

GUIDELINES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIC ENROLMENT MANAGEMENT FOR UNDERGRADUATE UNIVERSITIES IN YUNNAN PROVINCE*

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Abstract

In China, higher education is under increasing pressure to meet regional labor market needs while maintaining equity and quality. Recent university enrolment reform has increasingly emphasized diversified, data-informed, and student-centred approaches. As a result, Strategic Enrolment Management (SEM) has become a core governance mechanism. However, existing national enrolment policies provide broad policy direction, but do not fully address the province's differentiated development conditions. This study aims to examine how SEM is implemented in undergraduate universities of Yunnan and proposes a SEM model for Chinese higher education governance. A mixed-methods approach was employed, collecting quantitative data from 549 administrators and teachers across 28 universities, and qualitative data from 17 key informants through in-depth interviews and a Delphi validation process. Data were analyzed

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using descriptive statistics, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), and thematic analysis.

The EFA identified six dimensions of the SEM model: (1) optimization of enrolment organisational structure, (2) enrolment publicity strategies, (3) formulation of dynamic enrolment plans, (4) development of an enrolment information platform, (5) diversified enrolment selection criteria, and (6) post-admission engagement activities and follow-up services. The study proposes a SEM model that connects governance with university planning, digital technology, student support, and educational outcomes. It strengthens equity and quality in undergraduate education in Yunnan.

Keywords: Strategic Enrolment Management, Undergraduate Universities, Higher education governance

Introduction

China began reforming the examination and enrolment system in 2013, and the policy emphasizes the demand for diverse and high-quality talent through systematic arrangements for the College Entrance Examination reform. In 2014, China issued a key decision focusing on deepening the examination and enrolment system reforms, which was to form a model featuring classified examinations, comprehensive evaluations, and diversified admissions. Strategic Enrolment Management (SEM) has emerged as a key mechanism for higher education governance. Unlike traditional enrolment work, which mainly focuses on completing admission quotas, SEM enables dynamic allocation of enrolment quotas based on social and economic development. As Cui (2020) argues, the university enrolment system balances government control, institutional autonomy, and public expectations, while supporting the development of high-quality talent in a changing environment.

Despite national policy efforts, universities face two core challenges: preventing over-enrolment that undermines teaching quality, and avoiding under-enrolment that leaves educational resources underused. To address these challenges, the universities constantly modify the enrolment plans across academic disciplines and major structures to optimize the input-output efficiency to maintain the quality of education through analysis of employment market trends. This reflects that enrolment is no longer understood simply as the acceptance of students but as a strategic process for improving the efficiency of educational development. Under the "Double First-Class" initiative, integrating enrolment with subject development not only reinforces an institution's competitive edge but also ensures sustainable growth in a changing higher education landscape (Wang, 2020).

As part of the fifth wave of provinces undergoing College Entrance Examination reform in 2025, Yunnan faces challenges in student source structure, increasing regional development demands, and systemic transformations within higher education. Enrolment management must respond not only to the general direction of reform, but also to local development needs and institutional conditions. China's demographic shift, marked by a declining birth rate and changing tertiary education demand has intensified competition for student enrolment and prompted universities to adapt strategically (Wu & Cheng, 2025). The policy orientation affects the enrolment mechanism. Such an approach to SEM not only boosts the quality of enrolment but also reinforces the institution's capability to attract a diverse and high-caliber student body, thus securing long-term academic competitiveness and sustainable development (Liu & Gao, 2022). A well-designed enrolment system helps attract talented students and adapt to both general standards and local needs. This balance is important for supporting quality, diversity, and sustainable development (Li & Zeng, 2022). From a theoretical perspective, SEM can be understood as an integrated governance system with key components rather

than a collection of isolated administrative tasks. However, existing studies have largely focused on national reforms, with limited attention to how SEM adapts to regional differences.

This study addresses the gap by analyzing Yunnan undergraduate universities and proposes a model that connects governance with university planning, digital technology, student support, and educational outcomes. In this study, SEM is used as an analytical lens to examine how undergraduate universities in Yunnan manage enrolment under conditions of policy reform and regional complexity, and to develop guidelines for the enrolment reform for Yunnan's undergraduate universities that dynamically adapts to regional development demands, offering solutions for enhancing higher education in Yunnan Province.

Objectives

1. To study the level of the development of Strategic Enrolment Management (SEM) for undergraduate universities in Yunnan Province.
2. To identify the components of SEM through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) in undergraduate universities in Yunnan Province.
3. To propose guidelines for the development of SEM model for undergraduate universities in Yunnan Province.

Methodology

1. Research Methodology

A mixed-methods design was adopted to identify, validate, and interpret the dimensions of Strategic Enrolment Management (SEM) in Yunnan's undergraduate universities. The quantitative component was used to examine the latent structure of SEM, while the qualitative component was used to refine the interpretation of the model and assess expert consensus.

