

## Tourism Students' Perceptions of Tourism Industry: The Case of Selçuk University Faculty of Tourism

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### Abstract

As tourism is a labor-intensive industry, it is quite difficult to set standards. Therefore, tourism industry is one of the industries needed by qualified personnel most. The purpose of this study is to determine Selçuk University Faculty of Tourism students' perceptions of tourism industry. The study employed the quantitative research method and used the survey technique. The data obtained from 322 survey forms were analyzed via SPSS 24.00. The study found out that the students' perceptions of tourism industry did not vary by gender, age group, grade, grade point average (GPA), the state of being/not being a graduate of a tourism high school, department, and people influential on their choice of department. However, significant differences were detected between their perception levels by experience in tourism industry and the state of doing/not doing internship. Since the students having experience and doing internship were found to have high perceptions, it is recommended to make internship compulsory in the first year in their department.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism is an industry standing out with its contribution to the economies of developing countries in particular. Countries make plans and develop strategies to have an advantage over rival countries and gain a higher share from tourism in today's developing competitive environment. One of the most important elements in tourism industry is quality of service. Personnel quality comes to the fore in this industry as service is consumed where it is produced. Since there was a lack of qualified personnel with adequate tourism education in the face of the tourism demand flourishing in Turkey as of the 1980s, speaking a foreign language was considered adequate for employment in tourism industry (Aymanıkuy and Aymanıkuy, 2002, p. 32). The developments in tourism industry from the 1980s, including increases in the number of facilities and in total bed amounts as well as in kinds of service, raised the issue of skilled labor with vocational education. Hence, the number of tourism education institutions in Turkey rose, and as a result, academic studies were launched on this subject. Some of the academic studies, which rapidly increased especially after 1990, addressed the education system in general while some others focused on internship programs and still some others on the internship problems of tourism students (Ağaoğlu, 1991, p. 439; Akoğlan, 1999, p. 37). Tourism education in Turkey has some fundamental problems that have been continuously emphasized but have not been solved yet (Hacıoğlu, 1992, p. 91). Many studies highlight that although tourism students receive quality education, they choose not to work in tourism industry following their graduation or head to other fields after a short time.

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between Selçuk University Faculty of Tourism students' perceptions of tourism industry and their success in their courses. The study tries to find out whether the students' perceptions of tourism industry vary by gender, age group, grade, grade point average (GPA), the state of being/not being a graduate of a tourism high school, department, people influential on their choice of department, experience in tourism industry and the state of doing/not doing internship.

