

The four-way approach of tourism students towards a post–Covid-19 world and the future of tourism

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This study explores current tertiary tourism students' post-pandemic career strategies and their visions towards Egypt's post–Covid-19 tourism future. The data were collected through 29 semi-structured in-depth interviews with 29 students majoring in tourism management at the University of Alexandria, Egypt. Findings demonstrate that in order to adapt to the tourism workforce in post–Covid-19 Egypt, students adopted a four-way approach: a dual temporal perspective, individual agency, parental support and active imagination of lifelong careers and reimagining the future of Egypt's tourism in the post-pandemic era. The four approaches are conceptualized in relation to participants' strategies and concerns towards future career paths and the Egyptian tourism industry in the post-viral world. In this regard, students' perceptions can guide policymakers, hotel professionals and government agencies to develop post-pandemic strategies and programs to meet the changing needs and expectations of post-pandemic tourists, as well as students. Finally, the study indicates avenues for future research directions related to the findings and limitations.

Keywords: *tourism students, career paths, four-way approach, post–Covid-19, market trends, Egypt*

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background: challenges faced by Egyptian tourism students

In an increasingly competitive and challenging job market in Egypt, Egyptian university graduates are more concerned about their future careers. While the employment rate of Egyptian tourism graduates used to be higher than those of unskilled and illiterate workers, the number of tourism graduates accessing the Egyptian job market has increased significantly over the last two decades. Consequently, recent tourism graduates are facing challenges in securing employment opportunities (The Egyptian Ministry of Local Development 2022). When facing global or national crises, young people are the most severely affected as they are the most vulnerable group in the labor market (Reichenberger/Raymond 2021a). The two political upheavals in Egypt between 2011 and 2013 have resulted in a sharp decline in international tourist arrivals, a dramatic decrease in tourism investments, challenges for potential tourism investors and

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substantial job losses in the travel and tourism industry. Hence, many Egyptian tourism graduates have experienced the challenge of securing a satisfying job, which led to long-term unemployment. Covid-19 added fuel to the fire with its additional negative impacts on tourism employment. The Egyptian tourism industry has demonstrated a proven ability in the past to create foreign exchange earnings, poverty alleviation in rural regions in Upper Egypt, career opportunities for new Egyptian graduates and infrastructure development in Egyptian coastal regions. The Egyptian tourism industry, being a workforce-intensive industry, needs a large number of Egyptian staff with specialized expertise and skills. In order to develop and provide current Egyptian university graduates with the appropriate attitudes and professional abilities to achieve sustainable tourism in Egypt, hospitality and tourism education is essential. After the uprising of June 2013, the Egyptian government invested heavily in higher education institutions to train students with expertise and skills in the hospitality, heritage, travel and leisure, recreation, agriculture, science and artificial intelligence technology sectors (The Egyptian Ministry of Local Development 2022). On the other hand, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, high inflation, the global energy crisis and the war in Ukraine, the Egyptian tourism industry has been in the doldrums again, making it more difficult for fresh tourism graduates to secure a satisfactory job offer (Wagdy 2022).

Highlighting the negative impacts of the Covid-19 crisis on the hospitality and tourism industry implies that whatever occurs in the tourism sector also affects both educational institutions and students' perspectives and plans towards future career paths. Within Egypt, the context of the current research, over half of travel and leisure companies had at least a 35% decrease in their revenues and, besides this, they had to implement several initiatives, such as banning of gatherings, redundancy and layoff policies, travel bans, closure of schools and religious and heritage sites, a night-time curfew, forced unpaid leave, working from home policy and a significant reduction in operation days and hours (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities 2022). There have also been concerns voiced by the Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education and academic staff that the pandemic has had negative consequences not only on the long-term financial feasibility of educational institutions offering tourism programs but also on the hospitality and tourism labor market, resulting in the formation of 'a human capital vacuum in the workplace', and even worsening earlier challenges to effectively recruit experienced and qualified staff who are capable of rapidly adapting to the post-Covid-19 working environment (BBC News Arabic 2020a; Goh/Okumus 2020: 5). Furthermore, local news media reported that during the initial three months of the Covid-19 pandemic about 713 Egyptian tourism-related business establishments (i.e., tour operators, restaurants, travel agencies, accommodation facilities, rental car companies, boat charters and national airline companies) filed for bankruptcy due to the declining demand fueled by the pandemic (Nile News 2020). According to Nile News (2020), the pandemic hit the public and private universities that offered tourism education hard. They have been facing a number of challenges – restoring students' post-pandemic confidence in tourism programs and the job market, recruiting and retaining domestic, North African and Arab Gulf students, restoring students' enrollment rates back to pre-Covid-19 levels and curbing the exodus of expatriate academics, to name but a few. Egyptian hospitality and students' education, lives and future plans have been adversely affected by the Covid-19 lockdowns. Private and public educational institutions in Egypt were abruptly closed to face-to-face education, and tourism and leisure companies across the country were not able to operate their businesses for a long time during the lockdown measures. Hence, tourism students did not have the opportunity to attend physical classes and missed the benefits of domestic and international work and internship experiences.

Likewise, non-academic sources and Egyptian popular press reported that the unemployment rate in the hospitality and tourism sector has increased to approximately 14.7%, and many new tourism and hospitality graduates have lost job offers and internship opportunities in the neighboring Arab Gulf states, and some were forced to accept jobs unrelated to their education (BBC News Arabic 2020b).

1.2 Rationale for the study

Although several scholars (i.e., Baker et al. 2022; Benaraba et al. 2022; Hasenzahl et al. 2022) documented the perspectives and experiences of academics, industrial professionals and students towards tourism education and career development before and during the Covid-19 pandemic, we still lack clear insights into students' concerns, approaches, plans and visions towards future career paths and the tourism industry in the post-pandemic world. Furthermore, the plethora of tourism literature relating to the critical effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on academia, entrepreneurs and students focuses on several case studies in different regions around the world, such as New Zealand (Reichenberger/Raymond 2021b); Turkey (Seyitoğlu et al. 2022); the Philippines (Benaraba et al. 2022); the United States (Park/Jones 2021); Hong Kong (Choy/ Yeung 2022; Ye/Law 2021); and Australia, Malaysia and Scotland (Siow et al. 2021), to name but a few. Still, to the best of our knowledge, almost no published academic work has assessed students' post-pandemic strategies and the future of tourism within the Egyptian and Arab world contexts. As Egyptian tourism graduates are likely to become one of the contributors to the future development of tourism in the country, it is vital to explore their future career perceptions and professional choices in the post-pandemic recovery phase. Accordingly, the authors of the present study respond to this noticeable scarcity in hospitality and tourism literature. They framed distinct major themes so as to address two main unanswered questions in the existing tourism literature, namely: 'what post-graduation career approaches have been utilized by year four tourism management undergraduate students at the university of Alexandria in order to adapt to the tourism workforce and industry expectations in post-Covid-19 Egypt' and 'how do year four tourism management undergraduate students perceive the future of Egypt's tourism industry in the post-Covid-19 recovery phase?'

Recent and ongoing research has focused primarily on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on tourism education (Chen et al. 2022), the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on students' internship experiences in event, hospitality and tourism majors (Park/Jones 2021), comparing tourism management students' career perceptions before and during the Covid-19 pandemic (Benaraba et al. 2022), tourism teachers' perspectives on remote learning during the Covid-19 lockdown measures (Hasenzahl et al. 2022), tourism and hospitality students' perceptions and experiences of eLearning during the Covid-19 pandemic (Baker et al. 2022), the role of online faculty development courses on tourism education and teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic (Qiu et al. 2020), the reshaping of tourism higher education policies in the post-Covid-19 world (Edelheim 2020) and the challenges of regaining and restoring tourism stakeholders and students' confidence and trust in post-Covid-19 tourism education and careers (Siow et al. 2021). There have also been recent frequent scholarly calls (i.e., Benaraba et al. 2022; Reichenberger/Raymond 2021b) to broaden the current research focus and knowledge on the effects of Covid-19 on tourism education to include qualitative investigations of tourism students' career perceptions and the way they determine their career paths in post-Covid-19 economic recovery. Seyitoğlu and Costa (2022) argued that the

least is known about tourism students' post-pandemic plans and their views of future trends in the tourism industry. The identification of these unexplored research areas guided us to focus on exploring the existing research gaps. Accordingly, Egyptian tourism students were selected as the primary focus of the research, and the University of Alexandria in Egypt was chosen as a suitable case study site.

1.3 Justification for choosing Egypt as a suitable case study site

There are some key elements for why the researchers selected Egypt as a research setting. The tourism industry is considered one of the key pillars of the Egyptian economy, and the Egyptian government's goal after the uprising of June 2013 was to make Egypt a thriving tourism and cultural hub for regional and international tourists. Tourism is a major source of income in Egypt and has employed over 12.6% of a total population of 102 million people, contributing about 15% of GDP before the start of the pandemic. One out of eight working Egyptians is employed either directly or indirectly in the tourism sector. Thus, Egypt is heavily dependent on the tourism industry, and a total of 13 million tourists visited the country in 2019 with the total international tourism receipts reaching US\$13.03 billion (The Egyptian Ministry of Local Development 2022). The Egyptian Ministry of Local Development (2022) and The Ministry of Planning and Economic Development (2021) have recognized the hospitality, leisure and tourism sectors as three of the fastest growing industries of Egypt's economy in the last fifteen years. While there are many avenues for recruiting staff in the tourism and hospitality sectors, students with a bachelor's and master's degree in hospitality and tourism management are considered the best candidates due to the quality of education they receive at the tertiary level (Qiu et al. 2017). In Egypt, a high proportion of employees (about 65%) are semi-skilled tourism workers who lack vocationally oriented qualifications or university degrees in the field of tourism, leisure, travel and hospitality industries (i.e., hotels, tour operators, restaurants, heritage sector, travel agencies, marketing, theme parks, tour guiding, museums and art galleries) (The Egyptian Ministry of Local Development 2022). Thus, Egyptian public and private universities and affiliated colleges that offer tourism programs can be the key element in resolving this long-standing issue. In this regard, over the past twenty years, the capacity of tourism education has been fast growing in the Egyptian higher education sector. Several public and private universities and affiliated colleges have come forward to offer tourism programs at different levels, including diploma, undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD programs. According to The Egyptian Tourism Federation (2018), bachelor's, master's and doctoral studies programs are provided in thirteen universities in Egypt out of twenty-three private universities and twenty public universities. These thirteen universities have six major departments in the field of tourism and hospitality: leisure and event management, hotel management, tourism and travel business, tourism planning and development, tourism destination marketing and tour guidance.

