



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Development of Sports Tourism in Golestan Province with Emphasis on Foreign Investment

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KEY WORDS

Foreign investment;
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ABSTRACT

In fact, the connection between tourism and sports has created a new form of tourism that provides a modern and comprehensive structure for leisure and recreation, combined with mental and physical vitality. The present study aimed to examine the development of sports tourism in Golestan Province with an emphasis on foreign investment. By leveraging this lucrative and job-creating industry, which has gained significant global importance and is expected to grow even further in the future, efforts can be made to attract tourists and generate income. The current research is applied in terms of its purpose and descriptive-survey in terms of data collection. The statistical population includes all employees of the Departments of Sports and Youth, as well as the staff of the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Departments of Golestan Province. The statistical sample was determined to be 272 individuals ($n=272$) using random sampling and Morgan's table. Data collection was carried out using the Tourism Development Questionnaire by Abdollahi (2012). After collecting the distributed questionnaires, descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to describe the data, and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was applied to assess the normality of the data. In the inferential statistics section, independent t-tests were used to test the research hypotheses. The results indicate that organizing and providing credibility to private and public institutions active in the field of sports tourism, along with offering necessary facilities to these institutions, leads to advancements in sports tourism. Moreover, precise planning and better organization help attract foreign investments.

Introduction

Today, tourism is recognized as a lucrative and job-creating industry that has gained significant global importance, with its impact expected to increase exponentially in the future. According to global statistics, tourism accounts for more than 10% of the world's gross domestic product, and this share is steadily rising, positioning it as a leading force in the field. Sports tourism refers to travel undertaken for non-commercial purposes, either formally or informally, based on recreation, spectating sports,

supporting athletes, or participating in sports events, whether domestically or internationally (Adelkhani, 2018). In fact, tourism is the largest generator of employment worldwide, creating nearly 200 million direct or indirect jobs, accounting for approximately 10% of global employment. Sports tourism is a relatively new form of tourism that has emerged over recent decades, where tourism and sports have become interdependent and complementary. This synergy between tourism and sports has introduced a

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new type of tourism, offering a modern and comprehensive framework for leisure and recreation that promotes both mental and physical well-being. Among various types of tourism, sports tourism is experiencing the most rapid growth in the global market (Adelkhani, 2018). The Sports and Youth Organization and the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization, as key entities managing integrated sports tourism, place special emphasis on investment in this field. Many countries are engaged in fierce competition to capitalize on their unique resources and secure a greater share of tourism-generated income, while also facilitating employment creation with minimal complexity (Nourbakhsh & Akbarpour, 2016). Iran is one such country endowed with abundant tourism attractions. Every corner of this country boasts its own distinct beauty. Among its regions, Golestan Province has always been a prime destination for tourism, characterized by its natural, pristine, coastal, and mountainous attractions. This region uniquely combines two independent geographical realms—mountains and the sea. The dynamic, variable, and diverse environment of Golestan is influenced by climatic and human factors. From a geopolitical perspective, access to both mountains and the sea provides Golestan Province with a crucial advantage in sports tourism management (Teymouri, 2011). Foreign investment, particularly foreign direct investment (FDI), has garnered special attention globally due to its potential to complement domestic capital resources and contribute to the economic growth and development of countries. Both developed and developing nations make extensive efforts to attract these financial resources into their economies. Among the most significant measures taken by national and provincial managers to attract foreign investment resources are creating safe and easy conditions for investment and economic activities, amending relevant laws and regulations, facilitating the process of implementing investment projects, and similar initiatives. Hosting various global, national, and regional competitions

strongly motivates people to attend these events, which can lead to substantial transformations across political, economic, social, cultural, and sports dimensions among countries. Events such as the Olympics and World Championships serve as prime examples, where host countries begin extensive and comprehensive planning years in advance to develop both basic and advanced infrastructures (Zeytoonli, 2007). Due to their ethical nature, personal characteristics, and physical abilities, individuals tend to participate in and benefit from various sports disciplines. For example, some are drawn to water sports, others to winter sports, and some to aerial sports, among hundreds of other sports types. Golestan Province, in addition to its thousands of historical and tourist attractions that energize and empower the tourism system, also possesses excellent potential for initiating various sports activities. The province's diverse climatic conditions allow for the establishment of extensive and well-equipped sports sites across different areas. Undoubtedly, Golestan Province, due to its numerous capabilities—often referred to as the “Treasure of Ecotourism in Iran” and “Province of Waterfalls”—has a special position in terms of potential and actualized sports tourism, both nationally and globally. The province's unique features include: Diverse climates (Mediterranean, semi-arid, semi-humid, and humid), Strategic geographical location, Beautiful shores of the Caspian Sea and Ashuradeh Island, Mountains, rocky terrains, diverse vegetation, plains, deserts, multiple lakes, wetlands, and dams, Hot and cold springs, stunning caves and waterfalls, Lush forests and vibrant wildlife parks. Golestan is also home to historical landmarks such as the Gonbad-e Qabus Tower, the tallest brick tower in the world, as well as ancient shrines, mosques, and schools. The cultural richness of the province is evident in the presence of various ethnic groups with diverse customs, handicrafts, music, arts, housing styles, attire, dialects, and celebrations. Traditional sports like Alish wrestling, Kabaddi, and horseback riding are also prominent, with three

