

Study on the Influences of Internship Experience, Self-efficacy, and Career Decision Making

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ABSTRACT. *Internships are a work-related learning experience for students that allow them to have the opportunity to create a resume with professional work experience. This study attempted to explore the influences of the internship experience, self-efficacy, and career decision making of undergraduates in Taiwan. It designed a questionnaire and distributed it to undergraduates with internship experience. A total of 216 valid copies of the questionnaire were collected. This study employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to analyze the results. The results demonstrated that the overall model fitness met statistical requirements and could effectively explain the significant and positive impacts of internship experience and career decision making. Self-efficacy was found to have a mediating effect on internship experience and career decision making. Lastly, based on the empirical analysis results, this study put forward suggestions for undergraduate internship systems, for the reference of relevant decision-making institutions.*

Keywords: *Internship experience, Self-efficacy, Career decision making, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)*

1. Introduction

A school educates its students in professional theoretical knowledge; however, there is a gap between the courses taught in class and what is required in the workplace. As a result, students may not be able to successfully enter the workplace after graduation. Therefore, students are expected to take on internships offered by enterprises before graduation so they can experience a workplace environment in advance and “learn by doing” to improve their employability and have more opportunities.

Ross, Beggs, & Young (2006) pointed out that an internship shifts students from a campus environment to a work environment, which plays an important role in an academic curriculum. Huang & Huang (2003) assumed that an internship is a simulated process for students to investigate when choosing a career. Tsao, Jung, and Liu (2000) asserted that, through off-campus internships, students can acquire practical work skills and interpersonal skills, as well as develop independence, which contributes to career planning. In recent years, the Taiwan government has launched various policies to bridge the gap between the courses taught in class and what is required in the workplace and has encouraged universities and colleges to cooperate with companies. The connection and close interaction between industry and universities can provide internships and job opportunities, as well as cultivate and strengthen students' employability (Ministry of Education, 2010). Tsai (2010) argued that the internship system provides an opportunity for career exploration. Through internships, students can learn about the workplace and probe into their career goals. Kaur & Singh (2013) believed that internships aim to cultivate students' practical leadership and professional skills. Chiu & Wang (2012) deemed that internships can connect the courses taught in class with what is required in the workplace and train students to become the professional talents required by companies. The studies of scholars and experts, both at home and abroad, hold that internships before graduation are necessary and beneficial.

At present, according to the government's policies, after acquiring basic knowledge during their freshman and sophomore years, students are arranged to have internships during their

junior or senior years. Some institutes arrange short- or long-term internships during summer and winter holidays or during a semester, according to their nature. Schools and students spend time and energy to participate in internships, with the hope that students will be able to integrate with business practices after graduation. The internship system aims to improve career decision making through the establishment of internship experiences and the improvement of the students' self-efficacy. However, domestic and foreign studies have seldom discussed the influence of self-efficacy on internship experience and career decision making. Therefore, in addition to the influence of internship experience on career decision making, this study regarded self-efficacy as a mediating variable of internship experience and career decision making and hoped to bridge the gap of academic researches via the empirical results, which could serve as a reference for schools to plan student internships.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Internship experience and career decision making

Aggett & Busby (2011) thought that schools should establish the value of off-campus internships and encourage students to face their careers in a stable and persistent manner. According to Ho et al. (2015), off-campus internships are one of the ways to acquire experiential learning and explore careers. Huang & Lin (2010) mentioned that internships refer to a special process of changing individuals from students to full-time employees. Hsu (2011) argued that it is meaningful when students apply what they have learned while accumulating practical experience during internships. Bay (2006) stated that off-campus internships have a unique value. If an internship program has a complete design and all internship resources can meet the needs of students' careers and employment preparation, it can achieve the effect of experiential learning. Chiang (2011) asserted that, currently, technical and vocational schools adopt the internship system, introduce practical experiences from industry into teaching through internships, facilitate exchanges and research cooperation, and increase the competitiveness of industry and universities. Chuang & Kuo (2005) assumed that internships are a simulated

