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Mediating role of Entrepreneurial Intention on the relationship between knowledge transfer in accepting innovations and sustainable entrepreneurial behavior: A study on farmers in Ratnapura district, Sri Lanka

S. D. D. Rathnachandra

Faculty of Graduate Studies, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, Belihuloya, Sri Lanka

E-mail: diliniathnachandr92@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6889-9193>

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ABSTRACT: Sustainable entrepreneurial behavior among farmers is essential for improving profitability, driving innovation, and advancing sustainability in the acceptance of knowledge transfer and innovation. This study investigates the mediating role of Entrepreneurial Intention (EI), in the relationship between knowledge transfer in innovation acceptance (KTIA) and sustainable entrepreneurial behavior (SEB). Using descriptive statistics and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the study analyzes data collected from a questionnaire survey of 392 farmers in Ratnapura District, Sri Lanka, between March and August of 2024. Participants were selected through a non-proportional random sampling method. All participants had attended agricultural extension programs and training sessions, organized by the Provincial Department of Agriculture in the Sabaragamuwa Province. The results revealed that most farmers are experienced, middle-aged males with senior secondary education and limited income. While they have exposure to agricultural training and practices, land ownership is minimal, and farm-level production is predominant. KTIA was found to significantly influence SEB both directly and indirectly through EI, emphasizing the importance of fostering EI to promote sustainable agricultural practices and innovation. The findings offer valuable contributions to the theoretical understanding of SEB, and provide practical implications for policymakers, educators, and enterprises support institutions aiming to foster a resilient and innovation-driven entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Keywords: knowledge transfer; Entrepreneurial Intention; innovation adoption; sustainable entrepreneurial behavior; mediation analysis

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is widely recognized as a driving force behind economic growth and sustainable development across the world (Apostu and Gigauri, 2023). In an era of rapid technological advancements and global challenges such as climate change, resource depletion, and food insecurity, sustainable entrepreneurial behavior (SEB) has become a crucial factor in ensuring long-term economic and environmental stability

(Pricopoaia et al., 2024). Entrepreneurs, particularly in the agricultural sector, play a significant role in adopting and implementing innovative practices, that enhance productivity, efficiency, and sustainability (Gadanakis, 2024). However, the successful adoption of innovations depends not only on the availability of knowledge, but also on its effective transfer and application (Robertson et al., 2023; Weerapperuma et al., 2022).

In many developing countries, agriculture remains a cornerstone of economic stability and

food security (Pawlak and Kołodziejczak, 2020). Farmers, as key entrepreneurial agents, rely on knowledge transfer to adopt new technologies, improve farming techniques, and address challenges such as climate variability and market fluctuations (Yeleliere et al., 2023). However, the effectiveness of knowledge transfer in influencing SEB varies, based on individual motivation, awareness and willingness, to embrace change (Wang et al., 2024; Hossain, 2021).

Entrepreneurial Intention (EI) is the cognitive state that drives an individual to engage in entrepreneurial activities, acts as a crucial link between Knowledge Transfer in Innovation Acceptance (KTIA) and SEB (He et al., 2024). When farmers develop a strong EI, they are more likely to apply acquired knowledge in ways that lead to long-term sustainability (Lee et al., 2022).

Sri Lanka, with its predominantly agrarian economy, has recognized the need for innovation-driven agricultural development (Export Development Board, 2025; Prasanna et al., 2022). The country has implemented various knowledge dissemination programs, technological advancements, and policy initiatives, to encourage sustainable farming practices (National Science and Technology Commission, 2023; Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2019). However, despite these efforts, the adoption rate of innovative agricultural techniques remains inconsistent, particularly among rural farmers. This challenge is evident in the Ratnapura district, a region known with its diverse agricultural activities, including tea, rubber, and paddy cultivation. While farmers in Ratnapura have access to knowledge transfer mechanisms through government and private sector initiatives, their ability to translate this knowledge into SEB depends significantly on their EI (Ranaweera, 2022; Selvananthana, 2024).

It is essential to examine the mediating role of EI in the relationship between KTIA and SEB to effectively address this research gap. By focusing on farmers in Ratnapura, this study aims to explore how KTIA influences their EI and, in turn, impacts their ability to engage in SEB practices. The findings will provide valuable insights for policymakers, agricultural extension services,

