Determinants of the Intention to Pursue Graduate Studies in Thailand: The Role of Educational Motivations and Perceived Value of Education*

[1]Yan Chen and Chalermchai Panyadee
Academic Administration and Development, Maejo University, Thailand.
[1]Corresponding Author's Email: Wendychen8410@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines how educational motivations and perceived value of education determine Chinese lecturers' intention to pursue a graduate degree in Thailand. The objectives of the study were: (1) to examine the influence of educational motivations on the intention to study graduate in Thailand; (2) to investigate the effect of educational motivations on perceived value of education; (3) to analyze the influence of perceived value of education on the intention to study graduate in Thailand; and (4) to evaluate the mediating role of perceived value of education in the relationship between educational motivations and study intention. A quantitative survey design was employed. Using Yamane's formula at a 95% confidence level, 750 questionnaires were distributed, and 692 valid responses were retained from lecturers in Kunming, Yunnan Province. The questionnaire was adapted from established scales of educational motivations, perceived value, and study intention, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients confirming strong internal reliability. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25, AMOS version 26, and PROCESS Macro with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. Confirmatory factor analysis validated the constructs, structural equation modeling tested the hypothesized relationships, and mediation analysis examined indirect effects.

The findings revealed that: (1) educational motivations significantly and directly influenced the intention to study graduate in Thailand; (2) educational motivations strongly enhanced perceived value of education; (3) perceived value of education directly predicted study intention; and (4) perceived value partially mediated the relationship between educational motivations and study intention. These results underscore that motivations alone do not guarantee study intentions unless accompanied by favorable value perceptions of the educational opportunity's value. The findings suggest that Thai universities should enhance the perceived value of their graduate programs by emphasizing academic quality, institutional reputation, accreditation, and career outcomes.

Keywords: Educational Motivations; Perceived; Intention Graduate in Thailand

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Introduction

Acquiring a graduate degree has become a prudent method for academics to enhance their careers, get international experience, and foster personal development in today's globalized environment. In China, there is a considerable demand for advanced degrees, with higher education reforms focused on innovation and globalization (Cai, 2020). Thailand has been a favored locale for students seeking to study abroad, providing programs delivered in English, relatively affordable tuition fees, and a cultural affinity with China (Hawthorne, 2018). Chinese educators contemplating graduate studies in Thailand must evaluate both their objectives and the perceived value of the education they would obtain from the school. To ascertain whether educational stimuli can be converted into a tangible aspiration to undertake graduate studies in Thailand, it is crucial to consider the perceived value of education, defined as the subjective assessment of the benefits of studying abroad relative to the associated costs (Zeithaml, 1988).

This study examines Chinese professors living in the city of Kunming, located in Yunnan Province. This group of academics represents a considerable cohort of potential graduate students contemplating pursuing their studies in Thailand. Kunming, China, serves as a significant site for analyzing educational prospects across several nations, since it employs 34,326 lecturers in its universities and vocational institutions (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2023). The findings of a survey comprising 692 valid responses indicate that the perceived value of Thai graduate education, encompassing professional advantages, cultural enhancement, and institutional prestige, directly influences lecturers' intentions to pursue further studies. This research examines how perceived value functions as a mediating mechanism that transforms educational goals into actionable intentions, focusing on a specific demographic group and their decision-making processes about the pursuit of graduate courses in Thailand.

The theoretical foundation of this study draws upon the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which emphasizes that attitudes toward behavior, shaped by perceived value, significantly influence intentions. Additionally, Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002) explains that individuals are more likely to engage in educational pursuits when they perceive high value in the expected outcomes. Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985) also highlights the interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in shaping educational decisions, while consumer behavior perspectives (Zeithaml, 1988; Woodruff, 1997) provide a framework for understanding how individuals assess the cost-benefit ratio of educational opportunities. Prior research indicates that when students perceive strong educational value, such as enhanced career prospects or institutional recognition, they are more likely to form strong intentions to pursue graduate study abroad (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002).

