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Modeling the Drivers of Occupational Socialization among Graduates of Sport Management

ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to model the drivers of occupational socialization among graduates of sport management. This applied, quantitative, causal-correlational study included 384 graduates of sport management who were employed either part-time or full-time in sport organizations and were selected using stratified random sampling. Given that the present study was extracted from a doctoral dissertation conducted through a mixed qualitative–quantitative method, the data collection instrument was a researcher-made questionnaire derived from the qualitative findings of the dissertation. Data analysis was conducted by describing the participants' demographic information and using confirmatory factor analysis and the partial least squares method in SPSS version 24 and SmartPLS version 3 at the significance level of 0.05. The research model showed an acceptable fit, and all three variables, namely improvement of universities' educational policies ($\beta = 0.513$; $t = 8.757$), improvement of sport management graduates' skills ($\beta = 0.142$; $t = 2.744$), and human resource management in sport organizations ($\beta = 0.299$; $t = 7.561$), had direct and significant relationships with the occupational socialization of sport management graduates in Iran. Improving universities' educational policies, enhancing the perseverance of sport management graduates, and optimizing human resource management in sport organizations in terms of recruiting, training, and retaining competent human resources are effective drivers of occupational socialization among sport management graduates.

Keywords: Educational policies, Human resource management, Graduates' skills

Introduction

Occupational socialization is considered one of the most important processes in shaping professional identity, enhancing occupational competence, and facilitating adaptation to organizational environments in contemporary organizations. In the field of sport management, occupational socialization is particularly significant because graduates of this discipline are expected to operate in dynamic, competitive, and multidimensional organizational settings that require managerial competence, communication skills, professional commitment, and organizational adaptability. Occupational socialization refers to the process through which individuals acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, and behavioral patterns necessary for effective participation in a profession and organizational environment [1, 2]. This process begins before entry into the profession through educational and social experiences and continues throughout professional life via organizational interactions, professional learning, and workplace adaptation [3, 4]. In sport organizations, where interpersonal communication, teamwork, leadership, and professional ethics are fundamental elements of successful performance, occupational socialization plays a critical role in employee effectiveness and organizational sustainability.

The increasing expansion of the sport industry and the diversification of sport organizations have intensified the need for specialized and socially competent human resources. Universities and higher education institutions are expected not only to

provide theoretical knowledge but also to prepare graduates for real organizational and professional environments. Nevertheless, many sport management graduates encounter difficulties in adapting to workplace expectations, organizational culture, and professional responsibilities after entering employment settings. This gap between academic preparation and organizational realities has raised concerns regarding the adequacy of educational systems and the effectiveness of professional preparation programs in the field of sport management [5, 6]. Occupational socialization therefore emerges as a key mechanism through which graduates can successfully integrate into professional environments and develop long-term career adaptability.

The concept of occupational socialization was initially developed in educational and physical education research, particularly through the pioneering works of Lawson, who emphasized the influence of recruitment, teacher education, and workplace experiences on professional development [1, 3]. Over time, this concept has expanded into broader domains of sport sciences, organizational studies, and management research. Contemporary studies suggest that occupational socialization is not merely an organizational adaptation process but also a multidimensional phenomenon involving identity formation, emotional adjustment, professional learning, and social integration [4, 7]. In the context of sport management, occupational socialization contributes to the development of professional values, organizational commitment, and behavioral consistency among employees and managers.

One of the most influential dimensions affecting occupational socialization is the quality of educational policies and university training systems. Universities represent the primary institutional setting in which future sport managers acquire professional values, managerial competencies, and occupational expectations. Educational policies that emphasize experiential learning, practical engagement, communication skills, leadership development, and professional ethics can significantly facilitate graduates' transition into employment environments. Conversely, rigid and theory-centered educational systems may weaken occupational readiness and reduce professional adaptability among graduates. Recent studies have highlighted the necessity of revising educational frameworks in sport sciences to better align academic curricula with labor market needs and organizational expectations [4, 8]. Research has also demonstrated that educational experiences substantially influence the beliefs, attitudes, and professional behaviors of individuals entering sport-related occupations [9, 10].

The role of educational systems in professional socialization has been particularly emphasized in physical education and sport pedagogy literature. For instance, occupational socialization experiences during higher education have been shown to shape students' pedagogical beliefs, career motivations, and professional identities [9]. Similarly, doctoral students in sport pedagogy often develop attitudes toward educational systems and professional roles based on their socialization experiences within universities and academic environments [10]. In addition, research on physical education teacher education indicates that integrating social and emotional learning into educational curricula can strengthen professional identity formation and facilitate future occupational adaptation [4]. These findings suggest that universities function as central agents of occupational socialization and can substantially influence graduates' future professional integration.