and rural development organizations, seeking to enhance farmer-driven innovation and sustainability in Sri Lanka.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurship is a key driver of economic growth, social progress, and sustainability in the modern era (Kim et al., 2022). SEB has gained increasing attention as it emphasizes the integration of economic, social, and environmental responsibilities in enterprise practices (Shepherd and Patzelt, 2023). In the agricultural sector, innovation adoption plays a crucial role in enhancing productivity, climate resilience, and food security (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2023). However, the successful implementation of agricultural innovations depends on effective knowledge transfer mechanisms and farmers' willingness to embrace new entrepreneurial strategies (Chindasombatcharoen et al., 2024; Zahran et al., 2020; Olum et al., 2019). KTIA serves as a critical link between research institutions, policymakers, and farmers, facilitating the dissemination of innovative agricultural practices (Houessou et al., 2024). Effective KTIA enhances farmers' ability to integrate sustainable techniques, optimize resource management, and improve long-term productivity (Cawley et al., 2023). Despite numerous initiatives, the effectiveness of knowledge transfer varies due to socio-economic constraints, technological accessibility, and cognitive engagement (Xiong, 2024). Research suggests that EI plays a pivotal role in determining whether knowledge transfer translates into practical entrepreneurial actions (Neneh and Dzomonda, 2024). EI acts as a bridge between knowledge acquisition and SEB, significantly influencing farmers' decision-making processes (Lone and Baba, 2024). Studies indicate that individuals with strong EI are more likely to leverage knowledge resources and implement sustainable agricultural innovations (Lediana et al., 2023). Recent evidence highlights the importance of entrepreneurial education, training, and access to financial resources in strengthening farmers' EI,

and fostering sustainable entrepreneurship (Abbes, 2024). The Ratnapura district in Sri Lanka presents a unique context for studying the interplay between knowledge transfer, EI, and SEB practices. While farmers have access to multiple knowledge-sharing platforms, the adoption of sustainable techniques remains inconsistent due to financial constraints, risk perception, and limited exposure to modern agribusiness models (Ministry of Agriculture [MOA], 2023). Understanding the mediating role of EI in this relationship, is essential for developing targeted interventions that promote SEB in the region. Despite the growing body of literature on knowledge transfer and entrepreneurship, limited empirical research explores their interrelationship in the Sri Lankan agricultural sector. The mediating role of EI in shaping SEB remains underexplored, particularly in the Ratnapura district. This study aims to bridge this research gap by examining how KTIA influences EI and, in turn, affects SEB among farmers.

Entrepreneurship, innovation, and sustainable development

Entrepreneurship has long been recognized as a key driver of economic growth and social development worldwide. The ability of entrepreneurs to identify opportunities, introduce innovations, and adapt to changing market conditions is essential for achieving long-term sustainability (Avelar et al., 2024). In the modern enterprise environment, SEB has gained prominence, emphasizing not only economic success, but also environmental and social responsibility (Odeyemi et al., 2024). Sustainable entrepreneurs integrate innovative solutions into their enterprises models, to ensure resource efficiency, reduce environmental impact, and promote social well-being (Rosário and Figueiredo, 2024).

In the agricultural sector, innovation plays a crucial role in improving productivity, enhancing resilience to climate change, and ensuring food security. The adoption of sustainable farming techniques, precision agriculture, and eco-friendly practices contributes to long-term agricultural sustainability (Huang and Wang, 2024).

However, the successful implementation of these innovations depends significantly on knowledge transfer mechanisms, and the willingness of farmers to accept and apply new knowledge in their entrepreneurial activities.

Knowledge transfer and innovation acceptance in agriculture

Knowledge transfer (KT) refers to the process of disseminating information, skills, and expertise from research institutions, extension services, and industry experts to end users, such as farmers (Cawley et al., 2023). Effective KT is crucial in enabling farmers to adopt innovations, optimize resource use, and improve agricultural sustainability (Huang and Wang, 2024). Governments, academic institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have developed various knowledge-transferring platforms, including agricultural extension programs, farmer training workshops, and digital information systems, to facilitate the diffusion of innovations (Farah and Amara, 2025).

Despite these efforts, the success of KTIA varies due to several factors, including farmers' cognitive engagement, cultural perceptions, economic constraints, and technological accessibility (Cawley et al., 2023). Studies have shown that the mere availability of knowledge does not guarantee its application; rather, the motivation and intention of farmers play a critical role in determining, whether they integrate new knowledge into their entrepreneurial activities (Sok et al., 2020).

Entrepreneurial Intention as a mediator in knowledge transfer in innovation acceptance, and sustainable entrepreneurial behavior

EI has emerged as a central concept in entrepreneurship literature, commonly understood as an individual's conscious state of mind that precedes and directs entrepreneurial action; such as launching and managing an enterprises (Neneh and Dzomonda, 2024). Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), EI is shaped by three core elements: attitudes toward the behavior, perceived behavioral control, and subjective

norms (Ajzen, 1991; Bayona-Oré, 2023). Within agricultural contexts, these factors significantly influence how farmers approach decision-making, particularly in relation to adopting new technologies, diversifying their practices, or shifting toward more entrepreneurial forms of farming (Bhujel and Joshi, 2023).

In recent years, research has increasingly recognized EI as a vital mediating factor in the pathway from knowledge acquisition, to actual behavioral change in agriculture. Specifically, EI helps explain how, and why some farmers are more likely to turn the knowledge, and innovations gained through training or extension services into SEB. Studies such as Hasan et al. (2025) and He et al. (2024) emphasize that farmers with strong EI are more motivated and psychologically prepared to engage in behaviors that promote sustainability, innovation, and long-term viability in their farming practices.

