

An Inquiry into the Motivation to Study English Abroad:  
Voice from Students and Parents  
การศึกษาแรงจูงใจการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษ  
ผ่านโครงการแลกเปลี่ยนวัฒนธรรมต่างประเทศ

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## Abstract

This study aimed to investigate integrative and instrumental motivations to study English abroad of Thai exchange students and to examine parents' expectations for sending their children to study English abroad. This research used a mixed-method approach with a sequential explanatory design. A questionnaire was used to collect data from 200 exchange students and 200 of their parents and a focus group interview was used with students and parents, eliciting in-depth data. The findings of this study indicated that students and parents reported having highly integrative motivation, and there were differences between students' motivation and parents' expectations.

**Keywords :** Motivation to study abroad, exchange students, parents' expectations

## บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยฉบับนี้ทำขึ้นเพื่อสำรวจแรงจูงใจซึ่งแยกออกเป็นแรงจูงใจเชิงบูรณาการ และแรงจูงใจเชิงเครื่องมือในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษในต่างประเทศของนักเรียนและสำรวจความคาดหวังของ 200 คน เพื่อหาแรงจูงใจในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษในต่างประเทศ ผู้วิจัยใช้สัมภาษณ์กลุ่มเจาะจงเพื่อหาข้อมูลเชิงลึกของกลุ่มตัวอย่าง ผลการศึกษาแสดงว่านักเรียนและผู้ปกครองมีแรงจูงใจเชิงบูรณาการในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษในต่างประเทศที่สูง

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อย่างไรก็ตามผู้ปกครองมีความคาดหวังที่ส่งนักเรียนเรียนภาษาอังกฤษในต่างประเทศมากกว่า งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาแรงจูงใจในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ

**คำสำคัญ :** แรงจูงใจในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษในต่างประเทศ นักเรียนแลกเปลี่ยน ความคาดหวังของผู้ปกครอง

## Introduction

English is very important since it has become a global language, used in business, manufacturing, technology, global trading markets, and education (Crystal & Nunan, 2003). With this importance, the Ministry of Education in Thailand stipulated that it is a requirement of Thai students to learn English as a compulsory subject in basic education and higher education. Even though English is a required subject, prior studies have pointed out that learning English has been reported as unsuccessful (Asian Correspondent, 2012).

To improve English proficiency, student exchange programs in English speaking countries have become popular among Thai students. Leask (2004) claimed that a student exchange program does not only provide learners with a good opportunity to become competence speakers, but it also promotes the internationalization of education. Similarly, Ryan (2003) pointed out that people learning a foreign language abroad experience a process of increased curiosity about culture and intercultural relations. Furthermore, Tsai (2011) pointed out that studying English abroad will inevitably assist students in discovering the context of conversational English, something that cannot be taught in the classroom.

There is another reason for student participation to study English abroad: parent's expectations. It is common in Thailand for parents to enroll their children in multiple English programs. A student exchange program has become a popular choice for language learning among parents. This rising trend of parent's expectations does not only demonstrate the interest in their children's advancement, but it also suggests that the parents are interested in being a co-learner in their children's academic journey. Li (2001) observed that the expectations of Chinese parents played a significant role in their children's school achievement. This means that even countries with more economic development still have similar goals when considering educational programs.

Even though the student exchange program has gained popularity among international students and parents, little is known about why these two groups decided to participate in this program when there are many other ways to improve English proficiency. As a result, this research was conducted to investigate the reasons why students and parents decide to enroll in a student exchange program. In so doing, we used the theoretical lens of motivation to understand why individuals decide to enroll

in a student exchange program. The next section presents the background literature for this study.

## Background Literature

### Motivation for Studying Abroad

Several researchers have used motivation as a theoretical lens to investigate why students decide to learn English in the classroom context, but little research has been conducted to examine motivation to study English abroad. Gardner and Lambert (1972) divided the notion of motivation into two main categories: *integrative* and *instrumental* motivations. Integrative motivation involves the purpose in learning English language in order to become part of community or society to speak English. Instrumental motivation involves the practical concepts in learning English language in terms of increasing education and career's opportunities (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

Prior studies (e.g., Frieze, Li, and Olsen, 2013; Morreale; 2011; Tsai; 2011; Zanghar, 2012) have pointed out that students reported having both integrative and instrumental motivations to study English abroad. For example, Frieze et al. (2013) pointed out that students' motivation to study English abroad came from a desire for achievement. Zanghar (2012) conducted research regarding instrumental and integrative motivation among undergraduate Libyan students of English as a foreign language. His findings revealed that the students had a high instrumental and integrative motivation to

learn English. His findings were attributed to the positive impression and affirmative perspective the Libyan students towards the West's people and foreign countries. The positive impression included two main factors: the role of Libyan students who lived and studied abroad in English-speaking countries, and the positive traits to the Libyan students who lived in Libya.

