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*Artículos científicos*

***Planteamiento de las Competencias Profesionales en Turismo  
desde la perspectiva de los egresados en México***

***Approach to Professional Competencies in Tourism  
from the perspective of graduates in Mexico***

***Abordagem às Competências Profissionais em Turismo  
da perspectiva dos graduados no México***

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## **Resumen**

La oferta globalizada de la industria turística requiere la mejora continua de los productos y servicios que proporciona, que consecuentemente repercute en la actividad del capital humano del sector y por complemento en las competencias profesionales por desarrollar. El objetivo de la investigación de carácter descriptivo fue la identificación basada en la exploración de la literatura de los elementos tocantes a las teorías de las competencias educativas en educación superior, específicamente en la formación del profesional en el sector turismo, con la finalidad de describir opiniones y compendio conceptual que organice

el planteamiento de las Competencias Profesionales en Turismo desde la perspectiva de los egresados en México. Para obtener el objetivo diseñado, el presente artículo tiene la siguiente organización; el apartado inmediato, presenta la introducción que enfatiza la relevancia del tema abordado, prosigue con un marco conceptual que enuncia el origen, definición y elementos de las competencias educativas en educación superior. Después, es detallado un marco de referencia conceptual relacionado con las competencias profesionales en turismo y el instrumento de investigación aplicado a egresados de la Licenciatura en Turismo en una institución de nivel superior en México. Finalmente, a modo de conclusión, es definido el esquema del planteamiento de competencias profesionales en Turismo desde el punto de vista de los egresados del programa profesional.

**Palabras clave:** competencias educativas, educación superior, competencias profesionales, turismo.

### **Abstract**

The globalized offer of the tourism industry requires the continuous improvement of tourism products, which consequently affects the activity of human capital in the tourism sector and complements the professional skills of tourism professionals. The objective of the descriptive research was the identification based on the exploration of the literature of the elements related to the theories of educational competences in higher education, specifically in the training of professionals in the tourism sector to describe opinions and Conceptual compendium that organizes the approach to Professional Competences in tourism from the perspective of graduates in Mexico. To obtain the designed objective, this article has the following organization: the immediate section presents the introduction that emphasizes the relevance of the topic addressed, continues with a conceptual framework that states the origin, definition, and elements of educational competences in higher education. Then, a conceptual reference framework related to professional competencies in tourism and the research instrument applied to graduates of the Bachelor of Tourism in a higher-level institution in Mexico is detailed. Finally, by way of conclusion, the outline of the approach to professional competences in Tourism is defined from the point of view of the graduates of the professional program.

**Keywords:** educational skills, higher education, professional skills, tourism.

## Resumo

A oferta globalizada da indústria turística exige a melhoria contínua dos produtos e serviços que disponibiliza, o que conseqüentemente tem impacto na atividade do capital humano do setor e, adicionalmente, nas competências profissionais a desenvolver. O objetivo da pesquisa descritiva foi a identificação com base na exploração da literatura dos elementos relacionados às teorias de competências educacionais no ensino superior, especificamente na formação de profissionais do setor turístico, com o objetivo de descrever opiniões e compêndio conceitual que organiza a abordagem às Competências Profissionais em Turismo a partir da perspectiva dos graduados no México. Para atingir o objetivo desenhado, este artigo possui a seguinte organização; A seção imediata apresenta a introdução que enfatiza a relevância do tema abordado, continuando com um quadro conceitual que afirma a origem, definição e elementos das competências educacionais no ensino superior. Posteriormente, é detalhado um quadro conceitual relacionado às competências profissionais em turismo e o instrumento de pesquisa aplicado aos graduados do Bacharelado em Turismo de uma instituição de nível superior no México. Por fim, como conclusão, define-se o esboço da abordagem às competências profissionais em Turismo do ponto de vista dos egressos do programa profissional.

