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ADVANCES IN GLOBAL SERVICES AND RETAIL MANAGEMENT

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Dr. Cihan Cobanoglu

Dr. Valentina Della Corte



Co-Editors

Dr. Cihan Cobanoglu, University of South Florida, USA
Dr. Valentina Della Corte**,** University of Naples Federico II, Italy

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An Exploratory Study on Cognitive Internship Perception of Tourism Students

Özge Büyük[1] and Gülşah Akkuş[2]

[1]Ezine Vocational School
Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey

[2]Faculty of Tourism
İzmir Katip Çelebi University, Turkey

Abstract

Tourism and hospitality education fills the need of skilled employees for tourism industry. Turkey has many vocational schools which provide the qualified personnel need. Students training in these institutions concerned carry out compulsory internships in tourism enterprises. Internship is a beneficial process that leads students the opportunity to transform their theoretical knowledge into practice. However, many problems exist during the internship. During this period, interns recognize both the sector and themselves further. Positive perceptions of internship period increase the willingness of students to work in the tourism industry after graduation. So defining the students' perceptions and complaints during the internship and determining positive and negative aspects is of great importance. This study aims to determine the cognitive perceptions of students' internship and whether different before and after this stage. Qualitative data which was collected by Word Association Test (WAT) analyzed with MAXQDA Software. According to the results, the perception of students completed compulsory internship is more negative than the others. The negative statements which express students' problems, complaints and fears are work conditions, mobbing, social life, accommodation and nutrition issues. The positive perception of the students is on experience, development, and socialization matters.

Keywords: internship, perception, tourism, WAT, exploratory, qualitative

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Introduction

The tourism industry operates in global economic importance all over the world. The total of employees in the sector was 272 million in 2020, with a decline because of COVID-19 (WTTC, 2021). This has also led to an increased need for skilled employees. Tourism is an employment-intensive industry. Effective competition for the sector requires the recruitment of not only sufficient numbers but qualified employees. In terms of competition, the inability of enterprises to imitate human capital sources leads to the employment of qualified employees in the tourism sector becoming even more important (Bednarska, 2013). Providing a skilled labor force is only possible with tourism education (Jafari & Sola, 1996).

Internship is an integral part of tourism education. As stated by Özdemir (2019), during the internship stage, most students come across all the positive and negative aspects of the tourism sector for the first time and decide whether to enter the industry after graduation. It is the initial point that interns experience the negative image of the tourism industry for their professional life. It is of substantial significance to increase the quality and efficiency of internship practices. Problems confronted during the internship is one of the important stages of tourism education, are among the study subjects of tourism researchers (Pavesic & Brymer, 1990; Aydos, 1992; Kuşluvan & Kuşluvan, 2000; Birdir, 2002; Üngüren & Ehtiyar, 2009). Therefore, it is important to determine students' cognitive levels and perceptions regarding the internship period.

Literature Review

The constant evolution of technology, globalization, and the new emerging economic and social order requires that society, institutions, and individuals adapt to changes in the social, cultural, and economic domains. Adapting to this incessant change also requires individuals to learn and renew themselves permanently. That tourism is a labor-intensive sector increases the importance of well-educated personnel. Therefore, the success of the enterprises in the industry depends on the presence of trained staff who keep up on innovations and improvements in their fields and maintain their self-improvement.

Instructional content and delivery of tourism education are crucial to respond to the updated requirements of technological, economic, sociologic trends and goals. Vocational and technical education is part of a lifelong learning and training process aimed at enabling the workforce to pursue careers in different fields (Owais et al., 2020). Vocational and technical high schools and colleges which are considered being the most effective instruments of meeting globalization demands (Mouzakitis, 2010) require vocational and technical education to play a significant role in the education system in Turkey.

The emergence of globalization required more specialized labor markets, higher skill levels, and diversified vocational training. With the increasing importance of the economic dimension of education, institutions providing vocational education show a significant role in society's economic development and welfare (Cice & Balkar, 2020; Shafi et al., 2021). One of the graduation requirements of vocational education is the successful completion of the professional internship period. The mission of relevant schools is to train the intermediate staff required by Law No 2547 of the Council of Higher Education (YÖK; 2015) and in particular to provide two-year (four-semester) training at the associated degree level.

