Article

A Study–Life Conflict and Its Impact on Tourism and Hospitality Students' Burnout and Their Employment Aspirations

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Abstract: This research aims to investigate the issue of study-life conflict and its negative consequences on students' attitudes towards their studies and future employment in the tourism and hospitality industry. It also seeks an answer to the question: what may contribute to experiencing such a conflict by tourism and hospitality students. Therefore, in this study, a research model was developed and tested that measures relationships between tourism and hospitality students' current working experience and study–life conflict and analyzes its relationships with students' burnout and their employment aspirations. Data were collected through a questionnaire from tourism and hospitality students of a Higher Educational Institution of Northern Poland. Structural equation modeling was used to test the relationships between the study constructs. This study demonstrated that due to the competing demands of both the study and social life roles, students may experience the study–life conflict that may be additionally boosted by their current working experience. It was also reported that experiencing the study–life conflict may result in students' burnout that exerts a significant and negative impact on students' employment aspirations. As far as the authors know, such research concerning the issue of the study–life conflict experienced by tourism and hospitality students and its consequences for students' burnout and its detrimental impact on employment aspirations has not been conducted before. This study is also the only one that simultaneously measures the relationships between the proposed constructs based on data from students in Poland.

Keywords: tourism and hospitality; students; study–life conflict; students' burnout; employment aspirations

1. Introduction

The dynamic rise of tourism on a global scale involves greater attention paid to developing adequate human resources and stimulates demand for tourism and hospitality (T&H) education [1]. T&H education is crucial to the future of the T&H industry, as, on the one hand, its main purpose is to provide well-qualified graduates and professionals in the business, answering the demands of a dynamically changing world [2,3], and on the other hand, proper education should provide students with enhanced career prospects and prepare them to contribute significantly to the industry [4] whose survival and competitive advantage mostly depends on the availability of skilled and engaged employees [5].

However, although T&H are often perceived as people industries [3], dependent on high-quality employees [6], they suffer from high staff turnover [4,6,7] and face the continual issue of finding and keeping high-quality staff [8–10].

Thus, unsurprisingly, there is still a demand for well-educated, trained, and skilled graduates perceived as "the effective practitioners of tomorrow" ([11], p. 4) and a source of talents in today's T&H industry [12]. Unfortunately, T&H students do not always favorably perceive their future careers in the industry [2]. For example, Aksu and Köksal [13], in their study among T&H management students in Turkey, revealed that they generally show negative attitudes toward the tourism industry. Similarly, in a study by Kachniewska and Para [5], among graduates of master's studies at public universities in Warsaw (Poland), little interest in working in tourism was revealed. Equally alarming are the results of Teng's

study [14] among hospitality students who display negative attitudes towards employment in hospitality upon graduation. As a result, students consider the industry only as a first step in the context of their career ambitions or as a temporary occupation [6] until they find a better place to work [5]. Supporting that view, in their study among students in China, Jiang and Tribe [15] reported that young people mostly are not committed to pursuing their careers in tourism and do not regard the industry as a long-term career prospect. Based on the above, it is not surprising that there is a low employment rate of graduates in the T&H industry [14] and that a continued shortage of a well-qualified and educated workforce in the T&H industry has been observed [12].

This lack of the youth's commitment to the industry may also result from the experienced elevated level of study burnout [16], particularly when they try to combine their study demands with social life activities. On the one hand, young people desire time, not only for their studies but also for fun and leisure. It is underlined that younger generations are fun-loving and focused on friends [17]. They want to have time for developing their own interests and passions, paying particular attention to the balance between social life and their other life activities [5]. On the other hand, T&H students experience excessive study loads that characterize most T&H programs, which, apart from classroom learning, require extensive practical exposure [18]. Although practical work experience is crucial for T&H graduates to be successful in their future jobs [3], simultaneously performing both theoretically and practically within the educational process [18] may require substantial effort, energy, and time, reducing the amount of time available for their social activities. In other words, study and social life roles may compete with each other for students' limited resources, such as time and energy. Having to meet these competing demands from both domains is a particularly difficult task, making students susceptible to conflicts between their study and social life, and thus resulting in an elevated level of stress and its far-reaching consequences. Hence, research addressing that issue seems to be still relevant.

Taking the above into consideration, this research aims to investigate the issue of study–life conflict and its negative consequences on students' attitudes towards their studies and future employment in the tourism and hospitality industry. It also seeks an answer to the question: what may contribute to experiencing such a conflict among T&H students. Therefore, this study proposes and examines a research model measuring the relationships between students' current working experience and study–life conflict and analyzes its relationships with students' burnout and their employment aspirations. Both the generational and the conservation of resources (COR) theories provide the theoretical framework for this study.

There are several reasons for the relevance of the present study. Firstly, given the fact that the T&H industry fails to attract and retain many well-qualified graduates [19], it is still vital to find out what constitutes students' perception of the industry and what factors affect their commitment to T&H [9]. Although numerous studies on T&H students have been conducted in different countries, such as Turkey [11,20], Taiwan [14,21], Malaysia [22], Australia [23], the United States [24], Egypt [10], South Africa [4], and India [25], as far as the Author knows, such research on the understudied problem of the study–life conflict experienced by T&H students (using the context of T&H students from Poland) and its consequences for the students' attitudes towards their study and future employment has not been conducted before. Secondly, in spite of extensive research focusing on generations in general, generation Y, which constitutes this study's respondents, still remains an insufficiently recognized group that dynamically shapes its value system [5]. Particularly, there is little research regarding younger generations in the context of the tourism industry [26].

