



Prerequisites for Transference of Professional Football Clubs in Iran with Emphasis on Economic Requirements

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ABSTRACT

Transference of professional sports clubs to private sector involves the necessary conditions for private sector activity. Therefore, the aim of this study was to determine the prerequisites for the transference of professional football clubs in Iran with emphasis on economic requirements. Statistical population included all CEOs and members of board of directors from professional football clubs, chairmen of committees and officials of provincial football boards, sports management and economics professors as well as football reporters. The research tool was a valid and reliable researcher-developed questionnaire. Factor analysis and Friedman ranking test were employed to analyze the research data. According to the results, the prerequisites for privatization were categorized in seven factors including cultural, executive, programming, motivational, legal, economic, and structural. Moreover, economic requirements (4.20) were the most important category, followed by executive (4.14), structural (4.04), motivational (4.02), legal (3.99), programming (3.97), and cultural requirements (3.62), respectively. Among the economic requirements, the transparency of financial information from country's football clubs, presence of strong sponsors and the creation of supportive funds for financial guarantee of private sector are in the first to third ranks, respectively. According to the findings the most important priority is to solve the financial problems and revenue generation of the clubs.

Introduction

Undoubtedly, football is the most prevalent and popular sport in the international arena. Today, football is the national sport in many countries, and the role of clubs among the pillars of football industry is more important than other things because they act like a manufacturing plant and its enterprises (Zhang, Kim, Mastromartino, Qian, & Nauright, 2018).The football industry has been

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strongly influenced by economic developments and has attracted the attention of media and audiences around the world as the most popular number one national sport in most countries (Abawari, 2013)

The sportive achievement of football clubs is due to investment on professional players, whereas the largest investment in this respect is made by private and foreign investors (Alaminos, Esteban, & Fernández-Gámez, 2020). Regarding the ownership process of a football club from an economic and professional viewpoint, it can be said historically that many football clubs are similar to private companies where small groups of local businessmen and shareholders are considered owners, most of whom are big fans of that team. However, in recent decades, the structure of club management in Europe has changed dramatically and the management of clubs has been left to private limited companies and institutions (Michie & Oughton, 2011)

Today, football as a sport has become a lucrative industry that is always in the spotlight of media, commercial companies and owners of other industries given the great interest of the people in football. Clubs are the most important component of football industry, and the persistence of this industry depends on the survival of clubs. Football clubs will be able to survive when they can cover their expenses and generate income (Asadollahi, keshtidar, Heydari, & Peric, 2020). Therefore, it can be said that financial and non-financial resources (Olayo, 2019) have a significant impact on achieving the optimal performance of sports clubs (Naderian Jahromi & Akhavan, 2021).

Football clubs are privately owned in all five major European football markets, including Italy, England, France, Germany and Spain. In the UK, for example, football clubs are structured as private limited companies, often with highly centralized ownership structures where one or more persons own a large percentage of shares. In recent years, there has been a relatively active market for buying and selling of clubs run by wealthy investors or a group of investors, the majority of whom live overseas (Morrow, 2013).

In Iran, the development of markets is slow because the activities of private sector are influenced by market-government interactions. Given the state structure of country's football industry, government-owned clubs have become consumers of financial resources due to their inefficient performance and do not allow the private sector to engage in productive economic activities. In this situation, privatization in a competitive environment presents a clear solution (Shahlaee & Ghorbanalizadeh Ghaziani, 2015).

In developed countries, the added value of sport industry constitutes a large part of GDP, but the situation of this industry is different in Iran. After the victory of Islamic Revolution in 1979, the role of state in sport became prominent, resulting in the emergence of various sports organizations, the largest and most important of which are owned by the government or are affiliated with it. Over time, the role of people in policymaking and planning decreased, which led to the sovereign attitude of state towards sport. The dependence of football clubs on the government has prevented them from attaining financial and managerial self-sufficiency. This dependence has turned clubs into costly enterprises that do not have the ability to generate revenue commensurate with their costs and do not need to generate revenue because of state assistance (Nazari, Sohrabi, & Moharamzade, 2021).