process for college students to select their careers and aim to render students the abilities required in the workplace. Wu (2008) believed that off-campus internships integrate practical experiences in industries into teaching and are a simulated process for college students to select their careers. They can improve students' required abilities for the workplace. Yang (2011) pointed out that internships allow students to apply what they have learned in practice. Huang & Lin (2010) found that the internship experience of undergraduates is significantly related to their work values. Internship activities can reduce dissatisfaction and student turnover for students and potential employers (Miriam & Ruth, 2016). In summary, internships are an extremely important experience. Students can learn practical practices in the industry through internships, understand the work process of full-time employees, and have a preliminary understanding of future work environments.

2.2. Internship experience and self-efficacy

Bandura (1977) first proposed the concept of self-efficacy and defined it as an individual's belief in his/her ability to achieve the desired goal of a task. Bandura (1982) further defined self-efficacy in a more specific manner as, "An individual makes subjective judgment on the behavioral performance required to successfully address an impending situation. This judgment will also determine the amount and duration of efforts that he/she will make." In the workplace, Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou, Mylonas, & Argyropoulou (2012) deemed that occupational self-efficacy refers to people's belief in the appropriate actions needed to effectively manage various occupational problems. Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou, Mylonas, & Argyropoulou (2015) pointed out that employees with a high sense of self-efficacy are more likely to play their professional roles creatively, while those with a lower sense of self-efficacy tend to process professional tasks routinely. Self-efficacy is crucial, as it can improve students' ability to organize and implement work-related tasks (Sidiropoulou-Dimakakou et al., 2014). At present, there are many studies at home and abroad related to student internships. However, few of them are related to the relationship between internship experience and self-efficacy, as well as

between self-efficacy and career decision making. Lu & Wang (2014) held that studies on the self-efficacy of interns in Taiwan are limited. Thus, it is necessary to explore how the degree of self-efficacy of interns influences internship experience and career decision making.

2.3. Self-efficacy and career decision making

Sung, Turner, & Kaewchinda (2013) and Michael et al. (2014) implied that internships play a significant role in shaping the career development path of students. With respect to future career development, the period from age 14 to 25 of an individual's life span can be regarded as the career exploration period (Super, 1970). The internship system provides students in their junior or senior years with planned career exploration. The internship experience will influence students' willingness to stay in relevant industries (Jauhari & Manaktola, 2006; Zopiatis, 2007). Chang (2012) studied students participating in summer part time jobs and pointed out that internships can increase employability and have a positive and significant impact on career development. Tsao, Jung, and Liu (2000) believed that, through off-campus internships, students can learn practical work skills and interpersonal skills, develop independence, and increase social experience, which contributes to career planning. Internships are one of the best ways for students to gain work experience, which can improve their professional development and career preparation skills and make them more likely to be employed (Hurst, Thye & Wise, 2014). Internships can develop the practical skills of students. Through effective training and management systems, students are expected to acquire skills in line with the demands of the institutions offering internships and improve their chances of getting employed by those institutions in the future (Antun, 2001). Internships provide students with an opportunity to learn what they want or do not want to do, if they want to work, and if their self-concept is suitable for possible career paths (Miriam & Ruth, 2016). Yang (2011) and Ho, Yang, Li et al. (2015) held that, through off-campus internships, students can develop the spirit of serving people. By gaining the recognition of customers, students can have a sense of achievement and become inspired to choose their careers. After graduation, they will better adapt to relevant works. Hence, internships are conducive to future careers. Bull (2014) argued that through internships,

students hope to gain industrial knowledge, establish a network of working relationships, and determine the direction of their future career development.

In summary, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Internship experience has a positive effect on career decision making.

H2: Internship experience has a positive effect on self-efficacy.

