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Research Article

JOB-READY GRADUATES IN THE GLOBAL TOURISM INDUSTRY

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to assess the employability of new graduates in the global tourism industry from the perspective of tourism managers. The study examines the expectations of tourism employers from new graduates, the level at which existing tourism education programs meet these expectations, and the sustainability of graduates' career development. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using a qualitative research method; participants were selected from senior managers and human resources experts working in international hotel chains such as Hilton, Marriott, Accor, and Wyndham. In addition, the websites of these brands were analyzed as secondary data sources. The data were analyzed using descriptive content analysis and two case studies with Maxqda 2024 software. The findings reveal that there are deficiencies in the practical skills and competencies of new graduates, but these deficiencies can be addressed through internal training programs offered by hotel brands. Inadequacies in foreign language, communication, CV preparation, computer skills, and self-confidence were particularly noteworthy. On the other hand, it was found that all global brands offer various corporate training programs to support the development of their employees. Collaborations with educational institutions are generally shaped through social events and internship programs, but these collaborations are more flexible. Future research could expand the scope to include more countries and hotel brands to examine the effects of different cultural and regional approaches on tourism training programs.

Keywords: Employability, Global Hotel Chains, Recent Graduates, Tourism Education

Introduction

The global tourism industry is becoming an increasingly important part of the world economy and its growth is increasing the demand for labor. Tourism is an important source of employment for both developed and developing countries. In this context, the participation and employability of new graduates in the tourism sector is critical for the sustainability of the sector. However, in this field of intense global competition, employers' expectations from new graduates are becoming increasingly complex. Institutions providing tourism education have to be in a continuous process of adaptation to prepare their graduates for this challenging business world.

Asuquo and Inaja (2013) emphasized that continuous learning, networking, teamwork, patience, planning, risk-taking, optimism, and flexibility are among the key skills that employers identify as determining the career development and employability of young people. Similarly, Karaca-Atik et al. (2023) drew attention to the critical skills that social sciences graduates should possess to be successful in the business world and social life. These skills include continuous learning, digital literacy, adaptability, critical thinking, communication skills, and the ability to collaborate. Habets et al. (2020) examined the skills that help them achieve sustainable success in their careers by providing a competitive advantage in the 21st-century labor market from the perspective of students and recent graduates. According to this study, recent graduates and students stated that they are aware of the most important skills that will increase their employability in the 21st-century business world are collaboration, communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills, and that they have the perception that these skills will give them an advantage in the job market. Accordingly, the employability of new graduates is shaped not only by the academic education they receive but also by their practical skills, personal competencies, and sectoral adaptation capacities. It can be said that employers today expect not only technical knowledge and skills from graduates but also qualities such as adaptability, flexibility, and global

awareness required by the digital age. This situation necessitates updating education curricula and developing strategic collaborations that are in line with sectoral needs.

The success of the tourism industry is influenced by the quality of service provided to customers and the skills of the employees who deliver that service. The ever-growing and changing nature of the global tourism industry provides successful employees with a variety of career opportunities in different geographies, enabling them to become part of the global workforce. Global brands offer local employees the opportunity to gain experience on an international scale and continue their careers in different countries. Gannon, Roper and Doherty (2015) emphasize that international hotel chains have strategies to recruit and retain high-potential employees to compete in the tourism industry.

Focusing on employability in the global tourism industry, this study focuses on international chain hotel businesses. In this context, it aims to assess the employability of new graduates by managers working in international hotel businesses. The study examines the expectations of employers in the tourism sector for new graduates, the level of meeting these expectations by existing tourism education programs, and the sustainability of the career development of new graduates. First, the educational structure, skills, and competencies that affect employability in the tourism sector are discussed, and then the collaborations between educational institutions and businesses that support the sustainability of graduates' career development are emphasized. The dynamic and competitive nature of the global tourism industry requires new graduates to acquire the necessary skills and competencies to be successful in the sector. Therefore, the findings of this study are envisaged to serve as a strategic guide to determine the future direction of tourism education and to ensure that graduates are better positioned in the labor market. In this context, following the literature review on the subject, the research methodology was adopted.

Conceptual Framework

Education and Employment

Many academic studies have been conducted on tourism education in the literature. These studies include the tourism education system in Türkiye (Okumuş and Yağcı, 2006; Kozak, 2009; Yeşiltaş, Öztürk and Hemmington, 2010), EU harmonization process (Demirkol and Pelit, 2002), competencies of tourism graduates (Zehrer and Mössenlechner, 2009; Hatipoğlu and Batman, 2014), tourism education curricula (Kozak and Kozak, 2000; Cooper, 2002; Gürbüz and Dağdeviren, 2007; Fidgeon, 2010), sectoral cooperation (Solnet et al, 2007), internship problems (Pelit and Güçer, 2006; Oktay, Pelit and Arslan, 2010; Zengin and Türkseven, 2012), student expectations and academician opinions (Ünlüönen and Boylu, 2007; Korkmaz, Gürol and Avcıkurt, 2012; Çavuş, 2015; Üzümcü, Alyakut and Günsel, 2015). In recent years, tourism education has been redesigned in accordance with the needs of the age (Edelheim, 2020), integrated with technology and digitalization components (Morellato, 2014; Balula et al., 2019; Williams and McKercher, 2023), and studies that shape the future of tourism education (Sheldon, Fesenmaier and Tribe, 2016). This emphasizes that tourism education will evolve.

The knowledge and skills acquired through education prepare individuals for the world of work. While employment refers to the participation of individuals in economic activities (Ünlüönen, Tayfun and Kılıçlar, 2007:164; Yağcı, 2003:169), employability defines the capacity of individuals to take part in the labor market and their potential to develop a sustainable career (Weinert, 2001). On the other hand, Hogan et al. (2013) argue that while in theory, employability is usually defined by the capacity to possess technical knowledge and competencies, a broader set of competencies is needed to achieve success in the business world. In the "Workforce Qualifications Needed by Industry" report of the Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Industry and Technology, the contribution of the education of individuals aged 15-34 to work is evaluated with the results of a survey conducted by TurkStat. According to the report, the contribution of the education of individuals with 4 years of higher education and above to work is 64%, while the contribution of 2 or 3 years of higher education graduates to work is 43.5%. It is emphasized that individuals with higher education and above are more compatible with the expected qualifications of the job. As the level of education decreases, the contribution of the received education to the job decreases. The average time to find a first job after graduation is 13.9 months for bachelor's degree graduates and 15.3 months for associate's degree graduates. While these durations vary according to the level and field of education, according to the same report, it can be said that participation in employment increases as the level of education increases (TurkStat, 2022).

