Determinants of Student Performance in Tour Planning and Guiding Course: The Mediating Role of Student Interest

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ABSTRACT

The Tour Planning and Guiding course for Diploma in Tourism Management students serves as a critical bridge between theoretical knowledge and the practical requirements of the tourism industry. This study examines the influence of Tour Planning Knowledge (TPK), Entrepreneurial Competency (EC), Communication and Interpersonal Skills (CIS), and Practical Tour Guiding Skills (PTGS) on Student Interest (SI) and Overall Student Performance (OSP), while examining the mediating role of SI. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire from 136 Diploma in Tourism Management students enrolled in the Tour Planning and Guiding course. The data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) with bootstrapping. The findings indicate that TPK and EC significantly and positively influence SI, while CIS and PTGS do not significantly influence SI. SI significantly and positively influences OSP. In addition, SI significantly mediates the relationship between TPK and OSP, while EC, CIS, and PTGS do not significantly mediate the relationship between SI and OSP. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening tour planning knowledge and entrepreneurial competencies while fostering student interest through engaging and experiential learning approaches. The study offers implications for tourism educators and curriculum developers in enhancing students' learning experiences and preparation for professional tourism practice.

Keywords: Tour Planning, Tour Guiding, Student Performance, Student Interest, Tourism Education

INTRODUCTION

Tourism education in Malaysia has expanded significantly in response to the tourism and hospitality industry's continued growth and evolving needs. The country offers a diverse range of academic and professional pathways, including diploma, undergraduate, postgraduate, and industry-oriented training programs in tourism, hospitality, leisure, and related fields. This expansion reflects the broader need for tourism education to meet not only disciplinary knowledge requirements but also the skills and competencies expected by the tourism industry. Previous research in the Malaysian context has highlighted the importance of integrating workplace readiness skills into tourism curricula to enhance graduates' employability and preparedness for the working environment (Shariff, 2021). Similarly, Mohd Yusof et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of university–industry collaboration in developing relevant curricula and competencies for hospitality and tourism graduates.

The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), Malaysia's national quality assurance body for higher education, plays a vital role in ensuring that tourism-related programs meet established academic and quality standards. The continued development of the tourism sector, together with the growing need for a skilled, knowledgeable, and competent workforce, underscores the importance of strengthening tourism education in Malaysia. According to the Malaysian Qualifications Register (MQR), which records accredited higher education qualifications in Malaysia, programs in Travel, Tourism and Leisure (NEC 1015) are offered across a wide range of higher education institutions (MQA, 2026). As of September 2026, the MQA database identifies 151 colleges and universities offering programs in this field, demonstrating the established presence and breadth of tourism education in Malaysia's higher education landscape. This extensive program provision highlights the vital role of tourism education in developing qualified human capital and preparing future professionals and leaders for an increasingly dynamic and competitive tourism industry.

The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) has outlined core learning areas relevant to tourism and hospitality education, including tour planning, travel package development, visitor interpretation, and tour guiding services. In line with these areas, the Diploma in Tourism Management program at a public higher education institution in Malaysia requires students to undertake Tour Planning and Guiding as a core course (UiTM, 2026). The course is designed to provide students with both theoretical knowledge and practical competencies related to tour guiding and tour management. Through the course, students are exposed to the processes involved in designing, organizing, managing, innovating, and promoting tour packages, while simultaneously developing essential technical and interpersonal skills required in the tourism industry. Beyond its role as a professional preparation course, Tour Planning and Guiding may also give students an opportunity to explore their interests and potential career orientation toward tour guiding and tour management. Furthermore, students' performance in the course can indicate their competency level and readiness to undertake tourism-related professional roles, particularly those involving tour interpretation, guiding, and tour package management.

