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Impacts of Educational Agritourism on Students' Future Career Intentions: Evidence from Agricultural Exchange Programs

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Abstract: Destination tourists are a critical stakeholder for developing sustainable tourism. Exchange students as tourists have become a growing segment of the international tourism market. Students undertake courses, internships, or exchange programs at an overseas university for a period of time. Student exchange programs (SEPs) through educational tourism offer exchange students ample learning opportunities from local universities, industries, and other stakeholders. The purpose of this research was to assess the relationships between experiential benefits (including practical business benefits, rural environmental benefits, and personal sociocultural benefits), professional identity, career choice intentions, and support for educational tourism via SEPs. This study surveyed students from Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia, Japan, Vietnam, and others who attended exchange programs in the field of agriculture in Taiwan and other host countries during the last 15 years and are back in their respective countries. Primary data on exchange students were collected using an online questionnaire survey with a sample size of 326 respondents. The results indicated that professional identity has a full intermediating influence on relationships among experiential benefits, career choice intentions, and support for educational tourism via SEPs. The findings are expected to contribute to the understanding of agricultural students' SEP behaviors, and to provide suggestions for planning and managing relevant policy to encourage more students to join SEPs overseas.

Keywords: experiential benefit; professional identity; career choice intention; student exchange program; agritourism

1. Introduction

Taiwan's agriculture has seen major structural changes within the last few decades. The rapid development of the information technology and manufacturing industries has meant that the traditional agriculture sector has lost its former importance. Agricultural growth has dropped as a result of almost 40 years of competition as well as industrial and technological strengthening and expertise. In 2015, Taiwan's total agricultural production reached an estimated value of 477.72 billion TWD (14.98 billion USD). This figure accounted for only 1.77% of the gross domestic product. In addition, the number of workers in agriculture declined from 1.6 million in 1978 to 557,000 in 2017 [1]. In response to these new circumstances, changing food consumption patterns, market liberalization, and the consequent

increased competition, policy-makers have shifted their focus from the cultivation of traditional staple crops to the production of higher-value and consumer-oriented commodities. This approach seeks to exploit products' market potential and Taiwan's technological advantages. With a limited supply of farmland and competition from imports, Taiwan has faced the serious problem of agriculture's labor shortage. Still worse, many high schools and universities have decided, due to declining enrollment, to close down their agricultural programs. This has resulted in the agriculture industry having to adapt rapidly to sustain its long-term development. Thus, it is not easy to cultivate new agricultural workers or young farmers. The new generation is not necessarily willing to do the same farming jobs as their parents and grandparents, so the agricultural sector needs to adjust or change. However, previous studies showed that high school students had relatively low attitude and belief scores, indicating they did not value learning about international agricultural issues, and had limited awareness of international agricultural concepts [2,3]. Even college students have demonstrated a similar lack of knowledge and understanding about international agricultural issues [4].

Student exchange programs (SEPs) have been implemented in many universities throughout the world, including in Taiwan. The goals of SEPs are to allow full-time students to study at a partner university, gaining a global vision during their academic experience by spending one semester or a year to live and study in a different country and environment. Most SEPs in this study arranged educational activities for the exchange students in this study who major in agriculture, such as visiting agribusinesses or experiencing agricultural activities. Specifically, the foreign students joining SEPs in Taiwan, practically all of whom are agricultural students, usually have chances to experience agricultural traditions, ecology, and farmers and communities. Thus, most of the SEP students majoring in agriculture experienced their educational tourism specifically via agritourism. They were able to become deeply involved in the local community and explore a new cultural environment to broaden their vision. Through the student exchange programs implemented with other memorandum of understanding (MOU) universities, students also gained the chance for self-examination and to understand their professional identity within their agricultural majors. Specifically, students were able to identify the role of workplace learning in order to develop their professional identities through structured activities arranged by the SEPs [5]. Furthermore, SEP students had to present an internship or SEP report, which could have provided them with an apt opportunity to investigate how the SEPs benefitted them, affected their professional identity, and established their career intentions.

The purpose of this research was to assess the relationships between experiential benefits (including practical business benefits, rural environmental benefits, and personal sociocultural benefits), professional identity, career choice intentions, and support for educational tourism via SEPs. The participants were a mix of Taiwanese and foreign exchange students who joined in agriculture-related exchange programs in the last 15 years, which were designed to increase cross-cultural awareness among university students in agriculture.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Student Exchange Programs (SEPs)

A student exchange program (SEP) is a study program in which students from a university study abroad at one of their institution's partner institutions for six months to one year [6]. The objective of participating in an SEP is not to receive a degree, but rather to acquire a foreign language and to experience a foreign culture, educational and industrial activities, and more at a university in a foreign country or region. In 2016, there were about 5.1 million internationally mobile students (around 2.3% of all tertiary students), a 2.42 increase in students since 2000, when there were 2.1 million [7]. The rapid global growth in the number of international students has captured the attention of researchers; their focus is often on the study experiences, such as the characteristics of teaching and learning or educational activities in the host country. Numerous studies have sought to investigate the travel motivations of foreign students in the place they choose to study [8–12]. Others have researched

insights around traveler destinations in the host country [8,13,14] and tourist activities [15]. Since the late 1990s, there has been a noticeable rise in research about studying in a foreign country [16,17].