In addition, Morreale (2011) researched study abroad and motivation in university students learning a foreign language at a large urban university located in the Mid-west of the United States. The result showed that study abroad plays an important role in facilitating increase motivation and decreased anxiety. Tsai (2011) studied the role of motivation with EFL students who studied in the United States. The result showed the intercultural learning could affect the EFL students' motivation to learn English which indeed facilitated their foreign language learning in a study abroad environment. It was also noted that integrative and instrumental motivations occurred and in virtually equal parts.

### Parents' Expectations for Sending Their Children to Study English Abroad

Parents' expectations for their children's education in particular are attitudes about their children's academic success and education outcomes (Cook, 2009). The goals that a parent sets for their children are based upon their perspective of a) what they believe is needed to be learned, and b) whatever practical

applications they believe the education has. Prior research has examined parent's expectations for sending their children to study English abroad as follows.

Zhang (2015) studied inter-cultural identity and parental expectation in the case of overseas youth programs. The study showed that parents' preferences for their children's future professional roles had a significant relationship with their international travel experience. However, parent's international travel experiences were also related to their opinion of the overseas youth program. Parents were noted as having their own perceived benefits of the trip, as well as their own desires and intentions for the program. A parent's expectations will in some way always manage to be a factor in the things that their children do while under their care, and this can often include attitudes and ideas.

Additionally, Morris, Lafontaine, Pichette, and Serres (2013) studied affective variables, parental involvement and competence among South Korean high school learners of English. The study investigated the relationships between various affective variables and two measures of competence in English. It found that students have strong motivation level of competence. The parent's roles seem to be minimal within the whole scope of their children's learning, their involvement. It is linked with the student's levels of attitude and motivation.

Finally, Li (2001) studied expectations of Chinese immigrant parents for their children's

education. Examined in this study specifically was the interplay of Chinese tradition and the Canadian classroom. The study found that their expectations reflected their deeply ingrained cultural values, their desire for a better life, their striving for excellence, and their struggle to adjust to their visible minority status. The Chinese parent's expectations played a significant role in their children's school achievement. Additionally, the expectations of parents always had some sort of effect on their children.

### Research Questions:

1. What motivates students at a private exchange organization to study English abroad?
2. What are parent's expectations for sending their children to study English abroad?
3. How does student's motivation relate to parent's expectations to study English abroad?

### Theoretical Perspective

In this study, I was employed the motivation theory developed by Gardner (1985). Gardner (1985) spoke of two kinds of motivation, labeled as 'integrative' and 'instrumental.' Integrative motivation refers to the learners' desire to communicate or integrate with the members of the target language's community while instrumental motivation refers to more functional reasons for learning the language in order to get a better job, a higher salary or pass an examination. According to a simple representation of the socio-educational model,

motivation is directly linked to the success of learning the language. The following model is a representation of Gardner’s explanation.

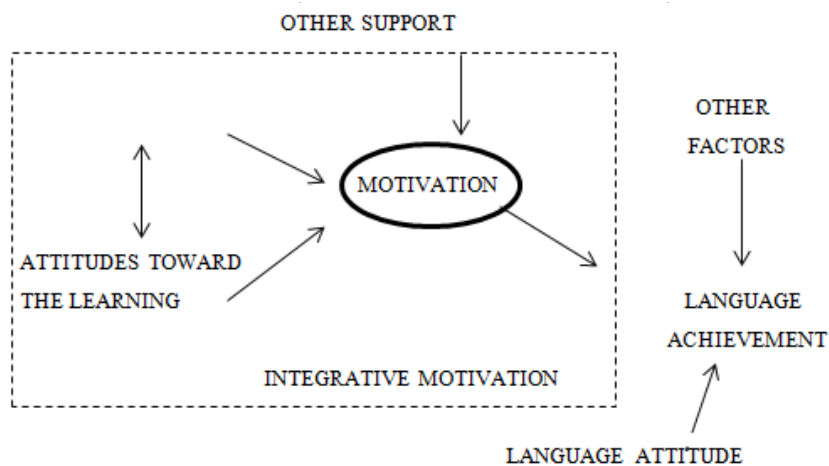


Figure 1 – A simple representation of the socio-educational model

As shown in Figure 1, integrativeness and attitudes toward the learning situation influence motivation in learning a second language. In Gardner’s model, motivation is directly linked to the success of learning a new language. Also, motivation and language attitude influence language achievement. There are other factors influencing language achievement as well, such as parental encouragement, teachers, and peers.

