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Motivation Through Perceived Benefits Leading to the Decision to Study in Thai University for Chinese Students: Case Study of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University

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Abstract

International higher education has become an increasingly competitive landscape, with Thailand implementing policies to transform itself into a premier regional education hub. Chinese students represent the most critical target group for Thai educational services. This research investigated the influence of motivation and perceived benefits on the decision to study in Thailand. The study employed a quantitative survey approach to collect data from 330 Chinese students currently enrolled at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University (SSRU). Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling PLS-SEM. The results revealed that motivation has a significant positive direct effect on the decision to study ($\beta = 0.325$) and a strong impact on perceived benefits ($\beta = 0.612$). Importantly, perceived benefits significantly mediated the relationship between motivation and the decision to study as a partial mediator, with a Variance Accounted For (VAF) value of 52.3%. These findings suggest that perceived academic and personal growth gains serve as the vital psychological bridge between a student's internal drive and their actual enrollment commitment.

Keywords: Motivation, Perceived Benefits, Decision to Study, Chinese Students, Higher Education

1. Introduction

Thailand's Education Hub Policy, launched in 2013, aims to elevate the country's higher education landscape to attract international students and foster a knowledge-based economy. Chinese students are a prominent market due to geographical proximity, cultural similarities, and the relatively low cost of education compared to Western countries (Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation, 2022).

While Thailand has made strides, intense competition from neighboring countries like Malaysia and Singapore poses challenges. Institutions must understand the underlying psychological drivers of Chinese students to refine recruitment strategies. This study addresses two main questions first is how do perceived benefits mediate the relationship between motivation and the decision to study? and second how does internal motivation directly affect that decision

1.1 Objective

1. To examine the effects of perceived benefits as mediators between motivation and the decision to study.
2. To analyse the model of motivation, perceived benefits, and the decision to study.

1.2 Conceptual Framework

The study integrates the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the SERVQUAL model. Motivation is defined by Self-Efficacy and Self-Regulation. Perceived Benefits include Academic Benefits and Personal Growth. The Decision to Study is measured through Tangibles, Assurance, and Responsiveness.

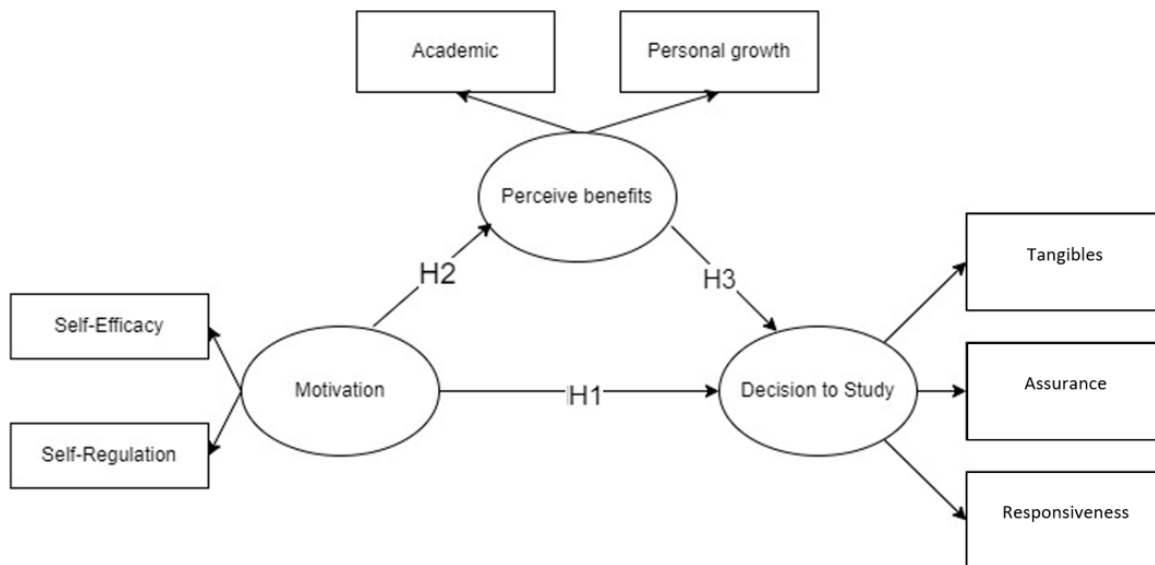
Hypotheses:

H1: Motivation has a direct effect on the decision to study.