To recapitulate, this study expects to contribute to the literature by investigating the study–life conflict experienced by T&H students and its critical attitudinal consequences on their current studies and future employment in T&H, taking into account a new socio-cultural context of Polish T&H students. This study's results should have both theoretical and practical ramifications, including for educators and businesses.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

A generation is defined as a group of people born during the same period and experiencing the impact of the same cultural, economic, political, social, and intellectual environment [27]. The generational theory tries to understand and characterize cohorts of people objectively belonging to a generation based on their year of birth [17].

Younger generations, particularly generation Y born up to 2003 [26], have become a symbol of a new culture, equipped with a particular set of values, skills, and behaviors [28]. This generation particularly desires a good quality of life [29]; they value freedom and autonomy [30], want to actively focus on relationships [31], and want to enjoy a range of cultural activities [32]. However, with the contemporary students' social life activities, it can be extremely difficult to balance the demands of rigorous higher education learning standards and the increasing complexities of various life requirements competing for students' time, energy, and well-being [33].

The rigorous T&H study requirements are especially evident with regard to T&H students who are expected to take both classroom learning and compulsory internship in a business setting as an integral component of their degree. It is underlined that today's reputable T&H educational programs include at least one internship [34], while in other fields, there is not as much emphasis on the obligation to take practical training as in T&H education [35]. Unfortunately, such programs with curricula combining classroom work with exposure to practical experience potentially also create more stress for students than the traditional ones [36], as students are required to put great effort simultaneously into theoretical and practical learning, which makes the study environment especially stressful [35]. In other words, under such conditions, students face heavy study loads that consume a huge amount of their scarce resources, such as time and energy, and limit their availability for other social life activities since accumulating too many resources in one domain means having too few of them in another one [37].

Students engage in many obligatory learning activities, including timely attending classes, taking exams, or completing homework [38]. However, although students are not permanently employed, from a psychological viewpoint, their core activities can be perceived as work [38,39]. Therefore, given the academic context and by an analogy to the theory of work–family conflict (W–F CON), describing W–F CON as "a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect" ([40], p. 77), it is proposed that the study–life conflict can be defined as a type of inter-role conflict in which the pressures resulting from roles performed in the study and social life domains (outside the study domain) are somewhat incompatible; thus, engaging in one role (e.g., the study role) hampers participation in the other role (e.g., social life role, outside the study domain), as they both may compete for limited, individual students' resources, such as time and energy. In other words, the pressure from studying and engaging in the student role may interfere with performing students' social life roles (outside the study domain). Moreover, given the fact that the work–family conflict can be two-directional, namely the family–work conflict when the family can interfere with work and the work–family conflict when work may interfere with family responsibilities [41–44], similarly, two directions of study–life conflict can be distinguished. The first one, life–study (L_S CON) conflict, takes place when students' social life interferes with their studies, and the second direction, the study to social life conflict (S_L CON), occurs when demands created by the study interfere with students' social life responsibilities.

2.1. Students' Working Experience and Study–Life Conflict

It is worth noticing that the problem of study–life conflict, which is the point of this study, can be additionally exaggerated by the fact that many young people are also working simultaneously while studying, which is an almost inseparable part of university students' experience [45], particularly visible in Poland and other Eastern European countries [18,46]. Specifically, the requirements of tourism and hospitality jobs, such as long, irregular, and

antisocial working hours, night and weekend shifts, and excessive workload [4,47–49], may consume students' limited resources of time and energy, leaving fewer of them for studying and other related activities. Many T&H students, including those with working experience in the industry, reflected that point in previous research [11,20,24,50,51], underlining that the nature of work in the industry is not suitable to live a normal, regular life, making it difficult to maintain a balance between work and the other aspects of students' life (e.g., family life) [11,13,20,24,50]. As a result, it can be assumed that working students experiencing the demanding nature of T&H work may be tired and stressed when facing another day at university, which ultimately may result in many negative outcomes, including exhaustion [18]. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *T&H students who are working and studying simultaneously experience higher study–life conflict.*

2.2. Study–Life Conflict and Students' Burnout

Burnout is defined as "a state of mental weariness" ([52], p. 294). It is a three-dimensional construct characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (cynicism), and reduced personal accomplishment [53,54]. Extensive research on burnout (or its dimensions) has been conducted within the service setting, including tourism and hospitality [55–61]. It is emphasized that the burnout syndrome in students is similar to that in service employees [62]. Therefore, when applied to the academic setting, students' burnout "refers to feeling exhausted because of study demands, having a cynical and detached attitude toward one's study, and feeling incompetent as a student" ([63], p. 465). The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory offers a theoretical framework for understanding the impact of study–life conflict on students' burnout and its consequences. The COR theory suggests that individuals seek to obtain, retain, and also protect their resources, which are defined as "those objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued in their own right or that are valued because they act as conduits to the achievement or protection of valued resources" ([64], p. 311). Stress occurs when certain valued resources are threatened with loss or are lost or when individuals fail to gain resources after investing in them substantively [64], which ultimately is central to experiencing the burnout that develops under high demands and low resources [35,65], leading to a loss of energy and motivation [35]. Based on the above, it can be assumed that juggling study and social roles may result in the loss of students' resources, making them particularly susceptible to experiencing an elevated level of stress, resulting in their burnout. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *The study–life conflict is positively related to students' burnout.*