Tourism education requires both theoretical and practical training processes to be carried out together. Besides, that practical knowledge and skills are required at all stages of tourism education. Turkey has many educational institutions providing education and training to deliver the tourism industry's qualified staff requirement. Schoolers studying in the institutions concerned accomplish compulsory internships in tourism enterprises as agencies, hotels, restaurants, etc. in the summer. Although there are different applications, internship training is among the common graduation requirements of tourism departments and programs. The vocational internship period is one of the important stages of tourism education.

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The professional skills of employees play a significant aspect during employee selection in the tourism industry. İnternship is a beneficial process in which students have the experience of transferring their theoretical knowledge into practice (Çetin, 2005). The tourism Internship is a means to instill professional skills in students during the experience (Evans, 2001). However, there are many problems and difficulties during the vocational internship. Experience reality by engaging a negative tourism image, students move away from the sector in the future and move on to other business areas after graduation. Researchers list the problems in various studies as rotation and adaptation problems, such as theoretical shortcomings that hinder practical applications; employers' perception of cheap labor (Kozak, 1999; Chen & Shen, 2012; Richardson & Butler, 2012; Aymankuy et al., 2013; Zengin & Kırmızı, 2017) and emerging economic problems (Aksu & Köksal, 2005, Güzel, 2010); interns to be employed in jobs outside their field and subject to overtime (Boyraz, 2020); limited social and vital opportunities for nutrition, shelter, transportation (Akay et al., 2018), safety, hygiene, (Kim & Park, 2013); length of internship periods; not being able to get internships in desired deportations or businesses, unfair practices at workplaces, mobbing (Eker et al., 2015); foreign language problems (Aydın & Korkmaz, 2018); lack of orientation training in enterprises; physical and psychological abuse (Güzel et al., 2014; Kılıç & Temizkan, 2020); lack or multiplicity of responsibilities given during the internship, difficulties in adapting to the sector, etc.

As stated by Alam (2015), the significance of human development cannot be denied, as it is directly linked with the economic growth of a country. The internship process provides the development of a skilled labor force in the tourism industry. This situation is reflected in the growth indirectly. Because education and training for productive employment are vital for economic and social development (Pavlova, 2014).

Methods

The research question of this quantitative study is: What are the cognitive perceptions of tourism students and whether it changed before and after the compulsory internship period? Word Association Test (WAT) was used for revealing the conceptual perception of students around the term "internship". Word Association Test (WAT) is a method of analysis based on the association of words and is also known as the "associative experiment". It is applied by listing the words that make associations with the term encountered. Word Association Test (WAT) has been used in social sciences for over a hundred years has different types according to its purposes and application method. It is carried out by classifying the responses of the subjects on which the information is got in terms of duration, category, and group of words and selection of responses (Kostova & Radoynovska, 2008).

Unlike quantitative research methods that are specific to generalizations existing in positive sciences, qualitative researches focus on the nature of individual characteristics of people. From this point of view, qualitative research, which is based on the claim that the originality and depth of information is important rather than generalizations, focuses on data received from small study groups rather than large samples (Baltacı, 2019). In qualitative analysis, the intention is to understand the situation of the individuals involved without the intent of generalizing. Unlike quantitative research, where its mathematical properties gain importance, the event or phenomenon itself comes to the fore in qualitative research (Başkale, 2016; Yıldırım, 2010). This paper has an exploratory study design to determine tourism students' perceptions of internships.

Sample

The study was conducted with the voluntary participation of 35 second grade students from the Department of Travel and Entertainment Services studying at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Ezine Vocational School. That some students have completed their compulsory internship because of being in the 2nd grade has also enabled them to reveal the change in their perceptions before and after this period. The research sample includes 35 students, 21 of whom have already completed their compulsory internship, 14 of whom have not yet completed an internship, total 35 students.

Data Collection

The data of the study were got by description and through Word Association Test (WAT), with no intervention, in order to determine the cognitive perceptions of the students about the internship. While collecting the data, the word "internship" was listed 10 times one after the other in the forms to reduce the possibility of chain replies. The concepts that evoke in the minds of the students were collected by giving 30 seconds after the announcement: "When you see the term, write the word that comes to your mind - that you think is related in the spaces below." Time constraint is a technique applied in controlled word association tests.