The competencies required of tourism management students, particularly those pursuing careers in tour guiding, have attracted increasing attention within tourism education research. Developing appropriate competencies is essential not only for students' academic achievement but also for their preparedness to meet the tourism industry's professional demands. Piróg et al. (2021) examined self-assessed competencies among tourism degree graduates in Poland and showed the importance of competency development in facilitating graduates' transition from higher education to the workplace. Similarly, Verdadero et al. (2020) investigated tourism students' preparedness for industry entry by assessing their concentration-area, generic, and functional-area skills. Their findings indicated considerable variation in students' preparedness, suggesting that tourism education should provide opportunities for students to develop competencies aligned with industry expectations. More recently, Corpuz et al. (2025) specifically examined the competencies of tourism management students in the context of tour guiding, highlighting the importance of developing relevant knowledge and skills for effective tour guiding practice.

This study examines the factors influencing the performance of Diploma in Tourism Management students in the Tour Planning and Guiding course. Specifically, it investigates the effects of Tour Planning Knowledge (TPK), Entrepreneurial Competency (EC), Communication and Interpersonal Skills (CIS), and Practical Tour Guiding Skills (PTGS) on student performance, while examining Student Interest in Tour Planning and Guiding (SI) as a mediating variable. By examining these relationships, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how competency development and students' interest contribute to learning performance in tourism education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review highlights three topics: trends in tourism education in Malaysia, students' interest and performance, and the research model and hypothesis development.

Tourism Education in Malaysia

Tourism and hospitality education in Malaysia has increasingly recognized the need to meet Industry 4.0 demands by adapting educational practices and strengthening industry–academia linkages to support technological and industry development (Mohd Sanip et al., 2024). This curricular evolution is further driven by the rapid growth of the tourism industry, which has amplified the demand for skilled professionals and prompted the expansion of specialized educational programs (Hussain et al., 2020). Key career pathways these initiatives target include travel agency operations and professional tour guiding. Industry data highlights the substantial scale of these fields: as of September 2026, Malaysia recorded 5,324 active tour operators and travel agencies registered under the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC, 2026). Additionally, the country boasts 9,596 active licensed tour guides, comprising 7,810 city guides, 1,103 regional-specific tour guides (RSTG), 494 nature guides, 126 geo-guides, and 63 local community hosts (MOTAC, 2026). These figures underscore the vast career potential and strategic need to expand tourism education focused on tour planning, operations, and guiding services.

Tour planning and tour guiding education are foundational to the tourism industry's success, sustainability, and quality. Several studies have highlighted training programs related to the tour planning and tour guiding profession, including skills development, delivery methods, and curriculum content (Le et al., 2025; Ly et al., 2022; Sezgin & Duz, 2018; Boi et al., 2025). One challenge in implementing these subjects is ensuring current training programs meet the evolving demands of the tourism industry (Boi et al., 2025). Additionally, tour planning and guiding programs are evolving to include innovative methods and broader skill sets to meet the industry's growing demands.

To prepare students for these career pathways and meet evolving industry standards, tour planning and guiding programs emphasize a comprehensive matrix of core competencies, technical skills, and domain knowledge. Prior research highlights the critical role of soft skills—such as effective communication, empathy, adaptability, networking, and self-leadership—in enhancing visitor experiences (Ghahramani et al.,2018; Kapa et al., 2022; Luo et al.,2026; Santos et al., 2025; Sumanapala et al.,2025). Concurrently, essential hard skills include itinerary design, spatial navigation, digital literacy, and financial management (Adane et al., 2024; Santos et al., 2025). In terms of foundational knowledge, curricula emphasize expertise in local culture and history, sustainable tourism practices, technology integration, and standard operational procedures (Alfukaha & Ababneh, 2025; Carmody, 2013; Kapa et al., 2022). Collectively, these findings underscore the need to embed a balanced mix of interpersonal, technical, and contextual competencies in higher education curricula to sustain Malaysia's growing tourism industry.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of technical, interpersonal, and contextual competencies in tourism education, existing studies tend to examine these competencies independently or within broader tourism and hospitality contexts, with limited attention to their combined contribution to students' performance in tour planning and guiding. In particular, Tour Planning Knowledge (TPK), Entrepreneurial Competency (EC), Communication and Interpersonal Skills (CIS), and Practical Tour Guiding Skills (PTGS) are complementary competency dimensions that may collectively shape students' ability to perform tour planning and guiding tasks effectively.