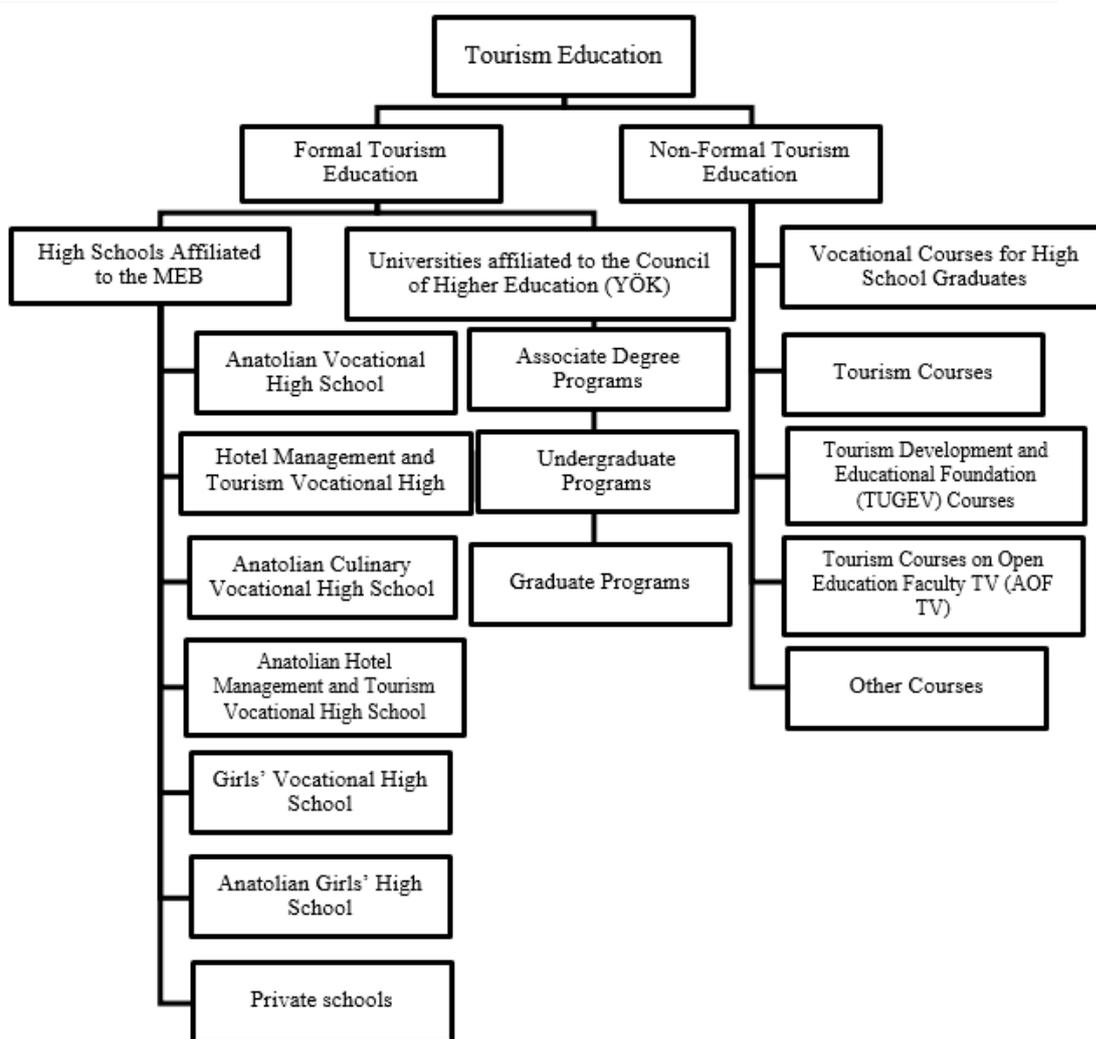
## **THE CONCEPTS OF EDUCATION, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, AND TOURISM EDUCATION AND THEIR FUNCTIONING**

Vocational education is an educational process that provides individuals with knowledge, skills, and work habits they will need in working life in society and aims to improve their current abilities in various respects (Hacıoğlu, 1992; Çimen, 2006, p. 54). Vocational tourism education, on the other hand, refers to educational activities for research and planning needed in tourism industry and ensuring improved productivity of businesses (Avcıkurt and Karaman, 2002, p. 53). Vocational tourism education aimed at raising trained labor for tourism industry is provided as formal education and non-formal education. In Turkey, the first hotel management school was opened in Ankara in the 1961-1962 academic year, the second one in Istanbul in the 1967-1968 academic year, and the third one in Kuşadası in the 1975-1976 academic year (Alıcığüzel, 2012, p. 21).

Today, there are a lot of educational institutions in Turkey that have been founded to raise qualified personnel for Turkish tourism. Providing formal and non-formal education, these institutions aim to raise personnel at different levels (Tuna, 2002, p. 43). Formal tourism education involves basic tourism education given in primary and

secondary schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Turkey (MEB), education for individuals to acquire specialization in tourism and gain a profession in this field, and education given in associate degree, undergraduate degree, and graduate degree programs affiliated to the Council of Higher Education of Turkey (YÖK) (Batman and Çankırı, 2013, p. 119). Non-formal tourism education, on the other hand, refers to the sum of educational activities in which individuals who have never got involved in the formal education system or are currently in any stage of it are engaged in to gain necessary knowledge, skills, and behaviors. Such educational activities are offered in line with individuals' interests, desires, and skills, are aimed at contributing to their economic, social, and cultural development, and are performed for life in various periods and at various levels (Demirel, 1996, p. 31; Çimen, 2006, p. 64-65).

**Figure 1:** Tourism Education System in Turkey



**Source:** Çimen, 2006, p. 63; Yağcı, 2001, p. 23-39

Öztaş (2002) listed the industrial goals of tourism education provided as formal and non-formal education as follows (Öztaş, 2002, p. 93):

- Raising qualified personnel for tourism industry,
- Contributing to the development of tourism industry,
- Establishing a good communication with different cultures,
- Raising tourism consciousness at social level,
- Ensuring and improving cooperation with other industries,
- Determining tourism supply potential,
- Improving tourism industry and producing solutions to the problems of tourism industry.