### Context of the Study

This study was conducted at a private exchange organization. Because of ethical concerns, it was essential to use a pseudonym to represent the organization. The outcome of the study was to determine student goals, parent goals, and the combination of the two. Throughout this research, I referred to this fictitious organization under the pseudonym

“International School.” However, to help readers understand the context of this study, I provided general information about the actual private exchange organization. The International School is located in Bangkok, and is a program that sends students from all over the world are sent to study in public high schools and private schools in the United States and Canada.

### Participants

The participants in this study were surveyed participants and interviewed participants. The surveyed participants, there were 200 exchange students and 200 of their parents in a private exchange organization. For students, 57% were female (114) and 43% were male (86), and parents, 59% were female (118) and 41% were male (82). The interview participants were purposively contacted for interviews which consisted of three exchange

students and three parents who shared their opinions in an open-ended question. The criteria to choose interview participants were unique, interesting, and willingness to participate (Stake, 1995).

### Research Instruments

The research instruments were a questionnaire and a focus-group interview protocol. The questionnaire was designed to investigate the trend of student's motivation to study English abroad and parent's expectations for sending their children abroad. The questionnaire (both for students and parents) was adapted from Gardner and Lambert (1972). There were 30 items with a four-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4).

The questionnaire was divided into six categories of integrative and instrumental motivations. For integrative motivation, three aspects were included: degree of integrativeness, interest in foreign language, and desire to learn language. For instrumental motivation three aspects were included: degree of instrumentality, motivational intensity, and parental encouragement. The questionnaire was translated into Thai language by using a collaborative translation approach (Craig and Douglas, 2007) and was reviewed through the IOC index by three experts. The IOC result of students' questionnaire was 0.85 and parents' expectations was 0.95. The reliability check from the pilot test as 0.85 for student questionnaire and 0.86 for parent questionnaire.

Apart from the questionnaire, a focus group interview was also implemented to examine data in-depth. A focus group interview was used to explain information regarding individual motivation and expectations to study English abroad. I purposefully chose three exchange students and three parents who answered an open-ended question and interviewed them together. I put them in the same room and explained to the purpose of the study. The four interviews focused on environment, culture, education/career, and encouragement.

### Data collection

The questionnaires were administered to students and parents face to face at a private exchange organization. The students and parents spent approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. After handing out the questionnaires, I waited to collect them, so the response rate was 100%. The three students and three parents who answered an open-ended question were selected for the interview. The criteria of choosing students and parents for the interview were that they were unique, interesting, and willing to participate. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

### Data Analysis

To analyze the data from the questionnaire, the mean and standard deviation were computed to determine the level of motivation to study English abroad. An

independent t-test was used to evaluate the difference in the mean value of the student’s motivation and the parent’s expectations to study English abroad. To analyze the interview data, I asked them questions regarding the motivation and expectation to study English abroad. The analysis explored four themes which related to integrative and instrumental motivations: environment, culture, education/ career and encouragement.

**Ethical Considerations**

The information in this study was confidentially protected. The participants understood that the results would not affect their exchange program enrollment or placement. The research enabled me to better understanding the student’s motivation to study English abroad and the parent’s expectations for sending their children to study English abroad.

**Findings**

**Student’s Motivation to Study English Abroad**

This section reports the average level of student’s motivation to study English abroad.

**Table 1** Descriptive statistics of student’s motivation to study English abroad

Types of Motivation	M	SD	Level
Integrative Motivation	3.47	0.19	Highest
Instrumental Motivation	3.16	0.13	High
Overall	3.31	0.16	Highest

(N=200)

As shown in Table 1, overall, the students reported having the highest motivation to study abroad ( $M = 3.31, SD = 0.16$ ). The integrative and instrumental motivations were close with a mean difference of 0.31.