H2: Motivation has an impact on perceived benefits.

H3: Perceived benefits mediated the relationship between Motivation and decision to Study.

Figure 1



2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design to quantify relationships between latent variables using structural equation modeling.

2.2 Population and Samples

The population consisted of 1,352 Chinese students at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University (SSRU). A sample of 330 students was selected using a multi-stage sampling technique, covering Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral programs to ensure representative data across education levels.

2.3 Instrumentation

A 5- point Likert scale questionnaire was developed based on a literature review of motivational factors and service quality. The instrument was validated using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC), with scores ranging from 0.67 to 1.00. A pilot test (n=30) yielded a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.925, indicating excellent reliability.

2.4 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were used for demographic data. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to evaluate both the measurement model (reliability and validity) and the structural model (hypothesis testing).

3. Results And Findings

3.1 Descriptive Results

The overall motivation level was high ($\bar{x} = 4.13$), and perceived benefits were rated at a very high level ($\bar{x}= 4.21$). Among decision factors, **Assurance** (faculty expertise, safety, and reputation) emerged as the most influential dimension ($\bar{x} = 4.13$).

3.2 Measurement Model Evaluation

All indicator loadings exceeded the 0.70 threshold (ranging from 0.838 to 0.904). Composite Reliability (CR) for all constructs was above 0.90, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were above 0.70, confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was confirmed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios (< 0.90).

3.3 Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

The model fit was confirmed with an SRMR of 0.051 and an NFI of 0.912.

Table1 Model Fit Results

Fit Index	Value	Criteria	Result
SRMR	0.051	< 0.08	Good Fit
NFI	0.912	> 0.90	Excellent

According to Table 4.20, the SRMR value of 0.051 is well below the maximum threshold of 0.08, indicating that the model has a good fit and the residual error between the observed and implied correlation matrices is minimal. Furthermore, the **Normed Fit Index (NFI)** value of **0.912** exceeds the generally accepted requirement of 0.90.

Table 2 Path Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	T-Value	P-Value	Result
H1	Motivation \rightarrow Decision to Study	0.325	4.842	0.000	Supported
H2	Motivation \rightarrow Perceive benefits	0.612	14.215	0.000	Supported
H3	Perceive Benefits Motivation \rightarrow Perceive	0.357	7.954	0.000	Supported

Hypothesis	Path Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	T-Value	P-Value	Result
	Benefits → Decision to Study				