This mediating role of EI is particularly relevant in rural development and agricultural innovation systems, where the successful translation of knowledge into practice often hinges on the farmer's mindset and proactive orientation (Calwey et al., 2023). In this context, EI serves not only as a bridge between KTIA and SEB, but also as a catalyst, that amplifies the impact of innovation acceptance and strategic risk-taking in farming enterprises.

SEB and KTIA in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's agricultural sector remains a vital component of its economy, employing a significant portion of the population and contributing to national food security. The government, in collaboration with research institutions and international agencies, has implemented various programs, to enhance agricultural knowledge transfer and promote innovation adoption (Wijekoon and Marikar, 2024; Dissanayaka and Thibbotuwana, 2021). However, despite these efforts, the diffusion of SEB practices among Sri Lankan farmers remains uneven, with many still relying on traditional methods.

EI among Sri Lanka's farmers is influenced by multiple factors, including education, risk percep-

tion, access to finance, and market opportunities (Sachitra and Padmini, 2020). While knowledge transfer mechanisms exist, their effectiveness in fostering SEB is dependent on farmers' willingness to engage in innovative activities (Pan et al., 2024). Understanding the role of EI as a mediator in this relationship is critical for developing targeted interventions that enhance SEB (Lediana et al., 2023).

The Ratnapura district in Sri Lanka is known for its diverse agricultural activities, including tea, rubber, paddy, and vegetable cultivation (Navaratne et al., 2023). The region's farmers have access to various knowledge transfer mechanisms, such as government extension services, cooperative societies, and private sector initiatives. However, despite the availability of knowledge-transferring platforms, the adoption of sustainable farming techniques remains inconsistent (Ranaweera, 2022).

Moreover, farmers with a strong EI are more likely to apply knowledge effectively and engage in SEB practices (Lone and Baba, 2024). In addition, existing literature highlights the significance of KTIA and EI in fostering SEB, there is limited empirical research exploring their interrelationship in the context of Sri Lankan farmers (Sachitra and Padmini, 2020). The role of EI as a mediator remains underexplored, particularly in the Ratnapura district. Therefore, examining the mediating role of EI in this relationship is essential for identifying strategies to enhance SEB in the district. The findings will provide valuable insights for policymakers, agricultural extension officers, and development agencies in designing more effective interventions to support SEB in Sri Lanka.

Based on the identified research gaps; the following hypotheses were developed for the study:

Hypothesis 1: Knowledge transfer in innovation acceptance has significant effect on Sustainable entrepreneurial behavior;

Hypothesis 2: Knowledge transfer in innovation acceptance has a significant effect on Entrepreneurial Intention;

Hypothesis 3: Entrepreneurial Intention has a significant effect on sustainable entrepreneurial behavior;

Hypothesis 4: Entrepreneurial Intention has a significant mediating effect on the relationship between knowledge transfer in innovation acceptance and sustainable entrepreneurial behavior.

Conceptual framework

According to Figure 1, KTIA is treated as an external variable that impacts both EI and SEB. As illustrated, this study explores the direct influence of KTIA on SEB, and its indirect impact through EI, using data collected via a field survey conducted in the Ratnapura district of Sri Lanka between March and August of 2024.

The conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1, outlines the following relationships: KTIA's impact on SEB (H1), KTIA's influence on EI (H2), and the effect of EI on SEB (H3). Additionally, EI acts as a mediating variable in the link between KTIA and SEB (H4). The framework proposes that sufficient KTIA enhances farmers' EI, which subsequently contributes to improve SEB. In this context, EI is shaped by KTIA, and serves as a key factor in explaining farmers' SEB.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Ratnapura district, situated in Sri Lanka's Sabaragamuwa Province, has a significant portion of its population engaged in agricultural activities (MOA, 2020). However, exist-

ing literature lacks empirical investigations into how Knowledge Transfer in Innovation Acceptance (KTIA) influences Sustainable Entrepreneurial Behaviour (SEB), particularly through the mediating role of Entrepreneurial Intention (EI). Addressing this gap, is essential to understanding how knowledge transferring processes within agricultural systems can enhance sustainable and innovative entrepreneurship among farmers. Accordingly, this study developed a conceptual framework grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and sustainable entrepreneurship theory, to examine the hypothesized causal pathways linking KTIA, EI, and SEB.

Sampling design

The study's population consisted of farmers, who had participated in agricultural extension programs and training sessions, organized by the Provincial Department of Agriculture in Sri Lanka's Sabaragamuwa Province. In total, 35,464 farmers from the Ratnapura District were recorded as beneficiaries of these programs across Agricultural Instructor (AI) segments (Provincial Department of Agriculture – Sabaragamuwa, 2023). To ensure adequate representation and variability across geographical and programmatic contexts, fourteen AI segments were randomly selected from the Ratnapura, Nivitigala, Embilipitiya, and Balangoda AI ranges.

