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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOME BASIC SKILLS AND VISUAL SCANNING WITH THE TECHNICAL LEVEL OF MIDFIELDERS AND FORWARDS AT AL-ZAWRAA CLUB, PARTICIPATING IN THE IRAQI STARS LEAGUE FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to identify the relationship between certain basic skills, visual scanning, and the technical performance level of midfielders and forwards at Al-Zawraa Club, which participates in the Iraqi Premier League. The research problem stems from the importance of visual scanning as a modern cognitive-motor requirement that contributes to improving the speed and accuracy of decision-making, and its impact on players' technical performance, particularly in the midfield and attacking positions, given their pivotal role in initiating and finishing attacks. The researcher employed a descriptive approach using correlational methods, as it is suitable for the nature of the research. The research sample was purposively selected from Al-Zawraa Club's midfielders and forwards, totaling (14) players. Data were collected using squash, rolling, and passing tests based on visual scanning, in addition to a standardized technical level assessment form. The data were statistically analyzed using appropriate statistical methods. The results showed a statistically significant correlation between certain basic skills and visual scanning, on the one hand, and the players' technical level, on the other. The results also indicated that a higher level of visual scanning contributes positively to improving the technical and tactical performance of midfielders and forwards. The researcher concluded that visual scanning is an important and influential factor in developing the technical level of football players. He recommended incorporating visual scanning drills into training programs and focusing on developing basic skills in line with the demands of modern football performance.

KEYWORDS: *Skills, visual scanning, technical level, football tournament.*

INTRODUCTION

Football is no longer what it once was, relying solely on physical, technical, and tactical aspects to evaluate a player's technical level, both positively and negatively. Previously, weaknesses in physical, technical, or even tactical aspects were assessed based on performance and results. Nowadays, however, the smallest details have become a major focus for coaches and football specialists due to advancements in technical skills and the positive impact of modern training methods. This has contributed to a narrowing of the gap in players' technical and skill levels.

This has led football experts to focus on the subtle details of the game, details that were previously neglected in training. Visual scanning is particularly important for midfielders and forwards, as it allows them to identify gaps in the opposing team's defense. This enables them to decide whether to sprint towards open spaces to receive the ball or pass it to a teammate making a run towards the goal. Good positioning, movement into open spaces, and thorough scanning of the field also allow players to deliver accurate passes that prevent interception by opposing players.[1]

Technical level is expressed by the performance and output of a player, a group of players across different positions, or the team during matches. It encompasses their ability to execute tactical and technical duties smoothly and with high coordination, both with and without the ball.[2] This level can be relatively stable, progressive, or fluctuating depending on the player's circumstances, the nature of the match, and the player's mental, psychological, technical, and physical state. The importance of this research lies in its presentation of scientific facts aimed at improving tactical performance and technical skill by emphasizing the importance of visual scanning (effective field vision) in skills such as passing, receiving, and shooting on goal. This enhances the offensive effectiveness of midfielders and forwards, as the quick and decisive visual scanning performed by players during passing, controlling, and dribbling provides them with numerous suitable solutions, thus promoting sound decision-making. This, in turn, positively impacts the overall technical level of the midfielders and forwards of Al-Zawraa Club, which participates in the Iraqi Stars League.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The research problem lies in the fact that many training programs focus primarily on developing technical, skill-based, and physical aspects, neglecting the importance of visual scanning. This may lead to players possessing high skill and tactical awareness, but a crucial element is always missing: how to effectively utilize these abilities during matches. This often forces players to make numerous mistakes due to a lack of visual awareness and quick perception of the field, the ball, and their teammates. This study aims to answer the following question:

Is there a significant correlation between the performance of certain skills, as measured by visual scanning, and the technical performance of midfielders and forwards at Al-Zawraa Club, which participates in the Iraqi Stars League?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To measure the performance of certain basic skills, along with visual scanning, among midfielders and forwards at Al-Zawraa Club, which participates in the Iraqi Stars League.
2. To measure the technical level of midfielders and forwards at Al-Zawraa Club, which participates in the Iraqi Stars League.
3. To identify the nature of the relationship between certain basic skills, visual scanning, and the technical level of forwards at Al-Zawraa Club.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

- There is a significant correlation between certain basic skills, visual scanning, and the technical level of midfielders and forwards at Al-Zawraa Club, which participates in the Iraqi Stars League.

