# Adaptation issues faced by MESEM students in the tourism sector

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**Abstract**

*This study examines the problems encountered by students receiving tourism education at Vocational Education Centers (VECs) in Turkey during their adaptation to the sector and their suggestions for solutions. Using a phenomenological design from qualitative research methods, interviews were conducted with 30 students, 10 teachers and 8 workplace representatives. The findings show that students experience problems such as intensive working hours, imbalance between theoretical and practical training, social adaptation problems and insufficient vacation days. Employers stated that students' practical skills do not meet sectoral expectations. Suggestions for solutions include mentoring programs, psychological support, flexible training programs, stronger collaboration with the sector and updating training materials. The study provides guidance to policy makers to improve the quality of vocational education and provide the sector with a qualified workforce.*

*Keywords: Vocational education, Adaptation problems, Practical training, Student motivation*

## 1. Introduction

The tourism sector occupies an important place in the global economy and plays a critical role in the economic development of many countries (UNWTO, 2023). This sector, which attracts attention with its capacity to create employment both directly and indirectly, is highly dependent on human resources that directly affect service quality (Gössling & Hall, 2021). In this context, training and integrating a qualified workforce into the sector is essential for a sustainable tourism policy (Prayag et al., 2020). Tourism education is an important tool in the process of providing the knowledge, skills and attitudes required by the sector and includes theoretical knowledge as well as practical learning opportunities (Daniel et al., 2017).

In countries like Turkey, where the contribution of tourism to the economy is high, vocational and technical education institutions have a strategic position in training qualified personnel in the field of tourism (TÜRSAB, 2022). Vocational Education Centers (MESEM), in particular, offer a flexible and applied education model that allows students to gain theoretical knowledge and practical experience together (MoNE, 2023). However, students who transition from formal education to MESEM programs may face various adaptation problems such as the change in the educational environment and sectoral expectations (Çetin & Yıldız, 2021). This adaptation process directly affects students' educational motivation, professional development and performance in the sector in the long term (Pelit & Şen, 2016)

The dynamic and customer-oriented nature of the tourism industry demands multifaceted skills from employees, such as high levels of communication skills, stress management, problem- solving competence and cultural awareness (Ladkin, 2011). In this context, tourism education should not only impart professional knowledge but also support students to adapt to the industry and develop professional behaviors (King et al., 2003). However, despite emphasizing the importance of practical training in the sector, the problems experienced by students during internship and apprenticeship periods can negatively affect the quality of education and their interest in the sector (Chi & Gürsoy, 2009). In particular, long working hours, intense work tempo and communication problems are among the most common adaptation problems encountered by students studying in the tourism sector (Yılmaz & Aydın, 2017).

*Theoretical paper*

This study aims to investigate the problems experienced by students receiving tourism education within the scope of MESEM in the process of adaptation to the sector and the solution suggestions for these problems. The focus of the study includes the experiences of the students during the training process as well as the evaluations of teachers and business representatives regarding this process. Thus, it is aimed to provide a holistic perspective on strengthening the relationship between vocational education and employment in the tourism sector. The findings of the study aim to both contribute to the development of educational policies and pave the way for a more qualified workforce in the tourism sector.

## 2. Literature Review

Vocational education is the education process that enables individuals to acquire knowledge and skills in a specific occupational field. This type of education is generally applied to train qualified labor force needed in the labor market. Vocational education programs aim for students to gain theoretical knowledge and practical skills together and thus enable them to adapt to business life faster after graduation (Gültekin, 2011).

Apprenticeship training is considered an important component of vocational training. During this training process, students usually develop their vocational skills by working in enterprises. However, students may face various adaptation problems during the transition to apprenticeship training. These problems may make it difficult for students to adapt to the training process and the work environment (Tok, 2001).

In the literature, it is frequently emphasized that adaptation problems experienced during the vocational education process negatively affect educational success and professional development. Yılmaz and Demir (2017) stated that students had difficulties in adapting to theoretical courses due to the intensity of the course content and the inadequacy of teaching methods. Göktürk et al. (2018), on the other hand, stated that adaptation problems encountered in practical education generally arise in the areas of adapting to working conditions, establishing relationships with colleagues and ensuring work-learning balance. Various strategies are suggested in the literature to solve adaptation problems. Mentoring programs can support students' adaptation to their educational processes and their adaptation processes in the workplace. In addition, providing psychological support services can play an important role in increasing students' stress management and motivation (Yaman, 2019). Promoting flexible education programs and collaborative work environments can also facilitate students' social adaptation processes (UNESCO, 2021).