Another important factor associated with occupational socialization is the level of graduates' professional and personal skills. In contemporary organizations, technical knowledge alone is insufficient for successful occupational adaptation. Graduates must possess a combination of communication abilities, problem-solving skills, emotional regulation, teamwork competence, critical thinking, and professional resilience. Studies have shown that employability perceptions among

university graduates are significantly associated with psychological and interpersonal factors such as mentalization, career ambition, and adaptive attachment styles [11]. These findings imply that occupational socialization is not solely dependent on organizational structures but also influenced by the psychological and behavioral characteristics of graduates themselves.

The relationship between professional competence and occupational socialization has also been supported by studies in sport and educational contexts. Harper et al. reported that retrospective evaluations of graduates entering full-time employment demonstrated the importance of socialization experiences in increasing confidence, professional readiness, and workplace adaptation [12]. Likewise, Merica et al. found that socialization experiences among physical educators were positively associated with professional confidence and implementation effectiveness in educational settings [13]. Such evidence indicates that professional skills and occupational socialization are closely interconnected processes that mutually reinforce each other.

Human resource management practices within organizations also constitute a central determinant of occupational socialization. Organizational socialization processes are highly dependent on recruitment systems, orientation programs, managerial support, mentoring relationships, professional development opportunities, and organizational communication. Effective human resource management can facilitate employee adaptation, strengthen organizational commitment, and improve workplace integration. In contrast, inadequate organizational support and poor human resource policies may generate stress, role ambiguity, and occupational dissatisfaction among newcomers. Research demonstrates that organizational socialization significantly influences organizational commitment, employee responsibility, and social capital development [14, 15]. In sport organizations specifically, human resource management practices can determine the extent to which graduates internalize organizational norms and become integrated into professional environments.

Organizational support mechanisms are especially important in sport settings because these environments often involve high interpersonal interaction, performance pressure, and complex organizational structures. Ayoubi et al. demonstrated that workplace humor, managerial support, and socialization processes positively contribute to employees' job embeddedness in sport organizations [16]. Similarly, Mokhlesabadi et al. reported positive associations between organizational socialization, organizational citizenship behavior, and employee performance in sport and youth departments [17]. These findings suggest that occupational socialization not only facilitates adaptation but also enhances organizational productivity and employee effectiveness.

Occupational socialization is also strongly connected to cultural adaptation and acculturation processes. Individuals entering organizations encounter formal and informal norms, professional expectations, communication styles, and behavioral standards that shape their organizational identity. Hommey et al. emphasized that acculturation strategies moderate the relationship between newcomer adjustment and employee behavior, indicating that successful adaptation requires both organizational support and individual flexibility [18]. In sport organizations characterized by diversity of professional roles and social interactions, acculturation can substantially influence employees' sense of belonging and occupational integration.

Research in sport sciences further illustrates the broad social implications of socialization processes. Bastik et al. found that sport participation contributes positively to the socialization of individuals with physical disabilities by strengthening communication and social integration [19]. Although this study focused on a different population, its findings highlight the transformative role of sport environments in promoting social and interpersonal development. Similarly, studies in physical

education have shown that occupational experiences and socialization mechanisms influence beliefs, professional identity, and career development among teachers and coaches [20, 21]. These studies collectively demonstrate that socialization processes extend beyond technical learning and encompass broader psychosocial dimensions.

The rapid technological transformation of organizations and labor markets has also changed the nature of occupational socialization. Information technology, digital communication, and organizational networking have created new pathways for interaction and professional learning. Norouzi and Roumiyani proposed that information and communication technology is positively associated with organizational socialization and social capital management in sport organizations [15]. Consequently, occupational socialization in contemporary sport organizations increasingly depends on graduates' ability to adapt to technological and communicative transformations.

Career development and employability are other concepts closely linked with occupational socialization. Employability reflects individuals' capacity to obtain, maintain, and progress within employment environments. Van Harten et al. emphasized that employability is a multidimensional construct influenced by organizational, psychological, and social factors [6]. Occupational socialization contributes to employability by enhancing organizational understanding, professional identity, and adaptive competencies. Moreover, Purnomo et al. found that organizational socialization and career development significantly influence employees' intentions regarding occupational continuity and turnover [22]. These findings indicate that effective occupational socialization can improve employee retention and reduce turnover intentions in organizations.

The growing complexity of professional environments has also increased attention toward motivational and psychological dimensions of socialization. Hamidizadeh et al. demonstrated that motivational strategies positively affect the professional socialization of postgraduate accounting students [8]. Similarly, Askari reported that philosophical mentality and thinking styles are structurally associated with socialization among sport managers [23]. Such findings indicate that occupational socialization is influenced not only by organizational systems but also by cognitive and motivational factors that shape professional engagement.

From a methodological perspective, the study of occupational socialization requires valid and reliable measurement tools capable of capturing multidimensional organizational and professional experiences. Nunnally emphasized the importance of psychometric rigor in scale development and psychological measurement [24]. More recent methodological studies have also highlighted the necessity of robust scale development procedures in management research to ensure construct validity and measurement accuracy [25]. Accordingly, investigating occupational socialization among sport management graduates requires comprehensive and empirically validated instruments that can accurately assess educational, organizational, and professional dimensions.