During the analysis of the data, Word Association Test (WAT) forms are numbered from 1 to 35. SPSS 21 was used to group and analyze demographic data, and MaxQDA 2018 Software was used for content analysis. The code list, which was constituted by one of the researchers utilizing the literature, was reconstructed while coding. Semantic similarity classification was made by considering the number and forms of the words that evoke the term "internship". The frequency distributions, concept maps, and word clouds of the responses provided by the two groups who did an internship and those who did not were created both together and separately.

In qualitative research, reliability and validity are considered differently from quantitative studies and are provided by observing the research subject as objectively as possible (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). However, in qualitative research, credibility is a particularity that should be inquired about rather than reliability. For this, some criteria of trustworthiness (Chowdhury, 2015), called the gold standard, have been determined: credibility, reliability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility is based on the researcher's in-depth understanding of the subjects and spending enough time with him or her to do so, as well as establishing a relationship based on mutual trust (Başkale, 2016). That the students and the researcher collecting the data are together throughout their educational life provides a sufficient opportunity for the formation of the standard. Reliability is provided by the study of over one researcher and the use of literature during data collection. The study fulfills this requirement. Confirmability is based on the principle of documenting all results that come out of the data so that other researchers can study related considerations. This is also shown that findings stem from the case and thoughts of the participants, not the researcher (Arastaman et al., 2018). All raw data collected for the analysis of the study were recorded and coded via the MaxQDA 2018 Software. Transferability is the fulfillment of the conditions that research results can be transferred to relevant studies. For transferability in qualitative research, elaborate descriptions of sample selection, characteristics of the participants, and the environment should be made.

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Findings

According to the research findings, 71.4% of the participants between the ages of 19-24 are male, 5.7% are graduates of Tourism Vocational High School, and 60% have completed their compulsory internship. When repetitions are considered, 179 different words were obtained from 350 responses. The first 10 words that are most often repeated are: fatigue, experience, hard work, hotel, sleeplessness, difficulty, task, money, learn, endurance (see Table 1).

Table 1. Words Associated With the Term of Internship

Word	*f*	Word	*f*	Word	*f*	Word	*f*	Word	*f*
Fatigue	13	Hardship	2	Serving	1	Shackles	1	Weekend	1
Experience	11	Rebuked	2	Ignorance	1	Slavery	1	Begin To Work	1
Hard Work	10	Environment	2	Errands	1	Delusion	1	Human Experience	1
Hotel	10	Relationship	2	Jugglery	1	Depression	1	Employ	1
Sleeplessness	10	Fun	2	Uneven Temper	1	Despondency	1	JOLLY	1
Difficulty	9	Friendship	2	Unsuitable Conditions	1	Trouble	1	Profession	1
Task	7	Communication	2	Sleeping in the Basement	1	Uneasiness	1	Professional R. Ship	1
Money	7	Socializing	2	Compulsion	1	Unjustness	1	Managers	1
Learn	7	Make Friends	2	Discomfort	1	Unquestioning	1	Customer	1
Endurance	6	Struggle	2	Needlessness	1	Unregarded	1	Success	1
Tour	6	Heavy Work Cond.	2	Deprivation	1	Victimization	1	Package-Tour	1
Summer-Heat	6	Career	2	Roads	1	Acumen	1	Guidance	1
Inequity	5	Effort	2	Transportation Pr.	1	Flexibility	1	Respect	1
Beginning	5	Will	2	Insufficient Breakfast	1	Self-Control	1	Sell Oneself	1
Overtime	5	Swearing	2	Undernutrition	1	Goal Setting	1	Chefs	1
Dirt	4	Haste	2	Too Much Caffeine	1	Necessity	1	Milestone	1
Guest	4	Temper	2	Perversion	1	Creativity	1	Boat	1
Cheap Labor	4	Low Income	2	Shaving-Necessity	1	Passion	1	ETS	1
Hot	3	Hate	2	Problems	1	Future	1	Face The Facts	1
Heavy-Duty	3	Club	2	Clothing Obligation	1	Talent	1	Life	1
Accommodation-Pr.	3	Travel-Agency	2	Rate Of Premium	1	Occupation	1	Vacationist	1
Stress	3	Tour-Sale	2	Job-Opportunity	1	Peace	1	Go Places	1
Sea-Sand-Sun	3	Abuse	2	Employment	1	Dignity	1	Betrayal	1
Coercion	3	Workload	1	Security	1	Diplomacy	1	Education	1
Development	3	Rush	1	Guarantee	1	Image	1	Student	1
Humiliation	3	Burnout	1	Corruption	1	Question	1	School	1
Low-Wage	3	Indiscipline	1	Salary	1	Human Relations	1	Teaching	1
Foreign-Language	3	Carry Coals	1	Crisis	1	Worried	1	Apprenticeship	1
Punishment	3	Iniquitous	1	Activities	1	Yelling	1	University	1
Tourist	3	Insecurity	1	Get Along	1	Discrimination	1	Molestation	2
No Vacations	3	Insidiousness	1	Beach	1	Dissatisfaction	1	Jailer	1
Garbage	2	Tiring Pace	1	Mutualization	1	Lack of foreign lang.	1	People	1
Force	2	Free Labor	1	Travel	1	A lot of effort	1	Notice	1
Lie	2	Insult	1	Teamwork	1	Greed	1	**Total: 179**	
Congestion	2	Interrogation	1	Revolt	1	Amercement	1	**Frequency:350**	