## **SELÇUK UNIVERSITY FACULTY OF TOURISM**

**Selçuk University, Faculty of Tourism, which is situated on Alaeddin Keykubat Campus of Selçuk University**, started to give education in 2010. Its total number of registered students is 1,088, 299 of whom are studying in Travel and Tourism Management Guidance Department while 789 are attending Tourism Management Department. The purpose of Tourism Management Department is stated as follows: “to educate students as managers of modern hotels and restaurants which provide services to meet all kinds of customer needs, according to contemporary tourism understanding”. The purpose of Travel and Tourism Management Guidance Department, on the other hand, is expressed as follows: “to train staff to work in the field of providing services to tourists, facilities management, and travel services” ([www.selcuk.edu.tr/turizm/tr###](http://www.selcuk.edu.tr/turizm/tr###), 2019). As this study covers the academic year of 2016-2017, it doesn't include the students of the Department of Gastronomy and Culinary Arts of Selcuk University Tourism Faculty, which started to receive students in 2017-2018 academic year.

## **MATERIAL AND METHOD**

The study employed the survey technique. The scale used by Batman and Çankırı (2013) was examined and found relevant to the purpose of the present study. Thus, it was adapted to this study. The scale consists of nine questions for determining demographic information and educational status. There were 19 statements for measuring the tourism students' perceptions of tourism industry. A 5-point Likert-type scale was used for 19 statements. The grading of the scale is as follows: (1) I strongly disagree, (2) I disagree, (3) I am neutral, (4) I agree, and (5) I strongly agree. The survey was administered at Selçuk University Faculty of Tourism in the spring semester of the 2016-2017 academic year. Based on the sample calculation file prepared by Uşak University, for the population comprising of 1,088 individuals, sample size was calculated as 217 with a confidence interval of 90% and an error margin of 5% ([sosbil2.usak.edu.tr](http://sosbil2.usak.edu.tr), 2016). For that reason, an attempt was made to reach the number 217 in the first place. Then that number was exceeded, and 322 survey data were obtained. In this way, it was intended to increase generalizability and reliability. The obtained data were analyzed via SPSS 24.0.

## FINDINGS

### Reliability Analysis

Reliability refers to the degree to which a test or a scale measures the thing it intends to measure consistently and steadily. The data obtained through an unreliable scale are useless (Çokluk et al. 2010, p. 122).

In the present study, a reliability test was administered to 19 statements used in the survey form. The Cronbach's alpha reliability of the scale was calculated to be 88% with an error margin of 5%. According to Özdamar (1999, p. 522), a scale is highly reliable if Cronbach's alpha value is from 0.80 to 1. The reliability test indicated no problem of reliability for analyses and research in the present study.

**Table 1.** Frequency Distribution of Demographic Information

<b>GENDER</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	203	63.0
Female	119	37.0
<b>AGE RANGE</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
18-19	21	6.5
20-21	142	44.1
22-23	121	37.6
24-25	30	9.3
Not less than 26	8	2.5
<b>GRADE POINT AVERAGE (GPA)</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
....-2.50	175	54.3
2.51-3.00	105	32.6
3.01-3.50	29	9.0
Not less than 3.51	13	4.0
<b>GRADE</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> grade	50	15.5
2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	94	29.2
3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	65	20.2
4 <sup>th</sup> grade	113	35.1
<b>EXPERIENCE</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	201	62.4
No	121	37.6
<b>INTERNSHIP</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	196	60.9
No	126	39.1
<b>GRADUATE OF A TOURISM HIGH SCHOOL</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	21	6.5
No	301	93.5
<b>DEPARTMENT</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Travel Management	57	17.7
Tourism Management	265	82.3
<b>PEOPLE INFLUENTIAL ON CHOICE OF DEPARTMENT</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Own Choice	216	67.1
Family	18	5.6
Friends		
School Counselor	26	8.1
By Chance	62	19.3
Graduate of a Foreign Language Section		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>100</b>

As shown in Table 1, 63% of 322 participants were male while 37% were female.

Of the participants, 6.5% were in the 18-19 age range, 44.1% in the 20-21 age range, 37.6% in the 22-23 age range, 9.3% in the 24-25 age range, and 2.5% were not younger than 26 years old.

54.3% of the participants had a GPA of not more than 2.50, 32.6% in the 2.51-3.00 GPA range, 9% in the 3.01-3.50 GPA range, and 4% had a GPA of not less than 3.51.