2.3. Students' Burnout and Their Employment Aspirations

Students' burnout can have many negative consequences; it affects the learning process as well as students' overall health and wellbeing [66]. It may lead to higher absenteeism, a higher percentage of dropout, lower motivation to do the required course work, and poorer academic achievements [62]. Specifically, in their study among tourism students in Northern Cyprus, Uludağ & Yaratan [35] proved that students' burnout dimensions, such as emotional exhaustion and cynicism, were negatively associated with their vigor and absorption, respectively. Such students experience a decrease in their energy while studying and have worse concentration, becoming disengaged and thus more likely to exhibit lower motivation and reduced efficacy [35]. Furthermore, in the latest study by Grobelna and Dolot [16], it was proved that students' cynicism is negatively correlated with their aspirations to find future employment in T&H. Such findings are especially worrying, as the majority of T&H graduates leave the industry or even fail to enter the industry on graduation [25,67–69], which creates particular threats for the T&H industry that is a service-oriented business and highly dependent on well-qualified employees [20,25,70]

that determine the efficiency and effectiveness of the business [71] and play a critical role in sustaining its competitive edge [72].

Therefore, the study–life conflict and its consequences for students' burnout is a critical issue that ought to be examined and must be controlled in order to improve students' learning motivation in the T&H fields and enhance their further aspirations to work in the industry after graduation. Thus, based on the above discussion and the rational empirical findings, it can be assumed that the potential negative relationship between students' burnout and their employment aspirations for their future work in the T&H industry may exist. As a result, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *Students' burnout is negatively related to their employment aspirations.*

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Model

Proceeding from the theoretical considerations and the rationale of earlier empirical outcomes, it is assumed that facing high study demands may influence students' social life activities connected with being a family member, a spouse, and a friend. Specifically, students may lose their finite resources, such as energy and time, when trying to maneuver between the competing study and social life demands. As a result, their stress level increases, which may lead to students' burnout and its negative consequences, visible mainly in their study domain and influencing their future T&H career perception. Additionally, it is proposed that students who work while studying may experience higher conflict between their student and social life roles (outside the study).

Inferring from the above, this study developed and tested a research model (Figure 1) investigating the effect of T&H students' current working experience (W_EXP) on the study–life conflict (S_L CON) and its consequences on students' burnout (S_BURN) as manifested by both students' exhaustion (S_EXH) and cynicism (S_CY) about the undertaken studies. Additionally, the relationships between students' burnout (S_BURN) and their employment aspirations (EMP_ASP) waere analyzed.
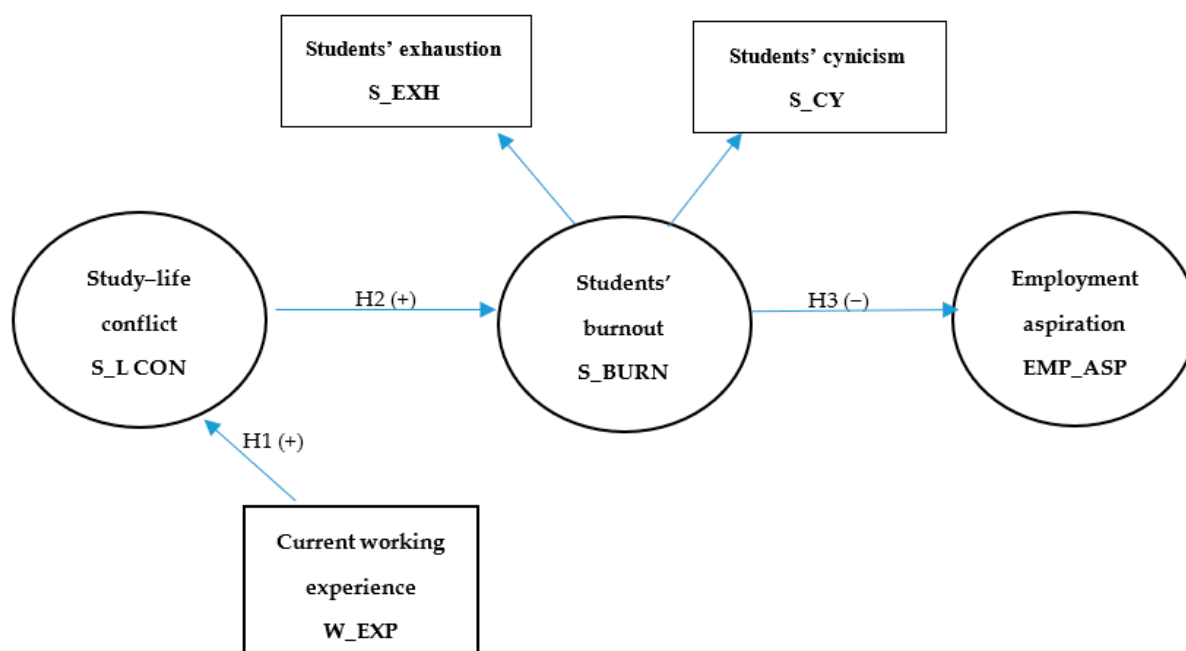

Figure 1. Research model. Source: own work.

