# How Educational Motivations Shape the Intention Among Chinese Lecturers to Pursue Graduate Studies in Thailand: The Impact of Language Proficiency*



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## Abstract

This study investigates examines the role influence of educational motivations and language proficiency in shaping on Chinese lecturers' intentions to study for pursue a graduate degree in Thailand. The research addresses the growing demand for international education among Chinese academics, particularly in Kunming, Yunnan Province, where studying abroad is viewed as a pathway to career advancement, academic development, and global exposure. Drawing on the Theory of Planned Behavior and Self-Efficacy Theory, the study argues that while educational motivations are crucial, language proficiency functions as a critical enabler that transforms motivation into concrete study decisions.

The study had four objectives: (1) to examine the influence of educational motivations on the intention to study in Thailand; (2) to assess the effect of educational motivations on language proficiency; (3) to analyze the impact of language proficiency on study intention; and (4) to evaluate the mediating role of language proficiency in this relationship. A quantitative design was employed, with data collected from 692 valid questionnaires distributed to lecturers in Kunming. The survey instrument, adapted from established scales, demonstrated high reliability. Data analysis involved confirmatory factor analysis, structural equation modeling, and mediation testing using bootstrap methods.

The findings revealed that: (1) educational motivations had a positive and significant direct effect on the intention to study graduate in Thailand; (2) educational motivations significantly enhanced language proficiency; (3) language proficiency directly predicted study intention; and (4) language proficiency partially mediated the relationship between educational motivations and study intention. These results highlight that although strong educational motivations are necessary, they are not sufficient unless reinforced by adequate language skills, which act as both a predictor and mediator of study intentions. The study contributes new theoretical insights by identifying language proficiency as a bridging mechanism that converts motivation into intention.

**Keywords:** Educational Motivations; Language Proficiency; Pursue Graduate; Thailand

*Received September 14, 2025; Revised October 10, 2025; Accepted October 23, 2025

## Introduction

In the current era of globalization, obtaining a graduate degree has become a strategic decision for those seeking to enhance their careers and compete internationally. The number of overseas students has surged, with Asia becoming a prominent center for higher education (OECD, 2020). Thailand has established itself as a regional educational hub, drawing students from adjacent nations owing to its affordable tuition, English-language curricula, and cultural affinities (Hawthorne, 2018). For Chinese educators, pursuing a graduate degree overseas serves not only as a career advancement option but also as a means to attain global exposure and garner respect among their professional colleagues (Cai, 2020). Nonetheless, linguistic proficiency remains a difficulty for pupils whose primary language is not English. Language competence significantly influences students' academic achievement and their propensity to seek higher education abroad (MacIntyre, Noels, & Clément, 1997).

This study effort concentrates on Chinese professors employed in Kunming, Yunnan Province, China. A substantial cohort of educators seeks to advance their education by enrolling in graduate courses in Thailand. The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (2023) reports that over 34,000 instructors are employed by universities and vocational schools in Kunming. This indicates that to improve teaching skills and academic credentials, there is an increasing need for certificates from other nations. This study examined data from 692 genuine survey replies, indicating that language competence, in conjunction with educational aspirations, significantly influences the decision to pursue studies in Thailand. This research elucidates the role of language proficiency in enabling the transition from the desire to study to the genuine intention to pursue education, specifically examining the circumstances of students attending school in Thailand or China while residing in the alternate nation.

This study is grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997). These theories underscore the importance of perceived behavioral control and self-efficacy in influencing intentions. Proficiency in a language is seen as a kind of human capital (Zhang, 2008), significantly impacting the capacity of Chinese lecturers to adapt to the academic demands and cultural environment of Thailand. The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, and Davis, 2003) elucidates the interplay between social influence, performance expectations, and language proficiency in the context of academic decision-making. Previous studies confirm that language proficiency enhances self-confidence, reduces academic anxiety, and facilitates cultural adjustment (Dörnyei and Ryan, 2015; MacIntyre et al., 1997). Thus, language proficiency is not only an independent factor but also a mechanism that links educational motivations to the concrete intention of studying abroad.