The experience of studied countries shows that if the necessary ground for privatization is not provided, it can increase injustice and public dissatisfaction in case privatization is not accomplished after comprehensive studies based on careful planning. Also, the implementation of privatization irrespective of the infrastructure and requirements that are prerequisites of privatization is faced with many problems. Therefore, the success of privatization requires the creation of a suitable environment for the private sector to be able to work in that situation. Developing such a setting requires macroeconomic reforms, improved legal framework, reinforced financial system, removal of barriers to competition, and deregulation of the market for goods and services. To successfully implement the sports privatization policy, the necessities and executive considerations of development programs and plans have become inevitable, and their success or failure depends on the observance of these requirements and considerations. Some experts believe that there are special prerequisites in all three stages before and after privatization (M. Ahmadi, A. Amirtash, & A. Safania, 2018a).

Ahmadi and Noudehi (2020) in a study entitled "factor analysis of the components of executive enforcement before privatization of sports in Iran" concluded that the privatization of sports claims requirements and prerequisites that will disrupt the privatization process and cause problems in this process if ignored. According to the findings of this study, executive enforcement is one of the most important requirements before the implementation of privatization policy. Therefore, the country's sports officials should pay attention to executive requirements before privatization, and then transfer sports to the private sector(Ahmadi & Noudehi, 2020).

Nasirzade and Rezaii (2018) in a study titled "the need for environmental analysis (SWOT) in the transference of Iranian football clubs (case study: Esteghlal and Persepolis clubs)" concluded that the transference of football clubs to the private sector in the current situation is almost doomed to failure. The most important threat to the transference of Iranian football clubs to the private sector is the lack of revenue-generating components(Nasirzade & Rezaii, 2018).

Ahmadi et al. (2018) in a research entitled "factor analysis of the necessary cultural components before the privatization of sport" concluded that the most important reasons of failure to implement privatization laws are lack of trust on the part of state managers and officials in the private sector. Trust can be built by providing records showing the capabilities and experience of the private sector as well as presenting practical and acceptable programs (M. Ahmadi, A. M. Amirtash, & A. M. Safania, 2018b).

Ahmadi et al. (2017) in a study with the title of "factor analysis of the executive enforcement requirements with an approach to social issues before the privatization of sports" concluded that the implementation of privatization in sport in the country needs consideration of the background contributing to the success of privatization. One of these prerequisites is to pay attention to executive enforcement with an approach to social problems. Accordingly, sport officials and stakeholders should consider the importance of executive obligation with an approach to social issues before privatization in sports, taking into account the administrative and social context of decision-making process for transference of sports to the private sector(Ahmadi et al., 2018a).

By examining the situation of private clubs, Shamsaei (2009) stated that privatization in these clubs has improved the employment situation (Shamsaei, Abdi, & Balouchi, 2010). In their analysis of economic barriers affecting the implementation of general policies of Article 44 in professional sports in Iran, Jalalieh Farahani and Alidoust Ghahfarokhi (2019) classified the barriers in two general categories of economic and financial(Alidoust Ghahfarrokhi, 2019). Prioritizing the barriers to the development of financial support of private companies for championship sports, Salimi et al. (2012) gave priority to economic barriers among the six defined obstacles (Salimi, Soltanhosseini, Padash, & Khalili, 2012). Khosravi Zadeh et al. (2014) showed that private sector investment and participation in sports faces economic, information and capital market, managerial, legal and legislative, cultural and social, supportive and motivational, and political barriers, respectively(Khosravi Zadeh, Bahrami, & Haghdadadi, 2014). Soleimani et al. (2014) in an article determined that financial and investment factors as well as economic interventions of the government in economic affairs have a positive effect on promoting privatization in sports. Farahani et al. (2015) introduced the inadequacy of facilities including bank loans and the like as the most important problems and obstacles of private sport clubs (Farahani, Alidoust Ghahfarrokhi, & Derakhshande Ghahferrokhi, 2015). Gharekhani et al. (2015) in a research entitled "designing a model of barriers to privatization of Iranian football clubs" introduced economic and financial factors as the most significant barriers (Gharakhani, Seif Panahi, & Fouladi Heidarloo, 2015). Naseh (2013) in a study stated that management problems and training guidelines have been affected by ineffective implementation of privatization and that the strengths of privatization include reduced basic government spending for expert activities as well as improved efficiency. Hemtinejad et al. (2017) stated that the most essential requirements for the privatization of Iranian football clubs are the fight against corruption and rent-seeking, general understanding of privatization, increasing ticket sales revenue, the transparency of laws and the government's supervisory role(Mehrali, Hamid-Reza, & Seyyed, 2017).

