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Graduates' perceptions of professional preparation and development processes of academics in tourism guiding bachelor's degree at public universities in Türkiye

Türkiye'de kamu üniversitelerinde turizm rehberliği lisans bölümü akademisyen profiline mezun öğrencilerin mesleğe hazırlık ve mesleki gelişim süreçlerine yönelik algıları

Yusuf Acar^{1*}

^{1*}Aksaray University, Faculty of Tourism, Department of Tourism Guiding, yacar1986@gmail.com, 0000-0003-3386-8810

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine graduates' perceptions of professional preparation and development in relation to the license ownership and professional practice status of academics in tourism guiding Bachelor's degree programs at public universities in Türkiye. The study, structured into two phases, was carried out using a qualitative research design. Data on academic profiles were obtained through document review of publicly available authorized websites of the Council of Higher Education and the Union of Tourist Guides of Türkiye and analyzed using document and content analysis. In the graduate-focused part, data were collected using a qualitative form technique. Participants were selected based on criterion sampling, and an online form developed with expert input reached 25 graduates. The collected data were subjected to content analysis using MAXQDA, and three first-level themes were identified. The study is important as it outlines the current situation in Türkiye while adding an updated perspective to the limited literature. Findings show that as of July 2025, 37 tourism guiding Bachelor's degrees exist across 35 public universities among 236 academics with various titles, of whom 98 are licensed. Graduate perceptions indicate that academics effectively support professional preparation and development.

ÖZET

Bu çalışma Türkiye'de kamu üniversitelerinde turizm rehberliği lisans bölümlerinde görev yapan akademisyenlerin ruhsatname sahiplik oranı ve mesleği icra etme durumlarının mezun öğrencilerin mesleğe hazırlık ve mesleki gelişim süreçlerine yönelik algılarının tespit edilmesi amacıyla hazırlanmıştır. İki kısımdan oluşan çalışma nitel araştırma deseni çerçevesinde yürütülmüştür. Akademisyen profillerine yönelik veriler, Yükseköğretim Kurumu ve Turist Rehberleri Birliği'nin kamuya açık resmi web sayfalarından tarama yöntemiyle elde edilerek doküman ve içerik analiziyle çözümlenmiştir. Mezun öğrencilere yönelik araştırma verileri nitel form tekniğiyle elde edilmiştir. Ölçüt örneklem yönteminin kullanıldığı bu aşamada, uzman görüşüyle hazırlanan çevrimiçi formlarla 25 mezuna ulaşılmış ve MAXQDA programı yardımıyla yapılan içerik analizi sonucunda üç birinci düzey tema belirlenmiştir. Çalışma, Türkiye'de konuya ilişkin mevcut durum tespiti ve literatürdeki sınırlı çalışmalara güncel bakış sunması bakımından önemlidir. Akademisyen profiline belirlenmesine yönelik bulgulara; 2025 yılı Temmuz itibarıyla Türkiye'de 35 kamu üniversitesinde toplam 37 turizm rehberliği lisans bölümü bulunmakta, bu bölümlerde farklı unvanlarda görev yapan 236 akademisyenden 98'inin ruhsatname sahibi olduğu anlaşılmaktadır. Mezun öğrenci görüşlerine yönelik elde edilen bulgular ise; eğitim kadrosunun mesleğe hazırlık ve mesleki gelişim süreçleri üzerinde etkili olduğunu kanıtlar niteliktedir.

1. Introduction

Tourist guiding is regarded not only as an information transmission activity but also as a professional occupation that facilitates intercultural interaction, shapes destination perception, and directly influences the visitor experience.

Therefore, the performance of this profession by individuals who possess sufficient knowledge and skills, are well-educated, aware, and competent, significantly contributes to the progress of the tourism sector.

The increasing societal and sectoral expectations toward the

tourist guiding profession have also sparked discussions regarding the scope and quality of education provided in this field. The academic staff holding positions in departments offering tourist guiding education within higher education institutions possess a significant role among the factors that directly influence students' preparation processes for entering the sector. At this stage, it becomes critical that academics possess not only theoretical knowledge but also practical field experience and the competence to perform the profession, as this is a key factor in strengthening the applied dimension of education. Therefore, investigating the professional backgrounds of academics in tourist guiding departments, their involvement in guiding activities, and whether they participate in the profession constitutes a significant area of research. The importance of the present study stems from its analysis of the academic profile in tourism guiding departments at public universities in Türkiye and its contribution to understanding how this profile shapes graduates' professional preparation and development. In this respect, the study offers scholarly value and serves as a basis for informing future policy directions and the design of practical initiatives.