H3: Self-efficacy has a mediating effect on internship experience and career decision making.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research subjects and questionnaire

This study considered undergraduates with internship experience in southern Taiwan as its subjects. The questionnaire was distributed via email and Line groups by teachers, supervisors, and students at universities and in hospitals. Students filled in the questionnaire voluntarily. This study referred to relevant researches to develop the questionnaire. After the first draft of the questionnaire was completed, three experts were invited to verify its validity. In accordance with the opinions of the experts, the questionnaire was revised and its quality was improved. It was then formally distributed.

3.2 Research structure

This study integrated relevant literature and theoretical analysis to explore the relationship between internship experience and career decision making, regarded self-efficacy as the mediating variable, and probed into the mediating effect of self-efficacy on internship experience and career decision making. Figure 1 illustrates the research structure.

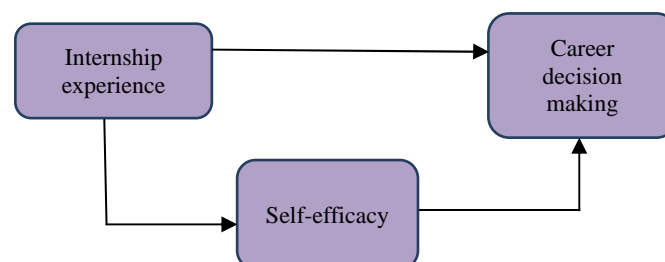


FIGURE 1. Research structure

3.3 Measurement of variables

This study implemented a structured questionnaire and adopted a Likert 5-point scale that included five options, namely, "Strongly disagree", "Disagree", "Fair", "Agree", and "Strongly agree". Scores of one to five points were given to the answers of the respondents. The main research variables include internship experience, self-efficacy, and career decision making. The control variables included gender, year of study, internship institution, and internship duration.

3.4 Data analysis

This study regarded SEM as the main data analysis method and used it for exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis of various dimensions so as to verify the reliability and validity of the dimensions. In addition, it verified the fitness and evaluated if the relationship hypotheses were valid. This study used the hypotheses relationship proposed by Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson (2010) and actual data to verify the fitness of the entire model. According to the four conditions proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986), it verified the mediating effect.

4. Research Results

4.1 Sample descriptive analysis

Based on the research purposes, this study adopted purposive sampling and regarded undergraduates with internship experience as its subjects. Due to limited manpower and time, it took the most effective and environment-friendly approach and utilized convenience sampling with a Google form questionnaire to conduct the survey via email. A total of 300 copies of the questionnaire were distributed, and 216 valid ones were collected. Men accounted for 23% of the respondents, while women accounted for 77%. Juniors accounted for 32%, while seniors accounted for 65%. Postgraduates accounted for 3%. Hospitals accounted for 77% of the institutions, while companies accounted for 9%, government agencies accounted for 4%, and others accounted for 10%. An internship duration of two months accounted for 62% of the total, between two and six months accounted for 15%, more than six months accounted for 16%, and longer than one year accounted for 7%.

4.2 Factor analysis

In order to clarify the correlation among research variables, the main exploratory factors were first analyzed. This study found that question 6 (During the internship, I had good interactions with my supervisors and other employees.) and question 7 (I am satisfied with my performance during the internship) for internship experience were similar to those for self-efficacy, so the two questions were deleted. The questionnaire was re-analyzed after the deletion. The KMO and Bartlett test were conducted. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.913 and the significance was 0.000. Confirmatory factor analysis was then carried out. According to Hair et al. (2010), questions with a factor load less than the threshold of 0.5 were deleted to avoid the influence on the entire model due to insufficient explanatory power. The analysis results showed that all the first-order factor loads for internship experience, self-efficacy, and career decision making were higher than 0.7, and the T value was higher than 1.96, thus reaching a significant level. The square roots of AVEs were above 0.5, and the combination reliability was above 0.75, indicating that the questions for each dimension had convergent validity.

