

The Career Expectation-Reality Gap: Analyzing Undergraduate Perspectives on Tourism and Hospitality in Morocco

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Abstract: This study explores the attitudes of undergraduate students in Agadir, Morocco, toward careers in the tourism and hospitality (T&H) industry. Surveying 352 students across four institutions, the research reveals a significant gap between students' career expectations and their perceptions of what the T&H sector offers. Gender and prior work experience influenced attitudes, with male students showing more optimism and experienced students expressing greater skepticism. The findings highlight a pressing need for industry and educational stakeholders to address negative perceptions and improve working conditions to attract and retain talent. This research fills a gap in Moroccan literature and provides a foundation for future policy and curriculum development.

Keywords: Work Experience, Tourism Education, Tourism and Hospitality, Morocco

I- Introduction:

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the tourism sector, leading to job losses and economic uncertainty (He et al., 2020). Lockdown and social distancing policies directly caused steep declines in T&H, as the sector relies on population mobility and personal service provided by employees (He et al., 2020). This has resulted in a fear of job insecurity among the current and future workforce of the tourism industry (Rahimi et al., 2022).

Additionally, the warning about the upcoming recession as a result of the pandemic has created a new form of mental burden for the current and potential workforce, leading to depression and anxiety

Factors such as low remuneration, unfavorable working hours, lack of career prospects, and unsatisfactory working conditions represent serious challenges in retaining a competent workforce in the tourism industry (Akeh,2021). The ability of managers to retain employees sustainably has become a pivotal factor in ensuring long-term success. This notion is underscored by the necessity for well-educated and well-trained professionals who can navigate the complexities of the sector (Dewhurst et al 2007). T&H is in need of educated and well trained professionals in the industry. It is important to have workforce development and business support services in retaining employees (Akeh,2021).

Workforce development and business support services play a crucial role in this endeavor, as they help cultivate a motivated and competent workforce that is fundamental to the industry's prosperity (Dewhurst et al 2007). The tourism sector thrives on human interactions, making the quality of service and guest experiences deeply dependent on the skills and attitudes of the workforce (Zgolli & Zaiem, 2017). The positive impact of a well-trained and enthusiastic team cannot be overstated, as it forms the backbone of a flourishing tourism environment(Hai-yan & Baum, 2006).

Educational institutions have a significant role in shaping the future of the tourism industry by addressing negative perceptions and misconceptions about the field (richardson 2009). In Turkey, a group of tourism students exhibited a range of perceptions and attitudes towards their industry, reflecting both enthusiasm and skepticism (Akin Aksu & Deniz Köksal, 2005). Similarly, in Ecuador, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically influenced the career aspirations and views of undergraduate tourism students, reshaping their expectations and goals (Ortiz Zurita & Coromina Soler, 2021). The value of tourism degrees also came into focus as researchers delved into the attitudes of undergraduate students By developing a comprehensive attitude scale, they uncovered the varied perceptions and career goals of these future professionals (Petrova & Mason, 2004). Understanding these insights is essential for enhancing tourism education programs to align better with the industry's evolving needs. External factors, such as global pandemics, undeniably affect students' perceptions and career aspirations (Rahimiet al., 2022, (Ortiz Zurita & Coromina Soler, 2021). However, by fostering a positive and well-informed outlook towards the tourism industry, educational institutions can play a

transformative role in attracting and retaining talented individuals who will drive the sector forward (Iqbal Rosyidi, 2021).

Based on the aforementioned information, it becomes evident that researchers from various countries have documented both favorable and unfavorable perceptions regarding choosing the hospitality and tourism industry as a career. This highlights the necessity to delve into the examination of Moroccan hospitality students and their attitudes towards this industry. This research could provide valuable insights for educational institutions and industry stakeholders in Morocco to address any concerns or negative perceptions and attract and retain talented individuals in the tourism industry. Understanding students' attitudes and expectations can guide stakeholders in creating a more attractive and supportive work environment. This knowledge can aid in designing initiatives to retain skilled professionals, ultimately strengthening the workforce in the Moroccan tourism and hospitality industry.

To address these concerns, this study aims to answer the following research question:

What is the attitude of undergraduate students in Agadir towards pursuing careers in the tourism and hospitality industry?

