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A Comparative Analysis of Educational and Occupational Perceptions in Tourist Guidance According to Participant Profiles

Katılımcı Profillerine Göre Turist Rehberliğinde Eğitimsel ve Mesleki Algıların Karşılaştırmalı Bir Analizi

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Abstract / Öz

Tourist guiding holds a critical role within the tourism industry and requires a specific process of education and specialization. Understanding the professional perceptions of candidates who directly experience this process is of great importance for both measuring the quality of education and developing comprehensive strategies for the future of the sector. This study aims to comparatively analyze the educational and professional perceptions of associate degree tourist guiding students through demographic variables such as university type, gender, and grade level. In the research designed with a qualitative approach, interviews were conducted with 28 students, and the obtained data were subjected to content analysis by being examined in depth using MAXQDA software. During the analysis process, 1 main theme, 5 sub-themes, and 25 codes were developed. The findings indicate that the code 'Duration and Ease of Education,' which has the highest frequency in the research, is perceived by students as a practical advantage offering a quick entry into the profession. In this regard, since entering the profession is possible with an associate degree, it is understood that students' motivations for transitioning to undergraduate education are based on entirely personal academic goals rather than a professional necessity. This study holds a unique position in the literature by addressing the perceptions of associate degree tourist guiding students comparatively within the focus of demographic differences. In line with the findings obtained, academic and sector-oriented suggestions are presented for four different stakeholder groups: higher education institutions, sector representatives, students, and researchers.

Turist rehberliği, turizm endüstrisinde kritik bir role sahip olup belirli bir eğitim ve uzmanlaşma süreci gerektirmektedir. Bu süreci doğrudan deneyimleyen adayların mesleki algılarını anlamak, hem eğitimin niteliğini ölçmek hem de sektörün geleceğine dair kapsamlı stratejiler geliştirmek açısından büyük önem taşımaktadır. Bu çalışma, turist rehberliği ön lisans öğrencilerinin eğitimsel ve mesleki algılarını; üniversite türü, cinsiyet ve sınıf düzeyi gibi demografik değişkenler üzerinden karşılaştırmalı olarak analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Nitel bir yaklaşımla tasarlanan araştırmada, 28 öğrenci ile mülakat yapılmış ve elde edilen veriler MAXQDA yazılımı kullanılarak derinlemesine incelenerek içerik analizine tabi tutulmuştur. Analiz sürecinde 1 ana tema altında 5 alt-tema ve 25 kod oluşturulmuştur. Bulgular; araştırmanın en yüksek frekansına sahip olan 'Eğitim Süresi ve Kolaylığı' kodunun, öğrenciler tarafından ön lisans programının mesleğe hızlı giriş imkânı sunan pratik bir avantaj olarak algılandığını göstermektedir. Bu doğrultuda mesleğe katılımın ön lisans mezuniyetiyle mümkün olması nedeniyle, öğrencilerin lisans eğitimine geçiş motivasyonlarının mesleki bir zorunluluktan ziyade tamamen kişisel akademik hedeflere dayalı olduğu anlaşılmaktadır. Bu çalışma, ön lisans düzeyindeki turist rehberliği öğrencilerinin algılarını demografik farklılıklar odağında karşılaştırmalı olarak ele alması bakımından literatürde özgün bir konuma sahiptir. Elde edilen bulgular doğrultusunda; yükseköğretim kurumları, sektör temsilcileri, öğrenciler ve araştırmacılar olmak üzere dört farklı paydaş grubuna yönelik akademik ve sektörel gelişim odaklı öneriler sunulmaktadır.

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1. Introduction

Enhancing service quality and ensuring tourist satisfaction within the tourism industry are directly linked to the development of a qualified workforce. Service quality and customer satisfaction are closely associated with the

[*] This article was produced from the master's thesis titled "An Investigation of the Perspectives of Associate Degree Tourist Guiding Students on Undergraduate Education" written by Bilal Furkan Sırım and accepted in 2025 by the Institute of Graduate Studies, Sakarya University of Applied Sciences. The study was prepared by expanding the abstract paper presented at the 4th International Congress of New Generations and New Trends in Tourism.

presence of skilled personnel within the sector (Pelit & Güçer, 2006). Consequently, the importance of tourism education, which aims to provide qualified human resources to the tourism industry, is increasing day by day. On a global scale, tourism education is offered within the framework of vocational training and aims to equip individuals with professional formations that align with the sector's needs (Üzümcü et al., 2015). In Türkiye, various institutions provide vocational education opportunities in the field of tourism. In this context, vocational tourism education in Türkiye is conducted in two primary forms: non-formal and formal education. While non-formal education consists of short-term vocational courses provided by private organizations, formal education is carried out through institutions at secondary and higher education levels (Ünlüönen & Boylu, 2005). Currently, associate degree tourist guiding education is provided in 33 different vocational schools within higher education institutions in Türkiye (ÖSYM, 2025). This research focuses specifically on students enrolled in associate degree tourist guiding programs provided through formal education methods.

Although there are studies in the literature similar to the current research targeting students of the tourist/tourism guiding department, the vast majority of these studies focus on undergraduate students. For instance, while Tolga et al. (2015) examined the professional attitudes of undergraduate tourism guiding students, Eser and Çakıcı (2019) analyzed the effect of academic motivation on professional attitudes through a sample of undergraduate tourism guiding students. It is considered that the educational and professional perceptions of associate degree tourist guiding students have not yet been sufficiently and comprehensively examined in the literature. Moving from this gap in the literature, the primary originality of the research presented here lies in its aim to address the perspectives of students in this specific field in depth by focusing on the associate degree group. The fundamental problem of the research is to determine whether the educational and professional perceptions of students show similarities or differences according to demographic variables. In this regard, the views and attitudes of students are analyzed comparatively in light of demographic variables.