3.2. Data Collection Procedure and Respondents' Characteristics

The study sample comprised three higher education institutions (HEI), both public and private. The selection criteria were based on their educational offering, including tourism and/or hospitality educational programs, location in Tricity, and previous collaboration of the researchers and these HEI. Tricity, being an attractive seaside tourist destination in the north of Poland and a major academic and business center in Pomerania, has an important double role in the development of tourism: firstly, it educates future employees in the tourism industry, and secondly, it dynamically creates an increasing number of jobs and new offers in tourism and the related fields [73,74].

The data were collected with the use of a questionnaire survey; 155 paper-based, self-administrated questionnaires were distributed among the respondents who were asked to fill them in during classes as had previously been agreed with the participating HEI teaching staff. Students were assured that their participation was voluntary and anonymous and that their answers were confidential. They were also informed that their participation in the present study was not a formal part of their obligatory curriculum [67].

Remarkably, there were some advantages of the application of self-administrated questionnaires [75]. The study respondents were under no pressure to answer the questions immediately, so they had ample time to think carefully about all of the survey questions, and they could avoid some embarrassment (compared to interviews) while answering sensitive questions (e.g., those related to their commitment to their studies). These aspects, including the controlled administration of the questionnaire during formal teaching time and under the researcher's supervision, contributed to achieving the best response [45]. Ultimately, 110 valid questionnaires were retrieved and analyzed in this study, which yielded a response rate of 70.97%.

3.3. Measures

The study constructs shown in Figure 1 were operationalized by adapting scales derived from previous extensive research available in the management literature (Appendix A).

To measure the study–life conflict (S_L CON), five items were reformulated based on items from the work–family conflict scale (W_F CON) from Karatepe and Kilic [48], which was based on Netemeyer et al. [44] and Boles et al. [76]. They have been adapted to the academic context of this study and reworded accordingly (e.g., an original item from the W_F CON scale: "I often have to miss important family and social activities because of my job" has been reworded to "I often have to miss important family and social activities because of my study"). This approach has been consulted with academics from the tourism and hospitality fields, receiving substantive acceptance, and similar practices have been used in earlier research (e.g., [63]).

To measure students' burnout (S_BURN), two core dimensions of students' burnout, namely exhaustion (S_EXH) and cynicism (S_CY), were used in this study. Similar practices of measuring burnout using the two abovementioned dimensions have been taken in Chen and Kao [56] or Min et al. [77]. Five and four items have been used for each of the dimensions, respectively, from the MBI-Student Survey (MBI-SS) [63]. Sample items include 'I feel burned out from my studies' and 'I have become less interested in my studies since my enrollment at university'. It has been proven that the MBI-SS is a valid instrument to measure academic burnout regardless of cultural background [78].

The employment aspirations (EMP_ASP) of the students were measured using four items adapted from Teng [14], who successfully assessed the employment aspirations of undergraduate hospitality seniors in Taiwan after their internships. However, due to the fact that participants in this study came from various T&H specializations, their employment aspirations mean their commitment to the field in which they are currently studying and will gain qualifications upon graduation. Thus, the scale items used in this study have been reworded accordingly (e.g., "I believe I can advance my career in the field within which I am currently studying").

A potential antecedent of S_L CON, students' working experience (W_EXP), was measured via one dichotomous question referring to whether students were working when the study was being conducted.

All of the items were assessed according to five-point Likert-type scales, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, except W_EXP, which was binary coded.

The survey instrument was originally prepared in English and later translated into Polish using the back-translation method in order to ensure good quality translation equivalence. A pilot test conducted among T&H students confirmed a good understanding of the scale items.

To conduct the descriptive statistical analysis, the IBM SPSS Statistics package (version 27, IBM, Armonk, NY, USA) was used. To assess the predictive model properties, the PLS structural equations modeling was conducted in WarpPLS software (version 6.0, ScriptWarp Systems, Laredo, TX, USA) [79–81].

This study is part of a larger research project on the factors influencing students' attitudes towards undertaken studies and their employment aspirations in tourism and hospitality fields [32].

Analyzing the respondents' profile, 75.5% of the respondents were female, and 62.7% of the students were aged in the range of 18–21 years. The respondents were enrolled in a wide range of specializations within tourism and hospitality fields, including tourism & recreation (35.5%), tourism & hospitality (19.1%), gastronomy & dietetics (14.5%), Spa & Wellness (12.7%), air traffic service (9.1%), hospitality & gastronomy (7.3%), and others (1.8%). Moreover, 61.62% of the students were working along with studying. Thus, in most cases, students had to share their scarce resources, such as time and energy, between studying and working simultaneously, probably leaving not many of them for personal and social life activities, such as meeting with friends, a spouse, and families.

3.4. Methods

This study used structural equation modeling based on the partial least squared (SEM-PLS) modeling method. This statistical analysis aims to maximize the variability of dependent measurements by a series of predictors. This is an algorithm using the partial least squares method in two main phases. The first phase is related to establishing the measurement model where confirmatory analysis validates and constructs variables for use in the second, regression-oriented phase [82]. These variables are used to calculate a structural paths model, which confirms the theoretical model.

This second phase of the SEM-PLS analysis was oriented toward predicting and explaining dependent variables. This second step was a statistical model where relations between measurements were derivatives of the formulated theory. The predictive power of the inspected model was its main evaluation criterion. The assessment was conducted through the R^2 and Tenenhaus Goodness of Fit (GoF) coefficients. In the following calculations, the consistent PLS method was implemented. It used the information about the measurement model of variables and controlled their measurement errors, which resulted in better predictive properties [80,82]. The statistical significance of the predictors was estimated by the exponential smoothing method. This algorithm had better properties in estimating standard errors than the widely known bootstrapping methods [83–86]. The authors predicted linear relations, and this assumption was set in the tested SEM-PLS model.

