



Systematic Review

Tourism and Hospitality Students' Perceptions of Their Employment Prospects and Future Career Paths: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

This study systematically reviews 129 peer-reviewed empirical studies examining tourism and hospitality (T&H) students' perceptions of their employment prospects and future career paths. A systematic review was conducted using the RePEc database, which provides comprehensive coverage of economics, tourism, and hospitality research, ensuring broad and interdisciplinary representation of relevant studies. By synthesizing evidence across three decades, the review identifies persistent and emerging themes shaping students' career outlooks. Negative perceptions, particularly regarding pay, working hours, job security, and career progression, remain the most frequently reported concerns and are strongly associated with employment anxiety. At the same time, the analysis highlights a significant rise in entrepreneurial intentions after 2015, reflecting students' growing preference for autonomy and innovation. Internships and real-world experiences consistently emerge as pivotal in shaping perceptions, either reinforcing commitment to the sector or exposing mismatches between expectations and workplace realities. The review further underscores the influence of cultural, social, and personal factors, including family background, gender norms, and self-efficacy, in shaping career decisions. This study contributes by offering a comprehensive thematic synthesis, identifying patterns and transitions over time, and outlining research gaps. The findings provide actionable insights for educators, industry practitioners, and policymakers seeking to strengthen career pathways and ensure the long-term sustainability of the T&H workforce.

Keywords: tourism and hospitality; students; employment prospects; career path; systematic literature review



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1. Introduction

Understanding tourism and hospitality (T&H) students' perceptions of their future career paths and employment prospects is crucial, as these perceptions directly influence their motivation, academic engagement, and ultimately, their commitment to the industry [1]. Educational institutions play a vital role in preparing students for the multifaceted challenges, and understanding their perspectives is essential for tailoring curricula and pedagogical approaches to meet industry demands [2]. Career perceptions held by students significantly impact their decisions regarding internships, further education, and eventual job selection, thereby influencing the talent pool available to the industry [3].

In this review, "career perceptions" refer to students' subjective evaluations, attitudes, expectations, and beliefs regarding employment conditions, career advancement opportunities, and long-term professional trajectories within the tourism and hospitality sector.

“Employment prospects” denote perceived job availability, stability, remuneration, and entry pathways into the industry. “Future career paths” encompass anticipated progression routes, including managerial advancement, entrepreneurship, sector mobility, or potential exit decisions. These constructs collectively frame the scope of the present synthesis.

Furthermore, the alignment of students’ career expectations with the realities of the workplace is critical for ensuring job satisfaction and reducing employee turnover rates, which can be particularly problematic in these sectors [4]. Therefore, it is important to explore students’ attitudes toward various aspects of working conditions, including pay and benefits, physical work environments, and opportunities for advancement [5].

The persistence of challenges such as expectation–reality misalignment, employment anxiety, and fluctuating entrepreneurial aspirations underscores the fragmented nature of existing research. Although numerous empirical studies have examined specific aspects of students’ career perceptions, findings remain dispersed across contexts, time periods, and methodological approaches. Without a structured synthesis, it is difficult to assess overarching patterns, theoretical consistencies, and evolving trends. A systematic literature review is therefore necessary to consolidate existing knowledge, identify thematic regularities, and provide a coherent foundation for future research and policy development.

This paper contributes to the literature as it systematically reviews 129 studies on the perceptions of tourism and hospitality students with respect to their employment prospects and their future career paths. This review provides one of the most extensive syntheses, which attempts to highlight the main characteristics and findings of each study, to categorize them, to identify patterns over time and to produce a thematic synthesis grouping studies by key themes. This review provides insights for educational institutions, industry practitioners, and policymakers, enabling them to make informed decisions that foster a robust and engaged workforce in the tourism and hospitality domains.

While prior studies have examined tourism and hospitality students’ career perceptions, most existing contributions are either narrative reviews, conceptual discussions, or analyses focusing on specific dimensions such as internship experiences, employability skills, or entrepreneurial intentions. To date, no study has systematically synthesized the full breadth of empirical research on this topic using a structured PRISMA-based systematic literature review covering more than three decades of scholarship.

The present study advances the literature in several ways. First, it compiles and analyzes 129 empirical studies, providing one of the most comprehensive datasets on tourism and hospitality students’ career perceptions. Second, it applies a transparent systematic review protocol, enabling structured identification of thematic patterns and methodological characteristics across the literature. Third, it integrates multiple theoretical frameworks—including Human Capital Theory, Social Cognitive Career Theory, the Theory of Planned Behavior, and Career Construction Theory—into a unified conceptual interpretation. Finally, the review identifies temporal shifts in research themes, particularly the growing prominence of entrepreneurial intentions and employment anxiety in the post-2015 literature. Together, these contributions provide a consolidated and forward-looking foundation for future research on tourism and hospitality career development.

The layout of the paper is as follows: the second section presents the main theories on the T&H education and labor outcomes nexus, and the third section describes the methodology of the systematic literature review and shows the main characteristics and results of the studies. The fourth section summarizes the main findings and discusses the key insights. Thereafter, Sections 5 and 6 present the patterns over time and a thematic synthesis, respectively. Finally, Section 7 discusses the theoretical integration of the findings, Section 8 highlights the gaps in literature and discusses future research directions, and Section 9 presents the conclusions of the study.

2. Main Theories on the Relationship Between Tourism and Hospitality Education and Labor Outcomes

Understanding tourism and hospitality students' career perceptions requires a multidimensional theoretical foundation. The empirical literature synthesized in this review draws primarily on established career development and employability theories that explain intention formation, motivational processes, adaptability, and skill acquisition. The frameworks discussed below were selected based on their prevalence within the reviewed studies and their conceptual relevance to dominant themes such as entrepreneurial intentions, employment anxiety, career adaptability, and perceived employability.

While originating from distinct disciplinary traditions, these theories offer complementary lenses for interpreting how students evaluate career pathways in the tourism and hospitality sector. The theoretical frameworks discussed in this section were selected based on their prevalence in the reviewed empirical literature and their conceptual relevance to career intention, employability, adaptability, and educational outcomes within tourism and hospitality contexts. While other career and employability theories exist, the selected frameworks represent the most frequently cited and analytically influential perspectives within the body of research synthesized in this review.

2.1. Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory suggests that investments in education and training enhance individuals' knowledge and skills, thereby increasing their productivity and value in the labor market. This theory posits that skilled workers not only possess educational attainment but also encompass tacit knowledge and specific skill sets [6]. Within the context of tourism and hospitality education, this framework emphasizes the importance of curricula that equip students with industry-relevant competencies, enabling them to secure desirable employment opportunities and advance their careers [5]. Students' perceptions of the value of their education are therefore shaped by their expectations regarding the returns on their investment, including anticipated salaries, job security, and career progression [7]. The application of human capital theory to tourism and hospitality education underscores the need for educators to align their programs with the evolving demands of the industry, ensuring that graduates possess the skills and knowledge required to succeed in a competitive global market [8].

In the context of the present systematic review, Human Capital Theory provides a useful lens for interpreting studies that examine the relationship between educational preparation, internship experience, and perceived employability. Many of the reviewed studies implicitly rely on the assumption that enhanced skills and competencies translate into improved employment prospects. However, the thematic synthesis also reveals limitations of this perspective, as negative career perceptions often persist despite skill acquisition. This suggests that while Human Capital Theory effectively explains instrumental dimensions of career evaluation, it may be insufficient for capturing subjective factors such as work–life balance concerns, industry prestige, or emotional disillusionment that are particularly salient in tourism and hospitality contexts.

2.2. Social Cognitive Career Theory

Social Cognitive Career Theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the psychological processes that influence career decision-making and development. This theory posits that career choices are shaped by the interplay of self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals, all of which are influenced by individual experiences and environmental factors. Self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform specific tasks, plays a crucial role in shaping career interests and

aspirations [9]. Furthermore, this theory emphasizes the importance of observational learning and social persuasion in shaping career beliefs and aspirations. Students often look to role models, such as successful tourism industry professionals or alumni, to gain insights into potential career paths and develop their own aspirations. Moreover, contextual factors, such as perceived social support and barriers to achieving career goals, also influence career decision-making [10].

Within this review, Social Cognitive Career Theory informs the interpretation of recurring themes such as self-efficacy, employment anxiety, and the role of contextual supports or barriers. The prominence of self-efficacy across the reviewed studies aligns strongly with SCCT's core propositions. At the same time, the findings suggest that sector-specific structural constraints—such as seasonality, wage instability, and crisis vulnerability—may extend beyond individual cognitive appraisal processes. Thus, while SCCT offers a robust framework for understanding motivational dynamics, its explanatory power may benefit from integration with broader structural perspectives when applied to tourism and hospitality education.

2.3. *Theory of Planned Behavior*

Theory of Planned Behavior suggests that individuals' intentions to engage in a particular behavior, such as pursuing a career in tourism and hospitality, are influenced by their attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Attitudes, reflecting individuals' positive or negative evaluations of a career in these industries, are shaped by beliefs about the potential outcomes and associated values [11]. Subjective norms, representing individuals' perceptions of social pressure to pursue or avoid a particular career, are influenced by the opinions of significant others, such as family members, friends, and mentors. Perceived behavioral control, referring to individuals' beliefs about their ability to successfully perform the behaviors required for a career in tourism and hospitality, is influenced by factors such as skills, resources, and opportunities. The more favorable the attitude and subjective norm, and the greater the perceived control, the stronger the person's intention to perform the behavior in question [12].

In relation to this review, TPB provides a structured model for interpreting studies examining entrepreneurial intentions, career commitment, and intention to remain in or exit the tourism sector. Many empirical studies rely on TPB constructs such as attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control to explain career-related decisions. However, the thematic analysis indicates that career perceptions in tourism and hospitality are often shaped by dynamic and emotionally charged experiences, particularly during internships or crises. As such, while TPB offers strong predictive value for intention formation, it may not fully capture evolving identity processes or contextual volatility characteristic of the sector.

2.4. *Krumboltz's Social Learning Theory*

Krumboltz's Social Learning Theory of Career Decision Making provides a framework for understanding how individuals make career choices based on their learning experiences [13]. This theory emphasizes that career paths are not predetermined but rather evolve through a series of learning experiences that shape individuals' beliefs, interests, and skills [14]. Krumboltz posits that career decisions are influenced by four key factors: genetic endowments and special abilities, environmental conditions and events, learning experiences, and task approach skills. In the face of economic shifts, Krumboltz's theory equips career counselors with tools to guide students in adopting proactive career behaviors and capitalizing on emerging opportunities [15]. This model acknowledges the complexities of

career development, highlighting the importance of adaptability and life-long learning in navigating the ever-changing landscape of the tourism and hospitality industries [16].

Krumboltz's Social Learning Theory is particularly relevant for interpreting the role of experiential learning and unplanned events identified in the review, especially in relation to internship experiences and exposure to workplace realities. The synthesis demonstrates that such experiences frequently recalibrate students' expectations and career intentions. Nevertheless, despite its conceptual relevance, this theory appears comparatively underutilized within tourism and hospitality research. Greater empirical application of learning-based and happenstance perspectives could enhance understanding of how students adapt to sector-specific uncertainties.

2.5. Career Construction Theory

Career construction theory views career development as an active process where individuals create meaning from their choices as they build their careers, highlighting that careers are not simply unfolding but are thoughtfully constructed through individual action [17]. The core of this theory emphasizes career adaptability, which involves individuals possessing the psychological resources needed for current and future career tasks [18]. It helps individuals navigate career challenges by understanding personal narratives [19]. Career adaptability, a central tenet of career construction theory, encompasses an individual's resources for managing career development, including concern, control, curiosity, and confidence [20]. Furthermore, this theory emphasizes the importance of self-construction in linking one's self-concept with work, thereby empowering individuals to actively create their work and derive meaning from their careers, an approach particularly relevant in navigating the evolving dynamics of the modern workplace [21].

Career Construction Theory contributes to a developmental perspective that is particularly useful for interpreting themes related to adaptability, shifting aspirations, and declining enthusiasm over time. The evidence synthesized in this review suggests that students' career perceptions evolve through exposure to industry realities, reflecting processes of career adaptation and identity reconstruction. However, the relatively limited application of this theory within the reviewed literature indicates an opportunity for more longitudinal and narrative-based research approaches that move beyond static intention models.

While career adaptability is most explicitly conceptualized within Career Construction Theory, related constructs such as self-efficacy and task-approach skills in other frameworks reflect complementary dimensions of adaptive capacity. In this review, career adaptability refers specifically to the psychosocial resources enabling individuals to navigate career transitions.