The main purpose of this study is to provide a comparative analysis of students enrolled in the associate degree tourist guiding program based on gender, university type, and grade level. In this framework, students' reasons for choosing the associate degree program, curriculum evaluations, career goals, and views on the tourist guiding profession were analyzed. Adopting a qualitative research design, this study utilizes interviews conducted with 28 participants, which were subsequently subjected to content analysis to materialize the data. In the following sections of the research, it is aimed to explain the elements forming the conceptual framework, to bring the findings to a conclusion by analyzing them, and to provide recommendations in light of the results achieved.

1.1. Literature Review

The tourism industry is known as a vast sector encompassing numerous professional groups, one of which is the profession of tourist guiding. Tourist guides play a universal role in promoting, preserving, and transmitting cultural heritage to future generations. They are also seen as voluntary ambassadors who enhance tourist satisfaction and effectively represent their country by facilitating connections between tourists, local communities, and destinations (Çapar & Yenipınar, 2017; Gökdemir & Hacıoğlu, 2018). In this context, the profession of tourist guiding is not only a significant profession that strengthens societal interaction but also one that provides diverse cultural benefits. According to the World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (WFTGA), tourist guiding is defined as the profession where individuals, qualified by the relevant authorities, offer guiding services in the requested language, interpret the cultural and natural values of the region, and act as professional individuals (www.wftga.org). In our country, tourist guiding is regulated under the Law No. 6326 on the Profession of Tourist Guiding, which involves the promotion of cultural, historical, environmental, and social values to domestic and foreign tourists. This law stipulates that such activities are conducted on behalf of travel agencies, within tours organized in accordance with cultural and tourism policies (www.mevzuat.gov.tr). While both definitions aim to clarify the concept of tourist guiding, WFTGA focuses on the roles and competencies of individuals practicing the profession, whereas Law No. 6326 emphasizes the scope and execution of the profession. In the literature, Başoda and Varol (2022) propose a model to define the scope of experiential tourist guiding by presenting the conceptual framework of tourist guiding, while Köroğlu (2013) compiles the concept of tourist guiding from different perspectives and examines the roles of tourist guides within the professional context. These studies aim to provide a more detailed understanding of the concept of tourist guiding and reveal the multifaceted nature of the profession.

Education is viewed as a fundamental phenomenon that shapes every stage of an individual's life, from birth to death, through the acquisition of new knowledge and impacts every aspect of life (Eker, 2015). In addition to supporting individual development, education also influences societal structures and is an important tool for the development and sustainability of societies (Dinçer, 2003). Historically, education has been considered a key factor in the continued existence of societies, while lack of education has been linked to the collapse of civilizations. Education

is an important concept both individually and socially and requires a comprehensive approach. The concept of education, derived from the English word “education” has its roots in the Latin terms *educere* (to draw out) and *educare* (to nourish) (Büyükcengiz, 2019). The Turkish Language Association (2026) defines education as helping children and youth acquire the knowledge, skills, and understanding necessary to integrate into society. In academic literature, the concept of education is defined as a comprehensive set of processes that enable individuals to develop skills aligned with societal values, facilitate their adaptation to social life, and ensure their integration into society (Good, 1945; Taymaz, 1992; Demirel & Kaya, 2006). In Türkiye, tourism guiding education is provided in two forms: formal and non-formal education. Formal education is offered through associate, bachelor’s, and postgraduate programs at universities, while non-formal education is provided through courses organized by unions under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Eker, 2015). Graduates of formal education programs receive diplomas, while those completing non-formal education programs are awarded certificates (Akdu & Akdu, 2024). In Türkiye, formal education in tourist guiding began in 1990 at the associate degree level, in 1998 at the bachelor’s degree level, in 2015 at the master’s level, and in 2021 at the doctoral level (Çokişler, 2021). The number of institutions offering education in this field has increased, and students have chosen to pursue education in this area due to their interest. Tütüncü (2022) indicates that the interest in tourism guiding education stems from students' language proficiency and their desire to receive legally protected professional training. In the literature, Yağcı et al. (2019) examine the opinions of students receiving tourism guiding education regarding distance education, while Şahin & Erdem (2021) focus on tourism guiding students and assess their views on vocational education. These studies aim to provide a more detailed understanding of the concept of tourism guiding education.

The adaptation process is a phenomenon that students encounter during the enrollment phase of a bachelor's program after taking the Vertical Transfer Examination. In Türkiye, the Vertical Transfer Examination is a national exam that enables associate degree graduates to transfer into undergraduate (bachelor’s) programs and complete a four-year degree. Upon reviewing the literature, no direct definitions of this concept are found. However, when examining the origin of the term, according to the Turkish Language Association (TLA) (2026), the concept of adaptation can be explained through the term “adjustment”. In this context, the adaptation process refers to the adjustment phase that students go through at the institution they are transferring to. During this process, students may gain exemption from courses in the bachelor's program by submitting their transcripts, which include the credit points for the courses they have taken, to the relevant departments of the program they are transferring to. Before the student begins their education, the receiving institution forms a committee to determine which courses the student will be exempt from and from which class level they will continue their education. During the adaptation process, students may face challenges such as low passing grades set by the receiving institution, differences in course credits, uncertainty regarding class progression, excessive course load due to limited exemptions, changing course curricula, and starting courses late (Boz, 2016). It is believed that these issues and the adaptation process may affect students' motivation and career planning.