national and international equestrian fields hosting exciting horse racing events that attract thousands of spectators from across the country and neighboring nations. These attributes collectively enhance Golestan's exceptional standing in sports tourism. (Zeytoonli, 2007).

Theoretical foundations

In contemporary times, it is rare to find anyone who does not recognize the necessity of a comprehensive system for engaging youth—a significant portion of society—in recreational sports. The growth, expansion, and evolution of management knowledge in general, and resource management specifically, have made the establishment of development systems within organizations both evident and unavoidable. The absence of such systems is often considered a symptom of organizational dysfunction (Parhizkar, 2014). The tourism Industry in Iran holds a high comparative advantage. If it achieves its rightful position, it can significantly contribute to economic growth, improved employment, enhanced social welfare, and many other benefits. Evident factors such as the increase in holidays, income, life expectancy, the continuous evolution of the aviation and railway industries, and the expansion of global communication indicate a promising future for tourism and its continuous growth. With the technological revolution, traditional tourism has been transformed, giving rise to modern tourism. In the 21st century, technological advancements are expected to further liberate human time, increase wealth, and allow individuals to dedicate more time to leisure activities. Indeed, the latter half of the 21st century can rightly be called the “Era of the Tourism Industry.”

Iran is a four-season land with a civilization spanning thousands of years, boasting diverse and unique historical, religious, cultural, and natural attractions. For this reason, it ranks among the top ten countries in the world in terms of tourism attractions. Golestan Province is located between 36°24' to 38°5' N latitude and 53°51' to 56°14' E longitude from the Greenwich

meridian. It is bordered by Turkmenistan to the north, Semnan Province to the south, North Khorasan Province to the east, and the Caspian Sea and Mazandaran Province to the west. With an area exceeding 22,000 square kilometers, Golestan Province is situated in the southeastern part of the Caspian Sea, covering 1.33% of the country's total area. It shares a 205-kilometer border with Turkmenistan in the north, 120 kilometers of which is a water boundary formed by the Atrak River. The lowest point of elevation in the province is -28 meters below sea level in the western region, while the highest point reaches 3,813 meters in the south. Based on the 2002 census, the population of the province was approximately 1.6 million, with 58.7% residing in rural areas and 41.3% in urban areas. This population is distributed across 13 counties, 16 cities, 16 districts, and 45 rural districts. The relative population density is 77.9 people per square kilometer, with the highest density in Gorgan County (222.1 people/km²) and the lowest in Kalaleh County (28.8 people/km²). Golestan Province separated from Mazandaran Province in 1997. The southeastern shores of the Caspian Sea are among the most significant potentials for developing water sports and attracting athletes in Golestan Province. The province has the capacity to expand various aquatic and coastal sports, including swimming, boating, water skiing, diving, and more. Turkaman Port Bay and Miankaleh Peninsula, designated as a wildlife sanctuary and a biosphere reserve due to their ecological significance, are among the strategic areas for water sports athletes in the province and the country (Zeytoonli, 2007). Additionally, the presence of mountainous regions, foothills, plains, lowlands, Gomishan Wetland, rivers, dams, and waterfalls in Golestan can position the province as a hub for sports tourism not only in Iran but also globally.

However, despite this, it has not yet managed to achieve its true position in the world (Nourbakhsh & Akbarpour, 2016).

A. Economic Aspect: The arrival and stay of tourists

bring foreign currency into the country and strengthen its financial and economic position. The more active we are in this field and the more attractions we create, the more tourists we will attract. These visitors might bring suitable plans and ideas, become good customers for our goods, or even consider collaborating with our traders. Of course, experts in the field can better analyze and evaluate this matter.