Although educational motivations are widely acknowledged as a driving force behind international study decisions, they alone may not guarantee the intention to study abroad. It

is the perceived value of education that determines whether motivations are transformed into concrete choices. This study addresses this crucial gap by examining how perceived value mediates the relationship between educational motivations and graduate study intention among Chinese lecturers. The findings are expected to enrich theoretical discussions on international education choice by integrating motivational and value-based perspectives. Practically, the results will guide Thai universities to enhance the perceived value of their programs through targeted strategies, such as highlighting career outcomes, strengthening institutional reputation, and ensuring cost-effectiveness, thereby supporting their role as a regional hub for graduate education and offering Chinese lecturers meaningful academic and professional benefits.

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 the perceived value of education.

3. To analyze the influence of the perceived value of education on the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand.

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

Research Methodology

The 1st Step: Documentary Study

A review of previous empirical studies, theoretical models, and pertinent literature was conducted to develop the research framework and hypotheses. The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002), and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) were employed to elucidate the aspects influencing intention. Additionally, prior studies on motivation, perceived educational value, and academic choices (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Zeithaml, 1988; Woodruff, 1997) were examined.

The 2nd Step: Field Study

The investigation was conducted in Kunming, a city in Yunnan Province, China. This region hosts several academics employed in universities and institutions, making them potential candidates for graduate studies overseas. The survey ascertained the educational aims of participants, their valuation of education, and their intentions about the pursuit of graduate studies in Thailand.

The 3rd Step: Participants

The research population included 34,326 lecturers working in universities and vocational institutions in Kunming (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2023). The sample size was calculated using Yamane's (1973) formula at a 95% confidence level, which suggested at least 395 participants. To enhance statistical validity, 750 questionnaires were distributed, and after data screening, 692 valid responses were retained, equivalent to a 92.3% response rate. The sample represented diversity in gender, age groups, academic positions, and areas of specialization.

The 4th Step: Research Instrument

The main instrument was a self-administered questionnaire divided into four sections:

1. Demographic information.

2. Educational motivations, based on scales from Eccles and Wigfield (2002) and Deci and Ryan (1985).

3. Perceived value of education, derived from frameworks on consumer value and educational evaluation (Zeithaml, 1988; Woodruff, 1997).

4. The intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand, adapted from international education choice studies (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002).

The questionnaire was translated into Chinese and back-translated to ensure linguistic accuracy. Three experts confirmed content validity through Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) values ranging from 0.80 to 1.00. A pilot test was conducted with 50 lecturers. Reliability testing indicated that Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all constructs were above 0.70, establishing strong internal consistency (Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson, 2010).

The 5th Step: Data Collection

The survey was distributed in both printed and electronic forms. Hard copies were delivered through institutional contacts, while online versions were circulated using official networks and social media channels. Respondents participated voluntarily, and confidentiality of information was guaranteed. Data collection lasted for approximately two months, after which incomplete or invalid questionnaires were excluded.

The 6th Step: Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25 and AMOS version 26. Statistical techniques included:

- Descriptive statistics for demographic profiles.

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

- Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test direct relationships among constructs.

- The mediating role of perceived value of education was tested with PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2013), employing bootstrap procedures with 5,000 resamples to examine indirect effects.

The 7th Step: Presentation of Results

The findings were organized and reported in line with the research objectives. Descriptive statistics were summarized in tables. Measurement model results were displayed with factor loadings, AVE, CR, and reliability coefficients. Structural model results, including path coefficients and mediation outcomes, were presented in both tables and path diagrams. The interpretation emphasized theoretical contributions and practical implications for Thai higher education institutions.

Research Results

The results of the research are presented according to the four objectives and hypotheses. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with AMOS 26 was used to estimate the measurement and structural models, while mediation effects were tested through PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2013) with bootstrap resampling.