Despite the increasing importance of occupational socialization in sport management, empirical research examining the combined influence of educational policies, graduates' skills, and human resource management on occupational socialization remains limited, particularly in the Iranian context. Most existing studies have focused on isolated dimensions of socialization or specific occupational groups, while fewer investigations have attempted to develop an integrated structural model explaining the determinants of occupational socialization among sport management graduates. Given the expanding labor market challenges faced by graduates, the increasing complexity of sport organizations, and the strategic importance of human resource development in the sport industry, identifying the drivers of occupational socialization appears essential for

both educational institutions and organizational policymakers. Therefore, the present study aimed to model the drivers of occupational socialization among graduates of sport management.

Methodology

The present study was applied in terms of objective, quantitative in terms of data type, and causal-correlational in terms of data analysis. The statistical population of this study included all graduates of sport management who were employed part-time or full-time in sport organizations. The statistical population in this section covered a wide range of sport organizations, including the Ministry of Sport and Youth and its affiliated departments, sport federations and their affiliated boards, physical education departments of the Ministry of Education and universities, clubs, sport venues and facilities, and other related organizations. In the implementation phase, each of these was considered a stratum, and stratified random sampling was used. To determine the sample size in this section, a decision was made by considering the type of statistical analyses used in the research process, namely factor analysis, after determining the number of items designed for the scale. In general, the recommended rule for scale development and validation is a minimum of 10 participants for each statement/item of the scale (Nunnally, 1978). However, in recent management studies, it has been suggested that a ratio of five participants per scale item may also be sufficient. In addition, it has been recommended that, in implementation, the final sample size should be at least 20% larger than the calculated minimum required sample size to prevent problems caused by participant attrition and missing data. In general, with a larger sample size, measurement errors decrease, factor loadings become more stable, and the obtained results become more generalizable (Hair et al., 2019, 2020; Tilak-Hari et al., 2021). Therefore, based on all the explanations provided, the sample size in the quantitative section of the study was determined to be 384 participants.

Given that the present study was extracted from a doctoral dissertation conducted using a mixed qualitative–quantitative method, the data collection instrument in this study was a researcher-made questionnaire derived from the qualitative findings of the dissertation. This questionnaire consisted of four components and 59 items. Its components included improvement of universities' educational policies (Items 1 to 12), improvement of sport management graduates' skills (Items 13 to 19), human resource management in sport organizations (Items 20 to 29), and occupational socialization of sport management graduates (Items 30 to 59). To examine the validity of this instrument in the present study, the face and content validity of the questionnaire were first reviewed and confirmed by 10 university professors of sport management. Then, its construct validity was examined and confirmed using convergent and discriminant validity, the results of which are reported in detail in the findings section. The reliability of the questionnaire was also examined and confirmed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, such that the Cronbach's alpha values of the questionnaire components were 0.793, 0.811, 0.874, and 0.798, respectively, and their composite reliability values were 0.844, 0.846, 0.913, and 0.833, respectively.

To analyze the data, the demographic information of the research participants was first described using frequency and frequency percentage. Then, confirmatory factor analysis and the partial least squares method were used to examine the relationships among the research variables as well as the fit of the research model. All analyses in the present study were performed using SPSS version 24 and SmartPLS version 3 at the significance level of 0.05.

Findings and Results

At the beginning of the findings section, the demographic characteristics of the participants were described, and the results are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants in the Quantitative Section

Variable	Category	Frequency	Frequency Percentage
Gender	Female	119	30.1
Gender	Male	265	69.9
Age	25 years or younger	49	12.8
Age	26 to 30 years	71	18.5
Age	30 to 35 years	195	50.8
Age	Over 35 years	69	17.9
Type of employment	Part-time	141	36.7
Type of employment	Full-time	243	63.3
Type of organization	Public	218	56.8
Type of organization	Private	166	43.2

In the continuation of the findings section, the results related to the examination of the instrument and model, as well as the relationships among the research variables, are presented. In this study, factor analysis and structural equation modeling using the partial least squares (PLS) approach were employed. This algorithm includes three main stages: 1) fitting the measurement models, 2) fitting the structural model, and 3) fitting the overall model.

According to the PLS analysis algorithm, two criteria, namely reliability and validity, are used to examine the fit of measurement models. Reliability assessment is carried out in three ways: measurement of factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, and composite reliability. Regarding the examination of the factor loadings of the indicators, the results in Figure 1 showed that the factor loadings of all items related to all variables had acceptable validity, because the factor loading values of all items were greater than 0.40.