B. Cultural Aspect: The arrival of foreign nationals in Iran facilitates cultural exchange between Iranians and foreigners. This means that they become familiar with Iranian customs and traditions and convey the positive and negative aspects of Iranian culture and civilization to the rest of the world. Therefore, the better our relations with them, and the more hospitable we are while observing security measures to protect and support tourists, these actions can have highly valuable outcomes.

C. Political dimension: when our government adopts appropriate and balanced laws, presents a more rational image of itself, exhibits behaviors befitting a governing body, declares its disdain for terrorism, establishes relations with most rational governments worldwide, and even disregards the political stances of foreign governments to provide suitable measures for the welfare of foreign tourists and practically demonstrates goodwill, it can, with minimal cost, attract the attention of global public opinion toward Iran. This approach would leave a bright and deserving image of Iran in their minds, effectively nullifying any accusatory labels over time.

Materials and Methods

In this study, considering the statistics on the number of employees in the Sports and Youth Administration and the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Administration of Golestan Province, the sample size was determined.

Using random sampling and Morgan's table, 140 employees from the Sports and Youth Administration and 132 employees from the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Administration were selected, resulting in a total sample size of 272 individuals.

A closed-ended (standard) questionnaire was used in this study. The questions in the questionnaire, designed to measure the main variables, utilized a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: general and specialized questions.

A) General Questions: This section included general questions such as age, gender, education level, and work experience.

B) Specialized Questions: This section included the Tourism Development Questionnaire by Abdollahi (2012), with a Cronbach's alpha reliability of 92%. Internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha method was employed to assess the questionnaire's reliability. To this end, 30 questionnaires were distributed among the study population, and the Cronbach's alpha was calculated at 90%. For data analysis, SPSS software version 22 and LISREL version 8.8 were used. Descriptive statistics methods, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were applied to describe the questionnaire data. In the inferential statistics section, after conducting the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to determine the normality of the research data, the independent t-test was employed to test the research hypotheses.

Data analysis

Gender Distribution of Respondents

The gender distribution of the research sample is presented in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, 64.33% of the research sample were male, and 35.66% were female.

Table 1. Distribution of Research Samples by Gender.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	175	64.33
Female	97	35.66
Total	272	100

Age distribution of respondents

The frequency distribution of respondents' ages, which is one of the demographic variables in this study, is shown in Table 2.

As seen in Table 2, the largest age group among

respondents falls within the 41–50 years range, accounting for 33.45%, while the smallest age group is below 30 years, accounting for 11.39%.

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Age Groups.

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Up to 30 years	31	11.39
31 to 40 years	88	32.35
41 to 50 years	91	33.45
Above 50 years	62	22.79
Total	272	100

Educational level of respondents

The educational level of respondents, another demographic variable, is summarized in Table 3. As shown in Table 3, the majority of respondents

(37.50%) have a bachelor's degree, while the smallest group (1.84%) holds a Ph.D.

Table 3. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Educational Level.

Educational level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Associate Degree	76	27.94
Bachelor's Degree	102	37.50
Master's Degree	89	32.72
Ph.D.	5	1.83
Total	272	100

Work experience of respondents

The distribution of the research sample based on work experience is shown in Table 4. As observed in Table 4, the majority of respondents have 10–15 years of

work experience (36.39%) and the smallest group has less than 5 years of experience (5.14%).

Table 4. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents' Work Experience.

Work Experience	Frequency	Percentage (%)
5 years	14	5.14
5-10 years	83	30.51
10-15 years	99	36.39
Above 15 years	76	27.94
Total	272	100

Normality test of data (Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test (K-S))

To determine the appropriate statistical test for the research hypotheses, the normality of the data distribution was evaluated using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (K-S). Based on the test results, suitable parametric or non-parametric methods were selected

for analysis. The hypotheses were as follows (Table 5):

H_0 : The distribution of the observations is normal.

H_1 : The distribution of the observations is not normal.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Kolmogorov-Smirnov (K-S) Test for Research Variables

Research Variables	Normal Parameters		Maximum Differences			Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z statistic	Significance level
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Absolute	Positive	Negative		
Facilitating factors for recruitment	89.40	3.71	-0.109	0.063	0.109	1.49	0.051
Barriers to recruitment	16.74	2.11	-0.156	0.221	0.156	1.02	0.602
Necessary recruitment capabilities	17.16	3.28	-0.119	0.089	0.119	0.91	0.184
Recruitment infrastructure	24.39	4.01	-0.141	0.184	0.141	1.05	0.101
Individual characteristics	71.03	2.97	-0.144	0.171	0.144	1.02	0.087

Based on the results:

For the facilitating factors, the significance level is Sig = 0.051.