**Palavras-chave:** competências educativas, ensino superior, competências profissionais, turismo.

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## Introduction

According to UN Tourism (2024) World Tourism Barometer, in 2023 international tourism reached 88% of pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels, with an estimated 1.3 billion international arrivals (para. 2). Available information also indicates that several large, small and emerging destinations experienced a double-digit increase in international arrivals in 2023 compared to 2019 (para. 7). Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General of UN Tourism, says that the data highlights the resilience of tourism and the positive impact that this recovery has on economies, jobs, growth and opportunities for communities worldwide (para. 8). Regarding information prior to the COVID-19 health contingency, with reference to the International Tourism Overview (2019 Edition), it mentions that it was a relatively solid world economy, the growth of a rising middle class in emerging economies, technological progress, new business models, more affordable travel costs, and the simplification of visa

requirements, stimulated international tourist arrivals by 5% in 2018, reaching a record figure of 1.4 billion. This figure was achieved two years earlier than anticipated by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). At the same time, export revenues derived from tourism amounted to 1.7 trillion US dollars, thus consolidating the sector as a true global driving force for economic growth and development. It drives the generation of more and better quality jobs, in addition to serving as a catalyst for innovation and entrepreneurship. Therefore, this sector is contributing significantly to improving the quality of life of millions of people and transforming entire communities (UNWTO, 2019a).

The description of the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic information from UN Tourism indicates the importance of tourism activity in the world, particularly in the economic and social spheres, emphasizing the generation of jobs and business innovation. Likewise, tourism stands out as one of the most resilient and fastest-growing economic sectors worldwide, being one of the main sources of employment on a global scale. Although its socioeconomic impact and its potential to boost economic growth and employment are recognized, its role as a generator of employment and entrepreneurship in the formulation and implementation of policies, including educational ones, is often underestimated. Given its high degree of dependence on human capital, tourism is significantly affected by current social and technological transformations, which are shaping new business models, consumption patterns and changes in the value chain, as well as in the dynamics of supply and demand in the sector (UNWTO, 2020a, p.8).

In relation to the above, the increase in demand within the tourism industry has generated a notable expansion of job opportunities at all levels. More and more destinations around the world are recognizing the potential of tourism as a fundamental driver for socioeconomic development. Currently, tourism generates one in ten jobs worldwide, thus being an important source of employment, and placing it among the main job creators in the world that require various levels of skills. Tourism allows for the rapid entry into the workforce of young people, women and migrant workers and provides opportunities for local communities in urban and rural areas. (OMT, 2019b, p.14).

In the case of Latin America, tourism education, according to the UNWTO, refers to a perspective marked by three important situations: the adaptation of various countries to higher and technical education systems based on competencies, the increase in private educational institutions that teach tourism, and the absence of research on the situation of

higher education oriented towards the formation of human capital in the region in a comprehensive manner (2019b, p.17).

With information from the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (INEGI), the Satellite Account of Tourism of Mexico (CSTM), 2022; published in December 2023 indicates that the Gross Domestic Product of Tourism (GDP) obtained an amount of 2,372,556 million pesos, equivalent to 8.5% of the national GDP. Additionally, tourism activities produced 2.8 million paid jobs, corresponding to 7.1% of the national total (INEGI, 2023).

The Mexican Ministry of Tourism (2024) published the information regarding the National Survey of Occupation and Employment for the fourth quarter of 2023, issued by INEGI, which presents the main results in the tourism sector in Mexico; the information regarding the employed population in the sector amounted to 4 million 801 thousand people employed in the period October-December 2023, which is why it had a growth of (+0.8%) compared to the previous quarter. Tourism employment represented 9.0% of national employment.

Due to the importance of tourism activity in Mexico, the research by Aldaz et al. (2023) sets out the labor competencies for the tourism sector, with the purpose of proposing a professional training model in this area.

Based on the above, the objective of the research was the study through the recognition of theoretical works analogous to the themes of educational competencies in higher education, with a focus on the training of professionals in the tourism sector, in order to build a conceptual meeting and considerations that allow the delineation of the proposal of professional competencies in Tourism from the perspective of graduates in Mexico.

### **Previous literature**

The definition of the word 'competence' according to the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE, 2023), contains two meanings; according to the definitions described and due to the polysemic nature of the word "competence" this work addresses the conceptualization of expertise, aptitude, suitability to do something or intervene in each matter. Continuing with the thematic punctuality of educational competences in higher education, the conceptual referents are addressed in chronological order; firstly, it was identified that the theories of communication derived from linguistic studies and the use of language carried out in 1965 by Noam Chomsky propose the idea of a "linguistics of speech". Chomsky distinguishes in this theory competence and performance. Competence refers to the innate capacity that

human beings have from an early age to understand new sentences and create original messages. On the other hand, performance refers to the execution or realization of this capacity; that is, the ability to understand and produce original messages using a pre-existing language. Chomsky (1965) considers that a competence consists of a set of refined rules that allow the generation of countless performances and offer the preamble for the definition of educational competence; as a set of social, affective behaviors and cognitive, psychological, sensory and motor skills that allow to adequately carry out a role, a performance, an activity or a task (Chomsky, 1985).