Currently, universities in many countries open their doors for students worldwide to be part of this diversification, regardless of students' nationalities. As a driving force, SEPs can offer exchange students the educational advantages or benefits of the host universities, help to establish students' professional identities and career choice intentions, and provide support for educational tourism or agritourism development in the host region. Other goals of SEPs include, for instance, using technical assistance to improve the lives of people in third-world nations through participation in educational collaboration programs [18] or in global service-learning in developing areas such as Africa, the Caribbean, Central America, and Europe [19]. Researchers have described college study abroad as "one of the most important experiences students can have during their undergraduate years" [20]. In studying the international agricultural exchange program, Rowan-Kenyon's and Niehaus's [21] research found that "students who had engaged in subsequent learning opportunities even continued to find meaning in their study abroad experience". Wingenbach, Boyd, Lindner, Dick, Arispe, and Haba [22] further supported that students learned about international agricultural issues from international agricultural exchange programs, they agreed to learn more about global agriculture in a variety of audio-visual teaching materials, and they understood international agriculture career opportunities. Other research has provided evidence that the choice of country for studying abroad is closely related to the available tourism opportunities there. For example, Glover [23] found that travel opportunities were a significant factor for US students choosing SEPs in Australia. This study targeted National Chung Hsing University (NCHU) students majoring in agriculture (e.g., agribusiness, agricultural economics, agronomy, animal sciences, soil science, etc.) and joined the SEPs in the host countries, or foreign students who participated in NCHU's SEP in Taiwan. Students could visit rural areas, communities, destinations, or entrepreneurs for the purpose of experiencing educational activities or learning about local agriculture topics, such as the production and manufacturing processes of local agribusinesses, agribusiness management, agricultural traditions or ecology, etc.

2.2. Agritourism and Educational Tourism

Agritourism, which combines agriculture with tourism, is a form of tourism, and it creates an ideal environment for eco-education, which has the same components as educational tourism. Ohe (2012) [24] claimed that "educational tourism in agriculture has gained world-wide popularity as an emerging market segment of agritourism or rural tourism, along with rising demands for experience-oriented tourism". In the past two decades, agritourism has gained a spotlight and grown increasingly important in many places, such as Taiwan. Increasing financial strains on family farms/ranches have put pressure on these businesses to look outside agriculture as a means to sustain their operations. One option has been to offer farm/ranch recreation to visitors (i.e., agritourism) [25]. According to Chang (2003) [26], agritourism is an "industry that utilizes the rural view, natural ecology, and environmental resources, and that combines agriculture and forestry, fishery and ranching production, agricultural activities, farmland culture, plus farmland lifestyle". It could promote local food industries, and preserves the unique culture to be found in the farming villages. The Agricultural Marketing Resource Center (AgMRC) also defined agritourism as "the act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural, or agribusiness operation for leisure, education, or participating in farm activities" [27]. Wu and Lin (2016) [28] showed that the agriculture industry constituted a complex and inclusive industry that encompassed food service, accommodation, and leisure, or a diversifying among farms in order to incorporate leisure and recreational activities for the benefit of visitors. Agritourism or rural tourism provides not only farming learning experiences, but also cultivates knowledge of the environmental functions (e.g., land preservation, landscape formation, and biodiversity), cultural and social functions, and recreational and educational functions of agriculture with multifunctional activities. Prior studies [29–32] also support that agritourism has productive functions (farm production, processing, and selling), social functions (hospitality services,

cultural, and educational), and environmental functions, such as organic production, preservation, and conservation of agricultural resources. Several studies have shown a link between educational tourism and agritourism using cases in Japan [33], Poland [34], Nepal [32], and Indonesia [35] to explain the agritourism demand through educational tour packages (educational activities and services) on agritourism farms in the current tourism market. For instance, farmers in Japan have successfully developed diversified activities, offering on-farm working experiences at educational dairy farms to form a wider perspective and have more social learning opportunities.

Agritourism has the potential to remove farmers from isolation and offers the opportunity to build stronger links to the community, leading to its sustainable development [36]. As a framework, agritourism represents the connection of three sectors: agriculture, recreation and leisure, and social transformation. It combines the supply and demand sides of farm-based leisure and tourism via practices such as diversification, growth of the community, and environmental sustainability. Assets such as social skills and a scenic, clean, attractive farm play an essential role for successful results of agritourism and can transform farms into more ideal destinations for visitors. In Taiwan's farms, for example, the total number of legal leisure farms promoted by governments was 250 in 2014 [37]. This is in harmony with nearly 400 varied rural tourism activities from diverse countries such as Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. An estimated 24.5 million tourists engaged in rural tourism events, generating 693 million USD of revenue in 2015. By the end of 2018, there were 93 leisure farm areas in Taiwan, attracting more than 27.6 million domestic visitors and 0.61 million international visitors, and generating 3700 relevant jobs and 3.72 billion USD [38]. In short, it has been proven that agritourism could help rural communities generate economic effects (e.g., job opportunities, extra income, and retail growth), recreational effects (mental and physical health), and educational effects (village cultural and heritage teachings). Specifically, educational or cultural activities in rural areas offer rich experiences for learning agricultural techniques in the production (crops, fruits, vegetables) and manufacturing of agricultural products, indicating that rural cultural heritage is a substantial component in agritourism [24].

