

Research Article

An Analysis of Thai Rural Students' Perception and Participation Intention of Working Holidays: Reflections for Expanding the Possibilities

Piyawan Rungwaraphong

Ph.D. (Educational Psychology and Pedagogy)

Faculty of Commerce and Management, Prince of Songkla University Trang Campus

Corresponding author: piyawan.r@psu.ac.th

Received: January 15, 2025/ Revised: July 31, 2025/ Accepted: August 6, 2025

Abstract

This study aims to investigate Thai rural students' perception and intention regarding the working holiday scheme. The study also attempts to discover ways to increase the number of Thai rural students to undertake working holidays programs. Data were collected from 82 students and 3 staff members from a government university located in a rural area of Thailand. Data were collected through an online questionnaire, focus group discussions, and structured interviews. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the quantitative questionnaire data while the framework matrix approach was performed with the qualitative data. Results indicate that the majority of Thai rural students are not well familiar with overseas working holiday; however, they still perceive the potential benefits of this scheme. The findings indicate an incongruence between students' perceived benefits and participation intention. Finally, this study shows that students from universities located in small cities, rural settings, have different life conditions, life expectations, and life perception. All of these affect their decision and intention to undertake or not undertake the working holidays. Universities play a key role in shaping their students' perception, expectation, and decision-making. If a rural university aims to optimize the number of students undertaking the working holiday scheme, universities need to provide students with aids and supports in terms of finance and fundings; English communicative skills; and documentation and application.

Keywords: Rural, Students, Thailand, Travel, Working Holiday

Introduction

During the past decades, a growing trend can be seen among young generation, particularly university students and early-career professionals, to travel and work for a short period of time in another countries. This type of travelling and working activities allows young people to earn money and gain authentic, life-changing experiences. The combination of work and travel is arranged under the working holiday concept, and offered by various private providers around the world. The working holiday scheme is practiced and called differently from country to country. In New Zealand, it is known as the Working Holiday, which requires a Working Holiday Visa (WHV). In Australia, it is also called a Working Holiday and requires the participants to apply for a 12-month working holiday visa. In the U.S.A, it is called Work Travel program, offering an opportunity for foreign students to work in varieties of jobs and travel in the United States.

Working holiday programs enable young people to have real-world opportunities to integrating themselves into another culture, interact with locals, and understand the way others live. Working Holiday experiences contribute significantly to global cultural exchange and creating lasting connections between individuals from different parts of the world. It's a unique opportunity for young people to broaden their horizons, gain practical skills, and create memorable experiences while embracing diverse cultures.

In Thailand, the concept of working holidays has become a fast-growing phenomenon. Each year a number of Thai students from both private and public universities apply for the working holidays programs offered in a wide range of countries around the world. Some of the most popular destinations for Thai students include U.S., Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Ireland, Singapore, and South Korea. According to information by U.S. Embassy & Consulate in Thailand (n.d.), Work & Travel in the U.S.A in particular draws thousands of students from around the world, and Thailand is no exception.

The working holiday scheme seems to be popular for Thai students from large cities in urban settings in Thailand. The scheme has been well perceived among Thai students. It serves as a powerful catalyst for students' self-development, self-formation, and future success. Perceived benefits have been proven to be a key factor influencing willingness and intention to take an expected, specific action (O'Brien & Hess, 2020; Zhang et.al. (2023). However, the situation might not be the same for Thai students from rural universities. According to Rungwaraphong (2025), Thai universities that encourage or support students for overseas traveling usually are those located in big cities. In addition, the promotion by universities in rural areas Thailand for students' international travel either for academic or working holidays is underinvestigated. The extent to which the scheme is known among Thai students from rural universities, how they perceive the working holiday scheme, and whether or not they will undertake the scheme if they have a chance are also underresearched. This study, therefore, attempts to fill up these gaps.

Research Objectives

This study aimed to investigate Thai rural students' perception and intention regarding the working holiday scheme. The study also sought to discover ways to expand the number of Thai students from rural university that join working holidays programs. Specifically, the study is driven by three objectives:

1. To assess the extent to which the overseas working holiday is known among Thai rural students.
2. To explore factors that affect Thai rural students' decision to join the overseas working holidays.
3. To provide suggestions for universities in supporting students to join the overseas working holiday.

Research Questions

To achieve the ultimate aim and the three research objectives, the study sought to answer the following four research questions:

RQ1 To what extent are Thai rural students familiar with the working holiday?
RQ2 How the working holiday is perceived among Thai rural students?

RQ3 What are reasons why Thai rural students want or do not want to undertake the working holiday?

RQ4 How should Thai rural universities support their students to undertake the working holiday?