II- Literature review:

Reports indicate that the tourism and hospitality sectors suffer from a notably negative perception among students pursuing careers in hospitality. This implies potential challenges in attracting, recruiting, and retaining high-quality staff within the industry (Kevin Jenkins, 2001). Additionally, there are reports of numerous tourism and hospitality management graduates exiting the industry or facing difficulties entering it upon graduation. This is attributed to factors such as low job satisfaction, unfavorable employment conditions, and a lack of motivating factors, contributing to high staff turnover and the loss of trained and experienced personnel (Kevin Jenkins, 2001; Pavesic & Brymer, 1990). Studying the attitudes of undergraduate students towards pursuing careers in tourism and hospitality has been explored in various tourist destinations, but there is a noticeable gap in research within Morocco. This gap is especially pertinent given that Agadir-Taghazout ranks as the second most visited destination in Morocco, and the country heavily depends on tourism. Consequently, there is a clear and urgent need to investigate this matter within the Moroccan context.

The attitude of tourism students towards working in the tourism industry can vary. Several studies have been conducted to understand their perceptions and attitudes. (Roney & Öztin, 2007) conducted a study in Turkey and found that the overall perceptions of undergraduate tourism students towards tourism careers were neither favorable nor unfavorable. However, willingness to study tourism, willingness to work in tourism after graduation, and work experience were identified as important factors in shaping their image of tourism careers (Roney & Öztin, 2007). Another study by (Akin Aksu & Deniz Köksal, 2005) in Turkey also showed positive attitudes of undergraduate tourism students towards the nature of work in the tourism industry. However, there are also studies that indicate negative perceptions and attitudes towards the tourism industry among tourism students (Elhoushy, 2018) . (Purcell & Quinn, 1996) surveyed former tourism students and found that graduates complained of having little opportunity to develop their managerial skills. A study by (Ortiz Zurita & Coromina Soler, 2021) in Ecuador examined the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the perceptions and career goals of undergraduate tourism students. The results showed that the pandemic has had a negative impact on students' perceptions and commitment to their academic program and future industry career. It is important for educational institutions and industry stakeholders to understand these perceptions and address any concerns or negative perceptions to attract and retain talented individuals in the tourism industry (Ortiz Zurita & Coromina Soler, 2021).

Kusluvan & Kusluvan (2000) developed a multi-dimensional and multi-item attitude scale, in order to measure perceptions and attitudes of tourism students towards careers in the tourism industry. The authors employed factors such as nature of work, social status, industry–person congeniality, physical working condition, wage and associated benefits, career opportunities, coworkers, managers, and commitment to the tourism industry in crafting a comprehensive attitude measurement scale. The scale developed by (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000) is particularly relevant in understanding the perceptions and attitudes of students towards working in the tourism and hospitality industry. It has been used in various studies to assess the image of the industry and the career aspirations of students (Elhoushy, 2018; Han et al., 2018; Richardson, 2009; Roney & Öztin, 2007; Rosyidi, 2021) . The scale was constructed based on procedures suggested by (Churchill, 1979) and (Tull & Hawkins, 1987), and conducted statistical tests to ensure the reliability and validity of the scale . (Richardson, 2009) tackled the subject with an innovative way to figure out what factors undergraduate tourism students found important when considering a career and how well they thought the tourism and hospitality industry offered these. The match between an individual's perception of essential

career aspects and their belief in how well a specific career provides those factors will significantly influence the decision-making process for that individual (Richardson, 2009).

In addition to evaluating students' attitudes towards pursuing careers in Tourism and Hospitality, hypotheses were formulated to investigate potential differences between various groups. These groups were distinguished based on gender, academic majors, work experience, initial choice of study, the institution where they study and whether they had relatives working in the industry.