In the academic year of 2021/2022, tourism faculties in Egypt enrolled 29,897 students in different programs (tourism planning and development, tourism destination marketing, tour guidance, hotel management, leisure and event management, and tourism and travel business; The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research 2019). Hence, tourism education, training and research are fully recognized in Egypt. Additionally, as tourism students' perceptions of employability and career growth in a post-pandemic future are essential to keep them in the tourism/hospitality industry,

understanding students' perspectives and identifying their post-graduation career plans and challenges will be valuable to retaining qualified tourism employees. On the other hand, hospitality and tourism-related businesses in Egypt that are eager to deliver high-quality services to their tourists benefit exceptionally from fresh tourism graduates and try to retain them in the industry. For example, an important tourist destination, New Alamein City, which is located in northwestern Egypt, has recently witnessed the completion and opening of several new high-quality hotels, theme parks, luxury resorts, retail shops, entertainment venues and international cuisine restaurants. The city lacks highly qualified employees, and the competition for recruiting well-trained and qualified staff has already begun among many leisure and hospitality businesses (The Egyptian Ministry of Local Development 2022). The rest of the paper is structured as follows: section 2 examines the relevant tourism literature on the factors that impact students' career paths before and during the Covid-19 pandemic and the future of tourism in a post-Covid-19 context, section 3 presents the research methods, section 4 presents the research findings, section 5 presents the discussion and section 6 concludes with a summary of key findings, the theoretical and managerial implications, as well as limitations and avenues for future studies.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Factors affecting tourism students' future career paths

In this subsection, the authors present emerging themes from the tourism and hospitality literature. They focus on the diverse array of factors that likely influence hospitality and tourism students' perspectives towards working in the tourism industry. Tourism is a labor-intensive service sector and a significant industry in almost all destinations. The tourism sector is heavily dependent on a highly qualified and skilled workforce. Well-planned career strategies and the development of a tourism education system are essential for the tourism sector to raise organizations' productivity, reduce staff turnover and labor cost, enhance engagement and belonging among employees and utilize modern management methods (Reichenberger/Raymond 2021b). In this sense, the career development of tourism and hospitality students as the future skilled workforce and human capital for organizations is pivotal for a flourishing and developing tourism sector. Numerous scholars (i.e., Benaraba et al. 2022; Choy/Yeung 2022; Reichenberger/Raymond 2021a; Seyitoğlu et al. 2022) explored the experiences, attitudes, thoughts and views of students towards careers in hospitality and the tourism industry before and during Covid-19, but none have looked at tourism students' career perceptions in the post-pandemic era. They have consistently highlighted a wide range of factors that influence hospitality and tourism students' perspectives of a career in tourism sectors – such as high workload, inadequate salary, lack of job security, seasonal employment, irregular working hours, poor training facilities, unethical practices, lack of career progression and promotion opportunities, and the sector's reputation for attracting semi-skilled and unskilled workers. A number of studies (i.e., O'Leary/Deegan 2005; Richardson 2010; Nachmias et al. 2017) have found that tourism and hospitality students who first embarked on tourism studies viewed the sector more positively than others; still, a large proportion of these students showed less favorable attitudes towards the industry after their early employment in the tourism sector. Within tourism, several studies (i.e., Roney/Öztin's 2007; Lusby 2017) conducted in different countries to explore career perceptions and attitudes of tourism and hospitality students have all concluded that

poor internship experiences, management's poor treatment of staff, low wages, job insecurity and heavy workload are the key factors that negatively influenced students' attitudes towards the sector and generated a lack of long-term commitment to the industry. In this sense, tourism students' direct early experience of the tourism sector can create negative career expectations for the future. Still, research findings are not consistent. For example, past (Airey/Frontistis 1997) as well as recent studies (Choy/Yeung 2022) found that tourism and hospitality students showed optimistic attitudes towards their future careers in the tourism industry. These studies highlighted the fact that increased students' awareness of the reality and complexity of the tourism sector and employment structures produced more positive attitudes towards hospitality and tourism career paths and motivated them to pursue further studies and training. Equally, research (Benaraba et al. 2022; Choy/Yeung 2022; Reichenberger/Raymond 2021b; Seyitoğlu et al. 2022) conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic collectively showed that students' lack of exposure to behind-the-scenes marketing, human resources and organizational and management-oriented roles resulted in an overall negative assessment of current and future positions in the tourism and hospitality industry. Still, these studies highlight the fact that the Covid-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the industry's already negative image.

Other studies have continued to do much work on the key aspects that shaped vocational job perceptions of tourism and hospitality students, and their findings collectively identified the quality of the internship experiences and supervisors' attitudes and behaviors toward interns as positive influential factors in increasing interest in the tourism industry. Across decades, it is especially noticeable in the tourism literature that internship experiences have received more attention than any other factors that significantly impact students' interest in future tourism-related careers. Internship experiences create an authentic environment for students and provide a broader space and context to assess their knowledge, abilities and social and operational skills. Ongoing research (i.e., Brown et al. 2014; Walsh et al. 2015; Wan et al. 2023) emphasizes that a successful internship program should bring students, employers and educators together to ensure the successful planning of goals, effective industry engagement and student satisfaction. Therefore, it is important that these three stakeholder groups reach an agreement and understanding to ensure that their collaboration is successful and that the goals of the internship program are achievable (Farmaki 2018). Internship programs are viewed as a win-win opportunity for both the student and the internship provider, as the student can combine his or her academic knowledge with hands-on experience gained from practical training, while the internship provider gets a stable, well-educated workforce (Lee/Chao 2013). From an industry perspective, an industrial internship is a great opportunity to test a student's abilities before they are hired as a full-time employee, and accordingly, students in tourism and hospitality management utilize this opportunity for vocational exploration (Walsh et al. 2015).

Literature shows tourism students' readiness to take part in internship practices, but that companies hope that students are ready before they start working, saving the extra cost of training and supervision. Beyond that, a gap exists in many tourism and hospitality internship practices between what students think they are equipped to do and what managers believe students can do. Students expect the internship experience to represent great responsibility and lead to job opportunities in the future, but in reality, that is not always the case. In certain cases, students will expect the organization to offer them full-time jobs once they graduate, or at least help them obtain jobs. Some tourism and hospitality students have unrealistic expectations of working in the industry, and they may realize after their internship programs that their actual satisfaction does not match

their initial perceptions and expectations. This discrepancy between students' expectations and their internship experience has negatively affected students' perceptions and occupational choices after graduation (Wan et al. 2023).

Reviewing the existing literature, several studies (i.e., Bergin 2016; Farmaki 2018) have highlighted that environmental factors like family, teachers and friends influence a student's career development behaviors. Parents, teachers, and peers have the greatest role in students' social experiences, therefore impacting their career development interests and preferences during their academic journey and early stages of their lives (Bergin 2016). The findings of different studies (i.e., Saleem et al. 2014) indicated that parents' occupations, education and income levels in different fields of expertise, norms, values, knowledge about modern occupations, attention to the domestic and global labor market, and acquired skills influence students' vocational choices. Research on Taiwanese students indicates that parental factors are the most influential in students' career decisions (Kim et al. 2016). Although both parents influence a student's intention towards career choice, they do not influence it with the same intensity. Some studies separately examined the impact of mothers and fathers on the occupational decisions of their children and found that the impact of mothers on their children's career decisions and ambitions tended to be greater than that of fathers (Muthukrishna/Sokoya 2008). The influence of mothers is considered particularly strong because the support they provide alleviates the child's career concerns. For example, research on occupational decisions among South African students revealed that students' parents significantly influenced their occupational decisions, with mothers having a greater influence (Bojuwoye/Mbanjwa 2006). Other scholars (i.e., Reichenberger/Raymond 2021b: 222) continued to indicate that career perceptions and attitudes of tourism students are affected by 'key influencers' or 'external influencers' whose opinions and concerns exacerbate negative views and thoughts about tourism careers and education. Peers and parents as relevant 'external influencers' have usually raised concerns about the career progression of tourism students, the low social status associated with tourism employment, the impact of tourism employment on family life and the negative impact of the pandemic on the future outlook for the tourism industry. Tourism students attributed the negative pre-existing peers' and parents' attitudes towards tourism careers to their lack of awareness about the dynamic nature and complexity of the tourism industry (Reichenberger/Raymond 2021b). In this regard, family and peer perceptions towards tourism careers and education reinforce and reflect the negative image of employment in the tourism sector.

2.2 Career perception

Career perceptions serve as clear guidance of the specific requirements and objectives individuals have for their desired professions. Career perceptions outline the trajectory that individuals envision for their career progression. The formation of career perceptions is influenced by a range of factors, including personal values and characteristics, interests, skills, culture, family, environmental factors, availability of opportunities and experiences. These aspects play a crucial role in determining an individual's level of job satisfaction, motivation and overall career success (Lent et al. 2002). Therefore, understanding and aligning one's career perceptions with their professional goals is significant for achieving career fulfillment and development (Akkermans et al. 2020). Career intentions are part of a career plan and contribute to the pursuit of a specific career path. The career intentions of individuals were found to be significantly influenced by their perceptions of their

future careers. Research also indicates that positive perceptions of career paths are associated with goal-oriented behavior, a lasting interest in the industry, performance and persistence. An individual's career choice is influenced by transformations, various interactions and turning points that occur throughout their lifetime. Accordingly, it is important to be aware of students' perceptions, and understanding of their perspectives towards career decisions. Such an understanding can facilitate the creation of new possibilities and positive turning points and transformations for the student, as well as the stakeholders involved (Akkermans et al. 2018). A number of scholars (i.e., Betz/Voyten 1997; Lent et al. 2002) have explored the relationship between career perceptions and expectations, and how this relationship influences employee's intention to remain in an organization. Their studies reveal a significant relationship between job expectations and career perceptions, indicating that job expectations have significant impact on career perceptions. Pre-employment and early career expectations refer to the anticipated outcomes that individuals hold prior to commencing their career, which are shaped by their goals and personal attributes. Career expectations encompass all the anticipated outcomes and plans associated with a particular occupation. Career perception is a perspective that is shaped by an individual's personal expectations and experiences with respect to a particular job, and subsequently influences their decision-making process in selecting a career path for the future (Betz/Voyten, 1997).

Career perception is the desire of tourism students to pursue careers that match their skills and career interests. It is the students' future career paths that they desire to pursue. It is the objective that students set for themselves in order to attain their future careers or profession. The notion of perception refers to the process of selecting, comprehending, categorizing, analyzing and interpreting facts, circumstances, information, individuals, objects and activities in order to comprehend our current situation. This notion also refers to a process by which students analyze and assess their personal abilities, specific employability skills and interests in order to make a relevant career decision in the future. This implies that there is a strong link between career perceptions and individuals' future career decisions. Scholars have argued that the concept of career perception has evolved and changed significantly over the past fifty years. They contend that career goals and career choices in contemporary times have become a lifestyle concept (Akkermans et al. 2020). It follows from this concept that a career is described as a series of actions that shape a person's life or the sequence of roles a person performs during the course of his or her lifetime. Scholars put forward the claim that career perceptions and occupational choices mirror the person's values, interests and identity. As the individual's view of identity is associated with his or her career, then the notion and implication of career choice are significant to the individual's perception of health and personal well-being (Akkermans et al. 2018).

