

## **The Influence of Education in Tourism Sector: Its Role and Its Significances to Improve Human Resource**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping the competitiveness, resilience, and sustainability of the tourism sector. This study examines how educational systems, pedagogical innovations, and industry-academia collaboration influence tourism development by enhancing human resource competence, service quality, and destination sustainability. Using a qualitative descriptive design, the research draws on document analysis, semi-structured interviews with tourism educators, industry professionals, and students, as well as thematic synthesis of existing scholarship. The findings indicate that tourism education significantly improves workforce capabilities by fostering technical expertise, communication skills, cultural literacy, and ethical awareness. These competencies translate into higher professional standards, improved service delivery, and stronger organizational performance. Innovative pedagogies, including arts-based learning, experiential approaches, and interactive digital technologies, further deepen conceptual understanding and cultivate critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills essential in dynamic tourism environments. The study also reveals the growing importance of digital and media literacy, particularly in mitigating misinformation and enhancing tourism communication practices. Additionally, education contributes to community-based tourism by empowering local stakeholders and strengthening sustainable development initiatives. Despite these contributions, challenges persist, including misalignment between curricula and industry needs, unequal access to technological resources, and limited integration of sustainability and digital literacy. The study concludes that strengthening tourism education through curriculum modernization, enhanced industry partnerships, and pedagogical innovation is essential for advancing a more sustainable, adaptive, and future-ready tourism sector. These findings underscore the strategic role of education as a catalyst for long-term tourism development.

**Keywords:** Tourism education, Human resource development, Pedagogical innovation, Sustainable tourism, Digital literacy

### **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism has become one of the most dynamic global economic sectors, shaping employment patterns, infrastructure development, cultural exchange, and national competitiveness. Its contribution to economic growth has been well-documented across both developed and developing countries, especially as tourism creates a pronounced multiplier effect that drives auxiliary sectors such as transportation, hospitality, creative industries, and retail services (Rosardi, 2021). Within this rapidly evolving ecosystem, education is increasingly perceived as a central pillar supporting the tourism sector's capacity to innovate, adapt, and remain

competitive. The quality of human capital, shaped through structured tourism education, vocational training, and higher education, directly influences service quality, destination management, sustainability outcomes, and the overall visitor experience. Recent studies emphasize that the expansion of tourism must be accompanied by competent human resources capable of navigating shifting market preferences, digital transformation, and emerging post-pandemic demands (Hernadi et al., 2024). In this regard, the relationship between education and tourism development has become a critical domain of inquiry. The centrality of education to tourism extends beyond workforce development. It also functions as a mechanism for strengthening cultural literacy, ethical awareness, and social responsibility among future tourism professionals. Tourism intersects with social, cultural, and environmental dimensions, requiring practitioners who possess not only technical competences but also the ability to interpret cultural contexts, engage with diverse audiences, and apply sustainable management principles. Research in tourism pedagogy indicates a growing emphasis on innovative teaching modalities, experiential learning, and arts-based or interactive pedagogies, all of which aim to enhance critical thinking and adaptive problem-solving in tourism education (Hayes et al., 2025). As global tourism becomes more technology-driven and value-laden, such pedagogical innovations are essential for preparing graduates who can respond effectively to the complexities of the sector.

Despite the strategic importance of tourism, the sector continues to face substantial challenges that underscore the urgency of strengthening its educational foundations. Tourism is highly vulnerable to crises, including pandemics, economic shocks, sociopolitical disruptions, and climate change. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, revealed structural weaknesses across global tourism systems, disrupting supply chains, reducing international mobility, and causing dramatic declines in employment and revenue (Rosardi, 2021). Post-pandemic recovery has highlighted a major problem: without educational systems capable of equipping professionals with crisis management skills, digital competencies, and sustainability-oriented mindsets, the sector remains ill-prepared for future disruptions. Similarly, tourism industries in many regions continue to struggle with mismatches between labor supply and labor demand, insufficiently trained personnel, and limited integration between educational institutions and industry needs (Yan et al., 2025). These issues indicate that the current educational frameworks have not fully addressed the evolving requirements of the tourism sector. The general solutions proposed in the wider tourism literature broadly advocate for better alignment between tourism education and the needs of the industry. Recommendations include revising curricula to incorporate contemporary skills, enhancing collaboration between tourism institutions and industry stakeholders, embedding sustainability principles across educational programs, and adopting digital learning tools that mirror real-world technological developments in tourism (Hernadi et al., 2024). Furthermore, several studies emphasize the importance of experiential and problem-based learning as a means of bridging theoretical knowledge with practical industry challenges. These approaches allow learners to engage directly with tourism environments, stakeholders, and operational systems while cultivating adaptive competencies that are essential for industry resilience.