These above-mentioned theories underscore the importance of proactive personality traits, self-efficacy, creativity, and adaptability in shaping students' career paths and employment prospects, especially in the tourism and hospitality sectors [22,23]. Moreover, individual attributes and cultural backgrounds play a pivotal role in shaping career adaptability and adaptation, further emphasizing the need for tailored support and guidance. The interplay between personality traits, self-efficacy, creativity, and employability highlights the importance of these inter-connected factors in promoting professional success and personal growth within the hospitality and tourism sectors [9]. Therefore, to enhance the quality of education, it's crucial to regularly assess students' perceptions and adapt curricula to align with industry demands, thereby ensuring graduates are well-prepared for their future careers.

Although the theories discussed originate from distinct disciplinary traditions, they share several overlapping constructs, including self-efficacy, adaptability, learning experiences, and contextual influences. Together, they provide a multidimensional understanding

of career perceptions, encompassing cognitive intention formation (TPB), psychosocial resource development (Career Construction Theory), contextual and motivational processes (SCCT), and skill-based investment perspectives (Human Capital Theory). While overlapping in certain constructs, each framework contributes a distinct explanatory emphasis, thereby offering complementary insights for interpreting the empirical literature synthesized in this review.

3. Methodology

3.1. The Systematic Literature Review Methodology

A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted to examine empirical research on students' perceptions with respect to their career paths and employment prospects in the T&H sector. A five-step process has been followed, which has been used in reviewing tourism and hospitality research, in accordance with recent SLRs in the literature [24,25]. These steps include (1) defining the 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 database utilized was Research Papers in Economics (RePEc), due to its comprehensive indexing of scholarly work in economics, tourism & hospitality, and education. The search spanned until 2024. The keywords included were: "tourism AND career", "hospitality AND career", "tourism OR hospitality AND students", "tourism OR hospitality AND employment". A study to be included had to be peer-reviewed, only empirical studies were considered, a focus should be on T&H students, and only English-language papers were considered. Studies which were opinion articles or theoretical essays, belonged to grey literature or were non-peer-reviewed works were excluded from the sample. Although RePEc provides broad interdisciplinary coverage, we acknowledge that relying on a single database may limit comprehensiveness. Future research may benefit from multi-database searches including Scopus and Web of Science.

The screening process was conducted by the author using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure consistency and transparency in study selection. Although systematic procedures were followed, the absence of independent dual screening represents a methodological limitation and may introduce potential selection bias. The search initially yielded 1169 results in total. After reading the title and abstract, 757 studies we found to be irrelevant and were excluded. In the rest 412 studies, after de-duplication and removing non-English ones, 370 full-text articles were re-viewed. Based on eligibility criteria, excluding those which expressed the view of the authors, were theoretical or were not peer-reviewed, 129 studies were included in the final analysis. Although strict inclusion criteria were applied (peer-reviewed empirical studies, English-language publications, and relevance to tourism and hospitality students), a formal methodological quality appraisal tool was not employed to score individual studies. The peer-review process was considered a baseline indicator of scholarly rigor. However, the absence of structured quality scoring means that studies of varying methodological robustness were synthesized without differential weighting. Future systematic reviews may benefit from incorporating formal appraisal frameworks to assess study design quality, sampling adequacy, and analytical transparency.

In the present study, methodological transparency was addressed by documenting the research design characteristics of the reviewed studies (e.g., quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches) and by applying strict inclusion criteria requiring peer-reviewed empirical research. This approach ensures baseline scholarly rigor while maintaining the primary objective of thematic synthesis.

To further enhance analytical depth and address variation in study rigor, the reviewed studies were categorized into three broad robustness groups based on sample size, research design, and analytical sophistication. Studies employing large samples and advanced statistical techniques (e.g., structural equation modeling) were classified as high robustness, standard cross-sectional survey-based studies were classified as moderate robustness, and studies with smaller samples or primarily descriptive analytical approaches were classified as lower robustness.

While this classification does not constitute a formal methodological quality appraisal framework, it introduces a degree of differentiation across the evidence base and supports a more nuanced interpretation of the findings.

Figure 1 presents the procedures used in the PRISMA diagram.

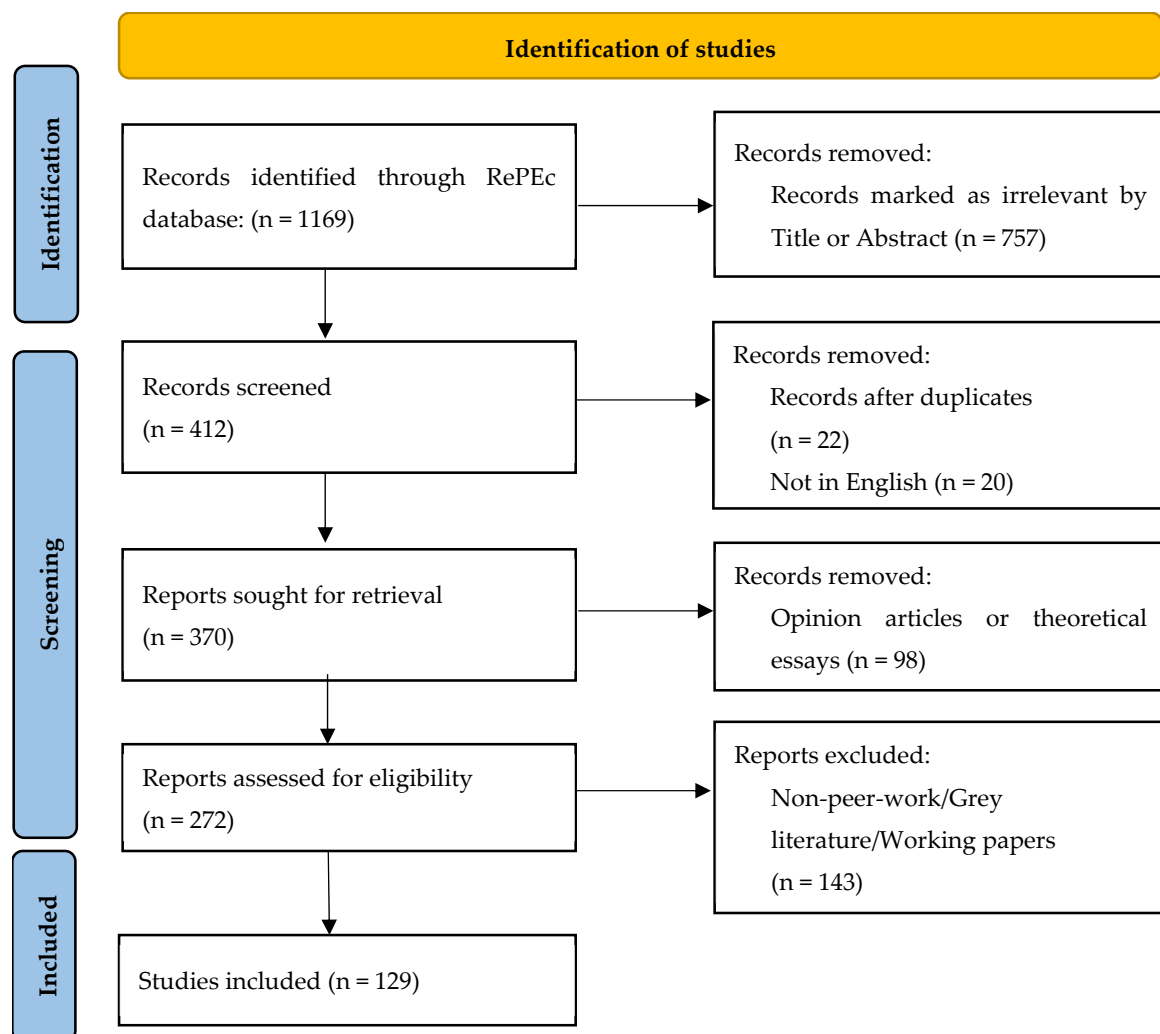


Figure 1. Systematic Literature Review Flowchart.

To further assess the robustness of the dataset and address potential database coverage limitations, a supplementary verification search was conducted in the Scopus database using comparable keywords (TITLE-ABS-KEY: tourism OR hospitality AND students AND career/employment/perception). The search returned 1912 documents before filtering. After applying basic restrictions (English-language journal articles within business, management, and social sciences), the pool of potentially relevant studies was substantially reduced to a manageable subset. We then cross-checked the final dataset of 129 studies included in this review and found that 101 studies (78.3%) are indexed in Scopus. This substantial

overlap indicates that the RePEc-based search captured the majority of the core empirical literature on tourism and hospitality students' career perceptions. The remaining studies are primarily published in specialized or regional journals not indexed in Scopus, suggesting that the use of RePEc also enabled the inclusion of additional relevant contributions.

While the high overlap (78.3%) with Scopus indicates that the RePEc-based search captures the core body of empirical literature, the remaining 21.7% of studies not indexed in Scopus primarily consist of publications in specialized regional journals, education-focused outlets, and emerging interdisciplinary venues. This suggests that the use of RePEc not only ensures coverage of mainstream academic literature but also enables the inclusion of additional relevant studies that may be underrepresented in larger citation databases. Accordingly, the study is positioned as a RePEc-based systematic review, complemented by a Scopus verification search to assess coverage and robustness.

Table 1 presents the list of studies included in the review and indicates whether each study is indexed in Scopus.

3.2. Thematic Coding and Synthesis Procedure

Following the identification of the final sample of 129 studies, a thematic synthesis was conducted to identify recurring patterns across the literature. The coding process followed a hybrid inductive–deductive approach. While the theoretical framework presented in Section 2 informed initial analytical sensitivity (e.g., self-efficacy, career adaptability, employment expectations), themes were primarily derived inductively from the empirical findings reported in the reviewed studies.

Each study was systematically examined and coded according to its main findings using a structured classification matrix. Studies were allowed to be assigned to multiple thematic categories where appropriate, as many addressed overlapping dimensions (e.g., negative career perceptions and employment anxiety). Consequently, thematic percentages reported in Table 1 exceed 100%, reflecting the non-mutually exclusive nature of categories.

The themes were refined iteratively to ensure conceptual clarity, internal consistency, and distinctiveness across categories. This process resulted in the identification of eight major thematic clusters that structure the synthesis presented in Sections 5 and 6.

In addition to thematic coding, the methodological characteristics of the reviewed studies were examined to provide additional transparency regarding the evidence base. The studies were broadly classified according to research design, including quantitative survey-based studies, qualitative studies (e.g., interviews or case studies), and mixed-methods approaches combining surveys with qualitative data. The review indicates that the majority of studies employ quantitative survey-based designs, typically analyzed using statistical techniques such as regression analysis or structural equation modeling. A smaller number of studies adopt qualitative or mixed-methods approaches. This classification helps contextualize the nature of the empirical evidence synthesized in the review while maintaining the primary objective of thematic synthesis rather than formal meta-analysis.

Table 1. Studies included in the systematic literature review and their Scopus indexing status.

No.	Authors (Year)	Publication	Sample/ No. of Observations	Scopus Indexed
1	Airey and Frontistis (1997) [26]	<i>Tourism Management</i>	176 UK and 152 Greece pupils	Yes
2	Aksu and Köksal (2005) [27]	<i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i>	689 T&H Students	Yes

Table 1. Cont.