2. Methodology

The fundamental problem of this research is to reveal the elements that show similarities or differences in the educational and professional perceptions of associate degree tourist guiding students according to demographic variables. The study aims to comparatively examine the perspectives of students enrolled in associate degree programs in tourist guiding in terms of gender, university type, and class level. In this context, students’ reasons for choosing the associate degree program, their views on the educational process, career objectives, the impact of legal regulations and legislative changes, as well as their perceptions of the tourist guiding profession were evaluated across different groups. Thus, the study seeks to reveal the similarities and differences of these factors among various demographic groups by employing a qualitative research design. A basic qualitative research approach was adopted in the study. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using content analysis.

In this study, a qualitative interview technique was employed to examine the participants' perspectives in depth. The interview questions were developed based on gaps identified in the literature and subsequently revised in accordance with feedback from an academic and a professional tourist guide, resulting in a 10-question semi-structured interview form (Appendix-A). The use of this technique facilitated the inclusion of follow-up questions during the interviews, allowing for a more nuanced exploration of the participants' experiences. This methodological structure established a robust framework for determining the study group in direct alignment with the research objectives.

Following the determination of the research design and the finalization of the interview questions through various revisions, the process shifted to the selection of the study group. The study group comprises 28 students enrolled in associate degree programs in tourist guidance. The participants were selected from first and second-year students at

a state university in Kütahya and a foundation university in Istanbul. The sample group was determined using the purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is a method based on the strategic selection of participants who can provide the most comprehensive insights into the research questions, directly aligning with the study's objectives (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). This approach, by incorporating diverse institutional contexts and academic levels, facilitated a multifaceted analysis of the phenomenon and enhanced the thematic richness of the data. Once the study group was defined, ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Sakarya Applied Sciences University Rectorate with the decision dated April 16, 2025, numbered E-26428519-050.99-168009, and this approval was presented to the relevant educational institutions. The interviews were conducted between April 17, 2025, and May 10, 2025; voluntary informed consent was obtained from the participants before the interviews, which were held either face-to-face or via online platforms depending on their availability, and were recorded. The audio recordings were subsequently transcribed and prepared for analysis, then imported into MAXQDA software for content analysis. During this stage, the data were coded, and similar codes were grouped to form themes. To ensure the reliability of the analysis, each researcher independently reviewed the alignment of the data with the identified codes and themes, confirming the consistency of the coding process. Thus, consensus among coders was established, methodologically supporting the reliability of the findings. Furthermore, to ensure the validity and reliability of the research, all raw data and digital files are securely archived to allow for future verification and re-examination.

3. Findings

The study group consists of 28 students specifically selected from associate degree tourist guidance programs at both state and foundation universities. To ensure a balanced perspective across different academic stages and institutional structures, the sample was equally divided, comprising 14 first-year and 14 second-year students, as well as an equal distribution of 14 students from public and 14 from foundation universities. By maintaining this equal distribution, a balanced representation of the sample across demographic and institutional groups was achieved, aiming to enhance the comparative validity and representation of the qualitative findings within the study's scope. In terms of gender distribution, the participant group includes 16 female and 12 male students, with ages ranging between 18 and 29. The qualitative data gathered through these diverse profiles allowed for the systematic identification of main themes, sub-themes, and codes. This structural hierarchy of the findings, derived directly from the transcribed interview texts, is detailed in the following visual representation to provide a comprehensive overview of the research outcomes.

