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Research Paper

The role of service orientation in shaping tourism students' willingness to work within the sector

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Abstract

A shortage of qualified personnel in the tourism sector adversely affects service quality, a problem exacerbated by insufficient tourism-trained staff and the tendency of tourism graduates to leave the industry. This study aims to examine the relationship between service orientation and the intention to work in the tourism sector, as well as to identify potential differences based on demographic and educational characteristics. Data were collected from 470 tourism students through convenience sampling and analyzed using SPSS and AMOS statistical software. The findings indicate that the type of degree program significantly influences service orientation. Moreover, the intention to work in the tourism sector varies according to the type of university attended, voluntary department choice, prior awareness of job requirements, and the decision to pursue tourism education despite knowledge of employment conditions. The results reveal a statistically significant and positive relationship between service orientation and the intention to work in the tourism sector. These findings suggest that alignment between individual personality traits and career choice enhances employee effectiveness and contributes to service quality and sectoral sustainability.

Keywords

Keywords: Service Orientation, Intention to work in tourism, Tourism students, Tourism education

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1. Introduction

The tourism industry represents a complex and service-intensive ecosystem that integrates accommodation, food and beverage services, transportation, and travel intermediaries (Camilleri, 2018). Due to its labor-intensive nature, the sustainability and competitiveness of the sector depend not only on physical and technological investments but, more importantly, on the development of qualified human capital (Pelit & Güçer, 2006). In an increasingly volatile and competitive global tourism environment, the presence of well-educated and service-oriented employees has become a key determinant of organizational success (Vo, 2024).

Tourism education plays a critical role in supplying the sector with a skilled workforce by equipping students with professional knowledge, service competencies, and industry-relevant attitudes (Kuşluvan & Kuşluvan, 2000). However, the effectiveness of tourism education is contingent upon students' successful transition into the industry and their willingness to pursue long-term careers within the sector (Tuna et al., 2017; Philips, 2023). In this regard, understanding the factors that shape students' career intentions has become increasingly important for addressing persistent labor shortages and turnover problems in tourism.

Among these factors, service orientation has emerged as a crucial individual attribute influencing both employee performance and career sustainability in service-based industries. A strong service-oriented approach enhances customer satisfaction, increases job motivation, reduces turnover intention, and strengthens employees' commitment to the sector (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Mazlum & Güven, 2024). Previous studies indicate that individuals with higher levels of education and sector-specific training are more likely to demonstrate customer-oriented behaviors, empathy, and professionalism (Tekin & Kalkan, 2017; Garcia & Porto, 2022).

In the tourism sector, the prioritization of high-quality service delivery is essential for organizational success. Service quality significantly influences customer satisfaction and loyalty (Parasuraman et al., 1988), which in turn contributes to positive work-related outcomes such as employee job satisfaction (Kozak & Andreu, 2017). Prior research demonstrates that service-oriented employees are more capable of meeting customer expectations, solving service-related problems, and sustaining long-term engagement within the sector (McCole, 2004; Kim et al., 2005; Brown & Lam, 2008). Consequently, organizations that successfully attract and retain employees with strong service orientation are more likely to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage (Tremblay & Parent-Rocheleau, 2025). In line with this perspective, the present study examines the relationship between service orientation and tourism students' intention to work within the tourism sector. Focusing on associate and undergraduate students receiving formal tourism education, the study aims to determine how service-oriented attitudes influence students' willingness to pursue employment in the sector. In addition, it explores whether service orientation and intention to work in the tourism sector differ according to demographic and educational characteristics. By addressing these relationships, the study seeks to contribute to the literature on human capital development and workforce sustainability in the tourism sector.

2. Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development

Service Orientation

In a service context, customer value emerges as value-in-use and becomes evident only through customers' direct interaction with the service process. Within this framework, firms and customers act as interconnected partners who jointly create value for all stakeholders involved (Nguyen & Le, 2025). Given the labor-intensive nature of tourism, employees' service-oriented attitudes play a central role in shaping service outcomes. Zeithaml et al. (2018) define service orientation as a combination of individual attributes, competencies, and mindsets demonstrated during interactions with customers. Core components of service orientation include empathy, effective communication, problem-solving ability, and stress management (Grönroos, 2007), as well as the capacity to establish and maintain long-term customer relationships (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2016).