2.3. Experiential Benefits

Experiences can be described as “the individual mental state felt by participants during a service encounter” [39]. Benefits refer to the personal value that consumers associate product attributes with. This refers to how users believe the product will benefit them. Keller (1999) [40] suggested that benefits can be further subdivided into three separate classifications depending on the motivations [41]. Consumer satisfaction studies should incorporate an extra level of measurement—one that focuses on the functional, symbolic, and experiential benefits that represent the most influential motivations for purchase [42]. According to previous research [43], experiential benefits relate to the feelings conjured when using the product, and they are also usually linked to the attributes of the product. These benefits are able to fulfill experiential needs, which include things such as physical pleasure, variety, and mental stimulus.

Regarding the experiential benefits of SEPs, intellectual and cognitive knowledge growth or other perceived benefits have been found to be a benefit of study abroad [10]. For instance, Trede, Bowles, and Bridges (2013) [44] reported that 85% of students learned additional information about political/social issues, the people, geography, history, and culture of another country in short-term study abroad. Miller-Perrin and Thompson (2010) [45] found that achievement scores increased over time for study abroad students, while they decreased in a non-traveling student control group. Similarly, Sutton and Rubin (2004) [46] compared about 250 students who studied abroad with those who did not, and discovered significant differences in knowledge, including functional knowledge and knowledge of global interdependence, cultural relativism, and world geography.

On the other hand, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of tourists' experience in various tourism contexts, including educational tourism. Destination attractiveness could be an experiential product that helps tourists generate feelings, excitement, and awareness. Freestone's

and Geldens's (2008) [47] research "located student exchange as a mode of tourism, and they had opportunities for sharing in the leisure activities of the local culture and participating in the routines of everyday life to gain tourist experiences". They found that "the exchange experience goes beyond tourism; students identified their experience as a more authentic engagement with their host country and culture than encountered when they had backpacked or holidayed in the area". Empirical research on tourists' experience have been conducted in a variety of areas, such as heritage sites and parks [48], and family farms and ranches [25,49]. From tourists' viewpoints, it has also been seen as vital in creating a symbiotic relationship between the guest and the resources of the farm [50]. Moreover, Chronis's (2005) [51] research about tourists' experiences of heritage exhibition in Greece found that there were six experiential benefits that are prevalent among visitors exploring the past: the involvement of knowledge, cultural uniqueness, cultural beliefs, escape in time, aesthetic appreciation, and narrative link. In this study, the main product of agritourism could be called "beneficial experiences" gained by the guests in the context of agriculture, as appreciated by them and expressed in their own words when experiencing agricultural activities, facilities, and environments.

2.4. Professional Identity

The foundation of a professional identity is established when people experience the process of socialization to the profession during the professional training period [52]. An individual's professional identity as either a social or role identity is important because it is a key way that individuals assign meaning to themselves, and it shapes work attitudes, affect, and behavior [53]. Professional identity is worthy of study, since it is one of the driving forces and explanations for the development and implementation of any profession. One's professional identity can serve as an organizing framework for an individual's self-concept [54]. Specifically, the way in which an individual defines themselves in their professional role becomes an important tool that the individual will use to understand and define themselves and, in particular, their life's aim. Professional identity could first occur in the family (knowledge, representations, attitude towards work), and then takes place in school and its more established form of transfer. Thus, professional identity has a heavy influence on individual behavior at work; for instance, the norms and values of a profession affect job attitudes and shape behavior [46].

Chen's (2013) [55] research proposed that professional identity was composed of professional value, professional knowledge, professional behavior, and professional role. Similar elements of professional identity, including job involvement, ideology, emotional commitment, and professionalization, have been supported by prior studies [55–58]. These studies show that professional value, professional knowledge, and future career involvement can significantly explain the professional identity for students in SEPs in this study. A person who attended a student exchange program could develop a positive behavior while creating his or her own identity after accumulating professional knowledge, as well as ideals to pursue the set goal.

The experiential benefits could positively affect professional identities among students or employees, such as nurses. For instance, Sabanciogullari and Dogan (2015) [59] and Kabeel and Eisa (2017) [60] found that the higher the job satisfaction with professional skills or professional attitudes, the higher the professional identity. Hernandez et al. (2017) [61] found that the positive benefits of mentorship on deep interest and persistence intentions positively affected scientific identity among female undergraduate students. In another study, Wang (2012) [62] pointed out that internships could assist students in understanding working content and could establish professional recognition in the field, so the experiential benefits positively influence professional identity. Based on prior empirical studies, perceptions of experiential benefits could significantly affect professional identity [55,59–61,63]. As Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010) [64] suggested, the evidence of empirical studies could support the hypothetical relationships between the constructs. Our study, therefore, could establish the causal relationships between the independent and the dependent variables. Based on above discussions, this study proposes the following hypotheses, which could support the antecedents (three kinds of benefits) that influence students' professional identity based on prior empirical studies:

Hypothesis 1-1 (H1-1): *Practical business benefits positively influence professional identity.*

Hypothesis 1-2 (H1-2): *Rural environmental benefits positively influence professional identity.*

Hypothesis 1-3 (H1-3): *Personal sociocultural benefits positively influence professional identity.*

2.5. Support for Educational Tourism through SEPs

The World Tourism Organization (2005) [65] defines sustainable development of tourism as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities”. Prior studies supported that locals who perceived higher economic, sociocultural, and sustainable benefits from tourism were likely to support future tourism development [66–68]. Hearne and Santos (2005) [69] stated that “efforts need to be made to understand tourist demand as well as the capacity of locals to supply services and share their communities with visitors”. Park, Nunkoo, and Yoon (2015) [70] also claimed that the positive socioeconomic and environmental impacts would influence residents’ support for tourism development in a more rural context. There are differences of perceived tourism impacts among stakeholder groups, such as residents, entrepreneurs, government officials, and tourists [71,72].