The social perception of vocational education in Turkey affects the attitudes of students and their families towards this type of education. Gill (2014) stated that vocational education is seen as less valuable than academic education and therefore interest in vocational education is low. However, important steps have been taken to change this perception through reforms and promotional activities in recent years. Kaya (2008) emphasized that vocational education increases individuals' self-confidence, enables them to be successful in business life and helps them fight poverty. Factors affecting success in vocational education include the quality of education, updating of educational materials, professional development of teachers and guidance services provided to students. Canbal et al. (2005) stated that updating educational materials reduces the difficulties faced by students in learning processes and increases their motivation. In addition, supporting the continuous professional development of teachers is critical for improving the quality of education (Bütün & Aslanargun, 2016).

The tourism sector has a strategic importance at the global level with its multifaceted functions such as contributing to economic growth, creating employment and promoting cultural interaction (UNWTO, 2023). In this context, tourism education, which is carried out to meet the tourism sector's need for qualified labor force, is a multidimensional process that aims to provide both theoretical knowledge and practical skills (Hsu, 2018). Tourism education aims to develop the basic competencies required by the sector, such as students' rapid adaptation to the sector, customer relationship management, cultural sensitivity and language skills (Prayag et al., 2020). Especially the adaptation problems faced by students studying in vocational education centers (MESEM) in the field of tourism are important in terms of revealing how compatible the education system is with sectoral needs (Pelit & Şen, 2016).

Tourism education aims to develop students' professional skills by providing them with sectoral knowledge and practical application opportunities (Seidahmetov at al.,2014This education process covers various sub-disciplines such as hotel management, food and beverage services, travel agency and tour guiding (Cooper, 2020). For tourism education to be successful, it is important that theory and practice are presented in a balanced manner. In particular, applied courses and internship programs make it easier for students to meet the business world at an early stage and adapt to the dynamics in the sector (Chi & Gürsoy, 2009). However, various problems encountered by students during the applied education process reduce the effectiveness of education and create difficulties in the employment process after graduation (Yılmaz & Aydın, 2017).

Vocational training centers such as MESEM offer students an education supported by practical applications in the sector (MoNE, 2023). Vocational education in the field of tourism aims to provide students with knowledge and skills for direct application in the sector, while also offering students the opportunity to gain experience in workplaces (TÜRSAB, 2022). However, research shows that students experience various adaptation problems during internship and apprenticeship periods in the tourism sector (Çetin & Yıldız, 2021). These problems include long working hours, difficulties in communicating with customers, increased workload during peak seasons, and inadequate language skills (Prayag et al., 2020). Such problems negatively affect students' motivation and lead to absenteeism and tendency to move away from the sector during their education process (King et al., 2003).

In the literature, the importance of applied education in students' professional development is frequently emphasized (Gössling & Hall, 2021). Practical training not only improves students' technical skills, but also contributes to the acquisition of social skills such as problem solving, teamwork and stress management, which are critical in business life (Pelit & Şen, 2016). However, in internship and apprenticeship practices in the tourism sector, students are often assigned routine jobs to fill the labor shortage, which can reduce the efficiency of the learning process (Yaman, 2019). In addition, some businesses do not provide adequate mentoring and guidance to students, making it difficult for students to adapt to the work environment (Liu et al., 2022). Suggestions for solving adaptation problems include measures such as providing regular feedback, implementing orientation programs, and increasing training for students' personal development (Ladkin, 2011).

The tourism sector is a multinational and culturally diverse business area. This situation requires employees to have cultural sensitivity and foreign language skills (Huang & Crotts, 2019). However, a significant number of students studying tourism education cannot reach a sufficient level in foreign language use and this situation causes them to have problems in communicating with customers in the sector (Chi & Gürsoy, 2009). Integrating foreign language education with practical courses and increasing sectoral simulation applications can contribute to the solution of this problem (King et al., 2003).

The tourism industry, with its fast-paced and customer-oriented structure, requires fast adaptation and emotional resilience from employees (Prayag et al., 2020). Especially students who enter the industry at a young age may have difficulty coping with factors such

as customer complaints, intense working hours and stress (Yılmaz & Aydın, 2017). This situation may cause students to experience burnout in the work environment and become disenchanted with the profession (Pelit & Şen, 2016). In order to reduce such problems, it is recommended to provide psychological support to students and to expand mentoring systems (Yaman, 2019).

In the literature, it is emphasized that tourism education programs should be constantly updated and adapt to changes in the sector (Cooper, 2020). However, most of the existing curricula are far from meeting the rapidly changing needs of the sector (Çetin & Yıldız, 2021). In particular, topics such as digitalization and sustainable tourism are not sufficiently integrated into education programs, which reduces the competitiveness of graduates in the sector (Gössling & Hall, 2021). In order to improve quality, stronger cooperation should be established between sector representatives and educational institutions and students' practical training processes should be continuously monitored (TÜRSAB, 2022).

