



Students' Career in Tourism Industry in Northern Albania: A Comparative Analysis Between Vocational High School and University Diploma*

Ardita Borici¹ 
Volfrida Toma² 

Received: January 26, 2025 / Accepted: June 30, 2025

© Association of Economists and Managers of the Balkans, 2025

Abstract: *First, this study seeks to examine the potential factors impacting a student's career in the tourism industry; secondly, it explores whether there are any significant differences in students' careers in the tourism industry based on demographic variables, such as education. Data was collected through questionnaires, distributed to the students in vocational high schools and universities in Northern Albania, in 2024. To find out the factors that impact student careers in the tourism industry, the factor and reliability analysis were used. The multiple regression analysis was performed, using the 'student career in the tourism industry' as the dependent variable and factors as: 'Perspective and Confidence in the Tourism Industry'; 'Personal and Professional Development', 'Values and Commitment in the Tourism Industry', 'Willingness to Adapt and Relocate' and 'Emotional Adaptation in the Tourism Industry' as independent variables. Several factors were found to have a significant impact on students' careers in the tourism industry. The results revealed that education has a significant impact on student careers in the tourism industry. University students expressed higher levels of students' career compared with vocational high school students, and the difference was statistically significant. Moreover, the results of the t-test for each of the five potential factors showed that there was a significant difference based on education.*

Keywords: *Students' career, Tourism industry, University, Professional high school, Northern Albania, Factor analysis.*

JEL Classification: I21 · J24 · L83 · P26 · J31

✉ ardita.borici@unishk.edu.al

¹ University "Luigj Gurakuqi", Faculty of Economy, Shkodër, Albania

² University "Luigj Gurakuqi", Faculty of Economy, Shkodër, Albania

* This research is financially supported by the University "Luigj Gurakuqi", Shkoder, Albania.



1. INTRODUCTION

Vocational education plays a crucial role in equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge needed for careers across various industries. In Albania, as well as globally, vocational education systems face significant challenges in aligning training programs with labor market demands. A notable concern in Albania is the emphasis on general education over targeted skill development, as highlighted by a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2021) report. While efforts such as work-based learning practices and partnerships with the private sector are gradually improving the system, particularly in the tourism sector, substantial gaps remain in bridging education and industry needs.

The tourism industry, a vital economic driver in Albania, underscores these challenges. Despite initiatives like the National Employment and Skills Strategy (Ministry of Finance, Republic of Albania, 2023), which seeks to tailor vocational programs to address skill shortages, issues such as low enrollment in tourism-focused programs and limited awareness of career opportunities persist.

Globally, similar patterns emerge. The hospitality and tourism industry reveals that students often view careers in the sector as offering limited personal fulfillment, despite valuing transferable skills and educational opportunities (Amissah et al., 2020). Likewise, British tourism students have low aspirations for careers in the field, often citing unclear career pathways and limited engagement with the industry (Ramakrishnan & Macaveiu, 2019).

This study examines the potential factors impacting a student's career in the tourism industry. It explores whether there are any significant differences in students' careers in the tourism industry based on education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), introduced over 30 years ago, is widely used in empirical studies to predict human behaviour. It identifies behavioural intention—driven by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control—as a key factor linking attitudes to actions (Ajzen, 2006, 2011; Armitage & Conner, 2001).

Studies demonstrate mismatches between education and industry needs. Wakelin-Theron (2014) identified a critical skills shortage in South Africa's tourism industry, emphasizing the need for higher education institutions to integrate employability skills into their programs. Similarly, Chen and Gursoy (2008) found that leisure, recreation, and tourism programs must focus on adaptability and comprehensive skill-building to prepare students for career success.

Bontenbal and Aziz (2013) examined student perceptions at Oman Tourism College, highlighting challenges such as low enrolment and unmet recruitment goals despite tourism's role in economic diversification. Richardson (2009) reveals that undergraduate tourism and hospitality students in Australia do not perceive the industry as providing the key attributes they consider essential when selecting a future career.

The impact of global disruptions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has also influenced tourism education and career strategies. Reichenberger and Raymond (2021) found that New Zealand tourism students adapted flexible, short-term career plans to navigate uncertainties. Despite disruptions, students maintained optimism about a sustainable and progressive future in tourism.

Research also explores the perceptions of secondary school students. Roberts (2024) highlighted that New Zealand's tourism education is perceived as vocational and less credible academically, contributing to negative attitudes toward careers in tourism. To enhance enrolment and engagement, it is essential to improve the perception of tourism education and its career opportunities.

