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Research Paper

Determining the professional self-esteem levels of tourism guide students

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the levels of professional self-esteem among students enrolled in a tourism guiding program and to determine whether these levels differ according to selected demographic and educational variables. A quantitative research design was employed, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 198 undergraduate students studying tourism guiding at a public university during the 2024–2025 academic year. Professional self-esteem was measured using an adapted version of the Professional Self-Esteem Scale, and the data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, independent samples t-tests, and one-way ANOVA. The results indicate that students generally exhibit moderate to high levels of professional self-esteem. Significant differences were observed in certain dimensions of professional self-esteem with respect to gender and class level. Furthermore, prior knowledge about the profession and voluntarily choosing the program were found to be significant determinants of students' sense of professional belonging. These findings suggest that professional self-esteem among tourism guiding students is shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by educational experiences and informed career choices. The study contributes to the limited empirical literature on professional self-esteem in tourism education and provides insights for strengthening professional identity development in tourism guiding programs.

Keywords

Keywords: Self, Professional Self, Professional Self-Esteem, Professional Self-Esteem Level, Tourism Guidance Students, Tourist Guiding Profession

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1. Introduction

Self-concept refers to the attitudes and beliefs people hold about their current and desired personalities. The concept of self-concept is defined as a whole consisting of ideas, perceptions, and evaluations related to the self. In the process of evaluating these elements, self-esteem is formed as the individual develops a positive attitude and values themselves (Cast & Burke, 2002; Üzbe & Bacanlı, 2015). Self-esteem is expressed as the positive outcome of an individual's self-evaluation. In other words, it is the individual's acceptance and appreciation of their psychological, physical, and economic characteristics. One of the most important factors in the formation of self-esteem is the individual's chosen profession (Harter, 2013; Orth & Robins, 2014). Occupation is of vital importance because it imposes various roles and responsibilities on individuals and encompasses a significant part of human life. Occupation encompasses both spiritual elements, such as the individual being respected and gaining a place in society, and material elements, such as earning economic income. Individuals can achieve success in their chosen professions by selecting a career that is compatible with their sense of self. Achieving this compatibility leads to the development of the individual's professional self-concept (Baloğlu, 2006; Ünlü, 2023).

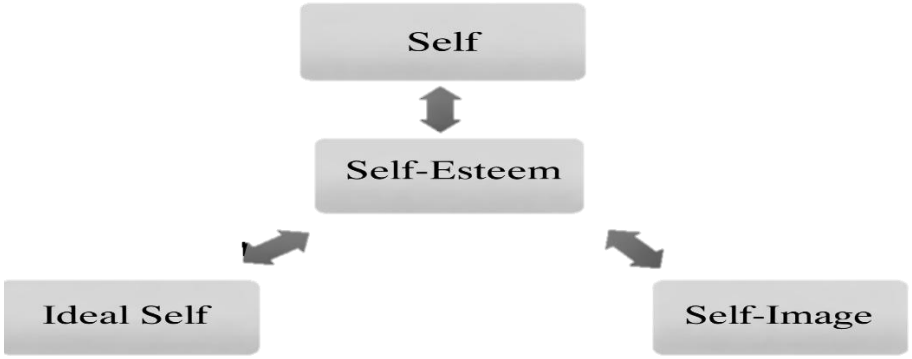
Professional self-concept is extremely important in terms of the sustainability of the chosen profession. It can be said that as the harmony between an individual's self-concept and their profession increases, their level of professional success also rises. Professional self-concept is defined as the reflection of individuals' self- concept perceptions on their professional choices. Professional self-esteem is expressed as the sense of confidence individuals feel in their competence in their chosen professions (Tabassum & Ali, 2012; Uslusoy et al., 2016; Çivilidağ et al., 2018). Professional self-esteem is considered one of the key determinants of individuals' ability to progress in their careers. Individuals can achieve job and life satisfaction to the extent that they possess professional self-esteem. This concept also encompasses the value judgments individuals develop regarding their professions (Ünlü, 2023). Within the framework of these definitions, professional self- esteem in tourism guiding can be expressed as "professional tourist guides having a positive attitude towards their profession and the degree to which they take pride in their work."

