THE IMPACT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT, AND TEACHER SUPPORT ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS MAJORING IN THAI LANGUAGE IN YUNNAN, CHINA: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF ACADEMIC EMOTIONS*

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Received 27 August 2025; Revised 2 September 2025; Accepted 4 September 2025

Abstract

Yunnan, China's gateway to Thailand, fuels intense trade and demand for Thai language specialists. Every public university now trains Thai language specialists, whose quality shapes China-Thai cooperation and serves as a soft-power benchmark, making student engagement a critical outcome to explain. Clarifying the determinants of student engagement is therefore critical. Grounded in self-determination and control–value theories, this study surveyed 924 Thai-major undergraduates across public universities in Yunnan. Structural analyses revealed that emotional intelligence, professional commitment, and teacher support predict student engagement directly and exert additional indirect effects through academic emotions. Academic emotions functioned as a pivotal mechanism that both mediates and moderates the influence of individual and

Citation:

* Yuan Yidan and Sudaporn Pongpisanu. (2025). The Impact Of Emotional Intelligence, Professional Commitment, And Teacher Support On Student Engagement Among Undergraduate Students Majoring In Thai Language In Yunnan, China: The Mediating Role Of Academic Emotions. Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Development, 3(5), 136-158.;

DOI: https://doi.org/10.

Website: https://so12.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/JISDIADP/

contextual factors on student engagement. The findings support a synergistic "student–teacher–institution" framework for cultivating high-quality foreign language talent.

Keywords: Student Engagement, Emotional Intelligence, Professional Commitment, Academic Emotions, Teacher Support

Introduction

Globalisation has reframed foreign-language proficiency as a strategic asset underpinning China's soft power and global competitiveness (Xia, 2024), prompting universities to cultivate linguistic capital that advances the internationalisation of national education (Xu & Zhan, 2024). As China's gateway to Southeast Asia, Yunnan has rapidly expanded Thai-language majors.As economic and cultural exchanges between China and Thailand continue to deepen, market demand for Thai-language professionals is expanding on two fronts: a quantitative increase in the required workforce and a qualitative elevation of competence standards. Student engagement is a robust predictor of learning quality and future attainment in foreign-language education (Li & Bai, 2018; Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2021), however, extant research has either treated engagement as a global construct or isolated single determinants, leaving the interplay between internal (e.g., emotional intelligence, professional commitment) and external (e.g., teacher support) variables in domain-specific contexts insufficiently examined. Focusing on Thai-major undergraduates in Yunnan's public universities, this study aims to model the antecedents of engagement and explicate their mediating pathways.

Objectives

The main research contents include the following points:

1. To examine the current status of student engagement among Thai language undergraduates in Yunnan.

2. To Construct a model of factors influencing student engagement,verify the causal relationship between emotional intelligence,professional commitment and teacher support on student engagement,and verify the mediating role of academic emotions.

3. Help Thai language major students understand their own deficiencies in emotional intelligence, professional commitment, and academic emotions, and propose improvement suggestions for them.

4. Understanding the roles of emotional intelligence, professional commitment, academic emotions, and teacher support in student engagement, providing suggestions for teachers and policymaker.

Literature Review

1. Student Engagement

Drawing on social control theory, student engagement (SEG) is defined as the affective linkage between individuals and their educational institution, encompassing commitment, belief, belonging, and involvement (Costello & Laub, 2020). Early studies reduced engagement to a "time-on-task ⟶ achievement" relation (Appleton et al., 2006); later work incorporated psychological investment in school activities (Astin, 1985) and deliberate effort to master knowledge and skills (Newmann, 1992), conceptualising engagement as a positive learning state (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Fredricks (2004) synthesised Bloom's taxonomy and authentic learning contexts into a tripartite model: behavioural engagement (active participation in academic activities), emotional engagement (affective reactions to those activities), and cognitive engagement (deployment of sophisticated strategies and mental resources). These three dimensions jointly determine the depth and quality of learning. Engagement is a dynamic interaction

between the person and the environment (Fredricks et al., 2004). This study investigates Thai majors at Yunnan public universities, modeling how interpersonal variables, emotional intelligence, professional commitment, and academic emotions interact with the contextual variable of teacher support, with academic emotions posited as a mediator.

2. Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) constitutes a non-cognitive competency that encompasses the accurate perception and expression of affect, its strategic deployment to facilitate cognition, the comprehension of emotional meanings, and adaptive regulation (Mayer et al., 2001). Framed as a domain-specific information-processing skill (Cherniss et al., 2006), EI is embedded within a social-cognitive paradigm, which posits reciprocal determinism among personal, behavioural, and environmental influences.

Within educational settings, EI robustly predicts academic adaptation. High-EI learners more effectively mobilize social resources, sustain autonomous motivation, and rapidly reframe setbacks (Wang et al., 2017; Gao, 2022). Accordingly, the following hypotheses are advanced:

H1: Emotional intelligence positively impacts student engagement.

3. Professional Commitment

Professional commitment(PC), construed as the academic analogue of organizational commitment, denotes undergraduates'favourable attitudes and sustained behavioral investment in their chosen discipline (Wu & Lian, 2005). The construct is multidimensional, comprising affective, continuance, normative, and ideal commitment dimensions (Lian et al., 2005). Grounded in Personal Investment Theory, commitment manifests when learners allocate personal resources,time, effort, aptitude, and expertise to domain-specific tasks according to perceived competence and task value (Kadir & Yeung, 2020).The following hypotheses are proposed for this study:

H2: Professional commitment positively impacts student engagement.

4. Teacher Support

Teacher support(TS) refers to students' perceived provision of academic, affective and competence assistance from instructors within the school context and represents a primary source of institutional social support alongside parental and peer networks (Brewster & Bowen, 2004; Sakiz et al., 2012).Grounded in self-determination theory, teacher support is divided into autonomy, emotional and competence support, each corresponding to the universal needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence(Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Satisfaction of these needs fosters autonomous regulation and a sense of belonging, thereby internalising motivation and intensifying engagement (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Building on these premises, the following research hypotheses are proposed.

H3: Teacher support positively impacts student engagement.

5. Academic Emotions

Academic emotions (AE) refer to situation-specific affective reactions elicited by learning tasks, instructional episodes, or achievement outcomes, ranging from excitement during task execution to pride following success and anticipatory anxiety before examinations (Pekrun et al., 2002). Within academic contexts, positive emotions optimize resource allocation, amplify intrinsic motivation, and facilitate self-regulated learning, thereby fostering superior achievement (Pekrun, 2006). Accordingly, the following hypotheses are advanced.

H4: Academic emotions positively impact student engagement.

H5: Emotional intelligence positively impacts academic emotions.

H6: Professional commitment positively impacts academic emotions.

H7: Teacher support positively impacts academic emotions.

Given that academic emotions are dynamic and simultaneously conditioned by emotional intelligence, professional commitment, and teacher support while reciprocally modulating engagement, they operate as proximal

affective indicators that explicate the mechanisms through which psychological need satisfaction galvanizes foreign language learners' sustained behavioral, emotional, and cognitive investment. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are advanced:

H8: Academic emotions play a mediating role in the relationship between Emotional intelligence and student engagement.

H9: Academic emotions play a mediating role in the relationship between Professional commitment and student engagement.

H10: Academic emotions play a mediating role in the relationship between Teacher support and student engagement.

Methodology

Employing a quantitative cross-sectional design, this study validated and analyzed the focal constructs in three integrated steps: first, five experts confirmed item–objective congruence (IOC ≥ 0.80); second, a pilot sample yielded Cronbach's α of 0.83–0.91 ($\alpha > 0.7$) indicating good reliability (Hair et al., 2012), KMO 0.87–0.93, and significant Bartlett's tests ($p < .001$); and third, the main survey data underwent confirmatory factor analysis to affirm measurement quality, followed by structural equation modeling to test the hypothesized paths.

1. Target Population and Sampling Design

The population consisted of 1587 Thai-major undergraduates enrolled in the 10 public universities in Yunnan Province. Taro Yamane's formula (e = 0.05) yielded a minimum sample of 320. Proportional stratified random sampling was employed; each university constituted a stratum, and quotas were allocated according to its share of the total population (Malik et al., 2022). Coordinators distributed Wenjuanxing QR codes during scheduled classes; participation was voluntary. The procedure produced 924 valid responses, with response rates ≥

40% in every stratum, satisfying the assumptions for finite and relatively homogeneous populations.