Despite the increasing recognition of Thailand as an attractive study destination, limited research has systematically explored the mediating role of language proficiency in the

relationship between educational motivations and graduate study intentions among Chinese lecturers. Addressing this gap is crucial, as linguistic readiness directly determines whether strong educational motivations can be effectively translated into actionable decisions. This study contributes both theoretically and practically by examining how language proficiency functions as a bridge between motivation and intention.

## Objectives of the Research

1. To examine the influence of educational motivations on the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand.

2. To investigate the effect of educational motivations on language proficiency among Chinese lecturers.

3. To analyze the influence of language proficiency on the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand.

4. To evaluate the mediating role of language proficiency in the relationship between educational motivations and the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand.

## Research Methodology

This study utilized a quantitative methodology to investigate the associations between educational motivations, language proficiency, and the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand. The technique comprised seven key phases as detailed below:

**The 1st Step: Documentary Study**

To create the conceptual framework and foundational assumptions, an extensive analysis of significant concepts, theories, and contemporary research was undertaken. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), Human Capital Theory (Zhang, 2008), and Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997) were the primary theoretical frameworks employed. Moreover, empirical studies examining educational motivations, language proficiency, and the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand have been assessed (MacIntyre, Noels, and Clément, 1997; Dörnyei and Ryan, 2015; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002).

**The 2nd Step: Field Study**

Field data were collected from Chinese lecturers in Kunming, Yunnan Province, China, who represent a key group of prospective graduate students considering study in Thailand. A survey method was employed to obtain quantitative data regarding educational motivations, language proficiency, and intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand.

**The 3rd Step: Participants**

The study population consisted of 34,326 lecturers employed at universities and vocational institutions in Kunming (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2023). Using Yamane's (1973) formula with a 95% confidence level, the required sample size was determined to be 395. To ensure reliability, 750 questionnaires were distributed. After

eliminating incomplete responses, 692 valid questionnaires were used for analysis, yielding a response rate of 92.3%.

**The 4th Step: Research Instrument**

The research instrument was a structured questionnaire divided into four sections:

1. Demographic information.

2. Educational motivations, adapted from Eccles and Wigfield (2002) and Deci and Ryan (1985).

3. Language proficiency, adapted from MacIntyre et al. (1997).

4. Intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand, based on Mazzarol and Soutar (2002).

The questionnaire was translated into Chinese, and back-translation procedures were applied to ensure semantic equivalence. Content validity was confirmed by three experts, with Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) values between 0.80 and 1.00. A pilot test with 50 respondents was conducted. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all constructs exceeded 0.70, demonstrating reliability (Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson, 2010).

**The 5th Step: Data Collection**

The questionnaires were distributed both offline through institutional administrators and online via official channels. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was assured. Data were collected over a two-month period. Completed questionnaires were reviewed, and invalid responses were discarded.

**The 6th Step: Data Analysis**

Data analysis was carried out using SPSS version 25 and AMOS version 26. The following procedures were applied:

- Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic data.

- Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed to test the measurement model, assessing factor loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE ≥ 0.50), and Composite Reliability (CR ≥ 0.70).

- Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in AMOS was applied to test the causal

- Relationships among constructs.

- To test mediation effects, PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2013) was employed to examine indirect effects using bootstrap methods with 5,000 resamples.

**The 7th Step: Presentation of Results**

Results were presented according to the research objectives. Descriptive results were shown in frequency tables, while CFA and SEM outputs were displayed in path diagrams with standardized coefficients and significance values. Mediation results were reported with bootstrapped confidence intervals. The findings were then interpreted in light of relevant theories and empirical evidence.

## Research Results

The results of this study are presented in accordance with the four research objectives and hypotheses. Structural equation modeling (SEM) using AMOS 26 was applied to test the measurement and structural models, while mediation was analyzed using PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2013) with bootstrapping.

The measurement model was first assessed for reliability and validity. All constructs achieved satisfactory levels of internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Table 1 presents the composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and Cronbach's alpha values. All CR values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, while AVE values were above 0.50, confirming convergent validity. The measurement model demonstrated acceptable fit indices ($\chi^2$/df = 2.008, RMSEA = 0.038, CFI = 0.925, IFI = 0.925, TLI = 0.923).