TABLE 1. Verification analysis of the measurement model

Dimension	Question	SFL	SE	CR	AVE
Internship experience	I had specific and clear goals for internship.	.731***	.029	0.897	0.637
	My internship experience can improve my understanding of my major.	.857***	.022		
	My internship experience responded to the professional courses taught at my university.	.812***	.030		
	My internship experience can enrich my professional knowledge and skills.	.873***	.021		
	My internship experience was very rewarding.	.702***	.033		
Self-efficacy	During the internship, I spared no efforts to perform each task well.	.716***	.017	0.916	0.577
	I had appropriate performance in line with different work demands.	.759***	.016		
	I could solve most of the problems encountered during the internship.	.733***	.028		
	In spite of setbacks during the internship, I overcame them and completed my tasks.	.831***	.014		
	In the face of different work conditions during the internship, I could make timely and appropriate judgments.	.720***	.028		
	During the internship, when I met a problem, I tried to solve it or actively ask for help.	.756***	.015		

	During the internship, I actively learned new knowledge and skills.	.800***	.015		
	During the internship, even if I was asked to do things that I dislike, I insisted in completing them.	.757***	.017		
Career decision making	After graduation, I will attach priority to the industry in which I had my internship.	.878***	.024	0.916	0.687
	After graduation, I will study at a graduate school related to my internship (department).	.721***	.055		
	After graduation, I will first try to get employed by the institution where I had my internship.	.713***	.053		
	My internship experience improved my willingness to get employed in an industry related to my internship.	.893***	.020		
	After graduation, I will apply what I have learned and get involved in a job related to my internship.	.915***	.019		

Note 1: *** denotes $P < 0.001$.

Note 2: SFL refers to standardized factor load; SE refers to the standard error of the factor load; SMC is the multiple correlation squared value; CR is the combination reliability; AVE means average variation extraction.

4.3 Verification of the fitness of the entire model

CMIN stands for Chi-square (X^2), which can be used to test if a model fits the data. When the data fully fits the model, the Chi-square value is 0. In contrast, when the model does not match with the data, the Chi-squared value will be very large. The fourth column of CMIN refers to the degree of freedom (DF), while P in the fifth column means significance. The P value refers to the probability value calculated based on the Chi-square value and DF. When $P > 0.05$, the model and data fit well. When $P < 0.05$, the model does not fit the data. However, as the Chi-square test is also affected by the number of samples, Bagozzi & Yi (1988) suggested that the ratio of the Chi-square value and DF can replace the Chi-square value to verify the fitness of the model, and that it is appropriate when the ratio is between one and five. It is the best when the ratio is < 3 . Although the Chi-square value shown in Table 2 of this study was 276.594 and P was $0.000 > 0.05$, the Chi-square value-DF ratio was $2.095 < 3$. Moreover, the fitness indicator verification of the entire model in Table 3 implied that, except for CN, which was affected by the number of samples, the other judgments of the fitness of the model were compliant or close to compliant, indicating that the fitness of the model and the data was acceptable.

TABLE 2. CMIN

Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF
Default model	39	276.594	132	.000	2.095
Saturated model	171	.000	0		
Independence model	18	2796.956	153	.000	18.281

TABLE 3. Fitness indicators of the overall model

Statistical verification amount		Standard value	Test Results	Model fitness judgment
Absolute fitness indicator	X^2	The smaller, the better ($P\alpha$)	276.594 ($p = 0.000$)	No
	X^2/df	1 to 5	2.095	Yes
	GFI	> 0.9	0.881	No (close)
	AGFI	> 0.9	0.845	No (close)
	RMR	< 0.08	0.028	Yes
	SRMR	< 0.08		Yes
	RMSEA	< 0.08	0.071	Yes
IFI	NFI	> 0.9	0.901	Yes
	NNFI	> 0.9	0.937	Yes
	CFI	> 0.9	0.945	Yes
	RFI	> 0.9	0.885	No (close)
	IFI	> 0.9	0.946	Yes
Parsimonious fitness indicators	PNFI	> 0.5	0.777	Yes
	PGFI	> 0.5	0.816	Yes
	CN	> 200	135	No