Review of literature showed that there have been appropriate studies in the field of privatization in sport; nevertheless, the study of the titles and content of these researches indicates that most of them have examined the obstacles of sports privatization policy and none of them has specifically investigated the prerequisites and major requirements of the privatization policy in the field of sports and professional football clubs with emphasis on these necessities before implementing the privatization. Besides, through the review of previous researches, both domestic and foreign, it can be realized that the infrastructure for privatization must be provided before its implementation, so that privatization can be run in a good way, and the study of these prerequisites has been neglected by researchers.

Therefore, according to the mentioned statements, it is necessary to identify the main prerequisites and requirements of this process so that we can take appropriate measures in implementing the privatization policy of professional football clubs in the country. Therefore, by conducting this research, we hope to be able to identify the most essential measures and requirements before the implementation of sports privatization policy with emphasis on sports clubs and provide practical solutions to achieve this goal. In this study, researchers review the prerequisites and requirements with emphasis on economic issues and seek to answer the following question: "What are the most important prerequisites and requirements before the privatization of professional football clubs in the country with emphasis on economic issues?"

Methodology

The present research is applied in terms of goal, descriptive in terms of method and field with respect to data collection approach. In this study, the requirements of privatization, namely economic, cultural, executive, programming, legal, motivational and structural prerequisites of Iran football clubs were examined. Managing directors and board of directors of football clubs, chairmen of various committees of Iranian football federation and officials of provincial football boards, some professors of sports management, economics and management who were familiar with the issues of football clubs, and elite sports reporters working in the field of football and familiar with privatization issues formed the statistical population of this study. Based on Cochran's formula 380 subjects were studied through available sampling. Data was collected in two ways: library study (review of theoretical foundations of privatization and its requirements with emphasis on sports and football using domestic and foreign books and papers) and field study (developing and distributing of a researcher-developed questionnaire).

After the development of concepts, appropriate tools were selected to collect research data. The tool used in this research to collect data is a questionnaire on the requirements for privatization of football clubs, which was developed by the researcher according to research goals and literature review with noticing the opinion of sports management professors and experts. The questionnaire items included seven categories of requirements as follows: cultural, structural, executive, programming, legal, motivational, and economic, which were used based on the five-point Likert scale. The face and content validity of the questionnaire were confirmed by twelve professors of sports management and experts in this field, and the reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed based on Cronbach's alpha coefficient (0.955). The questionnaire was distributed online among the target population due to COVID-19 pandemics crisis.

Table 1. The reliability of research variables

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha	Status
Cultural requirements	6	0.945	Excellent
Structural requirements	5	0.920	Excellent
Executive requirements	3	0.882	Good
Programming requirements	11	.0.964	Excellent
Legal requirements	2	0.807	Good
Motivational requirements	9	0.950	Excellent
Economic requirements	9	0.881	Good
Requirements before privatization	45	0.955	Excellent

Descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, percentage, standard deviation, graphs and tables) was used to organize and summarize raw scores and describe the sample size. In inferential statistics section, to check the normality of research data, skewness and kurtosis were employed, and to identify and prioritize the components, confirmatory and Friedman factor analysis methods were performed using SPSS and PLS software.

Results

Normality of research data was examined before reviewing and answering the research questions and objectives. In this regard, skewness and kurtosis were used to test the normality of data.

Table 2. Review of statistical data

Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Result
Cultural requirements	3.236	0.920	-0.093	-0.864	Normal
Structural requirements	3.359	0.859	-0.279	-0.700	Normal
Executive requirements	3.412	0.908	-0.466	-0.600	Normal
Program requirements	3.324	0.866	-0.913	-0.788	Normal
Legal requirements	3.378	0.845	-0.329	-0.327	Normal
Motivational requirements	3.383	0.842	-0.415	-0.564	Normal
Economic requirements	3.411	0.709	-0.320	-0.415	Normal

According to the results of the above Table, the values of skewness and kurtosis statistics are in an acceptable range (-2, 2, respectively), which indicates that the distribution of data is normal. Therefore, first-order factor analysis was done for all the requirements before the privatization of football clubs, and after examining the items of each component and the desired corrections, given the appropriateness of the factor loading of all questions, all of them entered the final model of research in the form of components under study. In the following tables and diagrams, the findings related to factor loading of each item, the effective level of each component and the fit indices can be seen. Table 3 shows the indicators used for reviewing items related to dimensions of pre-privatization requirements along with their regression weights.