The Tour Planning Knowledge (TPK) is fundamental to effective tour preparation, as it enables students to develop structured itineraries, anticipate logistical challenges, and respond appropriately to travelers' needs (Weiler & Walker, 2014; Sharma, 2025; Shidende et al., 2019). Entrepreneurial Competency (EC) is also increasingly relevant, as entrepreneurial capabilities enable students to manage resources, innovate, respond to market demands, and enhance their employability and potential to develop tourism-related ventures (Santos et al., 2025). Meanwhile, Communication and Interpersonal Skills (CIS) are consistently recognized as essential competencies for tour guides because effective communication influences tourist satisfaction, group cohesion, and the overall quality of the tour experience (Weiler & Walker, 2014; Ghahramani & Khalilzadeh, 2018). Similarly, Practical Tour Guiding Skills (PTGS), cultural interpretation, and group management enable students to translate theoretical knowledge into actual guiding practices and fulfill the role of tour guides as

cultural ambassadors and facilitators of tourism experiences (Weiler & Walker, 2014; Sharma, 2025; Shidende et al., 2019). However, these competency dimensions are often discussed as separate skill areas, while empirical evidence on their combined influence on tourism students' overall performance remains limited, particularly in the Malaysian higher education context. Therefore, an integrated framework incorporating TPK, EC, CIS, and PTGS is warranted to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the competency factors associated with students' interest and performance in tour planning and guiding education.

Students Interest and Performance

Student interest and engagement have frequently been examined as potential mediating mechanisms linking various educational and environmental factors, such as teacher behaviors, feedback, and parental involvement, to academic outcomes including achievement, motivation, and satisfaction (Roorda et al., 2017; Ukaj & Reshani, 2025; Veldeflor et al., 2024). Interest plays a key role in stimulating students' curiosity and encouraging them to explore subject matter more deeply, which can subsequently foster greater engagement, persistence, and willingness to learn (Veldeflor et al., 2024). Previous studies have also reported that higher levels of student interest are associated with improved academic achievement and learning outcomes (Teh et al., 2024; Kaku & Arthur, 2025). However, empirical research examining the role of student interest within tourism education remains limited. Research has paid insufficient attention to whether students' interest in tourism-related learning mediates the relationship between competency-related factors and academic performance. This represents an important research opportunity, as understanding the mediating role of student interest may provide further insight into how tourism students' knowledge, skills, and competencies are translated into improved learning and performance outcomes.

Students' performance is an important indicator of the effectiveness of tourism education and can be assessed through various approaches. Among these, self-assessment is considered a key component of the learning process, as it enables students to gather information about their own learning and reflect on their progress (Sharma et al., 2016). Self-assessment involves individuals evaluating their own performance against explicit or implicit standards, allowing them to identify their strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement (Barana et al., 2022; Piamsai, 2023). Self-evaluation processes, including self-assessment and self-reflection, can also contribute to students' confidence, preparedness, and performance in their field of study (Haake et al., 2025). In this regard, self-assessment can provide insights into students' perceived achievement of learning outcomes, their ability to apply acquired knowledge in real-world contexts, confidence in performing professional tasks, and preparedness for future employment. These dimensions are particularly relevant to tourism education, where students are expected not only to acquire theoretical knowledge but also to apply it in practical tourism situations. Nevertheless, self-assessment accuracy may vary, and previous research suggests it is more effective when used alongside other assessment approaches to provide a robust measure of student performance (Barana et al., 2022; Andersson et al., 2017).

In the context of tour planning and guiding education, self-assessment is therefore relevant for capturing students' perceptions of their ability to achieve the course learning outcomes, apply knowledge in real tourism situations, perform the duties of a tour planner or tour guide, and prepare themselves for employment in the tourism industry. Accordingly, this study measures Overall Student Performance (OSP) through students' perceived achievement of course learning outcomes, application of knowledge, professional confidence, industry preparedness, and overall performance in the course.