On the other hand, academic studies (Kızılırmak, 2000; Kuşluvan and Kuşluvan, 2000; Kuşluvan and Kuşluvan, 2000; King, McKercher and Waryszak, 2003) and official records (MoNE, 2018) show that the

tourism sector meets its labor force needs by employing labor force without tourism education. This problem can be explained by the working conditions in the tourism industry that affect tourism students' attitudes towards long-term employment in the tourism sector. Working dynamics in the tourism industry are characterized by long and inconvenient working hours, family-unfriendly shift patterns, promotion problems, lack of appreciation from senior management, low salaries, stress, low quality of life, limited free time for self or family, poor career structures, unplanned hiring practices outside of specialization, high levels of turnover, and low union membership and recognition (Kuşluvan and Kuşluvan, 2000: 256). Keleş (2018) stated that most of the tourism undergraduate students studying at 8 different universities in Türkiye chose the department involuntarily and did not want to work in the sector unless they had to. He also stated that the regret about the choice of the department is high and that this feeling increases as they advance in their classes. Such a high rate of graduates working outside the field is also supported by the findings of academic studies (Birdir, 2002; Unur, Duman and Tepeci, 2004; Öztürk and Pelit, 2008; Temizkan, Ceviz and Cankül, 2019).

The low employment rates of tourism graduates in their fields of study are not only related to the working conditions offered by the industry. The employability of graduates is also related to how well they are aligned with the needs and expectations of the industry. Wakelin-Theron, Ukpere and Spowart (2019) argue that tourism graduates need to possess critical skills and competencies to increase their employability. Among these skills, abilities such as problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and digital literacy stand out. In this respect, it is important to align traditional course content with the rapidly changing expectations and needs of the industry and the era. To achieve this alignment, educational institutions and industry representatives need to cooperate. While industry representatives can guide educational institutions on the latest trends, technological developments, and skills needed in the sector, educational institutions can reflect this information in their curricula to ensure that students can compete in the labor market when they graduate.

Skills and Competences

Various changes and developments around the world (e.g. changing labor market, increased competition, technological advances, consumer expectations) require new skills for graduates to adapt to the changing conditions of the tourism business world. Universities are therefore encouraged to incorporate these new essential skills into their curricula. However, there is a significant mismatch between what educational institutions offer and what the sector needs and demands. How these new skills and competencies will be incorporated into the curriculum is an important issue as well as what these new skills and competencies are (Günel, 2009:99). The most important feature of tourism education in developed countries is that the personnel selection system for employment is completely based on the needs of the sector and that the cooperation and support of the private sector is fully ensured (Kılıç, 2000:73). Failure to adapt to changing market conditions will negatively affect future employment. To adapt to market conditions, the expectations and needs of the sector must first be analyzed correctly. In this context, Üzümcü (2015), in his study explaining the expectations of hotel managers from tourism education, stated that practical courses should be given in addition to theoretical courses, and students should be made professionally aware by ensuring their personal development and career planning should be supported. In addition, the importance of providing tourism education by expert lecturers and industry professionals was emphasized. In the same study, managers stated that the main responsibility for tourism education belongs to educational institutions, that the quality of basic education should be improved first, and that universities have great duties in this direction.

Fallows and Steven (2000) stated that when employers hire new graduates, they not only value specific academic skills but also proactive and creative problem-solving abilities. The World Tourism Organization (2022) stated that skills such as digital literacy, online marketing, communication, sustainability, entrepreneurship, language skills, design thinking, leadership, cultural and social communication, innovation, and creativity should be included in tourism education content. At the same time, it emphasized that training contents should include multicultural work environments and skills such as cross-cultural customer communication. The World Tourism Organization aims to create a sustainable, inclusive, and innovative education structure to increase access to tourism education and to make the link between tourism careers, education, and employment clearer. To this end, it is emphasized that coordination and cooperation between public and private sector actors, academic institutions, civil society organizations, and governments should be encouraged and supported (World Tourism Organization, 2022). Table 2 shows the framework of employability skills and competencies adapted from Jackson and Chapman (2012).

Table 2. Competencies and related behavioural patterns affecting employability

Competencies	Behavioral patterns
Working effectively with others	Task cooperation; teamwork, social intelligence; cultural and diversity awareness, influencing others, and conflict resolution
Effective communication	Oral communication; giving and receiving feedback, public speaking; meeting participation, written communication
Self-awareness	Metacognition; lifelong learning, career management
Critical thinking	Conceptualisation; evaluation
Analyzing data and using technology	Quantitative skills; use of technology, information management
Problem-solving	Reasoning; analysing and diagnosing, decision making
Entrepreneurship and innovation development	Entrepreneurship/intrapreneurship; lateral thinking/creativity; initiative taking, change management
Self-management	Self-efficacy; stress tolerance, work/life balance; self-regulation
Social responsibility and accountability	Social responsibility; accountability, personal ethics; organizational awareness
Developing professionalism	Productivity; multitasking, autonomy; time management, motivation; goal and task management

Source: Adapted from Jackson and Chapman (2012)

In Table 2, the employability skills framework adapted by Jackson and Chapman (2012) shows the skills that graduates need to develop to be successful in the world of work and the behavioral implications of these skills. This framework provides a wide range of competencies from working effectively with others to self-awareness and critical thinking. For example, the ability to work effectively with others is associated with behaviors such as teamwork, social intelligence, and cultural awareness, while critical thinking is associated with the ability to conceptualize and evaluate. Furthermore, the ability to analyze data and use technology is underpinned by numeracy and information management, while the ability to develop entrepreneurship and innovation includes behaviors such as initiative, creativity, and change management. This skill set comprehensively addresses the competencies required for graduates to adapt to the requirements of the modern business world and to be successful in their careers.

Collaboration

Strong collaboration between the tourism industry and educational institutions plays a critical role in training a qualified workforce and adapting to the changing needs of the sector. This cooperation supports students to gain sectoral experience and practical skills in addition to theoretical knowledge during their education. By developing internship and practical training programs together with educational institutions, tourism enterprises can facilitate students' faster adaptation to business life after graduation. In addition, the contribution of industry representatives to the curriculum contributes to the organization of training programs to respond to current needs. Such synergy increases the employability of graduates and facilitates the tourism industry's access to a qualified workforce.