Table 3. First-order confirmatory factor analysis model

Item	Dimension	Estimate	S.E.	C.R	P	Regression weight
Prioritizing privatization in the minds of policymakers	<---	1.000				0.872
<--- National willingness to privatize football clubs	<---	0.951	0.042	22.618	***	0.853
<--- Informing and building public confidence in investing	<---	0.951	0.040	23.546	***	0.871
<--- Media attention to privatization	<---	0.940	0.042	22.270	***	0.846
<--- Creating a culture among the people to support privatization	<---	0.961	0.042	23.051	***	0.861
Advertising of private sector investment in football clubs		0.963	0.042	22.291	***	0.859
Eliminating structural vacuums		1.000				0.827
<--- Eliminating government decision-making	<---	1.022	0.053	19.403	***	0.835
<--- Compiling statutes and forming unions related to the country's football clubs	<---	1.078	0.054	19.958	***	0.852
<--- Commercializing football clubs	<---	1.017	0.52	19.596	***	0.841
<--- Manager's activity in a club	<---	1.050	0.056	18.790	***	0.817
<--- Preparing and empowering the private sector in terms of management	<---	1.000				0.885
<--- Using people familiar with management and privatization of football clubs	<---	0.784	0.041	19.035	***	0.818
<--- Supervision and control over the privatization of football clubs	<---	0.867	0.044	19.600	***	0.839
<--- Having a macro view and strategic planning in privatization	<---	1.000				0.842
<--- Having clear and logical perspective on privatization	<---	1.059	0.049	21.411	***	0.848
<--- Developing a comprehensive system of government support for the country's football industry	<---	0.980	0.048	20.530	***	0.827
<--- Stability and coordination in the implementation of the country's football privatization development policies	<---	1.009	0.049	20.723	***	0.832
<--- The government's all-round belief in the development of privatization	<---	1.178	0.051	23.291	***	0.889
<--- Modification of transfer methods and patterns by modeling successful countries in the field of sports privatization	<---	1.129	0.050	22.720	***	0.877
<--- Developing and implementing a comprehensive plan and using an appropriate method in the privatization of football and doing transference in a gradual and step-by-step manner	<---	0.953	0.047	20.492	***	0.827
<--- Adopting a policy to support the competitive environment in the country's football	<---	1.001	0.049	20.355	***	0.823
<--- Redefining the roles and areas of involvement of government agencies in privatization process of the country's football	<---	0.980	0.048	20.580	***	0.829
<--- Political and strategic support of decision-making executive bodies and	<---	1.010	0.049	20.655	***	0.830

government officials for the privatization of football						
<--- Developing comprehensive instructions and setting priorities for the transference of football clubs	<---	1.034	0.049	21.100	***	0.841
<--- Attempting to eliminate defects and conflicts between the rules and regulations of privatization of the country's football	<---	1.000				0.811
<--- Deregulating and removing cumbersome regulations	<---	1.023	0.053	19.507	***	0.833
<--- Providing technical, financial and technical assistance to the private sector, including bank facilities such as low-interest and long-term loans	<---	1.000				0.826
<--- Offering discounts and tax exemptions	<---	0.994	0.052	19.294	***	0.813
<--- Hiring and insuring the human resources of football clubs for privatization	<---	0.961	0.048	19.841	***	0.828
<--- Paying government subsidies to the private sector	<---	1.056	0.052	20.374	***	0.842
<--- Preparing the private sector financially	<---	1.007	0.052	19.236	***	0.811
<--- Earning money from advertising around the world	<---	1.047	0.053	19.737	***	0.825
<--- Ability to advertise goods through spectators and fans	<---	0.034	0.052	20.027	***	0.833
<--- TV broadcasting rights	<---	0.981	0.052	18.870	***	0.801
<--- Transference and sale of players in the professional sector	<---	1.067	0.053	20.427	***	0.843
<--- Providing suitable conditions for foreign direct investment in football clubs	<---	0.723	0.079	1.951	0.051	0.249
<--- Creating equal opportunities for economic activities for private sector investment in the country's football	<---	0.765	0.066	2.002	0.044	0.269
<--- Creating a safe economic environment and reducing investment risk in the club industry	<---	0.769	0.068	2.002	0.045	0.268
<--- Creating support funds to guarantee the private sector	<---	1.000	0.048	20.733	***	0.839
<--- Positive financial balance of clubs	<---	0.963	0.048	20.078	***	0.823
<--- Lack of competition and huge government investment with the private sector	<---	1.013	0.048	20.886	***	0.843
	<---	1.029	0.047	21.913	***	0.866
<--- Existence of strong sponsors	<---	1.200	0.053	22.502	***	0.880
<--- Transparency of financial and economic information in the country's football	<---	1.000				0.846