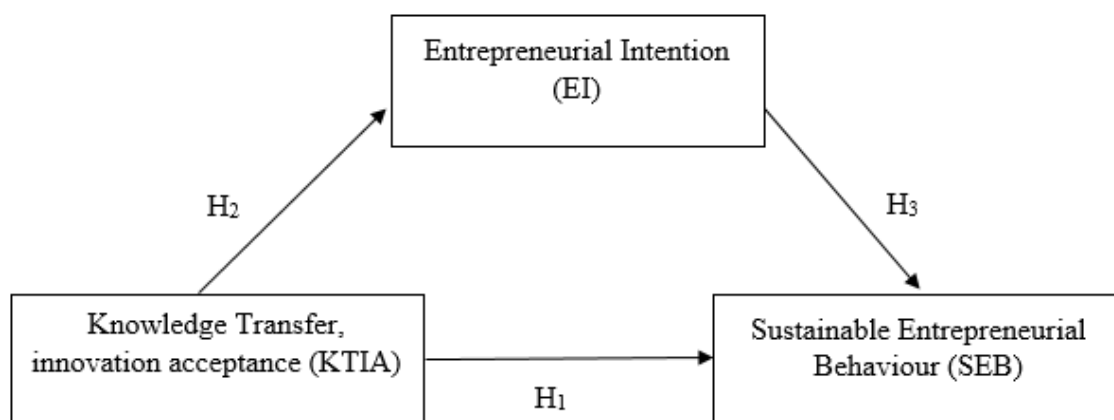


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework of the study

Source: Conceptualized by the researcher, 2025.

Using a non-proportionate random sampling technique, 392 farmers were selected from the population. Although the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table recommends a sample of 380 for the given population, a slightly higher number was used to increase statistical power and reliability, and to accommodate potential missing data and subgroup analyses.

Data collection procedure

A quantitative research design was employed to test the theoretical relationships proposed in the conceptual model. Data were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire administered between March and August of 2024. The instrument was developed based on established constructs in prior research, and refined through a pilot study conducted with a small group of

farmers to test clarity, content validity, and internal consistency.

Measurement of constructs

In line with the theoretical underpinnings of the TPB, KTIA was treated as an exogenous variable. Following Dissanayake et al. (2022), KTIA was operationalized through three dimensions:

- Attitude toward behaviour (ATB), measured via perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and compatibility;
- Subjective norms (SN), assessed through internal and external social influences;
- Perceived behavioural control (PBC), measured via self-efficacy, financial, technological, and human capital resources.

SEB, as the endogenous outcome variable, was conceptualized using the Triple Bottom Line

Table 1. Key Dimensions, Definitions and Indicators of KTIA, SEB and EI

Variable	Dimension	Definition	Indicators
KTIA	ATB	An individual’s positive or negative feelings (evaluative affect) about performing the target behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).	Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and compatibility
	SN	An individual’s perception that most people who are important to them think they should or should not perform the behaviour in question (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).	Internal influences and external influences
	PBC	An individual’s perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour of interest (Ajzen, 1991).	Self-efficacy, financial resources, technological resources and human capital resources.
EI	EI	EI acts as a bridge between knowledge acquisition and entrepreneurial behavior, significantly influencing farmers’ decision-making processes (Lone & Baba, 2024).	Willingness to embrace entrepreneurial challenges, openness to invest in innovative products, readiness to expand the enterprise, interest in entrepreneurship, and determination to develop innovative products
SEB	People	People in SEB refers to the social responsibility of enterprises to prioritize the well-being of individuals, communities, and society (Chenavaz et al., 2023).	Level of social Support, Skilful human resources availability, Innovative product development and staff training
	Profit	Profit in SEB refers to the pursuit of financial success that is achieved by balancing the goals of economic gain with social and environmental responsibility (Avelar et al., 2024).	The financial investment for labour force development, asset value availability in the enterprise, level of income earning, level of required resources, marketing strategies utilization, maintain quality of product for good price, marketing information availability and utilizing market opportunity
	Planet	Planet in SEB refers to the environmental responsibility of enterprises to reduce their negative impact on the natural world (Avelar et al., 2024).	Standards for product development, physical standards of workplace and recycling waste products

(TBL) framework addressing the social (people), economic (profit), and environmental (planet) dimensions of sustainable entrepreneurship. EI served as the mediating variable, measured using six items adapted from Nasar et al. (2019), capturing willingness to engage in entrepreneurial challenges, openness to innovation, investment readiness, and determination to expand or develop innovative products.

All constructs were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). Higher scores indicated stronger alignment with the given construct, reflecting higher levels of the measurements.

Reliability and validity testing

Reliability and validity assessments were conducted prior to hypothesis testing to ensure measurement robustness. The Cronbach’s Alpha values for all dimensions exceeded 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Convergent and discriminant validity were verified through inter-item correlations, which were significant at the 0.01 level. As shown in Table 2, the variance ratios indicated stability and low measurement error across constructs, confirming the model’s reliability and predictive adequacy.