Research Framework and Hypothesis Development

Based on the literature reviewed, this study proposes a research framework to examine the relationships between tourism-related competencies, student interest, and overall student performance in the Tour Planning and Guiding course. The framework incorporates four key competency dimensions, namely Tour Planning Knowledge, Entrepreneurial Competencies, Communication and Interpersonal Skills, and Practical Guiding Skills, as predictors of students' interest in the course. Student interest is further proposed as a mediating variable that may contribute to students' overall performance. Figure 1 presents the proposed relationships, followed by the development of hypotheses.

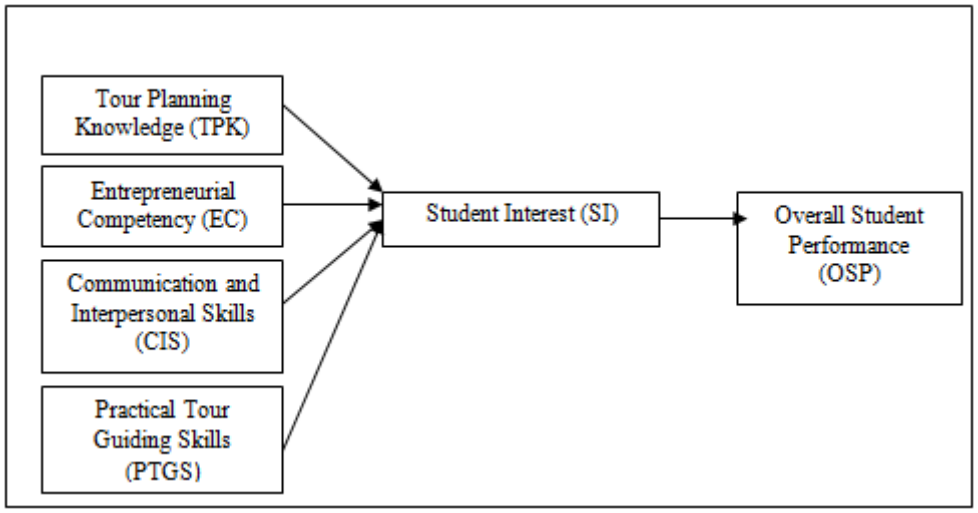


Figure 1: Research Framework

The following hypotheses were developed based on the proposed relationships among the constructs in the research framework:

H1: Tour Planning Knowledge (TPK) has a significant positive effect on Student Interest (SI) in Tour Planning and Guiding.

H2: Entrepreneurial Competency (EC) has a significant positive effect on Student Interest (SI) in Tour Planning and Guiding.

H3: Communication and Interpersonal Skills (CIS) have a significant positive effect on Student Interest (SI) in Tour Planning and Guiding.

H4: Practical Tour Guiding Skills (PTGS) have a significant positive effect on Student Interest (SI) in Tour Planning and Guiding.

H5: Student Interest (SI) has a significant positive effect on Overall Student Performance (OSP) in Tour Planning and Guiding.

H6: Student Interest (SI) significantly mediates the relationship between Tour Planning Knowledge (TPK) and Overall Student Performance (OSP).

H7: Student Interest (SI) significantly mediates the relationship between Entrepreneurial Competency (EC) and Overall Student Performance (OSP).

H8: Student Interest (SI) significantly mediates the relationship between Communication and Interpersonal Skills (CIS) and Overall Student Performance (OSP).

H9: Student Interest (SI) significantly mediates the relationship between Practical Tour Guiding Skills (PTGS) and Overall Student Performance (OSP).

METHODOLOGY

This study used a causal quantitative research design to examine the relationships between tourism-related competencies and the performance of Diploma in Tourism Management students in the Tour Planning and Guiding course. The study examined Tour Planning Knowledge (TPK), Entrepreneurial Competency (EC), Communication and Interpersonal Skills (CIS), and Practical Tour Guiding Skills (PTGS) as independent variables, Student Interest (SI) as a mediating variable, and Overall Student Performance (OSP) as the dependent variable. Data were collected using a structured online questionnaire distributed to students who had enrolled in the tour planning and guiding course. A convenience sampling technique was employed, resulting

in 136 valid responses. The questionnaire consisted of 32 measurement items covering TPK (5 items), EC (5 items), CIS (5 items), PTGS (5 items), SI (6 items), and OSP (5 items), measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

The collected data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) through SmartPLS 4. The measurement model was assessed using indicator loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio to establish reliability and validity. The structural model was evaluated using path coefficients, R^2, f^2, and bootstrapping to assess the hypothesized relationships. The mediating effect of Student Interest between the four competency variables and Overall Student Performance was examined using 5,000 bootstrap subsamples with a 95% confidence interval, following the recommended procedures for PLS-SEM analysis (Hair et al., 2019).