Previous studies have identified the perceptions of tertiary students regarding issues related to their career, as well as the factors that could potentially impede their post-university transition. Scholars (i.e., Bojuwoye/Mbanjwa 2006; Benaraba 2022; Mahmud et al. 2021; Tran/Vu 2018) found that there was a significant correlation between anxiety and depression with various perceived concerns related to lack of financial assistance and support, internal attribution of general transitional challenges, external attribution of employment or career obstacles, job dissatisfaction and limited educational opportunities. During global and local disruptions, tertiary students often perceived difficulties pertaining to their future career opportunities and suspended or quit their studies feeling unprepared to face labor market realities. Tertiary students in times of global economic disruption often have concerns and unclear perceptions regarding career planning and decision-making, and this vague perception of tourism

employment causes many students to experience feelings of anxiety and distress (Farmaki 2018; Reichenberger/Raymond 2021). Hence, these findings shed light on issues related to affective stress and anxiety that tertiary students encounter in relation to their career perceptions and concerns. Research on tertiary students' perceptions continue to confirm that they desire stability and security in their professional careers, yet students expressed heightened concerns about potential obstacles in the form of vocational, financial and physical challenges (Bojuwoye/Mbanjwa 2006; Betz/Voyten, 1997). For example, students express their perceived challenges of leaving their parental home and embarking on new and unfamiliar paths to pursue their career goals. In particular, some students are primarily concerned with the fact that they have detached themselves from their main sources of support, which have previously provided them with a sense of security. They seem to perceive self-support and social support as significant aspects in attaining a sense of stability (Bojuwoye/Mbanjwa 2006). Interestingly, some students also have a perception that certain careers (i.e., law enforcement or military) pose a risk to their physical safety or are deemed unsafe (Lent et al. 2002).

2.3 Career shock: students' perceptions toward potential tourism careers during the pandemic

Due to the global spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, international air travel slowed rapidly, and many countries introduced tourism bans, closed their borders or imposed quarantines, resulting in a sharp decline in international and domestic travel within a few weeks (Akkermans et al. 2020). This situation put tourism employees in a crisis of unemployment. A forecast from the World Travel and Tourism Council (2020) predicted that if the Covid-19 pandemic continues and global travel restrictions remain in place, the world's travel and tourism industry may lose 197.5 million jobs. With such a global shortage of tourism jobs, tourism students are less likely to secure a job because they are not as competitive as those practicing with some work experience (Seyitoğlu et al. 2022). Tourism education is a major predictor of success in a highly competitive employment environment. Students who acquire educational qualifications in tourism coupled with practical training and experiences have played a key role in improving the quality of tourism products and services. In addition, as one of the most significant players in the tourism development process, students are perceived as potential future entrepreneurs and employees in the tourism and hospitality industry. While students gain educational qualifications, degrees and certificates through tourism education programs, future employers in the post-Covid-19 context have been increasingly looking for lateral skills, such as information and communication technology skills, design, analytical and management skills as well as the moral character of employees and the ability to satisfy the requirements of the tourism and hospitality industry (Choy/Yeung 2022). As pandemic and epidemic outbreaks are expected to become more frequent in the future (World Travel/Tourism Council 2020), growing uncertainties surrounding job prospects after graduation within the tourism and hospitality industry are being exacerbated (Benaraba et al. 2022). Chen and Gursoy (2008: 22) noted that the majority of students in 'the leisure, recreation and tourism (LRT) field do not know what kind of jobs will be available to them upon graduation as the LRT field is vulnerable to economic, political and social changes'. The employment loss in the travel and tourism industry is critical since it would be difficult to rehire the pre-Covid-19 skilled and experienced staff in a relatively short period of time when the tourism demand bounces back (Choy/Yeung 2022). Recent research (Seyitoğlu et al. 2022) predicted that

acquiring a fuller range of knowledge and hands-on training relating to tourism industry requirements, retaining qualified staff and the need for experienced and skilled staff are all essential in the post-viral travel and tourism sector. In this vein, Reichenberger and Raymond (2021a, b) highlighted the fact that the significance of tourism training and education will accelerate the revival of the travel and tourism industry in a post-pandemic world. Gaining educational qualifications, degrees and certificates through tourism education programs forms the backbone of a thriving tourism industry in the future.

The Covid-19 pandemic can be regarded as a significant disruption to the career paths of individuals currently employed in, or aspiring to join, the tourism industry. The 'career shock' triggered by the pandemic may have long-term psychological impacts (i.e., social anxiety, fear, heightening feelings of loss, suicidal behaviors and thoughts, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder), particularly for young individuals who are pursuing their career advancement (Akkermans et al. 2020). A 'career shock' can be described simply as an unsettling and unexpected event that is triggered by factors beyond the limits of an individual's control with critical effects on the individual's future career growth (Akkermans et al. 2018). In this 'career shock' context, the long-lasting impact of the pandemic has led the primary researcher to explore career strategies and tactics among current Egyptian tourism management undergraduate students at the University of Alexandria, Egypt. How fresh tourism undergraduates in Egypt relate to this early career turbulence, their career strategies for post-pandemic tourism and their thoughts and perceptions of the future of the Egyptian tourism industry are not yet evident in the literature. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of career shock, some definitions will be provided. Slay et al. (2004) defined career shocks as important events that trigger individuals to contemplate their career choices. According to Seibert et al. (2013), a career shock is defined as an important event that prompts individuals to engage in thoughtful consideration regarding the possibility of changing a significant career-related behavior, such as pursuing further education qualifications and career advancement, changing employment status, or transitioning to new or other occupations. Akkermans et al. (2018) later presented a comprehensive definition of career shocks, which classified career shocks into two distinct categories: positive and negative (i.e., unexpected promotion as a positive shock versus being laid off as a negative shock). The definition by Akkermans et al. (2018) indicates that a career shock emerges as the outcome of the confluence between an external event and an individual's perception and that both components are essential to cause a career shock. In other words, a significant exogenous event that does not cause career deliberation would not be perceived as a career shock. Equally, a deliberate reflection regarding one's career path that is not caused by an exogenous event would also not be considered a career shock. The description by Akkermans et al. (2018) offers a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of career shock compared with the prevailing definitions in the existing literature. Their description provides a wider scope for classifying career shocks and exploring the coping mechanisms utilized by tourism students in order to adapt to the tourism workforce and industry expectations in a post-Covid-19 Egypt.

Career shocks can trigger negative or positive experiences and can influence individuals' careers in terms of development, career choices and decision-making. The literature on career shocks has found that particular employment shocks (i.e., loss of work, layoff, missed promotion and a wage cut) usually have negative psychological and career impacts in the short run, but in the long term, some employees may secure well-paying jobs and rewarding careers by adopting proactive career behaviors, such

as skill upgrades, career consultations and career planning. As an example, the negative career shock caused by the Covid-19 pandemic might also create possibilities for skills upgrading, more flexible work schedules and career development (Richardson/McKenna 2020). Richardson and McKenna (2020) provided a useful case study of how negative career experiences in professional sports (i.e., career-ending injuries among former Australian rugby players) provided opportunities for professional athletes to reset their careers and life directions. This example supports the argument by Akkermans et al. (2018: 4) that unexpected circumstances that are initiated by elements outside the person's control stimulate 'a deliberate thought process concerning one's career'. More importantly, a career shock prompts individuals to make an informed and conscious decision concerning career choices – it may not necessarily trigger a career change but may influence individuals to become more resilient and determined to pursue their actual career goals (Richardson/McKenna 2020).

The impacts of 'career shocks' on hospitality and tourism students' career outcomes and development may vary from one context to another. For example, hospitality and tourism students in Ecuador (Zurita/Soler 2021), New Zealand (Reichenberger/Raymond 2021b), Hongkong (Choy/Yeung 2022), Indonesia (Rosyidi 2021) and India (Shah et al. 2021) were optimistic that the tourism industry would recover and bounce back in the future and chose to pursue a career in the tourism industry after graduation despite the volatility of the sector as the pandemic continued. Still, there are also contradictory findings in the literature in terms of tourism students' career choices amid the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, the desire of hospitality and tourism students in China (Birtch et al. 2021) and the Philippines (Benaraba et al. 2022) to pursue a career in the tourism industry has been largely diminished during the pandemic.

2.4 The future of tourism in the post-Covid-19 context

The global pandemic has given rise to opportunities to reimagine post-Covid-19 tourists' motivations, perceptions, attitudes and experiences. There is considerable literature that has highlighted key tourism trends amid the Covid-19 pandemic, which are likely to reshape the future of the tourism industry. Among these trends, food tourism, which has increased during the pandemic, seems to have the potential to impact the future demand for tourism products. During the three major waves of the pandemic, people tended to believe that traveling abroad was risky, and it was safer to stay in their home country. Hence, this was a good time for local communities to enjoy local food and drink and support local businesses and farmers in rural communities who lost their major markets and main distribution channels (i.e., hospitality providers and grocery stores) during the pandemic. Many local communities enjoyed basic aspects of the Covid-19 experience, whether experiencing local food and drink in locally owned restaurants or sharing home-cooked meals with family and friends. The pandemic period witnessed strong interest in various types of food tourism experiences, including vineyard tours, cooking classes, visitation to local food producers, farm stays and fruit and vegetable picking (Fountain 2022). Revenge tourism or revenge travel has also been highlighted in the literature. Revenge tourism is characterized by an intense yearning to travel due to the inability of people to travel on vacation during the lockdown and global pandemic. People rushed to travel to mountains and coastal locations, and stayed in their second homes in rural areas for short and long vacations (Girish 2021). Recent research emphasized that key trends in post-pandemic tourism would be shaped around rural and coastal areas. Another aspect that was intensified during the quarantines and

prolonged lockdowns was the growing reliance on IT advancements and virtual reality technology. Virtual reality simulation reduces crowding and eliminates safety concerns and possible risks amid the pandemic. The adoption of smart tourism technologies in eco-tourism, cultural heritage, tourism marketing and tourist guiding has created memorable experiences and safe tourism spaces and services during the pandemic (Seyitoğlu/Ivanov 2022).

Additionally, the Covid-19 outbreak has increased the popularity of camping tourism experiences. There are a variety of interpretations and perspectives regarding individuals' tourism-related motivations for camping. Among the most common motives linked with camping are restorative aspects, family functions, experiencing nature and particular places, self-identity exploration, social contact and educational benefits for children. Campers perceive camping as an opportunity to clear their minds, relax, escape stress and anxiety and seek safe and convenient locations. Hence, the key elements of camping include nature, social interaction, comfort, safety and convenience. During the Covid-19 pandemic, a notable trend in camping tourism emerged as individuals sought relief from mental health concerns by participating in camping activities under restricted circumstances. This phenomenon was primarily driven by the fear of contracting the virus, leading to increased levels of anxiety and stress compared with the pre-pandemic era. Access to natural areas, the absence of crowds, family interaction, safety and convenience of private campgrounds during the Covid-19 outbreak were the primary motives for families choosing camping trips. The likelihood of contracting Covid-19 outside is significantly lower than inside, even in densely populated areas (Garst et al. 2009).