Previous research indicates that service orientation is influenced by multiple factors, including personal characteristics, educational background, work experience, and organizational support. In particular, tourism education combined with practical industry experience contributes to higher customer satisfaction (Ostrom & Iacobucci, 1995; Yoo & Park, 2001; Kwortnik & Thompson, 2009; Murray & Scullion, 2010; Lee et al., 2013), improved service quality (Peltier et al., 2003), the development of service-related skills, and stronger customer-centric attitudes (Chen & Tsai, 2007). These outcomes ultimately enhance job satisfaction (Dzogbenuku et al., 2025) and reinforce service-oriented behaviors (Ladhari, 2009).

Demographic and educational characteristics have also been shown to shape service orientation. Pimpakorn and Patterson (2010) emphasize that individual demographic attributes and sector-specific conditions play an important role in explaining service-oriented behaviors, particularly among frontline employees. Similarly, Homburg et al. (2002) demonstrate that individuals from different demographic backgrounds exhibit varying levels of service orientation. Drawing on this body of literature, the present study proposes that service orientation differs according to students' demographic and educational characteristics. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1a: Service orientation differs according to demographic factors.

H1b: Service orientation differs according to educational factors.

Intention to Work in Tourism Sector

The theory of planned behavior posits that individuals engage in intentional and reasoned actions, with behavioral intention serving as a key antecedent of actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Siddiqui et al., 2025). Within this framework, intention to work refers to individuals' willingness and motivation to pursue employment in a specific sector (Kwortnik & Thompson, 2009). This concept is particularly relevant for the tourism sector, which is currently experiencing a global labor and skills shortage, creating substantial challenges in attracting and retaining qualified employees (Kafetzopoulos, 2024). As a result, tourism students' intentions to work in the sector have become critical for ensuring workforce sustainability and effective human resource planning.

The tourism sector is characterized by a dynamic and continuously evolving structure, making career intentions a key determinant of sectoral stability (Kwortnik & Thompson, 2009). Prior studies indicate that demographic characteristics—such as age, gender, education level, experience, and training—play a significant role in shaping work-related attitudes and behaviors in tourism (Akova et al., 2015). Moreover, individuals' intentions to work in the tourism sector are influenced by factors including career goals (Wegge et al., 2006), perceptions of employment conditions (Chen & Chen, 2010), and the educational and professional competencies they acquire (Lee et al., 2014).

Empirical evidence suggests that educational background is a particularly influential factor in shaping work intentions, whereas the role of age remains less clear (Kafetzopoulos, 2024). Tourism education, especially when supported by internship and work-integrated learning experiences, enhances students' understanding of sectoral conditions and strengthens their career aspirations (Biyiri, 2018). Consistent with this view, recent studies emphasize that internships and work-related experiences significantly increase students' interest in the tourism sector and reinforce their intention to enter the workforce (Huang & Han, 2023; Wut et al., 2023; Rodrigues & Costa, 2024). Based on these findings, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2a: Intention to work in the tourism sector differs according to demographic factors.

H2b: Intention to work in the tourism sector differs according to educational factors.

Beyond demographic and educational influences, individual characteristics play a central role in shaping tourism students' willingness to pursue employment in the sector (Liu et al., 2022). Service orientation functions as a psychological and behavioral resource that enhances job-related outcomes by influencing individuals' perceptions of and attitudes toward work (Zablah et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2016). Previous research indicates that higher levels of service orientation are associated with improved job performance and reduced turnover intentions (Babakus et al., 2010; Ribeiro et al., 2020), as well as more positive work-related perceptions and emotions (Wu et al., 2017). Furthermore, when a strong fit exists between individual characteristics and job requirements, higher job satisfaction, stronger commitment, and lower turnover intentions are observed (Lin et al., 2018). Given these positive outcomes, service-oriented individuals are more likely to perceive employment in the tourism sector as attractive and sustainable. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that tourism students who exhibit higher levels of service orientation will demonstrate a stronger intention to work within the tourism sector. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Service orientation is positively related to intention to work in the tourism sector.

3. Methodology

This research primarily aims to investigate how the service orientation of tourism students influences their desire to pursue careers in the industry, while also highlighting the significance of this connection in ensuring a skilled workforce for the tourism sector and its implications for the sustainability of employment within the field. The

research also focuses on assessing whether demographic and education-related variables lead to differences in service orientation and the desire to pursue a career in the industry.