No.	Authors (Year)	Publication	Sample/ No. of Observations	Scopus Indexed
3	Alanzeh (2014) [28]	<i>Journal of Management Research</i>	100 T&H Students	No
4	Al-Jubari et al. (2019) [29]	<i>International Journal of Human Potentials Management</i>	206 T&H Students	No
5	Alrawadieh (2021) [30]	<i>Journal of Tourismology</i>	130 Tour Guiding Students	No
6	Altman and Brothers (1995) [31]	<i>Hospitality Review</i>	449 Hospitality Graduates	No
7	Amissah et al. (2020) [32]	<i>Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education</i>	441 T&H Students	Yes
8	Anthony et al. (2021) [33]	<i>Research in Hospitality Management</i>	1341 Hospitality Students	No
9	Appietu et al. (2019) [34]	<i>African Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management</i>	171 Hospitality Management Students	No
10	Arcodia and Dickson (2009) [35]	<i>Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education</i>	79 T&H Students	Yes
11	Ardani and Pradini (2023) [36]	ICBMASE 2023	73 Tourism Students	No
12	Armoo and Neequaye (2014) [37]	<i>Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes</i>	260 T&H Students	Yes
13	Atef and Al Balushi (2017) [38]	<i>Quality Assurance in Education</i>	88 T&H Students	Yes
14	Ayad et al. (2022) [39]	<i>Sustainability</i>	750 T&H Graduates	Yes
15	Badulescu et al. (2014) [40]	<i>Amfiteatru Economic</i>	123 Business Master Students	Yes
16	Bahceleri and Sucuoglu (2015) [41]	<i>Procedia Economics and Finance</i>	97 Tourism Students	Yes
17	Barron and Anastasiadou (2009) [42]	<i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i>	150 T&H Students	Yes
18	Barron et al. (2007) [43]	<i>Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management</i>	20 Hospitality Management Students	Yes
19	Bednarska and Olszewski (2013) [44]	<i>Journal of Entrepreneurship Management and Innovation</i>	345 T&H Students	Yes
20	Benaraba et al. (2022) [45]	<i>Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education</i>	196 Tourism Management Students	Yes
21	Birtch et al. (2021) [46]	<i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i>	425 Hospitality Management Students	Yes
22	Blomme et al. (2013) [47]	<i>Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education</i>	159 Hotel school Students & 78 Graduates	Yes
23	Bordean and Sonea (2018) [5]	<i>Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Issues</i>	114 Tourism Students	Yes
24	Bouchon et al. (2016) [7]	<i>TEAM Journal of Hospitality and Tourism</i>	60 Hospitality Students (among other stakeholders)	No
25	Butkouskaya et al. (2020) [48]	<i>Sustainability</i>	290 Tourism Students	Yes

Table 1. Cont.

No.	Authors (Year)	Publication	Sample/ No. of Observations	Scopus Indexed
26	Cantos et al. (2019) [49]	<i>Asia Pacific Journal of Education, Arts and Sciences</i>	305 T&H Students	No
27	Cesário et al. (2022) [50]	<i>Sustainability</i>	305 T&H Students	Yes
28	Chang and Tse (2015) [51]	<i>Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research</i>	305 T&H Graduates	Yes
29	Chen and Shen (2012) [52]	<i>Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education</i>	459 Hospitality Students	Yes
30	Chen et al. (2000) [53]	<i>international Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i>	311 Hospitality Students	Yes
31	Chi and Gursoy (2009) [54]	<i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i>	102 Hospitality Graduates	Yes
32	Chia and Liang (2016) [55]	<i>Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management and Innovation</i>	213 Tourism Students	Yes
33	Choudhary (2019) [56]	<i>Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research</i>	Unspecified Number of Students in Hospitality Sector	No
34	Choy and Yeung (2022) [57]	<i>PLoS ONE</i>	407 Tourism Students	Yes
35	Chuang and Dellmann-Jenkins (2010) [58]	<i>Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research</i>	360 Hospitality Students	Yes
36	Chuang et al. (2020) [59]	<i>Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education</i>	273 Hospitality Students	Yes
37	Datta and Jha (2015) [60]	<i>EPRA International Journal of Economic and Business Review</i>	60 Hotel Management Students	No
38	Datta et al. (2013) [61]	<i>ZENITH International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research</i>	60 Hotel Management Students	No
39	Dragin et al. (2022) [62]	<i>Sustainability</i>	310 T&H Students	Yes
40	Düzgün (2024) [63]	<i>Journal of Tourism, Sustainability and Well-being</i>	393 Tourism Students	No
41	Eminov and Aliyeva (2017) [64]	<i>Yearbook of D. A. Tsenov Academy of Economics</i>	64 Tourism & Management Students (and 42 Employees of hotels and tourism companies)	No
42	Fantilio et al. (2022) [65]	<i>Quantum Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities</i>	105 Tourism Management Students	No
43	Farmaki (2018) [66]	<i>Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education</i>	30 T&H Students	Yes
44	Getz (1994) [67]	<i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i>	50 (first wave) and 96 (second wave) High School Students	Yes
45	Grobelna (2017) [68]	<i>International Journal of Management and Economics</i>	168 T&H Students	No
46	Grobelna (2022) [69]	<i>Sustainability</i>	155 T&H Students	Yes
47	Grobelna and Skrzyszewska (2019) [70]	<i>Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management and Innovation</i>	171 T&H Students	Yes

Table 1. Cont.

No.	Authors (Year)	Publication	Sample/ No. of Observations	Scopus Indexed
48	Grobelna and Tokarz-Kocik (2021) [71]	<i>European Research Studies Journal</i>	60 T&H Students	Yes
49	Grobelna and Wyszowska-Wróbel (2021) [72]	<i>European Research Studies Journal</i>	110 T&H Students	Yes
50	Hjalager (2003) [73]	<i>Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education</i>	159 T&H Master Students	Yes
51	Hoque and Ahsif (2020) [74]	<i>International Journal of Tourism Policy</i>	220 T&H Students	Yes
52	Horng et al. (2021) [75]	<i>Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education</i>	122 T&H Students	Yes
53	Jenkins (2001) [76]	<i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i>	80 (Netherlands) & 58 Hospitality Students (UK)	Yes
54	Johns and McKechnie (1995) [77]	<i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i>	21 Hotel and Catering Graduates	Yes
55	Kapera (2017) [78]	<i>Tourism</i>	100 Tourism Students	Yes
56	Kim et al. (2008) [79]	<i>Journal of Marketing for Higher Education</i>	365 T&H Students & 175 T&H Graduates	Yes
57	Kim et al. (2010) [3]	<i>Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education</i>	31 T&H Students	Yes
58	Kim et al. (2016) [80]	<i>Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education</i>	1297 T&H Students (Korea = 404, Taiwan = 553, Hong Kong = 338)	Yes
59	Kipkosgei et al. (2015) [81]	<i>African Journal of Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure</i>	192 Tourism Students (Plus 5 semi-structured interviews with tourism lecturers)	Yes
60	Kusluvan and Kusluvan (2000) [82]	<i>Tourism Management</i>	397 Tourism & Hotel Management Students & two focus groups with 10 Tourism Students	Yes
61	Lambulira et al. (2022) [83]	<i>African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure</i>	30 T&H Students	Yes
62	Lashley (2013) [84]	<i>Research in Hospitality Management</i>	653 T&H Students	Yes
63	Le et al. (2018) [85]	<i>Empirical Research in Vocational Education and Training</i>	253 Hospitality Students	Yes
64	Lee et al. (2019) [86]	<i>Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education</i>	558 Hospitality Management Students	Yes
65	Lewis and Airey (2001) [87]	<i>Tourism and Hospitality Research</i>	120 Secondary School Students	Yes
66	Litvin (2000) [88]	<i>Tourism and Hospitality Research</i>	133 Leisure and Travel Management Students	Yes
67	Liu et al. (2023) [89]	<i>Economic Research-Ekonomska Istraživanja</i>	842 H&T Students	Yes
68	Lu and Adler (2009) [90]	<i>Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism</i>	503 H&T Students	Yes

Table 1. Cont.

No.	Authors (Year)	Publication	Sample/ No. of Observations	Scopus Indexed
69	Maiorescu et al. (2020) [91]	<i>Amfiteatru Economic</i>	292 Business and Tourism Students (Undergraduate & Master Students)	Yes
70	Mannaa and Abou-Shouk (2020) [92]	<i>Al-Adab Journal</i>	227 Tourism Students	No
71	Martín-Navarro et al. (2023a) [93]	<i>International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal</i>	464 Tourism Students	Yes
72	Martín-Navarro et al. (2023b) [94]	<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	464 Tourism Students	Yes
73	Maxwell et al. (2010) [95]	<i>Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management</i>	122 Hospitality Students	Yes
74	Mayuzumi (2020) [96]	<i>Asia-Pacific Journal of Regional Science</i>	406 Undergraduate Students & 198 High School Students	Yes
75	McKercher et al. (2023) [97]	<i>International Journal of Tourism Research</i>	174 in total in Tourism, Hospitality & Events (109 graduates, 53 post-graduates & 12 PhD graduates)	Yes
76	Mei et al. (2016) [98]	<i>Applied Economics</i>	267 Tourism Students	Yes
77	Mohammad and Alsaleh (2013) [99]	<i>International Journal of Asian Social Science</i>	175 T&H Students	Yes
78	Mungai et al. (2021) [100]	<i>Research in Business & Social Science</i>	192 Tourism Management Students (and 12 Departmental Heads)	No
79	Nachmias and Walmsley (2015) [101]	<i>Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education</i>	28 Hospitality Students	Yes
80	Omar (2014) [102]	<i>Journal of Association of Arab Universities for Tourism and Hospitality</i>	480 Tourism & Hotel Management Students	No
81	Ortiz and Coromina (2021) [103]	<i>Ciencia Unemi</i>	207 students during 2018 & 161 students in 2020	No
82	Özişik Yapici et al. (2021) [104]	<i>Journal of Tourism and Gastronomy Studies</i>	705 Tourism Students	No
83	Papathanassis (2021) [1]	<i>Current Issues in Tourism</i>	167 Cruise Management Students	Yes
84	Park et al. (2017) [105]	<i>Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism</i>	307 T&H Students	Yes
85	Petrova and Mason (2004) [106]	<i>Education + Training</i>	187 Tourism Students (and 6 employers)	Yes
86	Phuc et al. (2020) [107]	<i>Management Science Letters</i>	388 Tourism Students	Yes
87	Pol and Patil (2015) [108]	<i>Atithya: A Journal of Hospitality</i>	74 Hotel Management Students	No
88	Pranic (2023) [109]	<i>Sustainability</i>	300 T&H Students	Yes
89	Rahimi et al. (2016) [110]	<i>Advances in Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research</i>	128 T&H Students (Questionnaires) & 15 Students + 2 Lecturers for Focus Groups	Yes

Table 1. Cont.

No.	Authors (Year)	Publication	Sample/ No. of Observations	Scopus Indexed
90	Ramakrishnan and Macaveiu (2019) [111]	<i>Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management</i>	23 Tourism Students	Yes
91	Raybould and Wilkins (2005) [112]	<i>International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management</i>	211 Hospitality Management Students (& 850 Hospitality Managers)	Yes
92	Reichenberger and Raymond (2021a) [11]	<i>Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management</i>	24 Tourism Management Students	Yes
93	Reichenberger and Raymond (2021b) [113]	<i>Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism</i>	24 Tourism Management Students	Yes
94	Richardson (2008) [114]	<i>Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism</i>	86 T&H Students	Yes
95	Richardson (2009) [115]	<i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i>	379 T&H Students	Yes
96	Richardson (2010) [116]	<i>Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management</i>	379 T&H Students	Yes
97	Richardson and Butler (2012) [117]	<i>Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research</i>	429 T&H Students	Yes
98	Richardson and Thomas (2012) [118]	<i>Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management</i>	258 T&H Students	Yes
99	Roberts (2024) [119]	<i>Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education</i>	211 Tourist Students	Yes
100	Robinson et al. (2016) [120]	<i>Current Issues in Tourism</i>	34 T&H Students	Yes
101	Roney et al. (2007) [121]	<i>Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism Education</i>	450 Tourism Students	Yes
102	Ross (1992) [122]	<i>Tourism Management</i>	537 High School Students	Yes
103	Ross (1993) [123]	<i>Visions in Leisure and Business</i>	594 High School Students	No
104	Rosyidi (2021) [124]	<i>Jurnal Manajemen dan Kewirausahaan</i>	422 T&H Students	No
105	Selçuk et al. (2013) [125]	<i>International Journal of Business and Social Science</i>	315 Tourism Students	Yes
106	Şengel (2020) [126]	<i>European Journal of Tourism, Hospitality and Recreation</i>	270 Tourism Students (and 102 Tourism Business Managers)	No
107	Seyitoglu et al. (2022) [127]	<i>Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education</i>	30 Tourism Students	Yes
108	Shah et al. (2021) [128]	<i>Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism</i>	308 T&H Students for Quantitative method and 30 T&H students were interviewed for Qualitative	Yes
109	Sincharoenkul and Witthayasirikul (2022) [129]	<i>Frontiers in Education</i>	242 T&H Students	Yes
110	Skiert and Buchta (2012) [130]	<i>Polish Journal of Sport and Tourism</i>	167 Tourism and Recreation Students	Yes
111	Tan et al. (2016) [131]	<i>Procedia—Social and Behavioral Sciences</i>	70 T&H Students	Yes

Table 1. Cont.