The evokes of the term “internship” were then classified into two groups “positive” and “negative”. Positive statements were grouped under the titles of “Experience”, “Development”, “Socializing”, “Financial Benefit” and “Education” according to the subjects of the responses. “Negative expressions” in consideration of the literature review in which the problems encountered in internships in the literature (Kozak, 1999; Aksu & Köksal, 2005; Güzel, 2010; Chen & Shen, 2012; Aymankuy et al., 2013; Kim & Park, 2013; Güzel et al., 2014; Zengin & Kırmızı, 2017; Akay et al., 2018; Aydın & Korkmaz, 2018; Boyraz, 2020; Kılıç & Temizkan, 2020), are determined,

Negative expressions in consideration of the literature review in which the problems encountered in internships are determined as: “Poor working conditions”, “Mobbing-Harassment and Psychological Problems”, “Social Life-Accommodation and Nutrition Problems”, “Foreign

Language Inadequacy", "Non-Traditional Field Placement", "Economic Problems", has been coded by dividing into 6 different sub-groups. Table 2 shows the relevant separation.

Table 2. Grouping the Answers Regarding the Internship Term

	Perception	Words Received
Negative	**Poor working conditions**	fatigue, sleeplessness, overtime, difficulty, hard work, congestion , endurance, rush, haste, stress, heavy-duty, workload, tiring pace, task, a lot of effort, heavy work conditions
	Mobbing,- Harassment and Psychological Problems	coercion, force, hate, compulsion, discrimination, problems, humiliation, yelling, perversion, inequity, jugglery, unjustness, discrimination, greed, iniquitous, trouble, despondency, revolt, amercement, jailer, punishment, insidiousness, shackles, corruption, dissatisfaction, burnout, molestation hardship, slavery, unquestioning, uneven temper, insult, swearing, crisis, abuse, victimization, unregarded, rebuked, lie, depression, interrogation, needlessness, temper, uneasiness, worried, betrayal, indiscipline, delusion, insecurity, carry coals, struggle
	Social Life - Accommodation and Nutrition Problems	Summer-heat, dirt, no vacations, accommodation-problem, garbage dump, hot, shaving-necessity, discomfort, deprivation, road, insufficient breakfast, transportation problem, undernutrition, too much caffeine, unsuitable conditions, sleeping in the basement, clothing obligation
	Foreign Language Inadequacy	foreign-language, lack of foreign language
	Non-Traditional Field Placement	errands, ignorance, serving
	Economic problems	low income, cheap labor, free labor, low-wage
Positive	**Experience**	hotel, experience, tour, guest, tourist, club, travel-agency, tour-sale, life, chefs, human experience, guidance, boat, employ, begin to work, notice, customer, weekend, milestone, professional-relationship, respect, ets, vacationist, jolly, profession, package-tour, success, managers, sell oneself, go places, face the facts,
	Development	development, will, effort, career, passion, future, talent, occupation, necessity, peace, dignity, diplomacy, image, question, creativity, human-relations, goal setting, self-control, flexibility, acumen, beginning
	Socializing	relationship, fun, friendship, make friends, communication, socializing, activities, travel, get along, beach, mutualization, teamwork, environment, people, sea-sand-sun
	Financial Benefit	money, job-opportunity, employment, security, guarantee, rate of premium, salary
	Education	school, teaching, apprenticeship, university, learn, student, education

The word clouds of the positive and negative expressions of all the students' responses are shown in Figure 1. The most apparent expressions stand out as "fatigue", "experience".