DATA ANALYSIS

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the demographic and course-related profile of the 136 respondents. The majority were female (77.9%, n = 106), while 22.1% (n = 30) were male. All respondents were Semester 4 Diploma in Tourism Management students. All respondents had experience with the Tour Planning and Guiding course (100%) and had participated in practical tour guiding activities (100%). Regarding prior industry exposure, 40.4% (n = 55) had work experience in the tourism or hospitality industry, while 59.6% (n = 81) had no such experience. Overall, the respondent profile indicates that the sample had relevant exposure to the course and its practical tour guiding components.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Profile	Category	n	%	
Gender	Female	106		77.9
	Male	30		22.1
Semester	Semester 4	136		100
Tour Planning and Guiding Experience	Yes	136		100
Practical Tour Guiding Experience	Yes	136		100
Tourism/Hospitality Work Experience	Yes	55		40.4
	No	81		59.6

Descriptive analysis of Variables

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the study variables. Overall, all constructs recorded relatively high mean scores, ranging from 3.88 to 4.15. Student Interest recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.15, SD = 0.98), followed by Overall Student Performance (M = 4.12, SD = 0.72), Entrepreneurial Competency (M = 4.05, SD = 0.70), and Tour Planning Knowledge (M = 4.04, SD = 0.72). Communication and Interpersonal Skills (M = 3.89, SD = 0.69) and Practical Tour Guiding Skills (M = 3.88, SD = 0.62) recorded comparatively lower mean scores, although both remained above the midpoint of the five-point scale. These findings indicate that respondents perceived themselves as highly competent, interested, and skilled in Tour Planning and Guiding.

Table 2 : Descriptive analysis of Variables

Variable	No. of Items	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Tour Planning Knowledge (TPK)	5	4.04	0.72
Entrepreneurial Competency (EC)	5	4.05	0.7
Communication and Interpersonal Skills (CIS)	5	3.89	0.69

Practical Tour Guiding Skills (PTGS)	5	3.88	0.62
Student Interest (SI)	6	4.15	0.98
Overall Student Performance (OSP)	5	4.12	0.72

Measurement model result

The initial evaluation of the reflective measurement model assessed convergent validity through indicator loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). The results showed that all reflective indicators exceeded the recommended loading threshold of 0.70, with loadings ranging from 0.802 to 0.926. The composite reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.919 to 0.962, indicating high internal consistency among the items measuring each latent construct and exceeding the recommended minimum of 0.70. Similarly, the AVE values ranged from 0.695 to 0.819, which were above the recommended threshold of 0.50, confirming adequate convergent validity. Overall, the results indicate that the measurement items demonstrated satisfactory reliability and convergent validity. Table 3 presents the detailed results.

Table 3: Loadings, composite reliability, and average variance extracted

Construct	**Items**	**Loadings**	**AVE**	**CR**
Tour Planning Knowledge (TPK)	I can identify the essential components of a tour package.	0.856	0.707	0.923
	I can prepare a comprehensive tour itinerary.	0.86		
	I can accurately estimate tour costs.	0.845		
	I can analyze different tour planning options before making decisions.	0.802		
	I can prepare a tour package that meets customer requirements.	0.839		
Entrepreneurial Competency (EC)	I can design attractive tour packages for different market segments.	0.808	0.695	0.919
	I can promote tour packages using digital marketing platforms.	0.818		
	I understand customer needs when developing tourism products.	0.87		
	I can apply entrepreneurial thinking in the tourism business.	0.837		
	I am confident in developing tourism business opportunities.	0.833		
Communication & Interpersonal Skills (CIS)	I communicate confidently with tourists.	0.836	0.722	0.928
	I can deliver tour commentary clearly.	0.831		
	I can answer tourists' questions professionally.	0.822		
	I work effectively with team members during tours.	0.878		
	I can build positive relationships with tourists.	0.878		
Practical Tour Guiding Skills (PTGS)	I can organize tour activities efficiently.	0.879	0.729	0.931
	I can manage time effectively during a tour.	0.846		
	I can handle unexpected situations during a tour.	0.826		
	I ensure tourists' safety and comfort.	0.851		
	I am confident in conducting a guided tour independently.	0.868		
Student Interest in Tour	I enjoy learning Tour Planning and Guiding.	0.873	0.807	0.962