In most universities, tourism curricula are now divided into theoretical and practical components, with an emphasis on practical skills training. Field visits, case studies, and internships are elements of tourism education that support experience. Within the scope of the protocol signed between the Ministry of National Education and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, cooperation was established between MTEGM (Ministry of National Education General Directorate of Vocational and Technical Education) and Maxx Royal and Voyage Hotels to ensure that students studying in the field of tourism are trained to meet the qualified manpower needs of the sector and to increase the field competencies of teachers. With this cooperation, it is aimed to provide students with the qualifications needed by the sector by carrying out skills training and internship practices in real service and production environments. It is aimed to increase the professional competencies of field teachers and to provide continuity to in-service and on-the-job training (MoNE, 2023:106). Özyeğin University collaborates with Swissotel Hotels and Resorts, The Marmara Collection Group, Accor Hotels, Le Cordon Bleu, and Swissotel Hotels and Resorts for the Hotel Management undergraduate program. It is aimed to facilitate the acceptance of department students and graduates for employment after graduation by conducting their internships in these brands. In addition, in this cooperation, certificate, and diploma programs are also organized to meet the needs of business employees (Özyeğin University, n.d.). This cooperation between educational institutions and tourism businesses focuses on activities that support the development of both university students and hotel employees.

Collaboration with tourism businesses is also related to geographical accessibility. In our country, there are schools with easy access to tourism businesses as well as tourism schools in rural areas of cities. This situation makes it difficult for tourism students and instructors of schools established in these residential areas to communicate with sector stakeholders (Okumuş and Yağcı, 2006:97). Research suggests that for the work experience of graduates to be productive, education should be supported in a real environment that is closely related to subsequent employment. For example, there may be differences between the problem-solving skills of a student who has done his/her internship in a real tourism business and the problem-solving skills of a student who has done his/her internship in a training workshop environment (Fallows and Weller, 2000). Collaboration between tourism businesses and educational institutions plays a critical role in terms of the employability of graduates. While educational institutions provide theoretical knowledge about the sector and provide students with basic competencies, tourism businesses provide students with the opportunity to apply this knowledge in a real business environment and provide them with professional experience. In addition, the direct communication of the sector-specific needs of the enterprises allows the training programs to be updated by these needs. Thus, graduates can become more employable in the sector faster by having both theoretical and practical knowledge. In the long run, this cooperation can provide businesses with a competitive advantage by providing them with a qualified workforce.

Methodology

This study aims to evaluate the employability of new graduates in the global tourism industry from the perspective of tourism managers. For this purpose, the expectations of employers in the tourism sector from new graduates, the extent to which existing tourism education programs meet these expectations, and the sustainability of the career development of new graduates are discussed. Accordingly, a total of 13 semi-structured interview questions were prepared to determine the demographic profiles of the participants, to identify the skills and competencies sought for the evaluation of new graduates, and to reveal the activities of the institutions to support career development. In addition, to determine the activities that support the sustainability of the career development of graduates, the websites of international chain hotel brands providing services on a global scale were analyzed as a secondary data source.

International branded businesses apply the quality standards they set globally to their operations in Türkiye, bringing their global vision to the local tourism industry. In this context, the Turkish Hoteliers Association (TÜROB), Türkiye Chain and Group Hotels Survey 2023 report was used to determine the population of the research. According to this report, Wyndham Hotels ranks first in terms of the number of facilities in Türkiye with 105 hotels, followed by Hilton Worldwide with 77 hotels, Accor Group with 62 hotels, and Marriott Hotels with 44 hotels (TÜROB-Türkiye Chain Hotels Survey 2023). Within the scope of the research, since it is difficult to reach the entire population in terms of process, time, space, and cost, sampling was used and the purposive sampling method was preferred in the study. In this study, the purposeful criterion sampling method, which is one of the non-probability-based sampling methods, was used in the selection of individuals to be interviewed. Criterion sampling is aimed at examining a certain phenomenon or process in the best way by selecting candidates who meet the criteria determined by the researcher. It also enables the research to focus on specific questions by examining individuals or events with certain characteristics in-depth to increase the validity of the research (Patton, 2002). In this study, experts and managers working in international hotel brands, authorized in recruitment, with at least 3 years of professional experience were determined as criteria. Within the scope of the research, face-to-face and/or online interviews were conducted with managers working in Wyndham, Hilton, Accor, and Marriott brands, which have the highest number of facilities in our country, between May-2023 and August/2024.

Transcripts of the interviews were created and all data were transferred to the MAXQDA 24 program. For the analysis of the research data, descriptive content analysis and case analysis were preferred among qualitative analysis methods. The data summarized and interpreted by descriptive analysis are subjected to in-depth processing by content analysis, allowing the relationships between concepts to be discovered (Baltacı, 2019). Content analysis is a method used when qualitative research data are obtained through interviews, observations, or documents. This analysis process consists of coding the data, identifying themes, organizing codes and themes, and finally defining and interpreting the findings (Creswell et al., 2007). The content analysis method is based on the principle of organizing and interpreting similar data under certain concepts and themes (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2006).

On the other hand, two case analyses were applied to the data to identify the inferences arising from the different experiences of the department managers and human resources specialists whose opinions were taken

in the research. This analysis is an effective method to understand how individuals react in different contexts, situations, or processes. Yin (2018) states that two-case analysis offers in-depth insights in answering research questions by comparing the experiences or perspectives of different individuals. This method aims to analyze the views and expectations of department managers and human resources officers of tourism enterprises with different education and experience on the skills and competencies sought in new graduates. With this analysis, common and differentiating aspects of the data were highlighted and their frequencies were determined. The data were organized in line with the codes and themes created and interpreted with meaningful explanations.

This study received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of Social and Human Sciences at Balıkesir University, based on the decision numbered E-19928322-108.01-288873, taken during the meeting dated August 29, 2023 (Meeting No: 2023/06)

Findings

The demographic data of the participants were analyzed descriptively in terms of gender, workplace, and position in the organization. According to the findings, 54% of the participants are male and 46% are female managers. The average experience of the participants is approximately 18 years and it is seen that the managers participating in the study are generally experienced and have been working in the sector for many years. This situation supports sustainability in their career development. Table 3 shows some demographic information about the brands that the managers participating in the study work for and some demographic information about themselves. The brands that the participants work for consist of international hospitality companies that have many hotel brands in various segments such as luxury, mid-range, and economy worldwide.