The exchange students (or international students) stay in the host university or community for a period of time (half or one year), so they could be regarded as long-stay tourists of educational tourism or short-time residents. Weaver’s (2003) [73] study revealed that “the international students had an ongoing influential effect on the host country’s tourism industry over and above their education-related activities and expenditures”. More specifically, international students with the core educational experience in the host university or destination could contribute to local communities and industries, or even widen their own horizons [73]. Huang (2008) [74] pointed out that “international students have come to accomplish an educational goal before returning home; international students are not just students for the host countries where they are studying”. Exchange students have different backgrounds (e.g., cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious) from those of the host universities and countries. Tourists’ opinions or attitudes are important considerations in tourism development that affect local economies, societies, cultures, and environments, as well as their intention to revisit the same destination [75]. Prior studies have agreed that perceived impacts or experiential benefits have a positive, direct effect on supporting sustainable development [76,77].

Suess, Baloglu, and Busser (2018) [78] also found that “attitudes toward tourism and overall community satisfaction positively influenced the perceived impact of the tourism on community wellbeing”. Nunkoo and Gursoy (2012) [79] stated that “the resource-based occupational identity, environmental identity, and gender identity of the residents influence attitudes to tourism impacts and support (behavior)”. Thus, through the SEPs, students will consider their full experience instead of only their academic experience, and will compare this with different tourist experiences.

After reviewing the above empirical evidence [77–80] for the formulated causality, this study proposes the following hypothesis to test the relationship between exchange students’ professional identity and their career choice intention.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): *Professional identity positively influences support for educational tourism via SEPs.*

2.6. Career Choice Intention

The literature about understanding of career choice intentions has recently generally increased [81,82]. Most studies look at individual-level determinants and ignore the contextual influences [83]; for instance, students who experience institutional environments different from those in which they live may have better understanding of how entrepreneurship operates from a cross-country perspective through the role of SEPs. Career intentions are defined as “the degree to which a person has formulated conscious plans to perform or not perform some specified future behavior” [83]. Kracke (2002) [84]

claimed that “a major developmental task is to explore various career options and develop career choice intentions consistent with one’s own abilities, values, and interests”. Greening and Turban (2000) [85] stated that “companies characterized by a good corporate social performance can be part of such people’s decision-making when it comes to career choices”. Prior research has shown that “the opportunity to be useful to society is one reason that attracts people to public-sector jobs” [86]. Previous research indicates that students’ intentions to choose an occupation associated with their majors can be predicted if their career beliefs and interests match their career goals [87]. From a career development perspective, students’ career choice intentions will examine what they intend to do after graduation, as well as what they want to do in both the short term and long term in their career plan [88]. Chang (2003) [26] indicated that word of mouth (WOM) is the most essential information source used by visitors. Repeat visitors may be particularly important and influential by either bringing people along with them or telling others of their experiences. Weaver’s (2003) [73] research found that two-thirds of the respondents had influenced other persons from their home countries to study in Australia. Based on prior studies [82,88–91], three items of career choice intention were proposed, including “I am willing to stay in the agricultural profession in the future”, “I am willing to overcome the obstacles/challenges if I work in agriculture as a profession”, and “I consider myself a member of the agricultural sector”.

For instance, preservice teachers’ professional identity was positively related to increased program performance, which would enhance their professional abilities [92]. Li’s, Xu’s, and Lei’s (2008) [93] study supported that most college students maintained positive attitudes toward their social work careers; they found that students who passed the professional coursework and learned professional skills would increase their career choice intentions. Wang’s, Li’s, and Qi’s (2011) [94] research about the current situation of professional identification among 1085 college students revealed that the professional identity affects career choice intentions. Namely, professional identity plays a critical role that influences students’ learning interests and career intentions. Wu’s (2012) [56] research showed the impact of teachers’ professional identity on their job satisfaction and the turnover intent of substitute teachers in elementary schools. Loi, Hang-Yue, and Foley (2004) [95] also supported that professional identification is positively associated with career satisfaction.

In short, through SEPs, students could shape their feelings and attitudes towards their visits [96], and the higher the professional identity, the higher the tendency to stay in the profession. Specifically, agricultural students visit rural areas or rural tourism based on destinations, their interactions with nature, the environment, and other sources of stimulation (such as farm activities), which are elements of the educational tourism products or positive experiential benefits that are significantly related to students’ professional identity development and that influence their career choice intentions. Based on above empirical studies, the following hypothesis is developed for this study:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): *Professional identity positively influences career choice intention.*

Based on the above literature, this study helped explain the formation of multiple outcome variables, including “career choice intention” and “support for educational tourism via SEPs”, by measuring four antecedent constructs (practical business benefits, rural environmental benefits, personal sociocultural benefits, and professional identity). On this basis, five hypothesized relationships with six constructs are illustrated in Figure 1.

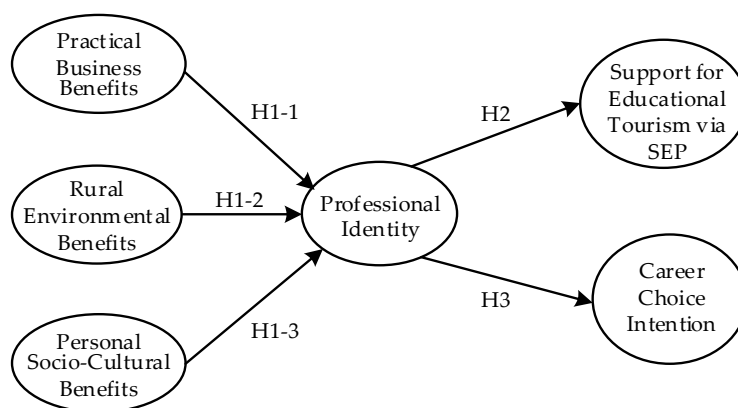


Figure 1. Proposed hypothetical model.