In Türkiye, "*Tourist Guiding Vocational Law No. 6326*" (6326 Sayılı Turist Rehberliği Meslek Kanunu, 2012), The law, enacted on June 7, 2012, and amended on April 17, 2024, granted tourist guiding professional status and established a legal framework for the profession (TUREB. Nasıl rehber olunur [How to become a tourist guide], n.d.; Arslantürk, 2019). According to the Vocational Law, Tourist Guiding Vocational Regulation (Turist Rehberliği Meslek Yönetmeliği, 2024), published in the Official Gazette No. 29217 dated December 26, 2014, and enacted thereafter, outlines the procedures, principles, and necessary regulations for engagement in the profession (Yılmaz, 2019). Furthermore, pursuant to the amendments made to the "*Tourist Guiding Vocational Law No. 6326*" on April 17, 2024, "*Tourist Guiding Vocational Regulation*" was published in the Official Gazette No. 32715 dated November 7, 2024. Based on Article 12 of the Vocational Law, two separate regulations have been prepared: Regulation of the Association of Tourist Guides (Turist Rehberliği Meslek Yönetmeliği, 2024) and Regulation on the Implementation of the Authorities and Duties Granted to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (6326 Sayılı Turist Rehberliği Meslek Kanunu İle Kültür Ve Turizm Bakanlığına Verilen Yetki Ve Görevlerin Uygulanmasına Dair Yönetmelik, 2024) by the Tourist Guiding Vocational Law No. 6326 TUREB. (n.d.). Yönetmelikler [Regulations], n.d.).

Since the terms license, work card, active tourist guide, and inactive tourist guide are frequently used throughout the study, they are presented in accordance with their definitions in the "*Tourist Guiding Vocational Law No. 6326* and *Tourist Guiding Vocational Regulation*".

According to the "*Tourist Guiding Vocational Law No. 6326* and the *Tourist Guiding Vocational Regulation*", a "license" is defined as "the document issued by the Ministry to tourist guides who meet the profession's admission requirements"; a "work card" is defined as "the permit granted by the chamber to active tourist guides, valid for one year, authorizing them to

perform the profession". Furthermore, an "active tourist guide" is defined as "a guide with a work card and authorized to provide tourist guiding services", whereas an "inactive tourist guide" is "one who has a license but does not possess a work card" (6326 Sayılı Turist Rehberliği Meslek Kanunu, 2012. m.2; Turist Rehberliği Meslek Yönetmeliği, 2024, m.3).

According to the amendments made to the "*Tourist Guiding Vocational Law No. 6326*" and the relevant regulations, in order to become a professional tourist guide in Türkiye, it is primarily required to graduate from one of the associate degree, Bachelor's degree, or thesis/non-thesis postgraduate programs that offer education in tourist guiding. In addition to the graduation requirement, candidates are required to participate in practical field training tours and successfully complete at least one regional tour, as well as demonstrate foreign language proficiency. With the recent amendment to the law, a new provision has been introduced that allows graduates of tourist guiding programs who fail to meet the foreign language requirement to obtain a license as Turkish-speaking guides, provided they complete the required field training tours. The professional qualification exams are mandatory assessments that tourism guiding graduates must take prior to applying for a license. Once all required conditions are met, the application for the license is to be submitted to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Training programs are to be conducted by institutions and organizations authorized by the Ministry (6326 Sayılı Turist Rehberliği Meslek Kanunu, 2012, m.2,3; Turist Rehberliği Meslek Yönetmeliği, 2024, m.3-4-5; TUREB Nasıl rehber olunur [How to become a tourist guide], n.d.).

From this perspective, the study aims to examine, within the framework of graduates' perceptions of professional preparation and development, the relationship between academics in tourism guiding Bachelor's Degree programs at public universities in Türkiye and the guiding profession. It seeks to reveal the connection between the professional licensing system and the academic world and to discuss more concretely how academics contribute to preparing competent professional tourist guides.

2. Theoretical Framework

The term "*profession*", etymologically, means to proclaim something aloud or make it public. From this perspective, professionals transform a certain type of activity and behavior, for which they have been trained and are expected to adhere to, into a "profession". Therefore, the essence of a profession can be understood as the promise, commitment, and dedication directed toward a specific purpose (Pellegrino, 2002, p. 379).

According to Flexner (2001), the six criteria necessary for evaluating a profession within the scope of professionalism are as follows:

- Being associated with individual responsibility
- Learning based on a comprehensive body of knowledge
- Theoretical knowledge that can be reproduced
- Educational discipline and teachable techniques

- Well-structured organization
- Through altruism, members of the profession are willing to help each other and contribute to the welfare of society.

Due to variations in legal regulations regarding participation in professional tourist guiding across countries, examining studies conducted specifically in Türkiye is of greater significance for accurately determining the current situation. A review of the relevant literature demonstrates that academic study focusing on the license ownership required for academics affiliated with universities under the Higher Education Council to engage as professional tourist guides and categorizing these academics according to various criteria, remains extremely limited.

In the research conducted by Baytok et al., (2019, pp. 1038, 1045, 1046) which examined the profiles of 271 academics serving in tourism/tourist guiding departments at universities in Türkiye, it was reported that these academics were registered with 11 distinct chambers of tourist guide; 21.4% of them possessed a tourist guiding work card, of which 62.1% were actively using their work cards. Additionally, professional tourist guiding was predominantly conducted in English, accounting for 82.8% of the cases. Based on insights gained from the literature, no studies other than the one conducted by Baytok et al., (2019) were found regarding license ownership among academics at universities in Türkiye. When examining studies related to the tourism/tourist guiding profession and education in Türkiye, it is understood that the research conducted by (Akdu, 2022; Avciokurt et al., 2009; Cansu & Tanrısever, 2020; Ceylan & Padır, 2022; Çetin & Kızıllırmak, 2012; Çokişler, 2022; Değirmencioğlu, 2001; Eker & Zengin, 2016; Güzel et al., 2014; Okumuş & Yagci, 2005; Pelit et al., 2023; Şengel & Demiroğlu, 2024, Temizkan & Ergün, 2018;) extensively discuss topics such as the current state of tourism guiding education in Türkiye, curricula, legislation, professional challenges faced by guides, and solution proposals to enhance the quality of guiding education.