3 METHODOLOGY

The present study employed a qualitative research framework to collect and analyze the empirical data. Adopting a qualitative research approach to explore career strategies among Egyptian tourism management undergraduate students and their perceptions of the future of the Egyptian tourism industry is suitable and enables the students' authentic voices and subjective experiences to be heard (Corbetta 2003). For example, during the interview, the primary author utilized an interview guide, including a list of particular questions, and also asked follow-up questions to ascertain certain things. Hence, the authors could gain insight into what and how the students perceived the future of the tourism industry in Egypt. It is also cost-effective to focus on a particular case site, phenomenon, community and characteristic. The research site was selected deliberately for this study for two reasons. First, the University of Alexandria is renowned for its hotel and tourism management programs in the Arab World. Second, it is an academic institution known for producing high-achieving and multi-talented hotel and tourism management graduates. Adopting qualitative methods rooted in the description and analysis of students' experiences and perceptions serves not only educational institutions and academics but also industrial professionals, governments and commercial tourism organizations that sometimes do not find quantitative methods suitable or useful (Farmaki 2018). Using purposive sampling techniques, the primary author conducted twenty-nine semi-structured in-depth interviews with tourism management students at the University of Alexandria throughout September and December 2022. The selection of research participants was guided by some criteria. Firstly, the sample was restricted to full-time, year-four tourism undergraduate students. Another important research criterion was the ability of the research participants to effectively

express their experiences and perspectives on the impacts of the pandemic on their future career paths and the tourism sector in the post-Covid 19 era. Also, only Egyptian nationals aged 18 years or over were interviewed. A command of the Arabic or English language was determined as another criterion for participant selection. Lastly, it was important to ensure that the research participants had prior knowledge or experiences in the field of tourism and hospitality in Egypt.

Given the rich data obtained through interviews, the sample of participants was not regarded to be a limitation since data saturation was reached and careful attention was given to the selection of participants. The Tourism Department provided the primary author with an initial list of 36 full-time tourism management students; hence, this adequate list was deemed to be the most effective method to obtain a purposive sample of students. Bernard (2000: 175) proposed that '10–20 knowledgeable participants, for qualitative research other than ethnographic research, are enough to uncover and understand the core categories in any well-defined cultural domain or study of lived experiences'. Other qualitative scholars (Guest et al. 2006: 78) argued that 'a sample of six interviews may have been sufficient to enable the development of meaningful themes and useful interpretations'. During the planning stage for the fieldwork, all thirty-six participants indicated their willingness to participate in the research. Upon completing twenty-nine interviews, it became evident that no new or additional themes or conclusions were emerging. Out of the twenty-nine tourism students who agreed to participate in the study, twelve were female and seventeen were male. In order to reach data saturation, both authors analyzed the full body of data on an ongoing basis, making constant comparisons of categories until no new themes were reported. The twenty-nine interview responses were labeled 'Interviewees S1-S29'. The subjective responses obtained from each participant were analyzed to identify any emerging data. Every interview was carefully analyzed, and redundancy of students' responses (i.e., similar sentences and keywords between participants S1-S29) were coded into themes once data became saturated. Scholars (Babbie 2004; Bernard 2000; Patton 2002) noted that data saturation can be achieved in qualitative studies by utilizing approximately 10–20 similar interview responses. The authors generated an audit trail, continually updating their documented records regarding the collection process, the development of themes during data analysis and the categorization of the findings. The second author re-examined both the findings and process of the current study in order to ensure credible findings. Lastly, triangulation of data collection was another strategy utilized to address trustworthiness in the current research (Bernard 2000). To guarantee that data analysis resulted in trustworthy and reliable findings, the data collected was reviewed and analyzed separately by the two researchers and then cross-referenced to uncover similar experiences, strategies and perceptions that arose from the data. The authors also triangulated the interview responses with press news, documents and websites. Besides this, the authors triangulated the responses provided by different participants on the same topic. The two researchers of the present study also discussed their research findings with another female faculty member from the Department of Tourism and Hotel Management at the University of Alexandria in Egypt. Such discussion was beneficial to provide external constructive feedback and additional explanations for students' perspectives and plans towards their future career paths. Finally, the two authors compared their findings with other research which increased the credibility of the current research findings.

Each interview lasted between 45 and 65 minutes, with an average length of 55 minutes. Prior to the start of the interview, the primary author briefly explained

to the respondents the purpose of the study, the topic and the intended use of the interview and further answered the respondent's queries. The primary author also informed the respondents that they could contact the primary researcher at a later date if they had any concerns related to the study. All information, including recording and transcription, was kept secure and confidential. Interview questions were framed so as to address two main concerns, namely: (1) 'What post-graduation career strategies have been utilized by year four tourism management undergraduate students?' and (2) 'How do year four tourism management undergraduate students perceive the future of Egypt's tourism industry in the post-Covid-19 recovery phase?' All interviews were digitally recorded, carefully listened to, transcribed and then translated into English by the primary author for analysis (Babbie 2004). The primary author's nationality (Egyptian), his own experiences as a tourism academic working in a Western university and that he speaks Arabic fluently provided him with a distinct advantage to acquire a deeper understanding of students' perceptions, attitudes and experiences. Hence, the author and the students were all fluent in Arabic, which they used in all interviews. To ensure translation accuracy and credibility, a professional translator (Arabic and English) from Cairo University was consulted during the translation process. The English textual data were analyzed and coded manually by the authors in order to construct key categories based on the students' full range of experiences and perceptions (Polkinghorne 2005).

3.1 Data analysis

The authors employed thematic content analysis in order to generate initial codes. The first phase of analysis involved a thorough immersion of the authors within the data, which entailed repeated listening to the interview recordings, reading the transcripts several times and examining fieldnotes before embarking on the thematic analysis process. Subsequently, the authors employed a manual coding system that 'let the data speak of themselves' (Patton 2002: 470). In order to enhance the reliability of the students' responses and reveal the meanings that they ascribed to their attitudes and perceptions, the authors presented lengthy and rich-text quotations from participants. The qualitative data analysis procedures followed the recommendations of Babbie (2004) and Patton (2002). Common accounts and patterns across different interviews were identified and compared, then allocated to an already existing category or assigned to a new one. Categories of similar content were then allocated to the similar theme. The resultant key themes and categories were derived inductively from the collected data. This process is based on qualitative data coding procedures. The authors conducted a process of coding in three stages: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Open coding, a common first step in qualitative research analysis, was carried out by separating the data into smaller manageable segments and creating 'codes' to label them. Then the fragmented units from open coding were assembled, employing axial coding, linking and grouping similar categories together. During the axial coding process, the authors created a new or more abstract category based on existing codes. In the final process of coding, the authors identified, integrated and refined key themes from the students' responses, which led to the formation of themes that are described below (Corbetta 2003; Patton 2002). The authors further connected the full body of data with established literature for the validation or refutation of current research findings (Bernard 2000).

4 FINDINGS

The present study is situated within the context of a ‘career shock’ event (Akkermans et al. 2020; Seibert et al. 2013; Slay et al. 2004) that was triggered by a significant shift in the ‘economic system’s needs from the bottom up’ (Reichenberger/ Raymond 2021: 223). In view of this, the research illustrates students’ career strategies and reveals their perspectives towards post–Covid-19 tourism trends and new business opportunities. The research showed that in order to adapt to the tourism workforce in a post–Covid-19 Egypt, students adopted four main approaches: a dual temporal perspective, individual agency, parental support and active imagination of life-long careers and reimagining the future of Egypt’s tourism in the post-pandemic era. The four approaches are conceptualized in relation to participants’ tactics and concerns towards future career paths and the Egyptian tourism industry in the post-viral world. Students developed the four main approaches as they adjusted to particular aspects of their external environment and made sense of uncontrollable events (Richardson/McKenna 2020). The authors used the following terms when referring to the number of student participants who expressed their strategies, experiences and their future visions for tourism: ‘many, most or several’ participants refer to 23–29; ‘some’ participants refers to 8–12; and ‘few’ refers to 1–7.

4.1 A dual temporal perspective: career strategies

The pandemic has been a hurdle for all student participants looking to secure experiential learning experiences (Park/Jones 2021). All participants stressed that they missed many opportunities for work experiences due to the Covid-19 crisis:

I applied for two internships one local and one overseas. Luckily, I secured both of them. But, ah I don’t want to remember. I wanted to go to the one at Sheraton Grand Doha in Qatar. I was so disappointed, so sad indeed. Not only I would’ve gained excellent practical experience, but who knows, I could’ve secured a permanent job there. Big money. (S3)

I prepared my CV and sent it to Regal Heights Hotel in Al Alameen City. Then I had an interview with a very nice lady. She said that I will make a good worker. But this pandemic has given me nothing but shattered dreams. I got a text from the hotel saying my internship contract was cancelled because of Covid-19. So how would I learn about the industry and improve my practical skills? I’ve never had any practical experience in the industry. This Covid-19 affected my future plans. (S17)

Additionally, a small minority of the interviewed students engaged in part-time employment to support themselves and supplement family income. They emphasized that they suddenly lost their part-time jobs in the tourism and hospitality industry (i.e., hotels, restaurants, small coffee shops and theme parks) due to the pandemic:

I used to have a part-time job in one of the best 10 fine dining restaurants in Cairo. And the money I used to make was good. It helped me to pay for my tuition fees and support my mom and sister. Then like by late July 2020, I was laid off because of the pandemic. There was not enough work. It came as a great shock. (S11)

Several students also reported that they observed high unemployment rates and large-scale job losses within their local communities and neighborhoods and that in turn affected their perceptions of career planning during and after the Covid-19 crisis. They also stressed that the widespread media coverage of extensive job losses, the

surge in inflation, closure of businesses and ongoing health risks made them feel that they were encountering a challenging economic environment they did not expect and were not prepared for:

The ongoing media coverage of the pandemic makes me worried. You watch and read about people dying, people losing their jobs and the rise in food prices. All that makes me sit back and ponder about my short-term goals and my future plans. What am I going to do after graduation? And what am I going to do in the future 4-5 years from now? How am I going to face this unexpected circumstance? (S2).

I live in a small community within Old Cairo and I noticed many of my friends there who are older than me lost their jobs. We'll be graduating in about 10 months or so and we'll be seeking jobs during this hard time. I've never expected that I would encounter this pandemic. I cannot always control what goes on outside. Now I think more deeply about my future strategies. (S9)

Data obtained from the students revealed two distinct themes in relation to short- and long-term career planning during Egypt's economic slowdown and uncertainty. The two themes were coded as 'a sharp employment decline in the tourism sector and an uncertain outlook for Egypt's tourism industry' and 'envisioning new opportunities that equip students to join the tourism workplace in the post-pandemic context and make it a lifelong employment'.

