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# The Nexus between Education and Tourism Employment: A Literature Perspective

Georgios Giotis \*

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**Abstract.** This paper explores the critical nexus between education and tourism employment, examining the theoretical perspectives and the outcomes of empirical research as well. It analyzes related literature to identify key challenges and opportunities, focusing on the disconnect between academic curricula and industry requirements, the prevalence of low-skilled, precarious jobs in the sector, and the need for stronger collaboration between educational institutions, the tourism industry, and policymakers. The paper proposes a multi-faceted approach to enhance alignment between education and employment, recommending that educational institutions modernize curricula with practical and industry-relevant approaches, the tourism industry actively participate in shaping tourism education, and policymakers implement policies that incentivize stronger partnerships and resource allocation for program modernization. By addressing these challenges and implementing the recommendations, stakeholders can collaboratively bridge the gap between education and tourism employment, ensuring a skilled and adaptable workforce that contributes to the long-term competitiveness and sustainability of the tourism sector.

**Keywords:** *Education, Tourism employment, Empirical Literature Review, Research Gaps, Policy recommendations.*

## 1. Introduction

The tourism industry, a dynamic and multifaceted sector, plays a significant role in employment creation and economic growth<sup>1</sup>. Its

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intricate nature encompassing diverse sub-sectors from hospitality and transportation to entertainment and cultural heritage necessitates a skilled workforce capable of adapting to evolving market demands and technological advancements. As industry continues to grow and transform, the relationship between tourism education and employment has become increasingly critical.

Effective education and training programs can enhance the employability and career prospects of individuals seeking employment in the tourism sector<sup>2</sup>. By equipping graduates with relevant knowledge, skills, and industry-recognized certifications, education can improve their chances of securing desirable positions and contribute to a more skilled and competitive workforce<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, specialized training programs can address specific skill gaps within the industry, leading to improved service quality, enhanced visitor experiences, and increased overall economic benefits<sup>4</sup>. However, the extent to which education translates into improved employment outcomes depends on various factors, including the quality and relevance of educational programs, the alignment of

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<sup>1</sup> C. Elgin, A. Y. Elveren, *Unpacking the economic impact of tourism: A multidimensional approach to sustainable development*, in *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 2024, 478, 143947. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2024.143947>; J. Stacey, *Supporting quality jobs in tourism*, in *OECD tourism papers*, OECD Publishing, Paris. <https://doi.org/10.1787/5js4rv0g7szr-en>.

<sup>2</sup> D. Airey, *Education for tourism: a perspective article*, in *Tourism Review*, 2020, vol. 75(1), 260-262. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2018.04.005>; K. R. Johnson, K. R. Bartlett, *The role of tourism in national human resource development: a Jamaican perspective*, in *Human Resource Development International*, vol. 16(2), 205-219, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2013.771867>; P. R. Fidgeon, *Tourism education and curriculum design: A time for consolidation and review?*, in *Tourism Management*, 2010, vol. 31(6), 699-723. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2010.05.019>.

<sup>3</sup> I. Booyens, *Education and skills in tourism: Implications for youth employment in South Africa*, in *Development Southern Africa*, 2020, Vol. 37(5), 825-839. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2020.1725447>; X. Y. Mei, *Gaps in tourism education and workforce needs: attracting and educating the right people*, in *Current Issues in Tourism*, 2018, Vol. 22(12), 1400-1404. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2017.1402870>; J. Stacey, *Supporting quality jobs in tourism*, op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> D. J. L. Choy, C. Y. Gee, *Employment opportunities in tourism: The implications of change in the visitor industry*, in *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 19(3), 57-64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001088047801900316>; E. DeGoias, L. Cruz, E. Freilich, *Meeting the need: The hospitality training program of the Palm beaches*, in *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, Vol. 50(3), 347-351. <https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-191017>; X. Y. Mei, *Gaps in tourism education*, op. cit.

curricula with industry needs, and the broader economic and labor market conditions<sup>5</sup>.

There is also the issue of transformation of tourism education, since digital technologies have penetrated into the tourism and hospitality industry. The recent covid pandemic disrupted traditional education models, accelerating the shift to digital learning<sup>6</sup>. Remote internships, virtual tourism labs, and hybrid education models emerged as alternatives<sup>7</sup>. Within this framework, a well-prepared workforce, equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills, is essential for the industry's sustained success<sup>8</sup>. Yet, the effectiveness of tourism education programs in preparing graduates for the demands of the industry has been a subject of ongoing debate and research<sup>9</sup>.

This paper examines the nexus between tourism education and employment by synthesizing theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence to identify key challenges and opportunities in this relationship.

It contributes to the literature by offering an integrated analysis of existing research and by highlighting the conditions under which education can more effectively support labour market outcomes in the tourism sector.

The layout of the paper is as follows. First it presents the theoretical perspectives on education and employment in the tourism industry and then explores the conceptual framework of the relationship between them. Thereafter it shows the results of empirical studies on this issue and discusses the key themes that are generated. Building upon the literature,

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<sup>5</sup> G. Psacharopoulos, H. A. Patrinos, *Returns to investment in education: a decennial review of the global literature*, in *Education Economics*, 2018, Vol. 26(5), 445-458. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09645292.2018.1484426>; L. Woessmann, *The economic case for education*, in *Education Economics*, 2015, Vol. 24(1), 3-32.

<sup>6</sup> H. Wang, T. Zhang, X. Wang, J. Zheng, *Does the digital economy enhance tourism employment? An empirical study of tourism industry in China*, in *Cogent Business & Management*, 2024, Vol. 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2396526>.

<sup>7</sup> S. Gössling, D. Scott, C. M. Hall, *Pandemics, tourism and global change: a rapid assessment of COVID-19*, in *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 2020, Vol. 29(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1758708>.

<sup>8</sup> P. J. Cárdenas-García, J. I. Pulido-Fernández, *Tourism as an economic development tool. Key factors*, in *Current Issues in Tourism*, 2017, Vol. 22(17), 2082-2108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2017.1420042>.

<sup>9</sup> C. Cooper, R. Shepherd, *The relationship between tourism education and the tourism industry: Implications for tourism education*, in *Tourism Recreation Research*, 1997, Vol. 22(1), 34-47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.1997.11014784>; M. Marais, E. du Plessis, M. Saayman, *A review on critical success factors in tourism*, in *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, Vol. 31, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2016.09.002>; X. Y. Mei, *Gaps in tourism education*, op. cit.; W. Wattanacharoensil, *Tourism curriculum in a global perspective: Past, present, and future*, in *International Education Studies*, 2013, Vol. 7(1), 9-20.

it refers to the challenges in aligning education with tourism employment followed by the research gap analysis and the policy recommendations to draw meaningful implications for both academic institutions and industry stakeholders. In the end, the paper concludes by presenting the key findings and implications of the study.

## 2. Theoretical Perspectives on Education and Tourism Employment

The existing literature has explored the relationship between education and employment in tourism and hospitality sectors through various theoretical lenses, each offering valuable insights into the complexities of this dynamic interplay<sup>10</sup>. Understanding these theoretical underpinnings is crucial for developing effective strategies to align education with industry needs and enhance the employability of tourism graduates.

First, there is the Vocational Education Theory. This perspective emphasizes the practical relevance of education to the industry, advocating for a balance between theoretical knowledge and hands-on training<sup>11</sup>. Tourism education, like other vocationally oriented fields, should promote individual development, advance knowledge and skills, and ensure practical relevance to the industry<sup>12</sup>. This approach aims to

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<sup>10</sup> D. Airey, *Education for tourism*, op. cit.; J. Qian, R. Law, X. Li, *Education research in tourism: A longitudinal study of 77 articles between 2008 and 2017*, in *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*, 2019, Vol. 24, 120-129. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhlste.2019.02.003>; C.H.C. Hsu, H. Xiao, N. Chen, *Hospitality and tourism education research from 2005 to 2014: "Is the past a prologue to the future?"*, in *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 2017, Vol. 29(1), 141-160. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-09-2015-0450>.