Analytical approach

The analytical strategy was guided by the study’s theoretical framework and the formulated hypotheses. Data analysis was conducted in sev-

eral stages to ensure a logical flow from descriptive to inferential assessment:

1. Descriptive statistics summarized respondents’ socio-economic characteristics, providing contextual understanding of the farmer population and their engagement in innovation-related activities;

2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was applied to validate the measurement model, verifying that observed indicators appropriately represented the latent constructs (KTIA, EI, and SEB);

3. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using the maximum likelihood estimation method was then employed to test the hypothesized relationships and mediating effects. SEM was chosen for its capacity to simultaneously assess multiple interrelated dependence relationships, and its alignment with the theoretical logic connecting KTIA, EI, and SEB.

The hypothesized causal paths: $KTIA \rightarrow EI$, $EI \rightarrow SEB$, and $KTIA \rightarrow SEB$ were examined through direct and indirect effect testing. The mediating role of EI was assessed using bootstrapping techniques, providing confidence intervals for the indirect effects. This analytical approach allowed for a nuanced examination of how knowledge transfer mechanisms and Entrepreneurial Intentions collectively shape sustainable entrepreneurial outcomes.

By integrating theoretical reasoning, empirical testing, and structural analysis, this methodology ensures coherence between the study’s

Table 2. Reliability of selected each dimension

Dimensions	No of items	Cronbach’s Alpha	Variance
Perceived usefulness (PU)	06	0.726	0.006
Perceived ease of use (PEU)	06	0.729	0.004
Compatibility (COMP)	05	0.749	0.01
Internal influences (InI)	05	0.704	0.009
External influences (ExI)	07	0.719	0.014
Self-efficacy (SE)	17	0.751	0.017
Resources (RESO)	31	0.866	0.023
Entrepreneurial Intention (EI)	06	0.768	0.038
Sustainable Entrepreneurial Behaviour (SEB)	17	0.865	0.016

conceptual assumptions, data collection strategy, and analytical procedures. The approach thus enables a comprehensive evaluation of the hypotheses and strengthens the validity of inferences, regarding sustainable entrepreneurship within the agricultural sector of Ratnapura District.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-demographic profile of farmers

The key socio-demographic characteristics of the farmers were analyzed, and the results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Farmers (n = 392)

Factor	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	223	56.89
	Female	169	43.11
Age	<39 Years	122	31.12
	40 – 59 Years	204	52.04
	>60 Years	66	16.84
Marital status	Single	25	6.38
	Married	327	83.42
	Separate	24	6.12
	Divorce	02	0.51
	Widowed	14	3.57
Educational level	No formal education	21	5.36
	Primary education	67	17.09
	Junior secondary education (O/L)	117	29.85
	Senior secondary education (A/L)	157	40.05
	Tertiary education	30	7.65
Monthly income (LKR)	less than 100,000	373	95.15
	100,001 – 200,000	15	3.83
	200,001 – 300,000	03	0.77
	300,001 – 400,000	01	0.26
Experience in agriculture	0 – 20 Years	292	74.49
	21 – 40 Years	83	21.17
	41 – 60 Years	17	4.33
Number of training programs participated	1 – 15	226	57.65
	16 – 30	57	14.54
	31 – 45	07	1.79
	46 – 60	02	0.51
Major type of enterprise	Farm Level Producers (Crop/ Livestock)	192	48.98
	Agri-Service Providers (Equipment hiring and distribution)	08	2.04
	Agri-Input Producers (Seed, Compost and Animal feed etc.)	87	22.19
	Processing and Marketing of Farm Produce (Value added products; De-hydration, Jam production)	105	26.79
Farm Acreage	0 – 2	315	80.36
	3 – 5	73	18.62
	6 – 8	04	1.02

Source: Field survey March to August 2024.

According to the results presented in table 3, the majority of farmers in the study were male (56.89%), with most falling within the 40 to 59-year age group (52.04%). A significant proportion (83.42%) were married, and the highest level of education attained by most respondents (40.05%) was senior secondary education (GCE Advanced Level). This educational background suggests that they have the potential to access and adopt new agricultural technologies, which could enhance their EI and SEB.

In terms of agricultural experience, the majority of farmers reported having 21 to 40 years in the sector. Additionally, most participants had attended 1 to 15 training programs related to agriculture. Regarding income levels, 95.15% of the respondents earned less than LKR 100,000 per month, while only 0.26% reported an income between LKR 300,001 and 400,000.

Based on the classification by Fleet et al. (2013), agriculture-based enterprises can be categorized into four types: Farm-Level Producers, Agri-Service Providers, Agri-Input Producers, and Processing & Marketing of Farm Produce. Among these, nearly half of the farmers (48.98%) were engaged in farm-level production, whereas agri-service provision had the least representation. Additionally, the majority (80.36%) owned

0 to 2 acres of farmland, while a small fraction (1.02%) possessed 6 to 8 acres.

Measurement model

Measurement model shows the analysis of objective that illustrates the relationship between the KTIA and SEB, highlighting the mediating role of EI within the study area. Accordingly, the Figure 2 presented the Measurement model as below:

The assessment of Measurement model began with Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to evaluate its validity, followed by path analysis to test the structural model. The Chi-square value was statistically significant (χ^2 (392) = 138.987, $P = 0.000$), and the model fit indices; such as NFI = 0.715 and SRMR = 0.096, fell within acceptable ranges. These findings support the appropriateness of the conceptual model, which incorporates three primary constructs, and confirm its reliability for hypothesis testing.