On the other hand, the contribution of Tejada and Navío (n.d.) is to recognize the concept of competence to professional success based on a comprehensive set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are combined, coordinated and integrated. This implies that the individual must possess both the know-how and the know-how to perform adequately in his work environment. The mastery of this knowledge enables the individual to act effectively in various professional situations. Next, with the purpose of organizing the conceptual review, a review of the approaches to competence and educational competence is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Summary of the conceptualization of competence and educational competence.

Authors	Competence / Educational Competence
McClelland (1973, p. 13)	Competencies are closely related to a way of assessing what leads to superior performance at work, rather than relying on assessing all the factors that exhaustively describe a person's characteristics, in the hope that some of them are related to job performance.
De Ketele (1996, p.20)	An ordered set of capabilities (activities) that are exercised on learning content, and whose integration allows for the resolution of problems that arise within a category of situations. A set of tasks of the same type, within a family of situations.
Beckers (2002, p.57)	Competence mobilizes various resources to serve an action with a specific purpose. According to this author, competence is the ability that allows the subject to mobilize, in an integrated manner, his internal resources (knowledge, know-how and attitudes) and external resources, to efficiently solve complex tasks.
Perrenoud (2007, p. 9)	Competence refers to the ability to mobilize a set of resources, such as knowledge, skills, information, among others, to effectively resolve a series of situations that are connected to specific cultural, professional contexts and social conditions.
Zabala y Arnau (2007, p.1)	Competence involves identifying what a person needs to address the challenges he or she will face throughout his or her life. Therefore, it is understood that competence lies in the ability to intervene effectively in various areas of life through actions that mobilize attitudinal, procedural and conceptual components in an interrelated manner.
OCDE (2013, p.3)	A competence goes beyond mere knowledge and skills. It involves the ability to respond to complex demands by using and mobilizing psychosocial resources, including skills and attitudes, in a particular context.

Note: Structured resource with data from the cited authors.

Competencies are aimed at the evaluation and development of the capacities that lead to correct performance at work; they integrate a set of aptitudes that are developed in the learning content in the academic field and allow solving specific problems in different scenarios and mobilize various resources (knowledge, skills, attitudes). Competencies address various contexts, that is, they are adapted to the specific cultural, professional and social environments in which they are applied. In addition, they imply a comprehensive capacity for solving challenges in different areas of life, jointly using attitudinal, procedural and conceptual components. Beyond knowledge and skills, competencies include the ability to solve problems through the mobilization of knowledge and psychosocial resources.

Based on Table 1, the thematic content of educational competencies in higher education is focused on the comprehensiveness of the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes directed to specific performances in a professional area. Therefore, the term educational competencies describe extensive material that various authors have described to show the

particularities of the subject; it is important to mention that each profession develops competencies, some of which are specific to the corresponding degree, while others are transversal or shared with other degrees. Manzur et al. (2021) state that a high-quality higher education system is crucial to ensure that graduates contribute effectively to economic development and society. In this context, fostering more efficient collaboration with employers facilitates a faster transition of students to the labor market and improves results, while employers obtain the qualified workforce they require.

On the other hand, Yáñez (2020) indicates the challenge of higher education to move towards the training of people to avoid the concentration of technical and specialized training, to the detriment of human performance in conjunction with the professional field. Higher education from the perspective of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2019, p.72) considers that professional, technical and specialized knowledge and skills are necessary to meet the demands of specific occupations, but also to be applicable, with sufficient transfer potential, in new fields that are still unknown.

The predominant function of higher education is the development of professional skills, which will allow graduates to fulfill the various tasks assigned to them in their professional-labor exercise. Next, in a succinct review of the topic of professional skills; the contribution of Gómez (2015) states that professional skills are attributions or responsibilities linked to the professional figure (tasks and functions) that "encompass the set of achievements, results, lines of action and achievements that are demanded of the holder of a given profession or occupation."

For Bembibre et al. (2016), the term professional competencies are currently defined as the individual's possession of the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to carry out his or her activity. Professional competencies are all the knowledge, skills and aptitudes that an individual must develop during his or her training at the university (Casimiro et al., 2019). On the other hand, Arévalo and Juanes (2022) indicate that competencies currently constitute a conceptualization and a way of operating in the management of human resources that allows for greater articulation between management, work and education.