<sup>11</sup> L. Chen, *Practice teaching reform of tourism management major in higher vocational education under the background of new industry form*, in *Journal of Physics Conference Series*, 2020, Vol. 1549(4), 42100.; E. Üngüren, Y. Y. Kaçmaz, A. Kahveci, *Accommodation business management's attitudes towards employees received vocational tourism education*, in *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2015, Vol. 174, 2767-2776. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.01.966>; F. Zagonari, *Balancing tourism education and training*, in *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 2009, Vol. 28(1), 2-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2008.03.006>; J. Churchward, M. Riley, *Tourism occupations and education: an exploration study*, in *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 2002, Vol. 4, 77-86. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.361>; G. Busby, *Vocationalism in higher level tourism courses: The British perspective*, in *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 2001, Vol. 25(1), 29-43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03098770020030489>.

<sup>12</sup> B. Kırklar-Can, M. Ertaş, M. Kozak, *Understanding the philosophy of tourism education: A perspective study in Turkey*, in *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 2021, Vol. 23(6), 1112-1125. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2472>.

produce graduates who are immediately employable and equipped to meet the demands of the workplace<sup>13</sup>.

Second is the Human Capital Theory, which posits that investments in education enhance individuals' productivity and employability<sup>14</sup>. In the context of tourism, education improves employees' technical expertise, interpersonal skills, and cultural competence, enabling them to deliver high-quality services<sup>15</sup>. However, human capital theory has been criticized for its narrow focus on economic outcomes and its potential to exacerbate inequalities<sup>16</sup>.

Third, the Stakeholder Theory highlights the importance of collaboration between various stakeholders, including academic institutions, industry partners, and government agencies, to align tourism education with industry needs<sup>17</sup>. This theory underscores the need for tourism programs to consider wider stakeholder requirements, including employer support and industry relevance<sup>18</sup>. It also recognizes the diverse interests and perspectives of different actors and emphasizes the importance of communication, coordination, and mutual understanding in shaping curriculum and learning outcomes<sup>19</sup>.

Fourth, the Experience Economy approach suggests that the rise of the experience economy has significantly influenced tourism education,

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<sup>13</sup> C. Cooper, *Curriculum planning for tourism education: From theory to practice*, in *Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism*, 2002, Vol. 2(1), 19-39. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J172v02n01\\_02](https://doi.org/10.1300/J172v02n01_02).

<sup>14</sup> R. Blundell, L. Dearden, C. Meghir, B. Sianesi, *Human capital investment: The returns from education and training to the individual, the firm and the economy*, in *Fiscal Studies*, 1999, Vol. 20, 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5890.1999.tb00001.x>; E. Tan, *Human capital theory: A holistic criticism*, in *Review of Educational Research*, 2014, Vol. 84(3), 411-445. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654314532696>.

<sup>15</sup> G. S. Becker, *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education*, 3rd Edition, University of Chicago press, 1993.

<sup>16</sup> S. Marginson, *Limitations of human capital theory\**, in *Studies in Higher Education*, 2017, Vol. 44(2), 287-301. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2017.1359823>.

<sup>17</sup> R. E. Freeman, S. D. Dmytriyev, R. A. Phillips, *Stakeholder theory and the resource-based view of the firm*, in *Journal of Management*, 2021, Vol. 47(7), 1757-1770. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206321993576>.

<sup>18</sup> I. Slivar, *Stakeholders in a tourist destination - Matrix of possible relationships towards sustainability*, in *Open Journal for Research in Economics*, 2018, Vol. 1(1), 1-10.

<sup>19</sup> R. E. Freeman, J. S. Harrison, A. C. Wicks, B. L. Parmar, S. de Colle, *Stakeholder Theory: The State of the Art*, 2010, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815768>; I. Erina, I. Ozolina-Ozola, E. Gaile-Sarkane, *The importance of stakeholders in human resource training projects*, in *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2015, Vol. 213, 794-800. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.11.477>.

reflecting the industry's shift towards providing immersive and personalized experiences for tourists<sup>20</sup>. This perspective acknowledges the impact of the "experience economy" on the demand for skilled personnel capable of delivering high-quality tourist experiences<sup>21</sup>. This paradigm shift has led to a greater emphasis on developing soft skills, such as communication, problem-solving, and creativity, alongside technical competencies in the tourism curriculum and should be provided in a timely manner, constructive, and aimed at reinforcing students' learning towards soft skill acquisition<sup>22</sup>.

There are also some other theoretical frameworks, such as a) signaling theory<sup>23</sup>, which suggests that educational credentials signal an individual's ability and potential to employers, and b) competency-based approaches, which focus on developing specific skills and knowledge required for job performance, which explore the employable skills perceived as important by hotel supervisors, highlighting the need for competency-based education<sup>24</sup>.

These theoretical perspectives provide a rich foundation for understanding the relationship between education-employment nexus in tourism and the various factors that influence its effectiveness. By integrating these perspectives, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in aligning education with industry needs and preparing future tourism professionals for success.

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<sup>20</sup> B. J. Pine, J. H. Gilmore, *The experience economy: past, present and future*. Chapters, in J. Sundbo, F. Sørensen (ed.), *Handbook on the Experience Economy*, chapter 2, 2002, Edward Elgar Publishing., pages 21-44.

<sup>21</sup> L. Mossberg, *A marketing approach to the tourist experience*, in *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 2007, Vol. 7(1), 59-74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15022250701231915>; N. Scott, E. Laws, P. Boksberger (Eds.), *Marketing of Tourism Experiences* (1st ed.), Routledge, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> D. Alt, L. Naamati-Schneider, D. J. N. Weishut, *Competency-based learning and formative assessment feedback as precursors of college students' soft skills acquisition*, in *Studies in Higher Education*, 2023, Vol. 48(12), 1901-1917. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2023.2217203>.

<sup>23</sup> M. Spence, *Signaling in retrospect and the informational structure of markets*, in *American Economic Review*, 2002, Vol. 92(3), 434-459; M. Spence, *Job market signaling*, in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 1973, Vol. 87(3), 355-374. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1882010>.

<sup>24</sup> J. Brownell, B. G. Chung, *The management development program: A competency-based model for preparing hospitality leaders*, in *Journal of Management Education*, 2001, Vol. 25(2), 124-145. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105256290102500203>; B. Škrinjarčić, *Competence-based approaches in organizational and individual context*, in *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 2022, Vol. 9(28). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01047-1>.

**2.1. Theoretical Contribution and Advancement**

Building on the reviewed literature, this study advances the existing body of research in three key ways. First, it integrates human capital theory, stakeholder theory, and the experience economy into a unified analytical framework, highlighting how education influences tourism employment not only through skill accumulation but also through institutional coordination and evolving service expectations.

Second, the paper moves beyond a static view of education–employment relationships by conceptualizing skill development as a mediating mechanism shaped by both supply-side (education systems) and demand-side (industry transformation, digitalization) dynamics.

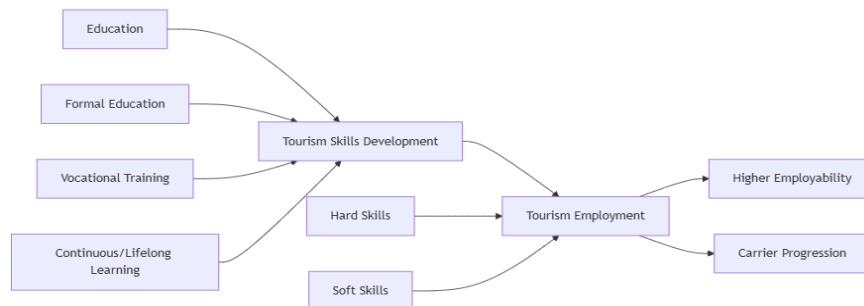
Third, it introduces a structured research gap matrix that links theoretical limitations with empirical and policy-oriented research agendas, thereby offering a more systematic foundation for future research.