3. Methods

3.1. Measurement Instrument and Data Collection

A self-administered questionnaire was used, consisting of six constructs and 21 corresponding items based on previous literature, with a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire comprised demographic characteristics and previous participation behavior or experiences about exchange program. More specifically, the section of the demographic characteristics comprised variables including gender, current grade, current age, country of residence, and family background (with farming family or non-farming family). A broad review of the extant literature about the six constructs supported the foundation of the development of the questionnaire items. The first section of the questionnaire identified the sociodemographic characteristics of the subjects. In addition, the participation behavior of each variable, including frequencies and participating year, was used for descriptive profiles. The second section evaluated participants' perceived benefits from SEPs, professional identities, and career choice intentions with the SEPs. Specifically, the six constructs include a total of nine items of experiential benefits (practical business benefits with three items, rural environmental benefits with three items, personal sociocultural benefits with three items), a six-item scale of professional identity, a three-item scale of support for educational tourism via SEPs, and a three-item scale of career choice intention. A summary of all constructs, measurement item statements, and the source of adoption is presented in Table 1.

The survey was conducted with participants of the student exchange program affiliated with the National Chung Hsing University (NCHU) in Taiwan together with other overseas universities since 2012. These students were mainly from Taiwan, Thailand, Indonesia, Japan, Vietnam, and others, who attended an exchange program in agricultural-related studies in Taiwan and host countries during these past years and are back to their respective countries. This study employed the purposive sampling method through an online survey to draw a sufficient number of respondents from the SEP students. Specifically, the link to the English survey on a website was distributed using participants' email addresses provided by the Office of International Affairs (OIA) at the NCHU from 25 February through 15 May 2018, and the Japanese survey was conducted for two Japanese universities from 8 May through 30 November 2018. This study used a sample size of 50 questionnaires for conducting a pilot study to evaluate the reliability and validity of the measurement scales. A total of 326 usable questionnaires were collected, yielding a 51.7% overall response rate.

Table 1. Summary of adopted items and sources for measurement.

Measurement Construct and Item Statement	Source of Adoption
Practical Business Benefits: 1. Through the exchange program, I could learn about the production and manufacturing processes of local agribusinesses. 2. Through the exchange program, I could learn about agricultural resource planning and the management of local agribusinesses. 3. Through the exchange program, I could learn about the knowledge and skills of farm management in local agribusinesses.	Wu and Cheng (2020) [97]; Tew and Barbieri (2012) [98]; Barbieri et al. (2019) [99]; Almeida et al. (2014) [100]
Rural Environmental Benefits: 4. The farms/agribusiness/agritourism we visited could preserve agricultural traditions and activities (e.g., farming and livestock feeding). 5. The farms/agribusiness/agritourism we visited could facilitate the preservation of agricultural ecology. 6. The farms/agribusiness/agritourism we visited could benefit both local farmers and communities (e.g., employment and prosperity).	Wu and Cheng (2020) [97]; Tew and Barbieri (2012) [98]; Barbieri et al. (2019) [99]; Almeida et al. (2014) [100]
Personal Sociocultural Benefits: 7. I felt relaxed or pleased with the people and activities during this visit. 8. I enjoyed social interactions with the host students and faculty, as well as the local people. 9. I could expand my knowledge base in agriculture and other fields during this visit.	Wu and Cheng (2020) [97]; Tew and Barbieri (2012) [98]; Barbieri et al. (2019) [99]; Almeida et al. (2014) [100]
Professional Identity: 10. Working in agriculture as a profession could help me achieve self-actualization. 11. Working in agriculture as a profession could complement my competency and values. 12. I believe that agricultural occupations are critical to the whole society. 13. It is meaningful for me to work in agriculture as a profession. 14. I believe that the agricultural profession requires professional training. 15. To strengthen agricultural knowledge and skills in agriculture, I will be a lifelong learner.	Wu (2012) [56]; Pai et al. (2012) [58]; Loi et al. [95]; Levy et al. (2014) [101]
Support for Educational Tourism via SEPs: 16. I am willing to support educational tourism in my visiting places. 17. I am willing to recommend the exchange program to others with my enthusiasm. 18. I am willing to participate in other exchange programs/internships if available.	Styliadis et al. (2017) [66]; Jiang and Tribe (2009) [77]; Nunkoo and Gursoy (2012) [79]; Ankomah and Larson (2009) [102]
Career Choice Intention: 19. I am willing to stay in the agricultural profession in the future. 20. I am willing to overcome the obstacles/challenges if I work in agriculture as a profession. 21. I consider myself a member of the agricultural sector.	Bergmann and Ostertag (2014) [82]; Cano et al. (2017) [88]; Schröder et al. (2011) [89]; Zellweger et al. (2011) [90]; Li (2015) [91]

Note: A five-point Likert scale was used, with a range of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