For the barriers to attraction, the significance level is Sig = 0.602.

For the necessary capabilities, the significance level is Sig = 0.184.

For the infrastructure for attraction, the significance level is Sig = 0.101.

For the individual characteristics, the significance level is Sig = 0.087.

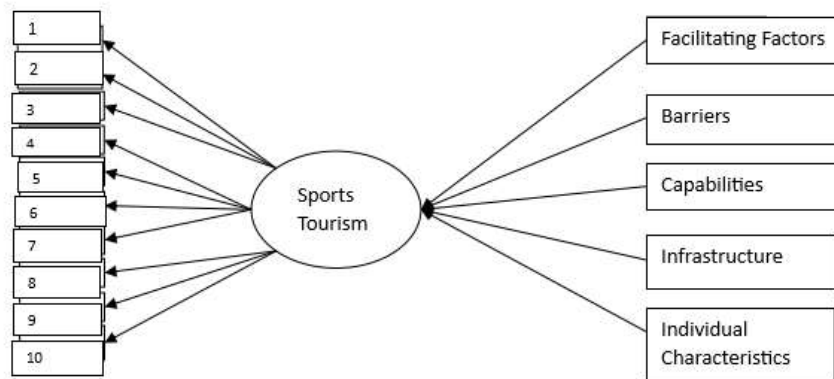
Since all significance levels are greater than $\alpha = 5\%$ (Sig > α), the null hypothesis (H_0) is accepted, and the research hypothesis (H_1) is rejected. This means the

assumption of normality for the distribution of observations is confirmed. Consequently, parametric statistical tests can be applied in this study.

Inferential statistics

Main Hypothesis: There is a relationship between the development of sports tourism in Golestan Province and foreign investment.

To test this hypothesis, data collected through the questionnaires were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM): To test the proposed model of this study, which examines the relationship between the components of sports tourism development in Golestan Province and foreign investment, the collected data were analyzed using the structural equation modeling approach. The results are presented in Figure1.



GFI= 0.108, RMSEA= 126.21, Chi-Square= 45, DF=0.90

Figure1. Testing the relationship model between components of foreign investment and sports tourism

(Path coefficients and their t-values – values in parentheses – Significance at the 0.01 level and s = scale)

Examination of Sub-hypotheses of the study

Sub-Hypothesis 1: There is a relationship between the facilitating factors of attracting foreign investment and the development of sports tourism in Golestan Province.

In analyzing the effects of the facilitating factors of attracting foreign investment on the development of sports tourism, as shown in the Table 6, the path coefficient is estimated to be 0.58. Considering the t-

value of 3.52, with a p-value of less than 0.001, which is lower than the significance level of 0.05, it can be concluded that this path coefficient is significant at the 0.05 error level. This result indicates that the facilitating factors of attracting foreign investment have a direct and significant impact on the development of sports tourism in Golestan Province.

Table 6. Direct Relationship between the Facilitating Factors of Attracting Foreign Investment and the Development of Sports Tourism

Hypothesis	Direct Path	Path Coefficient	P-values	Result
1	Facilitating factors → sports tourism	0.58	<0.001	confirmed

Sub-Hypothesis 2: There is a relationship between the barriers to attracting foreign investment and the development of sports tourism in Golestan Province.

In analyzing the effects of the barriers to attracting foreign investment on the development of sports tourism, as shown in the Table 7, the path coefficient is estimated to be 0.41. Considering the t-value of

2.85, with a p-value of less than 0.001, which is lower than the significance level of 0.05, it can be concluded that this path coefficient is significant at the 0.05 error level. This result indicates that the barriers to attracting foreign investment have a positive and significant impact on the development of sports tourism in Golestan Province.

Table 7. Direct Relationship between Barriers to Attracting Foreign Investment and the Development of Sports Tourism

Hypothesis	Direct path	Path coefficient	P-value	Results
2	Barriers to attracting investment → sports tourism development	0.41	<0.001	confirmed

Sub-Hypothesis 3: There is a relationship between the necessary capabilities for attracting foreign

investment and the development of sports tourism in Golestan Province.

In analyzing the effects of the necessary capabilities for attracting foreign investment on the development of sports tourism, as shown in the Table 8, the path coefficient is estimated to be 0.48. Considering the t-value of 5.38, with a p-value of less than 0.001, which is lower than the significance level of 0.05, it can be

concluded that this path coefficient is significant at the 0.05 error level. This result indicates that the necessary capabilities for attracting foreign investment have a positive and significant impact on the development of sports tourism in Golestan Province.