III- Methods:

In order to assess how the perceptions and attitudes of undergraduate students studying tourism or hospitality management in Agadir are influenced by industry experience, and the subsequent effect on their career intentions within the field, we have used a survey of two facets consisting of two different questionnaires used in previous studies (Kusluvan & Kusluvan, 2000; Kyriacou & Coulthard, 2000). The combination of the two have been utilized in a previous study by (Richardson, 2009) where students were asked to rate 20 factors on how important they thought each factor was in choosing a career. They were then asked to list whether they thought a career in tourism and hospitality industry offered these factors. The items in the perception of job-related attributes in the tourism industry were measure using a 4 points Likert scale (4 = strongly agree, 3 = agree, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree) and the importance of each attribute in the ideal job scale were measured using a 4 points Likert scale (4 = Very important, 3 = Important, 2 = Unimportant, 1 = Very unimportant). The survey was originally in English but has been translated to French since most students understand the latter fluently. The translation of the survey was done with the usage of artificial intelligence and has been approved by two French language professors.

III-1 Data collection:

The population of interest for this research consisted of undergraduate students in Agadir (Morocco). Given that the majority of students use the internet on a daily basis, an internet survey was chosen as the data collection method. Google Forms was used to create the survey, and the generated link was shared with universities to distribute it to their students. This approach leveraged the high internet usage among students to ensure broad and efficient participation. In order to test the survey, we conducted a pilot test (n=15) with students at Institut spécialisé en hôtellerie et restauration d'Agadir. Prior to distributing the survey,

permission was obtained from the local institutions involved. In total, four institutions participated in this study : the City of Profession and Skills of Agadir, the National School of Business and Management, Universiapolis, and the Institut spécialisé en hôtellerie et restauration d'Agadir. In total, 352 students responded to the survey. The research period was between December 1, 2023 and May 1, 2024

III-2 Data Analysis :

The collected data was processed and analyzed using SPSS 25. Statistical analysis was undertaken to determine the importance of each factor as well as the extent to which students believe tourism and hospitality careers offer these factors. To test for significant differences between the importance and the extent to which tourism and hospitality offer these factors, both t-tests and ANOVA were used. The t-test is suitable for comparing the means of two groups, while ANOVA is used when comparing means across three or more groups (Mishra et al., 2019). The usual null hypothesis is that the difference in the mean values is zero. This test is applicable in this study as we are trying to determine whether there are significant differences between the importance of factors in choosing a career and the extent to which students believe a career in tourism and hospitality will offer these for each unit of the sample.

ANOVA can provide more detailed information when dealing with multiple groups, allowing for the examination of interactions between variables (Mishra et al., 2019). The usual null hypothesis is that the difference in the mean values is zero. A significant difference is found if an alpha level (p-score) is less than 0.05. An ANOVA will be conducted to test for differences between students with different majors as well as between students at different stages of their university careers.

IV- Results :

Cronbach's Alpha was employed to test the internal consistency and reliability of the survey. Nunnally (1978) suggests that a reliability coefficient of 0.5 to 0.6 is sufficient for the early stages of basic research. The reliability values for both scales (importance and offers) exceeded the 0.50 threshold Nunnally suggests. The first scale, importance, returned a score of 0.61, while the second scale, perception, returned a score of 0.76. Nunnally (1978) adds that if the

coefficient alpha is >0.70 there is a strong suggestion of strong item covariance therefore these results indicate strong item covariance.

IV-1 Descriptive statistics

Section 1 of the survey was used to obtain demographic information about the respondents. As can be seen in Table 1 the study sample consisted of 52.1% men and 47.9% women. This indicates a relatively balanced representation of genders within the sample. The majority of respondents were from Institut spécialisé en hôtellerie et restauration d'Agadir, representing 65.0% of the sample. Students from La Cité des Métiers et des Compétences comprised 33.0% of the sample, while very few respondents were from Universiapolis (0.9%) and ENCG (1.1%). The low representation from Universiapolis and Ecole Nationale de Commerce et de Gestion means that comparisons involving these institutions should be interpreted with caution.