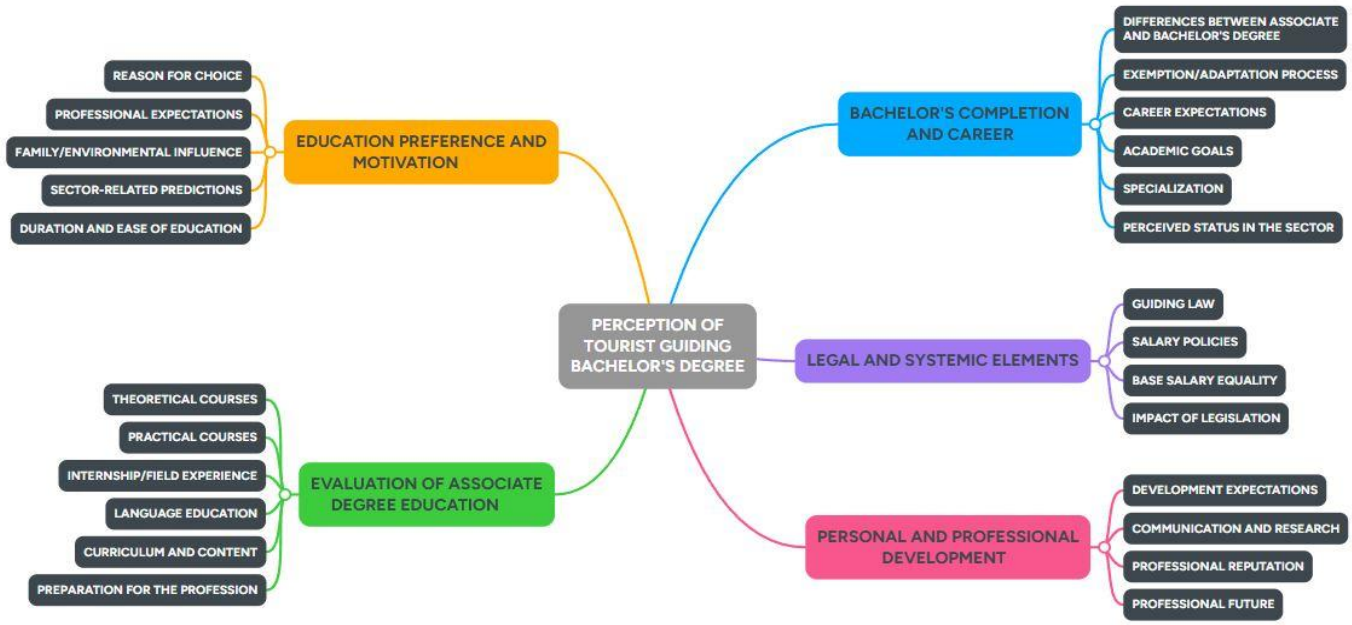


Figure 1. *Main themes, sub-themes, and code map*

When Figure 1 is examined, it can be seen that the main theme of the study is “Perception of Tourist Guiding Bachelor's Degree” In line with this main theme, a total of 5 sub-themes and 25 codes have been identified, with the relevant themes associated with different colors and the codes represented by ribbons for visualization. Thus, the themes, sub-themes, and codes are presented in a visually clearer manner for the reader. Descriptions of the main theme and sub-themes are presented in Table 1. Descriptions of the main theme and sub-themes are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Descriptions of the main theme and sub-themes*

Main Theme and Sub-Themes	Description
Perception of Tourist Guiding Bachelor's Degree	Provides a general framework regarding the participants' perceptions of the transition to undergraduate education and their career goals.
Education Preference and Motivation	Focuses on the participants' reasons for choosing the associate degree program and their decision-making stages during this process.
Evaluation of Associate Degree Education	Comprises the participants' evaluations regarding the quality, content, and adequacy of the current associate degree curriculum.
Bachelor's Completion and Career	Addresses the participants' intentions to transition to undergraduate programs and their long-term career planning goals.
Legal and Systemic Elements	Examines the participants' perceptions concerning the legal regulations encompassing both education and professional practice.
Personal and Professional Development	Reflects the participants' perspectives on their own development processes and their general thoughts regarding the guiding profession.

The distribution of participants' views according to themes and codes is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Distribution of participants' opinions and percentages according to themes and codes*

Theme	Code	Frequency(F)	Ratio(%)
Education Preference and Motivation	Duration and Ease of Education	60	25.32%
Evaluation of Associate Degree Education	Practical Courses	41	17.30%
Bachelor's Completion and Career	Exemption/Adaptation Process	28	11.81%
	Academic Goals	27	11.39%
Legal and Systemic Elements	Guiding Law	53	22.36%
Personal and Professional Development	Communication and Research	28	11.81%
TOTAL		**237**	**100**

Note: *(f) represents the frequency of coded segments; (%) represents the percentage of each code within the total number of segments (n=237)*

Table 2 presents the distribution of the data obtained in the study according to themes and codes, along with the percentage ratios of these opinions within the total. In this context, frequencies (f) refer to the total number of coded segments identified within the interview transcripts. To highlight the intensity of the opinions, the frequencies related to the codes under each theme were analyzed, and the total frequency count was calculated as 237. The table includes statistical information for the codes with the highest amount of data, showing their distribution and proportions within the themes.

3.1. Findings Related to Themes

In this section, the opinions emerging in line with the themes identified in the study have been analyzed. To enhance the transparency of the study, data quotations encoded into the themes have been included, thus presenting the findings in a clearer and more explicit manner.

Duration and Ease of Education (Education Preference and Motivation Theme):

P8: *"I would be studying for four years, but if I study an associate degree for two years and then complete the remaining years, it means I would be ahead by two years as a guide, which would lead to higher earnings."*

Practical Courses (Evaluation of Associate Degree Education Theme):

P3: *"I think we could have more practical training."*

Academic Goals (Bachelor's Completion and Career Theme):

P10: *"In the future, I hope to become an academician, I also want to pursue academia."*

Exemption / Adaptation Process (Bachelor's Completion and Career Theme):

P26: *"No, I hadn't heard about this process before."*

Guiding Law (Legal and Systemic Elements Theme):

P13: *"I personally condemn Turkish-language guiding. It was something that shouldn't have existed."*

P18: *"I definitely find Turkish-language guiding to be correct. Because, despite being a tourist country, we still have domestic tourists who travel from one province to another."*

Communication and Research (Personal and Professional Development Theme):

P12: *"With the development of technology in the future, I also think this profession might face a downfall."*

The research findings indicate that, in choosing the associate degree program in tourist guiding, students consider factors such as the short duration of the program and its perceived ease as advantages. Additionally, students have expressed a desire for more practical courses to enhance the efficiency of their education, and it has been found that academic goals act as a motivating factor during the transition to bachelor's education. However, it was observed that students lack sufficient knowledge about the adaptation process, and in relation to this process, they have expressed both positive and negative views regarding the legalization of Turkish-language guiding services. Finally, students evaluate the future of the tourist guiding profession in relation to technological advancements and express concerns that these developments may have negative effects on the profession.