Further studies analyse the gaps between student and industry expectations. For instance, Bustreo et al. (2018) revealed that Italian tourism students undervalue competencies like self-control and organizational ability, which are critical for the sector. Similarly, Brent et al. (2008) found discrepancies between student and practitioner perspectives regarding internships, calling for better alignment to enhance the effectiveness of experiential learning. Finally, Gomaa and Sobaih (2014) examined Egyptian students' perceptions of tourism and hospitality careers, revealing significant differences between students in tourism studies and hotel management. Tourism students showed more positive attitudes toward career opportunities, emphasizing the need for tailored career development strategies.

Alikaj (2017) examines factors influencing vocational training participation in Albania using Labour Force Survey data. The study identifies three key determinant groups: person-related, job-related, and employer-related factors. Technological advancements and structural unemployment drive the need for new skills, making vocational training crucial for workforce development. Moreover, while men traditionally dominated training, women's participation has increased, reflecting changes in their labour market role. The study offers insights for policymakers aiming to advance gender equality in training and employment.

Elmazaj (2016) explores overeducation in Albania's labour market, focusing on the mismatch between the growing number of tertiary graduates and market demands. The study highlights risks of an expanding education system misaligned with labour needs. While higher education offers benefits like better wages, job opportunities, and social outcomes, the oversupply of graduates raises concerns about degree devaluation, the nature of overeducation (temporary or structural), and the role of specific fields of study. National-level estimates reveal that this mismatch could weaken the economic and social advantages of higher education.

Gishti (2018) highlights the importance of social partnerships in vocational education and training (VET) to better align with labour market demands. Despite some successful examples, systemic efforts are needed to improve VET governance and align it with economic changes. The study emphasizes enhancing the roles, governance, and technical expertise of social partners, addressing their unclear responsibilities, and strengthening their capacity for effective participation in VET.

Vucaj (2016) critiques Albania's cultural bias for higher education over vocational training, despite higher wages and demand in technical fields. This preference weakens the link between vocational education and labor market needs, worsening labor shortages in technical professions, even with reforms like the Bologna Process.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) plays a crucial role in Albania's economic and social development, especially as the country seeks integration into the European Union (EU). Sela (2016) emphasizes the need for structural VET reforms to align Albania with labour market demands and modern standards. Despite low investment limiting quality and access, EU partnerships offer opportunities through funding, policy reforms, and best practices. The study uses qualitative methods to highlight resource gaps and the benefits of continued EU collaboration, underscoring VET's importance for Albania's economic goals.

Despite these diverse challenges and opportunities, the consensus across studies highlights the importance of aligning educational programs with industry demands, raising awareness about career potential, and addressing skill gaps to enhance employability in the tourism sector.

Based on the above-mentioned discussion, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the potential factors impacting a student's career in the tourism industry?
- Are there any significant differences in a student's career and in the potential factors based on demographic variables, such as education (professional high school and university diploma) and gender?

Consistent with the research questions raised, the following hypotheses are derived:

H1: There is a significant impact of potential factors on students' careers in the tourism industry.

H2a: There are significant differences in student's career in the tourism industry and in all potential factors based on education.

H2b: There are significant differences in student's career in the tourism industry and in all potential factors based on gender.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample and Data Collection

This empirical study was conducted in 2024 using the data collected from Northern Albanian respondents by self-administered questionnaires. The target population consists of Northern Albanian students engaged in professional high school and university. Each respondent, prior to filling out the questionnaire, was asked if they had engaged in a professional high school or university in the academic year 2023-2024. The purpose of the study was kindly explained to each participant, and we explained that the data would be used for statistical purposes only.

Data were collected from the authors with the help of two assistants throughout March, April and May 2024. In total, 199 questionnaires were distributed. Nine incomplete questionnaires were eliminated from the analysis, leaving 190 valid questionnaires for further analysis.

3.2. Demographic Profile

The characteristics of the respondents are summarized in Table 1. A majority of the respondents (56.8%) were female. In terms of age, 24.2 percent are 16 years old, 11.6 percent are 17, 23.7 percent are 18 years old, the majority of the respondents (30 percent) are 19 years old, and 10.5 percent are 20 years old and above. In terms of education, the majority (52.6 percent) of respondents report having a high level of education (bachelor's degree or master's degree), and 47.4 percent have a professional high school diploma. As per their city majority (80.5 per cent) of the respondents are from Shkodra, 11.6 percent from Lezha, and 5.3 percent from Kukes. More than 75 percent of the respondents report their preference for the field of work in managing hotels. The data were coded and processed using SPSS.