**Table 2** Descriptive statistics of integrative motivation

Integrative Motivation	M	SD	Level
Degree of Integrativeness	3.62	0.19	Highest
Interest in Foreign Language	2.52	0.12	High
Desire to Learn Language	3.11	0.13	High
Overall	3.08	0.14	High

(N=200)

As shown in Table 2, degree of Integrativeness was the highest ( $M = 3.62, SD = 0.19$ ), followed by Desire to Learn Language ( $M = 3.11, SD = 0.13$ ), and Interest in Foreign Language ( $M = 2.52, SD = 0.12$ ).

**Table 3** Descriptive statistics of instrumental motivation

Instrumental Motivation	M	SD	Level
Degree of Instrumentality	3.61	0.14	Highest
Motivational Intensity	3.68	0.21	Highest
Parental encouragement	3.56	0.09	Highest
Overall	3.61	0.14	Highest

(N=200)

As shown in Table 3, Motivational Intensity was the highest ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 0.21$ ), followed by Degree of Instrumentality ( $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = 0.14$ ) and Parental encouragement ( $M = 3.56$ ,  $SD = 0.09$ ).

In conclusion, the results provided a sufficient answer for the research question and

showed that the exchange students at a private exchange organization had higher integrative motivation than instrumental motivation. It indicated the personal desire to learn English in order to communicate in a native environment and to be better overall with language usage.

#### Parent's Expectations for Sending Their Children to Study English abroad

This section reports the average level of parent's expectations for sending their children to study English abroad.

**Table 4** Descriptive statistics of integrative and instrumental motivation

Types of Motivation	M	SD	Level
Integrative Motivation	3.57	0.18	Highest
Instrumental Motivation	3.36	0.18	Highest
Overall	3.47	0.18	Highest

(N=200)

As shown in Table 4, the integrative expectations of parents for sending their children to study English abroad was at the highest ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = 0.18$ ). Although, integrative motivation was slightly higher than instrumental motivation, parents had high expectations in integrative and instrumental motivation for sending their children to study English abroad.



**Table 5** Descriptive statistics of integrative motivation

Integrative Motivation	M	SD	Level
Degree of Integrativeness	3.62	0.08	Highest
<b>Interest in Foreign Language</b>	3.67	0.07	Highest
Desire to Learn Language	3.47	0.29	Highest
Overall	3.58	0.14	Highest

(N=200)

As shown in Table 5, the Interest in Foreign Language was the highest ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = 0.07$ ), followed by Degree of Integrativeness ( $M = 3.62$ ,  $SD = 0.08$ ), and Desire to Learn Language ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 0.29$ ).

**Table 6** Descriptive statistics of instrumental motivation

Instrumental Motivation	M	SD	Level
Degree of Instrumentality	3.63	0.03	Highest
Motivational Intensity	2.89	0.27	High
Parental encouragement	3.69	0.05	Highest
Overall	3.40	0.11	Highest

(N=200)

As shown in Table 6, Parental encouragement was indicated as the highest ( $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = 0.05$ ), followed by Degree of Instrumentality ( $M = 3.63$ ,  $SD = 0.03$ ) and Motivational Intensity was as a lowest ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 0.27$ ).

Overall, the result reported integrative motivation to be at the highest. It showed that interest in foreign language was the highest scoring item. Interest in foreign language can

be described as the general interest in studying foreign languages for one or more reasons.

#### **Differences between Student's Motivation and Parent's Expectations**

To answer this research question, there were statistically significant differences between student's motivation and parent's expectations to study English abroad. The result indicated the motivation and expectations to study English abroad were different.

**Table 7** Comparisons between student's motivation and parent's expectations

Motivation	Participants	M	SD	t	df	Sig p-value
Integrative	Students (N=200)	99.49	7.77			0.001*
&				-6.41	398	
Instrumental	Parents (N=200)	103.85	5.65			

\*p .001

### Student's motivation and parent's expectations to study English abroad

This section examined student's motivation and parent's expectations to study English abroad based on four themes, which are (1) environment, (2) culture, (3) education/career, and (4) encouragement. The information from a focus group interview was to compare opinions of students and parents.

The students and parents agreed that studying English would be a great opportunity to speak English in a native environment where they would be able to speak English in daily conversations. The students could engage the learning tasks of social environment learning. Also, the parents seemed to think that studying English in a native environment could lead their children to have English proficiency. Their children could engage with native speakers and learn to speak English through cultural exchange.