The scope of this research encompasses students undertaking tourism-related courses at the university level in Türkiye. The Institution of Higher Education reports that in the 2024-2025 academic year, there are 36,001 students enrolled in associate degree programs focused on tourism, while 51,559 students pursue undergraduate degrees in the same field. Establishing an adequate sample size that effectively represents the entire population is a vital aspect of scientific research (Ural & Kılıç, 2013). While the necessary number of samples can differ according to the total population, it has been established that 384 samples suffice for populations that include 100,000 individuals or greater (Ural & Kılıç, 2013; Coşkun et al., 2015; Altunışık, 2022).

A pilot analysis aimed at examining the reliability and validity of the measurement instruments was performed between February 22, 2024, and April 10, 2024, involving 200 students from various universities including Balıkesir, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Arel, and Muğla Sıtkı Koçman. Upon completion of the pilot phase, the scales demonstrated high reliability, allowing the main data collection phase to proceed.

In light of accessibility issues, budgetary constraints, and time limitations, the survey was executed online from April through June 2024. Data were obtained from 500 tourism students via a survey that implemented the convenience sampling strategy. This non-probability sampling method was justified by the logistical challenges of reaching a geographically dispersed student population across multiple provinces and the practical need to collect data during the active academic term. Nonetheless, convenience samples may not accurately reflect the characteristics of the target population, limiting generalizability (Scholtz, 2021). After removing incomplete or repetitive responses, the final analysis was performed on 470 valid surveys.

The dataset was initially screened for normality. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (2013), skewness and kurtosis coefficients between -1.5 and +1.5 indicate a normal distribution, which was confirmed in this study. Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS and AMOS software. The evaluation commenced with validity and reliability tests, followed by frequency analyses to examine demographic profiles. To address the research objectives, T-tests, ANOVA, and regression analyses were performed. All statistical results were interpreted at a significance level of $p < 0.05$. The research scales were adapted from the work of Brown et al. (2002) and Kuşluvan & Kuşluvan (2002). The service orientation (SO) scale comprises 12 items, and the intention to work (IW) scale includes 17 items, both utilizing a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1. Strongly disagree" to "5. Strongly agree.

4. Assessment of Measurement Model

Demographic Characteristic of Participant

Table 1 provides an overview of the 470 tourism students who participated in the study.

Table 1. Demographic and Educational Characteristics of the Students

Gender	***f***	***%***	***Educational Level***	***f***	***%***
Female	*249*	*53.0*	*Associate Degree*	*255*	*54.3*
Male	*221*	*47.0*	*Undergraduate*	*215*	*45.7*
Total	*470*	*100*	*Total*	*470*	*100*
University Type			*Class*		
State	*443*	*94.3*	*1*	*178*	*37.9*
Private	*27*	*5.7*	*2*	*180*	*38.3*
Total	*470*	*100*	*3*	*61*	*13.0*
Internship status			*4*	*51*	*10.9*
Yes	*189*	*40.2*	*Total*	*470*	*100*
No	*281*	*59.8*			
Total	*470*	*100*			
Department			*Type of high school attended*		
Tourism and Hotel Management	*76*	*16.2*	*Tourism*	*51*	*10.9*
Tourism and Travel Services	*43*	*9.1*	*Other*	*419*	*89.1*
Tourism Management	*24*	*5.1*	*Total*	*470*	*100*
Gastronomy and Culinary Arts	*52*	*11.1*	*The situation of choosing the department willingly*		
Recreation Management	*9*	*1.9*			
Tourist Guiding	*174*	*37.0*	*Yes*	*401*	*85.3*
Culinary	*69*	*14.7*	*No*	*69*	*14.7*
	4	*0.9*	*Total*	*470*	*100*

Tourism Animation Catering Services	*19*	*4.0*			
Total	*470*	*100*			
Knowing job prospects prior to choosing a department			*Had I known about the employment conditions in tourism, I would still choose to study tourism.*		
Yes	*241*	*51.3*	*Yes*	*304*	*64.7*
No	*46*	*9.8*	*No*	*40*	*8.5*
Partly	*183*	*38.9*	*Hesitant*	*126*	*26.8*
Total	*470*	*100*	*Total*	*470*	*100*