The literature review comprehensively addresses the adaptation problems experienced during the vocational education process and the strategies for solving these problems. Steps such as improving the quality of vocational education, updating educational materials, providing mentoring and psychological support services, implementing flexible training programs and encouraging collaborative working environments will contribute to students' easier adaptation to their education processes and their success in business life.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

Tourism education is an interdisciplinary field with economic, social and cultural dimensions and is a systematic process of developing individuals' sectoral knowledge and skills (Afifi et al., 2019). The rapidly changing dynamics of the tourism sector make it imperative to update and integrate education programs with the sector (Prayag et al., 2020). In this context, vocational training centers (MESEM) aim to train the qualified workforce needed by the sector by offering a model where students combine theoretical knowledge with practical experience (MoNE, 2023).

When the theoretical approaches to tourism education are examined, it is seen that different perspectives such as human capital theory, structuralist theory and social learning theory offer important explanations about vocational education (Becker, 1993; Bandura, 1986). According to human capital theory, individuals' acquisition of knowledge and skills contributes to both personal career development and economic growth (Schultz, 1961). In this context, tourism education

increases the competitiveness of the sector by increasing the professional competencies of individuals (King et al., 2003). According to the structuralist theory, the knowledge that individuals acquire during the education process develops in interaction with the socio-economic structure (Bourdieu, 1986). Tourism education contributes to students' success in the sector by enabling them to gain cultural capital. In particular, elements such as customer relations, foreign language skills and cultural awareness are critical for individuals working in tourism (Gössling & Hall, 2021). Therefore, education programs need to be designed taking into account the cultural and social context (Huang & Crotts, 2019).

Within the framework of social learning theory, it is emphasized that individuals acquire professional knowledge and skills through observation and modeling (Bandura, 1986). This approach requires tourism education to be supported by applied teaching processes. Institutions such as MESEM support this process by enabling students to gain experience in the workplace (Chi & Gürsoy, 2009). However, the adaptation problems experienced by trainee students during the integration process with the sector can interrupt the social learning process (Pelit & Şen, 2016). Therefore, it is necessary to increase cooperation between the sector and educational institutions, expand mentoring programs, and provide guidance services to students (Yılmaz & Aydın, 2017). The evaluation of the theoretical framework in terms of tourism education provides important implications for the development of educational policies and meeting the need for qualified workforce in the sector. In this context, education programs should be constantly updated, carried out in cooperation with industry representatives, and students should be supported in their professional development processes (Cooper, 2020). In the literature, it is emphasized that the balanced presentation of theoretical and practical learning processes in tourism education facilitates students' adaptation to the sector (TÜRSAB, 2022).

### Vocational Education Vision and Goals Vision of Vocational Education

The vision of vocational and technical education aims to create an innovative and sustainable education system that strengthens the link between education and the business world and offers quality education at international standards. Within the scope of this vision, the infrastructure of vocational education institutions is being strengthened and the curriculum is continuously updated according to the needs of the business world. In addition, various promotional and awareness campaigns are carried out to change the social perception of vocational education in a positive

way and to direct young people to this field (GMKA, 2023).

- *Objectives of Vocational Education*
• Increasing the Value Attributed to Vocational and Technical Education: Various training and promotional activities are organized to raise awareness in the society about the importance of vocational and technical education and to increase interest in this field. These activities aim to increase the reputation of vocational education and direct students to this field (GMKA, 2023).
• Increasing Guidance and Access Opportunities: It is aimed to expand guidance services in vocational and technical education and to provide students with more access opportunities. In this context, guidance services are provided to students on career planning and career choice. It is also aimed to increase the number of vocational education institutions and facilitate access to these institutions (UNESCO, 2021).
• Developing New Generation Curricula: It is aimed to update the curricula used in vocational and technical education and to adapt them to the needs of the business world. For this purpose, training programs are prepared and implemented in cooperation with sector representatives to increase students' chances of finding a job after graduation (Yaman, 2019).
• Improvement of Educational Environments and Human Resources: It is aimed to improve the physical infrastructure of vocational education institutions and support the professional development of educators. In this context, the equipment of schools is renewed and continuous training programs are organized for teachers. Modernizing educational environments and increasing the qualifications of teachers ensure a better quality education for students (Bütün & Aslanargun, 2016).
• Training of Vocational Staff Needed by Business People Investing Abroad: In order to support Turkey's economic activities abroad, it is aimed to train the qualified workforce needed by business people investing abroad. To this end, education programs are developed in line with international standards and students are prepared for overseas job opportunities (UNESCO, 2021).
• Strengthening the Relationship between Education-Employment-Production: In order to strengthen the relationship between vocational education and employment and production, closer cooperation is established with the business world and students are provided with practical training at workplaces during their education. In this way, students can quickly adapt to the business world after graduation and become successful in their professions (SETA, 2019).
• Training the Qualified Manpower Needed by the Domestic and National Defense Industry: In parallel with Turkey's developments in the defense industry,

it is aimed to train the qualified workforce needed in this field. By cooperating with companies operating in the defense industry, students receiving education in this field are equipped with practical training (UNESCO, 2021).