Table 3. Demographic data of participants

Number	Code	Gender	Position of work	Brand Worked	Experience Length
1	A	Male	General manager	Accor	25 years
2	B	Female	Human resources manager	Hilton	15 years
3	C	Male	FandB manager	Hilton	7 years
4	D	Female	Human resources executive	Wyndham	10 years
5	E	Male	Executive Chef	Accor	28 years
6	F	Female	Housekeeping Manager	Accor	24 years
7	G	Male	General manager	Wyndham	22 years
8	H	Female	Recruitment manager	Hilton	18 years
9	I	Male	Front office manager	Marriot	16 years
10	J	Male	FandB manager	Marriot	21 years
11	K	Male	Human resources officer	Marriot	14 years
12	L	Female	General manager	Wyndham	29 years
13	M	Female	Human resources officer	Hilton	5 years

In line with the findings of the study, the prominent themes in the evaluations of managers regarding the employability of new graduates are presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Sub-codes for the assessment of the current situation**
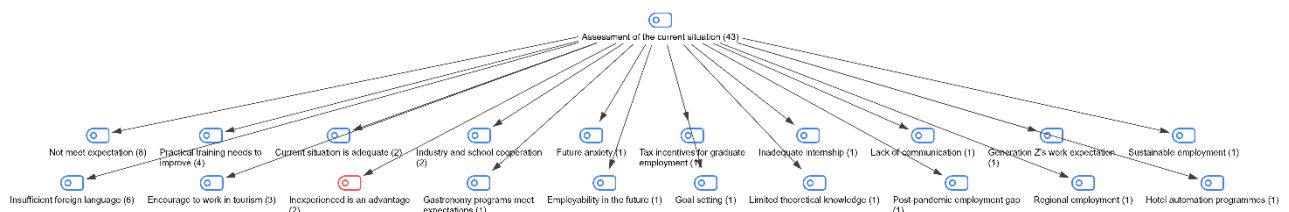
According to Figure 1, 61% of the participants (8 participants) stated that new graduates do not meet the current expectations of the labor market. While 46% of the participants (6 participants) stated that the foreign language skills of the graduates are insufficient, 30% (4 participants) stated that the theoretical knowledge in education is not sufficient and that applied training should be improved. Only 15% of the participants (2 participants) stated that the current situation is sufficient for new graduates to be employed, while 1 participant stated that the graduates of the kitchen department, which has intensive applied courses, meet the sectoral expectations. It is among the participant's opinions that new graduates have future concerns and are not willing to work in the sector. To manage this situation, it was stated that the working life expectations of Generation Z should be examined, sector-school cooperation should be made and, if necessary, tax incentives should be provided for

the employment of new graduates through the state. Although it was stated that new graduates lack experience, it is noteworthy that some managers consider this situation as an advantage. They explained that they easily shape new graduates in their own culture by supporting them with in-house brand training. Direct quotations based on the views of the participants are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Participant views on the evaluation of new graduates

| Participant Code	Expressions * (*Direct quote)
B	.....We usually give priority to young people to gain experience in this field. These people adapt to our system more easily. If they are willing to do this job, zero staff is better for me... ...In other words, tourism and hotel management do not meet our expectations in general, but they meet them in a kitchen. Because they have more practical lessons. I am already a graduate of tourism and hotel management. There were hours of theoretical lessons...
D	... most students do not want to do hotel management even though they study tourism. ...I think the number of hours of foreign language classes should be increased. Practical language lessons should be given according to the duties of each field. Current programs should be taught (opera, mod, micros, etc.)
H	....As in every field, the education system needs to be made more efficient with the cooperation of the sector and the school. ...Our country provides a really serious labor force and accessibility in the field of tourism. They have certain equipment due to the experiences they have had during their internship periods, but mastering sectoral skills of course develops with time and desire...
K	...I do not find sufficient new graduates, especially since the language issue is still a problem...
J	...The candidates seem a bit incompetent. It's not just my opinion. Our job interviews have a minimum of 2 people. We agree with the whole management team on this. If they don't have an interest or enthusiasm for development outside of the education they have received, unfortunately, they are not enough...

Figure 2. Sub-codes for the skills and competencies required in graduates
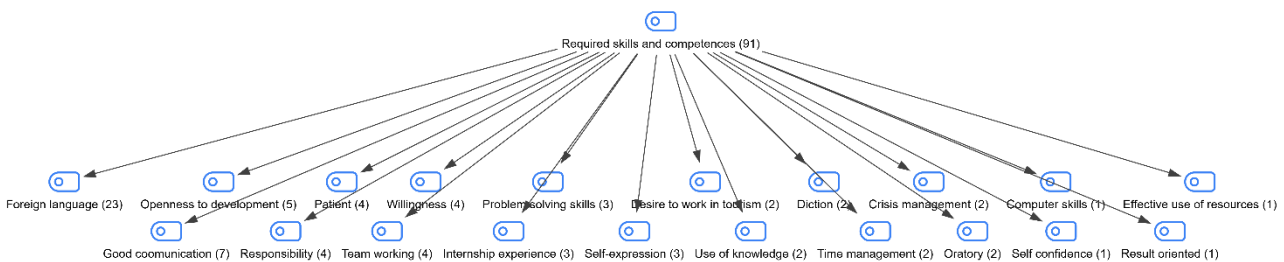
When the skills and competencies sought in new graduates were evaluated, 91 codes were identified. The most striking competency among these codes is foreign language skills. After foreign language skills, other important competencies such as good communication skills, openness to development, patience, and willingness come to the fore. Managers stated that they attach more importance to willingness than professional knowledge. Accordingly, they are more open to the idea of employing and training new graduates who are eager and open to learning.