Various negative words were found in all the 35 documents examined, and words including positive statements in 31 of them. According to the findings, all the students participating in the study have negative perceptions of the internship key concept. There are no positive statements in four documents. This is stated as "Uncoded Documents" in Table 3, which comprises the reveals of the variance and the frequencies of the relevant expressions.

In the comparison of positive key statement groups, it was observed that students who had internships were more positive about "Experience" than those who did not. "Experience" ranks first among positive perceptions for both groups. Among the words written by the students regarding the positive concept group, "Development" is in the second rank, and "Socializing" is in the third. The most used positive words by both groups are: experience, hotel, money, beginning, learn, tour, guest, sea-sand-sun, tourist, relationship. The Comparative Positive Expressions Model of the positive words used is given in Figure 2.

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Figure 1. Word Cloud Associated With the Concept of Internship

Word Cloud of All Students' Positive Statements



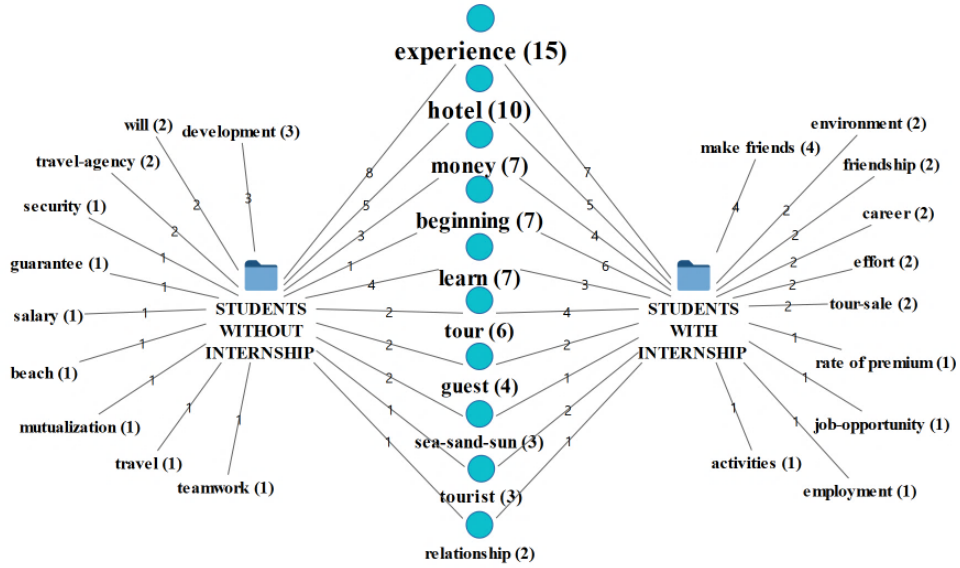
Word Cloud of All Students' Negative Statements