Likewise, the topics of –educational competencies in higher education and work competencies– are similar and closely linked; based on their relevance, the contributions of authors and public and private institutions in charge of regulating higher education based on competencies are presented.



Initially, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD, 2006, pp. 9-13) Definition and Selection of Competencies (DeSeCo) Project provides a framework that can guide a longer-term extension of assessments of new domains of competencies. The aim of PISA is to monitor how students at the end of compulsory education have acquired the knowledge and skills necessary to participate fully in society. The DeSeCo Project's conceptual framework for key competencies classifies these competencies into three broad categories. First, individuals must be able to use a wide range of tools to interact effectively with their environment, both physical and technological, as well as sociocultural, such as language. It is essential that they understand these tools comprehensively in order to adapt them to their own purposes and use them interactively. Second, in an increasingly interconnected world, individuals need to be able to communicate with others, especially as they will encounter people from diverse backgrounds. It is important that they are able to interact in heterogeneous groups. Thirdly, individuals need to be able to take responsibility for managing their own lives, placing them in a broader social context and acting autonomously.

Another approach that alludes to the issue of educational competences in higher education and work competences is the Tuning project (2003, p. 280), which defines competences, whether academic or professional, as a dynamic combination of attributes that encompass knowledge and its application, as well as attitudes and responsibilities that describe the learning outcomes of a specific program, or how students will be able to perform at the end of their educational process. This approach focuses both on the specific competences of each area of study and on generic competences, which are common to any course. This project (p. 25) emerged in a context of reflection on Higher Education, especially in the wake of accelerated changes in society and is part of the process of the Bologna Declaration of 1998. This declaration highlighted the central role of universities in European cultural development and promoted the creation of the European Higher Education Area to facilitate the mobility of citizens and enhance the overall development of the continent. Through which politicians aimed to create an integrated Higher Education area in Europe. Tuning is committed to considering degrees in terms of learning outcomes, focusing particularly on generic and subject-area-specific competences. The project contrasts a series of generic competences, divided into Instrumental, Interpersonal and Systemic Competencies.

In the case of the Tuning–Latin America project (2007, p.15), one of its main purposes is to contribute to the development of easily comparable and understandable qualifications,

based on the qualification objectives and the profiles sought for graduates. This seeks to broaden the articulation between higher education systems in Latin American countries, facilitate the mobility of graduates in the region and possibly also in Europe, and promote regional consensus on the understanding of qualifications in terms of the competencies that graduates could achieve. In short, the project seeks to establish common points of reference focused on competencies.

Based on the documentary review of previous contributions, the synthetic description of the relationship between educational competencies in higher education and professional competencies.

- Specific competences are those that relate to a particular field of study or qualification and are designed to achieve a specific graduate profile. These competences focus on specific training aspects, areas of knowledge or groups of subjects, and are developed continuously throughout the qualification.
- Generic competences, also known as transversal competences, are common skills that are applied in most qualifications, although their importance may vary depending on the context. These competences are adapted to each specific qualification. Within this set are personal competences such as time management and responsibility for one's own learning; interpersonal competences such as teamwork, leadership or negotiation; and competences related to information management, languages, computing, among others, the latter being grouped under the name of instrumental competences.

The integration of graduates from various vocational training courses into the work and social spheres implies the development of skills that are essential for their professional career. Reading comprehension, mathematical and digital skills contribute to the acquisition of new knowledge and the growth of other skills, such as social and analytical skills, which will contribute to the continuity of lifelong learning. Cognitive skills such as critical thinking and problem solving, among others, are necessary for continuous improvement. Likewise, socio-emotional skills such as empathy, collaboration, and self-sufficiency help to create societies with greater tolerance and cordiality.

### **Exploring the competencies of the tourism professional**

According to the glossary of tourism terms (UNWTO, 2020b, para. 1); tourism is characterized as a phenomenon that encompasses social, cultural and economic aspects, involving the movement of individuals to countries or places different from their usual environment for personal, professional or business reasons. These individuals, known as travelers, can be both tourists and excursionists, and can be residents or non-residents in the place they visit. Tourism encompasses a wide range of activities carried out by these travelers, many of which involve tourist expenditure.