Source: Authors' own elaboration

The demographic and educational profiles of the 470 tourism students participating in the study are summarized in Table 1. Descriptive analysis shows that 53.0% of the respondents are female, while 47.0% are male. Most participants (94.3%) are enrolled in state universities, and only 5.7% (n = 27) attend foundation (private) universities. Regarding educational levels, 54.3% are pursuing an associate degree, and 45.7% are enrolled in undergraduate programs. The distribution of grade levels indicates that the majority of students are in their first (37.9%) or second year (38.3%), followed by third-year (13.0%) and fourth-year students (10.9%). Additionally, 40.2% of participants have completed their professional internships, while 59.8% have yet to do so. Notably, only 10.9% graduated from vocational tourism high schools, suggesting that most students entered the field from diverse educational backgrounds.

Regarding departmental distribution, the Tourist Guiding department represents the largest group (37.0%), followed by Tourism and Hotel Management (16.2%) and Culinary Arts (14.7%). When examining students' initial motivation, 85.3% reported choosing their departments willingly. In terms of pre-enrollment awareness, 51.3% stated they were well-informed about the sector's prospects, 38.9% had partial knowledge, and 9.8% had no prior information. Finally, when asked whether they would still choose to study tourism given current employment conditions, 64.7% responded affirmatively, 26.8% remained hesitant, and 8.5% stated they would not choose the field again.

Exploratory Factor Analysis, Findings on the Validity and Reliability of Measurement Scales

The first stage of the research typically involves the use of exploratory factor analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014). Table 2 presents the results of the exploratory factor analysis along with the reliability assessments for the service orientation scale.

Table 2. Exploratory Factor Analysis and Reliability Results of the Service Orientation Scale

Items	***Factor Loadings***	***Eigenvalue***	***Total Variance***	***Cronbach's Alpha***	***Mean***
I find it easy to smile and show warmth to guests.	*0.901*	*9.909*	*82.573*	*0.981*	*3.980*
I enjoy remembering my guests' names.	*0.846*				
I naturally empathize with my guests.	*0.919*				
I take pleasure in responding quickly to my guests' requests.	*0.938*				
I feel satisfied when I make my guests happy.	*0.944*				
I genuinely enjoy serving my guests.	*0.889*				
I actively try to help guests achieve their goals.	*0.953*				
I reach my own goals by ensuring guest satisfaction.	*0.919*				
I encourage guests to talk to me about their service needs.	*0.915*				
I approach guest problems with a solution-oriented mindset.	*0.941*				
I take my guests' best interests into consideration.	*0.827*				
I am able to accurately answer guests' questions.	*0.903*				
KMO = 0.975; Bartlett Test Sig = 0.000					

Source: Authors' own elaboration

The Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) results indicated that the 12-item Service Orientation scale is organized into a single dimension. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was determined to be 0.975, which is well above the recommended threshold, and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($p < .001$), confirming that the dataset is suitable for factor analysis.

The factor loadings for the items ranged from 0.827 to 0.953, with every item surpassing the 0.80 threshold, demonstrating a high level of structural validity. The scale's eigenvalue was calculated as 9.909, accounting for 82.573% of the total variance. This robust factor structure suggests that the items consistently reflect the same underlying construct. Reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.981, indicating a remarkably high level of internal consistency (Ural & Kılıç, 2013). The examination of mean values indicates that participants' overall service orientation is high, with an average rating of 3.980 on a 5-point scale.

Table 3 presents the findings from the exploratory factor analysis and reliability assessment for the scale measuring students' intention to work in the sector.

Table 3. Exploratory Factor Analysis and Reliability Results of the Intention to Work Scale

Items	*Factor Loadings*	*Eigenvalue*	*Total Variance*	*Cronbach's Alpha*	*Mean*
In my opinion, the disadvantages of working in the tourism industry outweigh the advantages. (R)	*0.557*	*5.833*	*53.832*	*0.759*	*3.360*
I would not want my son to study tourism in the tourism industry. (R)	*0.838*				
I would not want my son to work in the tourism industry .(R)	*0.835*				
I will not put great effort into acquiring a job in the tourism industry. (R)	*0.544*				
It is definite that I will not work in the tourism industry after graduation. (R)	*0.720*				
I work in the tourism industry after graduation provided that I become a manager or department head. (R)	*0.603*				
I recommend first year students to sit in the university exam and choose another career path other than tourism. (R)	*0.781*				
It was a big mistake to choose tourism as a career path. (R)	*0.763*				
would want my daughter to study tourism in the tourism industry. (R)	*0.824*				
would want my daughter to work in the tourism industry. (R)	*0.831*				
I work only in high paid jobs in the tourism industry. (R)	*0.617*				
KMO = 0.874 ; Bartlett Test Sig = 0.000					

