

Guidelines for Enhancing Lifelong Learning for Chinese Students Studying in Thailand

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Abstract

The global landscape of higher education has witnessed a significant surge in international student mobility, with Chinese students representing the largest cohort worldwide. Thailand has emerged as an increasingly attractive destination for these students, particularly between 2023 and 2025. This article synthesizes existing literature and analytical findings to propose practical guidelines for enhancing lifelong learning (LLL) among Chinese students in Thailand. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks such as Andragogy, Social Cognitive Theory, Acculturation Theory, and Human Capital Theory, the paper identifies key facilitators and barriers to LLL engagement. The proposed guidelines offer actionable recommendations for Thai higher education institutions, Chinese students, and policymakers, aiming to foster a robust LLL mindset, cultivate essential skills, and maximize the overall benefits of their international educational experience.

Keywords: *Lifelong Learning, Chinese Students, Thailand, International Education, Guidelines, Andragogy, Social Cognitive Theory, Acculturation Theory, Human Capital Theory.*

Introduction

The landscape of global higher education has undergone rapid transformation over the past decade. Notably, the Asian region has emerged as a significant hub for economic and social growth, leading to an increasing importance of international student mobility. Students from the People's Republic of China consistently represent the largest cohort of international students worldwide, with over 1 million Chinese students pursuing their education abroad (IIE, 2023). This trend reflects evolving Chinese educational policies, economic expansion, and a national demand for access to quality global education.

During the period of 2023-2025, a distinct trend has become evident: a growing number of Chinese students are increasingly considering Thailand as a primary destination for their higher education. This shift is corroborated by reports such as that from the British Council (2023), which highlights a changing pattern in Chinese student mobility towards Southeast Asian destinations. Several key factors contribute to Thailand's increasing appeal for Chinese students:

1. Strong Bilateral Relations and Educational Support Policies: China's "Belt and Road

Initiative" (BRI) has fostered closer cooperation with Thailand across various sectors, including education. This facilitates student exchange programs and promotes scholarship opportunities (Chen & Xu, 2020).

2. Affordable Costs: Compared to Western countries, the cost of living and tuition fees

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in Thailand are significantly lower, making higher education more accessible for a large number of Chinese students (ICEF Monitor, 2022).

3. Cultural and Geographical Proximity: Thai culture shares certain similarities with

Chinese culture, combined with geographical proximity and convenient travel infrastructure, which collectively ease the adaptation process for Chinese students. This aligns with the "Cultural Distance" concept by Ward, Bochner, & Furnham (2001), which impacts acculturation processes (Li & Chen, 2021).

4. Enhancement of Thai Educational Quality: Many Thai universities have developed

international curricula, often taught in English, and have gained increased recognition in regional and global university rankings (QS World University Rankings, 2023). This attracts students seeking quality education within an international environment.

The influx of Chinese students into Thailand not only contributes positively to the internationalization of Thai universities but also presents a crucial opportunity for these students to develop holistically. However, the experience of studying abroad extends beyond merely acquiring a degree or academic knowledge within the classroom. It encompasses the acquisition and development of essential life skills necessary for future living and career progression, aligning with the concept of "Lifelong Learning."

Lifelong learning is a continuous, voluntary, and self-motivated process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and competencies throughout an individual's life, whether for personal or professional reasons (UNESCO, 2024; European Commission, 2020). In today's rapidly changing and dynamic world, particularly in the digital era where skills can quickly become obsolete, lifelong learning is paramount for adaptation, resilience, and success, both individually and organizationally (OECD, 2023). For Chinese students studying in Thailand, confronting a different educational system, a new culture, and an unfamiliar social environment provides a rich experiential context that can foster attitudes and skills conducive to lifelong learning. As Wang and Liu (2022) indicate, international students' out-of-classroom learning experiences significantly contribute to their skill development and adaptability and Cultivating Professional Skills and Adaptability: Focus on cultivating essential professional skills, including communication, problem-solving, and leadership. Moreover, instilling adaptability and resilience equips students to thrive in diverse and ever-changing professional environments. (Dowroong Watcharinrat et al., 2024)

While extensive research exists on the academic and cultural adaptation of international students, including Chinese students in various countries (e.g., Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001), there remains a notable research gap specifically focusing on "approaches to promoting lifelong learning and the influencing factors for Chinese students studying in Thailand." This is particularly relevant in the current period (2023-2025), characterized by shifts in Chinese student mobility trends and the escalating demand for 21st-century skills (Tan & Lim, 2023).

