iranian sports [A].

Player and Team Preparation: This refers to the strategies and processes employed by Iranian sports organizations and their stakeholders to ensure that individual athletes and sports teams are

well-prepared and equipped for success under the guidance of foreign coaches. As suggested by one of our experts:

Player and team preparation is the groundwork for foreign coaches' influence in Iran. It involves comprehensive assessments of athletes' strengths and weaknesses, aligning training regimens, and fostering teamwork. By preparing local athletes and teams beforehand, foreign coaches can hit the ground running, maximizing their potential and elevating the overall performance of Iranian sports [C].

Conflict Resolution and Communication refers to the strategies and processes to address and resolve conflicts between the team, coaching staff, or between foreign coaches and local counterparts. This strategy is beneficial when considering the pre-arrival phase of hiring foreign coaches to maximize their impact. As indicated by one of our participants:

Efficient conflict resolution and open communication are essential for foreign coaches' seamless collaboration with local counterparts in Iran. This construct creates mechanisms to address potential conflicts and fosters transparent communication channels. When issues are resolved swiftly, and ideas flow freely, foreign coaches and local stakeholders can work cohesively towards achieving sporting excellence in Iran [E].

Legionnaires' Role: This is the central theme among the post-arrival benefits of foreign coaches and legionnaires. The current study identified that patterning and knowledge transfer are the leading beneficial roles of legionnaires when they are present in a specific team. For instance:

Patterning: Legionnaires are indispensable in patterning young talent in Iran's sports landscape. As young Iranian athletes observe and learn from these seasoned professionals, they are inspired to aim higher and strive for excellence in their athletic journeys. Thus, the role of legionnaires in patterning young talent in Iran is instrumental [F].

Knowledge transfer: Legionnaires serve as invaluable conduits of knowledge transfer to young talent in Iran's sports arena. Their international exposure and expertise bring a wealth of insights, strategies, and techniques that are often beyond the scope of the local coaching staff. [J].

Foreign coaches' benefits for athletes: There is no denying that foreign coaches bring many benefits. Our study participants mentioned technical development, motivation, strategic planning, scouting networks, and cultural exchange. For instance, our experts mentioned that:

Technical development: Foreign coaches can enhance technical development among young Iranian talent. Foreign coaches, often possessing extensive experience and expertise, provide a fresh perspective and innovative techniques that can profoundly impact the technical skills of budding talents. They meticulously analyze and fine-tune

athletes' techniques, focusing on crucial aspects such as biomechanics, form, and execution. Through personalized coaching, they identify areas for improvement and tailor training regimens to address specific weaknesses, fostering a more well-rounded skill set [C].

Motivation: Foreign coaches' unique coaching styles and approaches often ignite a newfound passion and enthusiasm among potential talents. These coaches motivate local talent by excelling in creating a positive and driven training environment that encourages athletes to push their limits and strive for excellence [A].

Strategic planning: The in-depth understanding of the intricacies of sports in foreign coaches enables them to formulate well-thought-out training regimens and competition strategies tailored to each athlete's unique strengths and weaknesses.

These coaches emphasize setting clear and achievable goals, both short-term and long-term, fostering a sense of direction and purpose among the athletes. By breaking down the larger objectives into manageable steps, they help young talents navigate their athletic journey with precision and confidence [G].

Scouting network: Foreign coaches bring a vital dimension to young talent development in Iran by establishing extensive scouting networks. These networks open doors to opportunities that young athletes might not otherwise have access to, as foreign coaches can identify and recruit promising talents from various regions, enriching the talent pool in Iran [A].

Cultural exchange: Foreign coaches are pivotal in facilitating cultural exchange for young athletes in Iran. Beyond their expertise in sports, these coaches bring a wealth of cultural diversity and international experience. This cultural exchange enriches the lives of young talents by exposing them to different perspectives, traditions, and approaches to life and sports [J].

Foreign coaches' benefits for local coaches: The last theme of the study is the benefit of foreign coaches for local coaches. Foreign coaches help groom local talent and bring new techniques and strategies to local coaches, improving their capabilities. The current study identified professionalism, technical cooperation, and global interaction of local coaches as significant benefits of hiring foreign coaches. As quoted by one of the study experts:

Professionalism: The presence of foreign coaches in Iran contributes significantly to the professional development of local coaches. These coaches bring a wealth of international experience, advanced coaching methodologies, and exposure to diverse sports cultures. As local coaches work alongside their foreign counterparts, they can observe

and learn from their expertise. This exposure enhances the professionalism of local coaches by expanding their knowledge base and refining their coaching skills [C].