Furthermore, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to evaluate the hypothesized relationships, illustrated in the conceptual framework (Figure 1). The SEM procedure adhered to a two-step approach: first, validating the measurement model (as outlined in the methods section), to ensure that the constructs were suit-

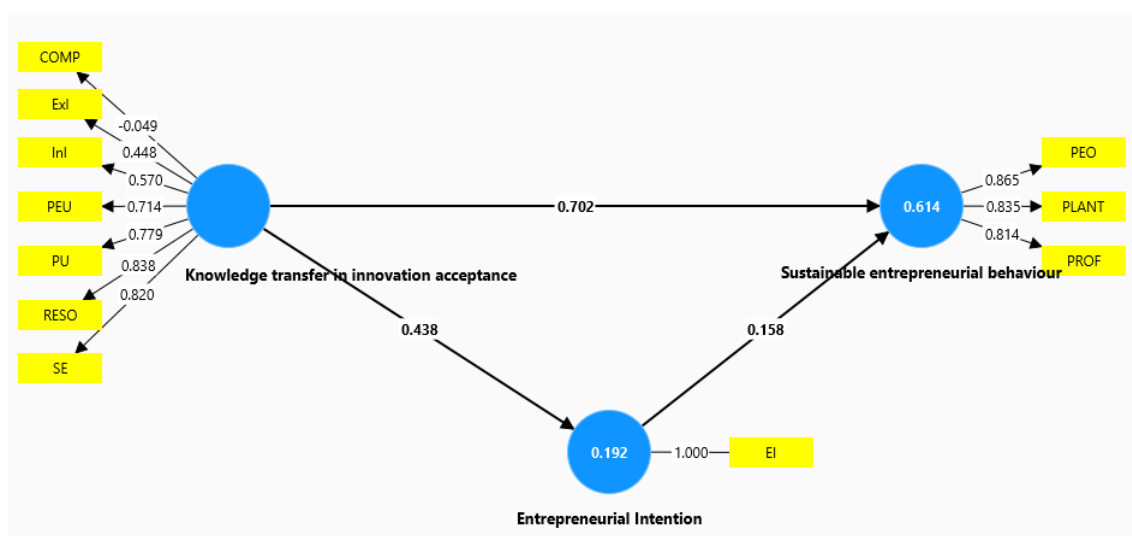


Fig. 2. The Relationship between KTIA and EP and the mediating role of SEB

Source: Developed by the researcher, 2025.

able for structural analysis; second, conducting hypothesis testing through structural modeling, using AMOS software (Figure 2). As presented in Table 4, the results revealed that KTIA had a significant positive effect on SEB ($\beta = 0.627$, $P < 0.01$), a significant influence on EI ($\beta = 0.462$, $P < 0.01$), and EI also significantly impacted SEB ($\beta = 0.194$, $P < 0.01$).

As shown in Table 4, KTIA has a significant effect on both EI and SEB. However, the influence of EI on SEB is relatively weaker, implying that although EI plays a role in shaping SEB, other factors may have a stronger impact on sustainability-oriented actions. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that EI significantly mediates the relationship between KTIA and SEB, highlighting its role as a key intermediary in this dynamic. Importantly, the direct effect of KTIA on SEB remains significant, underscoring KTIA’s critical role in fostering entrepreneurial success.

The findings offer valuable insights into the interconnections among KTIA, EI, and SEB. They emphasize both the direct and indirect pathways through which KTIA impacts SEB, with EI acting as a mediating factor. The results from the SEM analysis confirm that all proposed hypotheses are statistically significant, thereby enhancing our understanding of the mechanisms through which KTIA contributes to SEB.

The interpretations of the hypothesis testing results are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Direct impact of KTIA on SEB

The empirical results demonstrate a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between KTIA and SEB, as indicated by an estimated coefficient of 0.702 ($p = 0.000$). This provides robust empirical support for Hypothesis 1, which proposed that effective KTIA, significant-

Table 4. Standard regression weights and their significance for each path

Path analysis	Path Co-efficient/ estimate	P value	Result
KTIA -> SEB	0.702	0.000	Significant positive relationship
KTIA -> EI	0.438	0.000	Significant positive relationship
EI -> SEB	0.158	0.000	Relatively weak relationship
P value < 0.05			

Table 5. Hypotheses results

Hypothesis statements	Estimate	P value	Results on alternative hypothesis
Knowledge transfer in innovation acceptance has a significant effect on Sustainable entrepreneurial behavior.	0.702	0.000	Supported
Knowledge transfer in innovation acceptance has a significant effect on Entrepreneurial intention.	0.438	0.000	Supported
Entrepreneurial intention has a significant effect on Sustainable entrepreneurial behavior.	0.158	0.000	Supported
Entrepreneurial intention has a significant mediating effect on the relationship between knowledge transfer in innovation acceptance and Sustainable entrepreneurial behavior.	0.307 (0.702*0.438)	0.000	Supported

ly enhance the development of SEB. Beyond the numerical evidence, this relationship reveals how the diffusion and internalization of knowledge among entrepreneurs serve as a fundamental enabler of behavioural transformation toward sustainability.