15.5% of the participants were 1<sup>st</sup> graders, 29.2% 2<sup>nd</sup> graders, 20.2% 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, and 35.1% 4<sup>th</sup> graders.

62.4% of the participants had experience in tourism industry whereas 37.6% did not have experience in tourism industry.

60.9% of the participants had internship experience while 39.1% did not have internship experience.

6.5% of the participants graduated from a tourism high school while 93.5% did not graduate from a tourism high school.

17.7% of the participants were studying in Travel Management Department while 82.3% were studying in Tourism Management Department.

67.1% of the participants stated that getting their department was their own choice. 5.6% said that their department was their family's choice while 8.1% pointed out that the department was their school counselor's choice. Lastly, 19.3% noted that they chose the department by chance.

### **Normality Test Analysis for the Variables Concerning the Tourism Students' Perceptions of Tourism Industry**

This section provides the measurement results of the tourism students' perceptions of tourism industry through the survey used. Whether or not 19 statements aimed at measuring the tourism students' perceptions of tourism industry had a normal distribution was checked. The result of Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test applied for all variables turned out to be 0.000. As it was smaller than 0.05, it was concluded that the data did not have a normal distribution.

Since the data did not have a normal distribution, non-parametric tests were administered in analyses instead of parametric tests. Mann-Whitney U test, which is administered in non-parametric distributions, was applied instead of t-test, which is administered in parametric distributions.

**Table 2.** Mann-Whitney U Test Results for the Tourism Students’ Perception Levels Concerning Tourism Industry Based on the Variables

	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Significance</b>	<b>MWU</b>
<b>1</b>	Mann-Whitney U Test Results for the Tourism Students’ Perception Levels Concerning Tourism Industry Based on Gender	0.268	11186.5
<b>2</b>	Mann-Whitney U Test Results for the Tourism Students’ Perception Levels Concerning Tourism Industry Based on Experience in Tourism Industry	0.000	8641.5
<b>3</b>	Mann-Whitney U Test Results for the Tourism Students’ Perception Levels Concerning Tourism Industry Based on the State of Doing /Not Doing Internship	0.000	9095.5
<b>4</b>	Mann-Whitney U Test Results for the Tourism Students’ Perception Levels Concerning Tourism Industry Based on the State of Being/Not Being a Graduate of a Tourism High School	0.123	2526.0
<b>5</b>	Mann-Whitney U Test Results for the Tourism Students’ Perception Levels Concerning Tourism Industry Based on Department	0.996	7556.0

In Table 2, here are presented the evaluations of the hypotheses formulated to determine whether or not the tourism students’ perception levels concerning tourism industry varied by gender, experience in tourism industry, the state of doing/not doing internship, the state of being/not being a graduate of a tourism high school, and department. To measure relationships between the said variables and the students’ perceptions of tourism industry, non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was applied in the analyses instead of t-test since the normality test did not indicate a normal distribution.

The independent variable of gender included two groups: males and females. The level of significance for the relationship between the students’ perceptions of tourism industry and gender was found to be 0.268 through the Mann-Whitney U test. With this value being over 0.05, it was determined that the students’ perceptions of tourism industry did not vary by gender. Hence, the hypothesis H<sub>1</sub> “There are significant differences between the students’ perception levels concerning tourism industry by gender” was rejected. To the contrary of this finding, Olcay and Çelik (2010) and Aymankuy and Aymankuy (2013) reported that the participants’ perceptions varied by gender.

The independent variable of experience in tourism industry included two groups: yes and no. The level of significance for the relationship between the students’ perceptions of tourism industry and experience in tourism industry was found to be 0.000 through the Mann-Whitney U test. With this value being less than 0.05, it was determined that the students’ perceptions of tourism industry varied by experience in tourism industry. Thus, the hypothesis H<sub>2</sub> “There are significant differences between the students’ perception levels concerning tourism industry by experience in tourism industry” was accepted. The students experienced in tourism industry had higher perception levels compared to those not having experience in tourism industry (Group 1<sup>Level</sup>: Yes, 179.01; Group 2<sup>Level</sup>: No, 132.42).