Next, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) were used to assess the reliability of the model. Cronbach's alpha is a criterion for measuring reliability and an appropriate index for evaluating internal stability, or internal consistency. Composite reliability is considered a more modern criterion than Cronbach's alpha in PLS analysis, and its advantage over Cronbach's alpha is that the reliability of constructs is calculated not absolutely but according to the correlations among their constructs. Based on Table 2, all Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values of the research variables are appropriate and acceptable; therefore, the adequacy of the reliability status of the measurement model can be confirmed.

Table 2

Assessment of Model Reliability Using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability

Latent Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Occupational socialization of sport management graduates	0.793	0.844
Acculturation	0.759	0.798
Professional socialization	0.843	0.881
Organizational socialization	0.759	0.801
Improvement of universities' educational policies	0.811	0.846
Improvement of sport management graduates' skills	0.874	0.913
Human resource management in sport organizations	0.798	0.833

The second criterion for examining the fit of measurement models is convergent validity, which examines the degree of correlation between each construct and its own questions or indicators. Table 3 reports the values related to convergent

validity, namely average variance extracted (AVE). Based on the AVE values, the latent variables under study have appropriate convergent validity. In other words, there is a high correlation between each construct and its indicators; consequently, the measurement models have moderate fit, and the adequacy of the fit of the measurement models is confirmed.

Table 3

AVE Coefficients of Latent Variables

Latent Variables	AVE
Occupational socialization of sport management graduates	0.713
Acculturation	0.669
Professional socialization	0.651
Organizational socialization	0.598
Improvement of universities' educational policies	0.638
Improvement of sport management graduates' skills	0.694
Human resource management in sport organizations	0.708

Discriminant validity, measured using the Fornell–Larcker matrix, is another criterion for examining the validity of the research instrument and the fit of the model. The results are reported in Table 4. As shown in this table, the square root of AVE for all first-order variables is greater than the correlations among them, which indicates the discriminant validity of the research instrument and the appropriate fit of the research model.

Table 4

Discriminant Validity of the Research Instrument and Model (Fornell–Larcker Matrix)

Variables	Occupational Socialization	Educational Policies	Graduates' Skills	Management of Sport Organizations
Occupational socialization	0.874			
Educational policies	0.685	0.883		
Graduates' skills	0.574	0.714	0.917	
Management of sport organizations	0.684	0.669	0.698	0.881

To examine the fit of the structural model using the PLS method, the R Square or R^2 coefficients, the Q^2 criterion, and the variance inflation factor (VIF) were used. R^2 is a criterion used to connect the measurement and structural sections of structural equation modeling, and it indicates the effect of the exogenous variable on the endogenous, or criterion, variable. Stone–Geisser's Q^2 is a criterion that specifies the predictive power of the model. According to Table 5, the R^2 values were calculated for the endogenous constructs of the study. The higher the R^2 values related to the endogenous constructs of the model, the better the fit of the model. Based on Table 5, the strong fit of the structural model is confirmed. According to Table 5, by examining the Q^2 values related to the endogenous constructs of the model ($Q^2 > 0$), it can be stated that the predictive relevance of the structural model of the study is confirmed.

Table 5

R^2 Coefficients of Endogenous Variables

Endogenous Variables	R^2	Q^2
Occupational socialization of sport management graduates	0.731	0.279

Next, Table 6 reports the results of the variance inflation factor (VIF). Based on the research results, all VIF values were lower than 5; therefore, the instrument used in this study is not affected by variance inflation, and the research model has appropriate fit.

Table 6*Convergent Validity of the Research Instrument*

Latent Variables	VIF
Occupational socialization of sport management graduates	1.134
Acculturation	1.435
Professional socialization	1.057
Organizational socialization	1.841
Improvement of universities' educational policies	1.163
Improvement of sport management graduates' skills	1.556
Human resource management in sport organizations	1.841

After examining the fit of the measurement section and the structural section of the model, the overall model fit was assessed using the GOF criterion. GOF is a goodness-of-fit index used as an index for the validity of the entire PLS model. This criterion is calculated using the following equation.

Considering that three values have been introduced for GOF, namely weak (0.01), moderate (0.25), and strong (0.36), obtaining a GOF value of 0.721 indicates the strong overall fit of the research model.

The data analysis algorithm in the PLS method indicates that, after examining the fit of the measurement models, the structural model, and the overall model, the research hypotheses can be examined and tested, leading to the research findings. Model fit based on t coefficients is such that these coefficients must be greater than 1.96 in order to confirm their significance at the 95% confidence level. The path coefficient values and t coefficients are presented in Figure 2. In addition, the results of the path values of the research model are presented in Table 7.