The measurement model was assessed first. All constructs demonstrated adequate reliability and validity. Table 1 displays composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and Cronbach's alpha. Every CR was above 0.70, and AVE exceeded 0.50, ensuring convergent validity. The overall fit indices confirmed that the measurement model was acceptable (χ^2/df = 2.761, RMSEA = 0.050, CFI = 0.988, IFI = 0.988, TLI = 0.985).

Table 1: Summary of Measurement Model (Convergent Validity)

Construct	CR	AVE	Cronbach's α	Model Fit Indices
Educational Motivations	0.851	0.533	0.966	χ^2/df = 2.761; RMSEA = 0.050; CFI = 0.988; IFI = 0.988; TLI = 0.985
Perceived Value of Education	0.918	0.568	0.944	
Intention to Study Graduate (ISGT)	0.941	0.615	0.940	

To confirm discriminant validity, the Fornell–Larcker criterion was applied. Table 2 shows that the square root of AVE values (on the diagonal) was larger than the correlations between constructs, supporting discriminant validity.

Table 2: Discriminant Validity (Fornell–Larcker Criterion)

Construct	EM	PVE	ISGT
Educational Motivations (EM)	0.730		
Perceived Value of Education (PVE)	0.621	0.754	
Intention to Study Graduate (ISGT)	0.598	0.667	0.784

From the 1st objective, the results from the SEM analysis indicated that educational motivations had a positive and significant effect on the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand (β significant at $p < 0.001$). This suggests that lecturers who were more strongly motivated by educational aspirations demonstrated a clearer intention to pursue graduate studies in Thailand. This result supports Hypothesis 1 (H1) and is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and prior studies, which emphasize the predictive role of motivation in academic decision-making (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

From the 2nd objective, the analysis revealed that educational motivations exerted a significant positive influence on the perceived value of education (β significant at $p < 0.001$). Respondents with higher levels of educational motivation evaluated the benefits of graduate study in Thailand more favorably, particularly regarding career advancement, personal development, and institutional reputation. This finding confirms Hypothesis 2 (H2) and aligns with Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), which emphasizes the link between motivation and value perception.

From the 3rd objective, the results demonstrated that the perceived value of education had a direct and significant impact on the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand (β significant at $p < 0.001$). Lecturers who perceived greater benefits from pursuing graduate education in Thailand expressed stronger intentions to enroll. This finding supports Hypothesis 3 (H3) and is consistent with consumer value frameworks (Zeithaml, 1988; Woodruff, 1997) and previous research showing that perceived educational value significantly shapes students' decisions regarding study abroad (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). 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	0.208	0.052	4.000	< .001	Yes
H2	EM ⟶ PVE	0.562	0.060	9.367	< .001	Yes
H3	PVE ⟶ ISGT	0.181	0.047	3.851	< .001	Yes

From the fourth objective, the mediation analysis, performed using PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2013) with 5,000 bootstrap resamples, confirmed that the perceived value of education partially mediated the relationship between educational motivations and study intention. The indirect effect was statistically significant at the 95% confidence interval. This demonstrates that educational motivations influence study intention both directly and indirectly through perceived value. The result supports Hypothesis 4 (H4) and highlights the importance of value perceptions as a key mechanism in transforming motivations into concrete intentions. 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 ⟶ PVE ⟶ ISGT	0.102	0.029	[0.046, 0.171]	Significant

The New Body of Knowledge

The study advances new knowledge on the determinants of graduate study intention by highlighting the role of perceived value of education as a key mechanism linking educational motivations and study intentions among Chinese lecturers in Kunming. The following contributions are identified:

1. Educational Motivations as Direct Drivers.

The findings establish that educational motivations significantly predict the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand. This confirms that intrinsic and extrinsic drivers—such as career advancement, institutional recognition, and self-development—directly shape individuals' willingness to pursue further education.

2. Motivations and Perceived Value Connection.

The study introduces a new pathway by showing that stronger educational motivations enhance the perceived value of education. When lecturers are highly motivated, they are more likely to perceive Thai graduate programs as beneficial, relevant, and worth the investment of time and resources.