Many people view the profession of tour guiding as a career that offers freedom to travel and is primarily entertaining. However, tourist guiding is a labor-intensive profession that requires constant renewal, multifaceted knowledge and skills, and physical endurance (Çınar & Yenipınar, 2019). Therefore, the formation of professional self-esteem in prospective tourist guides who choose this profession is considered a critical factor for the sustainability of the profession. The limited number of studies addressing professional self-esteem in the context of tourism guiding in the relevant literature necessitates research on this topic. Considering the increasing importance of the tourist guiding profession, the need to examine the concept of professional self-esteem more comprehensively and to fill this gap in the literature becomes even more apparent. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to determine the levels of professional self-esteem among tourist guiding students and to examine whether these levels differ according to various variables. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically.

2. Conceptual Framework

Professional Self-Esteem

Selfhood is defined as the way an individual perceives and understands themselves, and is a concept that expresses how an individual sees and evaluates themselves (Kulaksızoğlu, 2000). This concept is approached as a governing force within individuals' psychological worlds that can judge, monitor, and evaluate them (Cast & Burke, 2002; Üzbe & Bacanlı, 2015). When approached more comprehensively, it encompasses not only the attitudes and beliefs that individuals develop internally towards themselves, but also their current self- perception and their views on the self-design they wish to achieve in the future (Swann & Bosson, 2010). Self develops within a dynamic structure throughout the life process and becomes more distinct as the individual's self-awareness increases. For healthy development, the difference between an individual's real self and ideal self must be minimal. The harmony between these two structures ensures that the individual's self-esteem is shaped in a positive way (Harter, 2013; Orth & Robins, 2014).



Source: (Yazıcı, 2018).

Figure 1. Self-Esteem Structure

Self-esteem is based on the concept of self. Self-esteem is defined as a state of satisfaction that arises when an individual realizes that they accept themselves based on their own personal assessments. In other words, it refers to an individual valuing themselves and displaying a positive attitude when evaluating their actions (Dilmaç et al., 2009; Stets & Burke, 2014). It is not necessary for an individual to attain high positions or achieve significant successes in order to have self-esteem. An individual can accept and appreciate themselves without comparing their characteristics to others (Kaya, 2021).

In the national literature, self-esteem is expressed with the concepts of 'self-respect', 'sense of self-worth', and 'self-respect', while in the international literature, it corresponds to the terms 'self-esteem', 'self-respect', and 'self-confidence' (Dilmaç & Ekşi, 2008; Brown & Murphy, 2011; Aydoğan, 2016; Bergam et al., 2022; Uglanova, 2024). The concept is defined in different ways because it encompasses physiological, psychological, sociological, and cognitive dimensions (Yaprak, 2018). When considered as a subjective phenomenon, it is seen to be shaped by the level of satisfaction an individual feels about themselves. More comprehensively, it refers to a structure that can vary depending on factors such as individual development, living conditions, and social status, and can manifest itself in either a positive or negative direction (Dilmaç et al., 2009; Brown & Murphy, 2011; Doğan & Eryılmaz, 2013).

According to İnanç's (1997) study, there are four fundamental elements that contribute to the development of self-esteem. The first of these elements is receiving respect from important people in the individual's life. The second element is the individual's social status; the third element is the goals they have achieved; and the fourth element is their perception of how their actions affect them. Indeed, the study authored by Maslow and Lewis (1987) also addresses the formation of self-esteem within similar frameworks.

Self-esteem can be assessed at three different levels: low, medium, and high (Gelbal et al., 2010). At a low level, individuals tend to evaluate their own attitudes and behaviors mostly in a negative and inadequate manner. At a medium level, individuals evaluate themselves neither with an overly critical nor a perfectionist approach. High self-esteem enables the individual to display self-confidence, problem-solving skills, and a positive outlook despite the adversities encountered in life (Mruk, 2006). This structure can be influenced by both the individual's internal dialogue and their interactions with other people. Various factors, such as parental attitudes, peer bullying, and personal successes or failures, can directly influence this process. As a result, the individual's mental and physical health, social relationships, academic success, and career choice may also be affected (Kristjánsson, 2007; Çiftçi et al., 2020).

The formation of individuals' self-concept and self-esteem is significantly influenced by their chosen professions. Therefore, it is crucial that an individual's career choice is compatible with their personal characteristics (Tekirgöl, 2011; Kuşluvan, 2020). According to the Turkish Language Association (2025), a career is defined as "producing goods and providing services for financial gain, based on knowledge and skills acquired through specific education." This definition reveals that a profession requires a certain level of education and is based on constantly evolving knowledge. In this context, a profession is considered an important tool that enables individuals to define their identity (Baloğlu, 2006; Ünlü, 2023).