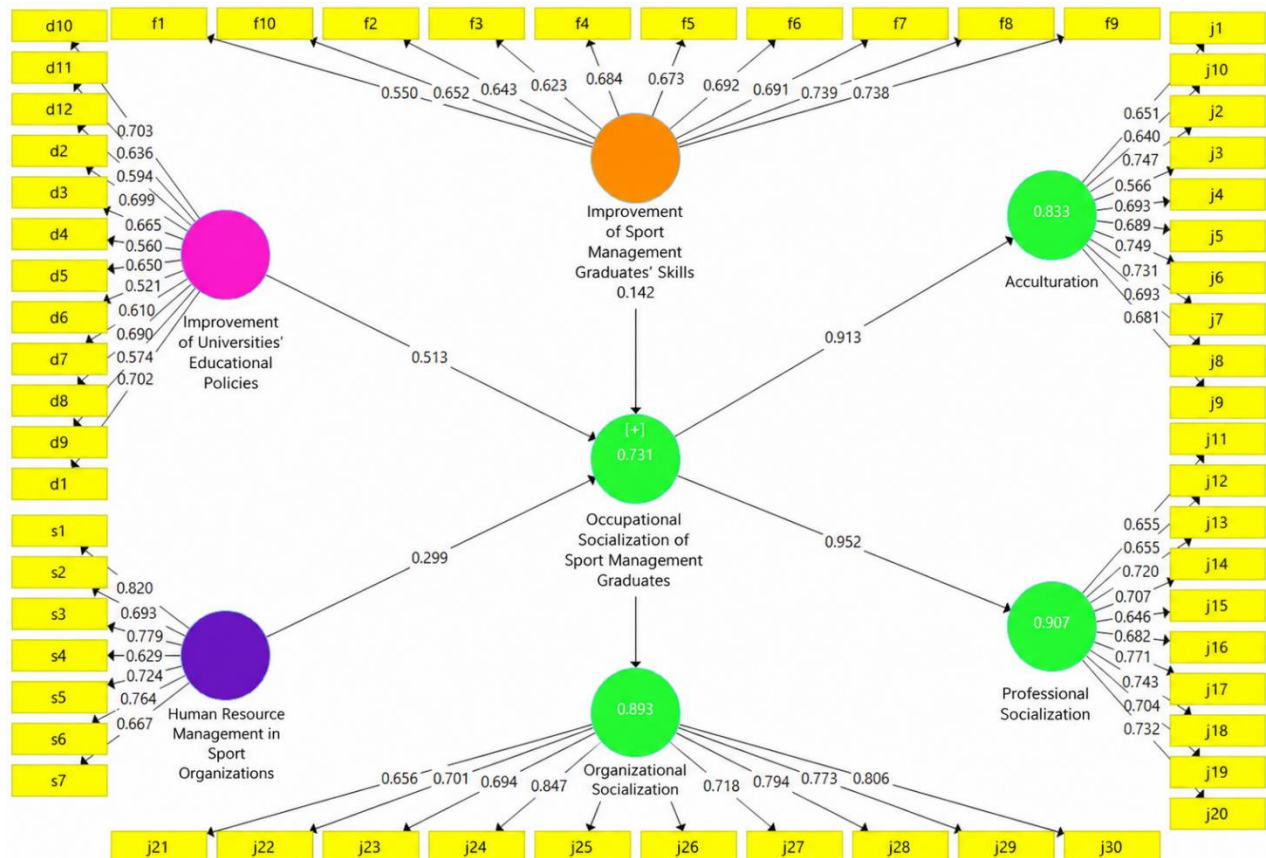
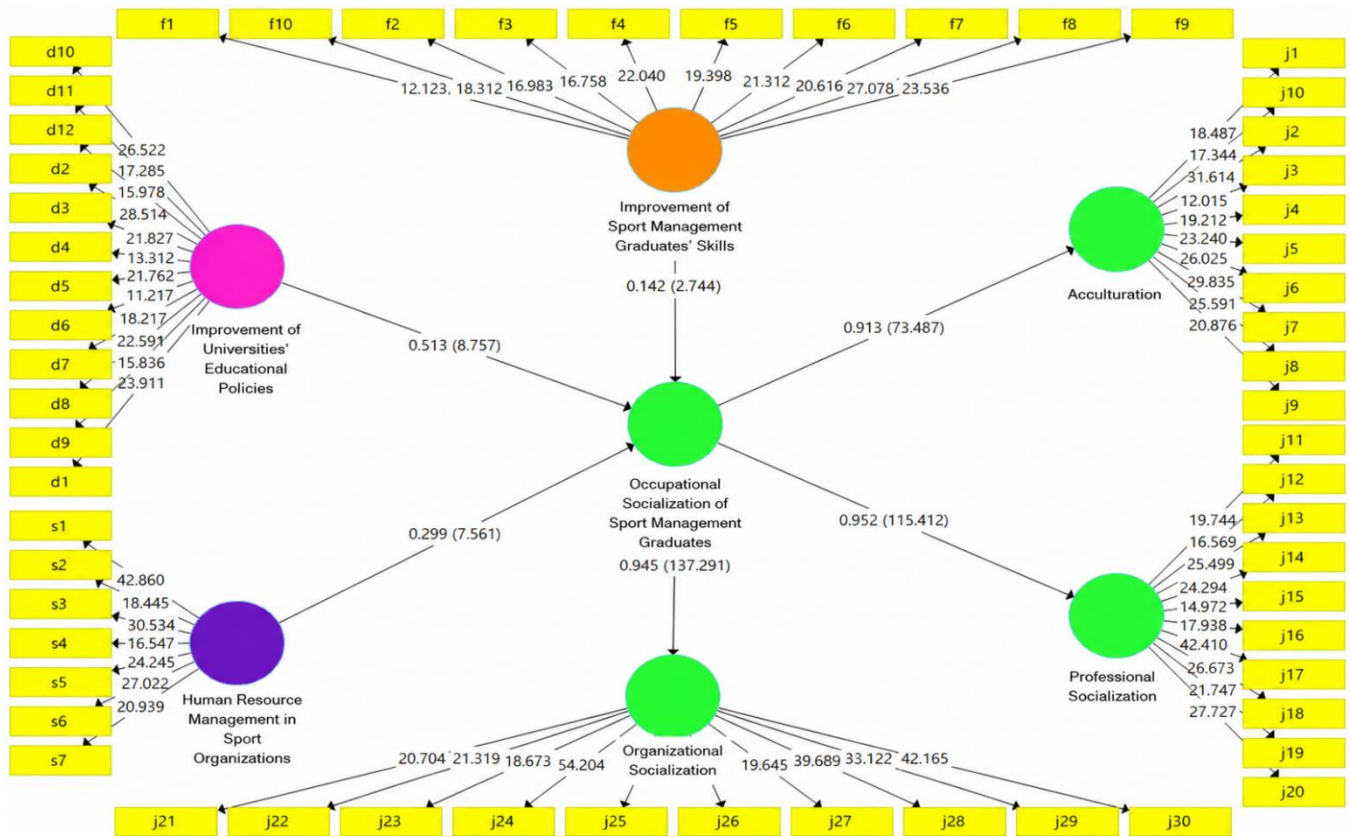
Figure 1*Factor Loading Values of the Items*