Literature Review

Definitions of Working Holidays

According to Katsiaficas and Frelak (2024), there is no single definition of working holidays. There are a wide range of definitions of working holidays. For example, Ho, Lin, and Huang (2014) view working holidays (WH) as a type of tourism, but not the full concept of traveling i.e. the working holidays scheme combines work and traveling. Unlike tourism industry in general sense, WH tourism includes employees whose aim is not just making money but also gaining the enjoyment of traveling. WH tourists are referred to as WH-makers and include backpackers who work while traveling. For the backpackers, working become the source of income, which will be used to support their trips. Similarly, Pecsek (2018) views WH schemes as the hybrid tourism, and call it the “workcation”, suggesting the idea of work on holidays. This hybrid form of tourism challenges the traditional form of tourism, and the people who join this alternative form of tourism are referred to as “workcation tourists”. Shaheer, Lee, and Carr (2021) regard WH as an alternative style of traveling in which the travelers are allowed to work during the trip to fund the holiday. Yang and Wen (2021) refers to overseas WH scheme as the youth’s transnational travel scheme, which becomes a new form of the youth leisure activity which combine work with travel. Young people joining such scheme can work while travelling, and the income earned from working can support their traveling cost. It can be said that the primary goal of young people joining this scheme is for traveling; working serve as a source of income that will subsidize their travel.

It can be seen from the definitions and explanations discussed above that the core principle of working holidays is the combination of work and travel within the holidays. The income generated during this travel is used to fund the travel itself, so the tourists under this scheme are financially independent. The idea of combining work and travel within the holiday setting was actually initiated by Pape (1965), who posits that while the ultimate goal of this scheme is to travel, working is regarded a means to achieve the goal: to fund the travel. Unlike Pape (1965), Cohen (1974) regards working holidays as a form of youth travel, emphasizing on the overseas traveling of young people during a summer vacation. The underlying principle of working holidays proposed by Cohen is the travel during the semester break and those young people subsidize their vacation by doing temporary jobs in the destination country. Having said so, the concept of working holidays proposed by Yang and Wen (2021), which focuses on youth leisure activity, is close to the concept proposed by Cohen (1974): both focus on the youth as the main group of the WH-makers, not the backpackers or general employees who also work while traveling to fund their holidays.

In Europe, working holidays scheme is regarded as part of the youth mobility concept, in which E.U. member countries aim to give young people a chance to travel to other countries in order to live, work, and gain international experiences. While other programs under the youth mobility concept can target at education or employment, working holidays scheme emphasizes the opportunities for young people to financially support themselves for their travel. Whether the emphasis of this travel will be on work or travel depends on each maker’s resources and preferences (Katsiaficas & Frelak, 2024).

Working Holiday & Labor Migration

Underlying the combination of the tourism and employment, the working holiday scheme also encompasses the labor migration. Oso, Kaczmarczyk, and Salamonska (2022) define labor migration as the movement of people from one place to another within or across the national borders, with the aim of employment or income-generating activities. Motivations for migration in a general sense can vary. However, in terms of the labor migration, the most influencing factors that labors migrate is for better employment. According to Kumpikaitė-Valiūnienė (2016), people will leave their home both within and outside of their own home country in search of better economic opportunities. For the working holiday scheme in particular, Katsiaficas and Frelak

(2024) regards the travelling of the WH makers as a form of labor migration, because it also the movement of people from one place to another place but on a temporary or short-term basis: most of working holiday programs offered by many countries do not permit WH-makers to stay longer or to extend their participation.

Interestingly, the working holiday scheme becomes a significant solution that many countries adopt to tackle their labor shortages. Australia, for example, regards the working holiday scheme as a temporary labor migration. According to Reilly (2015) Australia adopts has adopted the working holiday as one of its key approaches to address the labor shortage, especially the shortages for low-skilled jobs. Reilly et al. (2018) indicate that Australia heavily relies on the WH-makers as the core source of labor in horticultural industry, especially for jobs related to picking and packing fruit and vegetables. Like Australia, Canada is another country that employs the labor from the working holiday scheme to fill labor demands in jobs that locals do not want to do; Canada regards working holiday programs as the “back-door” migrant work programs that can help the country address the labor shortages (Vosko, 2022). However, Costa and Martin (2018) point that the temporary labor migration encounters numerous restrictions. First of all, these temporary employees must return to their home country after completing the work. Secondly, the visa issued to this type of migration specifies one specific employer and that thus they are not permitted to change work or employers. Lastly, the short-term employees are not allowed to apply for the permanent residence or citizenship. For the WH-makers, it is, however, possible for them to stay after the completion of the contract for a short while. The visas issued to WH-makers in many countries allow participants to travel domestically for a short period of time while preparing to return to homeland. However, this type of visa must not to be used for any other purposes.