Planning & Guiding (SI)				
	I look forward to attending this course.	0.91		
	I actively participate in learning activities because I find the subject interesting.	0.908		
	I am motivated to learn more about tour planning and guiding beyond the classroom.	0.908		
	I am interested in pursuing a career in the tourism industry.	0.862		
	I enjoy participating in practical tour planning and guiding activities.	0.926		
Overall Student Performance (OSP)	I have achieved the learning outcomes of this course.	0.874	0.819	0.958
	I can apply the knowledge learned in real tourism situations.	0.909		
	I am confident in performing the duties of a tour planner or tour guide.	0.911		
	I am prepared to work in the tourism industry.	0.922		
	Overall, I performed well in this course.	0.909		

The second aspect of the measurement model assessment involved evaluating discriminant validity using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio. Following Henseler et al. (2015), an HTMT value below 0.90 indicates adequate discriminant validity. The results showed that most HTMT values were below the recommended threshold of 0.90. However, the HTMT value between Entrepreneurial Competency (EC) and Tour Planning Knowledge (TPK) was 0.950, indicating a potential discriminant validity concern between these two constructs. Meanwhile, the HTMT value between Communication and Interpersonal Skills (CIS) and Practical Tour Guiding Skills (PTGS) was 0.854, slightly above the more conservative threshold of 0.85 but below 0.90. Table 4 presents the HTMT results.

Table 4 : HTMT Table

Construct	**CIS**	**EC**	**OSP**	**PTGS**	**SI**	**TPK**
Communication & Interpersonal Skills (CIS)	—					
Entrepreneurial Competency (EC)	0.608	—				
Overall Student Performance (OSP)	0.39	0.546	—			
Practical Tour Guiding Skills (PTGS)	0.854	0.7	0.402	—		
Student Interest (SI)	0.423	0.695	0.435	0.478	—	
Tour Planning Knowledge (TPK)	0.571	0.95	0.549	0.703	0.727	—

Table 5 displays the results of applying the Fornell and Larcker criterion for validity. The latent AVE variables exceeded the minimum value of 0.50, and the AVE square roots exceeded the latent variables' correlations, establishing discriminant validity.

Table 5: Fornell-Larcker criterion

Construct	CIS	EC	OSP	PTGS	SI	TPK
CIS	0.849					
EC	0.55	0.833				
OSP	0.365	0.502	0.905			
PTGS	0.778	0.633	0.378	0.854		
SI	0.405	0.645	0.418	0.457	0.898	
TPK	0.523	0.848	0.509	0.634	0.677	0.841

Structural Model Result

The structural model was evaluated using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 bootstrap samples to assess the significance of the direct and indirect relationships. As presented in Table 6, Tour Planning Knowledge ($\beta = 0.462$, $p < 0.001$) and Entrepreneurial Competency ($\beta = 0.245$, $p = 0.047$) had significant positive effects on Student Interest, while Communication and Interpersonal Skills ($\beta = 0.056$, $p = 0.593$) and Practical Tour Guiding Skills ($\beta = -0.034$, $p = 0.749$) did not demonstrate significant effects. Student Interest also had a significant positive effect on Overall Student Performance ($\beta = 0.418$, $p < 0.001$). For the indirect effects, Student Interest significantly mediated the relationship between Tour Planning Knowledge and Overall Student Performance ($\beta = 0.193$, $p = 0.008$). However, the indirect effects of Entrepreneurial Competency ($\beta = 0.102$, $p = 0.104$), Communication and Interpersonal Skills ($\beta = 0.023$, $p = 0.621$), and Practical Tour Guiding Skills ($\beta = -0.014$, $p = 0.761$) through Student Interest were not significant. Overall, the findings indicate that Student Interest significantly mediates the relationship between Tour Planning Knowledge and Overall Student Performance.