Figure 2*Path Coefficient Values and t Coefficients of the Model Paths***Table 7***Results of Partial Least Squares Analysis and Examination of Model Paths*

Model Paths	Path Coefficient (β)	t	P-Value	Result
Improvement of graduates' skills → Occupational socialization	0.142	2.744	0.002	Confirmed
Improvement of educational policies → Occupational socialization	0.513	8.757	0.001	Confirmed
Human resource management in sport organizations → Occupational socialization	0.299	7.561	0.001	Confirmed
Occupational socialization → Acculturation	0.913	73.487	0.001	Confirmed
Occupational socialization → Professional socialization	0.952	115.412	0.001	Confirmed
Occupational socialization → Organizational socialization	0.945	137.291	0.001	Confirmed

Based on Figures 2 and 3, as well as Table 7, it can be stated that the t statistic for all paths is greater than 1.96; therefore, all paths of the research model are confirmed. This section of the research results also showed that all three variables, namely improvement of universities' educational policies ($\beta = 0.513$; $t = 8.757$), improvement of sport management graduates' skills ($\beta = 0.142$; $t = 2.744$), and human resource management in sport organizations ($\beta = 0.299$; $t = 7.561$), have direct and significant relationships with the occupational socialization of sport management graduates in Iran.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to model the drivers of occupational socialization among graduates of sport management. The findings demonstrated that the proposed model had a strong and acceptable fit and that improvement of universities' educational policies, improvement of sport management graduates' skills, and human resource management in sport organizations had direct and significant relationships with occupational socialization among sport management graduates in

Iran. Furthermore, the results indicated that occupational socialization significantly explained the dimensions of acculturation, professional socialization, and organizational socialization. Overall, these findings confirm that occupational socialization is a multidimensional and dynamic process influenced simultaneously by educational structures, organizational systems, and individual competencies. The findings also suggest that successful occupational adaptation among sport management graduates cannot be understood solely through technical competence or organizational membership, but rather through a combination of institutional preparation, professional capability, and organizational support mechanisms.

One of the most important findings of the present study was the significant relationship between improvement of universities' educational policies and occupational socialization among sport management graduates. Among the predictor variables, educational policies demonstrated the strongest direct effect on occupational socialization. This finding highlights the central role of universities and higher education institutions in preparing graduates for professional and organizational life. Universities represent the first formal environment in which future sport managers encounter professional values, occupational expectations, communication norms, and leadership responsibilities. Consequently, educational systems that emphasize practical learning, professional interaction, field experiences, and skill-based training are more likely to facilitate graduates' integration into organizational environments. This finding is consistent with the theoretical perspectives proposed by Lawson regarding the role of educational experiences in occupational socialization processes [1, 3]. Lawson emphasized that occupational socialization begins long before individuals formally enter the workplace and is shaped through recruitment experiences, teacher education, and institutional learning environments.