As shown in the above Table, the results of confirmatory factor analysis revealed that the factor loading of three items (questions 1-3) in terms of economic requirements were lower than the acceptable value (0.4); therefore, they were eliminated from the final analysis. As indicated, the items related to seven dimensions of pre-privatization requirements have an acceptable t-value (>1.96) as well as factor loading (>0.4) (Figure 1-4) and are significant at 0.001 level, and this significance of regression weights (factor loading) indicates the convergent validity of variables in the model.

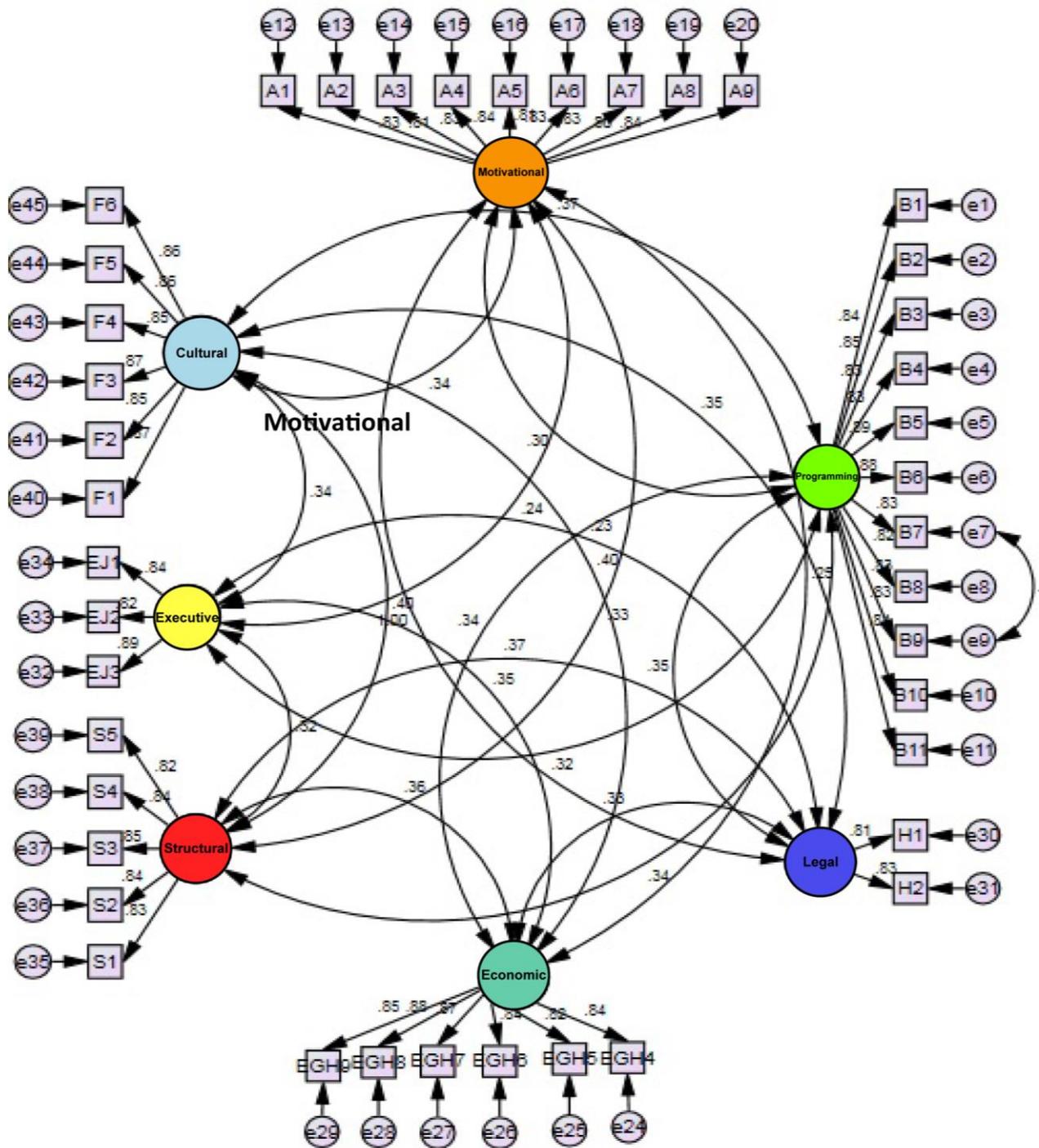


Figure 1. First order confirmatory factor analysis of dimensions and items of Pre-privatization requirements

The results of model fit indices (Table 4) show that the model has a good fit.

Table 4. Fit indices of first-order confirmatory factor analysis

Indices	RMSEA	CFI	IFI	NFI	AGFI	GFI	CMIN/DF
Final model fit	0.011	0.997	0.997	0.943	0.901	0.910	1.048
Acceptable values	<0.1	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	>0.8	>0.8	>3

Table 5. Status of divergent and convergent validity of research variables

Variable	MSV	ASV	AVE	CR
Cultural requirements	0.397	0.133	0.740	0.741
Structural requirements	0.395	0.126	0.694	0.696
Executive requirements	0.350	0.093	0.719	0.719
Programming requirements	0.368	0.113	0.709	0.710
Legal requirements	0.591	0.256	0.676	0.679
Motivational requirements	0.591	0.237	0.680	0.681
Economic requirements	0.397	0.116	0.721	0.722

Table 5 shows that mean variance of the seven categories of requirements is within the desired range (>0.5) and that the combined reliability in the three categories of structural, legal and motivational requirements is <0.7, which is higher than the mean variance and hence the convergent validity is confirmed. Moreover, the AVE of each factor is larger than ASV and MSV, so divergent validity has been confirmed and it can be said that the requirements structure before privatization has proper convergent and divergent validity.