Table 1 : Sample description

Variable	Category	Sample %
Gender	Men	52.1
	Woman	47.9
Institution	La Cité des Métiers et des Compétences	33.0
	ISHR	65.0
	Universiapolis	0.9
	ENCG	1.1
Field of study	Tourism management	41.0
	Hotel management	20.5
	Tableware training	15.4
	Tourist Animation	6.6
	Accommodation and Reception	0.6
	Culinary Art	1.1
	Yield Manager	0.3
	Restaurant Agent	7.7
	Travel Agency	6.8
First choice of study	Yes	78.9
	No	21.1
Have you worked in T & H?	Yes	53.3
	No	46.7
Relatives in the tourism industry	Yes	43.3

Table 1 shows that the largest proportion of respondents are studying Tourism Management (41.0%), followed by Hotel Management (20.5%) and Tableware Training (15.4%). A significant majority of students (78.9%) indicated that tourism and hospitality was their first choice of study. This suggests a high level of initial interest to the field among the respondents.

As can be seen in Table 1, Respondents were then whether they have experience within the T&H industry. Slightly more than half of the respondents (53.3%) have worked in T&H industry, while 46.7% have not. A considerable portion of respondents (43.3%) have relatives working in the tourism industry, whereas 56.7% do not.

The analysis revealed several key insights (Table 2). The degree of importance was relatively the same across several key factors, with respondents consistently valuing aspects such as "A job that I will find enjoyable" (61.0%), "Pleasant working environment" (63.2%), "A secure job" (63.2%), "Colleagues that I can get along with" (65.2%), and "A job which gives me responsibility" (68.4%). However, significant discrepancies were noted between the importance placed on these factors and the perception that the tourism and hospitality industry offer them. However, there was a notable discrepancy between the importance placed on these factors and the extent to which students believe a career in tourism and hospitality will offer them. For example, while 63.2% of respondents valued job security, only 35.0% believed the industry provides it. Similarly, 63.2% found good promotion prospects important, but 58.4% felt the industry did not offer this. These gaps suggest a significant mismatch between career expectations and the industry's perceived realities.

Table 2 : Important career factors and the extent to which students believe a career in tourism and hospitality will offer these

Career factors	Importance when choosing a career (%)		Extent to which T&H offers it (%)	
	Unimportant and Not important at all (%)	Important and very important (%)	Disagree and strongly disagree (%)	Strongly agree and agree (%)
1. A job that I will find enjoyable	39.0	61.0	66.1	33.9

2. Colleagues that I can get along with	34.8	65.2	63.0	37.0
3. Pleasant working environment	36.8	63.2	62.7	37.3
4. A secure job	36.8	63.2	65.0	35.0
5. A career that provides intellectual challenge	32.5	67.5	66.1	33.9
6. Good promotion prospects	36.8	63.2	58.4	41.6
7. A job which gives me responsibility	31.6	68.4	60.4	39.6
8. High earnings over length of career	36.5	63.5	66.4	33.6
9. A job where I will contribute to society	34.2	65.8	61.8	38.2
10. A job where I can use my university degree	36.5	63.5	62.4	37.6
11. A job where you gain transferable skills	33.0	67.0	61.8	38.2
12. A job that is respected	35.0	65.0	60.7	39.3
13. Reasonable workload	35.9	64.1	63.2	36.8
14. A job with high quality resources and equipment	37.9	62.1	66.1	33.9
15. The opportunity to travel abroad	35.9	64.1	61.5	38.5
16. Job mobility—easy to get a job anywhere	41.0	59.0	61.3	38.7
17. A job that can easily be combined with parenthood	41.3	58.7	59.3	40.7
18. Good starting salary	39.0	61.0	60.7	39.3
19. A job where I can care for others	34.2	65.8	64.4	35.6
20. A job that offers opportunities for further training	34.2	65.8	64.1	35.9

The t-test analysis reveals that there are significant differences between the perceived importance of various career factors and the extent to which students perceive the attributes in Tourism & Hospitality sector. All career factors show significant differences between the importance mean and the T&H mean, as indicated by the p-values (Sig. (2-tailed)) all being less than 0.05. This suggests that the differences observed are statistically significant. The t-values are high, reinforcing the significance of these differences. The importance mean for most career factors is consistently higher than the T&H mean, indicating that respondents generally place higher importance on these factors compared to their perceptions or experiences within the Tourism & Hospitality sector. This suggests that students generally do not believe that a career in tourism and hospitality will provide the factors they consider important when choosing a future career. We have also tested to see if there is any difference within groups Gender, institution, field of study, first choice of study, previous work experience in T&H and relatives being in the tourism industry.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the extent to which students perceive the attributes in tourism industry for Male and Female. In total, 5 of the twenty factors were found to be significantly different, therefore we would accept the null hypothesis and reject the alternate hypothesis for these 5 factors. There were five factors found to be statistically different,