Therefore, this research holds significant importance in:

1. Understanding Current Status: To explore and comprehend the perceptions, levels of engagement, and forms of lifelong learning among Chinese students in Thailand, providing an overview of their learning needs and behaviors.

2. Identifying Facilitators and Barriers: To ascertain which factors within the Thai environment (e.g., access to information, language proficiency, social networks, institutional support, and cultural context) either promote or impede the development of lifelong learning among Chinese students.

3. Proposing Practical Guidelines: To generate practical recommendations for Thai educational institutions, policymakers, and other stakeholders, enabling them to design and implement effective and sustainable activities or services that promote lifelong learning for Chinese students.

This study will not only enable Chinese students to maximize the benefits of their educational experience in Thailand by developing sustainable learning skills essential for their future but also assist Thai higher education institutions in enhancing their role as regional international learning hubs that genuinely meet the diverse needs of their international student population. Ultimately, this research

aims to contribute to the development of a high-quality human resource base for the region and the world.

This article aims to synthesize existing literature with analytical insights derived from relevant theoretical frameworks to propose practical guidelines. These guidelines are designed to address the unique facilitators and barriers faced by Chinese students in Thailand, ultimately fostering their LLL engagement and maximizing the returns on their international education investment.

Theoretical Framework and Analytical Synthesis

To understand the dynamics of LLL for Chinese students in Thailand, this paper draws upon an integrated conceptual framework comprising four key theories:

Andragogy (Adult Learning Theory - Knowles, 1980; Merriam & Brockett, 2007):

This theory emphasizes that adult learners are self-directed, experience-rich, and motivated by learning that is relevant to their immediate needs and goals. For Chinese students, a shift from more didactic traditional learning to self-directed LLL requires intrinsic motivation and recognition of the practical utility of new knowledge and skills.

Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986):

This theory highlights the reciprocal interaction between individual factors (e.g., self-efficacy), environmental factors (e.g., social support, cultural context), and behavior (e.g., LLL engagement). The Thai environment, with its new social norms and academic practices, significantly influences students' beliefs in their capacity for continuous learning and their willingness to explore new learning avenues through observation and interaction.

Acculturation Theory (Berry, 1997; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001):

This framework explains how individuals adapt to a new culture. A student's acculturation strategy (e.g., integration, separation) and the perceived cultural distance can profoundly impact their engagement with the host culture's informal and non-formal learning opportunities. Students adopting an integrative approach are more likely to seek out diverse experiences that promote LLL.

Human Capital Theory (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964):

This theory posits that investments in education and training enhance an individual's productivity and economic value. For many Chinese students, the pursuit of international education and supplementary LLL activities is a strategic investment to boost their future employability and competitiveness in a globalized job market.

A synthesis of the literature, viewed through these theoretical lenses, reveals several critical insights:

Motivation for LLL: Chinese students are often driven by a strong desire for personal growth and career advancement, aligning with Human Capital Theory. However, their readiness for self-directed learning may vary, necessitating pedagogical approaches that scaffold their transition towards independent LLL (Andragogy).

Environmental Influence: The Thai academic and social environment offers rich opportunities for LLL, particularly through informal learning experiences (Wang & Liu, 2022). Yet, cultural and linguistic barriers (Li & Chen, 2021) can impede deeper engagement, highlighting the role of Acculturation Theory. Peer networks and interaction with diverse groups can foster self-efficacy and new learning behaviors (Social Cognitive Theory).

Institutional Role: University support services, clear communication channels, and dedicated LLL initiatives are crucial for guiding students, overcoming information asymmetry, and providing accessible resources. Lack of such tailored support constitutes a significant barrier (Gu & Maley, 2021).