3.2. Data Analysis

This study employed the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 23 and Amos (Analysis of Moment Structures) version 22 programs to analyze the collected data from the study subjects. Descriptive analyses were performed on SEP students' sociodemographic characteristics. Structural equation modeling (SEM), which incorporates two structures—a measurement model and a structural model—in a single structure [103], was adopted to test the proposed hypotheses. The demographic characteristics of the respondents revealed that there were more female students (54.7%) than male students (45.3%). The majority of the participants listed their current grade (71.1%) as graduate students (38.0%), followed by senior (32.7%) and junior students (27.9%). A greater percentage of respondents were 22 years old (32.2%), followed by those who were 21 years old (19.53%), 23 years old (15.0%), and 25 years old (12.7%). The major countries of residence among all participants were Taiwan (33.1%), Thailand (23.0%), Japan (19.0%), and Indonesia (10.1%). There were more respondents with non-farming families (76.4%) than respondents with farming families (23.6%). As for the participation behavior with respect to SEPs, of the 326 respondents, the first-time participants comprised 78.9% of the total sample, while 13.5% were repeat participants, and only 7.6% had joined at least three times or more. About 43.9% attended an SEP in the year of 2017, followed by 2016 (25.7%), 2015 (19.2%), 2014 (4.3%), 2013 (2.5%), and both 2018 and 2012 (2.2%), as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of student exchange program (SEP) respondents (N = 326).

	Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	148	45.3
	Female	178	54.7
Current grade	Sophomore	2	0.6
	Junior	91	27.9
	Senior	107	32.7
	Graduate student	124	38.0
	Graduation	2	0.6
Current age	20 years old	16	4.8
	21 years old	82	25.1
	22 years old	102	32.2
	23 years old	49	15.0
	24 years old	30	9.3
	25 years old	41	12.7
	26 years old	6	1.9
Country of residence	Thailand	75	23.0
	Taiwan	108	33.1
	Japan	62	19.0
	Vietnam	21	6.4
	Indonesia	33	10.1
	Other (Africa, etc.)	27	8.2
Family background	Farming family	77	23.6
	Non-farming family	249	76.4
Participating frequency	1 time	257	78.9
	2 times	44	13.5
	3 times or more	25	7.6
Participating year	2012	7	2.2
	2013	8	2.5
	2014	14	4.3
	2015	63	19.2
	2016	84	25.7
	2017	143	43.9
	2018	7	2.2

4. Results

This study finds that the reliability coefficients of Cronbach's alphas among the six constructs are higher than 0.7 [103], including (1) the "practical business benefits" scale with $\alpha = 0.86$, (2) the "rural environmental benefits" scale with $\alpha = 0.82$, (3) the "personal sociocultural benefits" scale with $\alpha = 0.89$, (4) the "professional identity" scale with $\alpha = 0.86$, (5) the "support for educational tourism via SEPs" scale with $\alpha = 0.93$, and (6) the "career choice intention" scale with $\alpha = 0.91$, indicating that these six constructs are reliable. Following the recommended two-stage analytical procedures [103], the five hypotheses were assessed through measurement and structural models using Amos 23. First, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted for the measurement model to evaluate the six constructs. As presented in Table 3, the parameter estimates of standardized factor loading for all items were positive and higher than the 0.7 threshold, ranging from 0.71 to 0.85. In addition, all t-values for all the standardized factor loadings of the items were significant ($p < 0.01$), providing further evidence of the convergent validity [104]. The estimation of composite reliability revealed an acceptable internal consistency reliability (>0.70) with values ranging from 0.82 to 0.89 [104]. All values of the average variance extracted (AVE) were higher than 0.50 (from 0.58 to 0.64), implying that the 21 observed variables possess a high level of accuracy in forming the six latent variables [104]. The discriminant validity was further assessed by comparing the square root of the AVE for a given construct with the correlation coefficients between the construct and the other five constructs (Table 4). The results of the assessments of convergent validity and discriminant validity support the construct validity and reliability. Last, all goodness-of-fit indices for the measurement model surpassed acceptance levels as recommended by previous literature, including $\chi^2/df = 2.61$, adjusted goodness-of-fit index

(AGFI) = 0.95, non-normed fit index (NNFI) = 0.94, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.95, standardized root mean residual (SRMR) = 0.06, and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.05.

Table 3. Measurement model ($N = 326$).