TABLE 4. Overall model effect

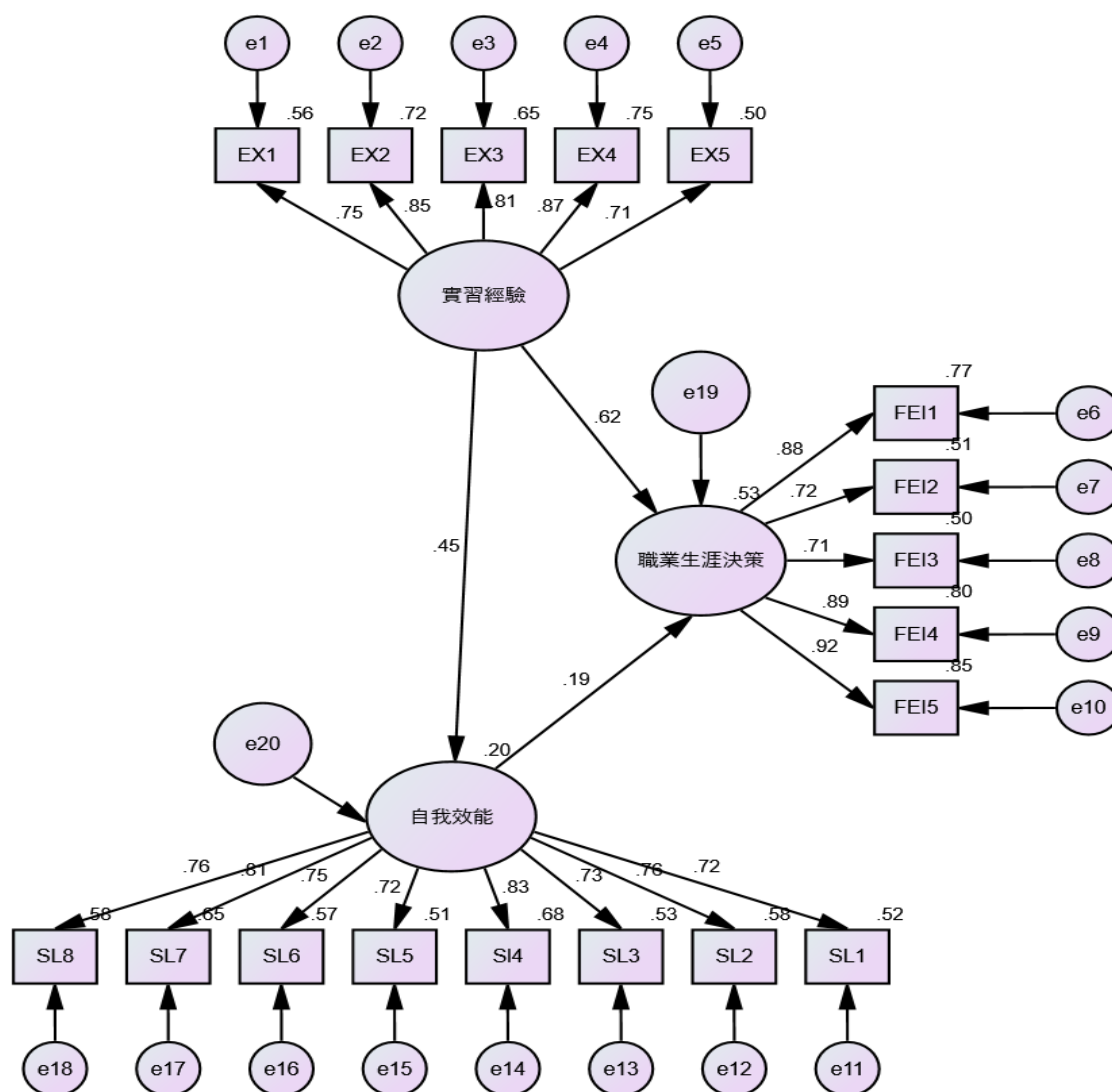
Potential variable	Potential independent variable	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Overall effect	Validity of hypothesis
Career decision making	Internship experience	0.62 * 1	0.09 (0.19 * 0.45)	0.71	H2 is valid.
	Self-efficacy	0.19 *	-- ²	0.19	H3 is valid.
Self-efficacy	Internship experience	0.45 *	--	0.45	H1 is valid.