Professional identity is defined as the transformation of an individual's identity into a professional choice and the integration of identity elements related to the profession. In this respect, it is considered an important structure in terms of the individual's development in their professional life (Sung et al., 2011; Min, 2018). An individual's job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and professional commitment are shaped by the level of harmony between their

identity and their chosen profession (Çiçekli Ayyıldız & Birdir, 2023). As harmony is achieved between the chosen profession and the individual's identity, positive development in professional self and professional self-esteem is observed (Uslusoy, 2016; Erkorkmaz et al., 2018; Figen & Avci, 2020).

The foundations of professional self-esteem were laid in the 1890s with William James's work on the concept of self (Barbalet, 1999). However, the concept was first addressed in the relevant literature based on Super's theory. Super's lifelong career development theory is accepted as one of the fundamental approaches that remains valid today. According to this theory, an individual's career development process involves a direct relationship between career choice and the formation, development, and completion of professional self- concept (Kuzgun, 2014). The concept of professional self-concept expresses an individual's personal beliefs that the intrinsic qualities they accept in relation to their profession are necessary and valuable. In other words, this structure is a concept that emerges from the transformation of professional self-esteem into professional preferences and reflects the value and importance that individuals attribute to their profession (Tabassum & Ali, 2012; Uslusoy et al., 2016; Çivilidağ et al., 2018).

In the literature, the concepts of professional self-esteem and professional respect are sometimes used interchangeably. Professional respect refers to a societal and general perception of value toward a profession, while professional self-esteem, derived from this concept, reflects a personal perception based on the individual's subjective evaluations. This phenomenon develops simultaneously with professional self-esteem and expresses the individual's level of respect, love, honor, and pride for their profession (Ünlü, 2023). Conscious career choice and education appropriate to the profession are among the fundamental elements in the formation of this structure. It is also stated that various individual and environmental factors such as the individual's gender, birth order in the family, interaction with parents, parents' educational levels and professions, social and economic status, school success, leisure activities, and cultural level are also effective (Çivilidağ et al., 2018).

3. Research Method and Findings

The purpose of this study is to determine the levels of professional self-esteem among students studying tourism guiding and to examine whether these levels differ according to various variables. Since the tourism guiding profession has a structure where individual representation, communication skills, and professional identity perception are at the forefront, examining the professional self-esteem levels of students studying in this field is important for understanding the process of preparing for the profession.

The population of the study consists of a total of 261 students enrolled in the Tourism Guiding Program at Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University in the fall semester of the 2024–2025 academic year. The sample consists of 198 students who actively continued their education during the research process and voluntarily participated in the study. Convenience sampling was preferred in determining the sample due to proximity to the research area and ease of access to participants. Convenience sampling is a sampling method that provides advantages in terms of time and cost, where the sample is formed from individuals who are accessible to the researcher and who agree to participate in the research (Yağar & Dökme, 2018). It should be noted that this method has limitations in terms of the generalizability of the findings; it is recommended that future studies include different universities and use probability sampling methods.

A questionnaire consisting of two sections was used as a data collection tool. The first section of the questionnaire included questions about the participants' demographic characteristics, while the second section used the Professional Self-Esteem Scale developed by Arıcak (1999) and adapted to the tourism guiding profession. The scale was evaluated based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) and initially consisted of 30 items. Fifteen items with negative meanings were reverse-coded and included in the analysis. A pilot study was conducted with 20 students prior to the research to test the comprehensibility of the items. The pilot study showed that the statements were comprehensible, and no changes were made to the questionnaire form. Data collection was conducted during the fall semester of the 2024–2025 academic year.

To determine the reliability of the scale used in the study, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was calculated, and the obtained value was found to be 0.842. This result indicates that the scale has a high level of reliability. In the analysis of the research data, descriptive statistics were used to reveal the characteristics of the participants, and appropriate statistical analyses were applied to test the research hypotheses. In this context, in the first stage of the analysis process, the findings regarding the demographic characteristics of the students participating in the research were evaluated and presented in Table 1.

Table 1 presents findings regarding the demographic characteristics of the students participating in the study. It is observed that 53% of the participants are male students and 47% are female students. When evaluated in terms

of grade level ( ), it was determined that the sample consisted predominantly of first-year students (37.9%) and that the participation rate decreased towards higher grades. This situation may be related to the weakening of the physical ties of students whose study period is prolonged with the university. Looking at prior knowledge about the profession, it is seen that the vast majority of students (87.4%) had prior knowledge about the tourism guiding profession. However, the percentage of students who stated that they chose the department voluntarily was 81.8%, which is lower than the percentage of those who had prior knowledge about the profession. This finding indicates that, although some students had knowledge about the profession, different factors may have influenced their choice.