No.	Authors (Year)	Publication	Sample/ No. of Observations	Scopus Indexed
112	Teng (2008) [132]	<i>International Journal of Hospitality Management</i>	483 Hospitality Students	Yes
113	Thetsane et al. (2020) [133]	<i>Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Management</i>	421 Tourism, Hospitality and Hotel Management Students	Yes
114	Tsai et al. (2024) [9]	<i>Sustainability</i>	588 T&H Students	Yes
115	Turanligil and Altıntaş (2018) [134]	<i>GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites</i>	204 Tourism and Hotel Management Students	Yes
116	Unguren and Huseyinli (2020) [135]	<i>Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education</i>	512 Tourism Students	Yes
117	Vaníček and Jarolimkova (2021) [136]	<i>Management and Business Research Quarterly</i>	186 Tourism Students (94 in 2020 and 92 in 2021)	No
118	Verdadero et al. (2020) [137]	<i>Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research</i>	134 Tourism Students	Yes
119	Wakelin-Theron et al. (2018) [138]	<i>African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure</i>	207 Tourism Graduates and 351 Tourism Industry Respondents	Yes
120	Wan et al. (2014) [139]	<i>Tourism Management</i>	205 T&H Students	Yes
121	Wang and Huang (2014) [140]	<i>Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism</i>	611 Tourism Students	Yes
122	Wen et al. (2018) [141]	<i>Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education</i>	525 Hospitality Students	Yes
123	Wen et al. (2019) [142]	<i>Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education</i>	614 Hospitality Students and 10 Interviews with Hospitality Management Students	Yes
124	Xu et al. (2018) [143]	<i>Current Issues in Tourism</i>	313 H&T Students	Yes
125	Yasar & Özturk (2023) [144]	<i>Manas Sosyal Arastirmalar Dergisi</i>	19 Tourism Management Graduates	No
126	Zhang and Chen (2024) [145]	<i>SAGE Open</i>	758 Tourism and Hotel Management Students	Yes
127	Zhang et al. (2020) [146]	<i>Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education</i>	668 T&H Students	Yes
128	Zhong et al. (2021) [147]	<i>Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education</i>	377 H&T Students	Yes
129	Zhong et al. (2022) [148]	<i>Sustainability</i>	840 Tourism Students	Yes

4. SLR Findings and Key Insights

Table A1 in the Appendix A presents an extensive SLR of studies on T&H students' perceptions on their career intentions and employability prospects. Several interesting outcomes and implications can be drawn. Regarding methodological approaches, most studies rely on cross-sectional survey data collected from tourism and hospitality students and analyzed using statistical techniques such as regression analysis, ANOVA, or structural equation modeling. Comparative examination of methodological approaches suggests that quantitative studies tend to emphasize measurable determinants of career intentions,

such as self-efficacy, attitudes, and perceived employability, whereas qualitative studies often reveal more nuanced interpretations of students' experiences, including emotional responses to internships, identity development, and expectation–reality gaps within the industry. A smaller number of studies employ qualitative methods (e.g., interviews or focus groups), while some adopt mixed-methods approaches combining surveys with qualitative data. This methodological distribution reflects the dominant reliance on survey-based empirical research within tourism and hospitality education literature. With respect to geographic insights, the studies covered a wide range of countries, with Turkey ($n = 13$), China ($n = 11$), UK ($n = 9$), and USA ($n = 8$) contributing the highest number of research works. Perceptions vary widely by country. For instance, students in countries with stronger T&H sectors or supportive entrepreneurial ecosystems (e.g., parts of China, Spain) often show more optimism.

A broader comparison across regions suggests that students in countries with well-developed tourism sectors or strong institutional support for entrepreneurship tend to report more optimistic career expectations, whereas students in regions characterized by seasonal tourism employment or limited career progression opportunities express greater employment anxiety and negative career perceptions.

As for the employment dimension, many studies report students' concerns or negative perceptions about long-term employment prospects in the T&H industry. Concerning the career dimension, while interest in entering the T&H field is often initially high, several studies show declining enthusiasm over time, especially as students face real-world working conditions (low pay, limited advancement, seasonality). This pattern can be interpreted through the lens of Career Construction Theory, which emphasizes adaptive recalibration of expectations following experiential learning. It also reflects SCCT constructs, particularly the interaction between self-efficacy and contextual barriers encountered during internships. However, a substantial number of students still express entrepreneurial intentions or resilience in pursuing T&H careers despite challenges. Factors such as self-efficacy, previous work experience, education quality (especially internships), family background, and entrepreneurship education play significant roles in shaping career intentions.

Table 2 summarizes the main findings of Table A1 in a clearer table.

Table 2. Summary of main findings.

Main Theme	Number of Studies	% of Total Studies
Negative career perceptions	35	27%
Positive career outlook	28	21%
Entrepreneurial intentions	26	20%
Impact of internships/education	24	19%
Employment anxiety	22	17%
Cultural/Social influence	18	14%
Preference for management/ownership roles	17	13%
Declining enthusiasm over time	15	12%

From Table 2, it is more obvious that the most frequent theme is “negative career perceptions” indicating that students often express doubts about long-term career satisfaction in the T&H sector. The prevalence of negative career perceptions challenges the purely instrumental assumptions of Human Capital Theory, suggesting that skill acquisition alone does not guarantee positive sector evaluation. Instead, subjective outcome expectations and contextual factors, central to SCCT and TPB, appear to play a decisive role. On the

other hand, positive outlooks and entrepreneurship together make up about 41%, showing that a substantial portion of students are still optimistic or proactive about their careers and see value in starting their own businesses. The increasing emphasis on entrepreneurial intentions aligns strongly with TPB constructs of perceived behavioral control and with SCCT's focus on self-efficacy, indicating a shift toward agency-driven career pathways. Another issue is the employment anxiety, which is quite widespread, particularly with post-pandemic concerns and sector instability.

Furthermore, with respect to the number of publications per year related to the topic, Figure 2 presents that the studies span from 1992 to 2024, showing a clear upward trend in research output over time.

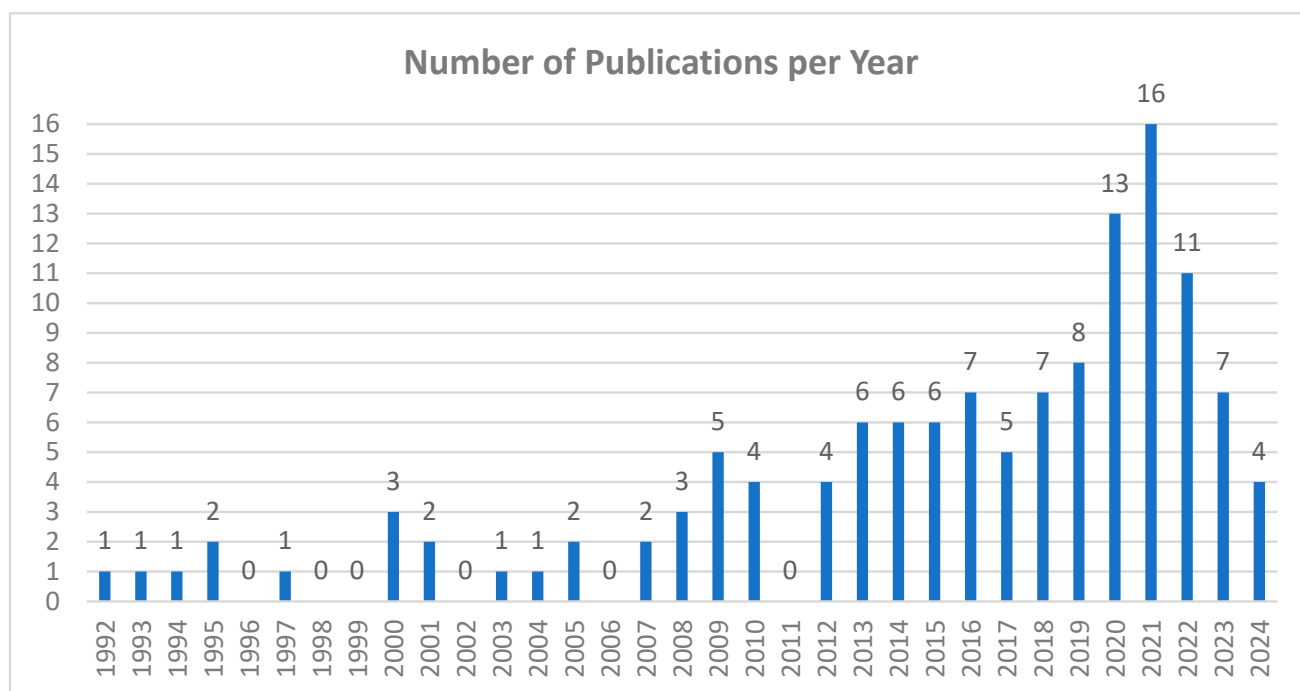


Figure 2. Number of Publications per Year.

It is shown that until 2008, the number of publications was relatively low, with sporadic contributions (mostly 1–2 papers per year), and for several years (1997, 1998, 2003, 2006) no publications on the issue were found. During the period 2009–2018, a steady increase in research interest is observed, reaching 5 publications in 2009 and fluctuating between 4 and 7 publications per year from 2013 onward. A sharp rise was seen in 2019 (8 papers) and 2020 (13 papers), indicating increased academic attention, possibly due to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on tourism and hospitality careers. Notable growth occurred between 2013 and 2017, showing a sustained level of scholarly output. The number of publications peaked dramatically in 2021 with 16 papers. A slight decline is observed, with 11 publications in 2023 and 7 in 2024. However, it should be noted that the data collection concluded during 2024, and therefore the publication count for that year reflects partial data. Consequently, the apparent decrease does not necessarily indicate a reduction in research interest but may instead reflect incomplete annual coverage.

Finally, regarding the journals which published the studies of the sample, Figure 3 depicts a list of the academic journals along with numbers that represent publication counts of the studies which constitute the studies of the SLR.

Research on tourism and hospitality students' career perceptions and employment prospects is more often published in Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism

Education which seems to align well with the educational focus of the topic. Moreover, the inclusion of Sustainability journal suggests that career prospects in hospitality and tourism are increasingly linked to sustainable practices. The list in general includes a mix of hospitality education journals (such as Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education, or Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism) and industry-focused journals (such as Tourism Management, International Journal of Hospitality Management, etc.).



Figure 3. Number of Publications per Journal.

While the Journal of Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education emerges as the dominant publication outlet, this pattern suggests that research on students' career perceptions is primarily framed within an educational and pedagogical context. The prominence of education-oriented journals indicates that scholars frequently conceptualize career perceptions as outcomes of curriculum design, internship structures, and employability development rather than solely as labor market phenomena.

The appearance of Sustainability among the leading publication venues is particularly noteworthy. This may reflect a growing intersection between sustainability discourse and career attractiveness in tourism and hospitality. As sustainable tourism practices and responsible business models gain prominence, students may increasingly evaluate career prospects not only in terms of financial stability but also through the lens of environmental responsibility, ethical values, and long-term industry viability. This trend aligns with broader shifts toward purpose-driven employment and value-based career decision-making observed in contemporary workforce research.

Moreover, the diversity of journals publishing on this topic—spanning education, management, sustainability, and tourism-specific outlets—indicates the interdisciplinary nature of the field. However, it also suggests that research remains somewhat fragmented across disciplinary silos. Greater theoretical integration across these domains could further consolidate and strengthen this area of scholarship.

5. Patterns over Time

The temporal segmentation into three periods (1990–2005, 2006–2015, and 2016–2024) was defined inductively based on observable shifts in publication volume and thematic emphasis across the dataset. The first period reflects the formative phase of research in this domain, characterized by relatively limited publication frequency. The second period captures a phase of expansion and diversification of research themes, coinciding with broader developments in global tourism growth and post-financial-crisis labor market concerns. The third period reflects a marked increase in publication intensity, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, alongside a notable rise in entrepreneurial and sustainability-related discourse. Although the intervals are not equal in length, they reflect substantive shifts in research patterns rather than arbitrary chronological divisions.

The final period includes studies published up to 2024, recognizing that the final year represents partial publication data. The analysis of the 129 studies revealed some patterns over time. Three broad timeframes are used to make the trends clearer:

- 1. Pre-2000. During this period, positive expectations were common, with students showing early enthusiasm for tourism careers [26,125]. The negative perceptions have already begun emerging in some studies (e.g., [82]).
- 2. From 2000 to 2015. A growing negativity toward employment in T&H became a recurring theme [79,114–116]. Moreover, internships and education started being seen as critical influencers [52,54]. Furthermore, employment anxiety emerged, tied to economic downturns (e.g., 2008 financial crisis).
- 3. From 2016 to 2025. Studies published in post-2015 first reveal that negative perceptions remained but became more nuanced. In addition, entrepreneurial intention skyrocketed, as students increasingly saw entrepreneurship as an alternative to traditional jobs [93,94,98]. Moreover, employment anxiety increased sharply during COVID-19, but some resilience and optimism persisted in many studies [65,148].