Highlighting the economic impact of tourism activity; according to Zurab Pololikashvili (Secretary General of the World Tourism Organization UNWTO); tourism contributes to improving the lives of millions of people and transforming entire communities by promoting the creation of more and better jobs and serves as a catalyst for innovation and entrepreneurship. The increase in tourism implies a greater responsibility to ensure effective management of destinations to reduce any negative impact. It is essential to manage tourism in a sustainable manner and for the benefit of all. The focus must be on growth in value, not just in volume. Digitalization, innovation, greater accessibility and social changes will continue to influence the sector, requiring destinations and companies to adapt to maintain their competitiveness and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals, thus building a better future for all (UNWTO, 2019a, p. 2).

Given the importance of tourism in the world, it is significant to analyse the elements and variables that constitute tourism activity as a system; about the element of human capital in the tourism industry, the references of competence-based vocational training in the context of tourism activity are briefly mentioned. Firstly, the Report of the Evaluation Commission for the design of the Tourism Degree of the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA, 2004), sets out the development and assessment of transversal and specific competences, the relationship with the profiles and the validation of the competences with the sector and the comparison of competences with the graduates. Also, Majó (2005), in the Congress Harmonisation of Tourism Studies in the European Higher Education Area, presented the competences most valued in the tourism sector by academic managers, the tourism sector and graduates in tourism. Another contribution is that of Garrigós and Narangajavana (2006) with their work Management skills and new technologies in the tourism sector; in which they describe the changes in the tourism sector that are driving the demand for specific competences in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

and linguistic skills. These competences are considered crucial by employers, reflecting the growing importance of digitalization and globalization in the tourism industry.

On the other hand, the UNWTO (2020c, paras. 1-3), has incorporated since 1998 the UNWTO. TEDQUAL; which is a program of the UNWTO Themis Foundation, whose main objective is to improve the quality of tourism education, training and research programs. To achieve this, evaluation criteria have been established that are universally applicable to any institution. These criteria seek to measure various aspects, including the efficiency of the academic system, the integration of the tourism industry and the needs of students in educational programs. The fundamental pillar of the Program: the UNWTO. TedQual Certification System is made up of a series of evaluation criteria universally applicable to any tourism education, training and research program that allows measuring the effectiveness of the pedagogical system and the extent to which the needs of the tourism sector, civil society and students are met in such programs. In addition, it is based on other pillars, such as the UNWTO. TedQual Network, a platform that facilitates the promotion and exchange of knowledge and experiences between the institutions that are part of UNWTO. TedQual. This has led to the creation of two additional sub-programs: the UNWTO TedQual Exchange Program and the UNWTO Mentoring Program. TedQual.

The OECD mentions that, after six decades of continuous growth, tourism remains one of the most important economic sectors in the world. It is a fundamental part of the growing service economy, generating income and foreign exchange, creating jobs, stimulating regional development and supporting local communities. Exports in this sector are economically significant and have a greater impact on the national economy than other export sectors. It is estimated that for every US dollar spent by an international tourist in OECD countries, on average, 89 cents of added value are generated in the country, compared to 81 cents for total exports (OECD, 2020, p.1).

Regarding Mexico, there is data published by the Government of Mexico (2024), available in the National Registry of Competence Standards by Productive Sector (RENEC), in which 48 competency standards of the tourism sector are described. However, they are oriented to the provision of services at a technical level and application.

Another document, called Competencies of People and Occupational Profiles of the Secretariat of Public Education of Mexico and the National Council for Standardization and Certification of Labor Competencies (CONOCER) knowledge-competitiveness-growth (National Council for Standardization and Certification of Labor Competencies, pp. 599-

620); describes the occupational profiles and competencies of people in the tourism and restaurant sector in three dimensions; transversal competencies, technical competencies, sustainability competencies and innovation. It is important to note that, of the profiles mentioned in the document, only six refer specifically to professional training in tourism. These profiles cover roles such as restaurant and hotel directors and managers, restaurant and hotel area coordinators and heads, hospitality and tourism specialists, travel agency workers, tour guides in museums, casinos, parks, cinemas and other recreational centers, as well as supervisors in food and beverage preparation and service, and in leisure and hospitality services. The other profiles related to the tourism sector have a technical-operational focus.