Construct and Indicators	SFL	T-Value	CR	AVE
<i>Practical Business Benefits (PBBs)</i>			0.82	0.60
1. Through the exchange program, I could learn about the production and manufacturing processes of local agribusinesses.	0.71	8.76 ***		
2. Through the exchange program, I could learn about agricultural resource planning and the management of local agribusinesses.	0.83	8.21 ***		
3. Through the exchange program, I could learn about the knowledge and skills of farm management in local agribusinesses.	0.78	9.19 ***		
<i>Rural Environmental Benefits (REBs)</i>			0.83	0.62
4. The farms/agribusiness/agritourism we visited could preserve agricultural traditions and activities (e.g., farming and livestock feeding).	0.75	11.52 ***		
5. The farms/agribusiness/agritourism we visited could facilitate the preservation of agricultural ecology.	0.79	10.47 ***		
6. The farms/agribusiness/agritourism we visited could benefit both local farmers and communities (e.g., employment and prosperity).	0.82	12.36 ***		
<i>Personal Sociocultural Benefits (PSBs)</i>			0.82	0.61
7. I felt relaxed or pleased with the people and activities during this visit.	0.76	10.24 ***		
8. I enjoyed social interactions with the host students and faculty, as well as the local people.	0.72	9.41 ***		
9. I could expand my knowledge base in agriculture and other fields during this visit.	0.85	15.66 ***		
<i>Professional Identity (PI)</i>			0.89	0.58
10. Working in agriculture as a profession could help me achieve self-actualization.	0.72	12.53 ***		
11. Working in agriculture as a profession could complement my competency and values.	0.76	14.25 ***		
12. I believe that agricultural occupations are critical to the whole society.	0.71	10.47 ***		
13. It is meaningful for me to work in agriculture as a profession.	0.83	11.12 ***		
14. I believe that the agriculture profession requires professional training.	0.79	12.34 ***		
15. To strengthen agricultural knowledge and skills in agriculture, I will be a lifelong learner.	0.77	11.24 ***		
<i>Support for Educational Tourism via SEPs (SET)</i>			0.84	0.64
16. I am willing to support educational tourism in my visiting places.	0.76	10.08 ***		
17. I am willing to recommend the exchange program to others with my enthusiasm.	0.84	14.85 ***		
18. I am willing to participate in other exchange programs/internships if available.	0.79	11.57 ***		
<i>Career Choice Intention (CCI)</i>			0.84	0.64
19. I am willing to stay in the agricultural profession in the future.	0.77	10.23***		
20. I am willing to overcome the obstacles/challenges if I work in agriculture as a profession.	0.83	12.54 ***		
21. I consider myself a member of the agricultural sector.	0.80	14.41 ***		

Note: SFL = standardized factor loading (λ), CR = composite reliability, and AVE = average variance extracted; *** $p < 0.001$.

The goodness-of-fit indices of the structural model reached the minimal acceptable standard, with $\chi^2/df = 2.65$, AGFI = 0.94, NNFI = 0.93, CFI = 0.95, SRMR = 0.06, and RMSEA = 0.05. Table 5 summarizes the model fit indices of both the measurement and structural model. The final results

of testing the five hypotheses are summarized in Table 6, revealing that all five hypotheses were supported with a positive relationship, as presented in Figure 2.

Table 4. Results of discriminant validities and correlations.

Construct	1. PBB	2. REB	3. PSB	4. PI	5.SET	6.CCI
1. PBB	0.77 ¹					
2. REB	0.58 ***	0.79				
3. PSB	0.44 ***	0.47 ***	0.78			
4. PI	0.52***	0.53 ***	0.49 ***	0.76		
5. SET	0.49 ***	0.45 ***	0.35 ***	0.42 ***	0.80	
6. CCI	0.53 ***	0.40 ***	0.39 ***	0.56 ***	0.48 ***	0.78

¹ The bold diagonal elements are the square root of average variance extracted (AVE). Correlations are the values of the diagonal; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 5. Goodness-of fit indices of measurement and structural models.

Model	χ^2/df	AGFI	NNFI	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA
Measurement model	2.61	0.95	0.94	0.95	0.05	0.06
Structural model	2.65	0.94	0.93	0.95	0.06	0.05
Recommended level	<3.00	≥ 0.90	≥ 0.90	≥ 0.90	<0.08	<0.07

Note: Recommended level: $\chi^2/df < 3$ [105]; the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI) ≥ 0.90 [106]; the non-normed fit index (NNFI) ≥ 0.90 [106]; the comparative fit index (CFI) ≥ 0.90 [107]; the standardized root mean residual (SRMR) < 0.080 [106]; and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) < 0.07 [107].

Table 6. Results of tested hypotheses (H1-1–H3).

Research Hypothesis	Hypothesized Path	Path Coefficient	T-Value	Results
H1-1	Practical business benefits → Professional identity	0.37	5.19 ***	Supported
H1-2	Rural environmental benefits → Professional identity	0.21	2.25 *	Supported
H1-3	Personal sociocultural benefits → Professional identity	0.42	5.84 ***	Supported
H2	Professional identity → Support for educational tourism via SEPs	0.53	6.07 ***	Supported
H3	Professional identity → Career choice intention	0.18	2.01 *	Supported

* $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$.

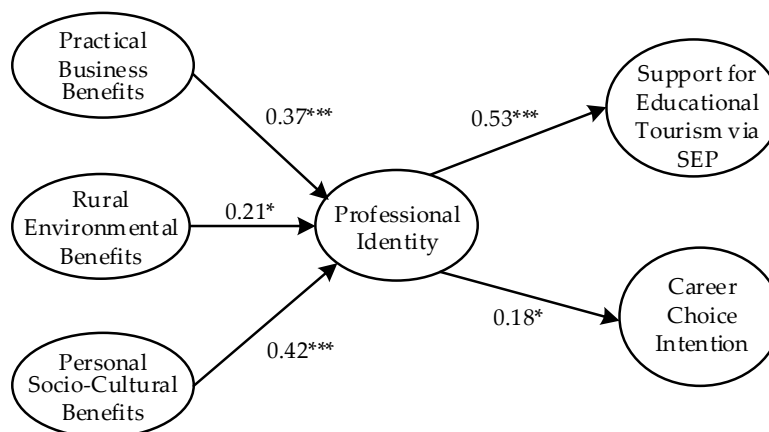


Figure 2. Summary of tested hypotheses (H1-1–H3).