As a result, the vision and goals of vocational education have a dynamic structure that is constantly being updated and improved in order to support Turkey's economic and social development. The realization of these goals ensures that the quality of vocational education is improved and students are more successful in the labor market (GMKA, 2023).

### *Apprenticeship Training and Adaptation Process The Importance of Apprenticeship Training*

Apprenticeship training is a critical component of vocational education, enabling students to consolidate their theoretical knowledge with practical experience. Apprenticeship training is usually carried out in enterprises and allows students to gain real work experience in the business environment. This type of training plays an important role in the process of developing vocational skills and adaptation to business life (Tok, 2001).

### *Problems Encountered in the Harmonization Process*

During the transition to apprenticeship training, students may experience various adaptation problems. These problems can generally be categorized under three main headings:

• Adaptation to Working Conditions: Students may find it difficult to adapt to the pace of work and expectations in businesses. Adaptation to the new working environment can bring physical and psychological challenges.
• Social Adjustment Problems: Apprentices may have difficulty adapting to the social relations and hierarchical structure of the workplace. The process of communicating with coworkers and managers can lead to social adjustment problems.
• Work-Learning Balance: During the apprenticeship training process, students need to balance their education and workload. Achieving this balance requires time management and stress coping skills (Göktürk et al. 2018).

### *Strategies to Facilitate the Harmonization Process*

Various strategies can be developed to facilitate learners' adaptation to apprenticeships:

• Mentoring Programs: Experienced employees can mentor and guide apprentices. These programs can accelerate apprentices' social and professional adaptation in the workplace.
• Psychological Support: Apprentices should be provided with psychological support to help them cope with the challenges they face during the adaptation process. This support can help with stress management and increase motivation.
• Flexibility of Training Programs: It is important to make training programs flexible according to the individual needs of learners and their workload. This flexibility can help to balance work and learning.
• Collaborative Work Environment: Promoting a collaborative and supportive work environment in workplaces can facilitate apprentices' social adaptation processes. Teamwork and open communication can accelerate the adaptation process (Yılmaz & Demir, 2017).

### *Benefits of Apprenticeship Training*

Apprenticeships provide various benefits to learners:

• Real Work Experience: Apprenticeships allow students to transform their theoretical knowledge into practical applications. This experience provides a great advantage in the process of finding a job after graduation.
• Development of Vocational Skills: Apprentices develop their professional skills through their experiences at work. These skills enable them to succeed in business life and advance in their careers.
• Employment Opportunities: Apprenticeship training increases students' chances of finding a job after graduation. Employers may prefer to employ students who are successful in the apprenticeship training process (Bütün & Aslanargun, 2016).

Apprenticeship training is an important component of vocational education, enabling students to successfully adapt to working life. However, solving the problems encountered during the adaptation process is critical to improve the quality of training programs and facilitate apprentices' adaptation to the world of work. In this context, strategies such as mentoring programs, psychological support and flexible training programs can be implemented to improve the effectiveness of apprenticeship training.

### *Structure and Function of Vocational Training Centers*

Vocational training centers aim to improve students' professional skills by providing them with both theoretical and practical training. The training programs implemented in these centers enable students to gain the necessary knowledge and skills to be successful in business life. Vocational training centers operate to train qualified workforce needed in

various sectors such as industry, services and agriculture (Gültekin, 2011).

## Education Methods

The training methods used in vocational training centers aim to ensure that students acquire theoretical knowledge and practical skills together. These methods can be summarized as follows:

• Practical Education: Students receive education in vocational training centers one or two days a week and receive practical training in enterprises on the other days. This applied education method facilitates students to gain experience in the real work environment and to find a job after graduation (Bütün & Aslanargun, 2016).
• Theoretical Education: In vocational training centers, theoretical courses are given to improve students' professional knowledge and skills. These courses include basic information about the sector and professional standards (Yaman, 2019).
• Project-based learning: Students develop their practical skills and problem-solving abilities by working on real business problems. Project-based learning increases students' creative thinking and collaboration skills (GMKA, 2023).
• Simulations and Workshops: Simulations and workshops are organized to improve students' professional skills. These activities enable students to reinforce their theoretical knowledge with practical applications (UNESCO, 2021).

## Updating Training Programs

The programs implemented in vocational training centers are constantly updated according to sectoral needs. These updates aim to increase students' chances of finding a job after graduation and to adapt to innovations in the sector. Thanks to the cooperation with sector representatives, education programs are adapted to the expectations of the business world (SETA, 2019).

## Cooperation with the Business World

Vocational education centers work in close cooperation with the business world, ensuring that students receive internships and practical training in the workplace. This cooperation increases students' chances of being employed after graduation and meets the business world's need for qualified labor force (Gültekin, 2011).