3.2. Evaluation of Student Opinions According to Demographic Variables

The opinions obtained within the scope of the study were analyzed based on various variables (gender, class, type of university). In this regard, an attempt was made to identify the differences in opinions across these variables. Additionally, the frequency and relationships of the variables with the codes were analyzed in more depth, and visual representations in the form of relationship maps were created.

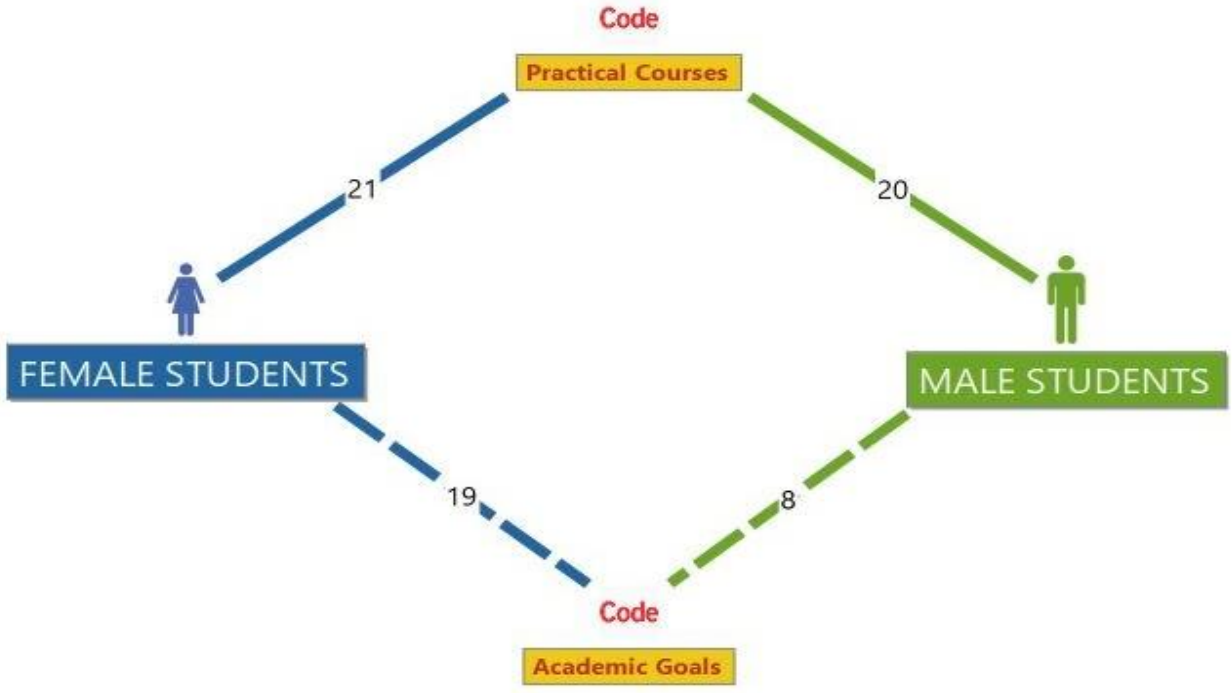


Figure 2. *Comparative relationship map according to gender*

When Figure 2 is examined, the frequency counts of male and female students for the codes within the scope of the research are shown. These codes are listed from top to bottom according to their frequency. Additionally, codes with the closest frequency range are indicated with a thick and continuous line, while codes with the furthest frequency

range are indicated with a thick and dashed line. In the figure, it is observed that the frequency value of female students for the "Practical Courses" code is 21 and for the "Academic Goals" code is 19, whereas for male students, the frequency value for the "Practical Courses" code is 20 and for the "Academic Goals" code is 8.

To support the findings, data quotations from the opinions of students from two different gender groups, related to the codes "Practical Courses" and "Academic Goals" are provided. It is believed that this approach will help ensure transparency and reinforce the findings obtained.

Practical Courses:

P10 (Female): *"I think there should be more practical courses. I believe they should focus more on field trips."*

P14 (Male): *"I think practical training could be provided. I think field training could be offered. In our school, thanks to our professors, we had the opportunity to participate in a field trip. However, we only observed the guides; we weren't active in the field. I think more practical training like this could be offered."*

Academic Goals:

P22 (Female): *"I want to advance in tourism guiding because I want to progress academically, I want to advance in tourism guiding."*

P13 (Male): *"It shouldn't be limited to just an associate degree. At least I think people should get their bachelor's degree and maybe even consider becoming an academician in the future."*

When the findings are examined, it is observed that both male and female students have similar views regarding the increase in practical courses. However, it has been determined that the motivating factors for transitioning to bachelor's education are academic goals, and these factors show differences between the two groups. Female students expressed more opinions about academic goals compared to male students, and this can be interpreted as an indication that women may be more inclined toward pursuing an academic career due to concerns about finding employment.