5. Discussions and Conclusions

This study is the first attempt to assess and demonstrate that these five hypothetical relationships between three experiential benefits—professional identity, career choice intentions, and support for educational tourism via SEPs—are significant. This study concludes that the experiential benefits could be the initial point or driving force to increase students' professional identity, as well as their support for SEPs and their career choice intentions. First, the findings showed that exchange students agreed that practical business benefits, rural environmental benefits, and personal sociocultural benefits together influenced their professional identity. Among three antecedents of professional identity in the context of agriculture, personal sociocultural benefits, were a key determinant of the professional identity, followed by practical business benefits. This finding was consistent with prior studies related to perceived benefits of educational agritourism [10,34,46,58,91–94]. Furthermore, the total effect of experiential benefits mediated by professional identity on support for educational tourism via SEPs was 0.53 (indirect effect only), which was stronger than the total effect on career choice intentions (0.18). The findings also indicated that the higher the exchange students' personal sociocultural and practical business experiences, the higher the level of perceived professional identity in the agricultural field, which, in turn, reinforces the exchange students' support for SEPs and helps build their career intentions toward agriculture. Thus, the SEP directors should foster concrete improvements to enhance experiential benefits from or satisfaction with SEPs, particularly in maintaining personal sociocultural and practical business benefits.

Second, the profile of SEP students showed that students' sociodemographic characteristics were related to their experiential benefits from SEPs. For instance, the findings imply that SEP students who were male, from a farming family, and from Taiwan, Thailand, or Indonesia tended to have had a higher perceived experiential benefit from SEPs than female students who were from non-farming families and from other countries. Specifically, exchange students' gender is related to their professional identity, indicating that male students perceived higher professional identity than female students, consistently with previous studies [51,52,55–58]. For instance, Thai students are usually required to have a farming family background before joining agricultural programs in their home country, implying that the students may perceived higher benefits of agribusiness or agriculture than students with a non-farming background. The findings suggest that rural environmental benefits should be improved, particularly in emphasizing the importance of environmental preservation, ecology, and sustainability to agriculture. The findings confirm the critical role of professional identity, which has a full mediating effect and could determine the relationship between experiential benefits, career choice intentions, and support for educational tourism via SEPs among agricultural students. [71–73].

Third, understanding students' future career choices and their intentions to stay in agriculture-related professions would help the host universities or destination managers to better understand how to improve the quality of SEPs by using their resources appropriately and establishing students' WOM recommendations and loyalty. Professional identity has a full mediating impact on the relationship between antecedents and consequences. Specifically, professional identity had a substantial mediating effect on experiential benefits in both support for educational tourism via SEPs and career choice intentions, indicating that both experiential benefits and professional identity are critical to determining students' career choice intentions and their support for educational tourism via SEPs. Consistently with prior studies [51,55–58], these data emphasized the importance of the impact of professional identity on students' future intentions. Through educational traveling in student exchange programs, agricultural students could enhance and construct their professional identity development, and career intentions. In this study, SEP students perceived higher levels in their personal benefits than with agribusiness practical benefits or agritourism benefits. The host universities should work to improve the experience of the practical agribusiness benefit and the agritourism benefit.

Fourth, professional identity is regarded as essential in the transition from college student to professional; universities need to own it to ensure that the workforce is appropriately prepared for the agricultural industry in the future. The formation of professional identity involves a focus on who the

student wants to become, as well as what a student knows or could do, and requires authentic learning experiences, such as practical exposure and interaction with farmers and practitioners [108,109]. Thus, without implementing student exchange programs with other MOU universities, students will miss the chance for self-examination and to understand their professional identity with respect to their agricultural majors in the near future. Conversely, students could develop their professional identities through SEPs and take an internship to help them figure out the role of workplace learning in professional identity. Finally, from the perspective of the agribusiness or agritourism entrepreneurs, students' perceived benefits from or satisfaction with their visits are crucial in initiating a positive image of the agricultural field and inciting career intentions among exchange students to stay and work for the agricultural industry. In addition, prior studies [60,110] have proved that there is a relationship between job satisfaction, professional identity, and intention to leave the profession; 15.5% of the employees who had inadequate professional identity development and low job satisfaction intended to leave their profession. Thus, students' learning satisfaction should be valued and given attention to maintain their intention to stay in the agricultural profession.

To conclude, the international students participating in SEPs could be considered as educational tourists in one segment of the travel tourism market. Their short stay could benefit the local economy of the destinations and facilitate a healthy rural environment. Moreover, the positive impacts (e.g., economic, social, and cultural life of a host rural region) of international exchange programs could also make important contributions towards the evolution of current tourism worldwide. Thus, the optimal strategy for SEPs among universities in different countries would increase the likelihood of students or visitors having high intentions or loyalty, resulting in spreading positive recommendations about spending one semester studying abroad through international partnerships. Universities could also promote the advantages or benefits of SEPs over the world, thus attracting new students.

This study has certain limitations that need to be addressed in terms of the study sites, participation, and hypothesized link selection. First, the survey participants were limited to NCHU students who joined the SEPs of foreign universities that signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) partnership with NCHU, or foreign exchange students who participated in NCHU's SEP. The sample may not be representative of the total SEP population in Taiwan and other countries, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should consider a wider sample across different disciplines, as well as with exchange students from other MOU universities overseas with cross-cultural backgrounds, to generalize the findings. Future studies could also consider making a cross-cultural comparison among SEP students (with equal sampling numbers between different countries) to identify the similarities and dissimilarities between the relationships among all constructs. In addition, other antecedents, mediators, or moderators could be included to replicate these findings to gain richer insights into how these antecedents influence SEP students' career choice intentions and support for educational tourism via SEPs.

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