2. Teacher Support Questionnaire

The conceptualization of teacher support in this study originates from the basic psychological needs sub-theory within Self-Determination Theory. It primarily refers to the perceived attitudes and behaviors of support from teachers in the school environment, specifically in the areas of learning, emotions, and competence. Based on this theoretical framework, teacher support is categorized into three dimensions: teacher autonomy support, teacher emotional support, and teacher competence support.This study draws on the Learning Climate Questionnaire (LCQ) developed by Williams and Deci (Williams & Deci, 1996), the scale developed by Stornes et al. (Stornes et al., 2008), and the scale developed by Sakiz (Sakiz, 2007). Additionally, it references the Teacher Support Questionnaire developed by Chinese scholars Chai and Gong (Chai & Gong, 2013). The research instrument was designed accordingly. Specifically, the questionnaire includes five items measuring teacher autonomy support, four items measuring teacher emotional support, and four items measuring teacher competence support. All items are assessed using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

3. Data Collection Procedure

This study employed an online questionnaire survey method to investigate the learning engagement of undergraduate students majoring in Thai language in Yunnan Province. The data were collected and retrieved via Wenjuanxing, an online survey platform. The primary reason for selecting the questionnaire survey is that, compared to other methods, it can efficiently gather valid data within a short period of time. Additionally, it is convenient for respondents to complete the questionnaire in its entirety and at their own convenience(Malik et al., 2022).

The data collection process began with the calculation of the number of questionnaires to be distributed to each university based on the number of undergraduate students majoring in Thai language. The researchers contacted a Thai language instructor at one of the public universities and distributed the designed questionnaire to undergraduate students majoring in Thai language across different grades through this instructor. The researchers contacted the Thai language instructors at each school to distribute the survey link to the targeted institutions. After clearly informing the participants about the content, purpose, and data confidentiality procedures of the survey, students who met the study criteria were invited to complete the questionnaire voluntarily.This online questionnaire survey allowing at least 1000 students to answer the survey via a link or a QR code at their convenience.

4. Data Preprocessing

The collected data were cleaned, including handling missing values and outliers, to ensure the integrity and accuracy of the data.

5. Statistics used in the research

5.1 Reliability and Validity Assessment

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was employed to assess the internal consistency reliability of the scales. Additionally, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine the structural validity of the scales.

5.2 Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistical analyses were conducted for all variables included in the study (emotional intelligence, professional commitment, academic emotions, teacher support, and student engagement). These analyses involved calculating means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions to provide an overview of the general characteristics of the data.

5.3 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine the relationships between the variables, including emotional intelligence, professional commitment, academic emotions, teacher support, and learning engagement.

5.4 Structural Equation Modeling

A structural equation model was constructed to analyze the relationships between variables and to develop a model of the factors influencing student engagement. Path analysis and model fit indices were used to validate the rationality of the model. The AMOS 29 was employed to examine the mediating role of academic emotions, including tests for direct and indirect effects. Specifically, the direct effects of variables such as emotional intelligence, professional commitment, and teacher support on student engagement were assessed, while the indirect effects mediated by academic emotions were also examined. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how these variables interact and influence student engagement through both direct and mediated pathways.

Results

1. Demographic Information

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of Thai language undergraduate

Variable	Categorles	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	371	40.15
	Female	553	59.85
Grade Level	Freshman	181	19.59
	Sophomore	440	47.62
	Junior	209	22.62
	Senior	94	10.17

Ethnicity	Han Chinese	766	82.9
	Ethnic minorities	158	17.1
Place of Origin	urban area	412	44.59
	rural area	512	55.41

The analytic sample included 924 Thai-major undergraduates: 59.85% female and 40.15% male. Grade levels were distributed as follows: sophomores 47.62%, juniors 22.62%, freshmen 19.59%, and seniors 10.17%. Ethnically, 82.9% identified as Han and 17.1% as ethnic minorities, reflecting China's overall population. Students' backgrounds were nearly evenly split between rural (55.41%) and urban (44.59%) areas.

2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Grounded in theory and a systematic literature review, the study specifies a measurement model encompassing student engagement, emotional intelligence, professional commitment, academic emotions, and teacher support. Confirmatory factor analysis, implemented with Statistical Package, assessed the convergent and discriminant validity of the indicators and their alignment with the hypothesised latent constructs.