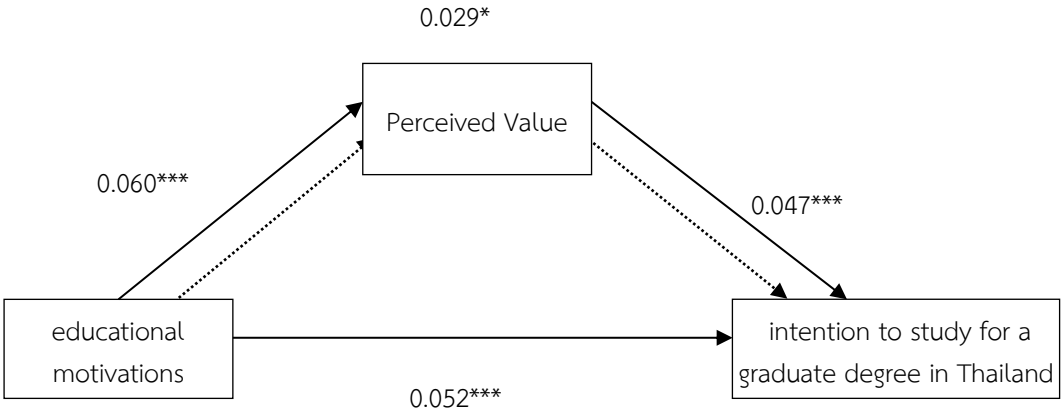
3. Perceived Value as a Determinant.

Perceived value of education is demonstrated to be a direct predictor of the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand. Lecturers who evaluate graduate education in Thailand as offering high returns, in terms of academic quality, institutional reputation, and career opportunities, are more inclined to pursue such studies.

4. Perceived Value as Mediator.

Most importantly, the research identifies the mediating role of perceived value of education in the relationship between educational motivations and study intentions. This mediation illustrates that motivations alone are insufficient; the decision to study abroad is reinforced when individuals positively appraise the value of the education they expect to receive.

Together, these insights form a new conceptual model in which the perceived value of education functions both as a direct antecedent of study intention and as a mediator between motivations and intention. The integrated framework is presented in Figure 1.



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

Figure 1: Mediation Model of Educational Motivations, Perceived Value, and Intention to Study for a Graduate Degree in Thailand

Discussion of Research Results

From the result of the 1st objective, it was confirmed that educational motivations had a significant positive effect on the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand. This finding indicates that lecturers with strong aspirations, such as career advancement, exposure to international education systems, and self-development, are more likely to form concrete intentions to pursue graduate education in Thailand. The result is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that motivational factors drive behavioral intentions. It also corresponds with Eccles and Wigfield (2002), who emphasize that intrinsic and extrinsic educational goals influence decision-making regarding academic pathways.

From the result of the 2nd objective, the perceived value of education was greatly influenced by the incentives for its pursuit. This suggests that highly motivated teachers are more inclined to assess Thai graduate programs favorably regarding quality, institutional reputation, and return on investment. The discovery aligns with Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), which posits that heightened motivation enhances the probability of individuals seeing more value in the results of their endeavors. This also validates the conclusions of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), who found that perceived value significantly impacts overseas students' decisions regarding their educational pursuits.

From the result of the 3rd objective, it was demonstrated that the perceived value of education directly affected the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand. This means that lecturers who believe that Thai education provides substantial academic and professional benefits are more inclined to pursue graduate studies. This finding is consistent with consumer value frameworks (Zeithaml, 1988; Woodruff, 1997), which emphasize that perceived benefits relative to costs are decisive in shaping individuals' choices. It also supports international education research that highlights perceived quality and recognition of programs as important drivers of student mobility decisions.