4. Results

The first phase of the SEM-PLS method resulted in confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) [82]. Table 1 shows that model coefficients informed about no heightened collinearity in the measurement model, the predictive model, and both of them [82,87,88]. The measurement model rations (SRMR and SMAR) informed that the indicators were well fitted to their corresponding latent variables. Indicators were strongly linked to the latent variables (χ^2; p-value) [89]. The normally acceptable fit is indicated by a p-value associated with a χ^2 that is equal to or lower than 0.05, i.e., significant at the level of 0.05. The smaller it is,

the better the fit [90]. The second phase of the modeling procedure was also well assessed through fit coefficients. The generalized predictive power (GoF) was high [80,91], and the tested model was free from Simpson's Paradox (SPR) and the Statistical Suppression (SSR) phenomena. These statistics showed that the signs and correlation values of the tested relationships were similar to the corresponding path values tested in the model [91,92]. Fit summaries are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Statistics of data fit to the measurement and path SEM-PLS model.

Model	Fit Coefficients	Value
Path	AFVIF	2.28
	GoF	0.46
	SPR	1.00
	SSR	1.00
Measurement	SRMR	0.12
	SMAR	0.10
	χ^2	1.28 ***

Note: AVIF = Average Variance Inflation Factor (accepted if AVIF $\leq$ 5.00, ideally AVIF $\leq$ 3.30); AFVIF = Average Full Variance Inflation Factor (accepted if AVIF $\leq$ 5.00, ideally AVIF $\leq$ 3.30); GoF = Goodness of Fit (low if GoF $\geq$ 0.10, moderate if GoF $\geq$ 0.25, high if GoF $\geq$ 0.36); SPR = Simpson's Paradox Ratio (accepted if SPR $\geq$ 0.70, ideally SPR = 1.00); SSR = Statistical Suppression Ratio (accepted if SSR $\geq$ 0.70, ideally SSR = 1.00); SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (accepted if SRMR $\leq$ 0.10); SMAR = Standardized Mean Absolute Residual (accepted if SMAR $\leq$ 0.10); χ^2 = Chi Square; *** $p < 0.001$.

According to CFA (Table 2), the loading magnitudes ranged from 0.66 to 0.92, and all of the t-values were significant. Specifically, the measurement model was formulated in two stages. In the first stage, there were two variables formulated as S_EXH and S_CY. Their measurement was statistically satisfied. Their factor loadings were significant and high. In the second stage, previously calculated latent variables were entered into the measurement model to calculate the S_BURN measurement.

Table 2. Measurement of the study constructs.

Stage	Measurement	Items	Factor Loadings	*t*-Test
1	S_EXH	v1	0.74	9.47 ***
		v2	0.73	9.29 ***
		v3	0.84	10.96 ***
		v4	0.75	9.52 ***
		v5	0.76	9.71 ***
	S_CY	v1	0.81	10.43 ***
		v2	0.83	10.78 ***
		v3	0.84	11.01 ***
		v4	0.67	8.42 ***
2	S_L CON	v1	0.82	10.69 ***
		v2	0.90	11.83 ***
		v3	0.82	10.57 ***
		v4	0.86	11.22 ***
		v5	0.89	11.77 ***
	EMP_ASP	v1	0.81	10.50 ***
		v2	0.87	11.50 ***
		v3	0.72	9.14 ***
		v4	0.66	8.19 ***
	W_EXP	EXP *	1.00	13.59 ***
	S_BURN	S_CY	0.92	12.24 ***
		S_EXH	0.92	12.23 ***

Note: All loadings are significant at the level of *** $p < 0.001$. * measurement without error measured by one indicator; Study–life conflict (S_L CON); employment aspirations (EMP_ASP); students' burnout (S_BURN); students' exhaustion (S_EXH); students' cynicism (S_CY); students' current working experience (W_EXP).

As shown in Table 3, the average variance extracted (AVE) for each factor was above 0.5 [93]. Cronbach's α, used to determine the internal consistency of the items [94], was above the cut-off point of 0.70 [95], indicating an acceptable level of internal reliability of the study constructs. Additionally, composite reliability (CR), which is highly recommended with the PTH1 algorithm [80], reached satisfactory values in the range of 0.87–0.93, being higher than the recommended value of 0.7 [96].

Table 3. The validation of the measurement and the explained variability of the study constructs.

Measure	R^2	ΔR^2	CR	α	AVE
S_LCON	0.08	0.08	0.93	0.91	0.73
EMP_ASP	0.23	0.23	0.85	0.77	0.60
S_BURN	0.48	0.47	0.92	0.82	0.85
S_EXH *	-	-	0.87	0.81	0.63
S_CY *	-	-	0.88	0.83	0.59

Note: R^2 (Explained variance); ΔR^2 (Adjusted R^2); CR (Composite Reliability); α (Cronbach's Alpha); AVE (Average Variance Extracted); * reliability and variability of burnout indicators; Study–life conflict (S_L CON); employment aspirations (EMP_ASP); students' burnout (S_BURN); students' exhaustion (S_EXH); students' cynicism (S_CY).