Motivational Factors for Participation in Working Holidays

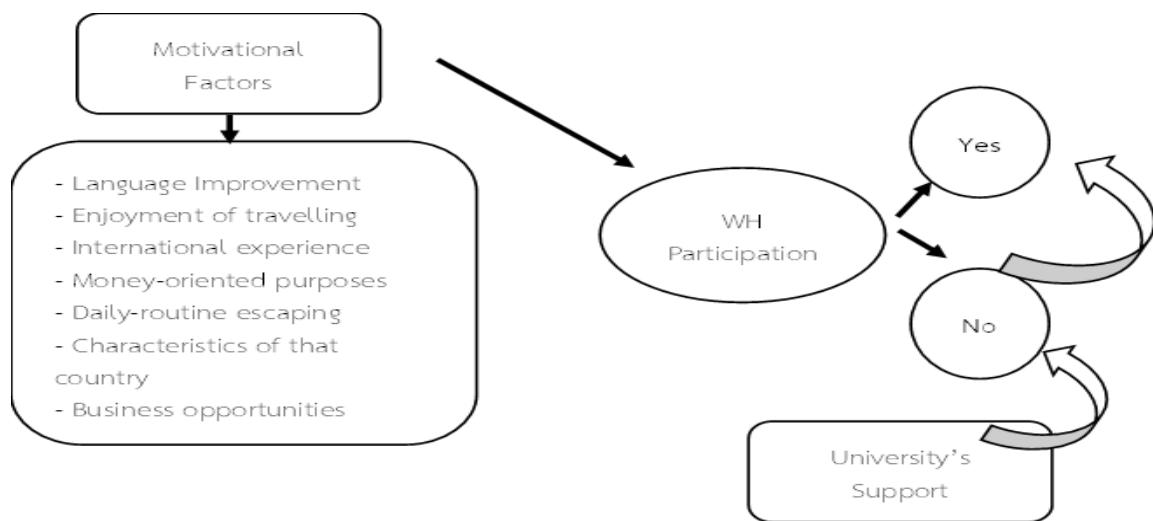
Like other types of labor migration, motivation for participating the working holidays vary. Extensive research has conducted to examine the factors that motivate young people to undertake working holidays.

The study by Nagai et al. (2018) explored factors that motivate young Asian people from three Asian countries (Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan) to undertake the working holidays in Australia. Framed under the theory of the push and pull factors, the results of the study indicate four push factors that pushing the young Asian WH-makers to work and travel in Australia: to improve English competence, to gain international experience, to make money, and to escape from daily routine. Four characteristics of Australia were identified as the factors that pulling Asian youth to the country, including visa arrangement, Australia as a native speaking country, positive perception of the country, and job opportunities.

Later, Shaheer et al. (2021) examined the motivations of the Latin Americans participating in the working holiday in New Zealand and explore the reasons for choosing this country. They found that WH-participants from countries in Latin America participate the working holidays in order to explore business opportunities in the destination country. This finding suggest that WH-makers are motived to take WH scheme by their internal factor i.e. their personal intention to do something while the country they choose is influenced by the characteristics of that country, which should enable them to achieve their personal intention.

Interestingly, Thai WH-participants seem to have a unique motivation for undertaking working holidays. Wattanacharoen sil and Talawanich (2018) examine what motivated Thai youth to undertake working holidays in Australia and found that monetary aspect is the major factor that drives Thai youth to participate in the working holiday programs. Instead of money-oriented purposes, Western WH-makers work and travel because they want to explore the world and gain experiences that go beyond their daily routine in their home countries. For Western WH-makers, the main goal of doing the working holidays is the enjoyment of travelling. Their desire to work is not the first aim; the work, instead, serves as an enabler that allows them to travel with their own income. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework underpinning this study.

Figure 1
Research Conceptual Framework



Research Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted the explanatory sequential design, in which quantitative data was collected and analyzed first, and then qualitative data was collected and analyzed. In the current study, a google online questionnaire was performed to collect quantitative data while structured interviews and focus group discussion were conducted to collect qualitative data. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), the qualitative data obtained in the second phase of the explanatory sequential design aim to explain or expand the quantitative findings. That is, the qualitative approach is an effective strategy to explore and elicit a comprehensive understanding the participants' perspectives and experiences (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022).

Participants

To answer the four research questions, this study collected data from two group of participants: Students and Staff. Eighty-two students from a government university located in a rural province of Thailand's south participated in this study. They were studying years 2-3 in different fields of study, ranging from Architecture to Arts. From all the participants, 59.7% of them were female and 40.3% were male, and the ages of the participants were between 20 and 22. The participants were not from only the province where the university is located; they were originally from different provinces across the south of Thailand. All of them have never travelled abroad before. Their English proficiency was in A1-A2 (Beginner Levels) according to the CEFR scale. As for the university staff, three supporting staff members participated in this study. Two of them were from International Affairs Division and the other one is from Student Care Division. They were purposively invited to join this study because their main duties directly involve student care and support.