3. Methods

3.1. Study Design

The study, consisting of two parts, was conducted using a qualitative research design. Data on academic profiles, which form the first part of the study, were obtained through a document review of publicly available official web pages of the Council of Higher Education and the Association of Tourist Guides, and were analyzed using document and content analysis methods.

3.2. Data Collection and Sample

In the section addressing graduates, data were gathered through a qualitative survey technique. At this stage, 25 graduates were contacted via an online form developed in line with expert opinion, based on criterion sampling. The dataset was subjected to content analysis using the MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software. The online form first required participants to have graduated from tourism guiding Bachelor's Degree programs at public universities in Türkiye.

Participants who did not meet this requirement were not allowed to complete the form, and their participation ended at this stage. For those who met the requirement, the second stage of the form collected information on graduates' knowledge regarding whether the academics who taught their courses held a tourist guide license and participated the profession. Graduates who stated that they had knowledge on this topic were included in the study, while those who did not, or selected "no" were excluded. Therefore, all participants included in the analysis (n=25) reported having this knowledge.

Data collected via the online form from participants were examined comprehensively through content analysis. This type of analysis allows the systematic categorization of the data, identification of themes, and the subjective interpretation of the content (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The reason for employing criterion sampling in the graduate-focused phase of the study is that the method ensures that the sample possesses the characteristics relevant to the research problem (Palinkas et al., 2015). In this study, this specifically means that participants had to have graduated from tourism guiding programs at public universities. From a qualitative research perspective, the adequacy of sample size depends not solely on participant numbers but also on the depth and richness of the data (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013). Additionally, participants are included until theoretical saturation occurs, meaning that further data collection yields no novel insights (Grady, 1998), and the minimum number of participants is recommended to be 20 (Green & Thorogood, 2018). Based on these criteria, 25 participants were included in the study.

Data on graduates' perceptions and evaluations regarding whether academics in tourism guiding Bachelor's Degree programs at public universities in Türkiye have a tourist guide license and engagement in the profession were collected using an online form. The form, prepared based on expert opinions, included three open-ended questions, five closed-ended questions, and a demographic section.

The study data were collected following approval from the Ethics Committee for Human Research at Aksaray University, Türkiye (Approval Date: 18.11.2025, Protocol Number: 2025-490). Data from the online form, in which participants confirmed their voluntary participation, were collected between 20.11.2025 and 02.02.2026, reaching a total of 25 graduate students.

In line with the study objectives, the online form included the following three open-ended questions aimed at determining graduates' perceptions regarding whether academics in the tourism guiding departments of the public universities they graduated from having a tourist guide license and perform the profession.

- In what ways do you think the training you received from academics with a tourist guide license who actively practicing the profession during your Bachelor's education contributed to your professional development?
- In what ways do you think the training you received from academics without a tourist guide license during your Bachelor's education affected your Professional

development?

- When you compare the training received from academics who have a tourist guide license but are not professionally active during your Bachelor's education, what distinction did you observe in terms of professional preparation?

Researchers can use various methods to demonstrate the reliability of a qualitative study. In qualitative research, providing comprehensive and systematic information about the entire research process is generally considered important for ensuring the reliability of the study (Kozak, 2017).

3.3. Ethical Statements

The study data were collected following approval from the Ethics Committee for Human Research at Aksaray University, Türkiye (Approval Date: 18.11.2025, Protocol Number: 2025-490). Data from the online form, in which participants confirmed their voluntary participation, were collected between 20.11.2025 and 02.02.2026, reaching a total of 25 graduate students.

4. Results

4.1. Results Related to Academics

In order to access data related to academics, as of July 2025, data were collected regarding Bachelor's programs in Tourism Guidance at public universities in Türkiye that actively admit students with the aim of training tourist guides, as well as information concerning the academic staff occupying positions in these departments. During the data collection stage, the full list of Bachelor's programs in Tourism Guidance offered by public universities in Türkiye was obtained by entering the term "Tourism Guidance" into the "Bachelor's" search section of the Higher Education Council's publicly accessible official website, YÖK Lisans Atlası, which provides up-to-date information on academic programs (YÖK Lisans Atlası Turizm Rehberliği Bölümü bulunan tüm üniversiteler [All universities offering Bachelor's programs in Tourism Guidance], n.d.-a). Subsequently, by accessing the relevant public university's page on the YÖK Lisans Atlası website, the list of academics possessing positions in the Tourism Guidance department of that university was obtained from the "Academic Staff" section under the heading "Higher Education Input Indicators" (YÖK Lisans Atlası. Yükseköğretim girdi göstergeleri: Akademik kadro [Higher Education Input Indicators 2024 YKS: Academic Staff], n.d.-b; YÖK Akademik Search, n.d.).