Table 6 : Structural Model Result

Relationship	Beta Value (β)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
Direct Effects					
TPK → SI	0.462	0.126	3.658	<0.001**	Supported
EC → SI	0.245	0.123	1.985	0.047*	Supported
CIS → SI	0.056	0.104	0.535	0.593	Not Supported
PTGS → SI	−0.034	0.107	0.32	0.749	Not Supported
SI → OSP	0.418	0.104	4.041	<0.001**	Supported
Indirect Effects					
TPK → SI → OSP	0.193	0.073	2.634	0.008**	Supported
EC → SI → OSP	0.102	0.063	1.624	0.104	Not Supported
CIS → SI → OSP	0.023	0.047	0.495	0.621	Not Supported
PTGS → SI → OSP	−0.014	0.047	0.304	0.761	Not Supported

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was assessed to evaluate the explanatory power of the structural model. The R^2 values for Student Interest and Overall Student Performance were 0.477 and 0.175, respectively. Based on Cohen (1988), these values indicate substantial explanatory power for Student Interest and relatively weak explanatory power for Overall Student Performance. The effect size (f^2) results indicated that Tour Planning Knowledge ($f^2 = 0.108$) and Entrepreneurial Competency ($f^2 = 0.030$) had small effects on Student Interest, while Communication and Interpersonal Skills ($f^2 = 0.002$) and Practical Tour Guiding Skills ($f^2 = 0.001$) demonstrated negligible effects. Student Interest demonstrated a medium effect on Overall Student Performance ($f^2 = 0.212$). Finally, predictive relevance was assessed using the blindfolding procedure. The Q^2 values were 0.374 for Student Interest and 0.141 for Overall Student Performance. Since both values were greater than zero, the results indicate that the structural model has sufficient predictive relevance for the endogenous constructs (Chin, 2010).

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that students' competencies in tour planning, particularly Tour Planning Knowledge and Entrepreneurial Competency, significantly influence their interest in the Tour Planning and Guiding course. These two competencies are key elements of tour planning, as students must apply knowledge and

entrepreneurial skills to develop, organize, and promote tour packages. This finding is consistent with Wakelin-Theron et al. (2019), who highlighted the importance of appropriate knowledge, skills, and employability attributes in tourism education and emphasized the need to strengthen entrepreneurship within tourism qualifications. Therefore, the present findings suggest that students may develop greater interest when they can connect tour planning knowledge and entrepreneurial competencies with the practical process of developing and managing tourism products. From a pedagogical perspective, this finding suggests that tour planning activities could incorporate more project-based and industry-oriented tasks, such as developing tour itineraries, designing tourism packages, and presenting tour products as viable business concepts. These activities may give students opportunities to connect theoretical knowledge and entrepreneurial competency with authentic tourism applications.

In contrast, the competencies related to tour guiding, namely Communication and Interpersonal Skills and Practical Tour Guiding Skills, did not show significant effects on students' interest. In a study on tour guide professions, Kapa et al. (2022) identified communication- and interpersonal-related skills as important competencies in tour guiding and emphasized the need to develop these skills through appropriate training. However, this finding suggests that although these competencies are important for performing the guiding role, they may not be the factors that generate students' interest in the course. This may be because students develop communication and practical guiding skills primarily through training, practice, and actual guiding experiences, rather than perceiving them as the main drivers of their interest. Therefore, greater emphasis could be placed on experiential pedagogical approaches, such as role-playing, mock guiding examinations, field simulations, and other authentic guiding activities. These approaches may provide students with more opportunities to practice communication and guiding skills in realistic situations and potentially make the learning experience more engaging.