The findings of the present study are also aligned with recent research in sport pedagogy and physical education. Suchon and Richards argued that educational systems capable of integrating social and emotional learning into professional training programs can strengthen professional identity formation and occupational adaptation [4]. Similarly, Brunsdon and Curtner-Smith reported that educational experiences significantly shape doctoral students' attitudes toward professional roles and future occupational practices [10]. Jowers et al. also demonstrated that occupational socialization experiences strongly influence the beliefs and actions of sport pedagogy doctoral students [9]. The consistency between these findings and the results of the present study suggests that educational environments function not only as academic institutions but also as socialization agents that transmit professional culture, organizational values, and behavioral expectations to students.

The significant influence of educational policies may also be explained through the mismatch that often exists between academic curricula and labor market expectations. Many sport management graduates possess theoretical knowledge but lack adequate exposure to organizational realities and professional interactions. When universities fail to provide opportunities for internships, field experiences, communication training, and practical management experiences, graduates may encounter difficulties in adapting to workplace demands. Therefore, revising educational policies toward experiential and competency-based learning appears essential for improving occupational socialization. Hafezy et al. similarly identified several barriers to effective socialization within academic environments and emphasized the importance of institutional support systems in facilitating professional adaptation [5]. Accordingly, universities should be considered strategic institutions in shaping occupational readiness and professional integration among sport management graduates.

Another major finding of the present study was the significant relationship between improvement of sport management graduates' skills and occupational socialization. Although the magnitude of this relationship was smaller than the effect of educational policies, it remained statistically significant and theoretically meaningful. This finding indicates that occupational

socialization is partly dependent on the individual competencies and adaptive capacities of graduates themselves. In contemporary organizations, occupational success requires more than disciplinary knowledge. Employees must possess communication abilities, emotional intelligence, teamwork competence, critical thinking, leadership capability, and professional resilience. Individuals with stronger interpersonal and professional skills are generally better able to understand organizational expectations, establish workplace relationships, and adapt to professional environments.

This finding is consistent with the results reported by Malekiha and JafariHarandi, who found that employability perceptions among university graduates are associated with psychological and professional characteristics such as career ambition and mentalization [11]. Similarly, Van Harten et al. argued that employability is influenced by multiple personal and organizational factors, including adaptive competencies and professional flexibility [6]. In addition, Harper et al. demonstrated that professional socialization experiences positively contribute to graduates' confidence and transition into full-time employment [12]. These findings collectively support the argument that occupational socialization is strongly related to graduates' preparedness for organizational interaction and professional engagement.

The relationship between graduates' skills and occupational socialization may also be interpreted within the context of increasing complexity in sport organizations. Sport organizations often involve dynamic communication patterns, teamwork structures, and multidimensional managerial responsibilities. Graduates who lack communication skills, conflict management abilities, or emotional adaptability may experience occupational stress and organizational maladjustment. Conversely, graduates with stronger adaptive skills are more likely to establish positive professional relationships and internalize organizational values. Hamidzadeh et al. similarly found that motivational strategies positively influence professional socialization among postgraduate students [8]. Furthermore, Askari reported that philosophical mentality and thinking styles are structurally related to socialization among sport managers [23]. These findings indicate that occupational socialization is influenced not only by structural conditions but also by cognitive, emotional, and motivational characteristics of individuals.

The present study also revealed a significant relationship between human resource management in sport organizations and occupational socialization. This finding underscores the importance of organizational systems and managerial practices in facilitating employee adaptation and integration. Human resource management practices such as orientation programs, mentoring, organizational support, professional development opportunities, performance evaluation systems, and communication processes can significantly influence employees' experiences during entry into organizational environments. Effective human resource management creates a supportive organizational climate that reduces uncertainty and strengthens organizational commitment among newcomers.

This finding is consistent with the results of previous organizational studies in sport settings. Mokhlesabadi et al. demonstrated that organizational socialization is positively associated with organizational citizenship behavior and employee performance in sport and youth departments [17]. Similarly, Ayoubi et al. reported that workplace humor, managerial support, and socialization processes contribute positively to employees' job embeddedness within sport organizations [16]. Norouzi and Roumiyani also found that organizational socialization is associated with information technology communication and social capital management in sport organizations [15]. These studies collectively indicate that organizational systems and managerial support mechanisms are central to successful occupational adaptation.

The significance of human resource management can also be interpreted through organizational behavior theories emphasizing social exchange and organizational support. Employees who perceive organizational fairness, managerial

support, and developmental opportunities are more likely to develop emotional attachment to their organizations and internalize professional values. Conversely, weak organizational communication and insufficient support may increase ambiguity, dissatisfaction, and occupational disengagement. Collins similarly emphasized that socialization processes help newcomers learn organizational expectations and become integrated into professional cultures [2]. Therefore, occupational socialization in sport organizations should not be viewed as an automatic process but rather as a structured organizational responsibility requiring strategic management.