After obtaining up-to-date data on the tourism guiding Bachelor's degree programs actively admitting students for tourist guide training at public universities in Türkiye and the academics serving in positions in these departments, the "Guide Database" section on the official institutional website of TUREB was accessed. Using the "Search by Name and Surname" feature, each academic's license ownership possession of a work card, allowing them to carry out professional activities, were individually verified (TUREB, Rehber Veritabanı, [Guide Database], n.d.).

The collected data were analyzed through qualitative methods, including document analysis and thematic interpretation, to

produce the research outcomes. Structuring the study in this manner allowed for a systematic examination of existing documents in the field and enabled a detailed analysis of the recognized themes. During the content analysis stage, the data were initially categorized according to themes, and the categories were subsequently reviewed to ensure accuracy and consistency.

Table 1. License ownership status of academics in bachelor's degree programs in tourist guiding at public universities in Türkiye

Number of Academics	License Ownership Status		Total (%)
	Licensed (%)	Unlicensed (%)	
236	98 (41.53%)	138 (58.47%)	236 (100%)

Source: Compiled from YÖK Lisans Atlası, n.d.-a; YÖK Akademik Search, n.d.; YÖK Lisans Atlası, n.d.-b; TUREB, Rehber Veritabanı, n.d.

According to data from YÖK, as of July 2025, there are 37 Bachelor's degree programs in Tourist Guiding across 35 public universities in Türkiye, with 236 academics possessing various academic titles assigned to these departments (YÖK Lisans Atlası, n.d.-a; YÖK Lisans Atlası, n.d.-b).

According to Table 1, as of July 2025, a total of 236 faculty members are appointed to positions under various academic titles in the Bachelor's degree programs in Tourist Guiding at public universities in Türkiye. Of these faculty members, 98 (41.53%) have a professional guiding license, while 138 (58.47%) do not. In Bachelor's degree programs such as tourist guiding, which require both expertise and field experience, a higher rate of academics who are licensed is expected to raise educational standards and greatly support the development of well-qualified professional tourist guide candidates.

According to Table 2, as of July 2025, among these, Assistant Professors constitute the largest group, with 36 members (36.74%), of whom 23 are active, and 13 are inactive. It is understood that the license ownership rates among academics are followed respectively by Associate Professors, Research Assistants, Professors, and Lecturers. The relatively low rate of license ownership among professors suggests that, in the later stages of their academic careers, they participate less in field engagement and face an increased administrative workload. On the other hand, the high rate of active professional experience among research assistants and faculty

Table 2. Active and inactive professional status of academics licensed as tourist guides

Academic Title	Active Tourist Guide		Inactive tourist guide		Total	
	n	% ^a	n	% ^b	n	%
Professor	7	7.14	6	6.12	13	13.26
Associate Professor	16	16.33	8	8.16	24	24.49
Assistant Professor	23	23.47	13	13.27	36	36.74
Lecturer	2	2.04	-	-	2	2.04
Research Assistant	17	17.35	6	6.12	23	23.47
Total	65	66.33%	33	33.67%	98	100%

Source: Compiled from YÖK Lisans Atlası, n.d.-a; YÖK Akademik Search, n.d.; YÖK Lisans Atlası, n.d.-b; TUREB, Rehber Veritabanı, n.d.

^{a,b}: Percentages are calculated based on the total number of license-holding academics (n=98).

Table 3. Distribution of licensed academics by their affiliated chamber of tourist guides

Chambers of Tourist Guides	Active Tourist Guide		Inactive Tourist Guide		Total	
	n	% ^c	n	% ^d	n	%
Ankara Chamber of Tourist Guides (ANRO)	15	15.31	2	2.04	17	17.35
İzmir Chamber of Tourist Guides (İZRO)	10	10.20	2	2.04	12	12.24
Şanlıurfa Regional Chamber of Tourist Guides (ŞURO)	8	8.16	3	3.06	11	11.22
İstanbul Chamber of Tourist Guides (IRO)	8	8.16	3	3.06	11	11.22
Nevşehir Chamber of Tourist Guides (NERO)	7	7.14	4	4.08	11	11.22
Antalya Chamber of Tourist Guides (ARO)	2	2.04	8	8.16	10	10.20
Çanakkale Regional Chamber of Tourist Guides (ÇARO)	4	4.08	5	5.10	9	9.18
Aydın Chamber of Tourist Guides (ATRO)	5	5.10	1	1.02	6	6.12
Muğla Chamber of Tourist Guides (MUTRO)	1	1.02	3	3.06	4	4.08
Adana Regional Chamber of Tourist Guides (ADRO)	3	3.06	-	-	3	3.06
Trabzon Regional Chamber of Tourist Guides (TRO)	1	1.02	2	2.04	3	3.06
Gaziantep Regional Chamber of Tourist Guides (GARO)	1	1.02	-	-	1	1.02
Total	65	66.33%	33	33.67%	98	100%

Source: Compiled from (TUREB, Rehber Veritabanı, [Guide Database], n.d.) <https://www.tureb.org.tr/RehberVeritabanı>.

^{c,d}: Percentages are calculated based on the total number of license-holding academics (n=98).