3.3. Measures

PC-Perspective and Confidence. A multidimensional construct that measures an individual's perceptions, beliefs, and confidence regarding the tourism industry's career opportunities, financial potential, and job security.

- PPD** Personal and Professional Development in the Tourism Industry. A multidimensional construct that measures an individual’s self-efficacy, academic preparedness, career growth expectations, and interest in continuous learning within the tourism industry.
- VC** Values and Commitment in the Tourism Industry. A multidimensional construct that measures an individual’s alignment with core values such as sustainability, work-life balance, ethics, and personal values, as well as their commitment to professional growth and practical experience within the tourism industry.
- WAR** Willingness to Adapt and Relocate. A multidimensional construct that measures an individual’s openness and readiness to work in diverse environments and relocate for career opportunities in the tourism industry.
- EA** Emotional Adaptation in the Tourism Industry. A multidimensional construct that measures an individual’s capacity to adapt emotionally within the tourism industry, emphasizing the ability to manage emotions and form meaningful connections with clients.
- SC** Student Career Intentions in the Tourism Industry. A multidimensional construct that measures an individual’s intention, preparedness, and clarity of career planning related to the tourism industry.

A five-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree”; 5 = “strongly agree”) was used to measure all items.

Table 1. Profile of the respondents (n = 190)

	Variable	Frequency (n = 190)	(%)
Gender	Male	82	43.2
	Female	108	56.8
Age	16	46	24.2
	17	22	11.6
	18	45	23.7
	19	57	30.0
	20 and up	20	10.5
Educational background	Professional High school	90	47.4
	University	100	52.6
Cities	Shkodra	153	80.5
	Lezha	22	11.6
	Kukes	10	5.3
	other	5	2.6
Field of work	Hotel and accommodation management	143	75.3
	Travel agency and trip planning	26	13.7
	Leading and guiding tourism experiences	13	6.8
	Event and conference planning	7	3.7
	Other	1	0.5

Source: Own calculations

4. RESULTS

Factor analysis is a statistical technique used to identify underlying relationships between measured variables by grouping them into latent constructs or factors (Meyers et al., 2013). This method provides a means to consolidate scattered information from multiple variables into a smaller, more manageable number of factors. This study used factor analysis with Varimax rotation. When performing such an analysis, importance should be paid to the factorial weights of each item. Each item had a factor loading higher than 0.70.

Table 2. Summary of measurement scales

Constructs	Items	α	Factor loading
Perspective and Confidence (PC)	PC1. I believe the tourism industry offers promising career opportunities.	0.917	0.906
	PC2. I consider work in the tourism industry to be financially fulfilling.		0.879
	PC3. I value the career development potential the tourism industry offers.		0.868
	PC4. I am willing to work in the tourism industry to achieve my professional goals		0.851
	PC5. I am optimistic about the future prospects of the tourism industry.		0.855
Personal and Professional Development (PPD)	PPD1. I believe I am academically well-prepared for a career in the tourism industry.	0.860	0.851
	PPD2. I believe there are ample opportunities for career growth and advancement in the tourism industry.		0.906
	PPD3. I am interested in pursuing additional training specific to the tourism industry.		0.900
Values and Commitment (VC)	VC1. Sustainability and responsible tourism practices are important considerations in my career goals.	0.798	0.899
	VC2. I consider the work-life balance in the tourism industry to be satisfying.		0.910
	VC3. I believe that integrity and professional ethics are essential for my career success in the tourism industry.		0.712
Willingness to Adapt and Relocate (WAR)	WAR1. I value the opportunity to work in a dynamic and multicultural environment.	0.729	0.847
	WAR2. For me, the chance to travel and work in diverse tourist destinations is a major career advantage in the tourism industry.		0.781
	WAR3. I am willing to explore employment opportunities abroad to broaden my perspective and gain global experience in the tourism industry.		0.790
Emotional Adaptation (EA)	EA1. I consider work in the tourism industry to be emotionally fulfilling.	0.719	0.884
	EA2. I see work in the tourism industry as an opportunity to form strong emotional connections with clients and positively impact their travel experiences.		0.884
Student Career (SC)	SC1. I have a clear plan for the steps I will take after graduation.	0.811	0.849
	SC2. I feel informed and prepared to handle current trends and challenges in the tourism industry.		0.870
	SC3. I am well-prepared to enter the job market in the tourism industry field.		0.844

Source: Own processing

To measure reliability, we used Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The measure "PC" reported the highest level of Cronbach's alpha (0.917). On the other hand, Cronbach's alpha for the measure "PPD" was 0.860, for the measure "VC" was 0.798, for the measure "WAR" was 0.729, for the measure "EA" was 0.719, and for the measure "SC" was 0.811. All of these levels indicate adequate reliability (Hair et al., 2010).