Outcome Recognition: Formal recognition of non-formal and informal learning (e.g., micro-credentials) can significantly enhance motivation by providing tangible proof of skill development and increasing perceived human capital.

Conceptual Framework

This research is underpinned by a comprehensive conceptual framework that synthesizes several key theories and models from the fields of adult learning, international education, and cross-cultural

psychology. This framework elucidates the complex interplay between individual attributes, the host country environment, and the outcomes related to lifelong learning engagement among Chinese students in Thailand.

Core Concept: Lifelong Learning (LLL) Defined as the continuous, voluntary, and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for personal and professional development (UNESCO, 2024; European Commission, 2020). LLL encompasses formal, non-formal, and informal learning experiences.

Key Theoretical Underpinnings:

Andragogy (Adult Learning Theory - Knowles, 1980):

Postulates: Adult learners are self-directed, draw upon their experiences, are ready to learn, and are motivated by problem-solving relevance. They are often task-oriented and internally motivated.

Relevance: This theory helps understand the intrinsic motivations and self-directed approaches Chinese students might adopt or need to develop for lifelong learning, especially given their transition into a new academic and cultural context.

Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986):

Postulates: Learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behavior. Key constructs include self-efficacy (belief in one's ability to succeed), observational learning (modeling), and outcome expectations.

Relevance: This theory explains how the Thai environment (e.g., interactions with local students, faculty, community, exposure to new learning methods) can influence Chinese students' self-efficacy for lifelong learning, their observational learning of new skills, and their expectations regarding the benefits of continuous learning.

Acculturation Theory (Berry, 1997):

Postulates: Explores how individuals adapt to a new culture. It identifies different acculturation strategies (integration, assimilation, separation, marginalization) based on the desire to maintain one's original culture and engage with the host culture.

Relevance: A student's chosen acculturation strategy can significantly impact their willingness and opportunities to engage in lifelong learning activities outside their ethnic enclave. Integration, for instance, might lead to greater engagement with diverse learning opportunities in Thailand.

Human Capital Theory (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964):

Postulates: Investment in education and training increases an individual's productivity and economic value. Lifelong learning is viewed as an ongoing investment in oneself to enhance skills and knowledge, leading to better career prospects and personal growth.

Relevance: This theory provides a lens to understand the instrumental motivations of Chinese students for engaging in lifelong learning—to enhance their employability and competitive edge in the global job market upon returning home or seeking international careers.

Interacting Components of the Framework:

Student-Specific Factors (Individual Characteristics):

Prior Learning Experiences: Learning styles, habits from Chinese education system.

Motivation: Intrinsic (personal growth) vs. Extrinsic (career prospects, parents' expectations).

Self-Efficacy: Belief in ability to learn new things in a new environment.

Language Proficiency: English and Thai language skills.

Acculturation Strategy: Approach to engaging with Thai culture.

Host Environment Factors (Thai Context):

Academic Environment: Pedagogical approaches, curriculum flexibility, availability of non-formal courses, faculty support.

Social & Cultural Environment: Opportunities for cultural immersion,

social networks (local/international), perceived cultural distance, community engagement.

Institutional Support Systems: Counseling, career services, extracurricular activities, student organizations, LLL initiatives by universities.

External Learning Opportunities: Availability of workshops, language classes, volunteer work, internships outside the university.

Engagement in Lifelong Learning Activities:

Formal Learning: Pursuing additional degrees/certificates, auditing courses.

Non-formal Learning: Workshops, seminars, language classes, skill-based training.

Informal Learning: Self-study, peer learning, cultural immersion, practical experiences, volunteering, networking.

Outcomes of Lifelong Learning:

Enhanced Skills: Critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, digital literacy, cross-cultural competence, adaptability.

Personal Growth: Increased self-awareness, confidence, resilience, global mindset.

Career Readiness: Improved employability, professional networking, entrepreneurial skills.

Academic Achievement: Deeper understanding, improved academic performance.