**Table 1:** Summary of Measurement Model (Convergent Validity)

| Construct | CR | AVE | Cronbach's $\alpha$ | Model Fit Indices |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Educational Motivations | 0.851 | 0.533 | 0.966 | $\chi^2$/df = 2.008; RMSEA = 0.038; CFI = 0.925; IFI = 0.925; TLI = 0.923 |
| Language Proficiency | 0.933 | 0.585 | 0.932 | |
| Intention to Study Graduate (ISGT) | 0.941 | 0.615 | 0.940 | |

To further establish discriminant validity, the Fornell–Larcker criterion was examined. As shown in Table 2**,** the square root of AVE (diagonal) exceeded the inter-construct correlations (off-diagonal), confirming discriminant validity among constructs.

**Table 2:** Discriminant Validity (Fornell–Larcker Criterion)

| Construct | EM | LP | ISGT |
|---|---|---|---|
| Educational motivations (EM) | 0.730 | | |
| Language proficiency (LP) | 0.615 | 0.765 | |
| Intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand (ISGT) | 0.587 | 0.642 | 0.784 |

From the 1st objective, the SEM analysis demonstrated that educational motivations had a positive and statistically significant effect on intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand ($\beta$ significant at $p < 0.001$). This indicates that lecturers with stronger educational motivations were more likely to develop a concrete intention to continue their studies in Thailand. This result confirms Hypothesis 1 (H1) and is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and related research emphasizing the motivational basis of educational choices (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

From the 2nd objective, the findings revealed that educational motivations had a significant and positive effect on language proficiency (β significant at $p < 0.001$). Lecturers with higher educational motivations demonstrated greater self-assessed language ability, particularly in English communication. This supports Hypothesis 2 (H2) and aligns with prior studies that motivation is a critical driver of language learning outcomes and self-efficacy (MacIntyre, Noels, & Clément, 1997; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015).

From the 3rd objective, the results indicated that language proficiency had a direct and significant impact on the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand (β significant at $p < 0.001$). Respondents who reported higher levels of language proficiency expressed stronger intentions to pursue graduate education in Thailand. This finding supports Hypothesis 3 (H3) and reinforces Human Capital Theory (Zhang, 2008), which suggests that language skills constitute a form of capital that enhances academic opportunities and decision-making regarding study abroad. The structural model results for H1–H3 are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Structural Model Results (Direct Effects: H1–H3)

| Hypothesis | Path | β | S.E. | C.R. | p-value | Supported |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1 | EM ⟶ ISGT | 0.216 | 0.051 | 4.235 | < .001 | Yes |
| H2 | EM ⟶ LP | 0.547 | 0.062 | 8.823 | < .001 | Yes |
| H3 | LP ⟶ ISGT | 0.169 | 0.048 | 3.521 | < .001 | Yes |

From the 4th objective, the mediation analysis, conducted using PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2013) with 5,000 bootstrap resamples, confirmed that language proficiency served as a partial mediator between educational motivations and intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand. The indirect effect was statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval, showing that educational motivations influenced study intentions not only directly but also indirectly through enhanced language proficiency. This result supports Hypothesis 4 (H4) and highlights the mechanism through which motivation translates into intention, echoing prior evidence from international student mobility research (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). The structural model results for H4 are summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4**: Mediation Analysis (Bootstrap Indirect Effect: H4)

| Path | Indirect Effect | S.E. | 95% CI (Lower–Upper) | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| EM ⟶ LP ⟶ ISGT | 0.092 | 0.032 | [0.035, 0.158] | Significant |

## The New Body of Knowledge

This study contributes new insights into the mechanisms by which educational motivations translate into graduate study intentions within the context of Chinese lecturers considering Thailand as a study destination. The findings confirm both direct and indirect effects, leading to the development of a new conceptual model that explains the dynamic relationships among educational motivations, language proficiency, and study intention.

1. Direct Influence of Educational Motivations.

The research establishes that educational motivations exert a significant direct influence on the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand. This finding reinforces the role of intrinsic and extrinsic educational goals as critical determinants of study intention.