Data Collection Tools

The study employed three data collection tools to gather quantitative and qualitative data. Data obtained various techniques enables the researcher to perform data triangulation, which help to increase credibility and validity of the study (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021). Data were collected through three tools:

Questionnaire

An online Google questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire aimed to assess the students' perception and intention in relation to the working holiday. The questionnaire consists of the following 6 sections: Demographic; Level of familiarity; Perceived level of benefit; Intention to undertake; Reasons for intention; and Support and aids needed from university.

Focus-group discussion

Based on their responses in Section 4 of the questionnaire, the participants were divided into two groups: the 'yes' group and the 'no' group. The 'yes' group referred to the participants who express an intention and willingness to undertake the working holiday if they get a chance. The 'no' group included the participants who report that they do not want to undertake the working holiday despite they get a chance. Then, eight participants were randomly selected from each group and invited to join the focus-group discussion. The focus discussion was chosen to elicit in-depth explanation in relation to the responses of Sections 1-3 of the questionnaire. It was also used to generate a rich understanding of the rural students' perspectives, reasons behind the intention to participate in the working holidays, and expectation for the support and aids from the university.

Structured Interviews

In this study, structured interviews were performed with three university supporting staff members. Despite its several disadvantages, a structured interview was adopted because it is a systematic, consistent approach to elicit a set of specific data (Elhami & Khoshnevisan, 2022). That is, the interview is based on a set of pre-decided questions that are specifically linked to the aim of the study (Wang, 2024). In this study, the structure interviews consisted of 4 questions related to things the university should do to promote the number of students undertaking the working holidays.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics was employed for the analysis of data from the questionnaire. As the focus group discussion and the structured interviews resulted in a large quantity of qualitative data, a framework matrix analysis was adopted. A framework matrix is a highly structured method for analyzing qualitative data (Rosen et. al., 2023). This method is appropriate for analysis of a large quantity of qualitative data because it primarily involves the creation of the matrices and the tabulation of data. It enables the researcher to thoroughly penetrate across a data set and discover the repeated patterns (Rungwaraphong, 2023).

Results and Discussion

Thai rural students' familiarity with the working holidays

Results of the questionnaire indicate that Thai rural students have five different levels of familiarity with the working holidays. Table 1 illustrates the levels of the participants' familiarity with the working holidays, ranging from not familiar to extremely familiar.

Table 1

Levels of familiarity with the working holidays

Familiarity	Frequency of Respondents (n=82)	
	No.	%
Not Familiar	25	30.5
Slightly Familiar	36	43.9
Somewhat Familiar	12	14.6
Very Familiar	4	4.9
Extremely familiar	5	6.1

Table 1 shows that the majority of the participants (74.4%) are not familiar or slightly familiar with the working holiday scheme while only 11% of the participants have good knowledge about the scheme ("Very Familiar" and "Extremely Familiar"). Based on these results, it can be said that Thai rural students are not familiar

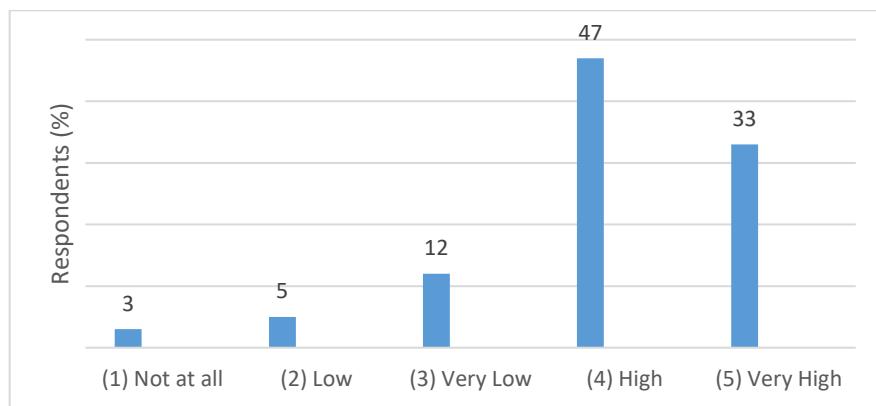
about the working holiday scheme. Many of the participants explained in the focus group discussion that they have heard the name of the scheme, but did not know in detail of what the scheme really is and how make an application.