Proposed Guidelines for Enhancement:

Based on the analysis of these interacting factors, this research aims to identify effective guidelines. These guidelines will emerge from understanding:

1. How student-specific factors (A) interact with host environment factors (B) to influence engagement in LLL (C).
2. The perceived value and impact of LLL engagement on student outcomes (D).

The guidelines will focus on actionable recommendations for universities and other stakeholders to optimize the host environment (B) and cultivate student agency (A) to maximize their LLL engagement (C) and ultimately achieve positive outcomes (D).

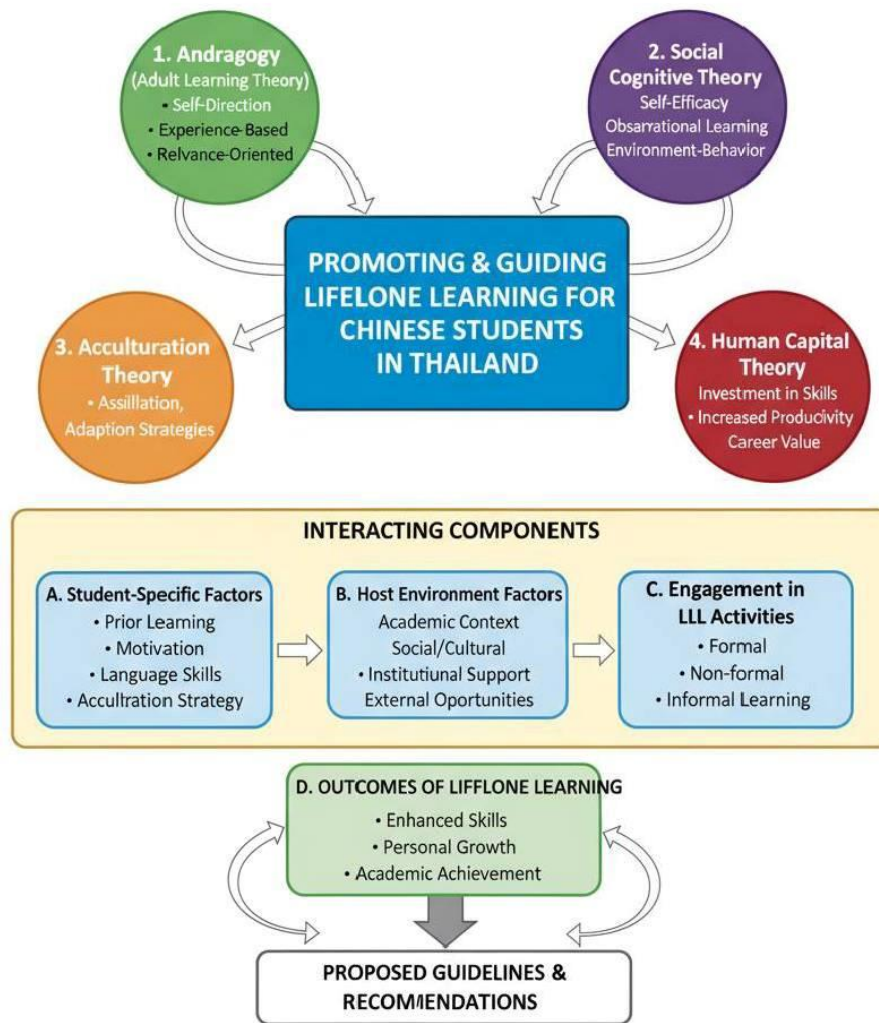


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Guidelines for Enhancing Lifelong Learning for Chinese Students Studying in Thailand

Based on the aforementioned synthesis and analytical findings, the following guidelines are proposed for various stakeholders to effectively enhance lifelong learning for Chinese students studying in Thailand.

For Thai Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) HEIs are pivotal in creating an enabling environment for LLL.

Curriculum and Pedagogical Innovation:

Integrate LLL Competencies: Embed explicit learning outcomes focused on self-directed learning, critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy across all curricula (OECD, 2023).

Promote Active & Experiential Learning: Shift towards pedagogies emphasizing project-based learning, case studies, internships, and service-learning, which are highly effective for adult learners (Knowles, 1980).