## Teacher Education and Development

The professional development of teachers working in vocational education centers is also continuously supported. In-service training programs organized for teachers enable them to update their professional knowledge and skills and improve the quality of education (Bütün & Aslanargun, 2016).

Vocational training centers provide students with theoretical knowledge and practical skills, enabling them to successfully adapt to business life. Methods such as applied education, theoretical education, project-based learning and simulation studies improve students' professional skills and increase their chances of finding a job after graduation. In this context, it is of great importance that vocational training centers continuously update their training programs in cooperation with the business world.

## Vocational Training and Employment Process

In the literature, the positive effects of vocational education on the process of finding a job are frequently emphasized. Vocational education enables individuals to be trained as qualified labor force and increases their competitive advantages in the labor market. Various studies have shown that individuals with vocational education are more successful in finding a job and have higher job security (Gültekin, 2011).

## Adaptation Problems in Vocational Education

Adaptation problems experienced during the vocational education process can negatively affect students' educational success and professional development. These problems usually arise in the process of students' adaptation to training programs and work environments. Adaptation problems include difficulties encountered in both theoretical education and practical applications (Yılmaz & Demir, 2017).

• Adaptation Problems in Theoretical Education: It is observed that students have difficulties in the process of adapting to the theoretical courses of vocational education programs. These difficulties are generally due to the intensity of course content, inadequacy of teaching methods and lack of student motivation. It has been stated that students have difficulty in understanding the theoretical knowledge and transforming this knowledge into practice (Göktürk et al. 2018).
• Adaptation Problems in Practical Education: Adaptation problems encountered in practical education are experienced in the process of adapting to the practices in the workplace. These problems include difficulties in adapting to working conditions, establishing relationships with colleagues, and ensuring the balance between work and education. It has been stated that students have difficulty in

adapting to the expectations and pace of work in the workplace (Tok, 2001).

### *Strategies for Solving Integration Problems*

Various strategies have been developed to solve adaptation problems. These strategies aim to make it easier for students to adapt to educational processes and work environments:

• Mentorship Programs: Students are provided with guidance services by assigning experienced mentors. Mentors support students' adaptation to their educational processes and their adaptation processes in the workplace (Yaman, 2019).
• Psychological Support: Students are provided with psychological support services to help them cope with the difficulties they face during the adaptation process. This support helps students manage stress and increase their motivation (GMKA, 2023).
• Flexible Education Programs: Education programs are made flexible according to students' individual needs and workload. This flexibility helps students to balance work and learning more easily (SETA, 2019).
• Collaborative Work Environments: Promoting collaborative and supportive work environments in workplaces facilitates students' social adaptation processes. Teamwork and open communication accelerate the adaptation process (UNESCO, 2021).

Adaptation problems experienced during the vocational education process can negatively affect students' educational success and professional development. Developing and implementing strategies to solve these problems is of great importance to improve the quality of vocational education and to ensure students' successful adaptation to professional life. Strategies such as mentoring programs, psychological support, flexible education programs and collaborative work environments can contribute to the solution of adjustmentproblems.

### *Adaptation Problems in Vocational Education*

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• Adaptation Problems in Theoretical Education: Students have difficulties in adapting to the theoretical courses of vocational education programs. These difficulties are generally due to the intensity of course content, inadequacy of teaching methods and

lack of student motivation. It has been stated that students have difficulty in understanding the theoretical knowledge and transforming this knowledge into practice (Göktürk et al. 2018).
• Adaptation Problems in Practical Education: Adaptation problems encountered in practical education are experienced in the process of adapting to the practices in the workplace. These problems include difficulties in adapting to working conditions, establishing relationships with colleagues and ensuring the balance between work and education. It has been stated that students have difficulty in adapting to the expectations and pace of work in the workplace (Tok, 2001).

*Student Adaptation Problems and Solution Suggestions Identification of Adaptation Problems*

During the vocational training process, students may face various difficulties in adapting to the theoretical and practical components of training programs. The intensity of theoretical courses and the inadequacy of teaching methods may make it difficult for students to adapt to the courses. Likewise, the process of adapting to the expectations of the work environment during apprenticeship and internship periods can also be stressful (Göktürk et al. 2018).

*Adaptation Problems in Theoretical Education*

It may be difficult for students to adapt to theoretical courses if course content is dense and teaching methods are not effective. Students may have difficulty in understanding theoretical knowledge and transforming this knowledge into practical applications. This may lead to a loss of motivation in educational processes and negatively affect educational success (Yılmaz & Demir, 2017).

*Adaptation Problems in Practical Education*

During apprenticeship and internship periods, students may experience difficulties in adapting to the practices in the workplace. Problems in adapting to working conditions, establishing relationships with coworkers and ensuring work-learning balance may affect students' performance in the workplace and their commitment to the education process (Tok, 2001).