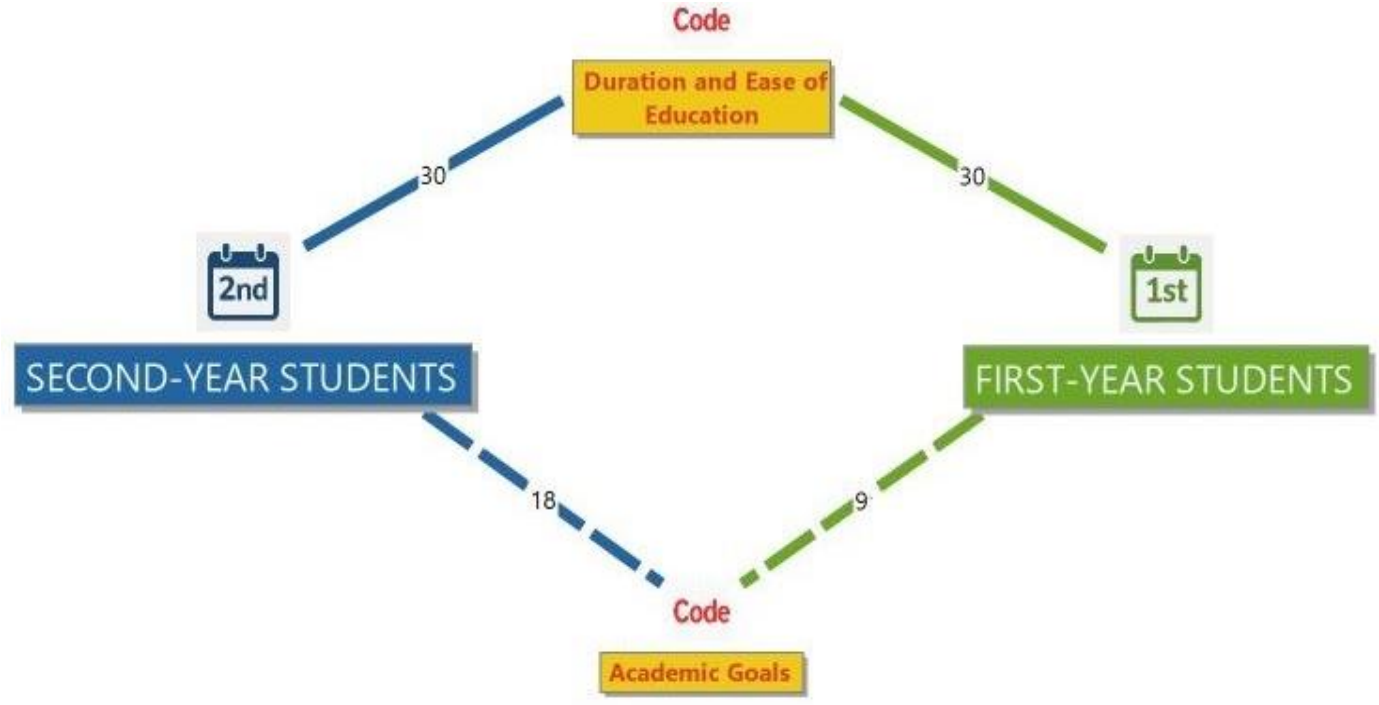


Figure 3. *Comparative relationship map of first-year and second-year students*

When Figure 3 is examined, the comparative frequency counts of first-year and second-year students for the codes within the scope of the research are presented. The codes are listed from top to bottom according to their frequency. The codes with the closest frequency range are indicated by a thick and continuous line, while the codes with the furthest frequency range are marked by a thick and dashed line. In the figure, it is observed that the frequency value of second-year students for the "Duration and Ease of Education" code is 30 and for the "Academic Goals" code is 18, whereas for first-year students, the frequency value for the "Duration and Ease of Education" code is 30 and for the "Academic Goals" code is 9.

To support the findings, data quotations from the opinions of students belonging to two different class level groups,

related to the codes “Duration and Ease of Education” and “Academic Goals” have been provided. It is believed that this approach will help ensure transparency and reinforce the findings obtained.

Duration and Ease of Education:

P5 (1st Year): *“Finishing in two years or a year and a half seems more reasonable to me than studying for four years. Because the work we'll do after four years of study is the same.”*

P27 (2nd Year): *“For me, I chose the associate degree because I wanted to receive education in a shorter period and reach my desired goal more quickly.”*

Academic Goals:

P17 (1st Year): *“Since I don't consider it academically, I will continue this profession as a guide.”*

P22 (2nd Year): *“I am turning towards academia so that I have an option in my hand.”*

When the findings are examined, it is observed that the short duration of education similarly influences the preference reasons of both first-year and second-year students. However, regarding academic goals, differences emerge between the two groups. While academic goals have a more pronounced effect on second-year students' decision to transition to bachelor's education, this effect is observed to be lower among first-year students. This situation can be interpreted as first-year students not focusing sufficiently on academic goals, while second-year students have more clearly defined their academic objectives.