Technical cooperation: Foreign coaches can cause a positive vibe by transferring technical cooperation to other team members, including the second coach. For example, Mr. Carlos Queiroz (the head coach of Iran's national team) was also used to measure the stadium's grass fields because our infrastructure is fragile. This practice was a new opportunity to learn about local coaching staff in Iran [E].

The presence of foreign coaches in Iran opens the door to global interaction for local coaching staff. This international exposure goes beyond the sports field, fostering valuable connections and collaborations on a global scale. Local coaches can engage with their international counterparts, participate in cross-cultural coaching exchanges, and attend global sports events and conferences [B].

DISCUSSION

The current study delved into the practical strategies concerning the involvement of foreign coaches and legionnaires in local talent identification and talent development. The results of this study revealed a two-fold process comprising the pre-arrival and post-arrival phases for coaches and legionnaires. The pre-arrival strategies encompassed preparatory measures taken before hiring foreign coaches. At the same time, the post-arrival aspects highlighted the advantages of bringing foreign coaches and legionnaires on board. The pre-arrival themes revolved around strategic planning and integration, cultural and administrative support, athlete and team preparation, conflict resolution and effective communication. On the other hand, post-arrival benefits were categorized into the legionnaires' roles, such as "grounding" (the structured development of athletes at a young age) and knowledge transfer, the advantages foreign coaches bring to athletes, including their expertise, motivation, strategic planning, and scouting networks, and the benefits these foreign coaches offer to local coaches, which encompass professionalism, cooperation, and global interaction.

The section focusing on pre-arrival themes delves into the issues that pertain to the preparation for foreign coaches' arrival and how they can contribute to better outcomes. The role of the sporting federation is particularly significant in this context, as it plays a pivotal role in sports management and marketing. Consequently, all sports-related matters are intricately connected to the federation's role. Fişne and Hasaan (2020) underscore the dependence of all sports on their federation policies, establishing the federation's influence as a key aspect of the current study. For example, the initial pre-arrival theme, strategic planning and integration, is deemed essential for effective preparation before the arrival of foreign coaches (Chen & Chen, 2022). Previous studies have also emphasized the importance of having transparent and clearly defined objectives for successful talent development (Lai & Ishizaka, 2020). Furthermore, other factors contributing to better planning and integration are explored. An absence of transparency can hinder the selection of the best available

coach and compromise the process from the outset (Caneppele et al., 2019). Ensuring transparent communication can facilitate smoother integration of foreign coaches into the local sports ecosystem. Given that sports federations address these issues, their role is central in managing and resolving the challenges associated with pre-arrival themes.

The second pre-arrival theme advocates for providing cultural and administrative support before the arrival of foreign athletes. Prior research has underlined the significance of addressing cultural and administrative differences to yield better coaching outcomes. For instance, Marques et al. (2016) stress the need for a profound understanding of social, cultural, and political dynamics to guide coaching development. Lifestyle differences among coaches also merit consideration, particularly in societies where disparities exist between Western and Eastern lifestyles. Coaches who better understand cultural nuances tend to achieve greater success. In this regard, Grima et al. (2017) have highlighted the importance of considering country-level and lifestyle factors for a successful sporting career.

The third pre-arrival theme pertains to athlete and team preparation. Accurate identification is crucial for effective talent development (Abbott & Collins, 2004). Several factors contribute to this endeavor. For instance, the athlete's age is considered essential for coaches, as physical advantages in youth are leveraged for talent development. Consequently, targeting individuals during childhood and adolescence is preferred in talent identification (Barracough et al., 2022). The role of football academies in talent identification is a well-established concept in academia. Academies have already identified and chosen specific players for their teams, making the selection of academy players more convenient and logical (Kelly & Williams, 2020). The concept of "grounding" is relatively new and emphasizes the planning of athlete development at the right age, as it profoundly impacts talent development. While previous studies have explored psychometric grounding (Towlson et al., 2021), only a few have addressed the physical and talent grounding aspects. The final pre-arrival theme focuses on conflict resolution and effective communication. Past research has consistently indicated that a transparent and conflict-free political environment is essential for effective talent development (Lai & Ishizaka, 2020). This study aligns with these previous findings, recognizing that conflicts and inadequate communication can hinder the efforts of an effective talent search.