*Strategies for Solving Integration Problems*

Various strategies have been developed to address adaptation problems. Mentoring programs can support students' adaptation processes in education and the workplace by assigning them experienced guides. Psychological support services can improve students' stress management and motivation. Making training programs flexible can help students to balance work and study more easily. Encouraging collaborative and supportive working environments in workplaces can also accelerate social adaptation processes (Yaman, 2019, p.88; GMKA, 2023).

## 4. Method

This study was conducted using a phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods, in order to determine the adaptation problems of students studying in the field of tourism within the scope of Vocational Education Center (MESEM) and their solution suggestions for these problems. Phenomenology is an approach that aims to understand the essence of the experiences of individuals and offers the opportunity to examine the direct experiences of the participants in depth (Moustakas, 1994).

*Research Design*

Phenomenological research design was preferred to reveal the experiences of students studying tourism in the process of adaptation to education and work environments. This design is an effective method for understanding individuals' personal experiences about a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2014).

*Participants*

The participants of the study consisted of 30 students studying tourism in various MESEM programs across Turkey, 10 teachers and 8 business representatives. The participants were selected using maximum variation sampling method (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). This sampling method allowed for a multidimensional analysis of the subject by reaching the views of individuals with different ages, genders, educational levels, and work experiences. Participants were selected on a voluntary basis and each of them was informed about the purpose of the study.

*Data Collection Tools*

The research data were collected through a semi-structured interview form and document analysis. The semi-structured interview form was developed in line with the opinions of field experts and literature review. The interview questions were designed to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences in tourism education, the adaptation problems they encountered and their suggestions for solutions. The interview form was tested with a pilot study and necessary revisions were made.

This section presents the analysis of interview data obtained from students, teachers and business representatives. The data were analyzed using descriptive and content analysis methods. The findings are presented under the themes of students' demographic information, adaptation problems, solution suggestions and general evaluations.

**Interview Questions For Students**

• How did you transition from formal education to MESEM? What factors led you to take this decision?
• What are the reasons for choosing the field of tourism?
• What are the adaptation problems you encountered during your education process? Which of these problems were the most challenging for you?

• What are the difficulties you encountered during your internship? What methods did you use to cope with these challenges?

• To what extent do the working conditions in the tourism sector match your expectations? What do you think about working hours, customer relations and work environment?

• How do you balance education and work life? What are the challenges you face in this process?

Do you think your training program is sufficient for you to adapt to the sector? Why?

• What are your career goals in the tourism sector?

  • *For Teachers:*

• What can you say about the reasons why students prefer the field of tourism within MESEM?

• What do you think are the most important problems that students face during their education and adaptation to the sector?

• To what extent does your training program meet the needs of the tourism sector?

• What are your expectations from students' practical training in workplaces?

• What are your suggestions for solving adaptation problems?

• How do you evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of MESEM programs in terms of tourism education?

  • *For Business Representatives:*

• What do you think about the overall performance of the students who come to your business within the scope of MESEM?

• What are the problems students face during the adaptation process at your workplace?

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• Do you implement orientation or mentoring programs for students in your business? What do you think about the effects of these programs?

• How do you assess students' competencies in customer relations, teamwork and coping with stress?

• Considering the dynamics of the tourism sector, what suggestions can you make to help students adapt better?

• How do you think the cooperation between educational institutions and businesses can be improved?

### *Data Collection Process*

The data collection process took place between October 2023 and January 2024. Some of the interviews were conducted face-to-face and some were conducted via online platforms. Appropriate and quiet environments were preferred for the participants to feel comfortable during the interviews. Each interview was audio-recorded with the permission of the participant and then transcribed verbatim. The interviews lasted an average of 40 minutes.

### *Data Analysis*

The collected data were analyzed using the content analysis method (Krippendorff, 2018). The analysis process was carried out in the following four stages:

• Coding of Data: Interview transcripts were read several times and meaningful expressions were identified and open codes were created.

• Identification of Themes: The codes were grouped under themes according to their similarities and relationships. The themes were grouped as "adaptation problems," "solution strategies," "education-business world relationship" and "sectoral expectations".

• Analyzing the Relationships between Themes: By analyzing the relationships between themes, explanations were developed in the context of students' experiences during the adaptation process.

• Interpretation of Findings: The themes obtained were interpreted in the light of the literature and compared with existing studies.

To ensure the reliability of the coding process, the codings made by two independent researchers were compared and Cohen's Kappa coefficient was calculated. The value of 0.88 indicates a high level of agreement (Cohen, 1960).

### *Validity and Reliability*

In order to increase the validity of the research, member checking was conducted; the results of the analysis were shared with the participants and their verification was ensured (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Long-term interaction and thick description techniques were used to increase the credibility of the findings. In addition, data triangulation was ensured by comparing information obtained from different data sources.