Table 3 presents briefly the above-mentioned patterns over time of the studies of the SLR.

Table 3. Patterns over time of the studies of the SLR.

Period	Positive Outlook	Negative Perceptions	Entrepreneurship	Employment Anxiety
Pre-2000	High	Emerging	Rare	Low
2000–2015	Mixed	Increasing	Emerging	Rising
2016–2025	Mixed/Low	High	High	High

A comparative examination of these periods reveals a clear shift from early optimism regarding tourism careers toward more critical and diversified career perceptions. While early studies emphasized sector attractiveness and growth opportunities, later research increasingly highlights employment instability, work–life balance concerns, and the emergence of entrepreneurial pathways as alternative career strategies.

The increasing employment anxiety observed during the 2000–2015 period coincides with broader global economic instability, particularly following the 2008 financial crisis, which significantly affected youth employment rates and job security perceptions across many economies. These macroeconomic shocks likely influenced students’ confidence in long-term career stability within tourism and hospitality.

The marked rise in entrepreneurial intentions after 2015 may be interpreted within the broader context of global start-up culture, innovation-driven economies, and the expansion of digital entrepreneurship ecosystems. Increased policy support for entrepreneurship education, business incubators, and start-up funding mechanisms may have contributed

to the normalization of self-employment as a viable career pathway. Simultaneously, the emergence of the gig economy and platform-based business models reshaped perceptions of traditional employment, encouraging greater autonomy and flexibility.

The COVID-19 pandemic represents a critical structural disruption that profoundly reshaped employment expectations. Sector shutdowns, travel restrictions, and workforce reductions heightened employment anxiety but also stimulated discussions of resilience, adaptability, and innovation within tourism education. These developments underscore how global crises function as catalysts that recalibrate students' perceptions of career risk and opportunity.

Furthermore, the growing emphasis on sustainability and responsible tourism in the late 2010s may have influenced students' motivations, particularly among those seeking meaningful and value-driven career paths.

These temporal patterns reflect not only structural industry shifts but also evolving psychosocial dynamics consistent with Social Cognitive Career Theory and Career Construction Theory, particularly regarding adaptability and outcome expectations.

6. Thematic Synthesis and Analysis

6.1. Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis followed a structured qualitative synthesis approach, combining inductive identification of recurring patterns with deductive sensitivity to constructs derived from the theoretical frameworks outlined in Section 2. Coding was conducted manually using a classification matrix, and themes were iteratively refined to ensure conceptual distinctiveness and internal coherence. The process was conducted by a single reviewer based on predefined criteria, which is acknowledged as a limitation.

This section presents a thematic synthesis grouping the studies by key themes. First, many students initially show enthusiasm and view T&H as offering enjoyable, flexible, and exciting career opportunities, indicating a positive career outlook (e.g., [26,34,57,65,103,119]). Second, there are negative career perceptions. Common concerns include low pay, long hours, seasonality, and limited career advancement (e.g., [30,60,82,89,92,114–116]).

Third, regarding entrepreneurial intentions, a growing number of students prefer entrepreneurial ventures over traditional employment, driven by creativity [55,62,93,94,98,107,145]. Fourth, there is the issue of the impact of internships and education. The key message is that practical experiences and well-designed educational programs, especially internships, strongly influence career intentions and improve employability (e.g., [1,52,54,66,75,105]).

A fifth theme arises from concerns about job security, employability, and work–life balance which are widespread heightened by economic crises and COVID-19. Some representative studies were conducted by [30,89,113,128,135]. The sixth issue is related to cultural and social influences. More particularly, family expectations, social status, gender, and cultural background significantly affect T&H students' career choices (e.g., [58,99,100,110,122,123]).

Declining enthusiasm over time is identified as a seventh theme, noticing that while many students begin their studies with optimism, exposure to industry realities often reduces enthusiasm and shifts career intentions [76,85,95,101]. A final eighth issue stems from the fact that students often aspire to leadership or entrepreneurial roles, motivated by a desire for control, creativity, and better work conditions [5,56,79,122,123,130].

While certain themes appear conceptually related, particularly negative career perceptions, employment anxiety, and declining enthusiasm over time, they capture distinct analytical dimensions. “Negative career perceptions” refers to generalized evaluations of

industry conditions (e.g., pay, work hours, advancement opportunities). “Employment anxiety” specifically denotes concerns regarding job security and labor market instability. “Declining enthusiasm over time” reflects a longitudinal trajectory in which initially positive expectations become moderated following experiential exposure. Distinguishing these dimensions enables a more nuanced interpretation of how attitudes, emotions, and temporal dynamics interact. The main themes, key issues, and representative studies identified through the thematic synthesis are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Thematic Analysis Matrix.

Theme	Key Issues/Insights	Representative Studies
Positive Career Outlook	Initial enthusiasm; careers perceived as enjoyable, flexible, and exciting.	[26,34,57,65,103,119]
Negative Career Perceptions	Concerns about low pay, long/irregular hours, seasonality, limited advancement opportunities.	[30,60,82,89,92,114–116]
Entrepreneurial Intentions	Rising preference for entrepreneurship over traditional employment; driven by creativity, independence, and opportunity recognition.	[55,62,93,94,98,107,145]
Impact of Internships & Education	Practical experiences and well-designed academic programs strongly shape career intentions and employability.	[1,52,54,66,75,105]
Employment Anxiety	Concerns about job security, employability, and work–life balance; intensified during crises (e.g., COVID-19).	[30,89,113,128,135]
Cultural & Social Influences	Family expectations, social status, gender, and cultural background significantly shape career choices.	[58,99,100,110,122,123]
Declining Enthusiasm Over Time	Students begin with optimism but lose enthusiasm after exposure to industry realities.	[76,85,95,101]
Preference for Leadership/Ownership Roles	Strong aspirations for managerial or entrepreneurial roles linked to control, creativity, and improved working conditions.	[5,56,79,122,123,130]

In sum, the key cross-cutting insights that are generated from the thematic analysis is that (i) employment anxiety and negative perceptions are common across most regions and time periods, (ii) entrepreneurial aspirations have risen sharply since 2015, (iii) internships and real-world experience are critical factors shaping career outcomes, (iv) cultural, social, and personal factors heavily influence career decision-making.

6.2. Critical Evaluation of the Thematic Analysis

1. Negative Career Perceptions

Across the 35 studies categorized under negative career perceptions, concerns about low pay, long and irregular working hours, limited career advancement, and employment instability emerge as the most consistently reported issues. Compensation dissatisfaction appears particularly salient in survey-based studies using Likert-scale instruments, where financial expectations are directly measured. In contrast, qualitative studies often reveal more nuanced ambivalence, with students acknowledging structural challenges while still recognizing professional development opportunities.

Regional patterns are observable. Studies from highly seasonal tourism economies (e.g., parts of Southern Europe and developing economies) emphasize instability and pre-

carioussness more strongly, whereas research in rapidly growing tourism markets sometimes reports mixed perceptions tied to expansion opportunities.

Importantly, contradictions exist within this theme. Students frequently express dissatisfaction with structural working conditions while simultaneously valuing international mobility and experiential learning opportunities. This tension suggests that negative perceptions reflect critical evaluation rather than outright rejection of the sector, aligning with Human Capital Theory's assumption that individuals weigh costs against long-term benefits.

2. Positive Career Outlook

The 28 studies categorized under positive career outlook commonly highlight enjoyment, creativity, international exposure, dynamic work environments, and personal growth opportunities. Positive perceptions often correlate with prior industry exposure or internship experience, suggesting experiential familiarity moderates initial enthusiasm.

Interestingly, qualitative research tends to reveal intrinsic motivations (passion for hospitality, cultural exchange), whereas quantitative studies more frequently measure perceived job attractiveness in instrumental terms (promotion opportunities, skill development). Cultural variation is notable: studies in regions where tourism is a prestigious or expanding industry report more optimistic outlooks.

However, positive outlooks are often time-sensitive. Longitudinal or retrospective studies indicate that optimism may decline following exposure to real working conditions. This suggests that early enthusiasm may represent aspirational perceptions shaped by education rather than grounded industry experience.

3. Entrepreneurial Intentions

The 26 studies addressing entrepreneurial intentions show a marked increase after 2015. Dominant predictors include self-efficacy, perceived behavioral control, entrepreneurial education exposure, and proactivity, often grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior and Social Cognitive Career Theory.

Quantitative structural equation modeling studies frequently report strong statistical relationships between entrepreneurship education and intention formation. However, qualitative research highlights perceived barriers such as capital constraints and regulatory complexity, suggesting a gap between intention and implementation.

Regional patterns indicate stronger entrepreneurial optimism in contexts with institutional support systems (incubators, start-up funding). Notably, entrepreneurship sometimes appears as an adaptive response to dissatisfaction with traditional employment structures, reinforcing the idea that entrepreneurial aspirations may be both opportunity-driven and constraint-driven.

4. Impact of Internships & Education

The 24 studies in this theme consistently emphasize internships as a pivotal turning point. However, findings are polarized: internships can reinforce commitment or trigger disillusionment, depending on quality and mentorship.

Survey-based research often measures satisfaction levels, while qualitative studies reveal deeper recalibration of expectations. In some cases, internships expose mismatches between academic preparation and industry reality, challenging Human Capital Theory's assumption that skill acquisition automatically enhances career attractiveness.

Regional differences appear where structured internship systems are institutionalized versus loosely regulated. Well-designed internships correlate with positive career commitment, suggesting educational quality mediates industry perception.

5. Employment Anxiety

The 22 studies addressing employment anxiety highlight concerns about job security, economic instability, work–life balance, and crisis vulnerability. Anxiety spikes during macroeconomic downturns, especially post-2008 and during COVID-19.

Quantitative studies frequently measure anxiety through psychometric scales, linking it to academic dissatisfaction and decreased sector commitment. Qualitative research, however, reveals resilience narratives, particularly during the pandemic, where students articulate adaptive career strategies.

Cultural context influences anxiety intensity. Regions heavily dependent on tourism demonstrate stronger crisis sensitivity. These findings challenge purely rational career models and suggest integrating contextual uncertainty into theoretical frameworks.

6. Cultural & Social Influences

The 18 studies under this theme emphasize family expectations, gender norms, social status perceptions, and cultural values. Family background significantly influences career decision-making, particularly in collectivist societies.

Quantitative regression-based studies often identify demographic predictors (gender, parental occupation), while qualitative studies reveal intergenerational expectations and prestige considerations.

Contradictions appear where tourism is economically important but socially undervalued, creating tension between economic rationality and social prestige. These findings align strongly with Social Cognitive Career Theory's emphasis on contextual factors and subjective norms.

7. Declining Enthusiasm Over Time

The 15 studies in this theme document a recurrent trajectory: initial optimism → exposure to industry realities → moderated expectations. Longitudinal and retrospective studies are particularly important here.

Decline is most frequently associated with internships, low compensation awareness, and work–life balance concerns. However, not all declines result in exit intentions; some students recalibrate toward management or entrepreneurship instead.

This pattern suggests that career construction processes evolve dynamically rather than linearly, supporting Career Construction Theory's emphasis on adaptability and narrative reframing.

8. Preference for Leadership/Ownership Roles

The 17 studies highlighting leadership aspirations consistently report desire for managerial authority, autonomy, creativity, and improved working conditions. Management roles are often perceived as offering escape from entry-level labor conditions.

Quantitative studies show high aspiration rates, but qualitative research suggests that such aspirations may be idealized rather than grounded in realistic promotion pathways. Cultural context again plays a role, with stronger leadership aspirations in regions emphasizing status mobility.

This theme intersects closely with entrepreneurial intention and suggests that students seek structural agency within or beyond traditional organizational hierarchies.

7. Theoretical Integration of Findings

While Section 2 introduced five major theoretical perspectives relevant to tourism and hospitality (T&H) education and labor outcomes, a deeper examination of the 129 reviewed studies reveals uneven theoretical application across the literature.

A substantial proportion of studies are either explicitly or implicitly grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). Studies examining entrepreneurial intention, career intention, self-efficacy, and perceived behavioral control frequently adopt TPB constructs, particularly attitude toward the profession, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Similarly, research emphasizing self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal agency often aligns with SCCT. These two theories appear to dominate the post-2010 literature, particularly in entrepreneurship-focused research.