where Men were more likely to agree with the statements. These five factors, all of which had p values less than 0.05, are "A job that I will find enjoyable", ($t(349)= 2.114$ $p= 0.035$) in the scores with mean for Male ($M=2.23,SD=1.07$) was higher than Female ($M=1.99,SD=1.01$). "A secure job", ($t(349)= 2.156$ $p= 0.032$) in the scores with mean for Male ($M=2.30,SD=1.11$) was higher than Female ($M=2.05,SD=1.02$). "Good promotion prospects", ($t(349)= 2.511$ $p= 0.012$) in the scores with mean for Male ($M=2.44,SD=1.12$) was higher than Female ($M=2.15,SD=1.059$). "High earnings over length of career",($t(349)= 3.458$ $p= 0.001$) in the scores with mean for Male ($M=2.36,SD=1.08$) was higher than Female ($M=1.96,SD=1.06$). "A job where I can use my university degree", ($t(349)= 3.058$ $p= 0.002$) in the scores with mean for Male ($M=2.33,SD=1.13$) was higher than Female ($M=1.98,SD=1.009$).

We have compared the extent to which students perceive the attributes in the tourism industry for students to whom T&H was their first choice to those who weren't. Only one factor was found to be significantly different, therefore we would accept the null hypothesis and reject the alternative hypothesis for this factor. Students to whom T&H was their first choice were more likely to agree with the statement. This factor of which p value is less than 0.05, is " A secure job ", ($t(349)= 2.033$ $p= 0.043$) in the scores with mean for students to whom T&H was their first choice ($M=2.28,SD=1.10$) was higher than students to whom T&H wasn't their first choice ($M=2.04,SD=1.21$). Same thing when, we compared students with relatives in working in T&H. Only one factor was found to be significantly different, therefore we would accept the null hypothesis and reject the alternative hypothesis for this factor. Students with relatives working in T&H were less likely to agree with the statement. "A job that is respected", ($t(349)= -2.219$ $p= 0.027$) in the scores with mean for students to whom T&H was their first choice ($M=2.09,SD=1.047$) was higher than students to whom T&H wasn't their first choice ($M=2.35,SD=1.083$).

After comparing the extent to which students perceive the attributes in T&H of students who have previous work experience in T&H to those who don't. It turns out that all factors were found to be significantly different with a (p -value > 0.05) across all the factors, therefore we would accept the null hypothesis and reject the alternative hypothesis for twenty factors. Students who have experienced the work in T&H were more likely to not agree with the statements.

When conducting an ANOVA to investigate differences in the opinions of various groups, only one significant difference was identified. The first ANOVA, which compared students from different majors, revealed that only one item is significantly different when assessing the When comparing the extent to which each of the groups thought a career in tourism and hospitality offered this factor aspects of a career. The item "Good starting salary" ($f = 2.189$, $p = 0.028$). Students in Tourism management rated the importance of "A good starting salary" significantly lower than students in Hotel management. Students in Hotel management rated the importance of "A good starting salary" significantly higher than students in Tableware training. The second ANOVA, comparing students from different institutions found no significant differences in opinions between the groups.

Table 3 : Differences between importance of factors in choosing a career and the extent to which students believe a career in tourism and hospitality will offer these.