The subsequent phase in recruiting foreign coaches and legionnaires encompasses their potential advantages. The role of legionnaires constitutes the initial aspect of these benefits. Legionnaires possess the ability to serve as patrons for local talent, largely owing to their hero-like image. The term "legionnaires" here refers to foreign athletes who contribute to local sports leagues by sharing their experience and expertise with local players. This discovery aligns with the findings of Taniyev and Gordon (2022), who noted that fans tend to idealize figures in the roles of their role models. Young boys and girls frequently exhibit role-model-like behavior, significantly attracting more talent to engage in sports (Hasaan et al., 2020). Additionally, legionnaires contribute to enhancing their respective teams by transferring their wealth of knowledge to local talents, as observed by Yabalooie et al. (2022). For instance, introducing legionnaires into the Iranian league can be advantageous, as they bring substantial experience and can effectively impart their knowledge to local players.

Foreign coaches bring numerous advantages to local talent. Their expertise in technical development stands out as a noteworthy benefit. Foreign coaches typically possess dynamism, extensive experience, and multidimensionality. Furthermore, foreign coaches are often perceived as more proficient in providing training and instructions to athletes when compared to their local counterparts, as highlighted by Razali et al. (2018). Consequently, their expertise plays a crucial role in elevating the technical skills of local talents. Foreign coaches also play a pivotal role in motivating local talents. For instance, foreign coaches tend to emphasize motivation and its potential for improvement, as emphasized by Munkácsi et al. (2010). Moreover, foreign coaches contribute significantly to the local sports structure by actively engaging in strategic planning for the present and the future. Culver and Werthner (2017) stress the importance of coaches participating in training, performance, classification, and planning cycles. They are further tasked with collaborating closely with parents, athletes, and sports organizations across all phases of planning and execution to understand how impairments can affect participation in sports (Townsend et al., 2022). However, foreign coaches may face challenges beyond cultural differences. These include adapting their coaching methods to align with local players' skill levels and addressing logistical limitations, especially in resource-constrained settings. Overcoming these barriers not only maximizes the effectiveness of foreign coaches in local sports environments but also enhances the overall image and performance outcomes of those involved in the sports sector, contributing to a more cohesive and productive sports culture (Hasaan, 2019).

Foreign coaches also expand their scouting networks, which, in turn, facilitates the emergence of local talents. The influx of foreign coaches to the host country catalyzes the rapid establishment of high-quality training camps, fully equipped with a blend of local and foreign agents, coaches, and scouts, as witnessed in the case of Kenya (Kanyiba et al., 2015). These networks prove invaluable in identifying local talents. Talent scouts associated with these networks possess the ability to identify the physical and psychological traits that football players must exhibit to qualify for entry into elite youth academies and, subsequently, the professional realm (Arslan et al., 2020). The direct involvement of foreign coaches within teams further streamlines the talent search process (Khosravi et al., 2015).

Another essential aspect identified by participants is the cultural exchange that accompanies foreign coaches. Sport is a prominent avenue for cultural exchange (Heere et al., 2012). In the context of foreign coaches, LeCrom and Dwyer (2013) observed that foreign coaches offer a form of cultural exchange that positively influences perceptions of sports. This influx of a new sporting culture positively impacts the local sporting culture (Yoo et al., 2018). Furthermore, local coaches can also play a key role in supporting the integration of foreign coaches by sharing insights into local practices and team dynamics. This collaboration fosters a mutually beneficial environment, enhancing knowledge-sharing between foreign and local coaches.

The final advantage identified in this study is the benefits foreign coaches offer local coaches. The introduction of foreign coaches not only directly impacts local talent but also indirectly provides substantial learning opportunities for local coaches, ultimately benefiting local talent. Coaches with international experience bring an added level of professionalism due to their previous affiliations and experience with prominent clubs, as noted by Reade et al. (2008). Research on the learning patterns

of coaches underscores that coaches frequently learn from their peers, resulting in high-performance coaches highly beneficial for local coaches. Collaboration between local and international coaches emerges as an effective means of knowledge transmission. Coaches often prefer to seek knowledge from their fellow coaches, opening up new avenues for learning as coach-to-coach knowledge transfer enables the replication of existing knowledge in varying coaching contexts (Kilic & Ince, 2015). Additionally, global interaction is valuable in facilitating the acquisition of new knowledge in various fields of life. Hassanin et al. (2018) found that the interaction between local and global sports positively influences the beliefs and practices of coaches.

To ensure the long-term sustainability of foreign coaches' contributions, sports federations and local coaching structures could focus on retaining and institutionalizing the knowledge introduced by foreign coaches. Adopting best practices has been shown to benefit teams and sports over extended periods (Koh et al., 2016). Therefore, measures such as documenting effective strategies, conducting follow-up training sessions, and establishing mentorship programs between foreign and local coaches can help sustain these benefits long after foreign coaches have departed.