In this sense, the paper contributes not only as a literature synthesis but also as a step towards a more integrated and multi-dimensional understanding of the education–employment nexus in tourism.

**3. Conceptual Framework**

The above-mentioned theoretical perspectives provide a rich foundation for understanding the complex relationship between education and tourism employment, and the various factors that influence the effectiveness of this relationship. To synthesize these theoretical insights, a conceptual framework is proposed in this section to illustrate the key elements and their interrelationships (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1. The Nexus Between Education and Employment in Tourism.**



The conceptual framework visually represents how education influences tourism employment through an interconnected process. Initially, education works as a starting point, since it serves as the foundation for preparing individuals for tourism-related jobs. It includes formal education (e.g., university degrees in tourism and hospitality), vocational training, and continuous or lifelong learning. The second dimension is the skill development which operates as a mediating factor. More specifically, education enhances various hard skills (e.g., customer service, management, digital literacy) and soft skills (e.g., communication, cultural competence).

Within this framework, well-structured curricula and training programs ensure that graduates meet industry demands. Thereafter, the development of specialized tourism skills, such as sustainable tourism practices, multilingual communication, and crisis management, makes individuals more employable<sup>25</sup>. With respect to the third dimension, tourism employment is the outcome, as skill development directly leads to better employment opportunities in the tourism sector. Well-educated individuals have higher employability in various tourism-related fields, including hospitality, event management, travel agencies, and sustainable tourism initiatives<sup>26</sup>. Moreover, higher education and vocational training improve career progression, lead to better wages, job security, and leadership roles<sup>27</sup>.

This conceptual framework demonstrates that education is the driving force behind skill development, which in turn enhances employment prospects in tourism. The arrows indicate the causal link between education, skill development, and employment. Without proper education,

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<sup>25</sup> I. Booyens, *Education and skills in tourism*, op. cit.; L. Varra, M. Scioni, L. Grassini, A. Giusti, *Job requirements in the hospitality industry: Technical or general skills? The dilemma for academic education*, in *European Journal of Tourism Research*, 2021, Vol. 29, 2915. <https://doi.org/10.54055/ejtr.v29i.2442>; J. C. Kimeto, *Tertiary tourism graduate employees and tourism employers' perceptions on tourism skills and competencies relevant for providing quality tourism services in Kenya*, in *Tourism Critiques*, 2021, Vol. 2(1), 20-37. <https://doi.org/10.1108/TRC-07-2020-0013>; X. Y. Mei, *Gaps in tourism education*, op. cit..

<sup>26</sup> S. Adeyinka-Ojo, *A strategic framework for analysing employability skills deficits in rural hospitality and tourism destinations*, in *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 2018, Vol. 27, 47-54; J. C. Kimeto, *Tertiary tourism graduate employees*, op. cit.; S. Singh, *Developing human resources for the tourism industry with reference to India*, in *Tourism Management*, 1997, Vol. 18(5), 299-306. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177\(97\)00018-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(97)00018-6).

<sup>27</sup> Z. Korsi, D. Z. Hasani, A. Korsi, *Employee skills, a very important factor in tourism growth*, in *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 2014, Vol 3(2), 397; R. M. Thetsane, M. C. Mokhethi, M. J. Malunga, T. Makatjane, *Lesotho students career perceptions in tourism and hospitality industry*, in *Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Management*, 2020, Vol. 8(1), 10.15640.

there may be skill mismatches, leading to lower employability and workforce inefficiencies in the tourism industry. This implies that policymakers should invest in tourism education and align curricula with industry needs, and from the perspective of employers, they should collaborate with educational institutions to create internships, apprenticeships, and training programs<sup>28</sup>.

To further investigate the empirical evidence supporting this framework and explore the specific factors influencing the education-employment nexus in tourism, the following section presents a detailed methodology and analysis of relevant research findings

### 3.1. Empirical Research on the Education and Tourism Employment Relationship

To investigate the relationship between education and tourism employment, a systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted aiming to synthesize the empirical evidence on this issue. This study follows a five-step process that has been used in reviewing tourism and hospitality research, in accordance with recent SLRs in the literature<sup>29</sup>. These steps include (1) defining the research questions and objectives for a review; (2) determining keywords, database, and inclusion and exclusion selection criteria; (3) searching database and screening initial results; (4) extracting and evaluating the quality of studies; and (5) synthesizing, interpreting, and presenting findings.

The papers which constitute the sample of empirical studies were searched from RePEc. Although RePEc was selected as the primary database due to its strong coverage of economics, labour, and tourism-related research, it is acknowledged that relying on a single database may limit the comprehensiveness of the review. The searching was applied

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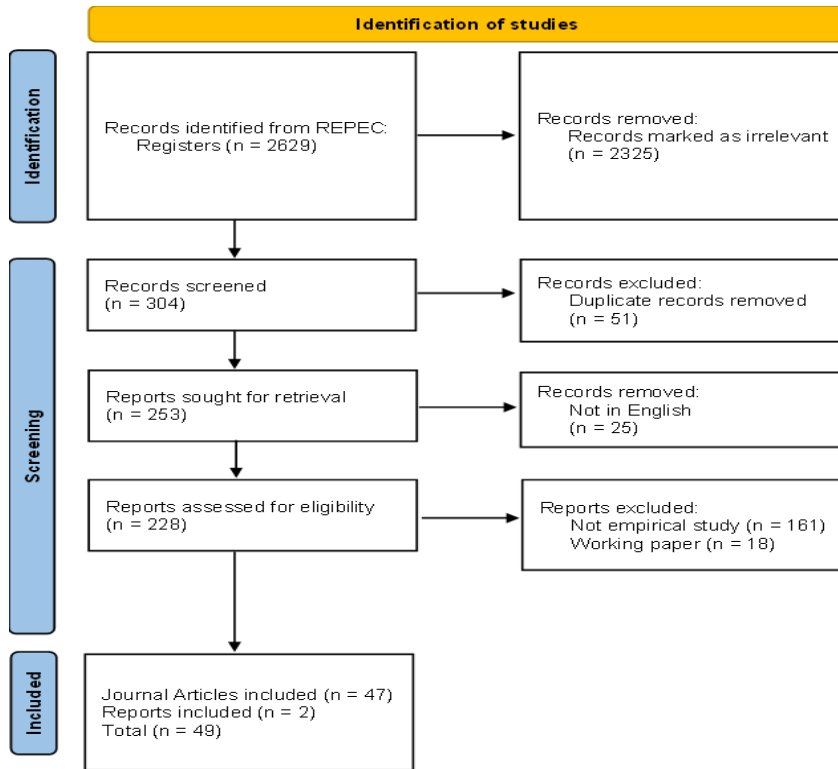
<sup>28</sup> J. Wang, H. Ayres, J. Huyton, *Job ready graduates: A tourism industry perspective*, in *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 2009, Vol. 16(1), 62-72. <https://doi.org/10.1375/jhtm.16.1.62>.