Human Capital Theory is implicitly reflected in studies emphasizing internships, practical education, skill acquisition, and employability enhancement. Although rarely explicitly stated as a theoretical framework, many studies operate under its assumptions—namely that education and experiential learning increase labor market value and career prospects.

In contrast, Career Construction Theory and Krumboltz’s Social Learning Theory are less frequently operationalized directly. While themes such as career adaptability, narrative identity, and learning experiences are present in the findings, only a limited number of studies explicitly employ these frameworks. This suggests an underutilization of developmental and constructivist career theories within tourism and hospitality education research.

Importantly, the synthesized findings both support and extend existing theoretical perspectives. For example:

The strong influence of internships supports Human Capital Theory but also suggests that experiential learning functions as both skill accumulation and expectation recalibration.

The rise in entrepreneurial intentions post-2015 reinforces TPB’s emphasis on attitudinal and normative drivers, yet also indicates structural industry dissatisfaction not fully captured by traditional intention models.

Persistent employment anxiety challenges purely rational-choice assumptions and highlights the importance of contextual uncertainty, suggesting opportunities for integrating crisis and resilience perspectives into career theories.

Overall, the review indicates that while TPB and SCCT dominate the field, the broader theoretical landscape remains fragmented. Greater theoretical integration, particularly incorporating career adaptability and longitudinal developmental perspectives, would strengthen future research.

The distribution of theoretical frameworks across the reviewed studies is summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Theoretical Distribution of Reviewed Studies.

Theory	Approx. Use	Dominant Research Themes
Theory of Planned Behavior	High	Entrepreneurial intention, career intention
Social Cognitive Career Theory	High	Self-efficacy, career commitment
Human Capital Theory	Moderate (mostly implicit)	Internships, employability
Career Construction Theory	Low	Career adaptability
Krumboltz’s Social Learning Theory	Low	Learning experiences, contextual influence

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives can be integrated into a conceptual framework explaining tourism and hospitality students’ career perceptions and intentions. Human Capital Theory emphasizes the role of educational investment and skill acquisition in shaping perceived employability and career opportunities. Social Cognitive Career Theory highlights the importance of self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations in shaping motivation and career commitment. The Theory of Planned Behavior provides a framework for understanding how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influ-

ence career intentions and entrepreneurial aspirations. Finally, Career Construction Theory offers a developmental perspective explaining how students continuously reinterpret and reconstruct their career identities in response to educational experiences, internships, and industry realities.

Integrating these perspectives provides a more comprehensive explanation of tourism and hospitality students' career perceptions, linking structural factors (education and labor market conditions), cognitive and motivational processes (self-efficacy and intentions), and dynamic career development processes (adaptability and identity construction). This integrative view helps explain why students' perceptions evolve over time and why some students remain committed to the sector while others seek alternative or entrepreneurial pathways.

Based on the synthesis, an integrative conceptual framework can be proposed in which tourism and hospitality students' career perceptions are shaped by the interaction of three core dimensions:

- (1) Structural factors, including education, internships, and labor market conditions;
- (2) Cognitive and affective processes, such as self-efficacy, employment anxiety, and perceived employability;
- (3) Career outcomes, including sector commitment, entrepreneurial intention, and potential exit decisions.

These relationships are further influenced by contextual factors such as cultural norms, social expectations, and industry characteristics. This integrative perspective highlights how career perceptions emerge from the dynamic interaction between external conditions and internal evaluation processes, providing a more comprehensive explanation than single-theory approaches.

8. Gaps in the Literature, Limitations and Future Research Directions

This systematic literature review has illuminated several key themes and insights regarding tourism and hospitality students' perceptions of their future career paths and employment prospects. While the existing literature offers valuable insights into tourism and hospitality students' perceptions of their future career paths and employment prospects, there are notable gaps and limitations that warrant consideration and highlight areas for future research endeavors.

A methodological limitation of this review is the reliance on a single database (RePEc), which may have excluded relevant studies indexed elsewhere. Although stringent inclusion criteria were applied, future systematic reviews should incorporate multiple databases to enhance comprehensiveness and minimize selection bias. Additionally, the original keyword combinations were relatively focused and may not have captured all relevant synonyms such as "perceptions," "attitudes," or "intentions.". This approach may have limited coverage. Future reviews could incorporate broader keyword combinations to further enhance comprehensiveness.

Another limitation relates to the screening process, which was conducted by a single reviewer. Although strict criteria were applied, future reviews should employ multiple independent reviewers and calculate inter-rater reliability statistics.

A further limitation relates to the absence of a formal methodological quality assessment of the included studies. Although all studies were peer-reviewed empirical works, the synthesis does not differentiate between studies of varying methodological rigor. Consequently, findings should be interpreted with appropriate caution, and future reviews are encouraged to incorporate structured appraisal tools. Although the review provides a structured thematic synthesis of the literature, it does not apply a formal methodological quality appraisal framework to weight studies according to research design rigor, sample

size, or analytical robustness. Future systematic reviews could incorporate structured appraisal tools or robustness classification systems to enable more evaluative synthesis.

Also, the geographic scope of existing studies is limited, with a concentration on certain regions or countries, which restricts the generalizability of findings across diverse cultural and economic contexts. Most studies are limited to four institutions, which may not fully represent the broader spectrum of schools [118]. Future research should aim to include a more diverse range of geographical locations and cultural settings to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions on a global scale.

Moreover, the research methodologies employed in many studies often rely heavily on quantitative surveys, mainly questionnaires, potentially overlooking the nuanced perspectives and experiences that qualitative approaches, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, could provide [149]. Descriptive statistics can be limiting in explaining the complex relationships among different measurement variables [90]. To gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions, future research should possibly incorporate mixed-methods approaches, combining quantitative data with qualitative insights to capture the complexity of the issue.

In addition, longitudinal studies tracking students' career trajectories over time are scarce, limiting our understanding of how perceptions evolve and influence actual career choices and outcomes. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to examine the long-term impact of education, industry experiences, and other factors on students' career paths and professional success. Furthermore, future research needs to explore the influence of emerging trends, such as technological advancements, sustainability concerns, and global events, on students' perceptions and career aspirations within the tourism and hospitality sectors [8].

It has to be noted that future research should evaluate the impact of career counseling, mentorship programs, industry partnerships, and curriculum enhancements on students' career readiness and success. The existing literature does not account for students' family backgrounds and their influence on career choices [68]. There is a need for more research to explore how socio-cultural values impact students' career decision-making in the hospitality and tourism industry [32]. Future studies should also examine the effectiveness of different interventions and strategies aimed at enhancing students' career prospects and fostering a more positive perception of the industry [150].

The main research gaps and future research directions are summarized in Table 6.

In addition to the above-mentioned research gaps, future studies would benefit from greater specificity regarding methodological design and career stages under examination. While mixed-methods approaches are recommended, qualitative inquiry is particularly needed to explore how students construct and reconstruct their professional identities over time. For example, in-depth interviews could examine how expectations change during internships, how students emotionally interpret workplace realities, and how perceptions evolve following exposure to crisis events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Such qualitative insights would complement survey-based findings on career intention and employability anxiety.

Similarly, longitudinal research would be especially valuable if focused on clearly defined transition points, such as: (i) pre-internship to post-internship perception shifts; (ii) the transition from final year of study to first employment; and (iii) the early-career stage (0–3 years after graduation), where attrition rates are often highest. Tracking these stages would allow researchers to examine whether negative perceptions translate into sector exit, whether entrepreneurial intentions result in actual venture creation, and how employment anxiety changes once graduates gain professional experience.

Table 6. Research Gap Matrix.

Research Gap	Implications	Future Research Directions
Limited geographic scope (concentration in a few regions/countries)	Findings lack global generalizability; cultural/economic diversity underexplored.	Expand research into underrepresented regions (e.g., Africa, Latin America, Middle East) to capture varied socio-cultural contexts.
Narrow institutional focus (most studies limited to few universities)	Results may not reflect broader spectrum of institutions and student populations.	Broaden samples to include diverse institutions (public/private, vocational/academic, international/local).
Overreliance on quantitative surveys	Risk of overlooking nuanced perspectives and deeper insights.	Incorporate mixed-methods and more qualitative approaches (e.g., longitudinal interviews, focus groups).
Scarcity of longitudinal studies	Limited understanding of how perceptions evolve over time and impact real career outcomes.	Conduct longitudinal research tracking students from study through early/mid-career stages.
Limited exploration of emerging trends (e.g., digitalization, sustainability, global shocks like COVID-19)	Risk of outdated insights; failure to capture students' adaptation to new realities.	Examine the impact of technology, sustainability, climate change, and global crises on career perceptions and aspirations.
Lack of focus on interventions (mentorship, counselling, industry partnerships)	Missed opportunities to evaluate tools that can improve employability and perceptions.	Test and evaluate the effectiveness of career counselling, mentorship programs, internships, and incubators.
Underexplored role of family and socio-cultural factors	Influence of social expectations and values on career choices is underestimated.	Investigate how family background, gender norms, cultural expectations, and societal values shape career paths.
Insufficient research on industry image improvement	Persistent negative perceptions may deter students from long-term careers.	Explore strategies to enhance sector attractiveness (e.g., fair pay, work–life balance, sustainability branding).

More targeted research questions that could guide future studies include:

- How do internship experiences recalibrate students' expectations regarding pay, work–life balance, and career progression?
- What factors predict long-term retention versus early exit from the tourism and hospitality sector?
- How do sustainability values influence career commitment among younger cohorts?
- Does participation in mentorship or entrepreneurship incubator programs increase post-graduation career stability?

Providing greater clarity regarding specific career transitions, identity development processes, and intervention outcomes would enhance theoretical advancement and generate more actionable knowledge for educators and policymakers.

Another significant gap concerns the limited number of intervention-based studies within the tourism and hospitality education literature. While many studies identify factors contributing to negative career perceptions, employment anxiety, or declining enthusiasm, relatively few rigorously evaluate solutions designed to address these issues. Future research should move beyond problem identification and adopt experimental or quasi-experimental designs to test the effectiveness of specific interventions.

For example, curriculum innovations incorporating sustainability, digital competencies, or entrepreneurial incubation could be systematically evaluated to determine whether they improve long-term career commitment. Structured mentorship programs linking

students with industry professionals could be assessed for their impact on employment anxiety, self-efficacy, and sector retention. Similarly, formalized industry–university partnership models could be examined to determine whether improved internship design reduces post-placement disillusionment.

Career counseling interventions also warrant systematic investigation. Controlled studies could examine whether targeted counseling reduces intention to exit the sector or enhances realistic career expectation alignment. By adopting quasi-experimental, longitudinal, or randomized designs, future research can generate evidence-based insights into which educational and institutional strategies effectively improve career perceptions and outcomes.

Shifting toward intervention-oriented research would significantly enhance the practical and policy relevance of tourism and hospitality education scholarship.

Another underexplored dimension concerns the interaction between individual differences and structural industry factors. While several studies acknowledge the role of gender, family background, and cultural expectations, future research should more systematically examine how personality traits (e.g., extraversion, resilience, proactivity), career values (e.g., desire for stability versus autonomy), and generational orientations influence career commitment within tourism and hospitality.

For example, it remains unclear why some students maintain strong sector commitment despite awareness of low pay or demanding working conditions, while others abandon their initial aspirations. Investigating how traits such as psychological resilience, adaptability, risk tolerance, or entrepreneurial orientation moderate the relationship between negative industry perceptions and career intention would provide a more nuanced understanding of career persistence.

Generational differences also deserve closer examination. Emerging cohorts may place greater emphasis on work–life balance, purpose-driven employment, and sustainability values. Future research could explore how these value orientations interact with industry realities and whether alignment between personal values and organizational practices enhances retention.

By integrating personality psychology, value theory, and structural labor market analysis, future scholarship can move toward a more holistic model explaining not only what students perceive, but why individuals respond differently to similar industry conditions.

Closing this section, it is imperative for the industry to improve its image by offering attractive compensation, facilitating work–life balance through flexible work hours, and fostering positive relationships between employees and managers [117]. Providing students with a comprehensive overview of career options, including potential career paths, working conditions, and advancement opportunities, is essential for fostering realistic expectations and informed decision-making [115].

Among the identified gaps, the scarcity of longitudinal and intervention-based research emerges as particularly critical, as addressing these areas would substantially enhance theoretical development and practical applicability within tourism and hospitality education.