RESEARCH SCOPE

- Human Scope: Midfielders and forwards at Al-Zawraa Club (participating in the Iraqi Stars League).
- Temporal Scope: From September 1, 2024, to February 1, 2026.
- Spatial Scope: Al-Zawraa Club's football stadium.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The nature of the problem and the research objectives determine the appropriate research methodology. Therefore, the descriptive survey method was used.

RESEARCH POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The research population consisted of the midfielders and forwards of Al-Zawraa Sports Club participating in the Iraqi Stars League for the 2024-2025 season. The sample comprised (14) players out of (17) midfielders and forwards at Al-Zawraa Club, representing 82.35% of the original population. Data on the midfielders and forwards, along with the results of skill tests, were recorded based on visual surveys and the players' technical level.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND RESEARCH TOOLS

- Personal interviews.
- Scientific sources and references.
- Tests and measurements.

- Two stopwatches.
- A Casio calculator.
- An HB-ZBOOK computer.
- Twelve player-shaped markers. - Six blue and six red light bulbs.
- Six regulation footballs.
- Two whistles.
- Six plastic goals, each measuring 120 cm wide and 75 cm high, were made by the researchers.

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

- **Test of quenching, rolling, and passing according to visual scanning.**[3]
- Purpose of the test: Correct quenching, rolling speed, and passing according to visual scanning.
- Equipment used: Six footballs, twelve human-shaped markers (six with blue lights and six with red lights attached to the marker), and six goals for passing (120 cm wide and 75 cm high).
- Performance Description: The test subject stands behind the designated ball reception area (1.5 x 1.5 m), which is 10 m from the coach. Twelve markers are placed 10 m from the designated area to the right and left of the test subject. When the ball is released from the coach, six markers (blue and red) are illuminated, distributed across six arcs (three to the right and three to the left of the test subject). The target area is 120 cm wide at the markers, all of which are 10 m from the test subject. Each arc contains two markers with blue and red lights. The blue light represents the teammate, and the red light represents the opponent. In total, 11 lights are illuminated: five red (opponent) and six blue (teacher). When the test subject receives the ball, all the lights are turned off. The test subject must then roll 10 m and pass the marker with the light. In blue only, then perform a handover on the target placed behind the marker, which is the best handover option.
- **Performance Requirements:**
  - The ball must be stopped in the designated receiving area.
  - The ball must be extinguished with a single touch.
  - The dribble must be performed at an appropriate speed.
  - The pass must be made to the target behind which the blue marker is illuminated, within 10 meters.
  - The test taker must not exceed 1 meter beyond the designated marker when making the pass towards the correct target.
- **Scoring Method:**
  - The test taker is given (3) attempts.
  - The time for each attempt is calculated from the moment the ball is received until it passes the correct target.
  - The test taker receives (1) point if the ball is played inside the target behind the marker where the blue light is illuminated.
  - The test taker receives (0) points if the ball is played outside the target of the marker where the blue light is illuminated.
  - A pass to the wrong target (red and blue) or (red only) is scored zero points.
  - No points are scored for stopping the ball outside the designated stop area.
  - A pass is not considered valid if it is not on the ground.
  - The final score is calculated as (score / time).
  - The final score for the three attempts is calculated by adding them together.