Finally, it is important to note that the Mexican Ministry of Tourism (2014) has created the Guide to Tourism Education Institutions, to inform about the educational offer of each institution and includes institutions that teach studies related to tourism activity at four different educational levels: Basic or Training for Work, Upper Secondary Level, Higher Level and Diplomas. In Mexico, tourism education is structured into four educational levels and in most cases the institutions and/or study programs show typologies of basic links with public and/or private organizations. However, there is no precision and framework of the knowledge, profile, characteristics and skills that tourism professionals must have to achieve efficiency in their professional practice that results in the competitiveness of the sector.

## **Materials and method**

The methodology used for the development of this research was descriptive, transversal and non-experimental; it focused on the analysis of graduates (100% accreditation of the Learning Units of the study plan) of the bachelor's degree in Tourism from the Higher School of Tourism of the National Polytechnic Institute. The dimensions considered the variables related to the academic profile, work profile and the evaluation of the academic training.

### **Participants**

The total number of participants was 164 graduates of the Bachelor's Degree in Tourism; as a reference group and analysis based on available data from the directory of the Graduate Monitoring Office dependent on the Sub directorate of Educational Services of the Higher School of Tourism of the National Polytechnic Institute, specifically generations 2009-2013 (515 graduates) and 2008-2012 (477 graduates); therefore the sample was calculated with a simple random procedure with the following data  $N = 992$ ,  $p = 0.5$ ,  $q = 0.5$ ,  $z = 2.575$  and  $d$



= 0.1; obtaining a sample size of 142 graduates ( $n = 142$ ). The graduates issued responses in relation to the analysis categories of academic profile, work profile, evaluation on academic training, in addition to general demographic data.

### **Instrument**

The instrument used was a fifteen-item questionnaire aimed at collecting data from three categories of analysis: academic profile, work profile and evaluation of academic training by graduates of the 2009-2013 and 2008-2012 generations of the bachelor's degree in Tourism from EST-IPN. Firstly, the academic profile category outlines the aspects of specialty (with optional answers that specify the academic trajectories of Food and Beverages, Hospitality, Planning or Travel Agencies), professional updating and postgraduate studies. Secondly, the work profile category includes the dimensions of activity and the work relationship with the professional profile, organization, position and work functions as well as the description of the professional activity. And thirdly, the analysis category on the evaluation of academic training that includes the assessment of knowledge, use of skills, attitudes and values, satisfaction with academic training, academic training for the development of professional activity, incorporation and/or emphasis of thematic content.

### **Data analysis**

Once the information was collected, the data was analyzed using percentages for the demographic and academic profile sections. For the academic training evaluation section, the relevance of the skills, knowledge, attitudes and values developed was concentrated based on the frequency of repetition of responses.

## **Results**

Based on the responses obtained from the questionnaire (the instrument of this research), the results of the competencies, characteristic skills, suitability and aptitudes required in the tourism sector in Mexico are described; based on the opinion of the graduates of the Escuela Superior de Turismo del Instituto Politécnico Nacional.

Regarding the academic profile, the specialization of the graduates is represented by the academic trajectory of the Bachelor of Tourism program in the following order: Food and beverage business management, Hotel management, Planning and management of tourism development, Travel agencies and transportation lines. Regarding professional development,

42% of the graduates have developed activities in favor of this point; the actions mentioned are diverse and described subsequently. There are topics that stand out due to the frequency of repetition, so the most mentioned courses and/or activities are meeting planner, congresses and conventions, globalizers (Sabre and Amadeus), languages (English and French), finance, and management skills. Likewise, actions to update marketing, planning and community development, travel agency areas, diplomas in food and beverages, tourism guides, gastronomic tourism, banquets, and wines were cited (although less frequently). This information indicates the tendency and interest that graduates have in training and knowledge of these topics, derived from their usefulness in the labor area of the tourism industry. In addition to the above, the correspondence to the postgraduate course of studies is 4%.

Regarding the labor profile, 80% of graduates develop labor activity coinciding with their professional training (bachelor's degree in Tourism). The type of functions performed in the professional exercise are primarily administrative, followed by operational and ultimately managerial.

The second part of the instrument was called Evaluation of academic training and specifies categorized questions to assess the professional skills and knowledge in the training of the Bachelor of Tourism.

Through the item What knowledge related to your training is most valued in your professional training? It was identified that knowledge related to business topics, marketing, administration (procedures), financial resource management and human resource management; obtained the highest number of responses in terms of importance. Additionally, it was recognized that knowledge concerning legal issues related to the tourism industry, trends in the tourism industry, cultural and natural heritage obtained the second place in terms of relevance. Finally, the topics of tourism principles, operational procedures in the areas of accommodation, catering and tourism intermediation; were those that, according to the graduates, have the least importance.