**Items marked with (R) were reverse-coded prior to analysis to ensure that higher mean scores consistently reflect a stronger intention to work in the tourism industry.*
Source: Authors' own elaboration

The intention to work in the sector was initially measured using a 17-item scale and subjected to Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). In line with the criteria suggested by Çakır (2019) and Akyüz (2018), factor loadings below 0.30 indicate structural issues, while loadings below 0.50 are considered insufficient for robust scale validity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Following these guidelines, six items with loadings below 0.50 were excluded, resulting in an 11-item, single-factor structure.

The remaining items exhibited factor loadings ranging from 0.544 to 0.838. The factor structure explained 53.832% of the total variance with an eigenvalue of 5.833. According to Hair et al. (2014), a variance explained exceeding 50% confirms a unified and valid structure. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy was 0.874, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant ($p < .001$), confirming the dataset's suitability for analysis. The reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.759, demonstrating a satisfactory level of internal consistency. The mean score for the scale was 3.360. As higher scores represent a stronger intention to work, this result indicates that participants possess a moderate level of commitment to pursuing a career in the tourism sector.

5. Findings

T-Test and ANOVA Test Results

This part of the research presents results examining whether demographic and educational characteristics lead to variations in service orientation and the intention to engage in the sector. Table 4 illustrates the key outcomes of this analysis.

Table 4. t-Test and ANOVA Results by Demographic and Educational Variables

Variables			*Groups*	*n*	*X*	*SS*	*t/F*	*p*	*Differences*
Service Orientation	*Educational Level*	*1*	*Associate*	*255*	*3.82*	*1.24*	*-3.502*	*.000*	*2>1*
		2	*Undergraduate*	*215*	*4.16*	*.801*			
Intention to Work in Tourism Sector	*University Type*	*1*	*State*	*443*	*3.34*	*.564*	*8.950*	*.007*	*2>1*
		2	*Foundation*	*27*	*3.64*	*.521*			
	Willingness in Choosing the Department	*1*	*Yes*	*401*	*3.42*	*.547*	*6.590*	*.000*	*1>2*
		2	*No*	*69*	*2.96*	*.510*			
	Awareness of Employment Opportunities Before Enrollment	*1*	*Yes*	*241*	*3.44*	*.593*	*5.562*	*.004*	*1>2,3*
		2	*No*	*46*	*3.20*	*.481*			
		3	*Partly*	*183*	*3.29*	*.533*			
	Willingness to Choose Tourism Despite Current Employment Conditions	*1*	*Yes*	*304*	*3.52*	*.529*	*56.982*	*.000*	*1>3>2*
		2	*No*	*40*	*2.73*	*.559*			
		3	*Hesitant*	*126*	*3.15*	*.435*			

**All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Independent samples t-tests were used for comparisons between two groups, while one-way ANOVA was applied for comparisons among three groups. Post-hoc analyses were conducted using the Tukey test.*
Source: Authors' own elaboration

Table 4 examines whether significant differences exist in students' service orientation and intention to work in the tourism sector based on demographic and educational variables, using independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA. Post-hoc analyses were conducted with the Tukey test to identify specific group differences. Only variables showing statistically significant variations are presented in the table. Overall, no significant differences were found in students' working intentions or service orientation according to gender, internship participation, departmental affiliation, academic year, or the type of high school attended.

Undergraduate students demonstrated higher service orientation scores ($\bar{X}$ = 4.16) compared to associate degree students ($\bar{X}$ = 3.82), with this difference being statistically significant (t = 3.502, p < .001). This suggests that undergraduate students may have a greater understanding of professional standards and practices in the tourism field.

Students enrolled in foundation universities reported higher intentions to work in the sector ($\bar{X}$ = 3.64) than their counterparts at state universities ($\bar{X}$ = 3.34), and this difference was statistically significant (t = 8.950, p < .05). This finding may reflect the stronger emphasis on applied education and industry collaboration typically offered by foundation universities.