Table 8. Direct Relationship between Necessary Capabilities for Attraction and the Development of Sports Tourism.

Hypothesis	Direct path	Path coefficient	P-value	Result
3	Capabilities → sports tourism development	0.48	<0.001	confirmed

Sub-Hypothesis 4: There is a relationship between the infrastructure for attracting foreign investment and the development of sports tourism in Golestan Province.

In analyzing the effects of the infrastructure for attracting foreign investment on the development of sports tourism, as shown in the Table 9, the path coefficient is estimated to be 0.41. Considering the t-

value of 2.89, with a p-value of less than 0.001, which is lower than the significance level of 0.05, it can be concluded that this path coefficient is significant at the 0.05 error level. This result indicates that the infrastructure for attracting foreign investment has a direct and significant impact on the development of sports tourism in Golestan Province.

Table 9. Direct Relationship between Infrastructure for Attraction and the Development of Sports Tourism

Hypothesis	Direct path	Path coefficient	P-value	Result
4	Infrastructure for attraction → sports tourism development	0.41	<0.001	confirmed

Sub-Hypothesis 5: There is a relationship between individual characteristics and attracting foreign investment in the development of sports tourism in Golestan Province.

Gender: In this study, to determine whether there is a significant difference regarding the level of foreign investment attraction based on gender, the data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using

an independent samples t-test. Considering that the Levene's test for equality of variances was conducted first, the results indicated that the variances of the two groups were equal, as the obtained p-value was greater than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that the variances of the compared groups are equal. The results of the independent t-test are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Results of the Significance Test for Differences in Attitudes Toward Foreign Investment Attraction by Gender

Variable	Gender	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	T-statistics	P-value
Foreign investment attraction	Female	97	3.56	0.77	1.68	0.068
	male	175	3.69	0.59		

As observed in Table 11, the results of the independent t-test indicate that the significance level obtained for gender is greater than 0.05. This suggests that there is no significant difference in attitudes toward foreign investment attraction between the compared groups. In other words, since the obtained significance value (sig) of 0.069 is greater than the alpha level ($\alpha = 5\%$), i.e. ($\text{sig} > \alpha$), the null hypothesis

is confirmed, and the research hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that at a 95% confidence level, there is no significant difference between gender and attitudes toward foreign investment attraction.

Education Level: To examine significant differences among respondents with varying education levels regarding attitudes toward foreign investment

attraction, respondents were categorized into four groups: associate degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctorate. For the analysis of foreign investment attraction, the mean and standard deviation

of the overall scale score were first calculated. As shown in Table 12, the values for each group are as follows:

Table 11. Mean and Standard Deviation of Attitudes Toward Foreign Investment Attraction by Education Level

Variable	Education level	Mean	Standard deviation	Number
Foreign investment attraction	Associate degree	3.17	0.52	76
	Bachelor's degree	3.29	0.49	102
	Master's degree	3.11	0.54	89
	doctorate	3.15	0.58	5

Subsequently, to analyze the differences in the scores of groups on the attitude scale toward foreign investment attraction based on varying education levels, a one-way ANOVA test was employed. The results are presented in the Table 12. It is worth noting that the Levene's test for equality of variances

was initially conducted. The results indicated that the variances among the groups are equal, as the obtained p-value was greater than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that the variances of the groups being compared are equal.

Table 12. Results of One-Way ANOVA for Attitudes Toward Foreign Investment Attraction by Education Level

	Source of variation	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom (df)	Mean square	F	Significance level (P-value)
Foreign investment attraction	Between groups	0.76	3	0.213		
	Within groups	64.71	357	0.210	1.397	0.081
	total	65.47	360			

Based on the results, the F-value is 1.397, and the significance level (P-Value) is 0.081, which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no statistically significant difference in attitudes toward foreign investment attraction among groups with different education levels.