9. Concluding Remarks

By systematically synthesizing three decades of empirical research and integrating multiple theoretical perspectives, this review provides one of the most comprehensive and methodologically transparent overviews of tourism and hospitality students' career perceptions currently available in literature. This systematic literature review analyzed 129 empirical studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of how tourism and hospitality (T&H) students perceive their employment prospects and future career trajectories.

The evidence illustrates a dynamic and sometimes contradictory landscape shaped by structural industry conditions, educational practices, and socio-cultural influences.

Beyond synthesizing empirical findings, this review contributes theoretically by contextualizing established career development frameworks within the specific dynamics of tourism and hospitality education. The evidence suggests that while Human Capital Theory explains instrumental expectations regarding skill acquisition and employability, subjective evaluations of industry conditions frequently mediate career commitment. Similarly, the findings extend Social Cognitive Career Theory by highlighting the interaction between self-efficacy and sector-specific structural volatility. Career Construction Theory is particularly relevant for understanding evolving perceptions over time, especially in the context of internship exposure and crisis-related recalibration. By integrating these perspectives, the review refines their applicability within a sector characterized by seasonality, uncertainty, and rapid change.

The persistence of negative career perceptions, including concerns about low pay, long hours, limited career advancement, and job insecurity, remains a critical challenge across regions and time periods. These concerns are closely tied to widespread employment anxiety, which has been further amplified by economic downturns and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Yet, the review also uncovers positive and adaptive trends. A significant rise in entrepreneurial intentions, especially after 2015, signals a shift toward greater autonomy, innovation, and resilience among students. In parallel, internships and practical learning experiences consistently emerge as decisive factors in shaping career perceptions, serving both as motivators and as reality checks that recalibrate expectations.

Another key insight lies in the influence of cultural, social, and personal factors, including family expectations, gender norms, and individual self-efficacy. These factors interact with broader structural conditions, resulting in highly diverse and context-dependent career outlooks.

Beyond synthesizing existing evidence, the findings of this review have concrete implications for multiple stakeholder groups.

For educators, the evidence strongly supports the importance of high-quality, structured internship programs with meaningful supervision and reflective components. Curricular design should integrate experiential learning with guided expectation management to prevent post-internship disillusionment. Embedding entrepreneurship education, sustainability-focused modules, and digital competency training can also enhance students' perceived agency and adaptability. Additionally, structured career counseling services that address employment anxiety and realistic career progression pathways may help align expectations with industry realities.

For industry practitioners, improving working conditions appears central to long-term sector attractiveness. Evidence suggests that transparent career progression pathways, competitive compensation structures, mentorship opportunities, and work–life balance initiatives are critical in reducing negative perceptions. Organizations that cultivate supportive workplace cultures and demonstrate commitment to employee development are more likely to retain graduates. In particular, structured onboarding programs and early-career mentoring may reduce attrition during the vulnerable first years of employment.

For policymakers, regulatory frameworks that incentivize fair labor practices, support youth entrepreneurship, and strengthen university–industry partnerships could significantly improve career pathways. Public investment in tourism innovation hubs, start-up incubators, and skills development initiatives may enhance entrepreneurial viability. Moreover, policies promoting sustainable tourism practices may increase sector attractiveness among value-driven younger cohorts.

By translating empirical insights into targeted, evidence-informed recommendations, the tourism and hospitality sector can better align educational preparation, workplace practices, and policy environments with students' evolving expectations and career aspirations.

While the review provides a comprehensive synthesis of existing research, its findings should be interpreted in light of certain limitations, including reliance on a single database, English-language publications, and published empirical studies. The absence of formal quality scoring and single-reviewer screening also represent methodological constraints. These considerations underscore the need for continued refinement in future systematic investigations.

Overall, while skepticism toward long-term employment in T&H persists, students increasingly demonstrate resourcefulness in crafting alternative pathways, often favoring leadership or entrepreneurial roles. For the sector to sustain a motivated workforce, stronger collaboration between academia and industry is essential. Enhancing working conditions, embedding entrepreneurial education, and aligning curricula with evolving industry demands will be critical steps in ensuring that the next generation of graduates can thrive while contributing to the long-term sustainability of tourism and hospitality.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Studies of the SLR with their Characteristics and Findings.

No.	Authors (Year)	Country/Region	Sampling Method	Technique	Findings
1	Airey and Frontistis (1997) [26]	Greece and UK	Questionnaire	Statistics	UK pupils have a less favourable view toward tourism.
2	Aksu and Köksal (2005) [27]	Turkey	Questionnaire	Statistics	The study finds both negative (mainly) and positive perceptions.
3	Alananzeh (2014) [28]	Jordan	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test, ANOVA, Regression	Various cultures of visitors and friends, and social & cultural factors affect the choice of specialization in hotel management.
4	Al-Jubari et al. (2019) [29]	Malaysia	Questionnaire	Regression analysis	The best indicator of entrepreneurial intention is self-efficacy.
5	Alrawadieh (2021) [30]	Turkey	Questionnaire	Statistics	Anxiety about employability was linked to higher psychological suffering and lower academic major satisfaction.
6	Altman and Brothers (1995) [31]	USA	Questionnaire	Statistics	38% of hospitality graduates quit their jobs within five years after graduation, or they decided not to work in the field.
7	Amissah et al. (2020) [32]	Ghana	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test, ANOVA	Students' opinions of jobs in the H&T sector were mostly negative.

Table A1. Cont.

No.	Authors (Year)	Country/ Region	Sampling Method	Technique	Findings
8	Anthony et al. (2021) [33]	Ghana	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test, ANOVA	In general, students had no interest in pursuing jobs in the field.
9	Appietu et al. (2019) [34]	Ghana	Questionnaire	Statistics, Wilcoxon test	Most students expressed favourable opinions about working in T&H.
10	Arcodia and Dickson (2009) [35]	Croatia, Germany, Slovenia, Canada, France, Finland, Iran	Questionnaire	Statistics	Most students were not sure if their studies will help them find work.
11	Ardani and Pradini (2023) [36]	Indonesia	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test, Regression	Knowledge and skills were crucial for increasing interest in a career.
12	Armoo and Neequaye (2014) [37]	Ghana	Questionnaire	Various multivariate techniques	Career choices were influenced by industry-person friendliness, social benefit aspects, professional growth opportunities and job competition.
13	Atef and Al Balushi (2017) [38]	Oman	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test, Regression	Almost 41% plan to stay employed in the T&H industry for a while.
14	Ayad et al. (2022) [39]	Saudi Arabia	Questionnaire	SEM	Correlations between training and entrepreneurship were totally mediated by the graduates' personal attitudes.
15	Badulescu et al. (2014) [40]	Romania	Questionnaire	U Mann–Whitney test, Factorial analysis	Students have clearly agreed with the points made on sustainable business practices.
16	Bahceterli and Sucuoglu (2015) [41]	Turkey	Questionnaire	Statistics	Students voluntarily opted to study tourism education.
17	Barron and Anastasiadou (2009) [42]	Scotland	Questionnaire	Statistics	83% of students were either employed or actively looking for work.
18	Barron et al. (2007) [43]	UK	Focus Group	Qualitative analysis	Opinions are both positive and negative.
19	Bednarska and Olszewski (2013) [44]	Poland	Questionnaire	Statistics	Most students plan a short-term career in tourism.
20	Benaraba et al. (2022) [45]	Philippines	Questionnaire & Focus group	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test, Thematic analysis	Students viewed their job options in the tourism industry during COVID pandemic as being filled with uncertainty.
21	Birtch et al. (2021) [46]	China	Questionnaire	Statistics, Regression, Bootstrapping Analysis	Study revealed negative emotions of students.
22	Blomme et al. (2013) [47]	Netherlands	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test, ANOVA, Tukey's tests	Pre-entry expectations of respondents affected employment outcome.

Table A1. Cont.

No.	Authors (Year)	Country/ Region	Sampling Method	Technique	Findings
23	Bordean and Sonea (2018) [5]	Romania	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test, ANOVA, Regression	Students' interest in starting their own firm was shown to be optimistic.
24	Bouchon et al. (2016) [7]	Malaysia	Interviews	Analysis of Interviews	Specialized programs should be created that link the academic curriculum with individualized industry engagement.
25	Butkouskaya et al. (2020) [48]	Spain	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test	The entrepreneurial goals of students did not influence their assessment of the obstacles hindering them from establishing their own enterprises.
26	Cantos et al. (2019) [49]	Philippines	Questionnaire	Statistics, ANOVA	Students were very sure of their ability to make good work decisions.
27	Cesário et al. (2022) [50]	Portugal	Questionnaire	SEM	The study highlighted the need to build links between education and businesses.
28	Chang and Tse (2015) [51]	Hong Kong	Questionnaire	Statistics	Over half of the graduates' first jobs were in H&T, and related industries.
29	Chen and Shen (2012) [52]	Taiwan	Questionnaire	SEM	The design of internship programs and industry participation had the most significant effects.
30	Chen et al. (2000) [53]	Taiwan	Questionnaire	Statistics	The students were apt to work in the hospitality sector.
31	Chi and Gursoy (2009) [54]	USA	Questionnaire	Statistics	The most important factor for the success of career was internship.
32	Chia and Liang (2016) [55]	Taiwan	Questionnaire	Factor and Regression	Stronger business inclinations were demonstrated by more creative tourism students.
33	Choudhary (2019) [56]	UK	Review	Review analysis	Students exhibited a great desire to start their own business.
34	Choy and Yeung (2022) [57]	Hong Kong	Questionnaire	SEM	Students frequently had a strong desire to enter the field.
35	Chuang and Dellmann-Jenkins (2010) [58]	USA	Questionnaire	Logistic regression	Students' gender, experience, transfer status, and industry outcome expectations were all substantially correlated with their career plans.
36	Chuang et al. (2020) [59]	USA	Questionnaire	Statistics, Regression	Self-report bias might be present.
37	Datta and Jha (2015) [60]	India	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test	Students strongly disagreed with what the business had to offer.
38	Datta et al. (2013) [61]	India	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test	Respondents highly disagreed on what the hotel management industry offered them.
39	Dragin et al. (2022) [62]	Serbia	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test, ANOVA	Male students and those whose parents were business owners or retired were more likely to have an entrepreneurial intention.

Table A1. Cont.

No.	Authors (Year)	Country/ Region	Sampling Method	Technique	Findings
40	Düzgün (2024) [63]	Turkey	Questionnaire	Regression analysis	Companies with strong psychological resilience and workers who are passionate about their work would have a competitive edge.
41	Eminov and Aliyeva (2017) [64]	Azerbaijan	Questionnaire	Statistics	Industries and educators should work closely together.
42	Fantilio et al. (2022) [65]	Philippines	Questionnaire	Statistics	Students were motivated by a desire to work in tourism.
43	Farmaki (2018) [66]	Cyprus	Interviews	Thematic analysis	Career intentions were influenced by several interrelated factors.
44	Getz (1994) [67]	Scotland	Questionnaire	Statistics	Over time, perceptions about a possible career in the field had gotten worse.
45	Grobelna (2017) [68]	Poland and Spain	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test	Respondents did not believe that a job in the T&H sector provided the motivational factors they desire.
46	Grobelna (2022) [69]	Poland	Questionnaire	SEM	Students might encounter study-life conflict.
47	Grobelna and Skrzyszewska (2019) [70]	Poland	Questionnaire	Statistics, Correlations	Students' opinions about the seasonality of tourism appear to be more favourable.
48	Grobelna and Tokarz-Kocik (2021) [71]	Poland and Croatia	Questionnaire	Statistics, Correlations	Students' perceived person-job fit, social support, and work experience were all significantly and favourably correlated.
49	Grobelna and Wyszowska-Wróbel (2021) [72]	Poland	Questionnaire	SEM-PLS	Participating in culture can give students valuable elements and resources.
50	Hjalager (2003) [73]	Sweden	Questionnaire	Statistics	Students appeared to prefer Swedish working cultures.
51	Hoque and Ahsif (2020) [74]	Bangladesh	Questionnaire	Statistics	Students generally had negative opinions about jobs in H&T.
52	Horng et al. (2021) [75]	Taiwan	Questionnaire & Interviews	<i>t</i> -tests, ANOVA	Educational intervention greatly improved innovative entrepreneurship.
53	Jenkins (2001) [76]	Netherlands and UK	Questionnaire	Statistics	Ten years after graduation, the majority anticipated becoming a general manager or corporate manager.
54	Johns and McKechnie (1995) [77]	UK	Questionnaire	Statistics	Within six months of graduating, nearly all respondents had found work in T&H. Ten years later, over half were still working in the field.
55	Kapera (2017) [78]	Poland (Ukrainian Students)	Questionnaire	Statistics	In more instances, students paired their degree program with employment, with 58% of the work being in the tourism sector.