A significant difference in sectoral career intentions was observed between students who chose their department willingly ($\bar{X}$ = 3.42) and those who did not ($\bar{X}$ = 2.96; t = 6.590, p < .001). Voluntary department choice appears to be associated with more positive attitudes toward the sector, highlighting the role of individual motivation in shaping professional orientation.

Students with prior awareness of the tourism sector showed higher intentions to work in the industry ($\bar{X}$ = 3.44) than those with limited ($\bar{X}$ = 3.29) or no knowledge ($\bar{X}$ = 3.20), and this difference was statistically significant (F = 5.562, p < .05). This indicates that pre-enrollment knowledge enhances students' professional commitment and facilitates integration into the sector.

Finally, students who indicated they would still choose the same department knowing the current employment conditions reported higher mean scores for intention to work in the sector ($\bar{X}$ = 3.52) compared to those who answered "No" ($\bar{X}$ = 2.73) or "Undecided" ($\bar{X}$ = 3.15; F = 56.982, p < .001). These results emphasize that awareness of employment conditions plays a crucial role in shaping students' career orientation and commitment to the tourism sector.

Regression Analysis Results

Table 5 presents the results of a simple linear regression analysis examining the predictive effect of service orientation on students' intention to work in the tourism sector.

Table 5. Regression Analysis Results

Model	*Unstandardized Coefficients*		*Standardized Coefficients*	*t*	*P*
	β	*SE*	*B*		
	2.619	*0.093*	*-*	*28.039*	*.000*
Service Orientation	*0.186*	*0.023*	*0.355*	*8.228*	*.000*

Dependent Variable: Intention to Work

$R = 0.355$; $R^2 = 0.126$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.125$; $F = 67.694$; $df = 1$; $p < 0.001$

Source: Authors' own elaboration

The regression model was found to be statistically significant (F (1, 468) = 67.694, $p < .001$), explaining approximately 12.6% ($R^2 = 0.126$) of the total variance in career intentions. The analysis reveals a moderate positive correlation ($R = 0.355$) between the two variables. The standardized β coefficient for service orientation is 0.355 ($t = 8.228$, $p < .001$), indicating that service orientation is a significant and positive predictor of the intention to work in the sector. These findings imply that as students' levels of service propensity increase, their commitment to pursuing a career within the tourism sector also strengthens significantly. This supports the theoretical argument that individual traits aligned with service requirements are fundamental in shaping vocational aspirations.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that undergraduate students exhibit higher levels of service orientation compared to associate degree students. This suggests that prolonged educational exposure contributes positively to the development of a service-oriented mindset. Extended academic engagement allows students to internalize professional norms, ethical standards, and customer-focused values more effectively. Supporting this view, Petrović et al. (2013) emphasize that service orientation is significantly influenced by educational attainment and argue that individuals with lower levels of education may require more frequent training to acquire service-related competencies and to better understand organizational philosophy. In addition, Nasurdin et al. (2015) highlight the importance of pre-professional internship experiences in shaping service orientation. In this context, undergraduate programs—characterized by longer durations of study and more extensive internship opportunities—may provide students with greater exposure to real-world service environments. This increased exposure likely enhances their understanding of service quality expectations and professional conduct, thereby contributing to higher service orientation levels.

The results further reveal that students enrolled in foundation (private) universities demonstrate a stronger intention to pursue a career in the tourism sector compared to those attending state universities. This finding aligns with prior research emphasizing the role of institutional characteristics in shaping student motivation and career intentions. Vandenberghe and Robin (2004) suggest that private educational institutions often promote values such as discipline, effort, and dedication among both students and educators, which may positively influence professional aspirations. Similarly, Hossain et al. (2018) argue that students in private universities tend to perceive themselves as active stakeholders in their education, given their financial investment, leading to higher expectations regarding institutional quality and career outcomes. Alkaabi et al. (2022) also note that institutional resources, tuition levels, and educational quality are closely linked to student performance and motivation. In line with these arguments, the stronger intention to work in the sector observed among foundation university students may stem from greater emphasis on applied learning, industry collaboration, and access to sector-oriented resources. Supporting this interpretation, recent studies highlight that participation in specialized courses and industry-focused projects positively influences students' professional goals and career clarity (Borges & Silva, 2024; Song et al., 2024).