Students tended to make decisions in terms of the short-term future and the long-term future. Still, all participants predicted that the lack of seasonal, casual and temporary (short-term) contracts in tourism and related sectors would continue and fewer full-time job opportunities would be available within the next five years due to the increased competition among graduates for available jobs and the current war in Ukraine. Recent research indicated that amid severe socio-economic conditions, recent college graduates in Australia could experience financial instability and precarious employment for up to seven years in the early years of their careers (Tomaszewski et al. 2021):

Egypt lost the European and Chinese markets. But also, tourism in Egypt suffers because of the war in Ukraine. We lost our Russian market too. The three markets are our bread and butter. I've noticed a rapid increase in Egyptian tourists and Arab Gulf visitors. Still, I am not that optimistic that the tourism industry in Egypt will recover soon so we can secure full-time jobs. I'd say it can take at least good up to 5 years for tourism employment to recover. That's why I have my plans in the near future and my plans then. (S21)

Students opted for temporary adjustments or 'short exit', reporting they would pursue either other career choices available to them or further qualifications in tourism, which might serve to help them in their future careers in the tourism sector. A number of participants also recognized not only the short-term advantages associated with changing careers and further education, but they also utilized their short-term plans to vividly imagine how their lifelong careers would be shaped in post-pandemic Egypt:

This pandemic won't break me down. I decided that after graduation, I'll have a short exit from the tourism industry. I won't apply for tourism jobs. I'll work for about 2.5 years in an accounting company. My father will help me to secure an accounting job in his friend's firm. Having experience in accounting will help me in the future when I get a job in the tourism and hospitality industry. Like if I apply for a night audit job in a 5-star hotel, then my application will be stronger. You know, 7-10 years from now I can see myself as a hotel manager or president of a 5-star hotel. If I become a manager, my accounting experience will help me down the road. I'll understand the ins and outs of how the finance work in the hotel. (S27)

With Allah on my side, I'm determined to achieve my short and long-term plans... The recovery period of the industry could take more than five years. Just before graduation, I'll apply for Tourism Management MSc. Then, I'll go for a PhD degree in tourism also. My gut tells me this is a good plan. A week ago, I had an epiphany in my dream that someday in the future I'd be a famous professor of tourism at a prestigious university in Kuwait and make good money so I can give back to my parents for the sacrifices they've made. (S15)

4.2 Individual agency: lack of institutional support

The vast majority of participants often identified the office of career development and the tourism department as the facilitators that they expected to support them to secure internship opportunities and develop employability in post-pandemic Egypt. However, many participants complained that they could not consult either the undergraduate coordinators or the career counselors via face-to-face consultations or online. One participant stated that the university did not provide 'any intimate level of support' for the student participants (S13). Many also expressed their disappointment that their department organized various online discussion forums, events and conferences dedicated solely to the economic impacts of Covid-19 and challenges of recovery while predominantly ignoring significant topics pertaining to 'the development of present and future career strategies for newly graduated tourism students' (S19). In this regard, students voiced their concerns that they lacked a clear understanding and direction of how to develop suitable short- and long-term plans in response to the pandemic. Within this context, students did not depend on the support of the career service and their department; rather, they relied solely on themselves to develop short- and long-term career strategies. The following quote is indicative of students' individual efforts and self-reliance:

I've been crying out for help. The career center and my department were useless. They didn't assist me at all. I tried to approach them via emails and Facebook messenger but to no avail. They advised us to contact them online due to the pandemic, but they never replied to my emails or Facebook messages. I've been uncertain about what particular skill sets should be acquired beyond the pre-Covid ones. They never organized extensive academic discussions of how our future careers are to be reimagined. Then, I had to rely entirely on myself to map out a strategic plan for my current and future tourism career pathways. (S29)

In the context of this study, student participants could not actively participate in employment and training activities within the higher education setting. There was a lack of engagement between students and the careers service. It should be noted here that only two participants asserted that as 'man-made disasters such as terrorist incidents, pandemic and epidemic threats' are expected to become more frequent in the future, it is essential to integrate career strategies courses into the curricula and offer mentoring services and employment contacts (S27).

4.3 Parental support and active imagination

The third sub-theme of students' career and professional development in the post-Covid-19 context, psychological impacts of perceived career insecurity and students' parental support, refers to career development concerns, anxiety, depression and fear arising from the impacts of the pandemic on Egypt's tourism in the post-pandemic world. It also refers to the supporting role played by parents in reducing students' pandemic-related

anxiety, as well as supporting students in developing career strategies in the post-pandemic context. Recent literature (Mahmud et al. 2021) has suggested that during the pandemic new university graduates about to enter the tourism sector are likely to have high levels of career anxiety, resilience and adaptability. All study participants were anxious about their future careers and that uncertainty of the future made them re-think their career strategies and options. They described that they felt anxious and depressed in the early phases of the pandemic, and they pondered career changes or pursuit of higher academic qualifications (Seyitoğlu 2022). However, this seemed to be only a short-term adjustment or temporary change for the time being, ultimately leading students to overcome anxiety and develop a positive attitude towards Egypt's tourism future and the establishment of lifelong careers in the field. Participants implied that their future plans and their deep passion for the industry outweighed the negative psychological effects (Choy/Yeung 2022):

In the early months of the pandemic, I was full of anxiety, anger, fear and self-doubt. But now I feel much better and I overcame that depression. For now, I know what directions I'll follow after graduation. I already set my short and long-term goals. My aunty is opening a fancy large bakery store, so I'll be working there for a year or two. Then I'll go back to the tourism industry. Bakery is a hospitality sector, so I'll gain hands-on experience. These goals help me to beat depression and gain the confidence I need to accomplish my main goal and secure a permanent job in the tourism field and be in a good financial status. (S11)

Very few participants (4 out of 29) talked about utilizing their 'active imagination and dreams to overcome depression, anxiety or other adjustment problems' (Lilienfeld et al. 2014: 185):

At the start of the virus, I experienced low mood and anxiety. I just felt frightened... Since I was in primary school, it's been my dream to work in the hospitality industry in Hurghada city and enjoy the nightlife and the Red Sea. I'll never give up on my dream because of this pandemic. I constantly think about my dream and that's how I overcome my anxiety. My dream gives me hope for the future. (S13)

In the beginning, I was beside myself with fear about the future. This pandemic massively changed the way I look at my career path. I try to spend time in the mosque contemplating where my work and life are taking me and imagining a bright future ahead of me. I try to picture my best possible career in vivid detail. That makes me happy. (S12)

Assistance was provided by parents to the participants, including reassurance, empathy, financial support and advice. This is comparable to the findings of an Arabic survey carried out in 2021 by the Arab Women Organization and Cairo University via questionnaires (Ghazawy 2021). The survey revealed that the majority of high school and university students were confident that their parents could support them financially and guide them in the selection of a career. In this respect, a student (S13) described that she experienced career anxiety. She emphasized that she missed her internship opportunities, which triggered fear and uncertainty about her future career. She found comfort and solace in her family. Many participants felt empowered and relieved to have psychological and emotional support from their parents:

I was under so much emotional pressure. I felt unable to cope. Then, I sought comfort and guidance from my parents. I had more open sharing with dad and mom. They told me don't worry about money now. They helped me to develop healthy coping skills. My mom advised me to draw on my faith in Allah to prevent panic and maintain hope. She told

me to read the Quran more often to expiate my sins and do lots of meditations and leave the future in Allah's hands because he knows what is best for me. (S15)

I used to have a part-time job in a nice privately-owned hotel. My manager was under constant pressure. He kept yelling at us all the time because he was losing his business because of the pandemic. He started getting verbally aggressive. I felt sad after getting yelled at. I told my mom and she was very nice. I love her so much. She said 'It's awful to go to work and be yelled at when you're working as hard as you are. I'm sorry you're experiencing that'. You know, we need money badly, but she insisted that I should quit and I did. (S8)

The findings also show that parents, especially mothers, played a supporting role in students' career strategies and choices (Muthukrishna/Sokoya 2008). A large number of research participants reported that their parents provided them with references only but were generally respectful and supportive of their own career planning in the post-pandemic world, and that their parents would not force them to follow their suggestions. Several participants emphasized that the supporting role of parents alleviates students' career concerns (Bojuwoye/Mbanjwa 2006). As the following excerpt attests:

I approached my mom and dad and shared with them my short and long-term goals. They appreciated my practical plans and encouraged me to follow them. They told me they would be happy if I continued to study until I got my PhD instead of wasting my time hanging around with no proper job. They just told me what advantages there are for me to earn master's and doctorate degrees in tourism. They just gave me a suggestion and it's up to me to decide. (S3)

I usually feel good when I consult my mom about my plans. She told me that she liked my realistic and pragmatic tactics. I have my own long-term strategy about what I want to do in the future after the recovery period. She won't force me to go down any path. She always respects my plans... She is supportive of me making my own choices and encourages me to work in any job for the time being till I secure a good job in the hotel industry. (S23)

One interesting finding is that some participants (11 out of 29) remarked that their parents hold a positive image and attitude toward tourism and tourism-related careers, which in turn might help explain why the parents were generally respectful and supportive of student participants' own career strategies. This finding contradicts decades of previous research that has consistently documented parents' and peers' negative attitudes and poor images towards tourism education and careers, including those of poor wages, job insecurity, workload density, low social status, lack of career progression and promotion opportunities, and the sector's reputation for attracting semi-skilled and unskilled workers (Goh/Lee 2018; Rahimi et al. 2016; Reichenberger 2020).

4.4 Re-envisioning the future of Egypt's tourism: opportunities in the post-pandemic world

The findings show that potential trends for tourism activities in post-pandemic Egypt include two major themes: tourists' wants, needs and attitudes towards hygiene standards, crowd avoidance and revenge tourism, and international and domestic tourists' participation in specific tourism activities in post-viral Egypt (i.e., Bedouin desert tourism, rural tourism and coastal tourism resorts, food tourism and camping tourism). Interestingly, none of the participants mentioned the significance of technology in Egypt's post-pandemic tourism future, which may reduce tourists' stress and fear by offering safe contactless services. The current findings contradict the plethora of

recent research that has consistently identified technology-based tourism as a significant trend in the post-pandemic tourism market.