Table 1: Demographic Information About Participants

Demographic Information		n	%
Gender	Male	105	53
	Female	93	47
	1	75	37,9
	2	54	27,3
Grade	3	38	19,2
	4	29	14,6
	4+	2	1
I had knowledge about the profession	Yes	173	87,4
	No	25	12,6
I chose the department voluntarily	Yes	162	81,8
	No	26	18,2

Source: Authors' own Elaboration

Factor analysis was applied to examine the structural validity of the research data. Factor analysis is a multivariate statistical method that allows a large number of interrelated variables to be grouped under a smaller number of conceptually meaningful factors (Büyüköztürk, 2002). In this study, factor analysis was performed to determine under which dimensions the statements in the professional self-esteem scale were grouped. During the analysis process, the factor loadings of the items were first examined; 8 items with factor loadings below 0.50 were excluded from the analysis on the grounds that they did not show sufficient correlation with the relevant factor. After this process, factor analysis was reapplied. The suitability of the data set for factor analysis was evaluated using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sample adequacy test, and the KMO value was calculated as 0.929. This value indicates that the sample size is highly suitable for factor analysis. As a result of the renewed analysis, it was determined that the remaining 22 items were grouped under four factors. It was observed that the obtained factor structure explained a significant portion of the total variance, and the variance explanation ratios and item loadings related to the factors are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Factor Analysis

Statements	Factors			
	1	2	3	4
M21	,826	,164	,135	,128
M17	,768	,108	,190	,091
M6	,726	,068	,143	,106
M10	,714	,021	,206	,227
M13	,694	,433	,187	,305
M24	,678	,415	-,079	,267
M19	,647	,303	,227	-,142
M27	,619	,325	,446	,003
M30	,600	,467	-,088	,268
M22	-,552	-,034	-,429	-,241
M29	-,548	-,347	-,454	,112
M7	,268	,760	,162	,044
M2	,168	,730	,181	,239
M16	,434	,672	,005	,122
M18	,011	-,593	-,318	-,251
M9	,054	,573	,205	,525
M26	,361	,482	,111	,455
M23	,162	,099	,724	,037
M15	,312	,132	,645	,282
M14	,142	,427	,575	,273
M20	-,243	-,189	-,020	-,765
M28	,077	,248	,336	,713
KMO	,929			
Bartlett	,000 (p<0,05)			
Bartlett x^2	2470,293			
Eigenvalue	9,535	2,101	1,354	1,063
Coefficient of Variation %	25,660	16,910	10,927	10,381
Total Variance Explained Ratio %	63,879			
Cronbach's Alpha (Entire Scale)	,842			

Source: Authors' own Elaboration

As a result of the exploratory factor analysis conducted in accordance with Table 2, the KMO value for the scale was calculated as 0.929; Bartlett's Sphericity Test was found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that the data set is suitable for factor analysis. The analysis yielded a four-factor structure ( ). The total variance explained by these factors was 63.879%, which is considered sufficient for studies in the social sciences (Yaşlıoğlu, 2017). The 22 statements aimed at explaining professional self- esteem cover this entire variance. When examining the factor structure, it is seen that the first factor consists of 11 items, the second factor of 6 items, the third factor of 3 items, and the fourth factor of 2 items. The factors have been named to make the factor groups more understandable, and the items belonging to each factor and the factor names are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Factor Names

Satatement	Factor names
I am considering changing my profession.	**Professional Belonging**
I sometimes experience internal conflict because I chose this professiona	
I chose my profession reluctantly.	
Due to a mistake in my choice, I am currently in a career field I do not want.	
I am satisfied with my profession.	
I will pursue my profession because I chose it myself.	
I don't think my skills are suited to my profession.	
My profession has the characteristics I want in a profession.	
I don't think my profession can meet my needs.	
Even though I don't actually enjoy my profession, I pretend to enjoy it	
My profession is part of my identity.	
My profession is very important to me.	**Positive Aspects of the Profession**
I can devote myself emotionally to my profession	
Through my profession, I can accomplish important and beneficial work for humanity.	
I have great respect for my profession.	
When the time comes, I can easily defend my profession.	
I would like to have a profession that I can speak of with pride.	
I underestimate my profession.	**The Impact of My Profession**
My profession has qualities that can leave an impact on people.	
I believe my profession has a bright future.	
I believe my profession is prestigious.	**Future Direction of the Profession**

Source: Authors' own Elaboration

The process of naming the factor dimensions was carried out in line with the Lifespan Domain Theory developed by Super (1980). This theory addresses an individual's professional development in terms of self- concept, professional identity formation, and attitudes toward the profession; it evaluates the individual's sense of belonging and commitment to their profession as fundamental components of professional self-esteem. Furthermore, negative statements within the factor dimensions were reverse-coded and included in the analysis. Therefore, although some statements appear negative in meaning, they were evaluated as representing professional self-esteem as a result of the reverse coding process.