Thai rural students' perceived level of the working holiday benefit

In the questionnaire, the participants were asked to rate the extent to which the working holiday will be beneficial to them, in terms of self-development, identity formation, and development of skills needed for future careers. Perceived level of benefit was investigated on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 "not at all" to 5 "to a very high degree". The central question was "Think about your life after graduation, to which degree do you think the experiences gained from undertaking the working holiday will benefit you, in terms of self-development, identity formation, and employability. Results of this question is illustrated in Figure2.

Figure 2

Thai Rural Students' Perceived Level of Working Holiday Benefit



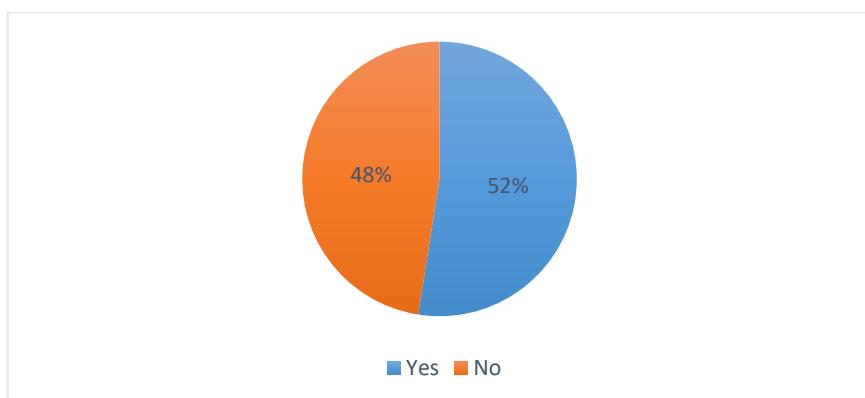
As shown in Figure 2, almost half of the participants (47%) believed that the working holiday will highly benefit their life after graduation and 33% of them believe that the benefits of the working holiday on their life after graduation will be very high. In contrary, only 5% of the participants believed that the experience gained from undertaking the working holiday scheme as a low benefit for their life after graduate. Only 3% of them think that the working holiday will not benefit their future at all. It can be concluded from these findings that the working holiday scheme is perceived among the majority of Thai rural students as highly beneficial for their future.

Intention and Reasons for undertaking or not undertaking the working holiday

All the 82 student participants were asked whether or not they intend to undertake the working holiday. Figure 3 shows Thai rural students' intention of undertaking the working holiday.

Figure 3

Thai Rural Students' Intention to Participate in Working Holidays

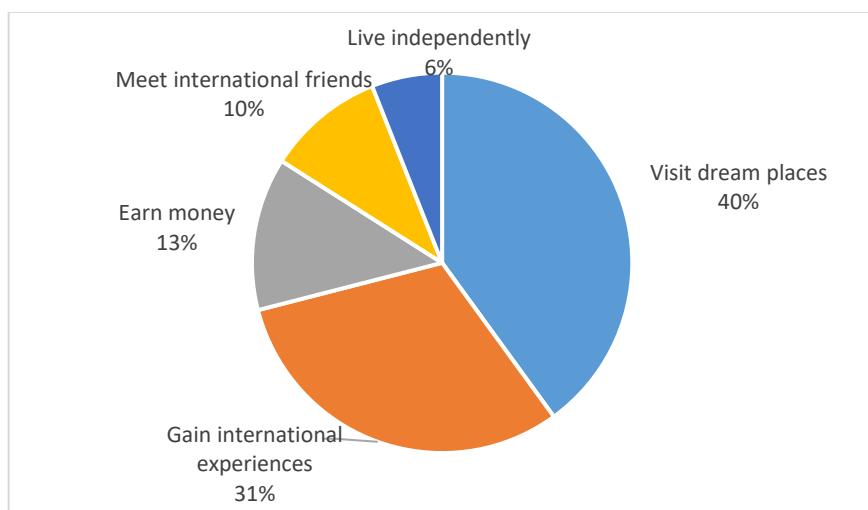


As shown in Figure 3, almost a similar number of the participants want to undertake and do not want to undertake the working holiday i.e. 52 % of the participants expressed their intention to undertake the working holiday programs if they get a chance, while the rest of them (48%) will not go work and travel even though they get a chance.

The participants in each group were also asked to list their reasons why they choose to undertake or not undertake the working holiday. Figure 4 illustrates top 5 reasons why the group of 52% of the participants will undertake the working holiday if they get a chance in the future.

Figure 4

Top 5 reasons some Thai rural students choose to undertake the working holiday



As can be seen in Figure 4, visiting dream places was found the main reasons why 40% of the “Yes” group of the participants would like to undertake the working holiday scheme. Many of the participants explained that they did not have enough money to visit their dream places. As their parents will not fund the trip, they need to work to fund their own trip. One of them said,

“Grand Canyon is one of my bucket list places to visit. But my parents are farmers; they definitely do not have money to fund my dream trip. I keep asking myself how I can go there and what I should do in order to visit this country. It seems the working holiday is the best answer.”