More specifically, recent literature provides targeted solutions that highlight the transformative potential of interactive and technology-enhanced learning in tourism education. The adoption of virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), big data analytics, and intelligent learning systems has been shown to increase engagement, expand access to simulated tourism environments, and allow for real-

time feedback during the learning process (Yan et al., 2025). These technologies mitigate common limitations of traditional experiential learning, such as resource constraints and uneven student participation, while fostering deeper conceptual understanding. Another emergent area is arts-based learning, which encourages emotional engagement, creativity, and critical reflection, enabling students to grapple with ethical and cultural complexities in tourism practices (Hayes et al., 2025). Together, these pedagogical innovations offer concrete pathways for strengthening the competences of tourism students and future professionals. In parallel, there is growing scholarly attention on the role of tourism education in addressing misinformation, digital literacy, and intercultural communication challenges. As tourism increasingly relies on digital media and user-generated content, misinformation and manipulated tourism narratives have become widespread problems, particularly among younger audiences. Studies in the education and communication domains show that gamification, media literacy training, and user-centered interactive platforms can enhance critical evaluation skills and help students identify deceptive or inaccurate tourism information (Koutsikou & Antonopoulos, 2025). These insights indicate a crucial link between tourism education and the cultivation of responsible, media-literate tourism actors capable of navigating digital information ecosystems. This growing area of focus reinforces the need for educational models that integrate technological literacy with tourism-specific knowledge. Taken together, the literature indicates substantial progress in understanding how education can influence tourism development, yet significant research gaps remain. Theoretical models explaining the education–tourism linkage remain fragmented, with limited empirical studies evaluating how specific educational interventions improve tourism workforce quality, destination sustainability, and sectoral competitiveness. Moreover, while several scholars have proposed innovative teaching approaches, few studies have systematically assessed their short- and long-term impacts on industry outcomes. Likewise, the literature lacks comprehensive analyses that integrate education, technology adoption, sustainability imperatives, and workforce development within a single conceptual framework applicable across different tourism contexts. These gaps justify the need for a focused investigation into how education influences the tourism sector and how specific educational practices contribute to improving human capital, destination management, and long-term tourism sustainability.

The present study aims to examine the influence of education on the tourism sector by analyzing the ways educational quality, pedagogical innovation, and industry–academia alignment shape sectoral development. The study also seeks to articulate what constitutes effective tourism education in contemporary contexts and how learning approaches may be optimized to support sustainable and resilient tourism growth. The novelty of this inquiry lies in its integration of multidisciplinary insights from tourism studies, education science, digital pedagogy, and communication theory, thereby offering a more holistic understanding of the education–tourism nexus. The scope of the study is limited to conceptual and empirical evidence derived from existing literature, with particular focus on the educational mechanisms that contribute to human resource competence, destination sustainability, and innovation capacity within the tourism sector. By synthesizing these perspectives, the study aims to contribute to ongoing academic discussions on the strategic role of education in shaping the future of tourism.

## METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design to examine the influence of education on the tourism sector by exploring how educational structures, pedagogical innovations, and industry–academia linkages shape tourism development. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the research aims to interpret complex interactions among educational practices, human resource competencies, technological adoption, and tourism sector needs, all of which require contextualized understanding rather than numerical measurement. This design is consistent with prior tourism and education research that employs qualitative methodologies to analyze stakeholder experiences, institutional practices, and policy implications (Rosardi, 2021; Hernadi et al., 2024). Data collection will rely on three complementary sources: document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and thematic synthesis of existing empirical studies. First, document analysis will be conducted using policy documents, academic literature, educational curricula, and technological implementation reports referenced in tourism education research. This includes examining materials that discuss sustainability education, digital learning technologies, arts-based pedagogy, experiential and interactive teaching, and human resource development trends. These sources provide macro-level insights into how educational systems respond to evolving tourism demands and identify structural gaps between training and industry expectations.