Finally, Friedman ranking test was used to rank the seven categories of requirements. The results showed that the average rank of economic, structural, legal, executive, motivational, programming and cultural requirements are not equal. In other words, some requirements are more important than others. Economic factors are the most important and foremost category of privatization requirements (4.20), followed by executive requirements (4.14) in the second rank, structural requirements (4.04) in the third rank, motivational requirements (4.02) in the fourth rank, legal requirements (3.99) in the fifth rank, programming requirements (3.97) in the sixth rank and cultural requirements (3.62) in the last rank (Table 6).

Table 6. Friedman analysis of variance of general privatization requirements (seven requirements)

Statistical index Variable	Mean	SD	Average rank	X ²	Test result	Priority
Economic requirements	3.411	0.7099	4.20	16.638	0.011	First
Executive requirements	3.412	0.9082	4.14			Second
Structural requirements	3.359	0.8586	4.04			Third
Motivational requirements	3.382	0.8423	4.02			Fourth
Legal requirements	3.378	0.8653	3.99			Fifth
Programming requirements	3.324	0.8658	3.79			Sixth
Cultural requirements	3.326	0.9202	3.62			Seventh

The results showed that the economic requirements factors have not equal importance, so that some of the requirements of the present study are more significant than others (Table 7).

Table 7. Friedman analysis of variance of economic requirements factors

H.	Significance level	Degree of freedom	X ²	Test result
Economic requirements factors have the same rank	0.001	8	15.033	H is rejected

As the Table above shows, the average rank of economic requirements factors is not the same. The average rank of each of economic requirements factors showed that the transparency of financial and economic information in the country's football is in the first rank and that creating a safe economic environment and reducing investment risk in the club industry are in the last rank in terms of importance (Table 8).