The independent variable of the state of doing/not doing internship included two groups: yes and no. The level of significance for the relationship between the students’ perceptions of tourism industry and the state of doing/not doing internship was found to be 0.000 through the Mann-Whitney U test. With this value being less than 0.05, it was determined that the students’ perceptions of tourism industry varied by the state of doing/not doing internship. Hence, the hypothesis H<sub>3</sub> “There are significant differences between the students’ perception levels concerning

tourism industry by the state of doing/not doing internship” was accepted. The students doing internship had higher perception levels compared to those not doing internship (Group 1<sup>Level</sup>: Yes, 178.09; Group 2<sup>Level</sup>: No, 135.69). Dolmacı and Duran (2017), Tekbalkan (2015), and Emir (2013) report that students receiving tourism education generally find internship practice very important. Köşker and Unur (2017) and Kaşlı and İlban (2013) indicate that students’ internship experience directly affects their perspectives on their profession. Uslu et al. (2017) note that doing internship in tourism improves individuals in every aspect.

The independent variable of the state of being/not being a graduate of a tourism high school included two groups: yes and no. The level of significance for the relationship between the students’ perceptions of tourism industry and the state of being/not being a graduate of a tourism high school was found to be 0.123 through the Mann-Whitney U test. With this value being over 0.05, it was determined that the students’ perceptions of tourism industry did not vary by the state of being/not being a graduate of a tourism high school. Hence, the hypothesis H<sub>4</sub> “There are significant differences between the students’ perception levels concerning tourism industry by the state of being/not being a graduate of a tourism high school” was rejected. To the contrary of this finding, Üzümcü et al. (2015) point out that graduates of vocational tourism high schools have different perceptions and more realistic expectations about the future of their profession.

The independent variable of department included two groups: tourism management and travel and tourism management guidance. The level of significance for the relationship between the students’ perceptions of tourism industry and department was found to be 0.996 through the Mann-Whitney U test. With this value being over 0.05, it was determined that the students’ perceptions of tourism industry did not vary by department. Hence, the hypothesis H<sub>5</sub> “There are significant differences between the students’ perception levels concerning tourism industry by department” was rejected.

**Table 3.** Kruskal-Wallis H Test Results for the Tourism Students’ Perception Levels Concerning Tourism Industry Based on the Variables

<b>Kruskal-Wallis H Test of the Variables</b>		<b>Significance</b>
<b>1</b>	Kruskal-Wallis H Test Results for the Tourism Students’ Perception Levels Concerning Tourism Industry by Age Range	0.292
<b>2</b>	Kruskal-Wallis H Test Results for the Tourism Students’ Perception Levels Concerning Tourism Industry by Grade	0.813
<b>3</b>	Kruskal-Wallis H Test Results for the Tourism Students’ Perception Levels Concerning Tourism Industry by GPA	0.724
<b>4</b>	Kruskal-Wallis H Test Results for the Tourism Students’ Perception Levels Concerning Tourism Industry by People Influential on Their Choice of Department	0.225

In Table 3, here are presented the evaluations of the hypotheses formulated to determine whether or not the tourism students’ perception levels concerning tourism industry varied by age group, grade, GPA, and people influential on their choice of department. To measure relationships between the said variables and the students’ perceptions of tourism industry, non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis H test was applied in the analyses instead of ANOVA test since the normality test did not indicate a normal distribution.

The variable of age group included five groups: 18-19, 20-21, 22-23, 24-25, and not less than 26. The level of significance was found to be 0.292 through the Kruskal-Wallis H test. With this value being over 0.05, it was determined that the students' perceptions of tourism industry did not vary by age group. Hence, the hypothesis H<sub>6</sub> "There are significant differences between the students' perception levels concerning tourism industry by age group" was rejected.

The variable of grade included four groups: 1<sup>st</sup> grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and 4<sup>th</sup> grade. The level of significance was found to be 0.813 through the Kruskal-Wallis H test. With this value being over 0.05, it was determined that the students' perceptions of tourism industry did not vary by grade. Hence, the hypothesis H<sub>7</sub> "There are significant differences between the students' perception levels concerning tourism industry by grade" was rejected.

The variable of GPA included four groups: 2.00-2.50, 2.51-3.00, 3.01-3.50, and not less than 3.51. The level of significance was found to be 0.724 through the Kruskal-Wallis H test. With this value being over 0.05, it was determined that the students' perceptions of tourism industry did not vary by GPA. Hence, the hypothesis H<sub>8</sub> "There are significant differences between the students' perception levels concerning tourism industry by GPA" was rejected.

The variable of people influential on their choice of department included four groups: own choice, family, school counselor, and by chance. The level of significance was found to be 0.225 through the Kruskal-Wallis H test. With this value being over 0.05, it was determined that the students' perceptions of tourism industry did not vary by people influential on their choice of department. Hence, the hypothesis H<sub>9</sub> "There are significant differences between the students' perception levels concerning tourism industry by people influential on their choice of department" was rejected.