It should be added that inferences from SEM models may carry a high risk due to the common method bias [97], but researchers agree that the SEM-PLS model is free from the common method bias if the AFVIF coefficient is <5 [87]. However, to check an exact construct validity, the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratios and zero-order correlations were calculated [98]. The results (presented in Table 4) were far better than the acceptable threshold values. The HTMT ratio informs that the variables measured in the model provided significantly different information about the tested observations. This means that the discriminant validity was established in the tested model. The correlation coefficients pointed out that covariance between the tested variables is predicted by the formulated theory and is similar to the path values reported in the tested model.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics, zero-order correlations (top quarter), HTMT ratios (bottom quarter).

	S_L CON	EMP_ASP	W_EXP	S_BURN
S_L CON	1	−0.01	0.29 **	0.69 ***
EMP_ASP	0.08 ***	1	0	−0.48 ***
W_EXP	-	-	1	0.30 **
S_BURN	0.70 ***	0.49 ***	-	1
Mean	3.18	3.93	0.84	3.03
Standard deviation	1.1	0.68	0.36	0.74

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, HTMT ratios good if <0.90, best if <0.80; Study–life conflict (S_L CON); employment aspirations (EMP_ASP); students' burnout (S_BURN); students' current working experience (W_EXP).

As shown in Table 4, students manifested experiencing the study–life conflict at the average level of 3.18. The average student's burnout score in this study was 3.03. Additionally, participating students manifested their (average) employment aspirations level at 3.93.

Analyzing the study findings shown in Figure 2, it can be stated that, as hypothesized, the increased level of students' current working experience significantly increases the level of the study–life conflict experienced by them; therefore, H1 received support from the empirical data. Students' current working experience explained 8% of the variance in their study–life conflict. The results also reveal that the study–life conflict exerts significant, positive effects on students' burnout, thus confirming H2. The study–life conflict explained 48% of the variance in students' burnout. Additionally, the present results also show that students' burnout has a significant and negative impact on their employment aspirations in the T&H industry, providing support for H3. The burnout experienced by students

explained 23% of the variance in students' aspirations as to their future employment in the industry.
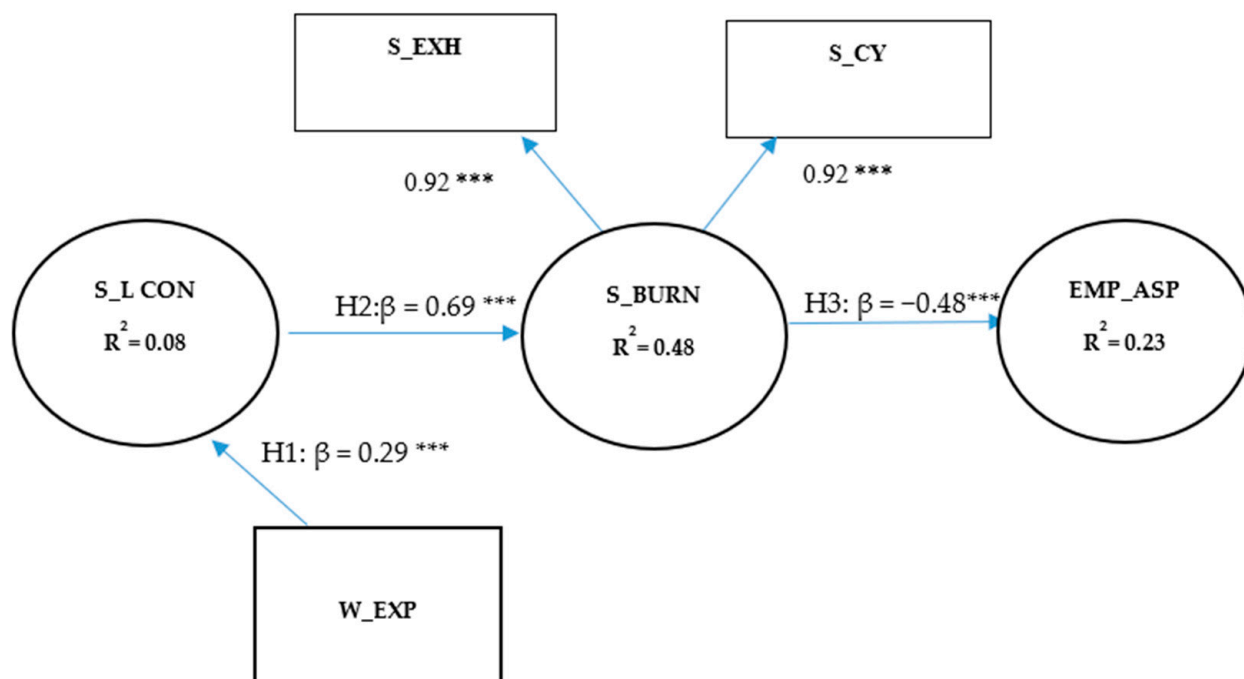