Table 4. Data on foreign languages listed in the professional licenses of academics

Foreign Languages	Active Tourist Guide		Inactive Tourist Guide		Total	
	n	% ^e	n	% ^f	n	%
English	58	59.18	30	30.61	88	89.80
German	1	1.02	1	1.02	2	2.04
Italian, English	2	2.04	-	-	2	2.04
French, English	2	2.04	-	-	2	2.04
Bulgarian, Russian, English	-	-	1	1.02	1	1.02
Russian	1	1.02	-	-	1	1.02
Japanese, English	-	-	1	1.02	1	1.02
Russian, English	1	1.02	-	-	1	1.02
Total	65	66.33%	33	33.67%	98	100%

Source: Compiled from TUREB, Rehber Veritabanı, [Guide Database], n.d.)

^{e,f}: Percentages are calculated based on the total number of license-holding academics (n=98).

members at the rank of Assistant Professor reflect their tendency to gain field experience prior to academic advancement. This shows a natural relationship between academic rank and professional engagement.

An examination of Table 3, which displays the distribution of licensed academics by their affiliated Chambers of Tourist Guides, reveals that these academics are registered with a total of 12 separate chambers, with the highest number of registrations, 17 members (17.35%), belonging to Ankara Chamber of Tourist Guides (ANRO). This situation reflects the widespread presence of undergraduate-level tourism guiding programs and professional chambers across various regions and provinces of Türkiye.

According to Table 4, which presents data on the foreign languages listed on the licenses of the academic staff, it is understood that 89.80% of them are licensed to guide only in English, and a total of seven varied foreign languages are represented. This situation is thought to be related to the emphasis placed on English in the curricula during tourist guiding education. However, in the context of Türkiye's diverse tourism markets, the diversification of foreign language skills presents a significant potential for enhancing the professional competencies of both academics and students.

4.2. Results Related to Graduates' Perceptions of Professional Preparation and Development

In this section, demographic, professional, and knowledge-level data, along with participants' responses obtained from the online form, are presented holistically using content analysis.

A review of the background profile of the graduates participating in the study indicates that most respondents are female, with women comprising 60% (n=15) and men 40% (n=10) of the sample. An examination of the age distribution shows that most respondents fall within the 21-25 age range (n=18). This reveals that a significant portion of the sample consists of recent graduates who can reflect on their Bachelor's education experiences in a current and relevant manner.

An examination of the year of graduation shows that the majority of participants graduated in 2021 or later (n=19). This finding reflects that the study provides strong data for examining current approaches to education, existing academic staff structures, and recent professional preparation processes. At the same time, the inclusion of participants who graduated in earlier years allows for the indirect assessment of changes that have occurred over time.

An examination of graduates' knowledge regarding whether the academics who taught their courses held a tourist guide license and were professionally active shows that all participants included in the analysis (n=25) had knowledge of these topics. However, this should not be interpreted as a finding; it resulted from a filtering process applied during the research. Initially, only participants who met the requirement of having graduated from tourism guiding Bachelor's Degree programs at public universities in Türkiye were considered. Subsequently, only those graduates who reported that they had knowledge about academics' license status and professional activity were included in the study. Therefore, the 100% distribution in the table reflects the sampling and analysis

Table 5. Demographic findings related to graduates

Demographic Variables	Category	f	%
Gender	Female	15	60
	Male	10	40
	Prefer not to say	-	-
	Total	25	100
Age	20 and under	-	-
	21-25	18	72
	26-30	1	4
	31-35	2	8
	36 and over	4	16
	Total	25	100
Graduated from a Public University Tourism Guiding Department	Yes	25	100
	No	-	-
	Total	25	100
Year of Graduation	2010 and earlier	4	16
	2011-2015	1	4
	2016-2020	1	4
	2021 and later	19	76
	Total	25	100

Source: Created by author

Table 6. Graduates' knowledge levels regarding academics' tourist guide license and professional status

Knowledge Levels	Category	f	%
Regarding Academics' Tourist Guide License	Yes	25	100
	No	-	-
	Not Sure	-	-
	Total	25	100
Regarding Academics' Tourist Guide License and Professional Status	Yes	25	100
	No	-	-
	Not Sure	-	-
	Total	25	100

Source: Created by author

criteria rather than participants' awareness levels. This approach demonstrates that participant evaluations are based on direct observation and experience rather than assumptions, which strengthens the validity and internal consistency of the comparisons presented in the qualitative findings.

An examination of the findings regarding graduates' professional status shows that a significant portion of the participants were not actively involved in the tourism sector after graduation. Of the participants, 40% (n=10) reported working in the tourism sector after graduation, while 60% (n=15) reported that they were not employed in the sector. Regarding graduates' tourist guide license ownership, 28% (n=7) of participants have a license, whereas 72% (n=18) did not. Similarly, when examining graduates' active tour guiding status, 20% (n=5) were regularly conducting tours, 8% (n=2) conducted tours occasionally, and 72% (n=18) did not conduct tours. Overall, the limited participation of the sample in the tourism sector provides a meaningful context, suggesting that the perceptions of professional development and preparation presented in the study reflect the quality of the education process rather than practical experience.

Within the study, the responses of graduates to the three open-ended questions in the online forms were coded, resulting in a hierarchical code-subcode model covering all questions, with a total of 165 codes generated. Based on this coding, three first-level themes were identified: "Contribution to Professional Development, Impact on Professional Development and Differences".