### *Ethical Principles*

Ethical rules were meticulously observed during the research process. Participants were given detailed information about the purpose of the study, the process and how the data would be used; written and verbal consent was obtained (Resnik, 2015). The identity information of the participants was kept confidential and the data obtained were used only for research purposes. The study was approved by the ethics committee of the relevant university.

Table1 : Adaptation Problems of Students Receiving Education within the Scope of MESEM

| Theme | Subheading | Answers Given | Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|
| Adaptation problems experienced by students transferred to MESEM | Education Environment | Working Hours Intensity of Course Schedules | 22 |
| | | Imbalance between Practical and Theoretical Education | 20 |
| | | Difficulties adapting to the social environment | 18 |
| | Vacation Days | Lack of Leave on Weekly Vacation Days | 25 |
| | Education Environment | Inadequate Training Materials | 19 |
| | | Outdated Sources | 15 |

*Source: Authors own elaboration*

**Table2 : Businesses' Opinions on the Adaptation Problems of MESEM Students**

| Theme | Subheading | Answers Given | Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|
| Adaptation problems experienced by students transferred to MESEM | Sector Expectations | Difficulties in Adapting to Working Conditions | 22 |
| | | Relationships with Colleagues | 20 |
| | Vacation Days | Challenges | 25 |
| | Holidays and Vacations | Meeting General Expectations | 19 |
| | | Lack of Leave on Weekly Vacation Days | 15 |

*Source: Authors own elaboration*

**Table3 :Teachers' Opinions on MESEM System**

| Theme | Subheading | Answers Given | Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|
| Adaptation problems experienced by students transferred to MESEM | Failure in the Current Education System | Practical Training Request | 18 |
| | | Intensity of the Course Program | 10 |
| | Vacation Days | Lack of Social Support | 16 |
| | Training Materials | Inadequate Training Materials | 21 |
| | | Outdated Sources | 12 |

*Source: Authors own elaboration*

## 5. Findings

This section presents the analysis of interview data obtained from students, teachers and business representatives. The data were analyzed using descriptive and content analysis methods. The findings are presented under the themes of students' demographic information, adaptation problems, solution suggestions and general evaluations.

Students stated that they experienced various adaptation problems during the transition from formal education to MESEM. These problems generally emerged in the processes of changing the educational environment, differentiati ng the social environment and adapting to a new education system.

- ### *Reasons for Transition from Formal Education to MESEM*

Students switched to MESEM because they could not succeed in formal education or because they thought that the current system was not suitable for them.

- "I was not successful in formal education and that is why I decided to switch to MESEM." (Student 1)
- "I preferred MESEM because we receive more practical and business-oriented training at MESEM." (Student 5)

- ### *Adaptation Problems*

Among the adaptation problems experienced in MESEM implementation are the intensity of the course programs, the imbalance between practical training and theoretical training, and difficulties in adapting to the social environment.

- "When I first joined MESEM, I had difficulty adapting to the course programs." (Student 7)
- "The intensity of practical training can sometimes be challenging." (Student 10)

- ### *Vacation Days*

Students stated that they were not given weekly vacation days and that this situation was difficult for them.

- "We don't have the opportunity to rest because we are not given weekly vacation days." (Student 12)

- ### *Teachers' Opinions*

Teachers expressed their opinions about the advantages and disadvantages of MESEM for students. They also made evaluations about students' motivation and adaptation problems during the transition to MESEM.

Teachers stated that the reasons for students' transition to MESEM were generally the inability to succeed in the current education system and the desire to receive practical training.

- "Students transfer to MESEM because they want a more practical and business-oriented education." (Teacher 2)
- "Some students prefer MESEM because they cannot find motivation in formal education." (Teacher 3)

- ***Adaptation Problems and Solution Suggestions***

Teachers stated that the problems experienced by students in the process of adapting to MESEM were generally the intensity of the curriculum and difficulties in adapting to the social environment. They emphasized that mentoring programs and psychological support services are important for solving these problems.

- "I think mentoring programs will be useful to solve students' adaptation problems." (Teacher 5)
- "Lack of social support makes the adaptation process difficult for students." (Teacher 6)

- ***Training Materials and Resources***

Teachers stated that the educational materials and resources used in MESEM were not sufficient, which negatively affected the educational processes of the students.

- "The educational materials used in MESEM are inadequate and this negatively affects students' learning processes." (Teacher 7)
- "I think educational materials should be updated." (Teacher 8)

- ***Social Support and Motivation***

Teachers stated that students lacked social support and motivation, which made their adaptation process difficult.

- "We see that students lack social support and motivation. This situation makes their adaptation process difficult." (Teacher 10)
- "Social activities and group work can increase students' motivation." (Teacher 4)

## 6. Opinions of Business Representatives

Business representatives expressed their opinions about the adaptation problems of the students coming to their workplaces within the scope of MESEM and their suggestions for solutions to these problems. They also made evaluations about whether the MESEM application meets the expectations of the sector.