Years of Service: To examine the significant differences among respondents with varying years of

service regarding attitudes toward foreign investment attraction, respondents were categorized into four groups: less than 5 years, 5–10 years, 10–15 years, and more than 15 years. For analyzing differences in attitudes toward foreign investment attraction across these four groups, the mean and standard deviation of the total scale score were first calculated. As shown in Table 13, the results for all groups are as follows:

Table 13. Mean and Standard Deviation of Attitudes Toward Foreign Investment Attraction by Years of Service

Variable	Year of service	Mean	Standard deviation	Number
Foreign investment attraction	5 years	3.56	0.31	14
	5-10 years	3.09	0.39	83
	10-15 years	3.11	0.54	99
	More than 15 years	3.16	0.39	76

To analyze the differences in the scores of groups on the scale of attitudes toward foreign investment attraction based on years of service, a one-way ANOVA test was conducted. The results are presented in the Table 14. It is important to note that Levene's test for equality of variances was initially

performed. The results indicated that the variances among the groups are equal, as the obtained p-value was greater than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that the variances of the groups being compared are equal.

Table 14. Results of One-Way ANOVA for Attitudes Toward Foreign Investment Attraction by Years of Service

	Source of variation	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom (df)	Mean square	F	Significance level
Foreign investment attraction	Between groups	0.56	3	0.217	0.672	0.801
	Within groups	70.12	357	0.314		
	Total	70.68	360			

Based on the results, the F-value is 0.672, and the significance level (P-Value) is 0.801, which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no statistically significant difference in attitudes toward foreign investment attraction among groups with different years of service.

Age: To examine significant differences among respondents with varying ages regarding their

attitudes toward foreign investment attraction, respondents were categorized into four groups: up to 30 years, 31–40 years, 41–50 years, and over 50 years. For analyzing differences in their attitudes toward foreign investment attraction across these groups, the mean and standard deviation of the total scale score were first calculated. As shown in Table 15, the results for all groups are as follows:

Table 15. Mean and Standard Deviation of Attitudes Toward Foreign Investment Attraction by Age.

Variable	Age	Mean	Standard deviation	Number
Foreign investment attraction	Up to 30 years	3.18	0.59	31
	31-40 years	3.64	0.40	88
	41-50 years	3.11	0.53	91
	Over 50 years	3.35	0.56	62

To analyze the differences in the scores of groups on the scale of attitudes toward foreign investment attraction based on different age groups, a one-way ANOVA test was conducted. The results are presented in Table 16. It should be noted that Levene's test for equality of variances was performed

initially. The results indicated that the variances among the groups are equal, as the obtained p-value was greater than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that the variances of the groups being compared are equal.

Table 16. Results of One-Way ANOVA for Attitudes Toward Foreign Investment Attraction by Age

	Source of variation	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom (df)	Mean square	F	Significance level
Foreign investment attraction	Between groups	0.78	3	0.169		
	Within groups	64.92	357	0.174	1.472	0.090
	total	65.70	360			

Based on the results, the F-value is 1.472, and the significance level (P-Value) is 0.090, which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no statistically significant difference in attitudes toward foreign investment attraction among different age groups.

Conclusions

The findings of the research indicate that organizing and accrediting private and governmental institutions active in the field of sports tourism, as well as providing the necessary facilities to these institutions, contribute to advancements in the sports tourism sector. At the same time, precise planning and better organization lead to attracting foreign investments.

Customs, governmental, and visa-related challenges create significant obstacles in attracting foreign investments, necessitating measures to facilitate these processes. Additionally, the renovation and modernization of sports facilities have a direct impact on attracting foreign investments. The results also show that international investments attract foreign investors from various countries to the province. In other words, capital interactions with other countries by provincial managers can draw the attention of foreign investors to invest in sports tourism within the province. The findings highlight that issues with communication infrastructure (air, land, and sea) are serious barriers to attracting foreign investments. Similarly, the lack of government support for foreign investment is a significant obstacle, emphasizing the need for practical and operational actions to simplify laws and regulations concerning foreign investment in sports tourism. Furthermore, given the presence of various ethnic groups in the province with diverse clothing, cultural, and religious beliefs, this diversity can serve as a significant opportunity to attract foreign investments for hosting competitions and training camps, particularly given the interest of the majority in traditional sports (e.g., horseback riding) and popular sports (e.g., volleyball). These capabilities in Golestan Province's sports tourism sector provide an important avenue for officials to focus on traditional and popular sports as a strategy for developing sports tourism in the province, thereby attracting more foreign investments.

Furthermore, the results indicate a relationship between individual characteristics and foreign investment attraction in the development of sports tourism in Golestan Province. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that, at a 95% confidence level, there is no significant difference in attitudes toward foreign investment attraction based on gender, education level, years of service, or age. In other words, individual characteristics do not influence attitudes toward attracting foreign investment for the development of sports tourism in the province, and

there is no relationship between these variables.

Conflict of interests

No conflict.

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