2. Research Steps

(1) A comprehensive literature review was conducted to establish the theoretical foundation. (2) Based on the literature and experts, a questionnaire was constructed under the guidance of theory and concepts. (3) Data were collected from 549 respondents across 28 undergraduate universities. (4) Quantitative data were analyzed, using Exploratory Factor analysis (EFA) to identify and validate the structure. (5) A Delphi round involving 17 experts was carried out to confirm the core factors of SEM through EFA. (6) Qualitative interviews were conducted to support the interpretation of the findings. (7) The SEM model was refined based on both quantitative and qualitative results.

3. Data Collection

3.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed based on literature review, expert input, pilot testing and the Delphi process. It consists of two sections: (1) Respondent demographics: gender, age, education, work experience, university type, and institution. (2) SEM items: 5-point Likert scale (1 = lowest, 5 = highest). Questionnaires were distributed online to 549 teachers and administrators.

3.2 Interview Form

The interview form has two parts: (1) A Delphi round with closed-ended questions with open-ended options to confirm key SEM factors. (2) Semi-structured questions to elicit expert perceptions of SEM priorities, operational challenges, and model refinement suggestions. Experts were selected because they held senior administrative positions directly related to admissions or enrolment management and possessed extensive experience in the field.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

Descriptive statistics were assessed using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation. Next, EFA with varimax rotation was used for factor extraction. Factors retained with eigenvalues >1 and loadings ≥ 0.50 . Finally, reliability and

validity were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability ($CR > 0.70$), average variance extracted ($AVE > 0.50$), and skewness and kurtosis values within ± 2 .

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

Coding by researcher; Category Agreement (CA) ≥ 0.8 ensures reliability. Expert input and thematic analysis integrated with quantitative results to refine the SEM model.

Results

1. Results of Demographic data of the Respondents

A total of 549 valid responses were included in the analysis after excluding system-missing cases. The sample was male-dominated, with 343 male respondents (62.5%) and 206 female respondents (37.5%). The majority were aged 25–39 years, and most had fewer than 10 years of higher education work experience. In terms of educational attainment, most respondents held bachelor's or master's degrees, while doctoral degree holders accounted for a smaller proportion.

2. Results of the mean ($\bar{X}$) and standard deviation (S.D.) of Strategic Enrolment Management (SEM) for Undergraduate Universities in Yunnan Province.

The results show that the factors for SEM for undergraduate universities in Yunnan Province, all items have an arithmetic mean ($\bar{X}$) between 3.25-4.34 and a standard deviation (S.D.) between 0.79-0.98, indicating generally favorable perceptions. The data indicate broad strengths in optimization of enrolment organisational structure, enrolment publicity strategies, and development of an enrolment information platform. At the same time, there are clear opportunities to improve diversified enrolment selection criteria, formulation of dynamic enrolment plans, and post-admission engagement activities and follow-up services.

3. Results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) for the SEM model in Undergraduate Universities in Yunnan Province.

3.1 Suitability test and the correlation coefficient matrix between the variables

In this study, the KMO value was 0.981, and Bartlett's test was highly significant ($\chi^2 = 26939.509$, $df = 3081$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the data are very suitable for factor analysis. These results indicate that the dataset was suitable for further factor extraction.

3.2 Factor Extraction

EFA was conducted to identify the underlying dimensions of the SEM model for undergraduate universities in Yunnan Province. These six factors together explain a cumulative variance of 61.618%, indicating that the extracted structure accounts for a substantial proportion of the total variance in the data. The analysis revealed six dimensions: (1) optimization of enrolment organisational structure, (2) enrolment publicity strategies, (3) formulation of dynamic enrolment plans, (4) development of an enrolment information platform, (5) diversified enrolment selection criteria, and (6) post-admission engagement activities and follow-up services.

4. Results of the proposed SEM model

4.1 Results of Expert Delphi Round

The Delphi process with 17 experts was used to confirm the content relevance and practical applicability of the six dimensions. All six dimensions met the predefined consensus threshold and were retained. Using a predefined inclusion threshold of 50% agreement, all six factors were retained. The item-level content validity index (I-CVI) values ranged from 0.529 to 0.941, while the scale-level content validity index (S-CVI/Ave) was 0.755, indicating an acceptable level of overall content validity.

4.2 Results of Interview

Experts highlighted several persistent challenges. In terms of organisational structure, unclear responsibilities, bureaucratic approval processes, and limited staffing were identified as key constraints. In enrolment publicity, fragmented communication channels, lack of differentiated content, and weak data integration were seen as limiting targeted outreach. With respect to enrolment planning, experts emphasised the need to move beyond single indicators such as employment rates and instead adopt multi-dimensional evaluation frameworks incorporating student demand, programme quality, faculty resources, and labour market outcomes. In addition, diversified selection criteria, post-admission support services, and enrolment information platforms were considered effective only when supported by robust data, fair governance mechanisms, and alignment with student development and graduate outcomes. Based on the synthesis of Delphi and interview findings, The exploratory SEM model is presented in Figure 1.