2. Link between Motivations and Language Proficiency.

The study highlights a new pathway showing that stronger educational motivations foster improved language proficiency. This indicates that motivated lecturers are more willing to invest effort in enhancing their language skills, thereby preparing themselves for international study.

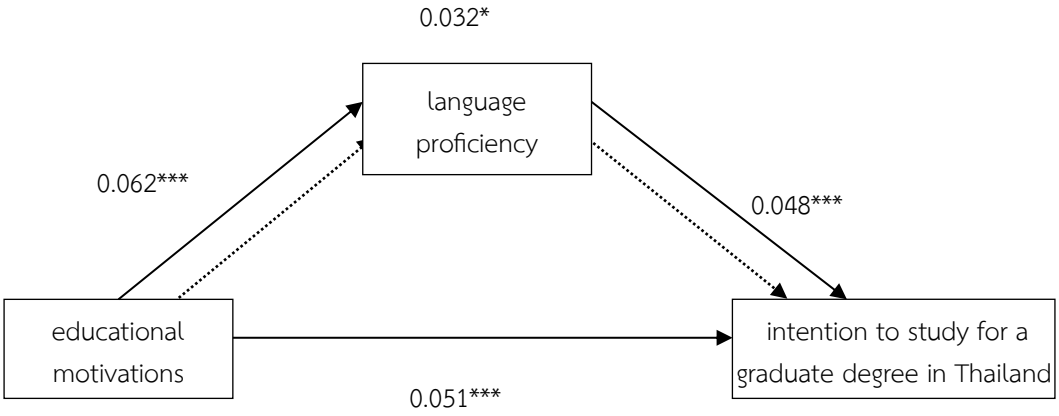
3. Language Proficiency as a Predictor.

The findings confirm that language proficiency itself significantly predicts graduate study intention. Beyond motivation, the ability to use language effectively emerges as an independent determinant that strengthens the decision to study abroad.

4. Mediating Role of Language Proficiency.

Most importantly, the study identifies language proficiency as a partial mediator between educational motivations and study intention. This mediating pathway represents the new knowledge generated by the research: educational motivations alone are not sufficient; they must be reinforced through adequate language competency to transform into actionable intentions.

The integrated framework is presented in Figure 1, which illustrates the new body of knowledge. The model emphasizes the dual role of language proficiency, functioning both as a direct predictor of study intention and as a mediator of educational motivations.




*Note:* direct ⟶ effect; mediating ⋯▸ effect, * p < .05, ***p < 0.001.

**Figure 1:** Mediation Model of Educational Motivations, Language Proficiency, and Intention to Study for a Graduate Degree in Thailand

## Discussion of Research Results

From the result of the 1st objective, it was found that educational motivations significantly influenced the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand. This indicates that Chinese lecturers who are driven by aspirations for career advancement, academic development, and international exposure are more likely to pursue graduate studies abroad. The finding is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that attitudes and motivations are central predictors of behavioral intentions. It also aligns with research by Eccles and Wigfield (2002), who emphasized the role of educational goals in shaping study-related decisions.

From the result of the 2nd objective, it was shown that the provision of incentives for educational motivations has a positive impact on language proficiency. Teachers who exhibit high levels of motivation are more likely to invest time and energy in enhancing their language proficiency, which will render them more prepared for studying in a foreign country. This is the meaning of the statement. The conclusion is consistent with the assertion made by Dörnyei and Ryan (2015), who asserted that motivation is a critical component in the process of acquiring a second language. This is corroborated by the findings of the study conducted by MacIntyre, Noels, and Clément (1997), which revealed that students who are motivated to learn generally possess a higher level of confidence and competency in their language skills.

From the result of the 3rd objective, it was confirmed that the level of language proficiency significantly influenced the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand. This illustrates that instructors who are proficient in English or Thai are more likely to possess the self-assurance required to complete academic assignments, feel at home in the classroom, and meet the criteria for academic writing. The discovery is in accordance with Human Capital

Theory (Zhang, 2008), which regards language proficiency as a form of capital that improves employability and increases access to opportunities.