Table 2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results, Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Variables	SEG	EI	PC	AE	TS
Source of Questionnaire (Measurement Indicator)	Lam et al (2014), Skinner et al(2008), Wang (2015)	Schaufeli et al(2002), Wang(2002)	Lian et al(2005)	Pekrun et al(2006), Dong and Yu(2007), Ma and Zhang(2010)	Williams and Deci(1996), Stornes et al(2008), Sakiz(2007), Chai and Gong (2013)
No. of Item	15	27	23	25	13
Cronbach's Alpha	0.907	0.945	0.926	0.898	0.907
Factors Loading	0.705~0.759	0.731~0.784	0.693~0.781	0.684~0.757	0.713~0.777
KMO	0.939	0.966	0.948	0.957	0.933

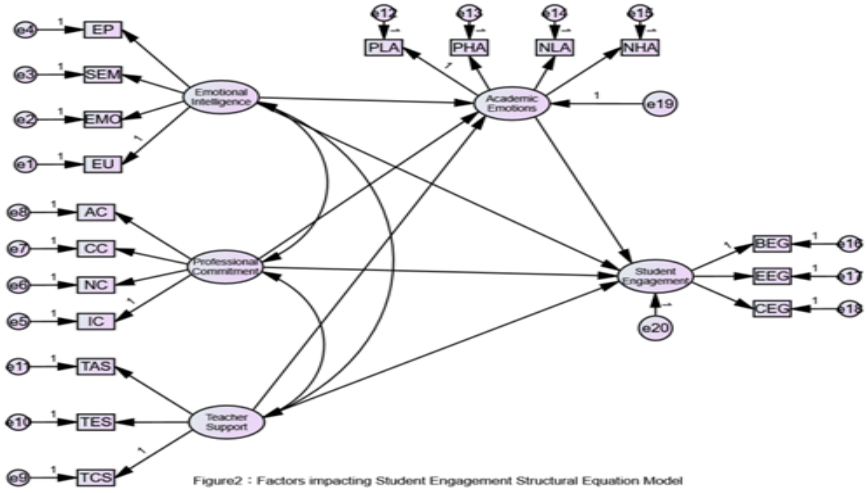
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	6151.78	13844.328	10040.904	11309.683	5494.014
	df	105	351	253	300	78
	p	0	0	0	0	0
Cumulative Variance Explained		62.96%	63.16%	61.63%	61.37%	65.54%
CR		0.772	0.821	0.786	0.793	0.809
AVE		0.530	0.534	0.479	0.489	0.585

Confirmatory factor analysis established construct validity by satisfying convergent and discriminant criteria. Standardised loadings exceeded 0.50, composite reliabilities surpassed 0.70, and average variance extracted values were greater than 0.50 for every latent variable. Discriminant validity was confirmed using the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion: the square root of each construct's AVE surpassed its highest correlation with any other construct.

Table 3 Discriminant Validity

	PC	EI	TS	AE	SEG
PC	**0.692**				
EI	0.632	**0.731**			
TS	0.561	0.57	**0.765**		
AE	0.565	0.608	0.518	**0.699**	
SEG	0.591	0.593	0.628	0.605	**0.728**

Note: The diagonally listed value is the AVE square roots of the variables.AE=Academic Emotion, SEG=Student Engagement, TS=Teacher Support, EI=Emotional Intelligence, PC=Professional Commitment.



3. Structural Equation Model

Structural equation modelling examined the hypothesised relations among latent constructs. SEM's simultaneous estimation of direct, indirect, and total effects permits rigorous appraisal of complex causal pathways (Hair et al., 2012). The specified model, derived from extant theory, depicts the determinants of student engagement among Yunnan's Thai-major undergraduates. Model fit indices and path coefficients for the proposed framework (Figure 2) are reported below.

Table 4 Goodness of Fit

Fit Index	Acceptable	Statistical Values
CMIN/DF	≤5 (Hair, 2011)	1.038
GFI	≥0.9 (Sica & Ghisi, 2007)	0.985
AGFI	≥0.9 (Sica & Ghisi, 2007)	0.979
NFI	≥0.9 (Arbuckle, 1999)	0.98
CFI	≥0.9 (Bentler, 1990)	0.999
TLI	≥0.9 (L. Hu & and Bentler, 1999)	0.999

RMSEA	＜0.05 (McDonald & Ho, 2002)	0.006
RMR	＜0.05 (Whittaker & Schumacker, 2022)	0.015

As shown in Table 4, Model fit is excellent: CMIN/DF = 1.038, GFI = 0.985, AGFI = 0.979, NFI = 0.980, CFI = 0.999, TLI = 0.999, RMSEA = 0.006, RMA = 0.015. All indices satisfy conventional thresholds, confirming adequate model–data correspondence.