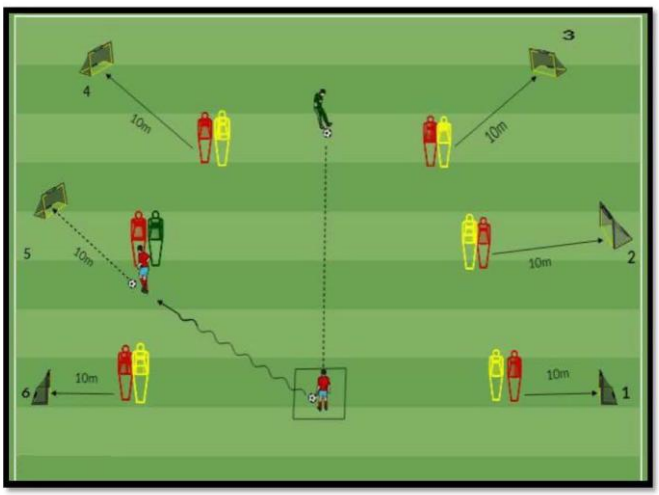

Figure 1. shows the quenching test, then the rolling test, then the handling test according to the visual scan

- **Technical Level Tests:**

The players' performance level was determined through the following:

- A performance evaluation form was used to assess the skill level of each player during the match.
- Al-Zawraa's matches in the Iraqi Stars League were recorded, and clips of the midfielders and forwards were provided. The players' skill level was then evaluated by a panel of technical performance assessors.

PILOT TEST

To understand the details of the research tests and to avoid obstacles encountered during the research, the researchers conducted a pilot test with a sample of (3) players from Al-Zawraa Club at Al-Zawraa Sports Club Stadium on November 1, 2024, at 5:00 PM. The objectives of the pilot test were:[4]

- To assess the efficiency of the support team.
- To evaluate the suitability of the tools used to implement the main test items.
- To determine the time required to conduct the tests.
- To assess the suitability of the tests for the research sample.
- To identify errors and obstacles that might occur during the implementation of the main test.

SCIENTIFIC FOUNDATIONS OF TESTS

- **Validity:** Researchers used content validity through a questionnaire distributed to experts and specialists to gather their opinions on the ability of tests to measure what they were designed to measure, as shown in Table (1), since "the test measures what it was designed to measure and nothing else."[5]

Table 1. shows the relative importance of expert opinions in research tests

Test name	Agree	Disagree	Relative importance
Extinguish, then roll, then handle according to visual scanning.	10	0	100%
Technical level	10	0	100%

- **Reliability:** To determine the reliability coefficients for the tests, the principle of a reliable test must be applied. This principle defines a reliable test as one that yields similar or identical results when administered multiple times under identical conditions. To ascertain the stability of the measurement, the researcher established reliability using the test-retest method. The tests were administered to the sample and then re-administered under the same conditions after seven days to the same pilot study sample. The reliability coefficient was calculated using the simple correlation coefficient (P/C). The results showed high reliability coefficients, as the significance values were less than the 0.05 level, indicating a significant correlation, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Shows the reliability coefficient for the skill and technical level tests and the significance values under study

Test name	Units	Stability coefficient	Level of meaning
Extinguish, then roll, then handle according to visual scanning.	degree	0.91	0.00

- **Objectivity:** This is a concept with several meanings. It refers to the absence of disagreement among the judges. The objectivity of the test stems from "the clarity of the instructions for administering the test, meaning the absence of ambiguity and misinterpretation."[6] Since the tests were clear and understandable to the participants, their implementation was simple, and the means of measurement were readily available, the objectivity of the tests was established by presenting them to the members of the scientific committee and obtaining their feedback on their suitability for application.

MAIN EXPERIMENT

After the results of the pilot tests confirmed the soundness and validity of the implemented testing procedures, their adherence to the scientific conditions and specifications for tests, and their suitability for the research sample, the skills tests, along with visual scanning, were administered to the research sample, consisting of (14) players representing the midfield and attack of Al-Zawraa Club, participating in the Iraqi Stars League. The researcher then determined the players' skill level by reviewing video footage of Al-Zawraa Sports Club's football matches in the Iraqi Stars League since the league's start on September 20, 2024. These matches were then presented to football experts and specialists to gather their opinions on the skill level of each participating player, excluding goalkeepers and defenders. This evaluation was conducted using a separate form for each player, assessing their skill level during both halves of the match to obtain a performance score, which was then analyzed using statistical methods.

STATISTICAL METHODS

The data was processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to obtain the results, employing the following formulas:

- Percentage.
- Mean.
- Standard Deviation.
- Skewness Coefficient.
- Simple Correlation Coefficient (Pearson's Coefficient).