Derived from the item What skills are used in your professional activity? It was established that the most important skills from the perspective of graduates are the use of information and communication technologies, oral and written communication; these are described as generic skills. Likewise, specific skills are those related to the use of specialized software in tourism (for example, Global Distribution Systems (GDS) or Hotel Management Systems).

Based on the item What attitudes and values favor your professional activity? The sample of graduates identifies the following attitudes and values as “very important”; problem solving, decision-making capacity and loyalty.

## Discussion

The objective of the descriptive research was to identify, based on the exploration of the literature, the elements referring to the theories of educational competencies in higher education, specifically in the training of professionals in tourism, to describe opinions and a conceptual compendium that organizes the approach to Professional Competencies in tourism from the perspective of graduates in Mexico.

The results identified the need for thematic content in the study plan (which, according to the graduates of the bachelor’s degree in Tourism), are pertinent. The highest repetition frequencies are focused on the topics of languages (curricular English), communication skills, leadership, finance and senior management. In summary; the categories of the competencies of "knowledge" (cognitive, disciplinary and conceptual) and "know-how" (procedural and instrumental); from the perception of the graduate, suggest a tendency towards specialization associated with the activities of each of the tourism industries. However, they highlight the importance and application of business, marketing, administration (procedures), financial and human resources management; languages (curricular English) in addition to mastery of a third language (preferably Chinese), communication and leadership skills, finance and senior management; in all economic-productive activities of the tourism sector. In reference to the "being" competencies (attitudes and values), having a marked orientation towards customer service, teamwork and motivation for quality are essential. Referring to generic-transversal competencies, problem solving, decision-making capacity and loyalty are the most valued by the sample of graduates.

The results of this research are consistent with the report prepared by the World Tourism Organization (2020a) "The Future of Work in Tourism and the Development of Competencies", since it states the maximization of digitalization in education and competency development, continuous training and development of soft skills, as well as technological skills. Likewise, the development of skills in areas such as communication, customer orientation, marketing and promotion (mainly online marketing), compliance with international standards, particularly in terms of food safety and accommodation quality, as