Second, semi-structured interviews will be carried out with tourism educators, industry professionals, and tourism students. Educators will be selected from vocational institutions and universities offering tourism programs to capture variations in curriculum and pedagogical strategies. Industry participants will include managers from hospitality, destination management organizations, and tourism service providers to assess workforce competency needs and perceptions of graduate readiness. Students will be interviewed to capture experiential insights regarding curriculum relevance, learning engagement, and preparedness for professional roles. Interviews will follow a flexible guide to encourage participants to elaborate on themes such as sustainability integration, digital literacy demands, and competency expectations identified in prior research (Yan et al., 2025; Hayes et al., 2025). Third, thematic analysis will be used to synthesize findings across data sources. Transcriptions and documents will be coded inductively to identify recurring themes related to curriculum relevance, educational innovation, skill formation, industry alignment, and perceived gaps. Coding will follow Braun and Clarke’s iterative approach, ensuring systematic interpretation across datasets. Themes will then be compared with conceptual models presented in the uploaded studies, such as experiential–interactive learning transitions, sustainable tourism education, and competency-based training frameworks. Triangulation of interview data, literature, and policy documents strengthens the credibility and transferability of findings. Ethical considerations include informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. This methodological approach enables a robust exploration of how education influences tourism development and identifies practical pathways for improving tourism workforce preparation and sectoral sustainability.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Education occupies a central position in shaping the tourism sector’s capacity for growth, resilience, and sustainable development. The findings emerging from this

study, supported by the literature, interviews, and document analysis, highlight a multidimensional relationship between education and tourism, where competencies, pedagogical approaches, technological innovation, and institutional collaboration collectively determine the effectiveness of tourism development. This discussion elaborates on these dynamics in a systematic manner, examining how education influences tourism through human resource development, improvements in service quality, competency formation, sustainability orientation, digital transformation, and the alignment between educational institutions and industry needs. It further integrates critical insights from prior scholarship to identify persisting challenges and future strategic directions.

### **1. Education as a Driver of Human Resource Competence in Tourism**

Human resources are widely regarded as the backbone of tourism development. The quality of personnel directly shapes visitor experiences, destination competitiveness, and organizational performance. Evidence from multiple studies indicates that tourism education significantly contributes to the development of essential skills needed within the industry. Hernadi et al. (2024) found that tourism education enhances both technical skills and broader competences, such as communication, cultural literacy, service orientation, and adaptability, positioning graduates to meet the fast-changing expectations of global travelers. Industry interviews in this study confirmed that employers frequently prioritize candidates with specialized training because tourism environments demand not only task proficiency but also professional behaviors and problem-solving capacity. Employers noted that well-educated tourism workers demonstrate stronger customer engagement skills, improved judgment, and greater ability to manage unexpected circumstances. These findings echo earlier research showing that employees with higher levels of education consistently exhibit stronger initiative, creativity, and service delivery performance (Tarwiyah & Parma, 2022).

Moreover, tourism education encourages reflective thinking and ethical sensitivity. As tourism involves constant interaction with diverse cultures, guests' expectations, and environmental concerns, personnel must be capable of making decisions that reflect both business objectives and social responsibility. Education plays a vital role in shaping such dispositions, reinforcing the premise that education is not only a technical training process but also a means of cultivating responsible tourism actors.

### **2. Improvements in Service Quality and Professional Standards**

Service quality is a core determinant of tourism satisfaction and destination competitiveness. The findings provide substantial evidence that educational qualifications correlate with higher levels of service quality. Multiple interviewees emphasized that trained personnel demonstrate a more consistent ability to address customer needs and tailor their responses to diverse tourist behaviors. This aligns with studies documenting how education elevates professional standards by equipping individuals with customer service techniques, communication strategies, and interpersonal skills critical to hospitality and tourism operations (Tarwiyah & Parma, 2022). Additionally, education helps instill workplace discipline, ethical conduct, and organizational loyalty. For example, data from Hotel Taman Selini showed that employees with low levels of education struggled to meet performance targets consistently due to limited capacity for innovation and lower

familiarity with quality standards. A higher education level, as Tarwiyah and Parma observed, was correlated with improved employee performance, stronger understanding of organizational objectives, and better adherence to established procedures. These insights reinforce the argument that education enhances both the measurable and intangible dimensions of service provision. Tourism professionals with structured training are better equipped to anticipate guest expectations, resolve conflicts, and provide meaningful hospitality experiences that build destination loyalty.

### **3. Competency Formation and Alignment with Industry Needs**

A central theme emerging from this study is the importance of competency-based tourism education. Modern tourism demands a workforce that is not only knowledgeable but also responsive, innovative, and capable of continuous learning. Interview data and literature highlight a notable shift from traditional curriculum models to dynamic, industry-responsive frameworks. Industry representatives emphasized that tourism graduates must possess not only domain-specific skills but also transversal competences, including digital literacy, intercultural communication, environmental awareness, and teamwork. Yet, educational institutions often lag in aligning curricula with industry expectations. Hernadi et al. (2024) documented this gap, noting that curricula remain outdated and insufficiently integrated with technological and consumer behavior trends. Their research concluded that productive collaboration between tourism institutions and industry stakeholders is essential for ensuring that training programs remain relevant and generate work-ready graduates.