Table 4 presents the mean and standard deviation values for the statements included in the professional self-esteem scale. Upon examining the findings, it is observed that participants' perceptions of their profession differ based on the statements. The statement with the lowest average value is "I appear to enjoy my profession even though I do not actually enjoy it" (Avg. = 1.93), and this finding shows that the vast majority of students do not experience internal inconsistency in their attitudes toward their professions. On the other hand, the statement "I belittle my profession" has a high average value (Avg.=4.61). However, since this statement is a reverse-coded item, this result should not be interpreted as meaning that participants belittle their professions. Taking reverse coding into account, it is understood that students do not develop a negative perception of their professions; on the contrary, they respect their professions. Overall, it is seen that participants' levels of professional self-esteem show a positive trend ; high averages stand out in the statements about embracing, defending, and attributing value to the profession.

Table 4. Averages of Professional Self-Esteem Statements

Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.
I am considering changing my profession	4.1970	1.26515
I sometimes experience internal conflict because I chose this profession.	3.9091	1.34497
I chose my profession unwillingly.	4.3687	1.17522
Due to a mistake in my choice, I am currently in a profession I do not want	4.4848	1.06025
I am satisfied with my profession	4.1667	1.03124
I will pursue my career because I chose it myself	4.3030	1.05151
I think my skills are not suitable for my profession.	4.0556	1.3932
I think my interests are not suitable for my profession.	4.1515	1.26542
My profession has the characteristics I want in a profession	4.0455	1.04854
I believe my profession cannot meet my needs.	2.0909	1.26323
Even though I don't actually enjoy it, I pretend to enjoy my job	1.9343	1.17966
My profession is a part of my identity.	3.7626	1.14405
My profession is very important to me	4.2980	.92187
I can emotionally commit to my profession	3.7323	1.0635
Through my profession, I can accomplish important and beneficial work for humanity	2.1465	1.23558
I have great respect for my profession	4.4040	.86581
I can confidently defend my profession when necessary	4.2525	,97004
I wish I had a profession I could proudly say I have	3.5808	1.56777
I look down on my profession	4.6061	.96453
My profession has qualities that can leave an impact on people	4.3535	.85274
I believe my profession has a bright future	2.0859	1.25755
I believe my profession is prestigious	4.1515	1.05545

Source: Authors' own Elaboration

Table 5. Professional Self-Esteem by Gender

Factor Groups		Levene's Test for Equality of Variance		T-Test for Equality of Means		
		F.	Say.	t	df	Sig. (2-pronged)
Professional Belonging	Even	,003	,954	-,889	196	,375
	Not equal			-,894	195,739	,373
Positive About the Profession Considerations	Even	,785	,377	1,843	196	,067
	Not equal			1,859	195,926	,065
Degree of Influence of the Profession	Even	6,744	,010*	2,676	196	,008
	Not equal			2,713	193,683	,007
Future Direction of the Profession	Even	6,905	,009*	1,498	196	,136
	Not equal			1,526	189,553	,129

Source: Authors' own Elaboration

To test the hypotheses of the study, the t-test for independent samples was used to examine the differences between two groups, while one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare more than two groups. Prior to the relevant analyses, the data were assessed to determine whether they met the assumptions of parametric tests, and the analyses were conducted accordingly.

To determine whether professional self-esteem differs by gender, an independent samples t-test was applied (Table 5). According to the analysis results, a significance level of $p<0.05$ was determined in the dimensions of "Degree of Influence of the Profession" and "Future Direction of the Profession." In contrast, the p-values obtained for the dimensions of "Professional Belonging" and "Positive Thoughts About the Profession" were found to be greater than 0.05. In line with these findings, it can be stated that the gender variable causes a significant difference in the dimensions of "Degree of Influence of the Profession" and "Future Direction of the Profession" in terms of professional self-esteem, while it has no significant effect on the other dimensions.