**Table 4.** Table of Accepted and Rejected Hypotheses

	<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Accepted</b>	<b>Rejected</b>
H <sub>1</sub>	There are significant differences between the students' perception levels concerning tourism industry by gender.		X
H <sub>2</sub>	There are significant differences between the students' perception levels concerning tourism industry by experience in tourism industry.	X	
H <sub>3</sub>	There are significant differences between the students' perception levels concerning tourism industry by the state of doing/not doing internship.	X	
H <sub>4</sub>	There are significant differences between the students' perception levels concerning tourism industry by the state of being/not being a graduate of a tourism high school.		X
H <sub>5</sub>	There are significant differences between the students' perception levels concerning tourism industry by department.		X
H <sub>6</sub>	There are significant differences between the students' perception levels concerning tourism industry by age group.		X
H <sub>7</sub>	There are significant differences between the students' perception levels concerning tourism industry by grade.		X
H <sub>8</sub>	There are significant differences between the students' perception levels concerning tourism industry by GPA.		X
H <sub>9</sub>	There are significant differences between the students' perception levels concerning tourism industry by people influential on their choice of department.		X

As shown in Table 4., the hypotheses H<sub>2</sub> “There are significant differences between the students’ perception levels concerning tourism industry by experience in tourism industry.” and H<sub>3</sub> “There are significant differences between the students’ perception levels concerning tourism industry by the state of doing/not doing internship.” were accepted. The other hypotheses H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>4</sub>, H<sub>5</sub>, H<sub>6</sub>, H<sub>7</sub>, H<sub>8</sub>, and H<sub>9</sub> were rejected.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this study, the perception levels of Selcuk University Tourism Faculty students towards tourism sector were tried to be measured. As the study was conducted in 2016-2017 academic year, it does not include the students of the Department of Gastronomy and Culinary Arts which was opened in the academic year of 2017-2018. 322 students participated in the survey. The analyzes for the hypotheses that were formed in accordance with the aim of the study were done with SPSS 24.00 program. According to the results of the analysis, students' perceptions about the sector don't change according to gender. This result differs with the findings of Kuşluyan and Kuşluyan (2000) in the literature. Similarly, student perceptions do not differ according to age groups, classes, grade point average, graduates of tourism high schools, the departments they study and the variables affecting the department selection. In this study, students' perceptions of the sector according to their class differs from Baltacı et al. (2012) and Solmaz and Erdoğan's (2013) studies. Contrary to the other variables, there is a significant difference between the perception levels of the participants according to their experiences in the sector and their internship. It is observed that the students who have experience and internship in the sector have higher level of perception towards the sector. In parallel with this, it is reported in the literature that doing internship in tourism improves individuals in every aspect (Uslu et al., 2017); the internship experience students undergo directly affects their perspective on their profession (Köşker and Unur, 2017; Kaşlı and İlban, 2013); students generally find internship practice very important (Dolmacı and Duran, 2017; Tekbalkan, 2015; Emir, 2013); internship may offer more knowledge and provide students with a perspective on which field is most appropriate for them (Baltescu, 2016); individuals' expectations about the future of their profession get more realistic (Üzümcü et al., 2015); and students consider compulsory internship practice important and necessary (Aymanıky et al., 2013). This result shows that the early acquaintance of the students with the sector increased their perception towards tourism. Similarly, Batman and Çankırı (2013) stated that the majority of students do not have an idea about the functioning of the sector before or during the internship or have a limited idea.

According to the results of the research, it is determined that the experience in the sector is important. It is suggested that the internship, which affects the students' perspective and perception levels, should be made from the first year. In this way, it will be ensured that the students get to know the sector early and to support the theoretical training received at the university by the practice in the internship. At the same time, the student will learn the proficiency of the profession during the internship and will be able to improve the positive negative aspects of the sector.

In the study, the findings of tourism students in the crisis experienced in tourism in 2015/2016 have reached important findings about the sector. These results are important for ensuring the participation of tourism students in the tourism crises that may occur in the following years.

Further studies will be achieved with the inclusion of students of gastronomy and culinary arts and the students of the Department of Tourism Guidance which will be taken with the foreign language score as of 2019-2020 academic year. With current studies, researchers can reach comparative results about students' view of tourism sector after tourism crisis.

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