Career factor	Importance mean	T&H mean	Mean difference	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
1. A job that I will find enjoyable	2.60	2.12	0.484	6.492	0.000
2. Colleagues that I can get along with	2.75	2.19	0.556	7.233	0.000
3. Pleasant working environment	2.67	2.22	0.450	5.985	0.000
4. A secure job	2.69	2.18	0.507	6.148	0.000
5. A career that provides intellectual challenge	2.71	2.14	0.564	7.683	0.000
6. Good promotion prospects	2.70	2.30	0.399	5.195	0.000
7. A job which gives me responsibility	2.73	2.23	0.499	6.357	0.000
8. High earnings over length of career	2.66	2.17	0.493	6.187	0.000
9. A job where I will contribute to society	2.74	2.19	0.541	7.135	0.000
10. A job where I can use my university degree	2.68	2.16	0.516	6.814	0.000
11. A job where you gain transferable skills	2.77	2.20	0.573	7.339	0.000
12. A job that is respected	2.68	2.21	0.467	5.844	0.000
13. Reasonable workload	2.68	2.15	0.538	6.668	0.000
14. A job with high quality resources and equipment	2.62	2.10	0.519	6.756	0.000
15. The opportunity to travel abroad	2.68	2.19	0.496	6.635	0.000
16. Job mobility—easy to get a job anywhere	2.54	2.18	0.356	4.434	0.000
17. A job that can easily be combined with parenthood	2.57	2.25	0.319	4.139	0.000
18. Good starting salary	2.60	2.21	0.385	5.135	0.000
19. A job where I can care for others	2.68	2.14	0.541	6.841	0.000
20. A job that offers opportunities for further training	2.58	2.16	0.422	5.525	0.000

Following the results discussed from table 3, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the importance of career factors and the extent of which students thought a

career in tourism and hospitality offered these factors. In table 3, all factors showed a significant statistical difference. Therefore, the null hypothesis **H1** is accepted ($p < 0.05$).

Undergraduate students in Agadir have a negative attitude towards pursuing careers in the T&H industry. However, the analysis of results from ANOVA test of specific hypotheses yielded mixed results:

H2 (Gender): Accepted. No significant differences were found on fifteen out of twenty factors. However, significant differences were found only in five factors, with male students more likely to perceive the industry as offering enjoyable jobs, secure positions, good promotion prospects, high earnings, and opportunities to use their university degree.

H3 (Institution): Accepted. No significant differences were found in attitudes based on the institution where students study.

H4. (Major of study): Accepted No significant differences were found in attitudes towards working in the tourism and hospitality industry based on the major of study.

H5 (First Choice of Study): Accepted. Significant differences were found only for Students whose tourism and hospitality were their first choice in one particular factor making them more likely to perceive the industry as offering secure jobs.

H6 (Relatives in the Industry): Accepted. Significant differences were found only for students with relatives in the industry where it shows that they are less likely to agree that the industry offers respectable jobs.

H7 (Work Experience): Rejected. Significant differences were found based on prior work experience in the tourism industry.

V- Discussion:

The results of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the attitudes of undergraduate students in Agadir towards careers in the tourism and hospitality industry. The findings reveal significant discrepancies between the career factors that students deem important and their perceptions of the tourism and hospitality sector's ability to provide these factors.

One of the most striking findings is the significant difference between the importance students place on various career factors and their belief that the tourism and hospitality industry can fulfill these expectations. For instance, while 61.0% of respondents consider having an enjoyable job very important, only 33.9% believe that the tourism industry can offer this (Table 2). Similar gaps were found in areas such as job security (63.2% vs. 35.0%), promotion

prospects (63.2% vs. 41.6%), and high earnings over the length of a career (63.5% vs. 33.6%). These discrepancies highlight a potential mismatch between students' career aspirations and the realities of working in the tourism sector.

The study found notable gender differences in perceptions, with male students more likely to perceive the industry as offering enjoyable jobs, secure positions, good promotion prospects, high earnings, and opportunities to use their university degree (Table 3). Specifically, significant differences were found for factors such as "A job that I will find enjoyable" ($p=0.035$), "A secure job" ($p=0.032$), and "Good promotion prospects" ($p=0.012$). These findings suggest that male students may have a slightly more positive outlook on the tourism industry compared to female students. This could be due to various socio-cultural factors or personal experiences that influence career perceptions differently for men and women.

Students with prior work experience in the tourism and hospitality industry showed significantly different perceptions compared to those without such experience (Table 3). This group was generally less optimistic about the industry's ability to offer desirable career attributes. Similarly, students with relatives in the industry were less likely to view tourism jobs as respectable, as indicated by the significant difference for the factor "A job that is respected" ($p=0.027$). These findings indicate that direct or indirect exposure to the industry's working conditions may shape more realistic, albeit less favorable, perceptions among students.