Table 8. Friedman analysis of variance of each of the economic requirements

Economic requirements	Mean	Average rank	Priority
Transparency of financial and economic information in the country's football	3.674	5.25	First
The need for strong sponsors	3.658	5.19	Second
Establishment of protection funds to guarantee the private sector	3.577	5.07	Third
Government support for private football clubs and the early stages of privatization	3.499	5.03	Fourth
Helping to generate revenue for the club and achieve a positive financial balance	3.378	4.99	Fifth
Providing suitable conditions for foreign direct investment in football clubs	3.346	4.96	Sixth
Lack of government competition with the private sector and huge investment in the club	3.336	4.92	Seventh

Creating equal opportunities for economic activities for private sector investment in the country's football	3.311	4.73	Eighth
Creating a safe economic environment and reducing investment risk in clubs	3.250	4.59	Ninth

Discussion and Conclusion

Confirmatory factor analysis showed that the privatization of professional football clubs in the country faces seven categories of requirements. Therefore, all the requirements predicted in the questionnaire were confirmed.

This finding was consistent with the results of many researches, including Ahmadi and Nodehi (2020), Nasirzadeh and Rezaei (2018), Ahmadi et al. (2018), Moharramzadeh et al. (2015), Rezaei et al. (2018), Mosallanejad (2014), Estrin (2021), Razavi (2018), Salimi (2012), Moosa and Cardak (2006). Therefore, before handing over and privatizing the country's professional football clubs, sufficient attention must be paid to these seven categories (Ahmadi et al., 2018a; Ahmadi & Noudehi, 2020; Estrin & Uvalic, 2021; Moosa & Cardak, 2006; Mosalanejad, Tabrizi, & Sharifian, 2014; Motahari, Motlagh, & Moharramzadeh, 2015; Nasirzade & Rezaii, 2018; Razavi, Amani, & Firouzabadi, 2018; Razavi, Amani, Firouzabadi, & Honarvar, 2018; Salimi et al., 2012).

Economic constraints were introduced as the most important and foremost category of privatization requirements (4.20). This finding is consistent with the results of Padash (2011), Zare et al. (2015), Sobhani et al. (2012) and Salimi et al. (2012). Elahi et al. (2009) in a study concluded that the most significant barriers to attracting income from sponsors in the Iranian football industry are rooted in the economic structure of the country (Donya Padash, Soltanhoseini, & Khabiri, 2011; Salimi et al., 2012; Sobhani, Heydarinejad, Shafeynia, & Boshehri, 2012; Zare, Babaeian, Moradi, & Hosseini, 2015). Padash (2012) in his research entitled "the most important factors affecting the privatization of sports clubs in the country" considered economic factors as the most important and the first element influencing the privatization of sports clubs in the country (D Padash, Soltan Hoseini, Khabiri, & Fathi, 2012). Zare et al. (2015) in a research entitled "identification and ranking of challenges in the privatization process of football clubs based on PEST model" concluded that the most essential challenges are political, legal, social, cultural, economic and technological, respectively (Zare et al., 2015). Sobhani et al. (2012) have conducted a study titled "determining and prioritizing the effective factors in attracting capital in sports by the private sector". Their results indicated that economic, legal, socio-cultural and managerial-executive factors, are the most significant factors attracting capital from the private sector (Sobhani et al., 2012). Salimi (2012) conducted a study with the title of "prioritization of factors affecting privatization in sports clubs using AHP and TOPSIS methods with emphasis on football" determined that economic and administrative factors are most influential in the privatization of football clubs, followed by managerial, legal and social factors as other effective elements in privatization, respectively, and considered the implementation of privatization to be dependent upon these components. Salimi believes that the privatization of sports clubs should be done step by step. Due to consistency of results of various researches concerning the importance of economic issues in the discussion of privatization and management of football clubs and other similar cases, the sports managers of the country and Iranian football federation should pay special attention to solve the economic problems of these clubs (Salimi et al., 2012).

Shahlaee et al. (2015) also introduced the non-realization of television broadcasting rights (i.e. a main source of income for the club) as the most essential economic problem and the insufficient facilities from the government to the private sector as a major technological challenge (Shahlaee & Ghorbanalizadeh Ghaziani, 2015). Tsun et al. (2009) also pointed out that the most significant managerial challenges of privatizing sports and sports-associated businesses were economic problems, political environment, and lack of proper management, conflict and conservative policies.

According to Mosallanejad's results, the obstacles to the privatization of sports facilities in Iranian public universities were as follows in order of priority: economic, investment, cultural-social and professional-specialized (Mosallanejad et al., 2014). Zare et al. also considered the problem of non-payment of media broadcasting rights, which is the main source of income for clubs, as the most important economic challenge and insufficient loans granted to the private sector by the government as the main technological challenge (Zare et al., 2015). Gharekhani et al. in a study on the problems associated with privatization of football clubs introduced economic problems as the most significant obstacles (Gharakhani et al., 2015). Considering the consistency of results, it can be inferred that the prevailing environment and context (especially the current economic conditions) of privatization of football clubs is undoubtedly the most essential factor in successful implementation of this policy in the field of sports, especially sports clubs.