Vendolská and Kačerová (2016) stated that flexibility and adaptability of the candidate followed by a willingness to learn, loyalty and self-confidence are the most important criteria that employers look for in new graduates during job interviews. In light of this finding in the literature, to determine which of these skills and competencies are considered necessary by human resources and which are considered necessary by the relevant department managers, the codes created were analyzed with the Maxqda two-case model as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 3. Comparison of skills and competencies required in new graduates
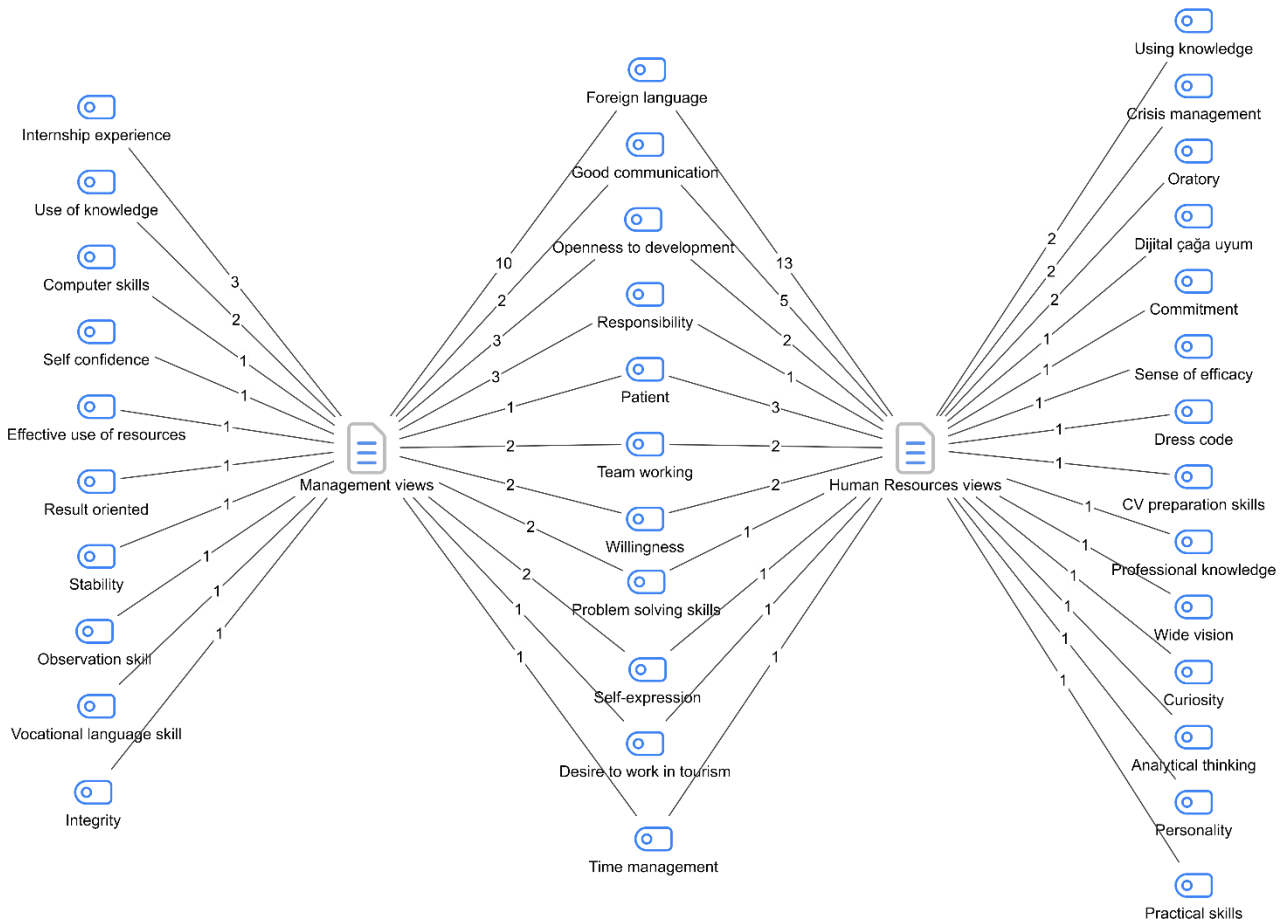
According to Figure 3, the competency of knowing a foreign language, which is frequently sought in new graduates, is preferred by both department managers and human resources managers. Following this, it is noteworthy that communication skills, responsibility, patience, and teamwork skills are common skills and competencies sought by department managers and human resources officers. On the other hand, it has been determined that some different skills and competencies are deemed necessary by human resources supervisors who conduct the first job interview with new graduates and provide reference information to department managers in favor or against their employment. Accordingly, it has been determined that skills such as diction, crisis management, oratory, adaptation to the digital age, dress code, dedication, and competence are considered necessary by human resources managers. When the skills and competencies that the relevant department managers look for in new graduates are analyzed, internship experience, the ability to use previous knowledge, the ability to use a computer, and self-confidence come first. In particular, it was stated that the managers of the operations department consider professional foreign language as necessary at least at the beginner level. Direct quotations based on the views of the participants are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5. Participant views on the skills and competencies sought in graduates**

Participant code	Expressions * (*Direct quote)
B	.. Now CVs are very empty. When I say empty, I do not expect such certificates from a graduate, but they prepare such a CV that a primary school student would not prepare such a CV. That is what attracts my attention the most. In this regard, they must dress and come at the promised time. For example, I make an appointment at 3 p.m. The candidate shows up at 5 p.m. or doesn't show up at all that day but doesn't give any notice. In such cases, I give a negative opinion in the first place without even talking to them.
H	...The tourism sector's top priority is, first and foremost, foreign languages. Then communication skills and adaptation to digital transformation
E	For new graduates to be employed in the sector, the great deficit after the pandemic is an opportunity, I think they should realize this and evaluate it. In addition, during the internship phase, it should be given to the appropriate departments with the observations of the master instructor and progress should be ensured so that the new graduate can be employed more easily in business life and

	contribute to the sector,
	…We warn and advise new graduates and recruits to be patient, observe well, and be determined.
G	First of all, I think that they should have a good command of English as a foreign language, if possible, they should have done an internship in the department they are applying to before graduation, and they should be familiar with the automation program used, even at an entry-level.

According to Table 5, there are several important factors that international hotel chains expect from tourism education. Firstly, respondents emphasized the practical focus of training programs and the capacity to provide students with work experience. At the same time, emphasis was placed on programs that can develop communication skills and problem-solving abilities. Moreover, in a period of rapid technological evolution, participants considered it important to include digital skills and automation programs in the training programs. It was mentioned that they need to be self-sacrificing and patient to be able to train themselves in the sector.