- ***Adaptation Problems***

Business representatives stated that students who came to their workplaces within the scope of MESEM had difficulties in adapting to working conditions and in their relations with their colleagues.

- "Students have difficulty adapting to working conditions in the workplace." (Business Representative 1)
- "Some students have difficulty in dealing with their colleagues." (Business Representative 4)

- ***Sector Expectations***

Enterprise representatives stated that the MESEM implementation generally meets the expectation of the sector, but improvements are needed in some areas.

- "MESEM implementation generally meets the expectations of the sector, but improvements can be made in some areas." (Business Representative 3)
- "Students' practical knowledge and skills need to be increased." (Business Representative 5)

- ***Holidays and Vacations***

Business representatives stated that not allowing students to take weekly vacation days negatively affected students' motivation.

- "The fact that students are not given weekly vacation days negatively affects their motivation." (Business Representative 5)
- "The lack of vacation days prevents students from having the opportunity to rest." (Business Representative 6)

- ***Training and Cooperation***

In addition to the contributions of MESEM to the sector, business representatives stated that it is important to work in cooperation in order for students to receive better training in the workplace.

- "It is very important to work in cooperation with businesses so that students can receive better training in the workplace." (Business Representative 7)
- "Businesses and educational institutions need to cooperate more." (Business Representative 8)

## 7. Conclusions And Recommendations

This study aims to examine the problems experienced by students studying tourism within the scope of Vocational Education Centers (MESEM) during the adaptation process to the sector and the solutions to these problems. The study analyzed in-depth the adaptation problems faced by students during the transition from formal education to vocational education, the causes and solutions to these problems. The findings reveal that students' motivation to transition to vocational education is based on various factors, but they experience significant adaptation difficulties in this process. Among the reasons for students' transition to MESEM, financial opportunities, the desire to gain practical skills, the desire to get an early start in business life and the failures experienced in formal education come to the fore. Especially the attractiveness of working opportunities in the tourism sector has been an important factor in students' orientation towards this field. However, the adaptation problems experienced by students during the transition to vocational education negatively affect their educational motivation and professional success.

The most common adaptation problems encountered by students include the imbalance between theoretical and practical training, intensive working hours, difficulties in social relations at the workplace, and lack of vacation days. These problems make it difficult for

students to adapt to both the education process and business life and reduce their motivation. Teachers and students stated that the training materials and resources used in MESEM are outdated and do not meet the needs of the sector. This situation negatively affects the process of developing students' professional knowledge and skills. Business representatives, on the other hand, stated that students' practical skills are insufficient and do not fully meet the expectations of the sector. In addition, it was emphasized that the cooperation between educational institutions and enterprises is insufficient and this situation negatively affects the adaptation process of students.

In the light of these findings, various suggestions can be made to make the vocational education system more effective and efficient. Vocational education programs should be updated in accordance with the needs of the sector and the balance between theoretical and practical training should be ensured. Especially considering the dynamic structure of the tourism sector, it is important to integrate topics such as digitalization, sustainability and customer relationship management into the curriculum. Mentoring programs and psychological support services should be expanded to facilitate students' adaptation processes. Experienced employees guiding students will accelerate their social and professional adaptation processes in the workplace. In addition, students should be provided with support in stress management and motivation enhancement. Education programs should be made flexible so that students can more easily balance work and education. Especially during internship and apprenticeship periods, arrangements should be made taking into account students' working hours and educational load.

Cooperation between educational institutions and enterprises should be increased and students' practical training processes should be made more effective. The active participation of enterprises in the education process will help students develop their professional skills and adapt to the sector faster. Materials and resources used in vocational education should be updated in accordance with the current needs of the sector and enriched to support students' learning processes. Especially digital training tools and simulation applications can be effective in developing students' practical skills. Social activities and group work should be organized to facilitate students' social adaptation processes. In addition, reward and incentive mechanisms should be developed to increase students' motivation. Allowing students to take weekly vacation days and balancing working hours will increase students' motivation and productivity. These arrangements will positively affect students' performance in the workplace.

This study has comprehensively addressed the adaptation problems of students receiving tourism education within the scope of MESEM and the solution suggestions for these problems. The findings of the study shed light on the improvements that need to be made to make the vocational education system more effective and efficient. Steps such as updating training programs, expanding mentoring and psychological support services, strengthening cooperation with enterprises and developing training materials will facilitate students' adaptation to vocational education and contribute to the formation of a more qualified workforce in the sector. In conclusion, sustainable development of the vocational education system will both increase the vocational success of students and contribute to the training of the qualified workforce needed by the tourism sector. In this context, increasing cooperation between policy makers, educational institutions and sector representatives is of great importance for the future of vocational education.

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