4.4.1 *Tourists' desires: hygiene standards, crowd avoidance and revenge tourism*

Participants believed that hygiene, cleanliness and safety of the Egyptian lodging and catering industry would be expected by both domestic and international tourists. A few participants also emphasized that health, sanitation and cleanliness would be more important post-pandemic travel motivators for female tourists and senior travelers than male tourists (S2, S16, S17). In support of students' statements, Ren et al. (2020: 9) stated that people tend to feel unsafe and uneasy when 'the world changes due to infectious disease outbreaks'. S1, S3 and S27 noted that tourism businesses where pandemic precautionary measures were strictly followed would be 'strongly favored by tourists'. They also noted that pre-Covid-19 health measures and policies will no longer guarantee international tourists' satisfaction. All participants remarked that in general domestic and international tourists will become more interested in visiting uncrowded attractions and destinations. S7, S9, S20 and S18 explained that 'tourists in general' would seek out a relatively crowd-free environment and avoid package tours in large groups. The majority of students (23 out of 29) indicated that they were optimistic about Egypt's booming tourism industry in the post-pandemic world (Choy/Yeung 2022). They contended that when Western tourists feel safe to travel in the post-Covid-19 world, Egypt will witness a tourist boom. One student voiced the opinions of many participants:

Covid provides a lot of opportunities. I see a bright future. When international tourists have the opportunity to leave their country, they will rush to come to us. In the meantime, when they feel confident about Egypt's health and safety precautions, then tourism will really boom throughout the country and the economic scars caused by Covid will fade in the next few years. (S14)

Another student concurred that:

Egypt can take advantage of Covid. You know, since Western tourists have been locked up and their lust for travel has been pent up for so long, they'd be eager to leave their countries, and there's going to be a huge craving to travel to the Middle East. So, I'm pretty confident that Egypt will witness a tourism boom in the next three years. I predict that Egypt could reach like 90% to 95% of pre-pandemic numbers. So, we need to be ready. (S21)

4.4.2 *Tourism trends: tourists' participation in specific tourism activities*

a. Bedouin desert tourism First, students expressed that tourists' preferences are shifting toward more 'natural, authentic, exotic and less crowded destinations' (S27, S13). In this sense, Bedouin desert tourism in post-pandemic Egypt will be the most important trend among domestic and international tourists. According to participants, Bedouin desert tourism is a tourism product marketed primarily to international and particularly Western tourists in terms of the cultural and desert landscapes, unique traditions and images of the Egyptian Bedouin communities. Most participants (22 out of 29) indicated that in post-pandemic Egypt, Western tourists will seek 'uncrowded', 'unpopulated', 'quiet', 'exotic', 'ethnic', 'authentic' and 'calm' destinations and avoid 'overcrowded and popular cities', such as Cairo, Alexandria and Hurghada (S8, S13, S11, S26).

They emphasized that Western tourists will favor wilderness and the sparsely populated Sinai Peninsula and the Western desert region instead of the well-developed Western-style resorts in Hurghada, Sharm el Sheikh, Alexandria and Nuweiba. In this aspect, participants argue that since Western tourists will have a particularly strong interest in visiting remote and sparsely populated environments, tourist activities, such as the 'Bedouin desert camp experience', 'desert walks', 'hiking', 'bird watching', 'horse riding', 'camel trekking', 'quad bike trips into the Sinai desert' and 'watching or participating in Bedouin cultural performances' (S7, S3, S19, S25, S10) will become increasingly popular in the post-viral world. Along the same lines, participants explained that during the Covid-19 global travel restrictions, domestic tourists showed great interest in visiting non-tourist places and sites because the Covid-19 restrictions provided them with the opportunity to experience ethnic and minority culture in Egypt (i.e., indigenous Bedouin tribes). Egyptian residents took a great interest in adventurous trips into the unpopulated Sinai and Western deserts, and they were also interested in long-term personal interactions with Bedouin tribes, a new trend for domestic tourists that started during the global travel restrictions and continued after restrictions were lifted (S11, S5, S14). A number of participants (15 out of 29) commented that during the travel restrictions, Egyptians showed a strong interest in 'getting to know Bedouin tribes' and experiencing authentic Bedouin culture based on the idea that Egyptians 'do not know as much about Bedouin history and lifestyle in the desert as they should' (S10, S20, S15). Two students voiced the opinions of several participants that the domestic market can be regarded as a strong emerging market for Bedouin site operators and Bedouin-family-owned businesses (S20, S15).

b. Rural tourism and coastal tourism resorts Participants emphasized that rural tourism in Egypt is a relatively new tourism phenomenon and will have significant growth opportunities in the post-pandemic era. Some participants (10 out of 29) explained that rural development planning and environmental policies aim to make the Delta and Nile Valley regions in Egypt more attractive to tourists and market them effectively. According to some participants' predictions, tourists in the future will avoid crowded cities and resorts in Egypt and prefer to travel independently or participate in small-scale rural tourism activities. They will actively seek and visit attractive natural landscapes and participate in different activities, ranging from 'nature-based tourism activities in the Nile Valley and Delta regions', visiting 'natural parks in Al Kanater Al Khairia and ancient Islamic and Pharaonic ruins in coastal agrarian regions such as Rashid and Fuwah' to going 'fishing and duck hunting in Fayoum' (S4, S11, S28). While there is growing potential for rural tourism experiences in Egypt, especially for the international market, a number of students identified several barriers to rural tourism development, which included 'rural communities' lack of awareness about the potential of rural tourism development', 'inadequate marketing' and 'lack of facilities, services, qualified staff, small-scale operators and variety of activities' (S12, S17, S29). Additionally, two participants associated rural tourism experiences with cultural heritage assets. They explained that since rural tourism experiences mainly depend on a geographical environment as well as the unique cultural assets of a particular rural community, tourists can experience 'natural attractions and activities but also in combination with the culture and lifestyle of Egyptian peasant villages in the countryside' (S13). Furthermore, a few students (5 out of 29) explained that during and after the first outbreak of the pandemic, many Egyptians escaped from large cities and retreated to their second homes in coastal towns along the Mediterranean. Participants highlighted that there will be a change in

domestic tourists' behaviors towards traditional accommodation (i.e., resorts and hotels) in the coastal towns along the Mediterranean. They argued that the fear, anxiety and uncertainty that a Covid-19-like virus could recur globally or locally in the future reflected wealthy Egyptian citizens' growing desire to keep away from the crowd and to enjoy privacy and independence. Thus, according to these students, the emerging desire for isolation and privacy will shift the balance in favor of 'private vacation homes and chalet villages over hotels, motels and resorts in Hurghada, Sharm El Sheikh and Alexandria' (S6). Two students also foresee that, in light of the Egyptian elites' desire for isolation and privacy, the growth in the demand for Egyptian non-mobile second homes along Egypt's Mediterranean coastline will also increase the demand for semi-mobile and mobile forms of second homes, such as touring caravans, yachts, campervans, tents and motorized boats (S5, S9).

c. Food tourism Participants suggested that food tourism business operators and owners should pivot towards the rapidly growing domestic and regional tourist market in the coming years. They argued that food tourism trends in Egypt's post-Covid-19 recovery stage are influenced by three significant factors including Egyptians' experiences with lockdowns and remaining close to home, the popularity of the Egyptian chain restaurants across the Arab Gulf states before, during and after the pandemic period and the Egyptian workers in the Arab Gulf region who brought their traditional recipes and Egyptian-style cooking along with them. The movement restrictions and the initial ban on traveling between Egyptian municipalities meant staying near home was preferable. The lockdown restrictions, combined with additional time and concerns about food hygiene, triggered a strong interest in rearing poultry or growing vegetables on rooftops and vacant or private plots (S12, S7). The lockdown restrictions reflected a growing desire among Egyptians to purchase food from local farmers and food producers, which helped to support local producers and their families who were unable to sell their products in the market or 'who lost their main distribution networks in major Egyptian cities' (S27, S6). S27, S6, S5 and S13 predicted that there will be rising demand among Egyptians for farm consumption and locally owned restaurants that 'provide traditional Egyptian cuisine made using locally produced ingredients'.

Study participants stressed that government policies, environmentalists and news broadcasters have repeatedly voiced their concerns about the effect of globalized and homogeneous processed food products. In this vein, participants argued that Egyptians have become detached from 'their authentic Egyptian food and local producers', and that the pandemic has put the spotlight on the significance of 'buying your own local Egyptian food', 'growing your own pesticide-free food' or 'gaining the knowledge and skills to build micro-farms on your own rooftop in Cairo' (S3, S17). Egypt's lockdown created an increased awareness of the significance of sustainable food production and food safety, hygiene and quality, and participants emphasized the essential role that food tourism could play in backing these initiatives. Participants foresee that in Egypt's post-pandemic recovery, farmers and local food producers may organize immersive farm visits to educate and inform domestic tourists about the basic techniques and knowledge needed to produce their locally grown vegetables or to set up and maintain 'their own rooftop mini-farms' (S17). Three participants suggested that on each farm tour experience, tourists can participate in 'picking their own vegetables, feeding animals and birds, milking cows, planting, harvesting and meeting the Egyptian peasants behind the scenes', 'visiting the

countryside along the Nile River and getting a flavor of Egyptian farmer's life' (S11, S6, S5). Only a few of the participants (4 out of 29) expected that the popularity of Egyptian chain restaurants across the Arab Gulf states before and during the Covid-19 pandemic and the Egyptian workers' early introduction of authentic Egyptian cooking to the general population in the Gulf region would generate a growing interest in food tourism in Egypt. Participants explained that since the Egyptian uprising of June 2013, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait had provided generous financial support to the military government in Egypt. Equally, the governments of these Arab Gulf states have made their investment visa policies more flexible for Egyptian investors, allowing them to enter the Gulf markets in the form of 'management contracts, sole ownership, franchising or joint ventures' (S2). Egypt's restaurant industry has benefited greatly from these relaxed investment policies, and many family-owned Egyptian restaurants have found their way to the Gulf states since 2018 (S9). These Egyptian-style restaurants, with their Islamic and ancient Egyptian décors, authentic Egyptian cuisine, genuine hospitality and colloquial Egyptian menus and signages, have become 'influential marketing tools' in promoting Egypt's traditional food image and supporting food-related tourism initiatives in Egypt (S11). As evidence of the growing interest in food-related tourism activities among Arab Gulf tourists, local news media reported that after Egypt fully opened its borders to international tourists, Arab Gulf tourists flocked to Egypt to try the unique traditional dishes and drinks (Arabic News 2020). Only one participant related the growing interest in food tourism in Egypt among Arab Gulf tourists to the successive waves of Egyptian workers who have arrived in the Gulf states since the late 1960s. She pointed out that the Arab Gulf tourists' previous experiences and familiarity with Egyptian traditional foods in their home countries have a significant influence on their intentions to visit Egypt and participate in food-related tourism activities (S15). Importantly, there were also concerns voiced by several participants that Egyptian cuisine is highly marginalized in promotional materials provided by the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism. They argued that whereas 'Switzerland is famous for cheese, France for red wine, United States for toasted hot dogs, India for its samosa, curry and masala and Japan for Sushi', the prototypical traditional Egyptian cuisine has been much less prominent, especially that of ancient Egyptian cuisine, such as 'Molokhia, Feseekh [salted, dried fish] and the Asser Asab [sugar cane juice] the best drink of the Pharaoh of Egypt' (S11, S15). Additionally, S2 remarked that while there are very few organized food events and festivals in Egypt, little is known about these culinary events held in Egypt, which should be advertised widely throughout Arab Gulf states in the post-pandemic world.

d. Camping tourism Participants revealed that the rapid proliferation of Covid-19 has aggravated anxiety in the Egyptian population, resulting in individual mental health concerns. Further evidence from the current research indicates that the constant occurrence of Covid-19 triggered a certain degree of anxiety, which in turn increased camping tourism engagement in Egypt. S3 and S21 stressed that the pandemic necessitated that individuals stay at home and limit their mobility within their communities to prevent the spread of the virus; hence, camping tourism was 'an excellent choice for many Egyptians' who were able to travel for brief periods of time in order to reduce stress and seek social interactions with family members. S21 argued that those Egyptian families who encountered challenges and stressful circumstances during the Covid-19 pandemic, possibly related to 'the loss of normal daily structure of their lives or merely

because the threat the pandemic posed to their employment and income', were more prone to participate in camping tourism. S3 and S21 highlighted that the selection of camping tourism as a mode of travel during the Covid-19 era is an emerging trend for tourism in Egypt and will increase the popularity of nature tourism in post-pandemic Egypt, most notably in the form of Egyptian residents preferring natural-area campgrounds as tourist destinations. Participants explained that natural-area campgrounds in Egypt provided special attractions for many Egyptian residents during the Covid-19 period, allowing them to connect with 'the wonders of creation and admire what Allah created' (S5). Participants argued that the pandemic provided potential opportunities for the development of camping tourism experiences in Egypt, especially for domestic tourists, in the aftermath of the pandemic. Still, there were also concerns voiced by a few participants that camping tourism research and development sites, camping tourism planning and recreational vehicles in Egypt have been very limited and are still in their infancy. They remarked that there is a lack of government awareness of the domestic camping tourism market accompanied by a lack of awareness of the economic significance of camping tourism and the absence of camping tourism businesses that can adapt to the needs of domestic tourists in post-pandemic Egypt.