Note: 1. * means $P < 0.05$

2. -- means no such effect.

4.4 Verification of the mediating effect

According to the four conditions proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986), three structural equation models were created to examine the magnitude and significance of the path coefficients among the potential variables.



卡方值=276.594 (P值=.000) 自由度=132 卡方自由度比值=2.095
GF=.881 AGFI=.845 NFI=.901 CFI=.945
RMR=.028 RMSEA=.071

實習經驗
Internship experience
職業生涯決策
Career decision making
自我效能
Self-efficacy
卡方值=276.594 (P 值=.000) 自由度=132 卡方自由度比值=2.095
GF=.881 AGFI=.845 NFI=.901 CFI=.945
The Chi-square value = 276.594 (P value = .000). Degree of freedom = 132. Chi-square-DF ratio = 2.095.
GF = .881. AGFI = .845. NFI = .901. CFI = .945.
RMR = .028. RMSEA = .071.

FIGURE 2. Overall model fitness

Condition 1: Internship experience must have a significant effect on career decision making (Model 1).

From the road map shown in Figure 3, it could be seen that the path coefficient of internship experience to career decision making was 0.706 and the T value was 9.463 (> 3.96 , $P < 0.001$). Obviously, internship experience has a positive and significant effect on career decision making. Hence, Condition 1 was valid.

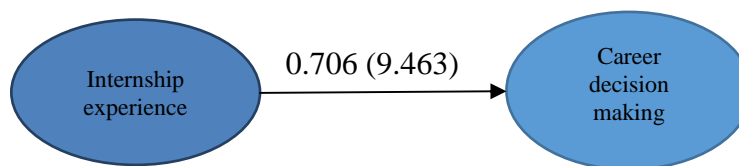


FIGURE 3. Analysis results of Model 1

Condition 2: Internship experience must have a significant effect on self-efficacy (Model 2).

From the road map shown in Figure 4, it could be seen that the path coefficient of internship experience to self-efficacy was 0.449 and the T value was 5.686 (> 3.96 , $P < 0.001$). Obviously, internship experience has a positive and significant effect on self-efficacy. Hence, Condition 2 was valid.

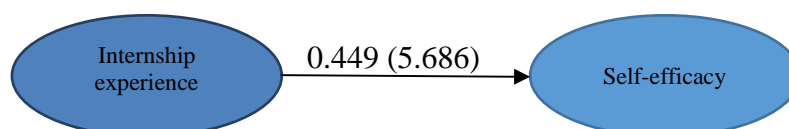


FIGURE 4. Analysis results of Model 2

The value in brackets represents the t value.

Condition 3: Internship experience is regarded as the predictor to self-efficacy. During SEM of career decision making, self-efficacy must have a significant effect on career decision making (Model 3).

From the road map shown in Figure 5, it could be seen that the path coefficient of self-efficacy to career decision making was 0.195 and the T value was 3.309 (> 2.58 , $P < 0.01$). Obviously, self-efficacy has a positive and significant effect on career decision making. Hence, Condition 3 was valid.