Table 7. Findings on graduates' professional status

Professional Variable	Category	f	%
Working in the Tourism Sector After Graduation	Yes	10	40
	No	15	60
	Total	25	100
	Yes	7	28
Graduates' Tourist Guide License Ownership	No	18	72
	Total	25	100
	Yes	5	20
Graduates' Active Tour Guiding Status	No	18	72
	Sometimes	2	8
	Total	25	100

Source: Created by author

According to Table 8, based on the content analysis, nine second-level themes and forty-four third-level themes were identified under the first-level theme, 'Contribution to Professional Development'. This structure was represented by a total of 75 codes.

The findings demonstrate that graduates perceive the education they received from academics who are licensed as tourist guides and actively practicing the profession during their Bachelor's studies as a multidimensional contributor to their professional development. Under the first-level theme, "Contribution to Professional Development" represented by a total of 75 frequencies, the distribution of sub-themes demonstrates that the contribution extends beyond mere knowledge transfer, encompassing various dimensions such as mentorship, motivation, practical experience, professional identity, and professional conduct. Among the second-level themes, the highest frequency theme, "Mentorship, Role Model, and Inspiration" is particularly noteworthy, as it highlights the guiding and directing role of actively practicing academics from the perspective of graduates. Following this, themes related to theory-practice integration, psychological empowerment, crisis and stress management, and professional knowledge and domain mastery highlights that the translation of academics' field experience into the educational process strengthens graduates' perceptions of professional competence. Although represented with lower frequencies, the sub-themes of professional identity, career orientation, ethical attitude, and professional conduct are also content-wise significant. They suggest that academics actively practicing the profession are perceived as key reference points in shaping graduates' long-term professional perspectives and attitudes toward the profession. This underscores that practitioner-academics are not only effective in imparting short-term skills but also serve a pivotal function in fostering professional values and shaping professional identity.

Overall, the thematic structure reveals that academics who actively active tour guides contribute to graduates' professional development at cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels, with this contribution being particularly pronounced in the dimensions of mentorship, experiential learning, and motivational support.

According to the content analysis of the data presented in Table 9, under the first-level theme "Impact on Professional Development" two second-level themes were identified, along with eight third-level themes and twenty fourth-level themes. This structure was represented by a total of 43 codes.

Table 8. Graduates' perceptions of the contribution of academics with a tourist guide license and actively engaging in the profession to their professional development

Code System	Frequency
First-Level Theme	
Contribution to Professional Development	75
Second-Level Theme	
Mentorship, Role Model and Inspiration	22
Third-Level Theme	
Guiding with professional experience	10
Gaining ideas for development while acquiring the profession	3
Providing professional counselling and guidance	3
Strengthening positive attitudes towards the profession	2
Inspiring with experience	2
Being a source of inspiration for the profession	1
Serving as a role model for the profession	1
Theory-Practice Integration and Applied Learning	9
Building bridges between knowledge and experience	4
Combining theory and experience to enhance development	2
Strengthening experience through professional practice	2
Gaining field practice through real-world experience	1
Psychological Empowerment and Motivational Effects	8
Strengthening professional commitment	2
Strengthening love for the profession	1
Strengthening passion for the profession	1
Increasing professional self-confidence	1
Changing professional perception in a positive direction	1
Building courage to practise the profession	1
Eliminating indecision about the profession	1
Coping with Difficulties, Crisis and Stress Management	8
Strengthening crisis management in the profession	3
Dealing with more realistic problems	3
Helping to overcome professional stress	2
Professional Knowledge, General Culture and Domain Mastery	8
Improving comprehension of theoretical lessons	3
Enhancing professional development with detailed tour information	1
Increasing field knowledge relevant to the profession	1
Ensuring professional relevance and up-to-date knowledge	1
Gaining a better understanding and grasp of the profession	1
Enhancing general cultural knowledge	1
Professional Identity, Vision and Career Orientation	7
Gaining open-minded perspectives on the future of the profession	2
Understanding which areas require development	2
Establishing a professional identity	2
Clarifying the professional vision	2
Gaining a realistic professional perspective	2
Strengthening professional awareness	2
Tour Execution Skills and Operational Competencies	6
Developing field command skills	2
Strengthening visitor communication	1
Gaining experience by imparting the tricks of the trade	1
Instilling detailed tour responsibility	1
Strengthening tour management skills	1
Preparation for the Profession, Transition to Adaptation and Acquisition of Equipment	4
Mastering the career preparation process	2
Adapting to the profession more quickly	1
Ensuring a well-equipped start to the profession	1
Ethics, Professional Attitude and Professional Conduct	3
Serving as a guide through professional conduct	1
Instilling professional style	1
Instilling professional ethics	1

Source: Created by author

An examination of graduates' perceptions regarding the impact of education received from academics without a tourist guide license on professional development reflects that this

education was predominantly evaluated in terms of negative effects, although limited positive contributions were also reported. The majority of the 43 codes were grouped under the

negative impact theme, suggesting that participants' perceptions were shaped within a distinctly critical framework. Findings related to negative effects were particularly concentrated on the retention of learning outcomes, theory-practice misalignment, and the incorrect or incomplete understanding of the profession. Participants stated that education received from non-licensed academics did not directly contribute to professional development, that theoretical knowledge had limited applicability in the field, and that this situation led to learning the profession primarily through assumptions rather than practical experience.