Another important finding of this study is that students who willingly chose their tourism-related departments exhibit more positive attitudes toward the sector and a stronger intention to pursue a career in tourism. This supports the argument that alignment between personal interests and academic choices plays a crucial role in shaping career commitment. Demirtaş and Hatipoğlu (2025) emphasize that when students' educational paths are

consistent with their intrinsic motivations, they are more likely to persist in both their academic and professional trajectories. In this regard, compulsory internships emerge as a critical mechanism for strengthening students' connection with the industry. Internships allow students to gain firsthand experience, reducing uncertainty and helping them form realistic expectations about working conditions. Lee and Chao (2013) describe internships as mutually beneficial, as students integrate theoretical knowledge with practical experience while organizations gain access to motivated and better-prepared individuals. Furthermore, Cheng and Liu (2024) demonstrate that prior understanding of the industry significantly enhances students' career motivation and interest in sectoral employment.

The findings also indicate that students' awareness of employment conditions in the tourism sector significantly influences their intention to work in the industry. Students who reported having prior knowledge of sectoral realities exhibited stronger career intentions than those with limited or no awareness. This highlights the importance of access to accurate and comprehensive information in career decision-making processes. Previous research supports this conclusion. Yılmazdoğan et al. (2015) note that perceptions of the tourism sector often differ between novice students and those with greater exposure, largely due to differences in work experience quality. Walsh et al. (2015) further emphasize that sector-specific factors—such as wage levels, work-life balance, job demands, and advancement opportunities—along with individual characteristics, play a decisive role in shaping career intentions. Moreover, Weisberg et al. (2018) argue that familiarity with a field enhances acceptance and engagement, while Chen et al. (2023) demonstrate that tourism students' perceptions of the industry are closely related to job satisfaction and overall professional well-being.

Finally, a key contribution of this study is the finding that service orientation has a significant and positive effect on students' intention to pursue a career in the tourism sector. From a person–job fit perspective, individuals with strong service-oriented traits are naturally more inclined toward service-based professions, where helping others and customer interaction are central (Walsh et al., 2015). Such alignment increases the likelihood that individuals find their work meaningful and engaging, which can enhance job performance and career persistence. Consistent with this view, Dusek et al. (2014) report that service orientation directly influences employees' intentions to remain in or leave the industry. Similarly, Ribeiro et al. (2020) highlight that customer-focused employees tend to demonstrate higher organizational commitment and job satisfaction. According to Person–Job Fit Theory, congruence between individual characteristics and job requirements promotes psychological well-being, performance, and long-term career engagement (Zeng et al., 2025). The findings of this study reinforce this theoretical framework by demonstrating that service-oriented students are more likely to envision a future career within the tourism sector.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The tourism sector in Türkiye continues to face persistent structural challenges, including seasonality, irregular working hours, and relatively low wage levels. These conditions often reinforce perceptions of tourism employment as temporary, thereby discouraging students from pursuing long-term careers in the sector. As a result, a notable gap persists between tourism education and sustained professional retention within the industry.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of addressing this gap through a Person–Job Fit perspective. Specifically, identifying and supporting students whose service-oriented personality traits align with the demands of the tourism industry may contribute to strengthening long-term workforce sustainability. The results suggest that service orientation plays a critical role in shaping students' career intentions, underscoring its value as both an educational and managerial consideration.

Early vocational experiences, particularly internships, appear to play a transformative role in guiding students' career trajectories. While educational institutions are encouraged to design curricula that foster service-related competencies and professional awareness, these efforts must be complemented by industry-level initiatives aimed at improving working conditions. Without such structural improvements, the positive effects of service orientation and education on career intentions may remain limited in practice.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged and addressed in future research. First, the sample was drawn from a limited number of universities, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should adopt broader, multi-regional sampling strategies to better reflect the diversity of tourism students across Türkiye.

Second, as the study focused exclusively on university students, future research could incorporate tourism industry professionals to examine how service orientation and career intentions evolve from academic settings into professional practice. Such comparative approaches would offer deeper insight into the continuity of Person–Job Fit over time.

Finally, the cross-sectional design of this research captures students' intentions at a single point in time. Longitudinal studies are therefore recommended to assess whether students with high service orientation ultimately remain in the tourism sector after graduation. Future research may also benefit from examining mediating and moderating variables—such as organizational culture, job satisfaction, or perceived working conditions—to further enrich the explanatory power of the Person–Job Fit framework within tourism research.

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