One of the questions asked to identify the activities of the organizations that support career development is related to in-house training activities. The sub-codes obtained in this regard are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Sub-codes related to in-house training
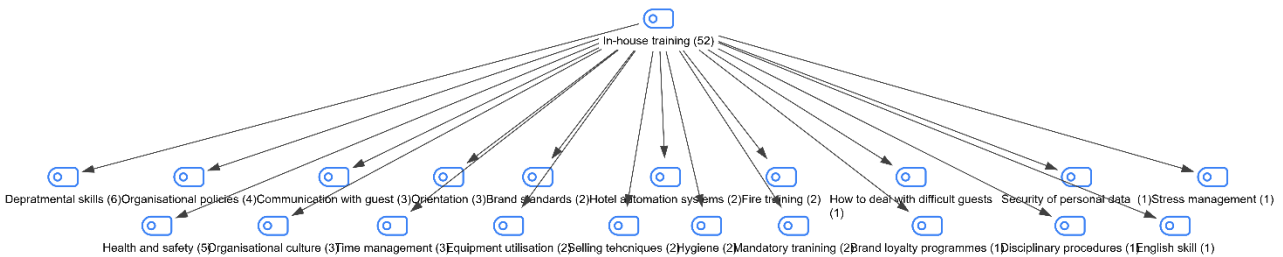
As indicated in Figure 4, participants indicated that they offer a wide range of in-house training to support the career development of their employees, including orientation, brand and customer service management, leadership, communication, and sustainability. Training is generally focused on professional and technical skills, leadership and management, personal development, and corporate compliance. Training organized on professional and technical issues covers topics such as department-specific issues, equipment use, sales methods, hygiene, and automation systems. Managerial and leadership training focuses on time and stress management, methods of dealing with difficult customers, and disciplinary procedures. Human resources and corporate compliance training includes orientation, corporate policies, corporate culture, recruitment, and loyalty programs. Personal development training includes English language training, while legal and mandatory training includes OHS (Occupational Health and Safety), KVKK (Personal Data Protection Law), and fire training.

At the same time, in order to identify the activities that support the sustainability of the career development of the employees of these brands on a global scale, the websites of the international hotel brands where the participant's work were analyzed as a secondary data source. As a result of this analysis, it was determined that major hotel chains such as Hilton, Wyndham, Marriott, and Accor offer various training and career development opportunities for new graduates and young professionals. Hilton brand offers an "Elevator Program" especially for new graduates and young professionals. The Elevator Program is an accelerated training program designed to train individuals who may be candidates for senior leadership and management positions within Hilton. During the program, participants rotate through Hilton's different departments such as accommodation, food and beverage, human resources, and sales, and gain extensive work experience. The main goal of the program is to prepare participants for future leadership positions in hotel management. Participants take part in various assignments under the guidance of experienced mentors, gaining in-depth knowledge of Hilton's values and corporate culture while developing their leadership skills. The program usually lasts 18-24 months and successful participants can be nominated for management positions in Hilton hotels at the end of the program (Hilton, n.d.)

Wyndham Hotels and Resorts offers online training and certification programs through Wyndham University to support the development of its employees. This platform, which aims to increase the technical and sectoral knowledge of employees, offers a wide range of training programs. In addition, leadership development programs and certified training programs for various departments focus on strengthening employees' leadership and management skills. Wyndham also organizes diversity and inclusion training to improve corporate culture and offers mentoring and individual development plans to support employees' career development (Wyndham University, n.d.).

Marriott International offers leadership and professional development-focused training within the Marriott Development Academy to support the career development of its employees. In addition, Marriott's accelerated leadership program called "Voyage Global Leadership Development Program" aims to provide new graduates and young professionals with leadership skills in the hospitality industry. The company continuously supports career development and strengthens long-term leadership potential through various certification programs, online learning platforms, and mentoring opportunities offered to its employees. Marriott's training strategies aim for employees to adapt to the corporate culture and respond effectively to changes in the hospitality industry (Marriott Careers, n.d.).

Accor Group stands out with its comprehensive corporate training and career development programs offered to its employees. Providing both face-to-face and online training opportunities through Accor Academy, Accor enables its employees to develop their leadership skills. In addition, the International Hospitality Management Program and leadership development programs offer the opportunity to accelerate the careers of young professionals. Mentoring programs, personalized development plans, and rotational assignments offered by the company aim to contribute to the long-term career development of employees (Accor, n.d.).

Another question asked to determine the activities of the organizations to support career development is to determine the collaborations they have made with educational institutions. The sub-codes obtained accordingly are shown in Figure 5. Accordingly, it is seen that tourism enterprises are in an active relationship with educational institutions in various fields. Within the scope of the cooperation of enterprises with educational institutions, it is seen that the intensity is perceived as the acceptance of interns (38% of respondents). The majority of these collaborations focus on introducing students to the sector, providing them with experience, and supporting their career development. In addition, businesses participate in employment and career fairs and are among the areas of cooperation on issues such as human resources planning and employment. Only 1 of the participants stated that they do not cooperate with any educational institution. Accordingly, it is seen that 92% of the participants (12 participants) are in communication and cooperation with educational institutions. While some of these collaborations are carried out through official protocols and programs, it is seen that some are more flexible and shaped through social activities such as invitations/visits.

Figure 5. Sub-codes related to the topic of collaboration
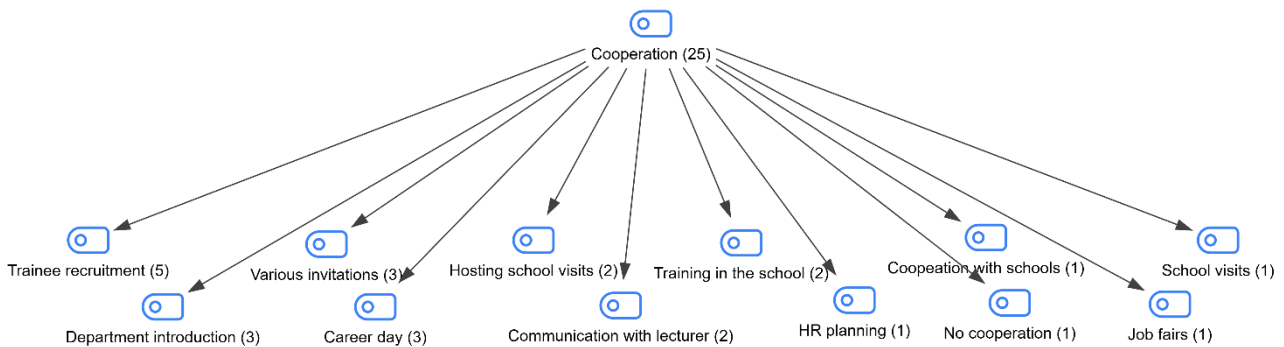
Direct quotations based on the participants' views on the topic of collaboration are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Participants' views on the cooperation between enterprises and educational institutions