<sup>29</sup> G. Hoang, M. Yang, T. T. Luu, *Ethical leadership in tourism and hospitality management: A systematic literature review and research agenda*, in *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 2023, Vol. 114, 103563. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2023.103563>; G. Hoang, E. Wilson-Evered, L. Lockstone-Binney, T.T. Luu, *Empowering leadership in hospitality and tourism management: A systematic literature review*, in *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 2021, Vol. 33(12), 4182-4214. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-03-2021-0323>; T.H. Le, C. Arcodia, M.A. Novais, A. Kralj, *What we know and do not know about authenticity in dining experiences: A systematic literature review*, in *Tourism Management*, 2019, Vol. 74, 258-275. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2019.02.012>.

during 1-15 January 2025 and included all studies that had been published until 2024. The searches included the words in “Whole record” field, “education AND tourism” which generated 2629 studies. By reading the abstract of these studies, it was found that only 304 studies investigated the issue of the impact of educational measures on employment in tourism industry. After removing duplicates, there were 253 papers remaining. By downloading the full-text articles and reviewing them to evaluate eligibility, it was found that 25 of them were written in Spanish, French, German or Russian and were excluded from the sample. Based on the additional criteria that should be an empirical and not a theoretical study on the effect of education on employment aspects, the final sample of the analysis was constituted of 67 studies.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: (i) empirical studies examining the relationship between education and employment in tourism or hospitality; (ii) studies published in peer-reviewed journals or reports by international organizations; (iii) studies providing measurable employment-related outcomes (e.g., employability, job quality, labour mobility). The exclusion criteria included: (i) purely theoretical papers; (ii) studies not directly addressing tourism employment; (iii) non-English publications; (iv) duplicate records. These were journal articles, working papers and reports. To use a more reliable sample, only journal articles and two reports conducted by OECD and UNWTO & ILO were included to provide more accurate findings. In the end, the final sample included 49 studies, which applied a quantitative or qualitative method to generate empirical results on the relationship (See Figure 2). To enhance transparency and replicability, the search strategy, keywords, screening process, and final sample selection are explicitly documented and illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Identification of Empirical Studies on the Education and Tourism Employment Relationship



A limitation of the study is the reliance on a single primary database, which may have excluded relevant studies indexed elsewhere (e.g., Scopus or Web of Science). Future research could extend the database coverage to improve robustness.

Then, I used the content analysis approach recommended by Gardner *et al.*<sup>30</sup> (2011) to analyze the empirical findings from 49 studies in our sample. To do this, I first coded the article's basic information, i.e. the author(s) and the year of publication, the publication, and the study contexts (data, sample or group related). Next, I coded the methodology applied, the educational variable, the employment variable, the underlying

<sup>30</sup> W.L. Gardner, C.C. Coglisier, K.M. Davis, M.P. Dickens, *Authentic leadership: A review of the literature and research agenda*, in *Leadership Quarterly*, 2011, Vol. 22(6), 1120-1145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2011.09.007>.

framework and the findings of each study. Table 1 provides a table summarizing the results of the coding process.

**Table 1. Empirical Studies on the Relationship between Education and Employment in Tourism and Hospitality Sectors (Alphabetical order)**

Authors (Year)	Country/Context	Data/Sample	Method	Education Variable	Employment Outcome	Key Finding
Al Saba <i>et al.</i> (2023)	84 countries	1,848 observations (2000-2021)	Regression	Training	Tourism employment	Positive relationship
Arcodia & Dickson (2009)	7 countries	79 students	Survey	Experiential learning	Employability	Moderate effect
Barron & Anastasiadou (2009)	Scotland	150 students	Survey	Study-related education	Student employment	High participation
Booyens (2020)	South Africa	Mixed stakeholders	Mixed methods	Skills training	Job quality	Precarious jobs persist
Bordean & Sonea (2018)	Romania	114 students	Regression	Higher education	Career intentions	Positive attitudes
Bouchon <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Malaysia	60 students + stakeholders	Interview	Education expectations	Employability	Need for integration
Budrfa & Telhado-Pereira (2009)	Portugal	2,057 individuals	Regression	Training	Employment status	Positive effect
Buneta <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Croatia	National data	Trend analysis	Education quality	Employment structure	Skills shortage
Chi & Gursoy (2009)	USA	102 recruiters	Survey	Education factors	Career success	Internships critical
Choden & Pholphirol (2024)	Bhutan	1,320 employees	Logit	Education level	Employment stability	Negative shocks
Del Chiappa & Abbate (2016)	Italy	1,500 residents	Survey	Education level	Job opportunities	Positive effect
Duyen & Anh (2022)	Vietnam	193 workers	Regression	Education & training	Work decisions	No significant effect
Eminov & Aliyeva (2017)	Azerbaijan	Employees & students	Survey	Education-industry link	Employability	Collaboration improves outcomes
European Commission (2016)	EU	Labour Force data	Statistics	Education level	Employment structure	Workforce less educated
Grobelna & Skrzyszewska (2019)	Poland	171 students	Survey	Seasonality perception	Career aspirations	Mixed perceptions
Grobelna & Wyszowska-Wróbel (2021)	Poland	110 students	SEM	Cultural engagement	Career aspirations	Positive effect
Homg <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Taiwan	122 students	Experiment	Educational intervention	Entrepreneurship	Improves skills
Jensen (2004)	Denmark	National data	Statistics	Education levels	Employment distribution	General education dominant
Kesar <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Croatia	104 teachers	Survey	Vocational education	Employment practices	Regulation needed
Lazzeretti & Capone (2009)	Italy	Census data	Regression	Higher education	Employment growth	Positive relationship
Lejsek (2011)	Czech Republic	National data	Statistics	Education levels	Sector employment	Variation across sectors
Marchante <i>et al.</i> (2007)	Spain	3,314 employees	Logit	Education mismatch	Labour mobility	No effect
Masadeh <i>et al.</i>	Jordan	24 workers	Interviews	University	Gender	Supports

(2019)				education	employment	female inclusion
Mazzola <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Europe	Panel data	Regression	Higher education	Employment levels	Positive effect
Mei (2017)	Norway	Stakeholders	Qualitative	Industry collaboration	Workforce development	Stronger links needed
Melián-González & Bulchand-Gidumal (2024)	Europe	Survey data	Regression	Education level	Job quality	Positive relationship
Mkini <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Tanzania	120 firms	SEM	Parental education	Entrepreneurship	Positive effect
Montañés-Del-Río & Medina-Garrido (2020)	Global	699 entrepreneurs	Logit	Education level	Innovation	Positive relationship
Mungai <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Kenya	Students & faculty	SEM	Education choice	Employment prospects	Employment drives choice
Obadić & Pehar (2016)	Mediterranean	Secondary data	Statistics	Education level	Employment levels	Tourism drives jobs
Papadopoulos & Papanikos (2005)	Greece	Survey	Probit	Education years	Labour participation	No effect
Papathanassis (2021)	Germany	167 students	SEM	Study satisfaction	Career choice	Strong effect
Pérez-Morote <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Spain	Survey	Factor analysis	Education level	Policy views	Gender differences
Raybould & Wilkins (2005)	Australia	Managers & students	Survey	Skills expectations	Employability	Soft skills critical
Ribeiro <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Brazil	Labour data	Spatial	Higher education	Employment growth	Positive relationship
Rotar (2023)	Europe	Panel data	Regression	Tertiary education	Employment levels	Strong positive
Simantiraki & Dimou (2016)	Greece	32 managers	Survey	Education level	Workforce skills	Soft skills lacking
Škrabić <i>et al.</i> (2021)	EU	Panel data	Regression	Education level	Employment levels	Positive effect
Sorn & Terrell (2000)	Czech Republic	Labour data	Logit	Education level	Employment stability	Higher stability
Stacey (2015)	OECD	OECD data	Statistics	Education levels	Employment structure	Low tertiary share
Szivas & Riley (1999)	Hungary	Survey data	Factor analysis	Education level	Labour mobility	Secondary dominant
Togaymurodov <i>et al.</i> (2023)	Uzbekistan	110 farmers	Logit	Education level	Agritourism entry	Positive effect
Tsai <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Taiwan	588 students	SEM	Student traits	Employability	Positive effect
Vaduva <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Romania	170 managers	Regression	University education	Hiring decisions	Degree valued
Varra <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Italy	University data	Regression	Degree characteristics	Job placement	Curriculum alignment needed
Wang <i>et al.</i> (2024)	China	993 firms	Regression	Education structure	Firm employment	Favors highly educated
UNWTO & ILO (2014)	Spain & UK	Labour surveys	Statistics	Education levels	Employment structure	Mixed distribution
Zhong <i>et al.</i> (2022)	China	840 students	PLS	Learning outcomes	Employment	Positive effect
Zhou <i>et al.</i> (2022)	China	369 interns	SEM	Internship experience	Career intention	Support matters

Beyond the descriptive overview presented in Table 1, several important analytical patterns emerge from the empirical literature. First, a generally

positive association between education and tourism employment is identified across most studies; however, this relationship is often conditional on the type, quality, and relevance of education. In particular, vocational training and work-integrated learning appear to have stronger and more immediate effects on employability compared to purely academic education.