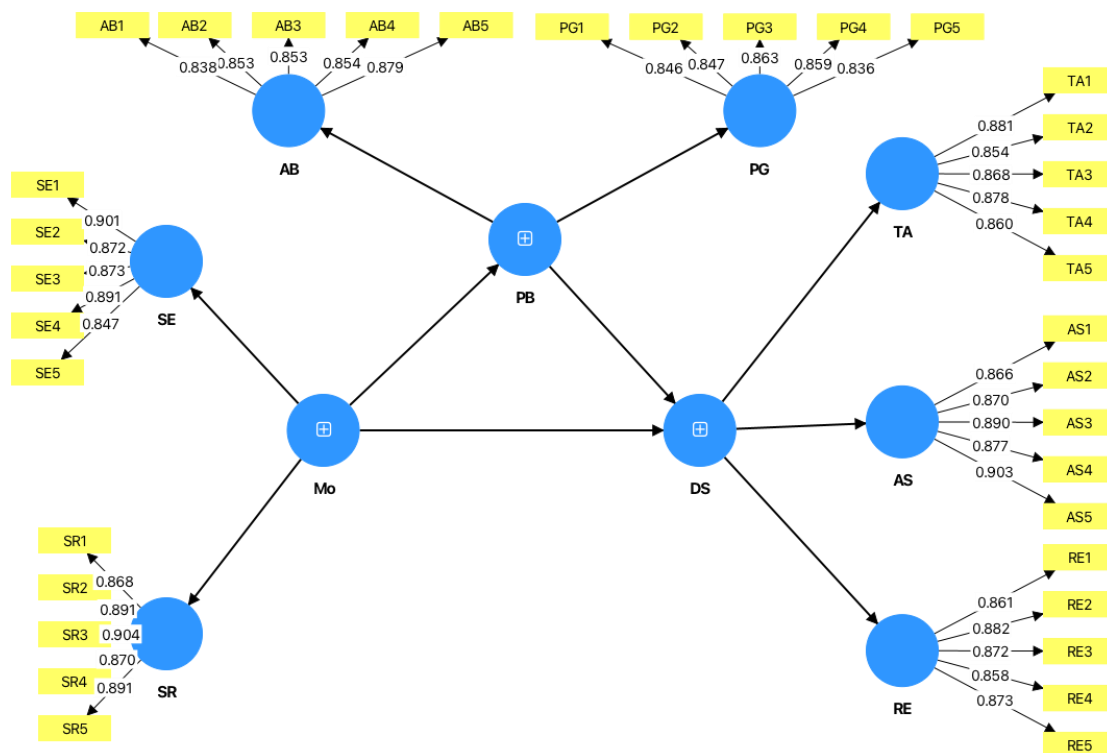
Table 2 shows that Motivation has a large effect ($f^2 = 0.600$) on Perceive Benefits. In predicting the Decision to Study, Perceive Benefits have a large effect ($f^2 = 0.535$), while Motivation contributes a medium effect ($f^2 = 0.165$). Confirms that both constructs are main predictors in the model.

The Variance Accounted For (VAF) for the mediation was **52.3%**, indicating that Perceived Benefits act as a **partial mediator**.

$$VAF = \frac{\text{Indirect Effect}}{\text{Total Effect}} = \frac{0.357}{0.682} = 0.523 \text{ or } 52.3\%$$

the value falls between 20% and 80%, it is concluded that Perceive Benefits serve as a Partial Mediator in this model. This found that while internal motivation directly drives the students' decision, the cognitive perception of academic and personal benefits significantly enhances and facilitates the final enrollment commitment.

Figure 2 Evaluation of the Measurement Model



As shown in Figure 2, the outer loadings for all indicators within each dimension range from 0.838 to 0.904. Values significantly exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, demonstrating that each indicator possesses a high capability to explain its assigned latent construct.