Moreover, the professional content was perceived as insufficient in terms of currency and practical experience, which contributed to the education being regarded as

superficial and limited in fostering professional depth. Nevertheless, some participants noted that this academic staff provided limited positive contributions through the transmission of theoretical knowledge, cognitive enrichment, and exposure to different perspectives. In particular, the detailed delivery of theoretical information and the provision of a multidimensional perspective on the profession were considered among the positive aspects of this education. However, it was emphasized that these contributions were insufficient to fully support professional development due to the lack of practical and field experience.

Overall, it can be concluded that education received from academics without a tourist guide license had an impact on professional development primarily at a theoretical level,

Table 9. Graduates' perceptions of the impact of academics without a tourist guide license on their professional development

First-Level Theme	Code System	Frequency
Impact on Professional Development		43
Second-Level Theme		
Negative Impact		
	Third-Level Theme	
	Learning Outcomes and Retention Issues	8
	Fourth-Level Theme	
	Failure to contribute to professional development	5
	Inadequate reinforcement of the profession	2
	Impeding the retention of knowledge	1
	Theory-Field Discrepancy and the Reality Gap	6
	The contrast between theory and real-world experience	3
	Perceiving the profession solely in theoretical terms	2
	Perceiving the profession based on assumptions	1
	Lack of Up-to-Date Professional Content and Experience	3
	The development of insufficient professional depth hinders progress.	2
	Superficial transfer of professional knowledge leads to insecurity.	1
	Insufficient Content Quality and Depth	2
	The development of insufficient professional depth hinders progress.	1
	Superficial transfer of professional knowledge leads to insecurity.	1
	Career Guidance and Perception Biases	7
	Misleading perceptions of the profession	4
	Incorrect guidance regarding the profession	2
	Inadequate professional information	1
	Learning Climate and Discipline Issues	2
	Failure to instil professional learning discipline	1
	Undermining the seriousness of professional learning	1
Positive Impact		
	Social Capital and Multidimensional Development Support	4
	Supporting development through social networks	2
	Supporting non-work-related development	2
	Cognitive-Theoretical Enrichment and Professional Perspective Expansion	11
	Gaining more detailed theoretical knowledge	7
	Providing different perspectives on the profession	3
	Ensuring professional motivation through theory	1

Source: Created by author

Table 10. Graduates' perceived differences concerning licensed academics not actively conducting tours

Code System		Frequency
First-Level Theme Differences		47
Second-Level Theme		
Field-Based Competence and "On-the-Job" Problem Solving		13
Third-Level Theme		
Conveying and imparting real-life experience		9
Strengthening group management and control		1
Conveying the subtleties of the profession that are not covered in theory		1
Ability to solve immediate professional problems		1
Teaching how to deal with professional problems		1
Theory-Experience Integration and Transfer of Current/Valid Knowledge		12
Ensuring harmony between theory and experience		8
Competence in imparting knowledge and experience		2
Transferring up-to-date professional knowledge and experience		2
Mentoring, Counselling and Career Guidance		9
Motivation to learn the profession		3
Career guidance and counselling		2
Communication of the advantages and disadvantages of the profession		2
Motivation to teach the profession		2
Building Professional Identity, Style and Professional Demeanour		9
Conveying the psychological and technical characteristics of the profession		5
Changing the professional perspective		2
Creating a professional style and identity		2
Educational Communication and Management of the Learning Process		4
Vocational training communication skills		2
Instilling confidence in teaching the profession		1
Preparing for the profession in a balanced and disciplined manner		1

Source: Created by author

while demonstrating inadequacies in terms of practical application, guidance, and alignment with professional realities.

According to the data presented in Table 10, content analysis identified five second-level themes under the first-level theme of "Differences" with 18 third-level sub-themes associated with these. This structure is represented by a total of 47 codes. Education received from academics licensed as tour guides who do not actively conduct tours was evaluated by participants in terms of variations in professional preparation. The findings, represented by a total of 47 codes, show significant divergences in the professional preparation process, particularly in field-based competencies, theory-practice integration, mentoring and guidance, and professional identity development. Participant responses highlight that education provided by academics who actively conducting tour is perceived as stronger in terms of conveying real-world experience and offering opportunities for on-the-job learning. In particular, the transfer of actual field experience, the acquisition of practical nuances not covered in theory, and the development of problem-solving skills for immediate professional challenges are determined as key factors that make a notable variation in the professional preparation process.

Alignment between theory and practice was observed by participants as another important area of divergence. While licensed academics but do not actively conduct tours were considered sufficient in conveying theoretical knowledge, participants noted limitations in presenting this knowledge in

an up-to-date, valid, and field-integrated manner. In contrast, academics who actively working in the tour guiding field were perceived to provide a more holistic learning process by supporting theoretical knowledge with field activities. Furthermore, significant distinctions were observed in mentoring, advising, and career guidance. Participants reported that licensed academics who have current field experience convey the advantages and disadvantages of the profession more realistically, enhance professional motivation, and provide more practical guidance regarding career development. Finally, field-based experience was found to be decisive in the development of professional identity, professional stance, and occupation-specific style. The transfer of psychological and technical aspects of the profession through practical examples from the field shapes participants' perspectives on the profession and contributes to their preparation in a more conscious, balanced, and disciplined manner.