Second, a clear distinction emerges between employment quantity and employment quality. While higher levels of education are frequently associated with increased employment opportunities, several studies highlight that tourism jobs remain characterized by precarious conditions, low wages, and limited career progression, suggesting that education alone is not sufficient to guarantee improved job quality.

Third, the literature consistently identifies a structural skills mismatch between educational outcomes and industry requirements, particularly in relation to soft skills, practical experience, and digital competencies. This mismatch reflects both supply-side limitations of education systems and demand-side dynamics within the tourism industry.

Finally, a smaller but significant group of studies indicates that the impact of education on employment outcomes is mediated by broader institutional and economic factors, including labour market structures, firm behaviour, and regional characteristics. These findings suggest that the education–employment nexus in tourism is multidimensional and cannot be understood in isolation from wider structural conditions.

#### 4. Key Themes in Empirical Literature

Several key themes emerge from the empirical studies of Table 1 on the nexus between education and tourism employment, which are presented below.

In addition to academic studies, grey literature from international institutions provides valuable insights into the education–employment nexus in tourism. The European Commission<sup>31</sup> highlights structural imbalances in tourism labour markets, including a high concentration of low-skilled employment and significant differences across subsectors.

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<sup>31</sup> European Commission: Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs and Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services, *Mapping and performance check of the supply side of tourism education and training – Final report*, Publications Office, 2016, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2873/129991>.

Similarly, the OECD<sup>32</sup> (2021) emphasizes the impact of digitalisation on tourism jobs, stressing the need for continuous upskilling and workforce adaptation. More recent evidence from the OECD<sup>33</sup> further underlines persistent skills shortages and the importance of coordinated policy responses to improve workforce resilience in tourism. In parallel, CEDEFOP<sup>34</sup> documents skills mismatches across European labour markets and highlights the growing importance of vocational education and lifelong learning systems.

Taken together, these institutional studies reinforce and extend the findings of the academic literature, particularly regarding skills gaps, the need for stronger alignment between education systems and labour market demands, and the importance of adapting to ongoing digital and structural transformations in the tourism sector.

*Skills Gap and Mismatch:* Several studies have identified a significant skills gap and mismatch between the skills acquired through tourism education and the skills demanded by the industry<sup>35</sup>. Tourism employers often find that graduates lack the necessary practical skills, industry knowledge, and soft skills required for effective performance in the workplace<sup>36</sup>.

*Experiential and Contextual Learning:* The literature emphasizes the importance of incorporating more experiential and contextual learning approaches in tourism education, such as internships, apprenticeships, and industry-based projects<sup>37</sup>. These types of learning experiences help

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<sup>32</sup> OECD, *Preparing the tourism workforce for the digital future*, OECD Tourism Papers, No. 2021/02, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9258d999-en>.

<sup>33</sup> OECD, *OECD Tourism Trends and Policies 2024*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1787/80885d8b-en>.

<sup>34</sup> Cedefop, *Skills developments and trends in the tourism sector. Skills intelligence*, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> I. Booyens, *Education and skills in tourism*, op. cit.; O. Bordean, A. Sonea, *Student satisfaction and perceived skills: any link to employability?*, in *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Issues*, 2018, Vol. 6(1), 356-370; D. P. Stergiou, D. Airey, *Chapter 1 Tourism education and industry expectations in Greece: (re)minding the gap*, in *Handbook of Teaching and Learning in Tourism*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781784714802.00008>; X. Y. Mei, *Gaps in tourism education*, op. cit.; European Commission: Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs and Centre for Strategy and Evaluation Services, *Mapping and performance*, op. cit.; A. J. Marchante, B. Ortega, R. Pagán, *An analysis of educational mismatch and labor mobility in the hospitality industry*, in *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 2007, Vol. 31(3), 299-320. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1096348007299920>.

<sup>36</sup> L. Varra, M. Scioni, L. Grassini, A. Giusti, *Job requirements*, op. cit.; C. Kimeto, *Tertiary tourism graduate employees*, op. cit.; J. Wang, H. Ayres, J. Huyton, *Job ready graduates*, op. cit.; C. Cooper, R. Shepherd, *The relationship between tourism education*, op. cit.

<sup>37</sup> L. Zhong, X. Li, S. Sun, R. Law, X. Qi, Y. Dong, *Influencing factors of students' learning gains in tourism education: An empirical study on 28 tourism colleges in China*, in *Sustainability*,

students develop the necessary technical and soft skills for the tourism industry<sup>38</sup>.

*Collaboration between Academia and Industry:* Researchers highlight the need for stronger collaboration between educational institutions and tourism industry stakeholders to ensure that curriculum design, course content, and teaching methodologies are aligned with the evolving needs of the sector<sup>39</sup>. Such collaboration can take the form of advisory boards, joint research projects, and co-designed training programs<sup>40</sup>.

*Lifelong Learning and Continuous Professional Development:* The dynamic nature of the tourism industry requires professionals to engage in lifelong learning and continuous professional development to stay relevant and competitive<sup>41</sup>. Tourism education should, therefore, instill a culture of lifelong learning and provide opportunities for upskilling and reskilling.

*Entrepreneurship and Innovation:* Tourism education should foster entrepreneurial mindsets and skills to enable graduates to create new tourism products, services, and business models that cater to changing consumer demands and market trends<sup>42</sup>.

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2022, Vol. 14(24), 16601. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su142416601>; A. Batra, *Bridging the gap between tourism education, tourism industry and graduate employability: Intricacies and emerging issues in Thailand*, in *ABAC Journal*, 2016, Vol. 36, 78-89; C. Arcodia, C. Dickson, *ITHAS: An experiential education case study in tourism education*, in *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, 2009, Vol. 21(1), 37-43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10963758.2009.10696935>;

<sup>38</sup> A. Papathanassis, *Cruise tourism 'brain drain': exploring the role of personality traits, educational experience and career choice attributes*, in *Current Issues in Tourism*, 2021, Vol. 24(14), 2028-2043. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2020.1816930>; L. Pranić, S. Pivčević, D. G. Praničević, *Top 30 soft skills in tourism and hospitality graduates: A systematic literature review*, in *ToSEE – Tourism in Southern and Eastern Europe*, 2021, Vol. 6, 637-656.

<sup>39</sup> A. Eminov, I. Aliyeva, *Assessment of education and employment cooperation in Azerbaijan tourism industry*. *Yearbook of D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics*, D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics, 2017, Vol. 1(1 Year 20), 121-142; A. Batra, *Bridging the gap*, op. cit.; E. Simantiraki, I. Dimou, *Undergraduate tourism education in Greece: Graduates' employment in the hospitality industry*. in *Tourismos: An International Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism*, 2016, Vol. 11(3), 113-132. <https://doi.org/10.26215/tourismos.v11i3.484>; C. Cooper, R. Shepherd, *The relationship between tourism education*, op. cit.