5 DISCUSSION

The qualitative analysis of the data identified four main themes, namely: (a) a dual temporal perspective; (b) individual agency; (c) parental support and active imagination; and (d) re-envisioning the future of Egypt's tourism. The four approaches are context-situated and molded and remolded by particular constraints and opportunities to which participants' experiences are exposed (Tran/Vu 2018). Students seemed to take different contextual constraints and opportunities into account when reimagining and planning their future careers and remained committed to working in the tourism industry in the long term.

The first theme refers to the challenges facing participants and their dual career strategies in relation to the ongoing impacts of the pandemic. Exploring participants' experiences and challenges during the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions provided significant preliminary data to understand students' post-graduation career plans and their perspectives on the future of Egypt's tourism industry in the post-viral phase. Students' future career plans are characterized by three contextual factors, namely: loss of internship opportunities and part-time employment, students' observation of substantial job losses within their local community and the ongoing media coverage of the economic and health crisis. As such, students' career strategies are redirected and shaped by particular conditions or contextual elements (Richardson/McKenna 2020). The majority of research participants had no prior work experience within the tourism and hospitality industry. Initially, all participants highlighted the overall value of real-life work experience and its career-related outcomes. They perceived internships, tours or field trips and skill-based training as vital to enhancing their employment prospects and helping them to define their future career paths. The purpose of internships is to fill the void between practice and theory. Internship experiences serve as a structured and systematic industry learning experience, as well as providing supervised professional work related to future career plans (Brown et al. 2014; Walsh et al. 2015; Wan et al. 2023). Internship programs are considered a very important component of tourism and hospitality management courses, providing Egyptian tourism students with valuable opportunities to put into practice the theory and knowledge from books

and classrooms (Zopiatis/Constanti 2012). Some of the participants also lost their part-time jobs in the tourism and hospitality industry. The ongoing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic have led to an unprecedented ‘career shock’ for tourism entrepreneurs, students and academics (Akkermans et al. 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic may be perceived as ‘a career shock’ for the research participants who intend to pursue a career in the tourism sector (Benaraba et al. 2022; Choy/Yeung 2022; Reichenberger/Raymond 2021a). Research participants graduated and sought employment during adverse socio-economic conditions (Choy/Yeung 2022) as a result of ‘a disruptive and extraordinary event that is, at least to some degree, caused by factors outside the focal individual’s control and that triggers a deliberate thought process concerning one’s career’ (Akkermans et al. 2018: 4).

In line with the three contextual factors reported earlier, participants gauged their future career planning in relation to the Covid-19 impacts in Egypt through a dual temporal perspective in terms of ‘my plans in the near future’ and ‘my plans then’ or ‘my long-term goals’. They clearly distinguished between short-term career strategies after graduation that related to the continuing challenges of the pandemic and its prolonged recovery period and long-term career planning for a post-Covid-19 Egypt. Students showed flexibility in adjusting to the stressful economic environment in Egypt. Their short-term career strategies reflected an acute observation and understanding of the impacts of the pandemic on the Egyptian tourism industry due to a substantial decline in tourist arrivals from Western Europe, China and Russia. A surge in the domestic tourism market and Arab Gulf tourist arrivals to Egypt reflected a cautiously optimistic view of the possible recovery of the tourism sector among participants. The literature (whether popular magazines, local news media or academic journals) predicted that as a result of the Covid-19 crisis domestic and Arab intra-regional tourism would play a pivotal role in the Middle East tourism system (Breisinger et al. 2020). Many media commentators and tourism industry stakeholders have rightly noticed that in the second half of 2020, Egyptian residents occupied private beaches and tourist resorts that were previously used by international tourists (BBC News Arabic 2020a). Students also recognized not only the immediate advantages associated with changing their careers and pursuing higher education but also utilized short-term strategies to envision the long-term trajectory of lifelong careers in a post-pandemic Egypt. A career goal is a career intention or plan to pursue a specific career path (Lent/Brown 2002). Setting goals is vital to individual career development because goals serve to organize and guide behavior, maintain behavior over a long period of time and increase the likelihood of achieving long-term goals (Farmaki 2018). Outcome expectations are also obtained through learning experiences (i.e., ‘having experience in accounting’) and refer to one’s beliefs regarding the long-term consequences of doing a particular action (i.e., ‘see myself as a hotel manager’) (Lent et al. 2002; Wan et al. 2023). Within the context of vocational development, outcome expectations refer to beliefs about the long-term results of the success of a particular educational or vocational decision-making behavior that leads to higher goals (i.e., ‘I’d be a famous professor’) (Airey/Frontistis 1997; Betz/Voyten 1997).

The impacts of significant external factors (i.e., Covid-19 crisis, natural disasters or terrorism) indicate the interrelationship between the student and the contextual factors that affect their future career strategies (Akkermans et al. 2020; Tran/Vu 2018). The pandemic challenged several research participants to reassess their approaches and attitudes toward career options and tourism education and training (Seyitoğlu/Ivanov 2022). They considered meaningful alternative career plans in post-Covid-19 Egypt. It seems that the negative career shock triggered by the

Covid-19 pandemic may open up opportunities for skill upgrading, further education qualifications and career advancement. While all participants believed that they have fallen victim to Covid-19, it is important to underscore that they tend to have positive attitudes toward securing lifetime careers in the Egyptian tourism industry (Rosyidi 2021). Current findings confirmed existing studies that before and during the Covid-19 pandemic tourism students were prone to developing positive attitudes toward tourism career paths, and they were motivated to pursue further studies and training (Choy/Yeung 2022). Particular employment shocks (i.e., loss of work, layoff, missed promotion and a wage cut) have generally incurred negative psychological and career consequences in the short run, but in the long term some workers may secure satisfying high-paying occupations and rewarding careers by engaging in proactive career behaviors, such as skill upgrades, setting goals, networking, career consultations and career planning (Richardson/McKenna 2020; Seibert et al. 2013; Slay et al. 2004).

The vast majority of participants voiced their concerns about the lack of institutional support during the pandemic (Benaraba 2020). Yet findings reveal that research participants were not powerless and passive agents but rather active individuals who reimagined and planned their future careers. They reassessed their career strategies when confronted with barriers in the higher education environment. Hereof, students were reflective agents who were capable of taking action on developing current and future career plans in response to particular contextual constraints. This finding supports the description by Tran and Vu (2018: 170–171) of the concept of ‘individual agency’ as the person’s ability to act with ‘intentionality’ in accordance with ‘rational’ decisions and in response to prevailing circumstances at any particular time; hence, it is ‘the condition of activity rather than passivity’ that shows how student participant agency is entangled with contextual factors (i.e., lack of institutional support). Another significant aspect, parental involvement in students’ career strategies, helped reduce students’ fear and anxiety associated with the pandemic. Many participants talked to family members about their anxiety and career tactics, and this was the most often reported source of informal support (Bojuwoye/Mbanjwa 2006). In general, the literature often indicates that peers, teachers, parents and internship supervisors play a reference role in students’ career decision-making (Kim/Spears 2022). Bergin (2016) pointed out that students’ career preferences and subsequent risks of entering the labor market are influenced, to a certain extent, by environmental factors, such as parents, teachers, relatives and peers.

Participants also re-imagined how the demand for tourism activities in Egypt will be shaped in the future. All participants were positive in their reimagination of the Egyptian tourism industry in the post-pandemic world and were less concerned about the negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the future of the Egyptian tourism sector (Choy/Yeung 2022). They indicated that tourists’ needs, wants, expectations and activities would radically change in different ways in the post-pandemic world. Students highlighted that in the post-pandemic epoch, tourists would be more interested in safety, cleanliness and hygiene. The literature supports the idea that safety, cleanliness and hygiene are important factors for potential tourists in the post-pandemic period; therefore tourism providers should improve their health measures and hygiene rules and should adopt post-pandemic tourists’ perceptions of hygiene procedures and health risks. A recent study (Ivanova et al. 2021) demonstrated that for many tourists health measures and hygiene rules in the post-pandemic world would be a significant aspect when selecting a tourism business, site or destination. Consumer behavior literature showed that during and after the Covid-19 crisis restaurant guests were very concerned

about crowdedness, and they preferred social distancing practices to reduce the risk of infection (i.e., glass or plastic partitions or more space between the tables) (Lu et al. 2020). It seems natural that student participants would predict that tourists will prefer less crowded catering establishments in post-pandemic Egypt. During the course of the interviews, revenge tourism was a persistent concept that came up in students' responses. Revenge tourism is a phrase that describes tourists' strong desire to travel due to the inability of people to travel on vacation during the lockdown and global pandemic (Girish 2021).

In the shadow of Egypt's booming tourism industry in the post-pandemic period, research participants revealed four major potential trends for tourism activities, namely: 'Bedouin desert tourism', 'rural tourism and coastal tourism resorts', 'the growing appeal of food tourism among domestic and Arab Gulf tourists' and 'camping tourism'. Participants revealed that during travel restrictions Egyptians showed a strong interest in experiencing authentic Bedouin culture and tradition. Higgins-Desbiolles (2020: 612) rightly capture the impacts of the pandemic on future travel preferences and tourism trends in the post-Covid-19 world, stating that the pandemic creates a 'transformational moment opening up possibilities for resetting tourism on a more resilient and regenerative path'. It can be concluded that the pandemic resulted in many Egyptians connecting with Egyptian ethnic culture and exploring their own country. In this vein, Bedouin culture-based tourism might also represent opportunities for Egyptians to learn more about Bedouin history and experience the nomadic lifestyle in a natural environment, providing new opportunities for Bedouin tourism operators to attract Egyptians and later international tourists. Recent academic research confirms that during the Covid-19 lockdown, domestic travelers escaped the trappings of heavily and noisy populated cities by visiting ethnic minority communities who live in sparsely populated environments. Domestic tourists were also keen to explore their own country and learn about the indigenous tribes, local population or natives (Fountain 2022). Another future tourism phenomenon found in this study was domestic tourists' participation in rural and coastal tourism experiences (Zoğal et al. 2022). The literature has identified camping as one of the greatest opportunities for outdoor activities within the context of nature tourism. Several recent studies (i.e., Girish 2021; Orîndaru et al. 2021; Seraphin/Dosquet 2020) confirmed that the Covid-19 era has seen the growing popularity of nature and rural tourism globally due to the fact that people equate rural and nature tourism with lack of crowds, health benefits, psychological well-being, unrestricted access to natural environments, serenity, safety and convenience. Additionally, Zoğal et al. (2022: 125) predicted that a major change in tourists' needs and demands in the post-viral world could place rural tourism, mountain tourism activities and second homes 'at the center of tourist activity'.