The findings indicate that Student Interest significantly influenced Overall Student Performance. This finding is consistent with Munawaroh et al. (2022), who found that learning interest had a positive and significant effect on students' learning achievement. Their study further demonstrated that learning interest mediated the relationship between E-Problem Based Learning and learning achievement. These findings support the view that students' interest in a particular subject can contribute to their learning outcomes. In the context of Tour Planning and Guiding, students who demonstrate greater interest in the course may be more engaged in learning activities and more willing to apply the knowledge and skills acquired throughout the course. From a pedagogical perspective, this finding suggests that tour planning knowledge should not be presented solely as theoretical content. Instead, educators may consider using interactive and technology-supported activities, such as digital itinerary development, tour design exercises, destination planning tasks, and industry-related planning tools, to help students apply their knowledge in practical contexts. By connecting tour planning knowledge with authentic tourism tasks, students may better understand the relevance of what they learn and become more engaged with the course.

Meanwhile, the findings revealed that Student Interest significantly mediated the relationship between Tour Planning Knowledge and Overall Student Performance. This finding is consistent with Kaku and Arthur (2025), who found that Student Interest significantly mediated the relationship between students' perceptions of mathematics and mathematics performance, with a significant indirect effect. Their findings demonstrate that student interest can serve as an important pathway linking students' perceptions of a subject to their academic performance. Similarly, the present study indicates that Tour Planning Knowledge is associated with Overall Student Performance through Student Interest. This suggests that developing students' knowledge of tour planning may foster greater interest in the course, which may subsequently contribute to their overall performance.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationships among tourism-related competencies, Student Interest, and Overall Student Performance among Diploma in Tourism Management students in the Tour Planning and Guiding course. The findings revealed that Tour Planning Knowledge and Entrepreneurial Competency significantly influenced Student Interest, whereas Communication and Interpersonal Skills and Practical Tour Guiding

Skills did not show significant effects. Student Interest significantly influenced Overall Student Performance and mediated the relationship between Tour Planning Knowledge and Overall Student Performance. These findings highlight the importance of developing students' tour planning knowledge while fostering their interest and engagement throughout the learning process.

From a practical standpoint, tourism educators and curriculum developers should enhance knowledge-based and experiential learning activities in the Tour Planning and Guiding course. Activities such as itinerary creation, tour costing, tour package design, market segmentation, and authentic tourism case studies can improve students' tour planning skills and entrepreneurial abilities. At the same time, more focus should be placed on creating engaging practical guiding experiences through role-play, simulations, field assignments, and interactions with industry professionals. Although Communication and Interpersonal Skills and Practical Tour Guiding Skills did not significantly predict Student Interest, they remain crucial for preparing students for professional tour guiding. Thus, the emphasis should be on improving the delivery and overall learning experience of the practical guiding component, rather than reducing its importance.

Based on these findings, future course delivery could integrate more authentic, student-centered, and industry-oriented activities that connect theoretical knowledge with real tourism situations. Educators may also consider designing activities that let students apply tour planning knowledge before progressing to practical guiding tasks, creating a clearer connection between knowledge, interest, and performance. Future research could further examine other factors that may explain students' interest in practical tour guiding, such as teaching methods, industry exposure, self-efficacy, perceived career relevance, or learning environment. Longitudinal or mixed-method studies could also provide deeper insights into how students' interest develops throughout their tourism education and practical training.

The limitation of the present study focused on several factors of competency and did not examine other potential factors that influence student interest in practical tour guiding and tour planning knowledge. Future research may add factors such as teaching methods, industry exposure, self-efficacy, perceived career relevance, and the learning environment. In addition, the study focuses on one specific educational setting; therefore, future research could include a larger sample of students from varied institutions.

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Declaration on the Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

"The author(s) declare that generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were used during the preparation of this manuscript. The following tool(s) were used: [ChatGPT, Gemini, Grammarly and Scopus AI]. The tool(s) were used for language editing, grammar improvement, translation, and data analysis. All AI-assisted content

was reviewed and verified by the author(s), who take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, integrity, and final content of the manuscript."

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