The findings of this study align with previous research conducted in other contexts. Studies by Roney and Öztin (2007) and Akin Aksu and Deniz Köksal (2005) in Turkey, for instance, revealed mixed perceptions among tourism students, highlighting both positive and negative attitudes towards careers in the industry. The negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' perceptions and career goals, as observed in this study, is consistent with the findings of Ortiz Zurita and Coromina Soler (2021) in Ecuador.

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly played a significant role in shaping the attitudes of students towards careers in the tourism and hospitality industry. The pandemic led to widespread job losses, economic uncertainty, and a heightened sense of job insecurity, all of which likely influenced the negative perceptions observed in this study. Previous research, such as the study by Ortiz Zurita and Coromina Soler (2021) in Ecuador, also highlighted the negative impact of the pandemic on students' perceptions and career goals in tourism. These

findings underscore the need for the industry to build resilience and adapt to such crises to maintain its attractiveness as a career choice.

Conclusion, limitations, and future studies

The study aimed to investigate the attitudes of undergraduate students in Agadir towards pursuing careers in the tourism and hospitality industry. This study shows that undergraduate students who are studying tourism and hospitality in Agadir (Morocco) do not believe that the industry offers them the attributes that they see as important in choosing a future career. The findings reveal a nuanced landscape of perceptions that are influenced by a variety of factors, including gender, prior work experience, and family connections within the industry.

Key insights from the study indicate that while students recognize the importance of several career factors such as job enjoyment, a pleasant working environment, and good promotion prospects, there is a significant disparity between the importance they place on these factors and their belief that the tourism and hospitality industry offer them. This gap suggests a potential mismatch between students' career expectations and the realities of working in the industry, which may contribute to challenges in attracting and retaining skilled professionals.

Gender differences were evident in the perceptions of certain career factors, with male students more likely to agree that the industry offers enjoyable jobs, secure positions, and good promotion prospects. Additionally, students for whom tourism and hospitality was their first choice of study, as well as those with relatives in the industry, showed varying levels of agreement on the attractiveness of certain job attributes. These findings align with previous research conducted in different contexts. Studies by Roney and Öztin (2007) and Akin Aksu and Deniz Köksal (2005) in Turkey revealed mixed perceptions among tourism students, highlighting both positive and negative attitudes towards careers in the industry. Similarly, research by Ortiz Zurita and Coromina Soler (2021) in Ecuador emphasized the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' perceptions and career goals in tourism.

The issue that needs to be addressed from this study is the quality of working conditions available within the tourism and hospitality industry. Organizations in this sector must focus on enhancing various aspects of these conditions. As mentioned earlier, students perceive the industry as lagging behind others, particularly in terms of pay, promotion opportunities, career prospects, working hours, and job security.

This research is academically important for several reasons. Firstly, it contributes to the existing body of knowledge on student perceptions and attitudes towards careers in the tourism and hospitality industry, particularly within the Moroccan context, which has been under-researched. This study employs robust methodological approaches, utilizing established scales and statistical analyses to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. This enhances the academic rigor of the research and provides a reliable basis for future studies to build upon. The implications of these findings are significant for educational institutions and industry stakeholders in Morocco. Addressing the negative perceptions and enhancing the positive aspects of careers in tourism and hospitality could be crucial steps in making the industry more appealing to potential employees. This might include improving working conditions, offering better career progression opportunities, and ensuring competitive salaries. Moreover, tailored interventions and educational programs that align more closely with students' expectations could play a vital role in bridging the gap between career aspirations and industry offerings. By fostering a more supportive and attractive work environment, the Moroccan tourism and hospitality sector can strengthen its workforce and ensure sustainable growth.

While the study included responses from four institutions, the number of responses from Universiapolis and ENCG was very low. The study relied solely on survey data, which may not provide a comprehensive understanding of the underlying reasons behind students' attitudes towards careers in the tourism and hospitality industry. Surveys are limited in their ability to capture in-depth insights and may miss nuanced perspectives that qualitative methods.

Further research in the same area could be done by undertaking qualitative assessments, which will provide more in-depth understandings of the students' perceptions and attitudes. Further study could also use the same survey to see if the same effects and attitude apply to students in the coming years.

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