Another important finding of the present study was the significant relationship between occupational socialization and its dimensions, including acculturation, professional socialization, and organizational socialization. Among these dimensions, professional socialization demonstrated the strongest association with occupational socialization. This finding suggests that occupational socialization is fundamentally connected with the development of professional identity and internalization of professional norms. Professional socialization refers to the process through which individuals adopt the values, ethical standards, behaviors, and expectations associated with a profession. In sport management, professional socialization enables graduates to perceive themselves as competent professionals and align their behaviors with occupational standards.

This finding is consistent with studies conducted in educational and sport contexts. Holland and Haegele demonstrated that first-year adapted physical education teachers experienced substantial professional identity development through occupational socialization processes [21]. Zhang also emphasized the importance of occupational socialization in shaping professional identities among pre-service physical education teachers [7]. Likewise, Merica et al. found that socialization experiences enhance educators' confidence and professional implementation capabilities [13]. These findings support the interpretation that occupational socialization functions as a mechanism through which individuals construct professional meaning and organizational belonging.

The significant relationship between occupational socialization and acculturation found in the present study also deserves attention. Acculturation reflects individuals' adaptation to organizational culture, communication norms, and behavioral expectations. In organizational contexts, newcomers must learn both formal regulations and informal social patterns. Hommey et al. reported that acculturation strategies moderate the relationship between newcomer adjustment and employee behavior [18]. The findings of the present study similarly indicate that successful occupational socialization requires effective cultural adaptation and acceptance of organizational values. In sport organizations, where teamwork and interpersonal communication are highly important, acculturation may facilitate stronger organizational integration and professional satisfaction.

The relationship between occupational socialization and organizational socialization further confirms the multidimensional nature of workplace adaptation. Organizational socialization involves learning organizational norms, responsibilities, procedures, and communication patterns. Employees who successfully experience organizational socialization are more likely to demonstrate organizational commitment, role clarity, and behavioral consistency. Ghasemzadeh Alishahi et al. found that organizational socialization positively influences responsibility and organizational commitment among employees [14]. Similarly, Purnomo et al. reported that organizational socialization and career development significantly influence employees' work-related intentions [22]. These findings suggest that occupational socialization enhances not only adaptation but also long-term organizational stability and career continuity.

The findings of the present study also contribute to the broader literature on socialization in sport and physical activity contexts. Studies have shown that socialization processes influence professional development, interpersonal interaction, and psychological adaptation across various sport-related settings. Bastik et al. demonstrated that sport participation positively contributes to socialization among individuals with physical disabilities [19]. Barnes and Curtner-Smith similarly highlighted the role of occupational experiences and professional pressures in shaping coaches' pedagogical responses and professional behaviors [20]. Although these studies focused on different populations, they collectively reinforce the importance of socialization as a fundamental mechanism in sport-related environments.

From a methodological perspective, the present study benefited from a researcher-made questionnaire developed based on qualitative findings and evaluated using psychometric principles. The acceptable reliability and validity indices of the instrument support the robustness of the measurement model. The importance of rigorous measurement procedures in social science and management research has been emphasized by Nunnally as well as by contemporary scale development researchers [24, 25]. Therefore, the methodological rigor of the present study strengthens confidence in the obtained findings and the proposed structural model.

Despite the valuable findings of the present study, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted only among sport management graduates in Iran, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or organizational contexts. Second, the cross-sectional design of the study restricted the ability to establish causal relationships among variables. Third, the use of self-report questionnaires may have increased the possibility of response bias and socially desirable responding. In addition, occupational socialization is a complex and dynamic process influenced by numerous contextual factors that were not examined in the present study, such as organizational climate, leadership style, economic conditions, and personality characteristics.

Future research should examine occupational socialization among graduates in different disciplines and organizational settings to provide comparative evidence regarding socialization processes across professions. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to investigate changes in occupational socialization over time and identify developmental patterns during professional careers. Furthermore, future studies could examine additional variables such as organizational culture, psychological capital, emotional intelligence, job stress, and leadership style as potential predictors or mediators of occupational socialization. Qualitative and mixed-method studies may also provide deeper insights into the lived experiences of graduates entering sport organizations.

From a practical perspective, the findings of the present study suggest that universities, policymakers, and sport organizations should adopt integrated strategies to strengthen occupational socialization among graduates. Universities should revise educational curricula to emphasize practical experiences, internships, communication skills, and professional development opportunities. Sport organizations should design effective orientation and mentoring programs to facilitate newcomers' adaptation and integration into organizational culture. Human resource managers should also create supportive organizational climates that encourage learning, professional interaction, and employee development. Strengthening collaboration between universities and sport organizations may further reduce the gap between academic preparation and labor market expectations and contribute to the development of competent and socially integrated sport management professionals.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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