CONCLUSION

The impact of foreign coaches and legionnaires on talent development in Iranian football is a multifaceted and dynamic process that extends across pre-arrival and post-arrival phases. The findings of this study have shed light on the strategies and advantages associated with integrating foreign expertise into the Iranian sports system. As highlighted in our research, the pre-arrival phase underscores the importance of strategic planning and integration. This step involves meticulous planning, alignment of coaching philosophies, and the establishment of clear objectives. Cultural and administrative support, as another pivotal component of this phase, plays a crucial role in ensuring the smooth adaptation of foreign coaches to the local culture and administrative processes. Player and team preparation, a key foundation for foreign coaches' influence, emphasizes comprehensive assessments, training regimen alignment, and fostering teamwork. Furthermore, efficient conflict resolution and open communication mechanisms are essential for seamless collaboration between foreign coaches and local counterparts.

The post-arrival phase, marked by the crucial role of legionnaires, is characterized by their impact on patterning and knowledge transfer. These experienced professionals inspire and mentor young Iranian athletes, fostering aspirations and enriching their technical skills. Foreign coaches offer various advantages to Iranian football, encompassing technical development, motivation, strategic planning, scouting network expansion, and cultural exchange among local talents. Their distinctive coaching styles ignite passion, enhance skills, and promote goal-oriented training environments. Their extensive scouting networks identify and recruit promising talents, enriching the local talent pool, while their cultural diversity and international experience expose young athletes to different life and sports perspectives. Foreign coaches also benefit local coaches by enhancing professionalism, facilitating technical cooperation, and encouraging global interaction. This interaction refines the

coaching skills of local coaches, expands their knowledge base, and fosters cross-cultural coaching exchanges, creating a dynamic sports ecosystem in Iran.

The practical importance of this study is undeniable, offering a comprehensive blueprint for Iranian football and sports organizations to harness the transformative potential of foreign coaches and legionnaires in talent development. By meticulously planning for recruiting foreign coaches, aligning coaching philosophies, and setting clear objectives, sports organizations can ensure optimal preparedness for this integration. Furthermore, creating a welcoming environment, providing cultural and administrative support, and facilitating efficient conflict resolution and communication channels enhance the adaptation and integration of foreign coaches. The study's emphasis on comprehensive athlete and team preparation provides a practical framework to maximize local athletes' potential, while recognizing legionnaires' roles in patterning young talent and knowledge transfer underscores the importance of mentoring and experience-sharing. Benefits for athletes, including technical development, motivation, strategic planning, scouting networks, and cultural exchange, offer the promise of an improved sporting landscape, and local coaches can benefit professionally through international exposure and technical cooperation, thereby fostering a culture of excellence and global interaction in Iranian football. These practical insights are poised to elevate talent development, promote competitiveness, and enhance the overall impact of foreign coaches and legionnaires in Iranian football.

This study makes significant academic and literature contributions by shedding light on the intricate dynamics of foreign coaches and legionnaires' impact on talent development in Iranian football, a topic that has received limited scholarly attention. It adds to the existing body of knowledge by providing a comprehensive analysis of the pre-arrival and post-arrival phases in the context of foreign coaches, offering a structured framework that can be applied beyond the Iranian sports landscape. The study's identification of key thematic elements, such as strategic planning, cultural and administrative support, player and team preparation, conflict resolution, and the pivotal roles of legionnaires, deepens our understanding of the multifaceted relationships within sports organizations. Moreover, the insights into the benefits for athletes and local coaches contribute to the literature by outlining the concrete advantages of foreign coaching expertise. As such, this research serves as a valuable resource for scholars and practitioners in sports management and talent development, offering a nuanced perspective on the global exchange of knowledge and expertise in football and, by extension, other sports.

This study opens up exciting avenues for future research in sports management and talent development. One promising area of inquiry could delve into the long-term impact of foreign coaches and legionnaires on the development of elite athletes, examining how their mentorship influences the career trajectories and achievements of young talents in Iranian football. Additionally, further investigation could explore the effectiveness of different strategies and approaches used by foreign coaches in diverse cultural and sporting contexts, allowing for a comparative analysis of their methods and their adaptability to various environments. Moreover, future research could focus on the role of technology and data analytics in enhancing talent development, as it is increasingly being integrated into modern coaching practices. Finally, the study paves the way for a broader examination

of the global dynamics of knowledge transfer in sports, particularly how the exchange of coaching expertise between different nations contributes to the evolution of sports ecosystems worldwide.

Conflicts of Interest: There is no personal or financial conflict of interest within the scope of the study

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