The average rank of the subsets of economic requirements showed that the transparency of financial and economic information in the country's football is in the first rank (5.25) and that creating a safe economic environment and reducing the investment risk in clubs is in the last rank (4.59). Consistent with this finding, Keshok concluded in his research that transparency in the financial information of clubs is one of the criteria for investors to decide whether or not support sports clubs, which is in line with our research. Michie and Oughton (2011) also found in their research that the clubs earn more profit by making their managerial and financial information more transparent. The reason for this fact is that sponsors and fans present more financial support to a club that provides clear information. As a result, it can be stated that the clarity of financial and economic information of country's football clubs, identification and selection of strong sponsors and the establishment of support funds to guarantee the private sector can be effective in solving these economic problems (Michie & Oughton, 2011).

Establishment of funds to guarantee the private sector, government support for private football clubs as well as in the early stages of the transference process, helping the clubs generate revenue and achieve a positive financial balance, providing suitable conditions for direct foreign investment in football clubs, absence of government competition with the private sector and lack of huge investment in club management, creating equal opportunities of economic activities for private sector investment in the country's football, developing a secure economic environment and reducing the risk of investing in clubs were identified as other important economic prerequisites before the transference of professional football clubs to private sector. These findings are also in agreement with the results of many researches such as Gharekhani et al. (2015), Deldar et al., Elahi and colleagues, Padash et al. (2010) (Deldar, Shahpar Tawfigh, & Bagheri, 2016; Gharakhani et al., 2015; Donya Padash et al., 2011).

Perhaps the main reason for these economic prerequisites and the consistency of results in mentioning these items is that Iran's economy is state-owned and operates in an introverted and monopolistic manner, which causes problems for the country's sports industry, especially professional football. The state ownership of most of the country's professional league clubs means that there is no competition between them because as long as the government owns the clubs and directly helps them, the club managers become expense managers and do not move towards revenue generation. Furthermore, the introverted action economy has left no desire for sponsors to invest directly in the sports industry.

According to the results of the present study, economic prerequisites are necessary to implement the privatization policy of football clubs. Therefore, to solve these problems and provide the necessary economic context for the presence of private sector, the following points can be mentioned. Suitable conditions for direct foreign investment in football clubs should be provided to create equal opportunities for economic activities of private sector investment in the country's football. Supportive funds must be established to guarantee the private sector financially and reduce the risk of investment in football industry via creating a secure economic environment. The clubs must receive help to achieve a positive financial balance by providing more revenue opportunities, and the government should only protect the private sector indirectly and in the initial privatization stage of clubs by

providing facilities and equipment and not do huge investments in professional sport and club management, avoiding open and hidden competition with the private sector. By creating suitable economic conditions and the possibility of commercial competition inside the green rectangle as well as outside it, the presence of strong sponsors becomes possible and transparency should be observed to support the financial and economic information sponsors of the clubs as much as possible.

Finally, it can be said that the success of privatization of professional football clubs in the country demands the creation of a suitable setting for the private sector to be able to work in that situation. Creating such an environment requires the provision of necessary conditions and context in seven areas, namely economic, executive, cultural, structural, motivational, programming and legal sectors. Therefore, macroeconomic reforms, especially in the structure of sports industry, improving the legal framework, strengthening the financial system, removing barriers to competition and deregulating market of goods and services, having a macro view and strategic planning in the privatization of football clubs, preparing and empowering the private sector in all aspects, especially in economic and managerial terms, inculcating the privatization policy of football clubs in the mind of strategists and sports planners of the country, providing technical, financial and technical assistance of the government to the private sector are among the most important measures. However, due to the higher importance and priority of economic issues and assigning the first rank to economic requirements, providing suitable conditions for private sector capital and eliminating the problems and bottlenecks of income generation for professional football clubs via providing foreign direct investment conditions, recognizing the legal ways for clubs to generate revenue and increase income through sponsorship and other measures that will increase revenue are among the most essential measures that have priority.

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