Gaining international experiences is the second top reason chosen by 31% of the “Yes” group. It is generally known that rural students have fewer opportunities compared to peers from big cities, especially the opportunity to go overseas and explore the world. Most of the participants in this study are also from low-income families; this makes it even more impossible for them to travel abroad to gain international experiences. Earning money becomes the third top reasons rural students want to undertake the working holiday, as chosen by 13% of the “yes” participants. more. This finding is in accordance with the study by Nagai et al. (2018), which found that earning money is one of the factors that motivate young Asian people to undertake the working holidays in Australia. It can be concluded that Thai students are like other Asian students, in the fact that making money is one of the main purposes of undertaking the working holidays.

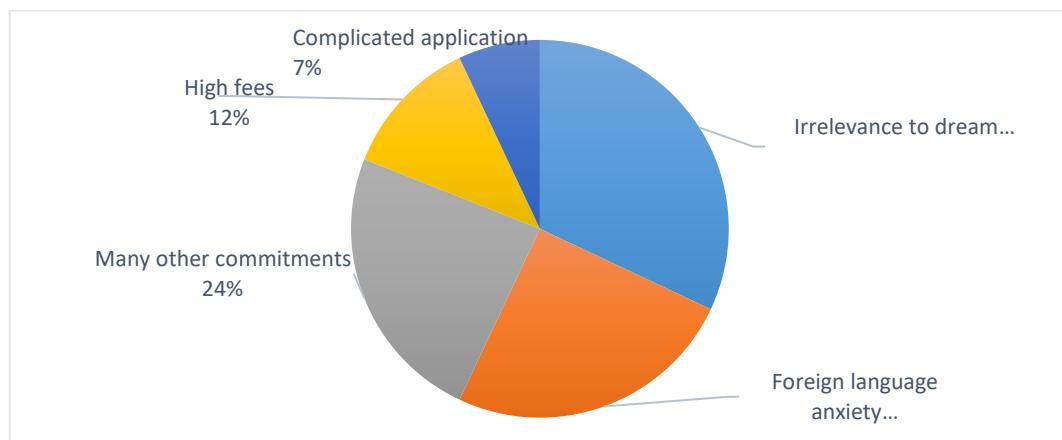
Another 10% of the “yes” group of the participants living independently was their main reason. For them, the working holiday experience would teach them to stand on their own feet. This group of rural students believe that by working in other countries, they will be pushed out of their comfort zone to live on their own. The rest of the participants in this “yes” group (6%) reported that they wish to work and travel because they want to meet

new people from different culture backgrounds from all over the world. Surprisingly, improving language skills was not listed as one of the five main reasons for joining the working holidays. This finding is in contrary to the popular findings from many studies, which found that the desire to improve English communication skills is one of the main factors that push young people to undertake the working holiday (Nagai et al., 2018)

As for the participants who reported that they would not undertake the working holiday even if they got a chance. Figure 5 shows the top 5 reasons why these participants choose not to undertake the program.

Figure 5

Top 5 reasons Thai rural students choose not to undertake the working holiday



As shown in Figure 5, the top reason for refusing the working holiday is its irrelevance to dream jobs i.e. 32% of the participants who said “no” to the working holiday did not want to undertake the working holiday because they thought the jobs they would do during the working holidays were not related their dream jobs and not in the field they were graduated. One of the participants explained this in the group discussion,

“I am doing a degree in Interior Design. If I have a chance to get a job in overseas, that job should boost my interior design skills.”

It can be seen from the statement above that the rural students who refuse to undertake the working holidays do not think that international experiences will help their career. One of the significant reasons is that most of the jobs offered by the working holidays are low-skilled. According to Reilly (2015), most of jobs offered for WH-makers are low-skilled, below the employment standards, and, therefore, not appropriate for university students. The second and the third reasons why some Thai rural student chose not to undertake the working holiday are their foreign language anxiety (25%) and having many other commitments after graduation (24%). The participants described that the anxious experiences of learning English in the classroom make them fear of communicating in English in foreign countries. The participants also thought their English competence was so low that they would not survive in foreign countries. One of the participants said in the focus group discussion,

“I don’t think I will survive if I have to work and live by myself in other countries”.

Another student reported,

“Even in the classroom where the teacher and friends are Thai, I still cannot speak English. Imagine if I have to work in other countries where everyone does not speak Thai. I may die!”