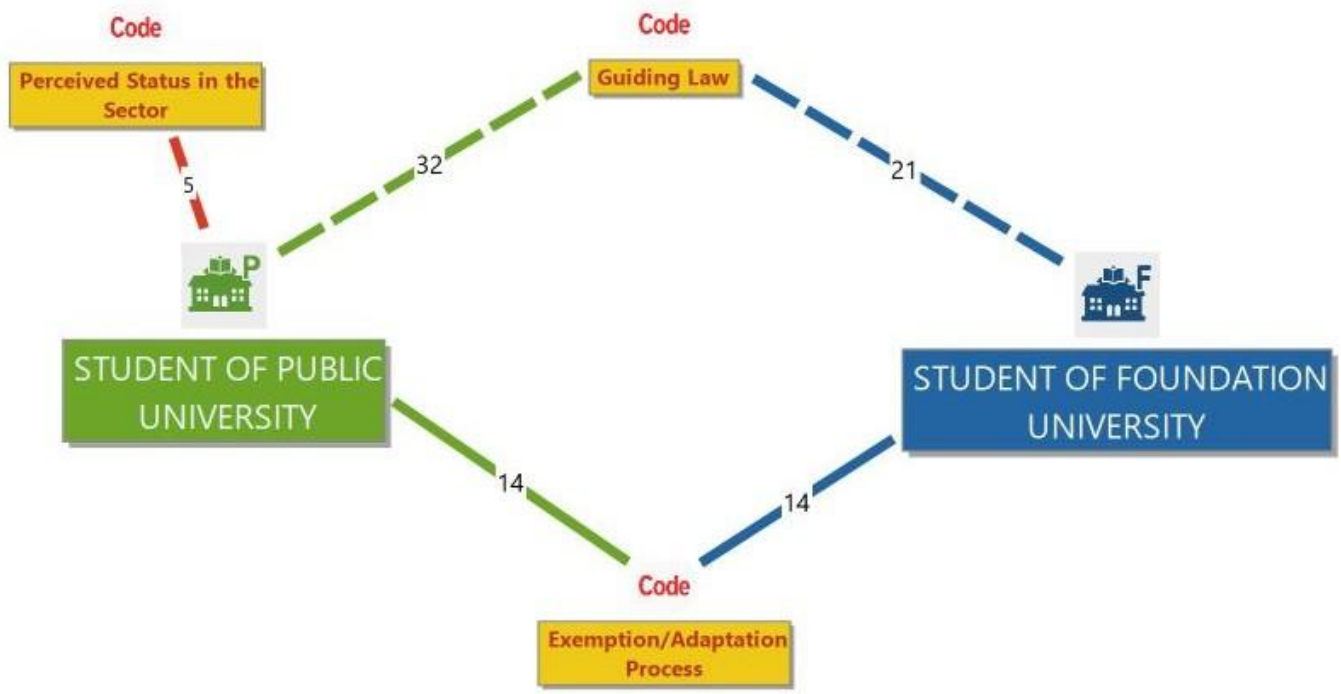


Figure 4. *Comparative relationship map of public and foundation university students*

When Figure 4 is examined, the comparative frequency counts of public and foundation university students for the codes within the scope of the research are shown based on demographic variables. These codes and frequency counts are listed from top to bottom according to their frequency. Additionally, codes with the closest frequency range are indicated by a thick and continuous line, codes with the furthest frequency range are marked by a thick and dashed line, and codes belonging to only one group are shown with a thick red line. Moreover, while creating the relationship maps, codes placed at opposite ends were identified. For example, public university students expressed opinions regarding the “Perceived Status in the Sector” code, while foundation university students did not comment on this code. This situation highlights the differences between the two groups. In the figure, it is observed that the frequency value of public university students for the “Guiding Law” code is 32 and for the “Exemption/Adaptation Process” code is 14, whereas for foundation university students, the frequency value for the “Guiding Law” code is 21 and for the “Exemption/Adaptation Process” code is 14. Additionally, the frequency value for the “Perceived Status in the Sector” code, which is located only on the public university side, is 5.

To support the findings, data quotations from the opinions of students belonging to two different types of universities, related to the codes “Guiding Law” and “Exemption/Adaptation Process,” have been provided. It is believed that this approach will help ensure transparency and reinforce the findings obtained.

Guiding Law:

P8 (Public University): *"As for Turkish-language guiding, I find it completely ridiculous. It feels like an attempt to destroy the industry for me."*

P22 (Foundation University): *"I think Turkish-language guiding was necessary because it was truly unavailable."*

Exemption/Adaptation Process:

P2 (Public University): *"No, I didn't have any prior knowledge about this process."*

P18 (Foundation University): *"No, unfortunately, I didn't have any knowledge about it."*

When the findings are examined, it has been determined that students from both public and foundation universities have a similar level of knowledge regarding the adaptation process. While both groups have limited information about the adaptation process, it has been identified that opinions regarding Turkish-language guiding differ between the two groups. In this context, public university students have expressed more opinions about Turkish-language guiding compared to foundation university students. Additionally, while public university students display a more negative attitude towards Turkish-language guiding, foundation university students show a more positive approach towards this practice. This situation is believed to be related to the students' guiding education and their level of attachment to the profession.

The research findings indicate that while the opinions of male and female students regarding the increase in practical courses are similar, there are differences between the two groups concerning academic goals. Female students have expressed more opinions about academic goals compared to male students. Additionally, it has been determined that for both first-year and second-year students, the short and easy duration of education has a similarly influential effect on their preference for the associate degree program. Regarding academic goals, second-year students show a clearer direction, while first-year students are less focused on these goals. Finally, it has been found that students from both public and foundation universities do not have sufficient information about the adaptation process, but their attitudes towards changes in the guiding law differ. Public university students approach these changes more positively, while foundation university students exhibit a more negative attitude.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings obtained throughout the research process were addressed through a holistic perspective and evaluated in detail. During the interpretation and analysis of the data, participants' views were taken as the basis, and the analyses were conducted in line with the relevant themes and codes. Accordingly, the results obtained within the scope of the study are presented through the evaluation of the emerging findings.

The study concluded that the most significant factor influencing associate degree students' preferences for tourist guiding education is the short duration of the program and the perception of the program as relatively easy and advantageous. It was determined that students expect a greater number of practice-oriented courses in order to improve the efficiency of the educational process. In addition, academic goals were identified as an important motivating factor in the transition to bachelor's degree education. Furthermore, the findings revealed that students possess limited knowledge regarding the adaptation process and express both supportive and critical views toward Turkish-language guiding services. Finally, it was concluded that students believe technological developments may negatively affect the future of the tourist guiding profession.