Table 6. Professional Self-Esteem by Grade Level

Factor		Sum of Squares	df	Squared Means	F	P
Professional Belonging	Across groups	3,564	4	,891	,889	,471
	In-group	193,436	193	1,002		
	Total	197,000	197			
Positive About the Profession Considerations	Across groups	18,960	4	4,740	5,138	,001*
	In-group	178,040	193	,922		
	Total	197,000	197			
Degree of Influence of the Profession	Across groups	11,502	4	2,875	2,992	,020*
	In-group	185,498	193	,961		
	Total	197,000	197			
Future Direction of the Profession	Across groups	8,035	4	2,009	2,052	,089
	In-group	188,965	193	,979		
	Total	197,000	197			

Source: Authors' own Elaboration

Table 6 presents the results of the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the subscales of professional self-esteem according to grade level. The analysis revealed statistically significant differences between students' grade levels in the subdimensions of "Positive Thoughts About the Profession" ($p<0.05$) and "Degree of Influence of the Profession" ($p<0.05$). According to the results of the Tukey multiple comparison test conducted to determine between which grade levels these differences occurred, statistically significant differences were found in the Positive Thoughts About the Profession sub-dimension between 1st and 2nd grades and between 2nd and 3rd grades ($p<0.05$). In the Degree of Influence of the Profession sub-dimension, a significant difference was observed between the 1st and 2nd grades ($p<0.05$). In contrast, no significant differences were found according to grade level in the sub-dimensions of "Professional Belonging" ($p>0.05$) and "Future Direction of the Profession" ($p>0.05$).

Table 7. Professional Self-Esteem According to Occupational Knowledge

Factor Groups		Levene's Test for Equality of Variance		T-Test for Equality of Means		
		F.	Say.	t	df	Sig. (2-pronged)
Professional Belonging	Even	4,445	,036	2,909	196	,004
	Not equal			2,257	28,887	,032
Positive About the Profession Considerations	Even	,840	,360	,755	196	,451
	Not equal			,685	31,083	,499
Degree of Influence of the Profession	Even	,356	,552	-,802	196	,424
	Not equal			-,768	32,108	,448
Future Direction of the Profession	Even	,509	,477	2,616	196	,010
	Not equal			2,517	32,190	,017

Source: Authors' own Elaboration

Table 7 presents the results of the independent samples t-test comparing the subscales of professional self- esteem according to occupational knowledge. According to the test results, a statistically significant difference was determined between the groups based on occupational knowledge in the "Occupational Belonging" sub- dimension ($p<0.05$). A statistically significant difference was found between the groups based on occupational knowledge in the Occupational Belonging sub-dimension ($p<0.05$). However, no significant difference was found in the subdimensions of "Positive Thoughts About the Profession," "Degree of Influence of the Profession," and "Future Direction of the Profession" based on professional knowledge ($p>0.05$). In light of these results, it can be said that professional knowledge is a determining variable in the "Professional Belonging" sub-dimension of professional self-esteem; however, it has no significant effect on the other sub- dimensions.

Table 8. Professional Self-Esteem According to Department Selection Information

Factor Groups		Levene's Test for Equality of Variance		T-Test for Equality of Means		
		F.	Say.	t	df	Sig. (2-pronged)
Professional Belonging	Even	17,836	,001	7,393	195	,001
	Not equal			5,397	39,459	,001
Positive About the Profession Considerations	Even	,872	,352	,256	195	,798
	Not equal			,228	44,791	,821
Degree of Influence of the Profession	Even	2,314	,130	-,593	195	,554
	Not equal			-,537	45,454	,594
Future Direction of the Profession	Even	3,098	,080	1,682	195	,094
	Not equal			1,454	43,788	,153

Source: Authors' own Elaboration

Table 8 presents the results of independent samples t-tests comparing the subscales of professional self-esteem based on department selection information. The analyses revealed a statistically significant difference between groups based on department selection information in the "Professional Belonging" subscale ($p<0.05$). However, no statistically significant difference was found in the subdimensions of "Positive Thoughts About the Profession," "Degree of Influence of the Profession," and "Future Direction of the Profession" based on department selection information ($p>0.05$). In light of these findings, it can be said that department selection information is a determining variable in the "Professional Belonging" sub-dimension of the professional self- esteem scale; however, it has no significant effect on the other sub-dimensions.

4. Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

Today, educational approaches are beginning to take into account the characteristics of students in the educational process (Çelik Demiray & Durak, 2023). The development of students in terms of professional self-concept is quite

important during the tourism guiding education process. The main objective of this study is to determine the levels of professional self-esteem among students in the tourism guiding department and to examine whether these levels differ according to various demographic and personal variables. The findings reveal that the participants' levels of professional self-esteem show significant differences according to the variables in question.