4. Research Hypothesis Testing Result

Table 5 Hypothesis Testing Results of the Structural Equation Model

Path			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
TS	**->**	**AE**	0.182	0.042	3.754	**
EI	**->**	**AE**	0.352	0.05	6.374	**
PC	**->**	**AE**	0.24	0.056	4.408	**
TS	**->**	**SEG**	0.312	0.045	6.315	**
EI	**->**	**SEG**	0.148	0.053	2.71	0.007*
PC	**->**	**SEG**	0.18	0.058	3.376	**
AE	**->**	**SEG**	0.252	0.054	4.935	**

Drawing on established theory and prior empirical findings, the study advances a set of directional hypotheses to be tested via structural equation modelling. Statistical significance and effect magnitude will be adjudicated through p-values and standardised path coefficients (β) derived from the model.

Table 5 confirms the hypothesised direct pathways. All four focal constructs exert significant positive effects on student engagement: emotional intelligence (β = 0.148, p = 0.007), professional commitment (β = 0.180, p < 0.001), teacher support (β = 0.312, p < 0.001) and academic emotions (β = 0.252,

p < 0.001). Moreover, emotional intelligence (β = 0.352), professional commitment (β = 0.240) and teacher support (β = 0.182) each significantly enhance academic emotions (all p < 0.001). In Table6 Bootstrap mediation tests (5,000 resamples, 95 % BC) corroborate that academic emotions transmit 37.55 %, 25.31 % and 12.85 % of the total effects of emotional intelligence, professional commitment and teacher support, respectively, onto student engagement, fully supporting H1–H10.

Table 6 Test Results of the Mediating Effect of Academic Emotions

Path	Effects	Estimate	S.E.	P(BC)	95%BC		Effects(%)
					LB	UB	
PC->AE->SEG	Total Effects	0.241	0.053	**	0.134	0.343	\
	Direct Effects	0.180	0.052	0.002*	0.077	0.282	74.68%
	Indirect Effects	0.061	0.019	**	0.030	0.105	25.31%
EI->AE-> SEG	Total Effects	0.237	0.055	**	0.127	0.346	\
	Direct Effects	0.148	0.058	0.012*	0.041	0.268	62.45%
	Indirect Effects	0.089	0.023	**	0.050	0.141	37.55%
TS->AE-> SEG	Total Effects	0.358	0.046	**	0.269	0.447	\
	Direct Effects	0.312	0.047	**	0.221	0.404	87.15%

	Indirect Effects	0.046	0.016	**	0.020	0.082	12.85%

Note: *p＜0.05， **p＜0.001.

Discussion

This study delineates the multilevel determinants of student engagement among Yunnan's Thai-major undergraduates. Emotional intelligence, construed as the capacity to perceive, regulate, and leverage affective information, emerged as a robust antecedent of engagement, enabling learners to neutralise negative states, sustain attention, and mobilise emotions for task completion (Shao et al., 2013). Professional commitment, operating as a psychological contract anchored in belonging, mission, and future orientation, exhibited a strong positive association with student engagement (Xu, 2014; Kong et al., 2016). Teacher support, congruent with self-determination theory, satisfied basic psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence, thereby internalising motivation and amplifying engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Finally, academic emotions,shaped by appraisals of control and value,functioned as both direct predictors and mediators of engagement, transmitting the effects of emotional intelligence, commitment, and support onto sustained participation and achievement (Pekrun, 2006; Wang et al., 2021).

Recommendation

To enhance student engagement, students should value emotional intelligence, regulate emotions, choose majors wisely, and actively participate in major-related activities while seeking teacher feedback. Teachers need to integrate emotional education into teaching, support students' professional commitment, and provide individualized support. Schools should optimize major

settings, promote a positive campus culture, establish emotional regulation support, and create platforms for teacher-student interaction.

Limitations and Further Study

Limitations and directions for future inquiry stem from the study's focus on Thai-major undergraduates within Yunnan's public universities. Although the sample was statistically sufficient, its geographic and disciplinary specificity constrains external validity. Subsequent research should adopt a multi-site, multi-level design that incorporates students from varied regions, disciplines, and academic stages to bolster representativeness. Comparative studies could also juxtapose traditional face-to-face instruction with online or blended modalities to elucidate how instructional context moderates engagement. Finally, integrating macro-level factors (school culture, family dynamics, societal influences) and employing longitudinal or qualitative designs will illuminate causal pathways and temporal dynamics, thereby enriching both theory and practice in student engagement.

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