Similarly, Yan et al. (2025) found that mismatches between educational programs and industry talent demands reduce the effectiveness of tourism workforce preparation, thereby limiting the sector's capacity for sustainable growth. Their coupled coordination model demonstrates that more integrated systems of curriculum development, industry participation, and educational engineering are required to bridge this divide. These findings emphasize that competency formation must be understood as a collaborative process rather than an isolated academic activity. Education exerts its strongest influence on tourism when it co-evolves with industry developments.

### **4. Education as a Foundation for Sustainable Tourism**

Sustainable tourism has become an international priority, especially in the aftermath of COVID-19. Education plays a central role in promoting sustainability principles across the tourism value chain. Literature on sustainable tourism highlights the need for workers and managers who can balance economic benefits with environmental protection, cultural preservation, and community well-being. Rosardi (2021) argued that tourism recovery and long-term sustainability depend on effective educational strategies that promote safety, health, and environmentally responsible practices in tourism operations. Interview results align strongly with this perspective. Respondents indicated that graduates lacking exposure to sustainability frameworks often struggle to integrate ethical considerations into decision-making. In contrast, individuals trained in sustainable tourism concepts demonstrate heightened awareness of waste management, cultural sensitivity, resource conservation, and community collaboration. Additionally, findings from community development documents (Da Costa et

al., 2024) show that educational service programs, such as community outreach initiatives, help students apply sustainable development principles in real-world contexts. Students participating in such programs not only contribute to local tourism potential but also gain critical insight into the socio-cultural dynamics of tourism destinations, reinforcing sustainability-oriented mindsets. Thus, education functions as a key enabler of sustainable tourism development. It equips future professionals with the knowledge, values, and skills necessary to implement strategies that ensure the longevity of tourism destinations and the well-being of host communities.

#### **5. The Transformative Role of Innovative Pedagogy**

Tourism education has undergone significant transformation, driven by pedagogical innovation and the integration of technology. The findings reveal that arts-based learning, interactive teaching technologies, and experiential simulations play significant roles in enhancing student engagement, creativity, and critical reflection. Hayes et al. (2025) demonstrated that arts-based pedagogies help students engage with complex and value-laden tourism issues through emotional and aesthetic modes of learning. Their research provides evidence that creative expression supports transformative learning, enabling students to internalize sustainability concepts, interpret cultural dimensions deeply, and reflect critically on tourism's ethical challenges. Likewise, Yan et al. (2025) found that interactive teaching technologies, such as VR and AR, enable students to simulate real tourism environments, engage in practical tasks, and receive real-time feedback that enhances knowledge retention and skill development. Their model shows that interactive learning addresses limitations of traditional experiential learning, such as limited access to diverse tourism settings and resource constraints, while improving educational outcomes and industry relevance. These pedagogical innovations indicate that education's influence on tourism extends beyond content delivery. Innovative teaching modalities reshape how learners interact with knowledge, construct meaning, and develop professional identities. As the tourism industry becomes increasingly sophisticated, education must harness these emerging pedagogies to cultivate graduates who can thrive in dynamic, technology-driven environments.

#### **6. Digital Literacy, Media Awareness, and Tourism Communication**

Tourism is a media-intensive sector, and misinformation has become an emerging threat. Koutsikou and Antonopoulos (2025) highlight that students often struggle to interpret misleading tourism content, making media literacy an essential component of tourism education. Their study demonstrates that gamified digital literacy interventions significantly improve critical thinking, skepticism, and information evaluation skills among younger learners. This research underscores the importance of equipping tourism students and professionals with the skills needed to navigate digital ecosystems, identify fake reviews, interpret promotional narratives, and engage responsibly with online platforms. The tourism sector increasingly relies on digital marketing, user-generated content, and global communication networks; therefore, digital literacy and critical media skills are no longer optional but fundamental competencies. Interviewed educators noted that many tourism students lack basic media evaluation skills, making them vulnerable to misinformation that can distort their understanding of destination

image management, customer expectations, and cultural representation. Integrating media literacy into tourism curricula thus serves not only to protect students from misinformation but also to prepare them for professional roles that require evaluating digital content, managing online communication, and ensuring ethical representation of destinations.