When examining the demographic characteristics of the participants, it is seen that 53% are male and 47% are female. Although the gender distribution is generally balanced, the proportion of male participants is relatively higher. Looking at the grade level, it is seen that first-year students (37.9%) constitute the largest group, and the number of participants decreases as the grade level increases. It was determined that 87.4% of the participants had prior knowledge about the profession. In addition, it was found that 81.8% of the students chose the department voluntarily, indicating a conscious orientation towards the profession. The relatively high proportion of male students may be related to perceptions that the profession of tourist guiding requires physical strength and has irregular working conditions. However, the popularity of tourist guiding as a profession makes access to information about the profession relatively easy. The fact that the percentage of participants who are knowledgeable about the profession is lower than those who voluntarily chose the department indicates that different department options may have been evaluated among the choices.

According to the t-test analysis conducted to determine whether professional self-esteem differs by gender, there is no statistically significant difference between genders in the factors of professional belonging and positive thoughts about the profession. However, statistically significant differences were found between genders in terms of the degree of influence of the profession and the future direction of the profession. These findings indicate that gender may be an influential variable on professional self-esteem. In particular, the differences that emerge in the context of the degree of influence of the profession and the perception of the future of the profession suggest that gender roles may be influential in the process of shaping individuals' professional self-esteem.

The findings obtained show similarities and differences with various studies in the literature. In the study by Ünal and Şimşek (2008), it was determined that the levels of professional self-esteem of primary education teacher candidates differed significantly according to gender; female students had higher professional self- esteem than male students. In the study by Castro and Armitage-Chan (2016), it was determined that male veterinary students exhibited higher levels than females in indicators reflecting professional self-concept; furthermore, their scores related to self-confidence, self-esteem, and leadership goals were statistically significantly higher. In Fırat Kılıç's (2018) research on nursing students, it was determined that female students had higher professional self-esteem than males. Similarly, Figen and Avcı (2020) also found that female nursing students had higher levels of professional self-esteem than male students. In a study conducted by Kahraman and Kılıç (2021) on nursing students, it was found that professional self-esteem differed significantly according to gender, and this time male students had higher levels of professional self-esteem. On the other hand, some studies conducted on different student groups found that gender had no significant effect on professional self-esteem. For example, Güleç and Özbek Ayaz (2017) studied teacher candidates; Gnatyshına et al. (2018) with pedagogical university students; Sa et al. (2019) with health profession program students; and Denizli (2020) with vocational school students, revealed that this variable did not show a significant difference in terms of gender. In this context, it can be argued that the differences between the findings may have been influenced by differences in the professional field, sample characteristics, and social context. Accordingly, it can be said that it may be important to consider the gender factor in practices aimed at developing professional self-esteem.

According to the results of the One-Way ANOVA test conducted to determine whether professional self- esteem varies according to grade level, statistically significant relationships were found between certain factors of professional self-esteem and students' grade levels. In particular, grade level was found to be a determining variable in terms of positive thoughts about the profession and the degree of influence of the profession. Significant differences were found between first and second-year students and between second and third-year students in terms of positive thoughts about the profession. Similarly, a statistically significant difference was found between first and second-year students in terms of the degree of influence of the profession. However, no significant difference was found in terms of professional belonging and the future direction of the profession according to grade level. These findings are consistent with the results obtained in the study conducted by Dilmaç and Ekşi (2008) on vocational school students. In that study, it was determined that self-esteem levels differed significantly between first- and second-year students and that second-year students had higher self-esteem levels. In the research conducted by Figen and Avcı (2020) on nursing students, it was determined that fourth-year students had higher professional self-esteem compared to other grade levels. In contrast, Dilmaç and colleagues (2009) concluded in their study on teacher candidates that grade level had no statistically significant effect on professional self-esteem. Similarly, Koçyiğit and Dizdar (2024) conducted a study on audiology specialist candidates and stated

that grade level had no significant effect on professional self-esteem; rather than a marked increase as grade level progressed, a downward trend could be observed from time to time. These differing findings indicate that certain dimensions of professional self-esteem may change as students progress through their education and that this change may vary depending on contextual factors.

This situation can be explained within the framework of Bandura's (1982) self-efficacy theory. As individuals gain experience in a field and successfully complete these experiences, their perception of self-efficacy strengthens; increased self-efficacy perception then becomes an important psychological resource that directly nourishes professional self-esteem. In particular, the fact that dimensions such as the degree of influence of the profession and positive thoughts about the profession vary with grade level shows that students begin to evaluate the individual and social value of the profession in a more realistic and holistic way over time. Furthermore, according to Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, individuals tend to compare themselves with their peers in order to evaluate their own views and abilities. This comparison process allows students to position themselves academically and professionally and plays an important role in shaping self- perception and professional self-esteem.