<sup>40</sup> X. Y. Mei, *Gaps in tourism education*, op. cit.

<sup>41</sup> V. V. Cuffy, J. Tribe, D. Airey, *Lifelong learning for tourism*, in *Annals of Tourism Research*, 2012, Vol. 39(3), 1402-1424. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2012.02.007>; J. Stacey, *Supporting quality jobs in tourism*, op. cit.

<sup>42</sup> J.-S. Horng, H.-L. Hsiao, C.-H. Liu, S.-F. Chou, Y.-C. Chung, *Learning innovative entrepreneurship: Developing an influential curriculum for undergraduate hospitality students*, in *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*, 2021, Vol. 29, 100289. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhlste.2020.100289>; L. Ivanova, *Tourism education - An important investment for the staff development*, in *Entrepreneurship*, 2018, Vol. 6(2), 326-337; S. Mileva,

The preceding analysis of key themes in empirical literature reveals a complex interplay between education and tourism employment, highlighting both opportunities and challenges. While education plays a crucial role in equipping individuals with the necessary skills for the tourism industry, several obstacles hinder the seamless alignment of educational programs with industry needs. The following section delves into these challenges, exploring the factors that contribute to skills gaps, mismatches, and other issues affecting the education-employment nexus in tourism.

### 5. Challenges in Aligning Education with Tourism Employment

The existing literature identifies several key challenges that impede the effective alignment of education with the evolving needs of the tourism industry. These challenges include lack of industry engagement, insufficient work-integrated learning, misalignment of curricula and industry needs, rapid technological change, shifting consumer preferences, institutional rigidity, resistance to change, and a lack of industry-relevant pedagogical approaches. These challenges in aligning education with employment in tourism and hospitality sectors are discussed as follows:

*Lack of Industry Engagement:* There is often a disconnect between educational institutions and the tourism industry, with limited collaboration and communication channels<sup>43</sup>. This often leads to a misalignment between acquired competencies and the specific requirements of tourism employers<sup>44</sup>. Stronger partnerships and engagement between academia and the tourism industry are needed to ensure that educational programs are aligned with the industry's needs and expectations.

*Insufficient Work-Integrated Learning:* Many tourism education programs lack sufficient hands-on, work-integrated learning opportunities, such as internships, apprenticeships, and industry projects. Students may not develop the necessary practical skills and industry exposure to transition

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*Skills and competences as main concern for innovation capabilities between universities and tourism industry*, in *Tourism Dimensions*, 2015, Vol. 2(2), 36-43.

<sup>43</sup> L. Kwok, *Labor shortage: a critical reflection and a call for industry-academia collaboration*, in *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 2022, Vol. 34(11), 3929-3943. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-01-2022-0103>; X. Y. Mei, *Gaps in tourism education*, op. cit.

<sup>44</sup> I. Booyens, *Education and skills in tourism*, op. cit.

smoothly into tourism employment, hindering their career readiness<sup>45</sup>. Increasing the integration of practical, work-based learning experiences into tourism education programs can better prepare students for the realities of the industry.

*Misalignment of Curricula and Industry Needs:* Tourism education curricula may not always adequately reflect the specific skills and competencies required by the industry. There is often a divergence between academic content and the practical demands of the tourism workplace<sup>46</sup>. Ongoing dialogue and collaboration between educational institutions and industry stakeholders are essential to ensure that curricula remain relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of the tourism sector.

*Rapid Technological Change:* The tourism industry is undergoing rapid technological transformation, with the emergence of digital platforms, automation, and data-driven decision-making<sup>47</sup>. These changes require tourism professionals to possess a diverse set of digital and technological skills, which can be challenging for educational institutions to keep up with and incorporate into their curricula in a timely manner<sup>48</sup>. Within this framework, educational institutions often struggle to quickly update their programs to keep pace with the industry's technological advancements.

*Changing Consumer Preferences:* The tourism industry is also experiencing significant shifts in consumer preferences, with tourists seeking more personalized, immersive, and sustainable experiences. Educational institutions may struggle to anticipate and rapidly adapt their curricula to

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<sup>45</sup> P. Moira, D. Mylonopoulos, A. Kikilia, *Tourism education and training system in Greece. The transition from 20th to 21st century*, in *International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Studies*, 2021, Vol. 2(1), 66-77. <https://doi.org/10.31559/IJHTS2021.2.1.7>; I. Booyens, *Education and skills in tourism*, op. cit.; X. Y. Mei, *Gaps in tourism education*, op. cit.; A. Batra, *Bridging the gap*, op. cit.

<sup>46</sup> D. P. Stergiou, D. Airey, *Chapter 1 Tourism education*, op. cit.; F. Bouchon, P. Daya, N. A. Ragavan, *Hospitality higher education talent management programme, STEP: A stepping-stone to develop future hospitality leaders*, in *TEAM Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 2016, Vol. 13, 41-53.

<sup>47</sup> S. Adeyinka-Ojo, S. Lee, S. K. Abdullah, J. Teo, *Hospitality and tourism education in an emerging digital economy*, in *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, 2020, Vol. 12(2), 123-125. <https://doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-12-2019-0075>; OECD, *Analysing megatrends to better shape the future of tourism*, OECD Tourism Papers, No. 2018/02, OECD Publishing, Paris; J. Stacey, *Supporting quality jobs in tourism*, op. cit.

<sup>48</sup> J. Qian, P. M.C. Lin, R. Law, X. Li, *Lack of IT and digital marketing professionals in hospitality: is it education's fault?*, in *Heliyon*, 2022, Vol. 8(12), e12002. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e12002>; E. Bilotta, F. Bertacchini, L. Gabriele, S. Giglio, P. S. Pantano, T. Romita, *Industry 4.0 technologies in tourism education: Nurturing students to think with technology*, in *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education*, 2021, Vol. 29, 100275. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhlste.2020.100275>.

these evolving market demands, making it difficult to prepare students for the changing needs of the tourism sector<sup>49</sup>.

*Institutional Rigidity and Resistance to Change:* The slow pace of institutional change can impede the ability of tourism education to keep up with the dynamic nature of the industry, contributing to the widening of the structural misalignment between education and employment. Overcoming institutional inertia and fostering a culture of agility and responsiveness within tourism education providers is crucial to bridging the gap between academic training and industry requirements<sup>50</sup>.

*Lack of Industry-Relevant Pedagogical Approaches:* Traditional lecture-based pedagogical approaches in tourism education may not adequately prepare students for the practical, problem-solving, and decision-making skills required in the tourism industry. There is a need for more industry-aligned teaching methodologies, such as case studies, simulations, and experiential learning, to enhance the relevance and applicability of tourism education<sup>51</sup>. The challenges outlined above highlight the complexities involved in aligning tourism education with the need for a more dynamic and collaborative approach to aligning tourism education with the evolving employment landscape. Universities, policymakers, and the tourism industry must work together to address these obstacles and ensure that tourism education programs are adequately preparing students for successful careers in the sector.

## 6. Research Gaps

Although the literature establishes a clear connection between education and tourism employment, the review reveals several persistent blind spots that limit theoretical depth, external validity, and policy relevance. These gaps are:

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<sup>49</sup> I. Booyens, *Education and skills in tourism*, op. cit.; J. Stacey, *Supporting quality jobs in tourism*, op. cit.