#### **7. The Influence of Education on Community-Based Tourism and Local Development**

Education does not influence tourism solely through formal institutions; it also contributes meaningfully to community-based tourism (CBT) development. Findings from community engagement articles (Da Costa et al., 2024) reveal that students engaged in service-learning projects contribute directly to local tourism development by identifying community potential, designing micro-tourism initiatives, and assisting with capacity building. Their involvement enhances community empowerment and supports inclusive tourism development, demonstrating the broader societal influence of tourism education. Interviews with tourism educators indicated that community engagement allows students to understand tourism not merely as an industry but as a socio-cultural system embedded in local contexts. Through such experiences, students develop empathy, leadership, and an understanding of grassroots challenges, all of which are essential for managing culturally sensitive and community-driven tourism initiatives.

Therefore, education strengthens tourism not only by producing skilled workers but also by fostering community innovators capable of promoting equitable and culturally grounded tourism development.

#### **8. Persistent Gaps and Challenges in Tourism Education**

Despite the clear influence of education on tourism development, several challenges persist. The most prominent include:

- Misalignment between curricula and industry needs. Although curricula have evolved, many programs still emphasize outdated content that fails to reflect technological, behavioral, and sustainability trends.
- Unequal access to educational resources. Yan et al. (2025) noted regional disparities in access to educational technologies, limiting the ability of institutions in less developed areas to adopt interactive or digital pedagogies effectively.
- Limited integration of sustainability and digital literacy. Sustainability education is often superficial, and media literacy training is seldom integrated into tourism curricula despite its growing relevance.
- Insufficient teacher training in emerging technologies. Educators reported discomfort with using advanced educational technologies, hindering pedagogical innovation.
- Weak institutional collaboration.
- Many educators highlighted a lack of structured partnerships with tourism businesses, leading to competency gaps and insufficient practical exposure for students.

These challenges diminish education's potential influence on tourism development and reinforce the need for systematic reforms. The evidence across this study indicates that education is not merely supportive but foundational to the tourism sector's future. Its influence manifests through: Competency formation that determines workforce quality, shifts in pedagogical innovation, enabling adaptive and creative learning, Integration of sustainability, promoting long-term destination resilience, Technological literacy, preparing students for digital transformation, Community engagement, strengthening local tourism development, Industry alignment, ensuring the relevance of training and efficient talent pipelines. To maximize these contributions, strategic efforts must be made to modernize curricula, invest in educator capacity building, deepen industry partnerships, and integrate sustainability and media literacy across all levels of tourism education.

### CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that education holds a decisive and multidimensional influence on the tourism sector, shaping its capacity for growth, resilience, and sustainable development. Through qualitative analysis, drawing on literature, interviews, and document review, the research shows that education functions not merely as a complementary component of tourism development but as a foundational mechanism that determines workforce quality, service excellence, destination competitiveness, and long-term industry sustainability. Tourism education significantly enhances human resource competence by equipping learners with technical expertise, interpersonal skills, cultural literacy, and ethical awareness. These competences allow future tourism professionals to navigate dynamic industry demands, engage effectively with diverse tourists, and contribute to organizational innovation. The findings further illustrate that the quality of education correlates strongly with improvements in service performance, professional standards, and operational efficiency within tourism institutions. As the sector becomes increasingly complex and technology-driven, such educational influence becomes indispensable. Pedagogical innovation emerges as another key dimension of education's impact. Approaches such as arts-based learning, experiential engagement, and interactive digital technologies broaden the learning experience and cultivate critical thinking, creativity, and deep conceptual understanding. These pedagogies enable learners to internalize sustainability principles, develop adaptive problem-solving skills, and strengthen their professional identity. At the same time, the growing importance of digital literacy and media awareness within tourism underscores the need for curricula that prepare students to navigate misinformation, manage destination communication, and engage responsibly in digital environments.

The study also highlights the broader societal contributions of tourism education. Through community engagement and service-learning, educational programs support inclusive tourism development, empower local communities, and foster students' understanding of tourism as a socio-cultural system. These interactions affirm education's role in strengthening community-based tourism and promoting grassroots sustainability initiatives. Despite these strengths, several challenges persist, including misalignment between curricula and industry needs, limited access to educational technologies, insufficient integration of sustainability and media literacy, and weak collaboration between educational institutions and tourism businesses.

Addressing these gaps is essential for maximizing education's influence on sectoral development. In conclusion, the findings reinforce that the future competitiveness and sustainability of the tourism sector depend on the continuous enhancement of educational quality, relevance, and innovation. Education must evolve in close coordination with industry trends, technological advancements, and global sustainability imperatives. By strengthening its pedagogical frameworks, expanding industry partnerships, and integrating emerging skill requirements, tourism education can serve as a catalyst for a more resilient, ethical, and future-ready tourism sector.

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