Figure 2. Verified model. Source: own work. Note: Study–life conflict (S_L CON); employment aspirations (EMP_ASP); students' burnout (S_BURN); students' exhaustion (S_EXH); students' cynicism (S_CY); students' current working experience (W_EXP); *** $p < 0.001$.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This research aimed to investigate the issue of study–life conflict and its negative consequences on students' attitudes towards their studies and future employment in the tourism and hospitality industry. It also sought an answer to the question: what may contribute to experiencing such a conflict among T&H students. Therefore, this study proposed and checked a research model investigating the effect of T&H students' current working experience (W_EXP) on the study–life conflict (S_L CON) experienced by them and its consequences on the students' burnout (S_BURN) and their employment aspirations (EMP_ASP). T&H students from Tricity in Northern Poland participated in checking the research hypotheses. All of the hypothesized relationships were supported by the empirical data. More specifically, the results demonstrated that juggling the competing demands from both study and social roles may lead to students' experiencing a study–life conflict. Additionally, it was revealed that temporarily working students may experience an even elevated level of such conflict, which may result from the fact that working in demanding T&H jobs may additionally deplete students' limited individual resources, such as time and energy, leaving less of them for other areas of students' life. In a recent study by Grobelna & Tokarz-Kocik [18], it was revealed that the more often and the more work students do, the more exhausted they may be while studying. In turn, Brand et al. [99] showed that unfavorable work schedules in T&H may be related to numerous negative outcomes, including decreased quality of students' sleep, anxiety, symptoms of depression, or social problems. This may finally contribute to students' tiredness and exhaustion. Naturally, students may change their career choices relating to the tourism and hospitality industries following their work experience [100].

The findings of this study also demonstrated that the study–life conflict experienced by T&H students might result in their burnout as manifested by their exhaustion and cynical attitudes toward undertaken studies. It may result from the fact that the difficulties T&H students experience in balancing the demands of their multiple roles may lead to their emotional and physical depletion, lack of energy, and detaching themselves from their studies, which loses its meaning for them. By contrast, students who have a possibility to be involved in social life activities, such as participation in culture, also become more involved in their studies, as reflected by their greater dedication [32].

Finally, it was also reported that students' burnout exerts a significant and negative impact on T&H students' plans to find employment in the industry after graduation. This echoes the study of Grobelna and Dolot [16], where a negative relationship between T&H students' cynicism, as a burnout dimension, and their employment aspirations was revealed.

To recapitulate, this study proved that facing high study demands requiring devotion of time and energy and creating a strain interferes with performing students' social life responsibilities, which can be additionally boosted by students' working temporarily in the industry. Worse yet, the study–life conflict experienced by students may have a detrimental impact on them, resulting in their burnout and its negative consequences on their future employment in the T&H industry, which is particularly alarming, given the high staff turnover that affects the tourism and hospitality industry globally and Poland in particular [101].

5.1. Implications

This study answers the research calls for more research focusing on students' perceptions of and aspirations for their future careers in the T&H industry (e.g., [11,14–16,20,22,23,32]). Specifically, this study offers a new perspective on understanding students' employment aspirations through the prism of a study–life conflict experienced by the future T&H workforce. Using the COR theory, this study revealed that students might lose their valuable resources of time and energy while handling the difficulties stemming from their study and social life activities, which may be particularly stressful for them. Students' study and social life roles compete with each other for their scarce resources, and consequently, this competition may generate many negative outcomes in the study domain, such as the students' burnout, which may significantly decrease their employment aspiration in T&H.

Additionally, this study also answers a need for more research into the factors influencing students' burnout [39] and constitutes a particularly interesting area of new research via examining study–life conflict and its outcomes, such as burnout, thus expanding the original theories of W_F conflict and burnout, which mainly deal with individuals who have occupations, into the academic context of T&H students.

Additionally, as far as the authors know, this research is among the first, if any, concerning the problem of the study–life conflict experienced by T&H students and its consequences for students' outcomes based on data from Polish T&H students. This is also the only study that attempts to simultaneously measure the relationships between the proposed study constructs using SEM analysis, which allows for the simultaneous testing of complex models with numerous dependent and independent variables. The application of the SEM tool may support a researcher in conducting superior quality tourism research [102].

As regards practical implications, this study provides useful recommendations for T&H educators, employers, and students as well. Firstly, universities should reasonably protect students from excessive study loads; therefore, it is important to provide them with a more flexible educational approach, such as flexibility in class scheduling, the number of subjects studied, the mode of delivery, diversified teaching, and/or assessment methods [45,46]. Particularly, introducing modern and involved teaching methods adapted to the youth's familiarity with communication media and digital technologies is recommended [26,30]. This could increase students' engagement and facilitate knowledge assimilation in an attractive form. The study programs should also be more suitable to

the students' interests, needs, cognitive ability, and hourly loads, in this way enhancing students' learning experience and engagement and reducing their burnout (see [35,46]). Thus improving the content of subjects, particularly the sector-specific content of specialist subjects, is recommended [103]. However, to prepare students whose competencies and skills achieve professional recognition and let them operate successfully when entering the business, specialization in tourism education requires close cooperation between academia and practitioners [104].

Moreover, students should also have an opportunity to complete a certain percentage of their study tasks in extra time or have a choice in their delivery time. Moreover, tighter and more remote students' cooperation with lecturers is recommended to increase daily accessibility to teachers while facing deadlines or other difficulties in completing the study tasks. Based on the above, it is also important to collect students' feedback on how they assess such flexibility and individualized approach and which solutions they prefer the most. Finally, it is vital to have students mainly based on choice rather than on chance. Thus, more rigorous and selective enrolment procedures to higher education for tourism and hospitality should be provided [20], focusing on a bigger picture of candidates, including their interests in T&H, previous educational and/or working experience, and general predispositions to have students who are really engaged in the educational process and who want to actively learn and see a purpose in their studies, instead of ambivalent ones enrolling in study programs purely by chance because they have not been accepted to other specializations. The latter ones may experience the burden of the undertaken studies quite differently.