Another theme highlighted by participants relates to the growing interest in food tourism among domestic and Arab Gulf tourists. The findings show that Covid-19 may create opportunities to support and sustain communities and local food networks and potentially develop knowledge sharing between Egyptian farmers and consumers. These findings are similar to the existing research on food and wine tourism experiences during the Covid-19 period, which shows that the pandemic era saw a significant rise in different types of food and wine tourism experiences globally, including vineyard tours, food tours, cooking classes and visits to local farms. Domestic tourists showed more positive attitudes toward food experiences and consumption during the Covid-19 period than in the pre-pandemic era, and this may largely be due to the fact that there was a strong desire to experience and learn more about locally produced food and authentic cuisine and support local food and drink producers (Fountain 2022).

Evidence in the tourism literature indicates that the outbreak of the global pandemic has represented potential opportunities for the development of food tourism experiences in many countries, especially for domestic tourists, in the aftermath of the pandemic. It has been argued in the literature on food tourism that the pandemic caused a shift in tourists’ perceptions, intentions and attitudes toward local food and drink because food tourism experience has been affected by an increased awareness of the significance of food safety, quality and hygiene, sustainable food production and the lockdown experience (Fountain et al. 2021). Finally, participants reported that the Covid-19 outbreak has increased the popularity of camping tourism experiences among Egyptians (Cohen 2020). It seems that natural-area campgrounds have religious importance for Egyptians as a site or a sanctuary to connect with God through the beauty of nature. It allows Egyptians to contemplate the wonders of God’s creation and enjoy the beauty of this vast universe.

6 CONCLUSION: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

On the theoretical side, this study enriches the body of knowledge on hospitality and tourism literature since the existing literature focuses mainly on the experiences and views of academics, industrial professionals and students toward career development and tourism education before and during the pandemic. In particular, the study provides a model illuminating students’ present and future career tactics (Figure 1) and revealing their vision of post-Covid-19 tourism trends and new business opportunities (Figure 2). The research showed that in order to adapt to the tourism workforce in a post-Covid-19 Egypt, students adopted four main approaches: a dual temporal perspective, individual agency, parental support and active imagination of lifelong

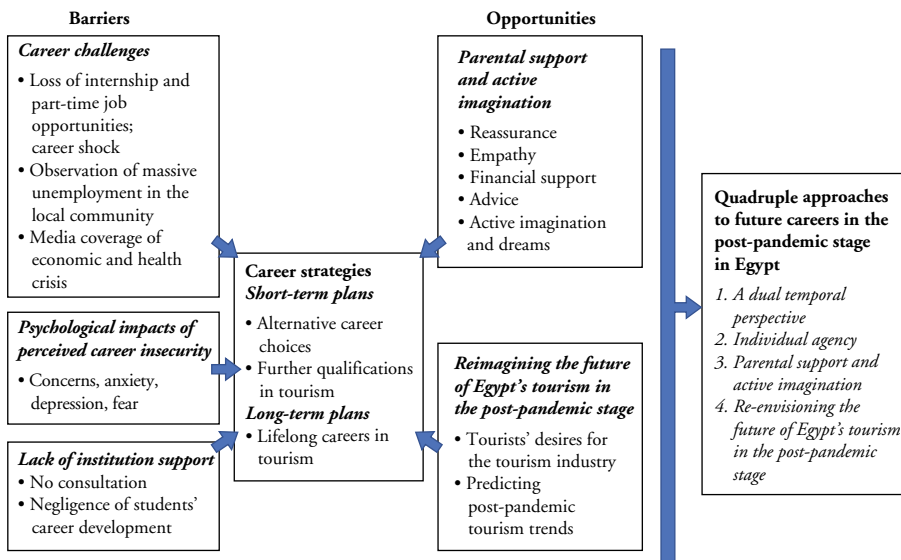


Figure 1 Tourism undergraduates’ four approaches to future careers in the post-pandemic period in Egypt

careers (Figure 1) and reimagining the future of Egypt’s tourism in the post-pandemic era (Figure 2). The four approaches are conceptualized in relation to participants’ strategies and concerns toward future career paths and the Egyptian tourism industry in the post-viral world. Students developed the four main approaches as they adjusted to particular aspects of their external environment and made sense of uncontrollable events (Richardson/McKenna 2020). Their career plans were mediated by different contextual barriers and opportunities. The first contextual barrier relates to the loss of internship opportunities and part-time employment, students witnessing or being victims of significant job losses and the ongoing media coverage of the economic and health crisis. In line with these contextual aspects, participants adopted a dual temporal approach, distinguishing between short-term career tactics and long-term strategies. A second barrier was the psychological impact of perceived career insecurity. Parents played a supporting role in helping students to overcome anxiety and fear by providing positive attitudes and strength when facing the crisis. A third contextual barrier involves the lack of institutional support. None of the student participants should be perceived as passive onlookers or victims; rather, deciding to overcome the lack of institutional support through their own initiatives was an active form of resistance in itself. Students tried to overcome the almost complete absence of formal support by being reflective agents and proactive individuals who envisioned and planned their future careers (Tran/Vu 2018). The findings also revealed two contextual opportunities that were related to parental support and active imagination of life-long careers and the potential trends for tourism activities in post-pandemic Egypt. In order to cope with pandemic-related anxiety and an unpredictable career environment, students relied on an informal network of support (i.e., parents). There was no formal

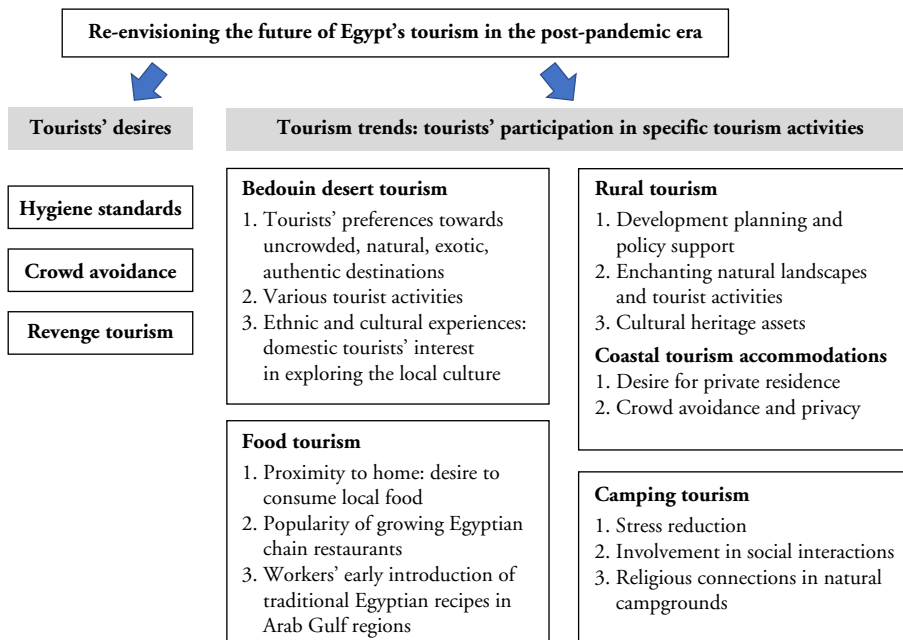


Figure 2 Re-envisioning the future of Egypt’s tourism industry in the post-pandemic era

support (i.e., career services staff and the tourism department); rather, they were largely helped by emotional and practical informal assistance from family members during stressful times as individuals with whom students had close ties. In addition, a very small number of participants employed vivid imaginations and dreams to overcome anxiety and the uncertain future. Utilizing active imagination provided the participants with an opportunity to envision their ‘best possible careers in vivid detail’ (S12). It gave them hope for future bright careers. The fourth approach employed by participants was the reimagination of Egypt’s tourism products in the post-pandemic world (Figure 2); this approach allowed students to develop a positive attitude toward Egypt’s tourism future and tourism-related careers. Students suggested that there are new tourism products, particularly for the regional and domestic markets, in post-Covid-19 Egypt.

On the practical side, the study findings will assist hotel professionals, policymakers, human resource management, destination managers, scholars and educational institutions in comprehending the future of the tourism industry from the perspective of students, and students’ career plans and opportunities in the post-viral world. In this regard, students’ perceptions can guide policymakers and government agencies to develop post-pandemic strategies to meet the changing needs and expectations of post-pandemic tourists (i.e., in terms of hygiene standards, crowd avoidance and revenge tourism) and to tap into the future travel preferences and tourism trends (i.e., opportunities lie in Bedouin tourism, rural tourism, food tourism and camping tourism). Several participants also called on their institution to take urgent steps in times of disruption to provide counseling for career development, alternative internship formats or virtual internships, various forums and networking events dedicated to future career planning and more in-depth information about the complexity and dynamics of tourism careers in the post-pandemic world. A small minority of participants suggested that as potential pandemic and epidemic outbreaks are expected to occur frequently in the future, institutions should make career strategy courses part of the required core curricula. Integrating such courses into the curricula will provide students with the ‘knowledge and skills to prepare and plan their career goals during unprecedented times and execute them. And a career strategy course is a tiny tool trying to fix a big problem’ (S13).

6.1 Research limitations and future directions

This research has a few inherent limitations that need to be acknowledged. Since the research only captured students’ plans toward future career paths at one point in time, it may not mirror any possible adjustments of their plans over time. Given that this study is primarily based on a single case study site and presented through the lens of year-four tourism management students, generalization of the current findings may not be possible in other contexts. Future research can focus on more than one institution and include different students from the hospitality, events, culinary, tourism retail and marketing programs, each confronting unique challenges. Such a study may have broader perspectives. Further research should also focus on industrial professionals’ and faculty members’ perspectives on tourism students’ future career opportunities and the tourism industry in the post-pandemic world. Indeed, the lead author of this study is currently planning such studies and considers them as the second stage of the present research. Last, as has been frequently recommended in different research articles on the impacts of Covid-19 on tourism education (i.e., Chen et al. 2022), the present research applying qualitative study methods can be

supplemented by quantitative data collection methods to validate the current findings and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

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