RESULTS

1. Presentation of the results of the skills tests, visual survey, and technical level under study for the research sample.

Table 4. Shows the statistical features of the results of the skills tests, visual survey, and technical level for the research sample

Variables	Units	Mean	Std
Extinguishing test, then rolling test, then handling test according to visual inspection.	Degree/Second	0.516	0.25
Technical level	degree	7.02	1.2

2. Presentation and discussion of the results of Pearson's correlation coefficient, probability value (sig), and statistical significance of the skill tests with visual survey and technical level of the research sample.

Table 5. Shows the results of Pearson's correlation coefficient, probability value (sig), and statistical significance of the skill tests with visual survey and technical level under study for the research sample

Variables	The value of (R) is the Pearson correlation coefficient*	Level of significance	Type of connection
Extinguishing test, then rolling test, then handling test according to visual inspection	0.928	0.00	Strong connection
Technical level	0.928	0.00	

* Significant at the confidence interval ≤ (0.05), p < (0.05), and with 12 degrees of freedom.

Table (4) shows:

The results demonstrated a very strong positive correlation between the skills of tamping, dribbling, and passing, as measured by visual scanning, and the level of technical skill. Pearson's correlation coefficient was (0.928) at 12 degrees of freedom, a statistically significant relationship at the (0.05) level, where the significance value was (0.00).

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Considering the study's findings, a strong and statistically significant positive correlation exists between some basic skills related to visual scanning (tamping, passing, and dribbling) and the technical skill level of the midfielders and forwards of Al-Zawraa Club, which participates in the Iraqi Stars League. This result reflects the integrated nature of performance in modern football. Skillful performance is no longer measured in isolation from the perceptual-environmental context in which it occurs, but rather as a direct product of the dynamic interaction between visual perception, decision-making, and motor execution.[7]

The strong correlation revealed by the results indicates that proficiency in visual scanning is a crucial factor in the quality of technical performance, particularly for midfielders and forwards, given the nature of their roles, which demand rapid field reading, identifying available options, and making precise decisions within limited space and time. Targeted taming, accurate passing, and effective dribbling are all motor processes that fundamentally depend on the quality of visual information gathered by the player before and during interaction with the ball.[8]

The results also confirm that the high technical level of the sample group was not solely a result of abstract motor proficiency, but rather a reflection of the effective integration between perceptual and visual processes on the one hand, and skill-based abilities on the other. This aligns with contemporary trends in sports training science that emphasize the concept of perception-action coupling as the theoretical basis for interpreting performance in team sports. These data indicate that midfielders and forwards who possess a greater capacity for systematic visual scanning before receiving the ball and redirecting their attention during play are better able to make appropriate technical decisions, which positively impacts their overall technical evaluation. Thus, visual scanning can be considered a mediating variable that explains the relationship between basic skills and technical level.[9]

Therefore, it can be said that the current study provides scientific support for the idea that developing basic football skills should occur within an integrated perceptual-tactical framework, and not through mechanical training isolated from the variables of the competitive environment. The results also confirm that integrating visual scanning drills into training sessions can contribute to raising the technical level of players, especially in positions requiring high decision-making intensity, such as midfield and attack.[10]

Considering this, the current findings not only help explain the differences in technical level among the sample group, but also provide a scientific basis upon which to build future training programs that align with the performance requirements of the Iraqi Stars League and keep pace with modern trends in preparing professional football players.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Visual scanning is a significant and influential factor in developing the technical level of football players.
2. Skill tests based on visual scanning are an objective criterion because they are more realistic than traditional tests of basic skills when evaluating skill performance during football matches.
3. The results of this study contribute to raising the levels of visual scanning and accurate field vision, which are linked to the technical level of players.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Focus on developing basic skills in line with the requirements of modern football performance.
2. Focus on training the skills discussed in this study in conjunction with visual scanning of the field, using comprehensive scientific methods that address both motor and skill aspects.
3. Emphasize frequent repetition of visual scanning drills to cultivate a habit among players of performing visual scanning on the field frequently and automatically.

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