Secondly, although it was revealed that working students might experience a higher level of study–life conflict, working experience in tourism and hospitality may have numerous benefits and should be perceived as one of the forms of practical work-related learning experience and a platform for students to put what they have learned in classrooms to use in reality, thus bridging the theoretical and practical world of the industry. Through such employment, students gain experience and develop ties with the industry that may be beneficial in their further careers [46]. Therefore, it is particularly important to recognize and acknowledge such industry experience by universities as a valuable and integral element of T&H education. However, to be successful in providing students with reasonable work and assisting them in personal development, tight cooperation between educators and businesses is required. It could also be beneficial to the latter ones, giving them a chance to gain a young, flexible, and quality workforce within the T&H industry, which is chronically understaffed and faces high employee turnover [105–109]. Therefore, the industry should realize that today's students, new, future recruits, become vital in winning the war for talent (see [107]). Thus, on the one hand, it is proposed to formalize and control students' employment to ensure that they are trained in certain skills useful for their future employment in T&H [45,46]; on the other hand, it would be important to offer practical assistance or more guidance for students as regards their temporary work, such as appropriate and flexible working hours, types of work or adequate working conditions, etc. (see [46]). To recapitulate, both universities and industry should be much more aware of different stressors experienced by students who simultaneously study and work. Lecturers should show more empathy for the demands of their students' employment [46], and practitioners should have more empathy for the requirements of their young employees' studies. They both should positively respond to the lived realities of working students.

Thirdly, students should also reasonably limit study hours per day and take a break from studying, particularly when they cannot focus despite trying [53]. Indispensable breaks and treating themselves as a reward for hard, well-done work may help them to consider their study worthwhile [53]. Moreover, it is also important that students develop a daily habit of calling or talking with others, regardless of whether they had a good or bad day [53]. This may also increase the chances that students will be offered adequate help and support if needed. Therefore, it is also important to develop a support system and academic counselling services for students showing them how to manage heavy study loads and

provide them with coping strategies. Improving the study–life balance means putting enough effort into the academic work while also taking time to enjoy the social, sporting, and cultural aspects of their lives [110]. Therefore, it is also important to provide students with the socio-cultural life of the academic community, which may meet the students' social needs, answering the call that youth should be both a time of education and of entering into culture [32].

5.2. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although the results of this study seem to be satisfactory, it also suffers from some shortcomings. Firstly, this study was carried out among students of only three HEIs from Tricity (Northern Poland), which hinders the generalizability of the results of this study. Conducting future studies with both a larger sample and other HEIs located in different regions is recommended.

Moreover, this is a cross-sectional study; hence, one cannot infer causal relationships between the study variables [111]. Therefore, future studies should adopt a longitudinal research design to establish the directions of causation more confidently. Additionally, even if the self-reported bias should not be a concern in this research, whenever applicable, future studies should collect data during various periods and from multiple sources. Moreover, it could be particularly interesting to test the legitimacy of the research model in other socio-cultural settings.

Lastly, given that all dependent variables in the tested model, such as, for example, a study–life conflict, are explained through one independent variable, it can be stated that there are other independent variables not identified within this research framework that can potentially improve the explained variance of this study constructs (e.g., study–life conflict). This opens an avenue for future research on the issue of other more or less significant predictors, which may provide additional explanations in the tested model. Therefore, as regards future studies, it is proposed to identify whether family/friend support may influentially alleviate the study–life conflict experienced by T&H students, as the previous studies revealed the important role of the students' social and family background in their understanding of the nature of tourism and hospitality. This may significantly affect their decision concerning a prospective career in the industry [50]. Furthermore, as indicated in the latest study by Grobelna and Tokarz-Kocik [68], the social support that students receive is positively related to their person–job fit, which has a positive relationship with their plans to find employment in the industry. Moreover, it could also be very interesting to examine how the study–life conflict is experienced by students depending on their motivations, perceptions, and choice of degree in T&H [112]. Finally, it could also be vital to investigate the phenomena of study–life facilitation—its antecedents and outcomes for T&H students.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Measures of the Constructs.

Constructs	Items
S_L_CON	The demands of my study interfere with home, family and social life.
	Because of my study I cannot involve myself as much as I would like to in maintaining close relations with my family, spouse, or friends.
	Things I want to do at home do not get done because of the demands my study puts on me.
	I often have to miss important family and social activities because of my study.
	There is a conflict between my study and the commitments and responsibilities I have to my family, spouse, or friends.
EMP_ASP	I would like to work in the field within which I am currently studying.
	I believe I can advance my career in the field within which I am currently studying.
	I would recommend the field within which I am currently studying to my friends and relatives.
	It would be a wrong decision to choose the field within which I am currently studying as a career path.
S_BURN S_EXH	I feel emotionally drained by my studies.
	I feel used up at the end of a day at university.
	I feel tired when I get up in the morning and I have to face another day at university.
	Studying or attending a class is really a strain for me.
	I feel burned out from my studies.
S_CY	I have become less interested in my studies since my enrollment at university.
	I have become less enthusiastic about my studies.
	I have become more cynical about the potential usefulness of my studies.
	I doubt the significance of my studies.

Note: Study–life conflict (S_L CON); employment aspirations (EMP_ASP); students' burnout (S_BURN); students' exhaustion (S_EXH); students' cynicism (S_CY).

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