Overall, it can be stated that education received from licensed academics who have limited field experience is perceived as adequate at the theoretical level, yet limited in terms of practical application, realism, and professional guidance during the professional preparation process. Based on the responses of graduates from public university tourism guiding programs who voluntarily participated in the study, it is evident that academics' license ownership and professional experience play a decisive role in shaping graduates' perceptions of professional preparation and development, particularly causing meaningful discrepancies in field-related activities and sectoral experience.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

This study holistically examined the impact of academics' tourist guiding license ownership and their field experience in tourism guiding bachelor's degree programs at public universities in Türkiye on graduates' perceptions of their professional preparation and professional development processes. The findings obtained within the scope of the study reveal a meaningful and multifaceted association between the professional profile of the academic staff and graduates' perceptions of their professional development.

Findings regarding academic profiles show that a substantial proportion of academics working in tourism guiding bachelor's degree programs at public universities in Türkiye are not licensed as tourist guides and not all licensed academics have current field experience. As of July 2025, only 41.53% of 236 academics were found to have a license, and 66.33% of this licensed group were actively engaged in guiding. This situation points to a clear divergence between the academic structure and professional experience in the field.

Findings derived from the content analysis based on graduates' views clearly demonstrate that academics' license ownership and their active field experience play a decisive role in shaping graduates' perceptions of their professional development. Education received from academics who are both licensed and have professional involvements predominantly perceived by graduates as a factor contributing positively to their professional development.

In this context, the findings under the first-level theme of Contribution to Professional Development suggests that these academics stand out particularly through their functions as mentors, role models, and sources of inspiration. Graduates reported that the direct transfer of professional experience by these academics increased their awareness of the profession and shaped their professional orientation. Furthermore, contributions in areas such as theory-practice integration, crisis and stress management, tour execution skills, and professional identity development demonstrate that education grounded in field experience produces more meaningful and lasting learning outcomes for graduates. In contrast, the effects of education received from academics who do not have a tourist guiding license were evaluated primarily under the theme of Impact on Professional Development, and this impact was largely perceived as negative. In particular, issues such as the mismatch between theory and activities, the lack of up-to-date professional content, and concerns regarding the retention of learning outcomes were prominent in graduates' views. Graduates emphasized that conveying the profession solely at a theoretical level remains insufficient in preparing them for the real challenges encountered in the field. Nevertheless, it cannot be argued that academics without a tourist guiding license are perceived as entirely ineffective. Their contributions, particularly in terms of cognitive-theoretical enrichment and providing diverse professional perspectives, were evaluated by graduates within the scope of positive impact. This finding reveals that academic knowledge maintains its importance as a component that supports professional activities; however, it is not considered sufficient

on its own. The Differences theme clearly revealed the distinction perceived by graduates between licensed academics with direct professional involvement and those without. According to graduates, these variations are concentrated in areas such as the development of field-based competencies, theory-experience integration, mentorship and career guidance, as well as the construction of professional identity and professional stance. In particular, it was emphasized that "learning by doing" and the ability to solve real-time professional problems are conveyed more effectively through academics who have direct professional involvement.

These findings indicate that, by its very nature, tourism guiding education requires a practice-oriented structure and that the relationship established between the academic staff and the sector directly affects the quality of education. Graduate perceptions suggest that academics should be regarded not only as transmitters of theoretical knowledge but also as actors who provide professional guidance, serve as role models, and reflect the real conditions of the profession.

5.1. Academic Implications

- Academics to be appointed in tourism guiding bachelor's degree programs should, as far as possible, be selected from individuals who have a professional tourist guiding license and have professional involvement or the teaching loads of academics with these qualifications should be increased.
- Practice-oriented educational models that support theoretical courses with field experience should be expanded.
- Sectoral experience should be considered as a criterion in academic promotion and evaluation processes.
- University-sector collaboration should be strengthened to encourage academics to maintain active engagement with the field.

5.2. Sectoral Implications

- Professional tourist guides should be more actively involved in academic processes.
- Joint training, mentoring, and practice-oriented programs should be developed between tourist guide chambers and universities.
- Internships, field trips, and field-based learning activities that facilitate graduates' transition into the profession should be expanded.

5.3. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study is limited to academics working in tourism guiding bachelor's degree programs at public universities in Türkiye and to graduates of these programs. Foundation (private) universities and associate degree tourism guiding programs fell outside the scope of the study. In addition, graduate views were limited to a specific number of participants, and qualitative data collection methods were employed. Future studies may contribute to more comprehensive findings by including foundation universities and associate degree

programs, conducting analyses on larger samples using quantitative methods, and examining the relationship between academic profile and graduate employment outcomes.

Ethics Statement: The study data were collected following approval from the Ethics Committee for Human Research at Aksaray University, Türkiye (Approval date: 18.11.2025, protocol number: 2025-490). If an opposing situation is recognized, all accountability lies with the author(s), and TO&RE Journal assumes no responsibility.

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Conflict of Interest: As the study has a single author, there is no conflict of interest.

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