In the literature, Lombard (2020) emphasized that academic factors play a decisive role in educational transition processes, and this finding is consistent with the results of the present study. In contrast, while Alkahlout and Karabat (2024) stated that digitalization contributes positively to professional activities, the participants in the current study evaluated digitalization as a potential threat to the profession. In this respect, it can be argued that the two studies reached different conclusions within the same field of research. By presenting a multidimensional perspective on educational and professional perceptions in tourist guiding, the present study contributes theoretically to the literature while also offering practical implications for stakeholders in the tourism industry in terms of improving vocational education quality and strengthening the professional structure.

The analyses conducted according to participants' gender, university type, and class level reveal both similarities and differences based on these variables. The findings demonstrate notable similarities and differences in terms of gender, class level, and university type. Regarding gender, although male and female students shared similar opinions concerning the increase in practice-oriented courses, differences emerged in their views on academic goals. Female students were found to consider academic goals more influential in the transition process to bachelor's degree education compared to male students. In terms of class level, the influence of the short duration of education

and the perceived ease of the program on associate degree preference was found to be similar among first-year and second-year students. However, differences were identified regarding the impact of academic goals, as second-year students considered academic goals more influential in the transition to bachelor's degree education than first-year students. Concerning university type, although students from public and foundation universities displayed similar levels of knowledge regarding the adaptation process, differences were identified in their views on Turkish-language guiding services. Foundation university students demonstrated a more positive attitude toward this practice, whereas public university students exhibited a relatively more negative perspective.

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations were developed for four different stakeholder groups. Higher education institutions should review the curricula of associate degree programs and provide students with clearer information regarding the adaptation process and related regulations. In this context, orientation programs and academic counseling mechanisms should be established in order to clarify the Vertical Transfer Examination and adaptation processes while reducing students' academic uncertainties. Sector representatives should support legislative and regulatory developments in tourist guiding through practice-oriented and collaborative programs. Students should contribute to their personal and professional development by benefiting from external resources beyond the formal educational process and by closely following technological developments. Finally, future researchers are recommended to examine the adaptation process, legislative changes, and the effects of digitalization using different sample groups.

Ethics Committee Permission/Etik Kurul İzni:

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Rectorship of Sakarya University of Applied Sciences with the decision dated 16.04.2025 and numbered E-26428519-050.99-168009.

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AI Usage / Yapay Zeka Kullanımı

During the preparation of this article, Google Gemini was used as a generative AI or AI-assisted tool for translation support purposes. The GenAI/AI outputs were checked and verified by the authors. The authors bear full scientific, ethical, and legal responsibility for the final content of the article.

Bu makalenin hazırlanma sürecinde Google Gemini, çeviri desteği amacıyla üretken yapay zekâ veya yapay zekâ destekli aracı olarak kullanılmıştır. ÜYZ/YZ çıktıları yazarlar tarafından kontrol edilmiş ve doğrulanmıştır. Çalışmanın nihai içeriğine ilişkin tüm bilimsel, etik ve hukuki sorumluluk yazarlara aittir.

Data Availability Statement / Veri Erişilebilirliği Beyanı :

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Bu makalenin sonuçlarını destekleyen ham veriler, geçerli bir kısıtlama bulunmadığı sürece yazarlar tarafından erişime sunulacaktır.

Conflict of Interest/ Çıkar Çatışması:

The authors declare that they have no conflicting interest.

Yazarlar, kendileri ve/veya diğer üçüncü kişi ve kurumlarla çıkar çatışmasının olmadığını beyan eder.

Authors' contribution/ Yazar katkısı:

Idea/Concept – B.F.S.,O.B.,Z.Y.E..; Design and Design – B.F.S., Auditing/Consultancy – O.B.,Z.Y.E..; Sources – B.F.S.,O.B.,Z.Y.E..; Data Collection and/or Processing – B.F.S.,O.B.,Z.Y.E..; Analysis and/or Interpretation – B.F.S.,O.B.,Z.Y.E..; Literature Review – B.F.S.,O.B.,Z.Y.E..; Writing – B.F.S., Critical Review – O.B.,Z.Y.E..

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

- What factors influenced your choice to pursue the associate degree in tourist guiding? What were your expectations about the profession and the sector when making this choice?
- How do you evaluate the general structure of tourist guiding education in Türkiye (curriculum, internships, language training, etc.)? Do you think the current structure adequately prepares students for the industry?
- Do you think the theoretical courses you have taken during your associate degree are sufficient for acquiring the knowledge and skills needed for the tourist guiding profession? Are there any aspects that need improvement?
- Do you think the practical courses and internship you have taken during your associate degree are sufficient for gaining field experience? How did these experiences affect your preparation for the profession?
- How does the possibility of working as a guide with an associate degree affect your decision to continue with a bachelor's education?
- In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of associate degree versus bachelor's degree education?
- Are you aware of the adaptation process applied for the transition from associate degree to bachelor's education? How does this process affect your decision to pursue a bachelor's degree?
- Are you planning to transition from associate degree to bachelor's degree education? Could you share your thoughts and reasons regarding this?
- What are your views on the legalization of Turkish-language guiding services and the regulation that requires associate/bachelor's degree graduates who guide in foreign languages to receive the same base salary? Do these regulations influence your preference for associate or bachelor's education?
- What are your views on the reputation and future of the tourist guiding profession? How does this perception shape your educational plans and career goals?