From the result of the 4th objective, it was demonstrated that the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand was somewhat influenced by language proficiency in relation to educational motivations. This implies that, despite the significance of the reasons, they are more likely to be translated into genuine study intentions when a high level of language proficiency supports them. This mediating function emphasizes the significance of language as a determinant of academic mobility, whether through direct or indirect effects. Language proficiency is a critical factor that influences the study destinations of students, as Mazzarol and Soutar discovered in their 2002 research on international student mobility. These findings are consistent with the findings of this study.

Overall, the discussion illustrates that simply setting educational goals is inadequate to inspire an individual to engage in attentive study. Acquiring linguistic skills is a necessity for advancing from desire to intention. This indicates that to attract and retain international students, Thai schools must establish language assistance programs alongside focused recruiting strategies.

## Conclusion

This study aims to investigate the influence of educational motivations and language proficiency, as well as their combined effects, on the intention of Chinese instructors in Kunming to pursue graduate studies in Thailand. The findings corroborated four principal discoveries. Initially, educational motivations significantly increased the aspiration to attain graduate education, illustrating that individuals are driven to learn by goals such as professional progression, intellectual growth, and cultural experience. Secondly, it was demonstrated that educational motivations positively influence language proficiency, suggesting that motivated individuals are more committed to enhancing their linguistic skills. Third, language proficiency appears to be a significant predictor of intention, underscoring the importance of linguistic preparedness in facilitating academic mobility. The relationship between educational motivations and study intentions was partially influenced by language proficiency. This indicates that for study decisions to be definitive, motivation must be underpinned by sufficient language proficiency.

In conclusion, the study's findings indicate that language proficiency serves as both a facilitator and a mediator in the decision to study abroad. At the same time, educational motivation is also a key variable in the decision-making process. This underscores the necessity for robust language support systems, initiatives that aid kids in college preparation, and transparent communication of academic expectations for Thai institutions. Schools may more successfully recruit and support international students by taking this measure, ensuring that motivated individuals acquire the requisite abilities to excel in their studies.

## Suggestions

Based on the research findings, the researcher presents the subsequent suggestions.

**1. The suggestions from the research**

From the research result of the 1st objective, the research demonstrated that the desire to undertake postgraduate studies in Thailand was markedly affected by educational motivations. This indicates that motivated teachers are more inclined to make specific selections for studying abroad. To enhance student intentions, Thai institutions and authorities must execute targeted academic advising and recruitment initiatives that specifically address professional advancement, academic development, and global exposure.

From the research result of the 2nd objective, the research demonstrated that educational motivations significantly influenced language proficiency. This indicates that instructors with a profound motivation to improve their language proficiency are more inclined to exert the requisite effort to achieve this goal. Consequently, to aid international students in preparing for communication in English or Thai, Thai colleges and universities must implement extensive language preparation programs that encompass pre-sessional courses in English or Thai.

From the research result of the 3rd objective, the research demonstrated that language proficiency significantly influenced the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand. This indicates that instructors with higher language proficiency are more likely to pursue PhD studies. Consequently, Thai educational institutions must incorporate language support into their curricula, ensuring that international students have numerous opportunities to enhance their language proficiency during their academic tenure.

From the research result of the 4th objective, the research indicated that language proficiency exerted a marginal influence on the relationship between educational motivations and the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand. This illustrates that language skills may facilitate the conversion of inspiration into action. Consequently, Thai universities and affiliated educational institutions must formulate comprehensive programs that integrate ongoing language training with strategies designed to enhance motivation. This is used to guarantee that international students are both motivated and linguistically equipped for academic achievement.

**2. The suggestions for future research**

2.1 To ascertain the generalizability of the findings, further research should broaden the analysis to encompass instructors from other cultural backgrounds or different regions of China.

2.2 Future research may need the inclusion of other variables to expand the range of factors influencing study intentions. However, these metrics do not encompass all aspects.

Assistance may encompass financial support, institutional aid, or acclimatization to a new culture.

2.3 Researchers must assess the feasibility of utilizing mixed methods designs that combine quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to produce both statistical correlations and in-depth insights into individuals' lives.

2.4 Longitudinal studies tracking students before, during, and after their graduate studies in Thailand would provide valuable insights into the progression of motivations, language skills, and objectives.

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