Moreover, living and studying English abroad would provide students the opportunity to explore a different culture. From the interview, it showed that students and parents were highly motivated in learning English through cultural

exchange. They would not only learn English but would also learn the way of life, adapt to a different culture and have life experiences while studying English abroad. The students and parents considered education as the top priority and academic achievement.

A student and a parent agreed that the student exchange program would keep them academically motivated. It could be said that the student exchange program could lead to higher education and a better career. All parents wanted their children to achieve a privileged position through the student exchange program. The parent's expectations played the most important role in their children's success in terms of life experiences and career choice. Moreover, students believed that parents would be linked to their success. They both agreed that the student exchange program would prepare them with the English and social skills necessary for improving their abilities.

In conclusion, integrative and instrumental motivations played a role in students and parents' awareness to study English abroad. Integrative motivation showed a desire to study English by

communicating with native speakers naturally. In contrast, instrumental motivation showed a desire to study English in order to gain practical opportunities.

## Discussion

### Student's Motivation to Study English Abroad

The findings from the study indicated that the student's motivation to study English abroad at a private exchange organization, as measured by the means in integrative motivation and instrumental motivation was at the highest level. When considering each category of motivation, integrative motivation was at the higher level. It indicated that the students desired to study English abroad in order to communicate English in a native community. This is similar to the previous studies in integrative motivation and instrumental motivation to study English abroad such as Frieze, Li, and Olsen (2013), Daana and Tahaineh (2013), Zanghar (2012), and Tsai (2011). The participants of these previous studies had equal integrative motivation and instrumental motivations to study English.

Based on the findings of the study, it can be said that students at a private exchange organization were motivated to study English abroad as they found that English was very important for various reasons, such as becoming part of the English-speaking country, and getting involved with English-speaking activities. A possible explanation could be that English became important for students once they

became aware of the fact that they may find a better opportunity for their future purposes. Gardner (1985) claimed, the students who had high motivation learned faster than the students who had low motivation. According to the survey, students and parents had high integrative motivation than instrumental motivations. Similarly, Karbor (2012) found that integratively motivated learners and high strategy users were more proficient than instrumentally motivated learners and low strategy users.

### Parent's expectations for sending their children to study English abroad

The overall mean score reported that the parent's expectations for sending their children to study English abroad was at the highest level. It indicated that the integrative motivation was at the highest. This could be seen as parents wanted their children's learning to be a part of another society. According to the findings, integrative motivation was directly related to instrumental motivation, which explains that parent's expectations were a strong influence on their children to be successful in English language learning. In the study, there was a statistical significantly difference between student's motivation and parent's expectations to study English abroad. Zhang (2015) found that parent's expectations in English learning could benefit their children in future purposes. Similarly, Li (2001) claimed that parent's expectations reflected their desire for a better life and their life experiences.

The focus group interviews clearly answered that students and parents had high integrative motivation to study English abroad. Based on the focus group interviews, the students were interested in the studying abroad as they wanted to experience a native English-speaking country in order to increase their English skills. According to parent's expectations, the parents considered the student exchange program as they could see a benefit of studying English abroad. They expected their children to be English proficient.

## Recommendations

As the finding of the present study indicate that students and parents had high integrative motivation to study English abroad. The study aimed to determine the student's motivation and parent's expectations level in studying English abroad. The international agency may need to prepare the students and parents before their trip in helping them to be aware of the cultural diversity and living in a new environment. It will be beneficial for their English language learning, higher education plans and careers. Further studies should be conducted with the other group of students and parents who would like to enroll in a private exchange organization. The investigation should be included student's age, gender, and learning styles in the study.

## Conclusions

This study attempts to investigate student's motivation to study English abroad and to examine parent's expectations to send their children to study English abroad. The findings in this study suggest that both students and parents tend to have more integrative motivation than instrumental motivation. Students and parents highly expected to have life experiences in a native English-speaking country where they could integrate the English language through cultural exchange. Becoming a part of a native English-speaking environment would lead them to be able to communicate better English in terms of increasing listening and speaking abilities. The students and parents were aware of the competitiveness of education which requires a higher English proficiency. Motivation and expectations were factors which contributed to the main reason for students and parents to be successful in English language learning. The findings of this research could help the students, parents and the international agency in planning and giving better information for their education choices. To sum up, this study defines the integrative and instrumental motivations of Thai exchange students and parents at a private exchange organization in English language learning. The high integrative motivation of students and parent's expectations should be the key to become successful and higher English proficiency.

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