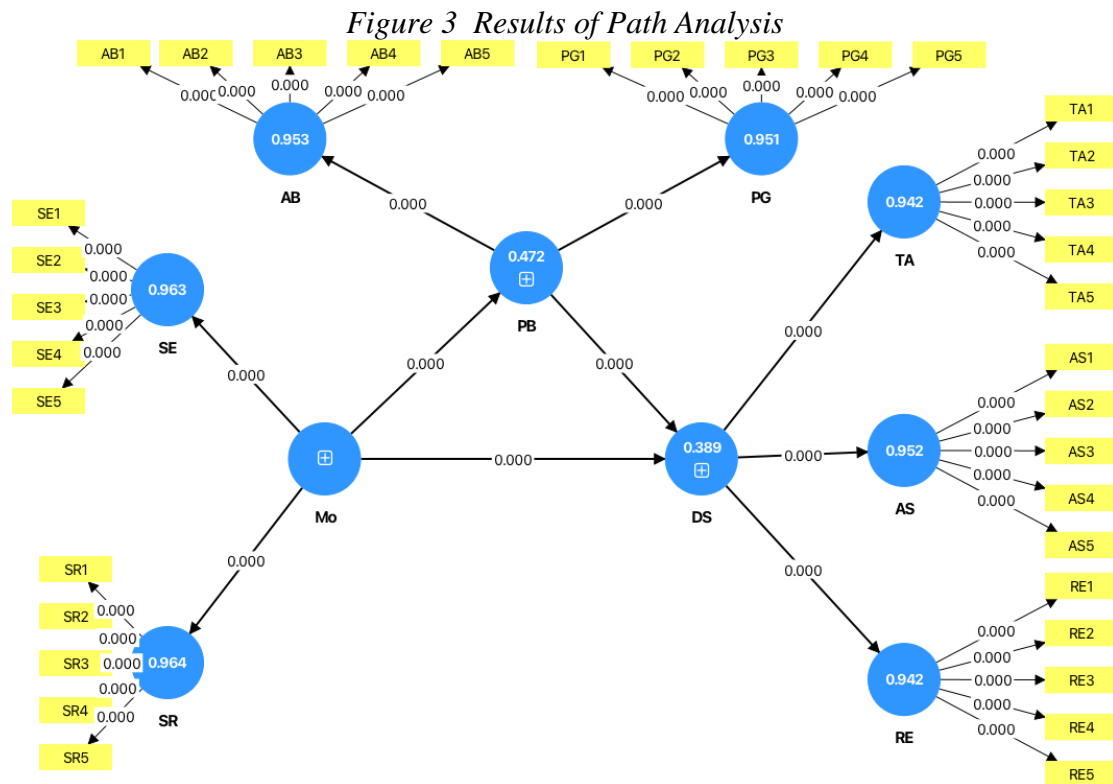


Figure 3 Show the path analysis results the directional influence between variables, with all path relationships yielding P-values of 0.000, thereby demonstrating that the connections during the independent, mediating, and dependent variables are statistically significant. The model's predictive power, represented by the Coefficient of Determination (R^2), shows that Perceived Benefits (PB) has an R^2 of 0.472, while the Decision to Study (DS) has an R^2 of 0.389. Additionally, indicator reliability is established as the outer loadings for all are statistically significant at $p = 0.000$, confirming the instrument's effectiveness and validity in measuring the latent constructs.

Discussion

The findings reveal that while Chinese students are internally motivated by self-discipline and academic goals, the decision to enroll is finalized only when they perceive tangible benefits. **Assurance** (Trust and Credibility) is the strongest dimension of the decision process ($\beta = 0.975$), confirming that students prioritize institutional reputation to minimize the risks of studying abroad.

The strong mediation effect (52.3%) suggests that Perceived Benefits are the main mechanism through which motivation is translated into action. Even a highly motivated student requires a clear perception of how a Thai degree will improve their career prospects or personal growth before committing to enrollment. This aligns with the "Rational Consumer" perspective of international education (Wang & Yu, 2023).

4. Conclusion And Suggestions

4.1 Conclusion

The study confirms that perceived benefits serve as a vital psychological bridge. Motivation triggers the interest, but perceived academic value and personal development opportunities cement the decision. Institutional trust (Assurance) remains the non-negotiable requirement for Chinese students in Thailand.

4.2 Suggestions

1. **Focus on Core Service Quality** Universities should emphasize "Assurance" in marketing, highlighting international accreditations, campus safety, and faculty expertise.
2. **Personal Growth** Since Personal Growth ($\beta = 0.976$) was a primary benefit factor, recruitment campaigns should showcase international networking and global citizenship opportunities.
3. **Policy Integration** the Thai Ministry of Education should continue streamlining visa documentation Responsiveness to maintain a competitive edge.
4. **Future Research** Longitudinal studies are recommended to track if perceived benefits meet actual student satisfaction post-graduation.

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