Participant code	Expressions * (*Direct quote)
A	.... We are trying to do something as an internship for the tourism students of the schools here, but other than that, we don't have anything different.
M	Due to your location, we are in one-to-one contact with both high schools and faculties. We already take our interns. We have no problem in this regard. At the same time, during the education period, we host students in our hotel and provide them with a business tour. Department managers and department supervisors tell the students about their departments. They talk about their careers. We can host the academic staff at any of our events here, or we participate in invitations at the university. We continue to cooperate with both the high school and the university in this regard...
L	...we participate in schools' career days and offer active employment opportunities...
J	We act by the decisions of our Human Resources Department.

Another question posed within the scope of the research was what the participants' evaluations of the internship processes were. The sub-codes obtained accordingly are shown in Figure 6.

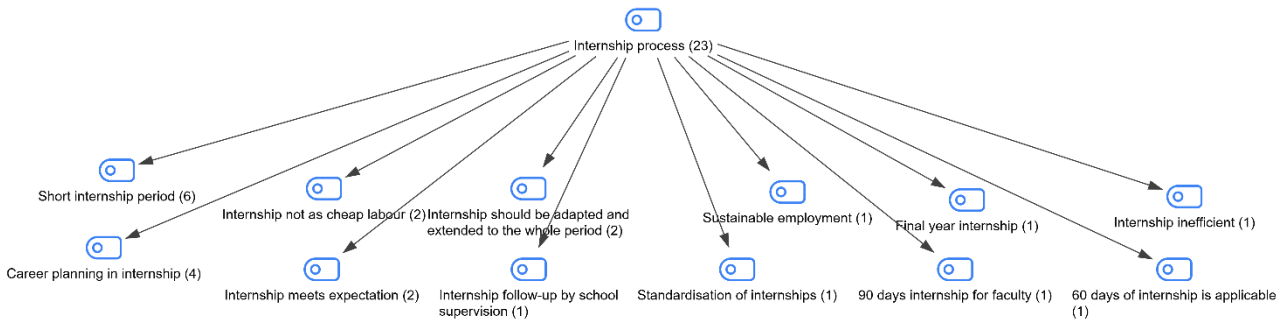**Figure 6. Evaluation of the internship**

Figure 6 shows the sub-codes obtained regarding the evaluation of internship processes. Accordingly, 46% of the participants (6 participants) stated that the internship periods were short. When the expectations of the participants from the internship are evaluated, it is seen that the internship period of 30 working days is insufficient. It was stated that planning the internship periods within the education period would be advantageous for both the business and the student. It was stated that the location of the schools in the tourism region or in rural areas would provide advantages or disadvantages to the students. It was emphasized that students studying tourism in the tourism region have the opportunity to experience the sector outside of internship and are more familiar with the sector, which is an advantage for these schools. It was also stated that students see internships as a condition for graduation, so they do not feel a sense of belonging to the businesses where they do their internships. For this reason, it was stated that student motivation should be increased before the internship and they should be psychologically prepared for the internship process. 31% of the participants (4 participants) stated that career planning should be made during internship and students should be directed to appropriate fields in the sector according to their abilities. Direct quotations based on the participants' views on internship evaluations are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Participant views on internship evaluations

Participant code	Expressions * (*Direct quote)
A	I mean, I studied like this, one week of internship and one week of school. This time, when you went to school, you had the opportunity to apply what you learned at school in the internship. This was a profit for both businesses and students. ...If education and internship are intertwined during the education period, the student decides whether to continue in this sector or not.
B	More practice than theory. Practice should be emphasized. Also, internship periods are very short, some departments do not have compulsory internships. For example, a student studying tourism by the sea will not have much trouble with this. Because they already have the opportunity to work in tourism during the summer period and so on. But when students, especially in rural areas, prefer tourism, they will at least get to know the sector as a necessity in the summer because they do not know. The protocols that schools will establish with businesses support them very well.
G	I think that the content of the internship programs is sufficient and meets the expectations. My expectation from educational institutions is to extend the duration of internships as much as possible to allow for more practice.
M	...we have already said that internship periods vary. Some schools follow a policy of one month and 30 days. For example, for a student who applies for a 30-day internship for the front office, my system is not worth teaching, he learns fully, and his internship is over. So, when you actually look at it, this issue creates a labor loss for us. Therefore, there should be a slightly longer internship period.

Discussion

These training programs are usually shaped by the standard service quality determined by the enterprises and aim to increase the professional skills of the employees. Lather, Garg and Vikas (2009) stated that tourism-related companies do not provide corporate training programs, especially for entry-level employees. However, it is seen that global companies support new graduates with corporate training outside of this assessment. Although Lather et al. (2009) stated that graduates are expected to be equipped with the right knowledge and skills when entering the sector, managers of global hotels stated that if the new graduate is willing to work in this sector and open to learning, they can support them with their own training and adapt them to their corporate

culture. In this context, it can be considered as an advantage for new graduates with limited experience to start their careers in global organizations.

In a study conducted by Krishnan et al. (2017) to determine the reasons for the inability of recent graduates in Malaysia to find a job, it was found that most of the recent graduates who participated in job interviews could not understand the basic questions asked in the interviews and could not give appropriate answers to the questions. Vendolská and Kačerová (2016) stated that the main criteria that employers look for in new graduates during job interviews are flexibility and adaptability, followed by willingness to learn, loyalty, and self-confidence. Within the scope of the skills and competencies sought in new graduates; while Lather et al. (2009) differed, similar findings were obtained from Vendolská and Kačerová (2016).