Diversify Learning Pathways: Offer a wide array of elective courses, short courses, workshops, and micro-credentials in English and/or Thai, particularly in high-demand areas like AI, data analytics, sustainability, and cross-cultural communication.

Robust Support Services and Resources:

Centralized Multi-lingual LLL Hub: Establish an accessible online platform (in Chinese, English, and Thai) detailing all LLL opportunities within and outside the university, including workshops, community events, and volunteering.

Enhanced Career Development Support: Provide specialized counseling, workshops on global job market trends, and networking events for Chinese students, directly linking LLL efforts to enhanced career prospects (Becker, 1964).

Comprehensive Language Assistance: Offer tiered Thai language courses and advanced academic English support, recognizing that language proficiency is a key facilitator for cultural integration and access to diverse learning resources (Li & Chen, 2021).

Mentorship and Peer Learning Programs: Develop structured mentorship programs (senior students, alumni, faculty) and peer support networks to facilitate social learning and foster a sense of belonging, crucial for overcoming adaptation challenges (Bandura, 1986).

Inclusive Campus Environment and Community Engagement:

Foster Cross-Cultural Integration: Organize regular social, cultural, and academic events that actively encourage interaction between Chinese, Thai, and other international students, promoting integration over separation (Berry, 1997).

Facilitate Local Community Engagement: Partner with local businesses,

NGOs, and community groups to provide volunteering, internship, or project opportunities, enabling informal learning and network building beyond campus.

Recognize LLL Achievements: Implement systems (e.g., digital badges, certificates, transcript notations) to formally acknowledge engagement in non-formal and informal LLL activities, incentivizing continuous participation.

For Chinese Students (Self-Guidance)

Students themselves play a critical role in actively seeking and utilizing LLL opportunities.

Proactive Engagement: Actively seek information on available learning opportunities from university resources, student organizations, and local community groups.

Embrace Cultural Immersion: Consciously participate in Thai cultural activities, practice the Thai language, and engage with locals to enhance cross-cultural competence and facilitate informal learning.

Strategic Goal Setting: Reflect on personal and career aspirations to identify specific skills or knowledge gaps, and then strategically select relevant LLL activities that align with these goals (Knowles, 1980).

Build Diverse Networks: Intentionally build friendships and professional connections with Thai students, other international students, faculty, and local professionals to expand learning horizons and gain varied perspectives (Bandura, 1986).

Utilize Support Services: Make full use of university career services, counseling, and academic support to enhance learning strategies and address adaptation challenges effectively.

For Policymakers and Educational Agencies National and regional policies can create a more supportive ecosystem for LLL.

Promote Inter-Institutional Collaboration: Develop policies and funding mechanisms that encourage collaboration among Thai HEIs to share LLL resources and allow cross-registration for non-degree courses, broadening student access.

Develop National Micro-credential Frameworks:

Establish clear national standards and recognition systems for micro-credentials and other forms of non-degree learning, providing tangible value and portability to LLL achievements (European Commission, 2020).

Invest in Digital Learning Infrastructure:

Support the development of high-quality, accessible online learning platforms offering a diverse range of LLL courses, especially for students with geographical or time constraints.

Streamline Post-Study Opportunities:

Implement clearer and more flexible visa regulations for internships, post-study work, or entrepreneurial activities, enabling students to apply and further develop their LLL skills within Thailand.

Conclusion

The increasing number of Chinese students choosing Thailand for higher education represents a significant opportunity to foster lifelong learning skills crucial for the 21st century. By synthesizing insights from established theories of adult learning, social cognition, acculturation, and human capital, this paper has elucidated the complex interplay of individual and environmental factors influencing LLL engagement. The proposed guidelines provide a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder roadmap for Thai higher education institutions, Chinese students, and policymakers. Implementing these evidence-based recommendations can not only enhance the academic and personal development of Chinese students but also strengthen Thailand's position as a vibrant, inclusive, and forward-thinking hub for international education, contributing to the global human capital pool.

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