From a theoretical standpoint, this finding is well-grounded in the Knowledge-Based View (KBV), which conceptualizes knowledge as a strategic resource that underpins firms' capacity for adaptation and innovation (Grant, 1996). Within the agricultural context, the process of acquiring, sharing, and applying knowledge fosters learning dynamics that facilitate innovation acceptance thereby strengthening entrepreneurs' ability to implement sustainability-oriented practices. The significant coefficient obtained empirically confirms that KTIA functions not merely as a mechanism of information exchange, but as a transformative process that integrates environmental awareness, economic efficiency, and social responsibility the three pillars of SEB (Chacín et al., 2024).

Moreover, the results align with the broader literature asserting that access to relevant knowledge and innovation stimuli encourages entrepreneurs, to adopt eco-innovations and socially responsible business strategies (Awad and Martín-Rojas, 2023; Yousaf et al., 2022). The statistical significance of this relationship validates the theoretical assumption that knowledge transfer enhances entrepreneurs' cognitive readiness to embed sustainability principles in their operational decisions. Consequently, KTIA serves as a bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical entrepreneurial outcomes, demonstrating logical coherence between the conceptual framework, methodological approach, and empirical findings. The analysis thus confirms that KTIA acts as both a cognitive catalyst and an operational mechanism, through which agricultural entrepreneurs transform sustainability awareness into tangible, enduring behavioural change.

Hypothesis 2: Direct impact of KTIA on EI

The analysis reveals a statistically significant positive influence of KTIA on EI, with an esti-

mated coefficient of 0.438 ($p = 0.000$). This provides strong empirical support for Hypothesis 2, confirming that exposure to relevant knowledge systems, innovative practices, and enterprise-oriented learning environments substantially enhances individuals' intentions to engage in entrepreneurial activity. Beyond its statistical strength, this relationship highlights the underlying behavioural mechanism, through which knowledge dissemination and innovation adoption translate into the cognitive motivation required for entrepreneurship.

Theoretically, this finding is consistent with both the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and the Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964). According to these frameworks, knowledge acquisition, skill development, and perceived behavioural control jointly influence individuals' attitudes toward entrepreneurship and their confidence in managing entrepreneurial challenges. The observed empirical pattern confirms that KTIA fosters these cognitive and attitudinal dimensions by improving individuals' understanding of market opportunities, innovation processes, and sustainable business models, thereby strengthening their perceived feasibility and desirability of entrepreneurial action.

Empirical parallels can be drawn with prior research demonstrating that access to knowledge resources, innovation networks, and mentorship significantly enhances entrepreneurial motivation and opportunity recognition (Li et al., 2023; Sullivan and Marvel, 2011; Neneh, 2020, 2022; Abbes, 2024). The present results extend this evidence to the agricultural sector, showing that KTIA does not only build technical or managerial competence, but also cultivates psychological readiness and self-efficacy key antecedents of entrepreneurial intention. The coefficient's strength and statistical significance therefore validate the theoretical assumption, that human capital formed through continuous learning and innovation acceptance serves as a critical driver of entrepreneurial cognition.

By integrating these theoretical and empirical insights, the analysis establishes a clear logical link between the study's conceptual rationale and

observed outcomes. It demonstrates that KTIA functions as both an intellectual and motivational resource, transforming abstract knowledge into intentional behaviour. Hence, KTIA acts as a bridge between learning processes and entrepreneurial aspiration, reinforcing the central argument, that knowledge-driven innovation is foundational to cultivating entrepreneurial intention in the agricultural context.

Hypothesis 3: Direct impact of EI on SEB

The analysis identifies a positive, but relatively modest influence of EI on SEB, with an estimated coefficient of 0.158 ($p = 0.000$). Although this result supports Hypothesis 3, it does so only partially, indicating that stronger EIs contribute to, but do not fully determine the exhibition of sustainability-oriented entrepreneurial actions. This nuanced relationship provides valuable insight into the behavioural dynamics of entrepreneurs: intention represents a necessary precursor to sustainable action, yet it is insufficient on its own to ensure behavioural realization.

From a theoretical standpoint, this outcome aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that while intention is the most immediate antecedent of behaviour, the transition from intention to action is often moderated by situational and contextual constraints. The observed modest coefficient reflects this Intention–Behaviour Gap, suggesting that even when entrepreneurs possess strong sustainability-oriented intentions, their ability to enact these behaviours is shaped by external factors such as resource availability, institutional support, and market conditions. The finding thus enriches the theoretical framework by emphasizing that cognitive readiness must be complemented by structural enablers, to achieve sustained behavioural outcomes.

Empirically, this interpretation is consistent with prior studies that highlight the inhibiting effects of financial constraints, limited institutional backing, and uncertain market environments on the practical implementation of sustainable entrepreneurship (Zhivkova, 2022; Duong, 2022; Yousaf et al., 2022). These studies collectively re-

inforce the argument that while EI lays the cognitive foundation for sustainability-oriented action, the actualization of SEB requires the interplay of supportive policy measures, access to finance, entrepreneurial education, and mentoring ecosystems that reduce perceived behavioural barriers.