The results of the t-test conducted to examine the relationship between professional self-esteem and professional knowledge reveal a statistically significant difference in terms of the professional belonging factor according to the level of professional knowledge. This finding indicates that the level of professional knowledge is an important variable affecting individuals' perception of belonging to the profession. In contrast, no statistically significant difference was found in terms of the degree of influence of the profession, positive thoughts about the profession, and the future direction of the profession based on the level of professional knowledge. This result indicates that as professional knowledge increases, individuals' sense of belonging to the profession may strengthen; it suggests that professional education processes should include more practices that support the sense of belonging and increase awareness of the profession.

These findings are also supported by studies in the field. Göksoy, Altınöz, and Argon (2013) stated that increased knowledge and positive attitudes toward the teaching profession are among the important factors that support individuals' professional self-esteem. Abdullah and colleagues (2018) state that university graduates' levels of self-knowledge and professional discovery strengthen their career decision-making competencies and that this process makes important contributions to the development of professional self- concept and professional self-esteem. Similarly, Kahraman and Kılıç (2021) found that students who consciously and willingly chose the nursing profession had higher levels of professional self-esteem. The findings of Güven and Ünsal (2022) also show that consciously choosing the nursing profession and satisfaction with the profession are among the key factors that strengthen individuals' professional self-esteem.

When examining the results of the t-test conducted to evaluate the relationship between professional self- esteem and department selection information, a significant difference was found in the professional belonging factor. This finding indicates that the information individuals possess about the department selection process is an important variable affecting their feelings of professional belonging. No statistically significant difference was found in other factors in terms of department selection information. These results suggest that the information students acquire during the department selection process can shape their commitment and sense of belonging to the profession. This result is consistent with the findings of the study conducted by Dilmaç et al. (2009). When the research results are examined, it is determined that students who choose their department based on their own preferences have higher professional self-esteem. Indeed, Koçyiğit and Dizdar's (2024) study also found that individuals who voluntarily chose the audiology profession had significantly higher self-esteem and professional self-esteem scores, supporting the notion that conscious choice and knowledge level regarding the profession strengthen professional self-perception. In this regard, guidance services should be strengthened and greater importance should be given to career guidance processes so that students can make conscious department choices.

In conclusion, it shows that tourism guide students' professional self-esteem levels are generally at medium to high levels. It has been determined that factors such as gender, class level, and professional knowledge create significant differences in professional self- e esteem. In particular, it has been determined that students who have prior knowledge about the profession have higher levels of professional self-esteem. This situation shows that professional knowledge strengthens individuals' perception of their professional identity and contributes to increased professional self-confidence. Identifying the factors that influence the professional self-esteem levels of tourism guiding students provides an important contribution from both academic and sectoral perspectives. Future research examining these relationships in greater depth using different samples and methodological

approaches could make significant contributions to the field. Theoretical and practical recommendations have been developed based on the findings of this study.

Theoretical Recommendations

- Course content covering topics such as psychological resilience, professional identity, gender roles, and self-awareness should be added to the curriculum of tourism guide bachelor's degree programs to develop professional self-esteem.
- Considering the effect of gender on professional self-esteem, seminars and course content that raise awareness of gender equality should be prepared.
- Studies should be planned to track changes in students' connection to their profession over time, with an emphasis on interdisciplinary research in this area.
- At the high school and pre-university levels, scientific content, promotional strategies, and social campaigns should be developed to increase awareness of the tourist guide profession; these should be evaluated academically.
- Career guidance and career choice processes should be incorporated into education programs through psychology-based modules, which should help students make informed choices.
- Practical Recommendations
- Field trips, simulations, role-playing activities, and real tour scenarios related to tourist guiding practice should be promoted to strengthen students' professional self-esteem.
- Comprehensive internship programs should be established, supported by sectoral oversight mechanisms and guided by tour guides, to ensure students gain early exposure to the industry.
- Mentoring relationships should be established between experienced tour guides and students, and mutual learning environments that strengthen students' sense of belonging to the sector should be supported.
- Career days introducing the profession of tour guiding, graduate talks, and digital information campaigns should be organized in high schools, particularly to increase the number of students who choose the department by choice.
- Universities should expand personalized psychological counseling services and career guidance sessions to support individuals with low professional self-esteem.
- Tourism sector professionals and academic staff should collaborate to develop projects and organizations that enable students to gain direct field experience.

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