4.2. Regression Analysis

To explore the potential factors impacting student careers, we performed multiple regression analyses, using student career (SC) as the dependent variable. The five potential factors: PC, PPD, VC, WAR, and EA were used as the independent variables. Below, we present only the variables that were found to be marginally significant or significant.

In the first model, we entered the five potential factors as the independent variables and student career as the dependent variable. The results indicated that the model was highly significant ($p = 0.000$); however, "PC", "PPD" and "VC" variables were not significant. R-squared = .541, which indicates that 54.1% of the total variance has been explained by the contribution of all the independent variables included in the model.

Dropping the variables that were not significant and re-running the regression analysis, we found the second model to be highly significant ($F(2,187) = 103.223, p = 0.000$); adjusted R^2 was 52.5%.

The remaining significant variables were: “WAR” ($p = 0.000$), and “EA” ($p = 0.000$). Consequently, hypothesis H1 was partially supported, given that we found two factors, such as “WAR” and “EA”, to have a significant impact on Student Careers (SC).

4.3. t-Test

To test whether there were any significant differences in students’ careers and the potential factors based on demographic variables, such as education (vocational high school and university diploma), we performed a t-test analysis, using a 1% level of significance.

The results indicated that there are significant differences in students’ careers and all the potential factors based on demographic variables, such as education (vocational high school and university Diploma). More importantly, university students expressed higher levels of students’ career (SC) ($M = 4.770$, $SD = 0.22$) compared with vocational high school students ($M = 3.895$, $SD = 0.89$); moreover, the difference was statistically significant ($t(188) = 8.463$, $p = 0.000$ (two-tailed)). On the other hand, the results of the t -test for each of the five potential factors showed that there was a difference; moreover, the findings were significant ($p = 0.000$ (two-tailed)). Consequently, hypothesis H2a was supported.

To test whether there is a significant difference in students’ careers based on gender, a t-test was performed. The result indicated that there was a difference; in fact, the mean students’ career for females ($M = 4.521$, $SD = 0.59$) was higher than mean students career for males ($M = 4.235$, $SD = 0.89$); moreover, the difference was statistically significant ($t(188) = 2.65$, $p = 0.009$ (two-tailed)). On the other hand, the results of the t -test for each of the potential factors showed that there was a difference; moreover, the findings were not significant for most of them. Consequently, hypothesis H2b was partially supported.

5. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Despite its contribution to existing literature, this study is subject to certain limitations. The sample size used is small ($n = 190$), therefore limiting the generalization of the findings. Additionally, the study offers a snapshot of students’ perceptions of three cities in Albania: Shkodra, Lezha, and Kukes. As a result, the findings may not accurately represent the perceptions of students in other cities in Albania. Furthermore, the data collected does not reflect changes in behaviour over time. Based on these limitations, future research should extend the study to other cities and countries, too.

Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into the examination of the potential factors impacting a student’s career in the tourism industry. It explores whether there are any significant differences in students’ careers in the tourism industry based on education and gender.

6. CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insights into the factors influencing student careers and underscores the importance of demographic considerations in career development programs. The regression analysis revealed that out of the five potential factors (PC, PPD, VC, WAR, and EA), only “WAR” (Work-Activity Relevance) and “EA” (External Assistance) had a significant impact on student career outcomes. The t-test results demonstrated significant differences in student career outcomes based on educational levels (vocational high school vs. university diploma). University

students exhibited higher levels of students' career ($M = 4.770$) compared to vocational high school students ($M = 3.895$), and this difference was statistically significant. Additionally, significant differences were found in all the potential factors based on educational levels. The analysis also revealed significant gender-based differences in levels of students' careers. Female students had higher levels of students' career ($M = 4.521$) compared to male students ($M = 4.235$), and this difference was statistically significant. However, while gender differences were observed for the potential factors, the findings were not significant for most of them.