<sup>50</sup> S. Vaduva, S. Echevarria-Cruz, J. Takács, *The economic and social impact of a university education upon the development of the Romanian tourism industry*, in *Journal of Hospitality Leisure Sport & Tourism Education*, 2020, Vol. 27, 100270. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhlste.2020.100270>; D. P. Stergiou, D. Airey, *Chapter 1 Tourism education*, op. cit.; A. Batra, *Bridging the gap*, op. cit..

<sup>51</sup> L. Chen, *Practice teaching reform of tourism*, op. cit.; W. Wattanacharoensil, *Tourism curriculum in a global perspective*, op. cit.; H. L. Theunis, A. Rasheed, *Alternative approaches to tertiary tourism education with special reference to developing countries*, in *Tourism Management*, 1983, Vol. 4(1), 42-51. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0261-5177\(83\)90049-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0261-5177(83)90049-3).

1. Fragmented evidence on how education improves employment quality (not just quantity). Most studies document associations between education and employment or job access, but fewer unpack pathways from specific educational inputs (e.g., work-integrated learning, micro-credentials, digital skills modules) to job quality (wages, stability, career ladders, occupational health). The synthesis applied notes the prevalence of precarious and low-wage work despite education, signaling an untheorized mechanism gap.

2. Overreliance on cross-sectional or perception data; weak causal identification

Much of the evidence uses cross-sectional surveys of students, graduates, or managers; rigorous quasi-experimental or longitudinal designs remain rare, constraining claims about causal effects of curricula, internships, or training reforms on employment outcomes.

3. Limited integration of demand-side dynamics (firm behavior & job design). Studies often center on graduate skills and curricula; fewer analyze how employers' technology adoption, staffing models, or seasonality shape the returns to education, despite the review highlighting rapid technological change and shifting consumer preferences on the demand side.

4. Skills mismatch is described, not measured consistently. The "gap/mismatch" theme is strong, yet operationalizations vary (manager perceptions, self-assessments, or coarse ISCED levels), impeding comparison across countries and time. A harmonized mismatch metric or competency framework linked to observable tasks is missing.

5. Underexplored heterogeneity (gender, socio-economic background, region, subsector). The evidence notes different experiences across groups (e.g., barriers for women; diverging subsectors like accommodation vs. travel agencies), but few studies estimate heterogeneous treatment effects of education by gender, region (urban/rural, island/mainland), or firm size (SMEs vs. chains).

6. Weak coverage of informal work and seasonal/temporary contracts. Given tourism's large informal/seasonal segments, formal datasets miss a sizeable share of jobs. This biases conclusions about education's returns and employability pathways, which the review flags via seasonality and precariousness themes.

7. Incomplete treatment of digital and green transitions. While technological change is frequently cited, few studies evaluate structured digital (data analytics, platform operations, AI tools) or sustainability (ESG, circularity) curricula and their distinct employment effects, despite industry transformation pressures.

- 8. Patchy evaluation of work-integrated learning (WIL) at scale. Internships, apprenticeships, and live projects are recommended widely, but robust evaluations of design features (duration, assessment, co-supervision models) and scalability/equity impacts remain scarce.
- 9. Limited triangulation across stakeholder perspectives. Student, faculty, and employer views are often studied separately. Few designs triangulate all three (plus policymakers) within the same setting to test alignment/misalignment and co-produce curricular adjustments.

**Table 2. Research Gap Matrix**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Thematic area</b>	<b>What we know (from the review)</b>	<b>What’s missing / gap</b>	<b>Why it matters</b>	<b>Illustrative research questions</b>	<b>Suggested methods &amp; data</b>
1	Job quality outcomes	Education links to employment access; precarious/low-wage patterns persist.	Causal evidence on effects of specific educational inputs on wages, stability, promotions.	Aligns curricula with decent work agenda & retention.	Which curriculum components (e.g., service design studio, micro-credentials) raise wages and reduce turnover within 24 months?	Difference-in-differences using institutional rollouts; linked graduate tracer + payroll/admin data.
2	Causal identification	Predominantly cross-sectional/perception studies.	Quasi-experimental or longitudinal designs are rare.	Informs policy investment with credible effects.	Do mandatory internships causally improve post-graduation employment stability?	Instrumental variables (policy timing), regression discontinuity (admissions cutoffs), panel graduate surveys.
3	Demand-side firm behavior	Tech change & consumer shifts highlighted conceptually.	Few link firm adoption (digital, automation) to returns to education.	Clarifies which skills stay complementary to technology.	How does hotel PMS/CRM sophistication moderate returns to digital literacy training?	Employer surveys merged with HR outcomes; multilevel modeling.
4	Skills mismatch	Mismatch widely reported; measures	No harmonized, competency-	Enables cross-study comparabilit	Can a standardized tourism	Develop/validate rubric; Rasch

	metrics	vary.	based, task-linked metric.	y & benchmarking.	competency index predict placement and first-year performance?	modeling; predictive validity with supervisor ratings.
5	Equity & heterogeneity	Gender barriers, subsector differences noted.	Limited HTEs by gender/region/firm size.	Prevents one-size-fits-all designs; targets support.	Do women benefit more from blended WIL + mentorship vs. WIL alone?	Stratified RCTs of mentoring add-ons; subgroup analysis.
6	Informal & seasonal work	Seasonality/precarity discussed.	Informal jobs largely missing from datasets.	Avoids biased ROI estimates for education.	What are education's returns in informal/seasonal roles vs. formal contracts?	Mixed methods; time-use diaries; respondent-driven sampling; off-season follow-ups.
7	Digital & green skills	Need to keep pace with tech & sustainability.	Few evaluated curricula for digital/ESG skills and their labor effects.	Future-proofing workforce; competitiveness.	Do sustainability certifications in curricula improve placement in higher-value niches?	Program evaluation; employer choice experiments (discrete choice).
8	WIL design & scale	Internships/apprenticeships recommended.	Little on optimal dosage, supervision, assessment, equity.	Improves WIL ROI and access.	What WIL duration and assessment mix maximizes early-career performance?	Multisite pragmatic trials; process evaluation + cost-effectiveness.
9	Multi-stakeholder alignment	Collaboration urged (academia–industry–policy).	Few triangulated studies across all stakeholders.	Reduces curriculum–industry misalignment.	How does a formal co-design board change competency attainment and hiring yield?	Comparative case studies; synthetic control when boards are phased in.

## 7. Policy Recommendations

The relationship between education and tourism employment is a complex and multifaceted issue, with numerous challenges that hinder the

effective alignment of educational programs with the industry's evolving needs. To address these challenges, a collaborative and comprehensive approach involving educational institutions, the tourism industry, and policymakers is required.

Educational institutions should establish strong partnerships and ongoing dialogue with the tourism industry to better understand their skill requirements and rapidly adapt curricula accordingly. In addition, they should integrate more hands-on, work-integrated learning opportunities, such as internships, apprenticeships, and industry projects, to provide students with practical experience and industry exposure. Active engagement with the tourism industry is essential so as to better understand its current and future skill requirements and regularly update their curricula to reflect these needs. Educational institutions should also foster a culture of agility and responsiveness within their institutions to enable timely and effective implementation of necessary changes to their tourism education programs. Another dimension regards the issue of ensuring relevant pedagogical approaches that go beyond traditional lecture-based methods and focus on industry-aligned teaching methodologies, such as case studies, simulations, and experiential learning. Furthermore, investing in the professional development of faculty members, ensuring that they maintain up-to-date industry knowledge and practical expertise, is of great importance. On any occasion it is important that the educational institutions streamline their curriculum development and review processes to enhance the responsiveness of tourism education programs to industry changes to generate a skilled and efficient workforce in the tourism and hospitality sectors.