Hence, the empirical evidence suggests that EI operates as a motivational driver that initiates sustainable entrepreneurial orientation, whereas the translation of that intention into practice is contingent upon contextual and institutional facilitators. The analytical coherence between the statistical findings, theoretical rationale, and prior evidence underscores a key insight: fostering SEB in the agricultural sector demands, not only strengthening individual entrepreneurial intentions, but also nurturing the external conditions that enable entrepreneurs to convert those intentions into tangible, sustainable enterprise practices.

Hypothesis 4: Mediating role of EI in the KTIA-SEB relationship

The results reveal that EI significantly mediates the relationship between KTIA and SEB, with an indirect effect of 0.307 ($p = 0.000$). This provides strong empirical support for Hypothesis 4, confirming that while KTIA exerts a direct and substantial influence on SEB, a meaningful portion of this impact is transmitted through EI. This mediation effect underscores that knowledge and innovation alone are not sufficient to foster SEB; rather, they must be internalized cognitively and motivationally to stimulate intentional action.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding aligns with the Knowledge Spillover Theory of Entrepreneurship (Acs et al., 2009), which posits that knowledge diffusion and innovation exposure expand individuals' opportunity perceptions and entrepreneurial alertness, thereby motivating entrepreneurial engagement. Simultaneously, it reflects the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which emphasizes that behavioural realization is preceded by intention, shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. The significant indirect effect observed here indicates that knowledge transfer enhances in-

dividuals' cognitive preparedness and perceived capability to act entrepreneurially, which then translates into sustainability-oriented behaviour.

Empirically, this finding is consistent with prior research identifying EI as a psychological conduit, through which knowledge and innovation stimuli are converted into sustainable entrepreneurial outcomes (Saoula et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2024; Yousaf et al., 2022). The partial mediation observed suggests a dual-path mechanism: KTIA influences SEB both directly by equipping entrepreneurs with the competencies, skills, and awareness necessary for sustainable practice, and indirectly by stimulating the motivational and cognitive drive to act on that knowledge. This dual pathway highlights the interplay between the cognitive (intention-based) and behavioural (action-based) dimensions of entrepreneurship, providing a more holistic understanding of how learning processes and motivational structures jointly shape sustainability-oriented outcomes.

In practical terms, this evidence underscores the importance of developing entrepreneurship programs and policy interventions, that integrate both knowledge enhancement and intention development. Strengthening EI through experiential learning, mentoring, and innovation exposure, can ensure that the knowledge acquired through KTIA is effectively transformed into sustainable entrepreneurial action. This interpretive synthesis reinforces the internal coherence of the study's theoretical model, illustrating that the pathway from knowledge to sustainable entrepreneurship is not merely informational, but deeply motivational and behavioural in nature.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that most farmers are experienced, middle-aged males, with senior secondary education and limited income. While they have exposure to training and agricultural practices, land ownership is minimal, and farm-level production dominates. These factors highlight both potential and constraints in advancing SEB through targeted support and innovation. More-

over, the study provides compelling evidence for the mediating role of EI in the relationship between KTIA, and SEB. The findings highlight that KTIA has a significant direct impact on SEB, demonstrating that farmers, who engage with KTIA are more likely to integrate sustainability principles into their operations. Furthermore, KTIA enhances EI, which in turn influences SEB, though its impact is somewhat weaker, suggesting that additional factors are necessary to fully drive sustainable practices. The most significant conclusion is the confirmation of EI's mediating role, reinforcing the idea that KTIA influences SEB, not only directly, but also indirectly through EI. This underscores the importance of fostering EI to maximize the effectiveness of KTIA in promoting sustainability. The results collectively affirm the significance of both KTIA and EI in advancing SEB among farmers, emphasizing the need for policies and initiatives that support knowledge transfer, innovation, and the development of EI in agricultural settings.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

- Agricultural policies should prioritize expanding access to KTIA initiatives, such as farmer field schools, digital extension platforms, and innovation hubs. These programs can strengthen farmers' ability to adopt sustainable practices and adapt to changing environmental and market conditions.

- Given the farmers' educational background and extensive agricultural experience, training should be practical, context-specific, and oriented toward sustainability and enterprise development. Capacity building in areas like resource management, value addition, and eco-friendly practices, could enhance SEB.

- The dominance of low income and small landholdings suggests a need for targeted financial support, including microloans, subsidies, and land access programs, to empower farmers to invest in SEB.

- Since most farmers are engaged in farm-level production, efforts should be made to diversify

their participation into underrepresented areas such as agri-service provision and processing.

- Policymakers should develop integrated frameworks that simultaneously address KTIA access, entrepreneurship development, and sustainability goals.

- As EI alone is not sufficient to drive SEB, interventions must also address structural barriers that hinder the realization of sustainable practices; such as market access, infrastructure, and institutional support.

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