As for life commitment, some of the participants reported that after graduation or during semester breaks, they have too many demands to travel to other countries. The demands of personal lives of the rural students participating in this study include, for example, taking care of parents, helping family business etc. In addition, many of them want to get a full-time, stable job right away after graduation because they have to repay the student

loan. All of these live commitments result in many of Thai rural students not wanting to spend a whole summer or year away on temporary jobs offered in the working holiday scheme.

The last two reasons why many Thai rural students will not work and travel are the expensive application fee (12%) and the complicated application process (7%). Data from the focus discussion indicate that in the participants' opinion, even though they can earn money in return from working during the working holiday period, the application fee they need to pay are too high. Furthermore, when applying for a visa, they are required to show a high amount of available fund in the bank. For many rural students, they cannot afford these money demands. As for the application process, the visa application requires multiple documents, including the financial evidence, a police certificate, and a health certificate. A participant said that,

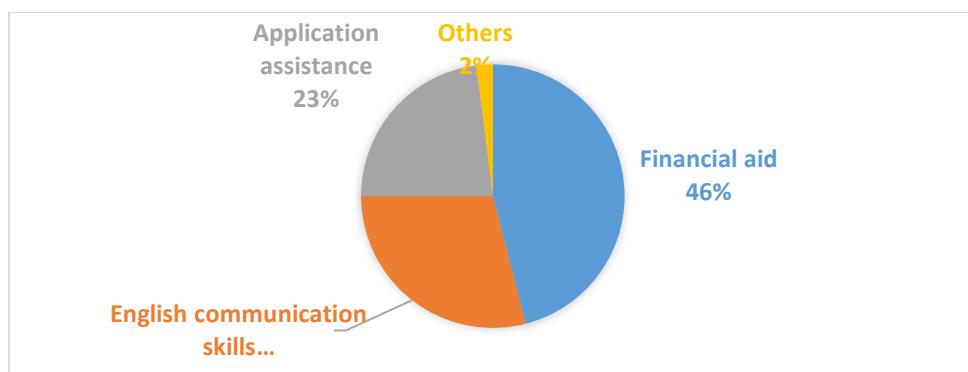
"The documentation sounds incredibly hard for me to follow along".

Support and Aids needed from University

The student participants were asked to list the support they want most from their university. Figure 6 shows that almost half of them (46%) expressed their want for financial aids from the university. Next, 29% of them indicated that the university must help them strengthen their English-speaking skills before travelling. Another 23% of the student participants wanted the university to aid in processing the application as well as provide advisory services to help them in preparing documents, filling in application forms, giving consultation and so on. The rest of them (2%) wanted other supports from the university, such as job training, travel essentials, and accommodation booking.

Figure 6

Support and Aids needed from University



In a similar vein, results of the structured interviews with the staff indicate budgeting, language improvement, and advisory and counselling services as the three main supports that need to be provided by the university. In addition to these three supports, the staff from Student Care Division pointed in the interview that the university needs to increase the awareness of working holidays' true value among students. She asked,

"Why don't we organize a sort of a working holiday fair? We just invite the leading working holiday providers to join this fair. We can do it [the fair] like once a month, every three months, or twice a year. I think by doing this, our students will know more about working holidays and more students might want to and see the possibility of join the program."

The two staff members from International Affairs informed that they have never seen the posting of notices about this scheme on university bulletin boards, building doors, or sidewalks. They further explained that their university was located in a small town, and surrounded with slow, peaceful environment. In their opinion, students who grow up in such rural environments are less likely to realize how the world outside is competitive and what skills are needed to stand out in the competitive labor market. All three of the staffs also agreed that more cross-cultural and English-enhancing activities should be organized on campus to enable the students to be more

culturally aware of international experiences. They pointed that if English skills and cultural awareness is increased, the students will be more confident and courageous to travel and work in other countries. Some of such activities include, for example, cultural camps, international food days, cultural dress days etc.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of the current research indicate that the majority of Thai rural students are not well familiar with overseas working holiday. However, they still perceive the potential benefits of this scheme. Despite not knowing much in details about the mechanism of the working holiday scheme, Thai rural students believe that by working and spending a period of time in other countries, they will pick up some new technical and soft skills. These are skills that cannot be gained by learning in the classrooms. This type of skills contributes to the employability after their graduation. According to Katsiaficas and Frelak (2024), the skills gained from the working holidays can increase the WH-makers' employability. This is because the experiences that WH-makers received are unique, which can distinguish them within the labor market, making them more competitive in comparison with other job applicants. It can be said that Thai rural students perceive that taking a working holiday not merely allows them to financially support themselves in exploring the world and exchanging cultures. The scheme gives them the opportunity to identify and foster their core personality, values, passions, and beliefs.