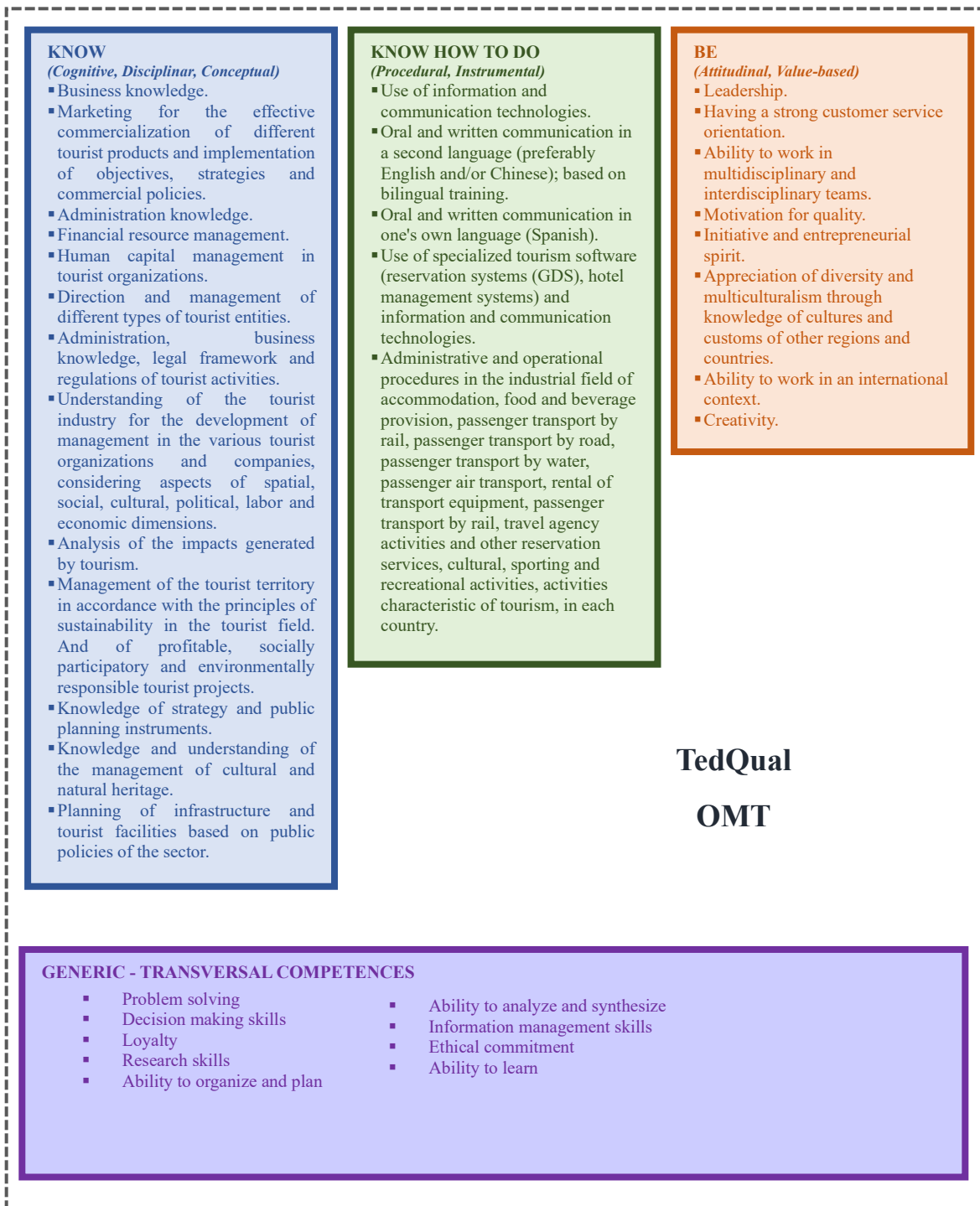


well as planning and policy formulation at national and local levels (p. 52). In contrast, the main differences between the cited report and the present research are the research instrument and the chapter description of tourism trends and prospects. Regarding the research instrument, a global survey was applied among tourism administrations, companies, educational institutions, workers and students in English, French, Spanish and Russian; in which there were more than 1,400 responses. (p. 27).

On the other hand, the affinity of this research with Aldaz et al. (2023) lies in the specification of the work competencies of the tourism sector professional with skills in three axes: cognitive, procedural and attitudinal. And the contrast of the referred research with the present work lies in the description of the competencies of the tourism professional based on educational theory, so the skills are referred to as the competencies of Knowledge (Cognitive, Disciplinary, Conceptual), competencies of Knowing How (Proceeding, Instrumental), competencies of Being (Attitudinal, Value) and includes the Generic-Transversal competencies.

Based on the findings obtained from the research, a statement of Professional Competencies in Tourism was designed from the perspective of graduates in Mexico, which is presented in Figure 1, based on the investigation of the literature of the elements concerning the theories of educational competencies in higher education, with specific focus on training tourism professionals.

**Figure 1.** Approach to Professional Competencies in tourism from the perspective of graduates in Mexico.



Note: Prepared by the authors using data from primary and secondary sources of the research

## Conclusion

The approach to professional competences in tourism from the graduate's perspective, the result of this work, derives from the analysis and relationship of information from the primary and secondary sources determined for the research study and aims to refer to the educational competences in higher education aimed at the training of professionals in tourism in the context of the work activity that explores the different forms of action of professionals in tourism, in the environment where they operate, thus achieving the objective of the research.

Likewise, the intention of this work was directed to expose the criteria and theoretical premises to the schemes of professional competence, together with the assessments of the graduates of the Bachelor's Degree in Tourism, using the descriptive methodology of the research; in relation to the positions and criteria of competitiveness and quality of tourism education by using specific instruments to obtain opinion data from the sample described in a higher education institution in Mexico. However, it is important to note that the main limitation of the study is that it only considers the bachelor's degree in Tourism offered by the IPN, so it is recommended to extend the analysis to other institutions that offer this educational option. It is also suggested to conduct studies on the development of professional skills in tourism in students during their academic career in various national and international institutions to obtain a comparative analysis of the educational training provided for this important sector of the countries.

## Future lines of research

Some proposals for the development of complementary work are those related to research into skills in the use of digital tools in the tourism industry, which constantly evolve the supply and consumption of tourism services. In addition, professional skills related to sustainability focused on the aspects of environmental, social and economic management of the resources involved in tourism activities.

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