According to the model of employment in tourism developed by Wakelin-Theron et al. (2019), the knowledge, skills, and competencies required for graduates to be successful in the global tourism sector are addressed in various categories. In this model, the main factors affecting the employability of graduates are categorized under four main headings: professional knowledge, information skills, operational skills, and personality traits. In the same direction, the findings of this study show that the competencies expected from new graduates are concentrated in the categories of professional skills, personality traits, and professional knowledge. Among the professional skills expected from graduates, competencies such as time management, problem solving skills, and professional dress come to the forefront, while qualities such as self-confidence, determination, openness to communication, and responsibility stand out under the heading of personality traits. In addition, in the category of professional knowledge of graduates, criteria such as having completed an internship, technological skills, and professional foreign language skills are also considered critical in terms of employability. In this context, it is clear that new graduates need to improve both their technical skills and personal competencies to increase their employability. Within the scope of the research, it is seen that the skills and competencies sought by global hotel chain managers in new graduates are similar to the literature. In terms of personality traits, individuals with strong communication skills, patience, adaptability to teamwork, and openness to learning are preferred by both human resources managers and department managers. This competency is mostly preferred by department managers since having an internship will provide a professional experience. However, with the training and career opportunities offered by global hotel chains for their employees in line with brand standards, it is seen that if the new graduate is willing and open to learning, there is a potential to improve their skills and competencies by being supported by brands. In fact, in support of this situation, some managers within the scope of the research stated that supporting inexperienced candidates with corporate training in line with brand standards provides an advantage in the process of adaptation to the corporate culture.

Zehrer and Mössenlechner (2009) stated that there is often a significant gap between what educational institutions for the tourism sector offer and the skills needed and demanded by the sector. Employers' expectations from graduates in the tourism sector include foreign language, communication skills, problem-solving and decision-making competencies, teamwork and adaptability, customer orientation, flexibility, and technological competencies. When the early 21st century and current research findings are evaluated together, it can be said that the expectations of tourism professionals from graduates are still similar. Although Zehrer and Mössenlechner (2009) and Wakelin-Theron et al. (2019) and this study were conducted in different geographies, with different sample groups, and at different times, similar results were found. Shariff and Abd Razak (2022) draw attention to the necessity of competency-based education, which is an important factor in increasing employability in the tourism sector, especially the integration of the competencies sought in the sector into education programmes. The rapid change in the hospitality industry, especially the integration of new technologies and the continuous development of service standards, requires graduates to have not only academic knowledge but also specific skills demanded by the industry. In this context, it is stated in the study that characteristics such as communication and bilateral relations skills, problem solving and leadership skills should come to the fore and educational institutions should update their curricula. At this point, it is suggested that the implementation of competency-based education will enable graduates to adapt to the sector more quickly and effectively and may positively affect employment rates. This situation can be explained by the fact that the tourism sector prioritises customer-oriented and highly interactive human relations. As the ability to adapt to developing technology and changing environments, it can be explained by the adaptation competencies of new graduates to changing situations. When the findings of the research are compared with the studies in the literature, it can be said that the situation in Türkiye overlaps to a great extent with the views of managers in the global tourism sector.

On the other hand, the training and career development programs offered by global hotel chains for young professionals and new graduates serve the purpose of developing competent leaders in the hospitality industry. Brands such as Hilton, Wyndham, Marriott, and Accor offer various programs to develop the leadership skills of their employees, support them to adapt to corporate values and adapt to changes in the industry. These programs enhance employees' technical and management skills, while also providing sustainable career development opportunities. As a result, the training activities offered by these brands are considered strategic investments that both support individual career development and aim to train the future leaders of the hospitality industry. Accordingly, it can be said that these training opportunities support the sustainability of the career development of new graduates.

Conclusions and recommendations

This study highlights the critical role of tourism education in shaping the employability of new graduates in international hotel chains. However, it is evident that education alone is not sufficient to guarantee employment. The findings indicate that while theoretical knowledge is important, practical skills such as foreign language proficiency, communication abilities, and extensive internship experiences are essential for success in the sector. Moreover, the willingness and openness to learn, as expressed by industry managers, often outweigh professional knowledge. This suggests that educational institutions must place a greater emphasis on developing these competencies within their curricula.

One key challenge identified in the study is the limited scope of collaboration between educational institutions and the tourism industry. Currently, most partnerships revolve around internship placements and social activities, without a strategic or long-term approach to improving the employability of graduates. This suggests the need for more structured collaborations that focus on aligning academic programs with the real-world demands of the tourism sector.

Based on these findings, several strategic recommendations are proposed. First, the development of joint educational programs that incorporate the specific competencies required by the industry into the curriculum is crucial. This will ensure that graduates are better prepared to meet sectoral needs. Second, extending the duration and scope of internships and on-the-job training is necessary to facilitate the transition from theoretical learning to practical application. This hands-on experience will significantly improve graduates' readiness for the workforce. Additionally, workshops and seminars led by industry professionals can help bridge the gap between education and employment by providing students with insights into current industry expectations. Post-graduation continuous education and certification programs should also be expanded to ensure that graduates have access to lifelong learning opportunities that support career development. The establishment of career centers and mentorship programs within educational institutions can accelerate job search processes and provide graduates with valuable guidance as they enter the workforce. Furthermore, state-supported financial incentives and grants could be offered to encourage collaboration between educational institutions and the tourism sector, thereby easing graduates' transition into the labor market. Given the rapid digitalization of the tourism industry, it is also critical to prioritize the development of digital skills within the curriculum. Educational programs must be continuously updated to reflect the evolving demands of the digital age, enabling graduates to remain competitive in the global job market.

Another important consideration is the influence of cultural and geographical contexts on the expectations of managers working in global hotel chains. While global brands maintain consistent standards, these expectations can vary significantly based on the cultural and economic conditions of the country in which a hotel operates. Managers may adapt their approaches to employee management and customer service based on local labor market conditions and customer preferences. This variability highlights the need for tourism education to be tailored to different regional contexts. For future research, it is recommended to explore how tourism education is implemented across diverse cultural and geographical environments and how these differences impact graduates' success in the labor market. Further investigation into the cultural influences on managers within global hotel chains can offer deeper insights into how these factors shape expectations and operational strategies. This will help refine tourism education programs to better prepare graduates for the complex, culturally diverse nature of the global tourism industry.

In conclusion, while tourism education plays a vital role in preparing graduates for careers in international hotel chains, a comprehensive approach that integrates practical skills, strategic industry collaborations, and cultural adaptability is essential for ensuring long-term employability and career success.

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