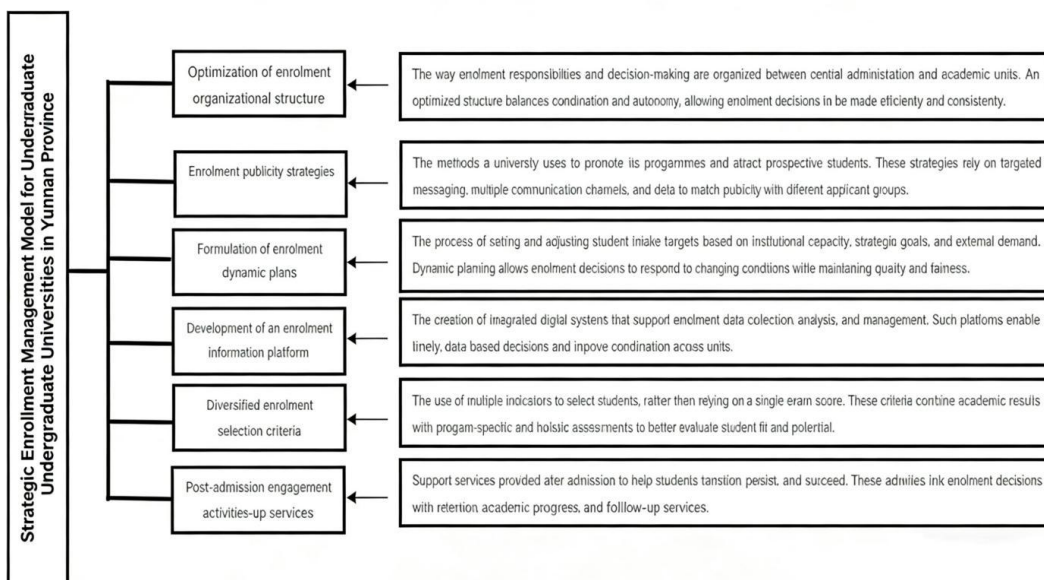


Figure 1 Final SEM model

Discussion

Taken together, the findings suggest that Strategic Enrolment Management (SEM) in undergraduate universities in Yunnan Province is best understood as a multi-layered governance system rather than a narrowly administrative. Among these, optimization of enrolment organisational structure, enrolment publicity strategies, dynamic planning, and information-platform development form the core governance architecture, while diversified selection criteria and post-admission engagement represent more selectively developed but increasingly important extensions of the model.

The six dimensions identified in this study should not be understood as isolated elements, but as parts of an interconnected governance process. In Yunnan's undergraduate universities, SEM appears to function as a strategic enrolment governance mechanism that links organizational coordination, data use, enrolment practice, planning, student selection, and post-admission support. Seen in this way, SEM in Yunnan can be understood as a closed-loop governance model: organizational structure and information platforms provide the base; publicity, planning, and selection drive implementation; post-admission support generates feedback; and the resulting evidence informs the next round of decision-making.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed for policy, institutional practice, and future research regarding the development of Strategic Enrolment Management (SEM) in undergraduate universities in Yunnan Province.

Policy Recommendations

1. Government agencies and higher education authorities should encourage universities to adopt Strategic Enrolment Management as an

integrated governance mechanism rather than treating enrolment as an isolated administrative function. Policies should support greater institutional flexibility in adjusting enrolment plans according to regional economic development, labour market demands, and demographic changes.

2. Provincial education authorities should establish a coordinated digital enrolment information system that enables universities to access accurate and real-time data related to student demand, graduate employment, and regional development trends. Such systems can improve evidence-based decision-making and increase the efficiency of enrolment planning.

3. Policies should also promote equity and diversity in higher education admissions by encouraging universities to develop diversified enrolment selection criteria beyond examination scores alone. Consideration may include student competencies, regional backgrounds, and individual potential.

Practical Recommendations for Universities

1. Undergraduate universities in Yunnan Province should strengthen organisational coordination by clarifying the responsibilities of enrolment-related departments and improving communication among academic, administrative, and student-support units. This would enhance the effectiveness of SEM implementation.

2. Universities should improve enrolment publicity strategies through the use of digital media, targeted communication, and data-driven outreach activities. Publicity content should reflect institutional characteristics, programme strengths, and student development opportunities to attract high-quality applicants.

3. Universities should establish dynamic enrolment planning mechanisms that regularly evaluate programme demand, employment outcomes, faculty readiness, and regional development priorities. Such mechanisms would help maintain balance between enrolment scale and educational quality.

4. The development of integrated enrolment information platforms should be prioritised to support data management, application analysis, student tracking, and decision support. Digital platforms can improve operational efficiency and facilitate strategic planning.

5. Universities should provide stronger post-admission engagement and follow-up services, including academic advising, student support systems, career guidance, and feedback mechanisms. These services can improve student retention, learning outcomes, and institutional sustainability.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Future studies should examine the long-term effectiveness of SEM implementation in different regional and institutional contexts across China in order to compare governance patterns and policy outcomes.

2. Researchers may apply Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) or Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to validate and further develop the SEM model identified in this study.

3. Additional research should investigate the relationship between Strategic Enrolment Management and student outcomes, such as academic achievement, retention rates, graduate employability, and institutional competitiveness.

4. Comparative studies between Chinese universities and international higher education systems may provide further insights into effective enrolment governance practices and global trends in higher education management.

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