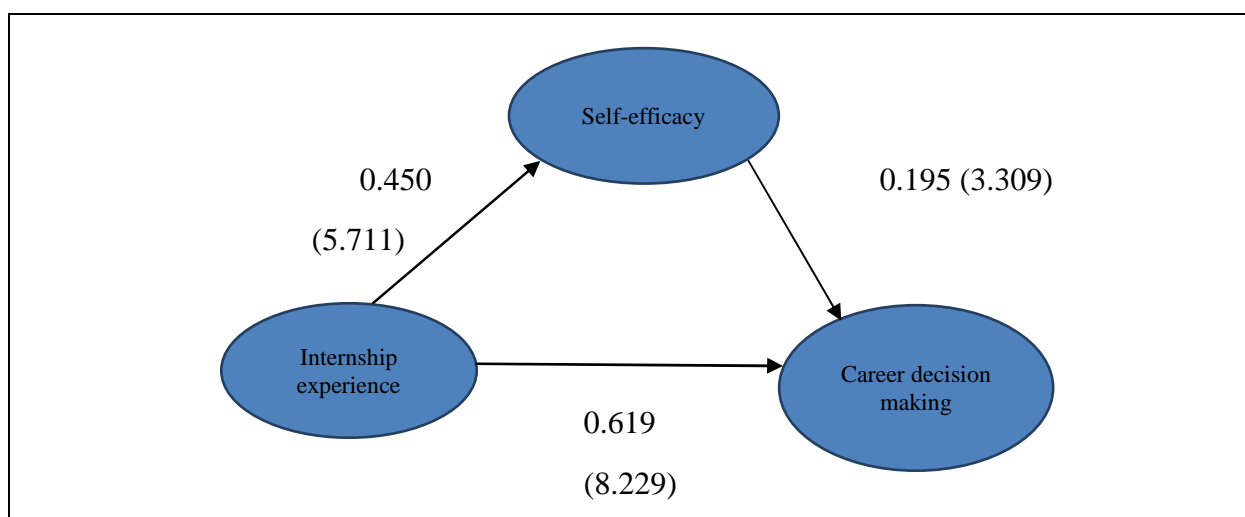


FIGURE 5. Analysis results of Model 3

The value in brackets represents the t value.

Condition 4: In SEM (Model 3), the regression coefficient of internship experience to career decision making must be smaller than the regression coefficient (Model 1) when internship experience solely predicts career decision making or even becomes insignificant.

From the road map shown in Figure 3, it could be seen that the path coefficient of internship experience to career decision making was 0.706 and the T value was 9.463. In Model 3, when both internship experience and self-efficacy were considered as predictors, the regression coefficient of internship experience to career decision making was 0.619 and the T value was 8.229, as shown in Figure 5. In summary, after the mediating variable of self-efficacy was added to the model, the regression coefficient of internship experience to career decision making became smaller. The explanatory power increased, confirming that, through the mediating effect of self-efficacy, internship experience can truly influence career decision making with a partial mediating effect.

TABLE 5. Results of hypothesis validation

Hypotheses	Result of validation
H1: Internship experience has a significant and positive effect on career decision making.	Supported
H2: Internship experience has a significant and positive effect on self-efficacy.	Supported
H3: Self-efficacy has a mediating effect on internship experience and career decision making.	Supported

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

5.1 Conclusion

Through a quantitative assessment model, empirical analysis, and statistical verification, the hypotheses proposed in this study were statistically supported, as shown in Table 5. Therefore, appropriate and planned internships can have a positive impact on students' career decision making before graduation. Additionally, the improvement of self-efficacy during an internship can improve students' career decision making.

5.2 Managerial implications

In the era of drastic changes in technology, the global market is continuously changing. In order to respond to changes, the job categories and duties of employees are rapidly adjusting to meet the needs of the market. In order to cultivate talents, in addition to teaching prerequisite knowledge, schools must ponder how to help students to quickly get involved in the workplace after graduation and meet the expectations of schools, students, and enterprises. In order to align school education with workplace practices, schools and enterprises must cooperate to arrange internships for students. Field experience, participation, hands-on activities, the sharing of experience, or the release of projects can enrich students' internship experiences and deepen their understanding of practices in the workplace. The results of this study revealed that internship experience and career decision making are significantly and positively correlated, while the improvement of self-efficacy can enhance students' career decision making. Therefore, schools should promote off-campus internships and encourage students to participate in them, understand the workplace, and improve their self-efficacy, which will improve students' career decision making and be beneficial for student employment and compliance with workplace needs.

5.3 Research limitations and future research directions

This study collected 216 valid copies of the questionnaire; however, it failed to conduct an all-round investigation and research analysis to further study the issue. It is hoped that future studies can expand the investigation and deepen the research.

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