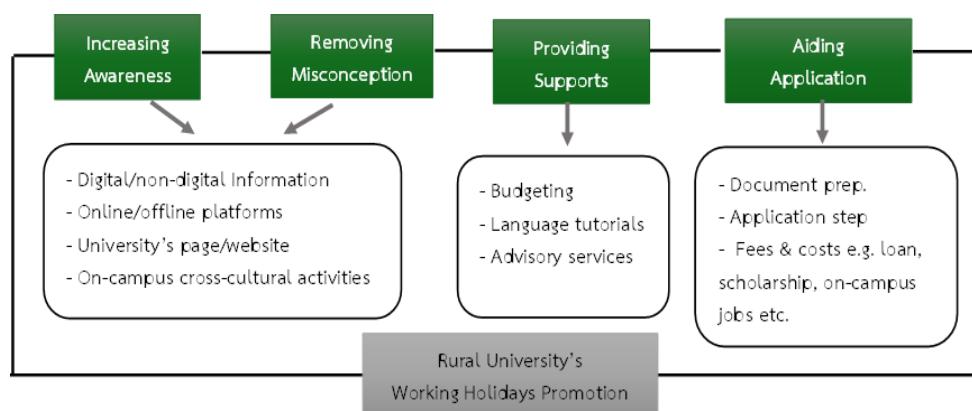
The findings indicate that the working holiday scheme is highly perceived among the rural students participating in this study. If these results are considered under the mechanism of the perceived benefits, the high level of perceived benefits should contribute to willingness or intention to take the expected, specific action (O'Brien & Hess, 2020; Zhang et al., 2023). Having said so, Thai rural students should be likely and willing to undertake the scheme i.e. the benefits they perceive should drive them to participate in the working holiday program. However, the study identified an incongruence between students' perceived benefits and participation intention. Despite the strong belief that countless positive outcomes will result from taking the working holidays, the number of Thai rural students that express their intention to undertake the scheme is almost equal to those who choose not to.

The incongruence between perception and intention that was identified becomes the gaps to bridge. Results of the study suggest certain measures Thai rural universities can implement to bridge the gaps between perception and participation intention. Firstly, the findings reflect that a number of Thai rural students still misunderstand or lack a true understanding of the core principle and virtue of the working holiday scheme. For these students, working holidays are just travelling and doing a part-time job in overseas. This may result from the inadequate information from the university and working holiday providers.

A framework is developed based on the study's findings, and presented in Figure 7. This framework can be used by rural universities as a guideline practice for promoting the number of students undertaking the working holiday scheme.

Figure 7

Working Holidays Promotion Framework



According the framework presented in Figure 7, the first thing rural universities need to do is to increase student awareness of the working holiday scheme through digital and non-digital promotion strategies. These strategies include providing more information on campus posters or campus boards; using online channels and spreading through twitter and watsup groups; creating a Working Holiday Page on university's website; and inviting the working holiday agencies to meet students physically or virtually on a regular basis. Rural universities also need to remove students' misconception particularly when they think international experiences will not help their future careers. Universities should organize activities that enhance students' understanding of the true value of international experiences that they will gain from working abroad. As rural environment may not provide optimal circumstances that will to foster students' cross-cultural familiarity and awareness, the provision of on-campus cross-cultural activities are highly recommended.

Importantly, the framework in Figure 7 indicates that budgeting, language tutorials, and advisory services are the three main supports students in rural universities wish to receive from their university. As one of the reasons for refusing the working holiday is the language anxiety which is a result of students' low English competence, universities might organize workshops or English communication training for students. This will help enhance English communication and build the courage and confidence to travel abroad among rural students.

In terms of the application process, Figure 7 indicates that universities should arrange an advisory service team to aid students on their path to the working-holiday application, especially the service on document preparation and application process. Finally, in terms of application fees and costs, universities might offer financial aid, such as part- or full-funding, loan, scholarship, on-campus jobs etc. These types of supports and aids from universities will help students assess the possibility and make better decision.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research

In conclusion, this study indicates that students from universities located in small cities, rural settings, have different life conditions, life expectations, and life perception. These differences affect their decision and intention related to the working holidays. Universities play a key role in shaping their students' perception, expectation, and decision-making. If a rural university aims to optimize the number of students undertaking the working holiday scheme, universities can provide aids and supports that are tailored to students' needs, as abovementioned.

There are some limitations in this study that should be addressed. Firstly, the sample size for the student participants is small ($n=82$). This may increase the margin of error and affect the generalizability of the study. Future studies need to include a larger sample size. Secondly, the study chose only one government university in a small town of the south of Thailand as a representative for Thailand's rural universities; so, the findings of the study may be specific to the student population from that university and generalizability might be limited. Future studies need to include more participants from a wider range of rural universities throughout Thailand.

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