Table 3. Document-Based Frequency Values for Expressions

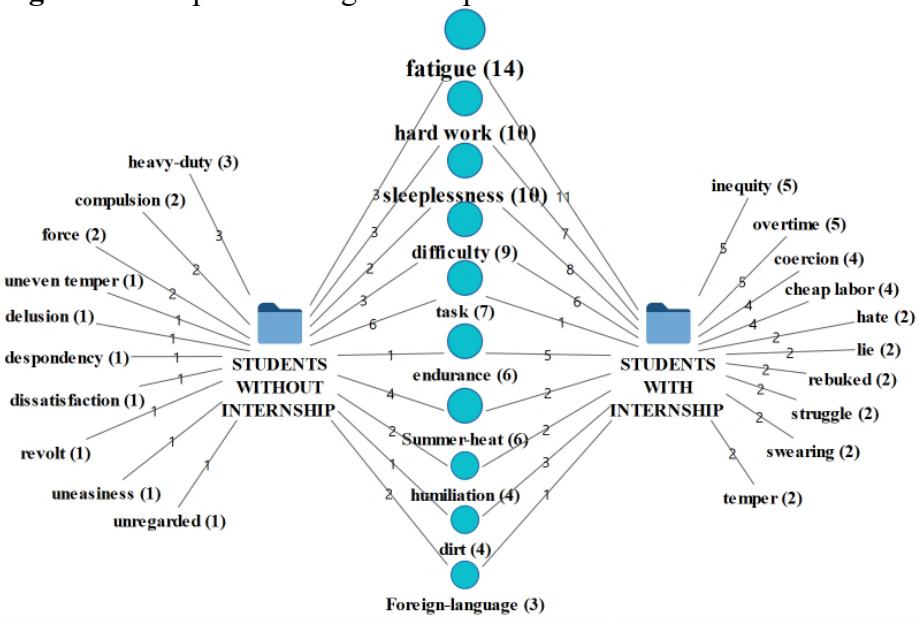
Positive Key Statement Groups	**Total**	**Students Without Internship**	**Students With Internship**
	f (%)	***f (%)***	***f (%)***
Experience	25 (%71,43)	11 (%78,57)	14 (%66,67)
Development	16 (%45,71)	8 (%57,14)	8 (%38,10)
Socializing	15 (%42,86)	7 (%50,00)	8 (%38,10)
Education	9 (%25,71)	6 (%42,86)	5 (%23,81)
Financial Benefit	8 (%22,86)	4 (%28,57)	3 (%14,29)
Coded Documents	31 (%88,57)	13 (%92,86)	18 (%85,71)
Uncoded Documents	4 (%11,43)	1 (%7,14)	3 (%14,29)
Negative Key Statement Groups			
Poor Working Conditions	31(%88,57)	12(%85,71)	19 (%90,48)
Mobbing - Harassment and Psychological Problems	25 (%71,43)	8(%57,14)	17(%80,95)
Social Life-Accommodation and Nutrition Problems	17(%48,57)	6(%42,86)	11(%52,38)
Economic Problems	9 (%25,71)	4(%28,57)	5(%23,81)
Non-Traditional Field Placement	3(%8,57)	2(%14,29)	1(%4,76)
Foreign Language Inadequacy	3 (%8,57)	2(%14,29)	1(%4,76)
Coded Documents	35(%100)	14(%100)	21(%100)
Uncoded Documents	0(%0)	0(%0)	0(%0)
Analyzed Documents	35 (%100)	14(%100)	21 (%100)

Figure 2. Comparative Positive Expressions Model



In the comparison of negative key statement groups, it was observed that students who had internships were more negative about "Poor Working Conditions" than those who did not. "Poor Working Conditions" ranks first among positive perceptions for both groups. Among the words written by the students regarding the positive concept group, "Mobbing - Harassment and Psychological Problems" is in the second rank, and "Economic Problems" is in the third. The most used negative words by both groups are: fatigue, hard work, sleeplessness, difficulty, task, endurance, summer heat, humiliation, dirt, foreign language. In addition, among the positive expressions, it was observed that the effect of the accommodation establishments on the perception of the internship was more apparent because of the high frequency of the word "hotel" in both groups. The Comparative Positive Expressions Model of the negative words used is given in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Comparative Negative Expressions Model



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Conclusions

Vocational internship is a compulsory period in which tourism students practice the theoretical knowledge they get in educational institutions. During this period, students get to know both the sector and themselves better. Knowing the students' attitudes and perceptions towards the tourism industry is useful for predicting whether they will work in it after graduation. Negative perceptions of the interns about the tourism profession would affect their job preferences for the future (Francis & Alagas, 2017). It is known that as positive perceptions increase, the willingness of students to work in the tourism and travel industry increases as well (Orhan, 2015; Kuşluvan & Kuşluvan, 2000; Lam & Ching, 2007; Farmaki, 2018). Because of that, defining the students' perceptions and complaints about the internship and determining positive and negative aspects of the experience is of great importance. The employment of qualified staff in the sector will enable the eradication of many negative images about tourism in the social world. Whether employees perform a quality service is very significant for the success of and the image of the tourism industry (Geva & Goldman, 1991). Besides, the increase in the number of trained personnel in the sector will create positive socio-economic effects as rising in economic benefit, expansion in employment rates, prevent hidden unemployment.