On the other hand, the tourism industry should actively collaborate with educational institutions to provide insights into the evolving skill demands, industry trends, and emerging competencies required for successful careers in the sector. It should offer more opportunities for student internships, apprenticeships, and work-integrated learning experiences to enhance the practical skills and industry exposure of tourism graduates. Industry associations and professional bodies can play a crucial role in facilitating this collaboration and ensuring that the curriculum and program offerings at educational institutions are aligned with industry needs to bridge the gap between theory and practice. They should also work closely with policymakers to advocate for policies and funding mechanisms that support the development of industry-relevant tourism education programs and engage more actively in the design and delivery of tourism education programs, providing input on curriculum content, teaching methods, and assessment approaches to ensure industry

relevance. This collaboration is essential to ensure that tourism education programs are responsive to the evolving needs of industry and produce graduates who are well-equipped to succeed in the dynamic tourism sector. By actively participating in the development and implementation of tourism education curricula, the industry can share its expertise, insights, and expectations, thereby shaping the next generation of tourism professionals and bridging the gap between academic training and industry requirements.

Thirdly, policymakers should participate in this above-mentioned process and assist in developing and implementing policies that incentivize and facilitate stronger partnerships between educational institutions and the tourism industry, encouraging the co-creation of responsive and industry-aligned tourism education programs. They could also provide funding and resources to support the development of work-integrated learning opportunities, industry-academia collaborative projects, and the modernization of tourism education curricula. Another recommendation is the establishment of national frameworks or guidelines that outline the core competencies and skills required for various tourism occupations, which can then inform the development of tourism education programs across institutions. In this way, they can ensure that national tourism strategies and policies recognize the critical role of education in developing a skilled and adaptable tourism workforce and allocate appropriate resources to strengthen the linkages between tourism labour market outcomes. Policy makers and governments should also provide faculty members with opportunities to update their industry knowledge and practical expertise through industry placements, training programs, and collaboration with industry professionals.

From the analysis of the literature on education and tourism employment, it stems out that several critical issues emerge. By addressing the challenges and implementing the recommendations outlined in this paper, stakeholders can work collaboratively to bridge the gap between education–labour market relationship, ensuring that the tourism workforce is equipped with the necessary skills and competencies to thrive in the rapidly evolving industry. Within this framework, the nexus between tourism education and employment can be strengthened, leading to an adaptable and industry-ready workforce, that can contribute to the long-term competitiveness and sustainability of the tourism sector.

## 8. Conclusions

This paper examined the relationship between education and tourism employment through a synthesis of theoretical and empirical literature. The findings indicate that, although education plays a central role in enhancing employability, significant challenges remain in ensuring that educational outcomes align with the evolving needs of the tourism sector. The key findings from the empirical literature include the following: Tourism education programs often fail to adequately prepare graduates with the industry-relevant skills and competencies required by employers. This disconnect between academic curricula and industry requirements can result in challenges for graduates seeking employment, as well as a perception that tourism education programs are insufficient in preparing students for the industry's needs. These challenges are primarily associated with limited industry engagement, insufficient practical training opportunities, and the rapid evolution of skill requirements within the tourism sector. In addition, it is found that employment in tourism is often characterized by low-skilled, precarious, and low-wage jobs, which can make the industry unattractive to potential students and contribute to a shortage of skilled labour.

To address these challenges, the paper has proposed a multifaceted approach involving key stakeholders - educational institutions, the tourism industry, and policymakers - to enhance the alignment between tourism education and employment. First, educational institutions should strive to modernize their tourism education curricula, incorporating more practical, experiential, and industry-relevant learning approaches. Second, the tourism industry should take a more active role in shaping tourism education, sharing insights into evolving skill demands, industry trends, and emerging competencies required for successful careers. Third, policymakers should develop and implement policies that incentivize and facilitate stronger partnerships between educational institutions and the tourism industry, while also providing resources and support for the modernization of tourism education programs. Implementing these recommendations can strengthen the alignment between education systems and labour market needs, contributing to the development of a more skilled, adaptable, and resilient tourism workforce.

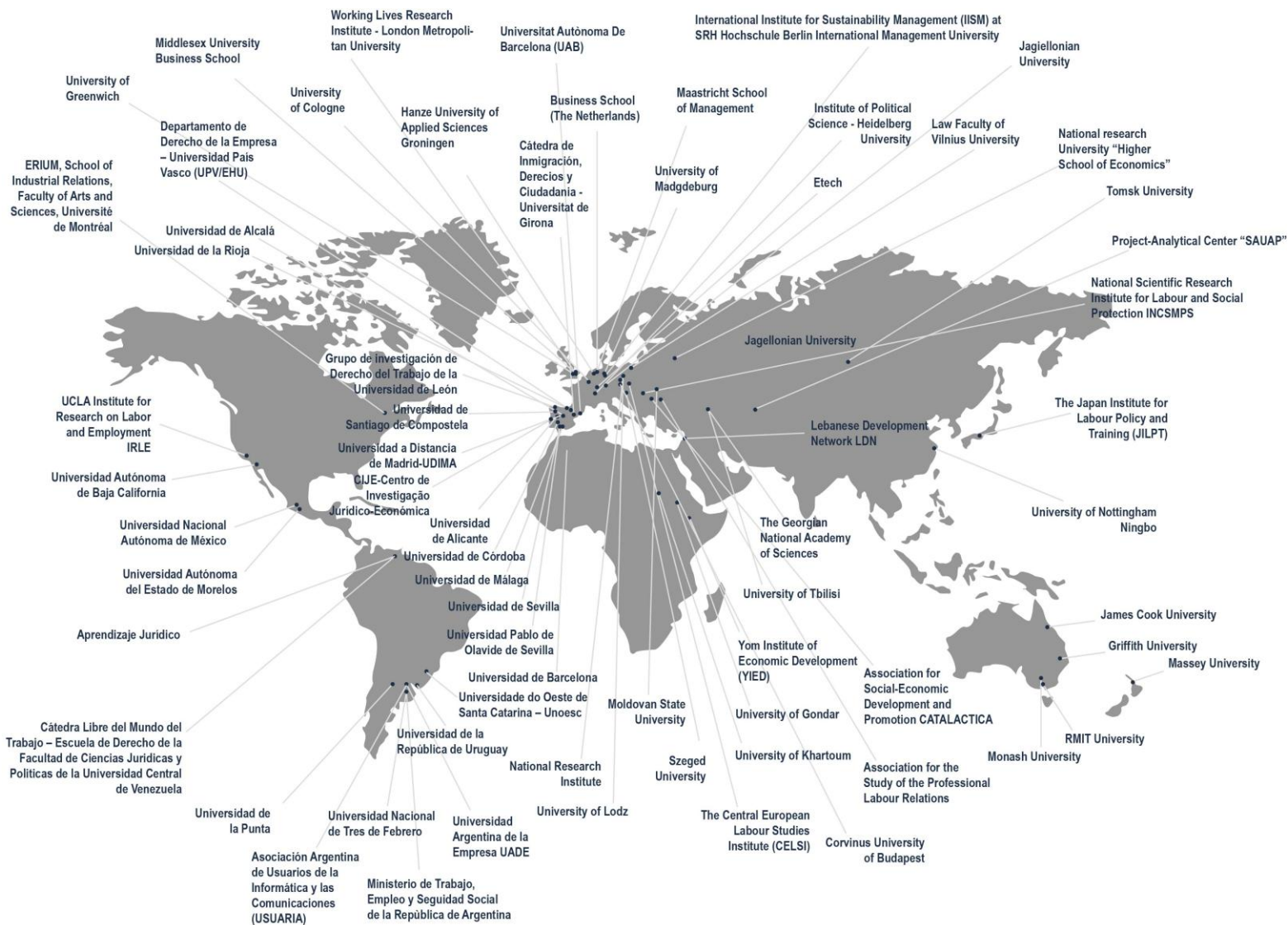
**Annex**

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