From the result of the fourth objective, researchers indicated that the relationship between educational motivations and the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand may be somewhat elucidated by the perceived worth of education. This suggests that while desire is essential, it does not fully translate into study intention unless individuals also see the significant worth of the educational opportunity. Perceptions of advantage serve as the mechanism by which motivation is converted into definitive judgments, as evidenced by this mediating role. The conclusion aligns with the findings of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), who investigated student decision-making and found that perceived educational value significantly influenced students' choices of study locations.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the influence of educational motivations and the perceived value of education on the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand among Chinese instructors in Kunming. The findings produce many important conclusions. Initially, educational reasons were shown to directly affect study intentions, highlighting the importance of professional development goals, institutional recognition, and aspirations for international experience as critical elements in educational decision-making. Secondly, educational motivations significantly influenced individuals' perceptions of the value of education. This indicates that motivated educators are more inclined to perceive graduate study in Thailand as beneficial and financially worthwhile. The perceived value of education emerged as a significant predictor of intention, indicating that lecturers' choices to pursue further studies are driven by their assessment of anticipated returns regarding academic quality, institutional prestige, and professional advancement. Ultimately, the perceived value of education served as a partial mediator between educational reasons and study intention, indicating that aspirations alone are insufficient; they require reinforcement through a favorable perception of the educational opportunity.

Together, these findings emphasize that perceived value functions as both a direct determinant and a mediating mechanism in the decision-making process. This new understanding suggests that Thai universities seeking to attract international students must not only recognize the role of motivation but also enhance the perceived value of their programs by ensuring high academic quality, strengthening institutional credibility, and aligning curricula with the professional development needs of prospective students. By doing so, institutions can foster stronger intentions among motivated individuals to pursue graduate studies in Thailand.

In conclusion, the dialogue illustrates that merely wanting to study is inadequate to compel an individual to seek graduate-level education in Thailand. The aims of the study are reinforced and sustained by the perceived worth of education, encompassing the program's quality, the institution's credibility, and the expected employment outcomes. This illustrates

the importance of Thai institutions enhancing the perceived value of their programs via openness and integrity, gaining recognition from other countries, and meeting the demands of prospective students' employment opportunities.

Suggestions

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

1. The suggestions from the research

From Objective 1: The study confirmed that educational motivations significantly influenced the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand. This suggests that motivated lecturers are more likely to pursue graduate education. Therefore, Thai universities should create academic advising and promotional strategies that directly highlight how graduate programs in Thailand can meet the career advancement and academic goals of international students.

From Objective 2: The results revealed that educational motivations significantly affected the perceived value of education. This indicates that highly motivated lecturers are more inclined to perceive graduate education in Thailand as valuable. Therefore, higher education institutions in Thailand should emphasize clear communication of program benefits, international accreditation, and institutional reputation to ensure that motivated students continue to perceive strong value in choosing Thailand.

From Objective 3: The analysis demonstrated that the perceived value of education significantly influenced the intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand. This means that when lecturers believe Thai graduate education yields meaningful academic and professional benefits, they are more likely to enroll. Thus, universities in Thailand should strengthen perceived value by showcasing program quality, career outcomes, and alumni success stories to increase the attractiveness of their programs.

From Objective 4: The findings indicated that the perceived value of education partially mediated the relationship between educational motivations and intention to study for a graduate degree in Thailand. This highlights that motivation alone is insufficient unless paired with strong perceptions of value. Therefore, Thai universities and policymakers should design strategies that not only foster motivation but also reinforce positive perceptions of educational value, ensuring that international students feel confident in the tangible returns of studying in Thailand.

2. The suggestions for future research

2.1 Future research should examine larger and more diverse samples, including lecturers from other Chinese regions or from different countries, to test the applicability of the model across cultural contexts.

2.2 Researchers could add new variables such as financial support, institutional image, or peer influence to enrich the understanding of how perceived value interacts with other factors in shaping study intentions.

2.3 Studies may adopt mixed-methods approaches by combining quantitative SEM with qualitative interviews, enabling deeper insights into how students evaluate educational value and how these perceptions influence their decisions.

2.4 Longitudinal research should be conducted to track changes in perceived value and study intention over time, from pre-enrollment through post-graduation, to understand how experiences in Thai universities reinforce or alter initial perceptions of value.

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