The findings emphasize the importance of "WAR" and "EA" as key factors influencing student career success. This suggests the need for initiatives that enhance work relevance and provide external assistance to support student career development. The observed differences based on education and gender highlight the need for tailored career development strategies that address the unique challenges and strengths of different demographic groups.

References

- Ajzen, I. (2006). *Constructing a theory of planned behaviour questionnaire*. Retrieved from <http://people.umass.edu/aizen/pdf/tpb.measurement.pdf>
- Ajzen, I. (2011). The theory of planned behaviour: Reactions and reflections. *Psychology & Health*, 26(9), 1113–1127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08870446.2011.613995>
- Alikaj, L. (2017). The determinants of participation in vocational training in Albania. *European Scientific Journal*, August 2017 (Special edition). ISSN: 1857-7881 (Print), e-ISSN: 1857-7431.
- Amissah, E. F., Opoku Mensah, A., Mensah, I., & Gamor, E. (2020). Students' perceptions of careers in Ghana's hospitality and tourism industry. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, 32(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10963758.2019.1654884>
- Armitage, C. J., & Conner, M. (2001). Efficacy of the theory of planned behaviour: A meta-analytic review. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 40(4), 471–499. <https://doi.org/10.1348/014466601164939>
- Bontenbal, M., & Aziz, H. (2013). Oman's tourism industry: Student career perceptions and attitudes. *Journal of Arabian Studies*, 3(2), 232–248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21534764.2013.864508>
- Brent, B., Ross, C., & Bryan, G. (2008). A comparison of student and practitioner perspectives of the travel and tourism internship. *Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sports and Tourism Education*.
- Bustreo, M., Micheletto, V., Quarantino, L., & Fiorentino, D. (2018). The impact of successful cross-competencies on a career in tourism in Italy: The meeting point between the students' perceptions and the requirements for professionals. *Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism*, 18(3), 179–201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15313220.2018.1460652>
- Chen, B. T., & Gursoy, D. (2008). Preparing students for careers in the leisure, recreation, and tourism field. *Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism*, 7(3), 21–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15313220801909296>
- Elmazaj, M. (2016). Overeducation and mismatches at the labour market: Albania case. *European Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 1(1), 211. <https://doi.org/10.26417/ejms.v1i1.p211-225>
- Gishti, E. (2018). Social Partnership in Vocational Education and Training in Albania. *European Journal of Education*, 1(3), 163. <https://doi.org/10.26417/ejed.v1i3.p163-169>
- Gomaa, H., & Sobaih, A. E. (2014). Student perceptions of careers in tourism and hospitality industry in Egypt.
- Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., Anderson, R. E., & Tatham, R. L. (2010). *Multivariate data analysis*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Meyers, L. S., Gamst, G. C., & Guarino, A. J. (2013). *Performing data analysis using IBM SPSS*. New Jersey: Wiley.

- Ministry of Finance, Republic of Albania. (2023, July 20). *NESS annual progress report 2022* [National Employment and Skills Strategy]. Retrieved from <https://arkiva.financa.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/NESS-Annual-Progress-Report-2022-20.07.2023.pdf>
- Ramakrishnan, S., & Macaveiu, C. (2019). Understanding aspirations in tourism students. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 39, 40–48. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2019.02.003>
- Reichenberger, I., & Raymond, E. M. (2021). Tourism students' career strategies in times of disruption. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 48, 220–229. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2021.06.011>
- Richardson, S. (2009). Undergraduates' perceptions of tourism and hospitality as a career choice. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 28(3), 382–388. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2008.10.006>
- Roberts, M. D. (2024). Secondary school students' views of tourism education and tourism careers. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, 36(1), 13–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10963758.2022.2056471>
- Sela, E. K. (2016). The European projects in the support of Albania's VET. *EIRP Proceedings*, 11.
- UNDP., (2021, May 23). UNDP Annual Report 2020. <https://www.undp.org/publications/undp-annual-report-2020>
- Vucaj, I. (2016). BP over VET? Theorized consequences of current education system in Albania. *Journal of Educational Leadership in Action*, 4(1), Article 5. <https://doi.org/10.62608/2164-1102.1063>
- Wakelin-Theron, N. (2014). Employability development in higher education institutions: A tourism student perspective. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure* Vol. 3 (1) - (2014) ISSN: 2223-814X, <http://www.ajhtl.com>