Table A1. Cont.

No.	Authors (Year)	Country/ Region	Sampling Method	Technique	Findings
56	Kim et al. (2008) [79]	Korea	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test	Students were primarily motivated by self-actualization, employment opportunities, and international experience.
57	Kim et al. (2010) [3]	USA	Questionnaire	Statistics, ANOVA	Job experiences and personal experiences had a considerably greater influence than any other source.
58	Kim et al. (2016) [80]	Taiwan, Korea, Hong Kong	Questionnaire	Statistics, Factor analysis, <i>t</i> -test	Real-world experience or a desire for work were the most important factors.
59	Kipkosgei et al. (2015) [81]	Kenya	Questionnaire	Statistics, Regression	A higher percentage of diploma students chose to become entrepreneurs.
60	Kusluran and Kusluran (2000) [82]	Turkey	Questionnaire, & focus groups	Statistics	There were reports of unfavourable or negative assessments of several aspects of working in the tourism sector.
61	Lambulira et al. (2022) [83]	Malawi	Interviews	Thematic analysis	Most students had positive opinions about careers in the industry.
62	Lashley (2013) [84]	UK	Interviews	Statistics	Students were drawn to work in the hotel industry.
63	Le et al. (2018) [85]	Vietnam	Questionnaire	Statistics, Logistic regression	The participants seemed less optimistic to a career in hospitality.
64	Lee et al. (2019) [86]	USA	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test	Social media might not have as much of an impact on students' job decisions as traditional influences did.
65	Lewis and Airey (2001) [87]	Trinidad and Tobago	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test, Kruskal–Wallis analysis	Students viewed jobs in the tourism industry favourably.
66	Litvin (2000) [88]	Singapore	Questionnaire	Statistics	Travel agencies were not viewed as desirable places to work.
67	Liu et al. (2023) [89]	China	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test	Career barriers had a significant detrimental impact on career intention.
68	Lu and Adler (2009) [90]	China	Questionnaire	Statistics	Most students expressed interest in pursuing a career in the H&T sector.
69	Maiorescu et al. (2020) [91]	Romania	Questionnaire	Statistics	Students believed that their lack of participation is the primary barrier.
70	Mannaa and Abou-Shouk (2020) [92]	United Arab Emirates	Questionnaire	SEM	Social factors, the nature of the profession, and the perks of compensation and advancement, had a detrimental impact on students' commitment to working in the tourism industry.

Table A1. Cont.

No.	Authors (Year)	Country/ Region	Sampling Method	Technique	Findings
71	Martín-Navarro et al. (2023a) [93]	Spain	Questionnaire	PLS-SEM	Proactivity, entrepreneurship learning programs, and causal inclination were antecedents of entrepreneurial goals.
72	Martín-Navarro et al. (2023b) [94]	Spain	Questionnaire	PLS-SEM	Entrepreneurial intentions were influenced by effective propensity.
73	Maxwell et al. (2010) [95]	Scotland	Questionnaire	Statistics	Gen Y indicated that their early exposure to the hotel business deterred them from seeking a career in the field.
74	Mayuzumi (2020) [96]	Indonesia	Questionnaire	Statistics, Factor Analysis ML method	Approximately 50% of young people chose to pursue careers in the tourism sector.
75	McKercher et al. (2023) [97]	Australia	Questionnaire	Statistics	Career anchors appeared to be crucial, at least regarding the aspirational aspects of desired jobs.
76	Mei et al. (2016) [98]	China	Questionnaire	SEM	Statistically significant relationships existed among personal attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioural control, and entrepreneurial intention.
77	Mohammad and Alsaleh (2013) [99]	Jordan	Questionnaire	Factor analysis	Social status and job opportunities were significant factors motivating students to pursue studies in tourism.
78	Mungai et al. (2021) [100]	Kenya	Questionnaire	SEM, Factor analysis	The most significant factors affecting the student's choice of tourism degree were tuition fees, employment prospects, and family/parental background.
79	Nachmias and Walmsley (2015) [101]	UK	Interviews	Thematic analysis	Participants showed conviction about career trajectories.
80	Omar (2014) [102]	Egypt	Questionnaire	Statistics	A negative stance toward employment in the tourism industry was found.
81	Ortiz and Coromina (2021) [103]	Ecuador	Questionnaire	Statistics, ANOVA	Most of the students showed strong motivation and dedication to pursue a career in tourism.
82	Özişik Yapıcı et al. (2021) [104]	Turkey	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test, ANOVA	After COVID, those studying gastronomy, cookery, and food and beverage showed a greater willingness to pursue a career.
83	Papathanassis (2021) [1]	Germany	Questionnaire	SEM-PLS	Study-satisfaction and experience internship both had a significant impact on the students' career intentions.

Table A1. Cont.

No.	Authors (Year)	Country/ Region	Sampling Method	Technique	Findings
84	Park et al. (2017) [105]	Korea	Questionnaire	Multiple regression	Students who had internship experience were more likely to develop positive attitudes toward T&H.
85	Petrova and Mason (2004) [106]	UK	Questionnaire	Authors' analysis	Undergraduates in travel and tourism were eager and hopeful about obtaining jobs in the tourism sector.
86	Phuc et al. (2020) [107]	Vietnam	Questionnaire	PLS-SEM	Entrepreneurial intention was directly influenced by subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, attitude toward entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurship education.
87	Pol and Patil (2015) [108]	India	Questionnaire	Statistics	Students responded neutrally to hotel jobs.
88	Pranic (2023) [109]	Croatia	Questionnaire	Statistics, Multiple regression	Study found correlation between entrepreneurial intentions and factors such as work experience, gender, and entrepreneurial disposition.
89	Rahimi et al. (2016) [110]	UK	Questionnaire & focus groups	Statistics, factor analysis	The origins of students' motivation, rooted in their cultural, societal, and familial backgrounds.
90	Ramakrishnan and Macaveiu (2019) [111]	UK	Interviews	Inductive thematic analysis	The study revealed assurance of desiring to pursue a career in tourism coexisting with uncertainty about positions.
91	Raybould and Wilkins (2005) [112]	Australia	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test	Students seemed to have realistic views of the skills that managers prioritize when recruiting hospitality graduates.
92	Reichenberger and Raymond (2021a) [11]	New Zealand	Interviews	Thematic analysis	Career strategies for the short to medium term were adaptable.
93	Reichenberger and Raymond (2021b) [113]	New Zealand	Interviews	Thematic analysis	Students mainly exhibited optimistic views about their future careers.
94	Richardson (2008) [114]	Australia	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test	Over half of those surveyed were considering careers beyond T&H.
95	Richardson (2009) [115]	Australia	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test	Students typically doubted that a profession in T&H would provide them with the factors they deemed important.
96	Richardson (2010) [116]	Australia	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test	Students from abroad were more inclined to think that the T&H sector provides the significant elements for selecting a career.

Table A1. Cont.

No.	Authors (Year)	Country/ Region	Sampling Method	Technique	Findings
97	Richardson and Butler (2012) [117]	Malaysia	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test	Students believed that a career in T&H would not offer them the factors that they found important.
98	Richardson and Thomas (2012) [118]	USA	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test	Respondents were mainly satisfied with the career options in T&H.
99	Roberts (2024) [119]	New Zealand	Questionnaire & Case study	Statistics, Thematic analysis	Students largely believed that the tourism industry provided career prospects that were fun, interesting, and offered access to travel.
100	Robinson et al. (2016) [120]	Australia	Interview	Thematic analysis	Students frequently modified their career decisions regarding the T&H sectors after work experiences.
101	Roney et al. (2007) [121]	Turkey	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test	Students' perceptions were neutral.
102	Ross (1992) [122]	Australia	Questionnaire	Statistics	Management employment became the preferred area.
103	Ross (1993) [123]	Australia	Questionnaire	Statistics	Many students indicated an interest in working in management roles.
104	Rosyidi (2021) [124]	Indonesia	Questionnaire	Statistics	While career progression and pay were viewed as significant elements, students revealed negative perceptions.
105	Selçuk et al. (2013) [125]	Turkey	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test	Students did not consider the tourism business to be interesting.
106	Şengel (2020) [126]	Turkey	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test	The aspect students expected the most was communication.
107	Seyitoglu et al. (2022) [127]	Turkey	Interviews	Content analysis	Students' perspectives were primarily shaped by vocational development and career planning during the COVID-19 era.
108	Shah et al. (2021) [128]	India	Questionnaire & Interviews	Statistics, Thematic analysis	Students believed that the industry would bounce back soon, so despite the pandemic downturn, they still opted to work in it.
109	Sincharoenkul and Witthayasirikul (2022) [129]	Thailand	Questionnaire	Logistic regression	Of the five recruitment attributes, competencies predicted likelihood on three: foundation, employability, and adaptability.
110	Skiert and Buchta (2012) [130]	Poland	Questionnaire	Statistics	Students expressed a great deal of interest in business proprietorship.
111	Tan et al. (2016) [131]	Malaysia	Questionnaire	Statistics, Regression	Only social status and pay benefits were found to have a statistically significant contribution to commitment in the hospitality industry career:

Table A1. Cont.

No.	Authors (Year)	Country/ Region	Sampling Method	Technique	Findings
112	Teng (2008) [132]	Taiwan	Questionnaire	Statistics	Students' aspirations regarding and attitudes towards hospitality jobs were significantly predicted by the personality trait of extroversion.
113	Thetsane et al. (2020) [133]	Lesotho	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test	Several factors deemed crucial when selecting a career in T&H.
114	Tsai et al. (2024) [9]	Taiwan	Questionnaire	Statistics, Factor analysis, SEM, Mediation analysis	Personality characteristics could impact and shape one's employability.
115	Turanligil and Altıntaş (2018) [134]	Turkey	Questionnaire	Statistics, Mann–Whitney Test	The respondents felt that their perceptions and expectations of the industry were not significant considering their experience.
116	Unguren and Huseyinli (2020) [135]	Turkey	Questionnaire	SEM	Students generally possessed a low intention to enter the tourism sector and exhibited high levels of post-graduation employability anxiety.
117	Vaniček and Jarolimkova (2021) [136]	Czech Republic	Questionnaire	Statistics	Even with the pandemic, students envisioned their future in tourism.
118	Verdadero et al. (2020) [137]	Philippines	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test	Most respondents were ready to enter the tourism industry.
119	Wakelin-Theron et al. (2018) [138]	South Africa	Questionnaire and Interview	Statistics and Data Interview analysis	The key competencies needed included customer service and awareness, ethical behaviour in the workplace, and communication skills.
120	Wan et al. (2014) [139]	China	Questionnaire	Statistics, <i>t</i> -test	The way the work was viewed did not correlate with career prospects.
121	Wang and Huang (2014) [140]	China	Questionnaire	Statistics, Factor Analysis, Regression, ANOVA	Students' perceptions differed based on their varying characteristics.
122	Wen et al. (2018) [141]	China	Questionnaire	PLS-SEM	Career intentions were positively affected by their attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and prior work experience.
123	Wen et al. (2019) [142]	China	Interviews & Questionnaire	Statistics, Multiple regression, data analysis	Compensation, benefits, and promotional prospects in the hospitality industry fell short of their expectations.
124	Xu et al. (2018) [143]	Ecuador	Questionnaire	Regression analyses	Student employees who indicated greater degrees of abusive supervision were more prone to leave the organization.

Table A1. Cont.

No.	Authors (Year)	Country/Region	Sampling Method	Technique	Findings
125	Yasar & Öztürk (2023) [144]	Turkey	Interviews	Content analysis	Individuals who had expectations for the tourism sector lowered these expectations to a minimal level after graduating.
126	Zhang and Chen (2024) [145]	China	Questionnaire	Descriptive, correlation analysis	Study highlights incentive policies, guaranteeing that universities offer entrepreneurship education in a range of disciplines.
127	Zhang et al. (2020) [146]	China	Questionnaire	SEM	The results showed education's beneficial effect on entrepreneurship.
128	Zhong et al. (2021) [147]	USA	Questionnaire	Statistics, Regression	Students' experience of engagement was positive despite COVID.
129	Zhong et al. (2022) [148]	China	Questionnaire	PLS-SEM	The employment situation of students was greatly improved by their growth in professional knowledge reserves, learning skills, innovation skills, teamwork skills, and social ethics.

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