While students have a positive attitude to make a tourism career before doing an internship in the sector, they can give up after this experience (Akay & Şıttak, 2019, Altınay, 2019). Therefore, the problems experienced by students in the sector experience can affect their motivation in tourism education, where they continue to return from their internship (Türkeri, 2014).

Hence, this study focuses on the cognitive perceptions of the students of vocational schools in tourism education. According to the research results, the words representing the cognitive perceptions of the students are: fatigue, experience, hard work, hotel, sleeplessness, difficulty, task, money, learn, endurance, tour, Summer-heat, inequity, beginning, overtime. The most often repeated of these are fatigue, experience, and hard work.

The outcomes that rise in line with the conceptual analysis of the terms are:

- Students define compulsory internship as the start of their professional life, the process required to gain experience and learn necessary things.
- Trainees consider the internship process as a gradation that requires endurance.
- Students consider they get exhausted while fulfilling the onerous tasks assigned to them by working hard during the internship.
- Trainees think they endure inequality, sleeplessness and hard living conditions during their internship, but earn money.

With the analysis of the data collected during the research, besides revealing the positive and negative cognitive perception about the internship, whether the opinions of the students undergoing tourism education changed before and after the internship examined to determine. For this reason, in the first stage of analysis, collected data were divided into two groups as students who did internship and those who did not.

Then, all words were grouped once again as positive and negative statements and coded with MaxQDA 2018 software. Five positive subcategories and six negative subcategories of

expressions given on the key concept were determined by the light of the literature. The statements reflecting the motivation and expectations of the students about the internship are in the positive category. Statements which are in the negative category express their problems, complaints and fears. According to the results of the research, the perception of students' completed compulsory internship is more negative. Getting an internship experience enables trainees to recognize the tourism industry. Thus, they have more ideas both positive and negative issues.

The interns' perception is negative on the work conditions, mobbing, and social facilities-accommodation-nutrition issues. This finding is confirmed by the other researches in the literature (Köşker & Unur, 2017; Güzel, 2010; Akay et al., 2018; Tüzünkan, 2018). Studies show that (Aksu & Köksal, 2005; Birdir, 2002; Duman et al., 2006) the learners receiving tourism education have a negative attitude towards the industry.

The perceptions of students who have never done an internship are more positive than those of those who have done (Tuna et al., 2017). The interns' perception is positive on the experience, development, and socialization issues. The finding is coherent with the literature (Christou, 1999; Tovey, 2001; Duman et al, 2006; Chuang & Jenkins. 2010; Özdemir, 2019; Akay et al., 2018). Students were determined to be aware of the importance of an internship. But the negativities they suffer during this process are more than positivity

Besides this, the expressions point out "Mobbing - Harassment and Psychological Problems" are frequent. The most used negative words in that sub-group are: inequity, humiliation, coercion, punishment, hate, abuse, force lie, molestation, hardship, rebuked, struggle and swearing. According to economists, the cost of mobbing is much higher than the cost of programs to prevent mobbing (Resch & Schubinski, 1996). Mentioned finding reveals the need for further studies on the dimensions of internship problems in the tourism industry and find solutions. Mentioned finding reveals the need for further studies on the dimensions of internship problems in the tourism industry and find solutions. In evidence of the results of the research, the internship processes should be audited and steps should be taken for improvement. The identified problems should be handled within the framework of the education policy of the country and sustainable solutions should be produced. Failure to take preventive measures against mobbing, trying to hide it, and not being able to communicate with the victims on this issue may cause mobbing incidents to spread. Mobbing is like an endemic infection in organizations. If preventive efforts are not taken, it will become widespread and harmful to the whole society. This condition will reduce the commitment, motivation, and satisfaction of the employees to the organization. As a stem of mobbing, the working climate will become stressful and work efficiency will decrease (Kırel, 2007).

On the other hand differences were observed among undergraduate, associate, and high school students to evaluate the tourism industry (Duman, et. al., 2006). Therefore, recommended comparing the perceptions of secondary education and undergraduate students by measuring them by using qualitative and quantitative techniques both.

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