

Examining the Relationship Between Teacher Emotional Support and Learning Engagement: The Mediating Role of Academic Resilience

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Abstract: *This study investigated the mediating mechanism of academic resilience (AR) in the relationship between perceived teacher emotional support (TES) and learning engagement (LE) among English majors. Data from 262 Chinese undergraduate English majors were collected via validated questionnaires measuring TES, AR, and LE. Structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis revealed two significant pathways: (1) a direct positive effect of TES on LE ($\beta = 0.452, p < .001$), and (2) an indirect effect through AR, accounting for 26.02% of the total effect (indirect $\beta = 0.159, 95\% CI [0.113, 0.210]$). Results confirm that teacher emotional support not only immediately enhances engagement but crucially cultivates students' capacity to overcome domain-specific adversities (e.g., linguistic anxiety, proficiency plateaus), thereby sustaining long-term investment in resource-intensive language acquisition. The findings establish AR as a critical psychological mechanism translating external emotional resources into resilient academic behaviors, offering empirical support for embedding resilience-focused pedagogy within tertiary English education to optimize instructional efficacy.*

Keywords—teacher emotional support; learning engagement; learning resilience; mediating role; structural equation modeling

1. INTRODUCTION

Within the educational ecosystem, teacher emotional support is recognized as a core environmental factor shaping the developmental trajectories of students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains. Scholars internationally have consistently demonstrated that high-level emotional support behaviors exhibited by teachers such as respect, understanding, care, and encouragement significantly enhance students' learning motivation, self-efficacy, and quality of classroom participation (Wentzel et al., 2016). The climate of trust and safety fostered by teacher emotional support constitutes an essential affective foundation necessary for students' in-depth knowledge exploration and engagement in challenging cognitive tasks (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). However, existing research predominantly centers on the basic education stage; in-depth investigations targeting student populations within specific disciplinary contexts (e.g. English majors) in higher education remain notably scarce. As language learners, this cohort experiences a learning process characterized by high interactivity and self-disclosure, rendering their perception of and need for teacher emotional support subject to disciplinary particularities. Consequently, precisely deciphering how university English majors perceive and internalize teacher emotional support, and how this subsequently impacts their learning engagement intensity,

represents a critical issue demanding clarification to deepen the mechanisms of foreign language talent cultivation.

Learning engagement, conceptualized as the profound psychological and behavioral state signifying students' active commitment to academic activities (Fredricks et al., 2004), serves as a core metric for assessing higher education quality. English majors in higher education must construct competency systems demanding intensive language input, output, and cross-cultural critical thinking learning, rendering their levels of learning engagement directly pertinent to the efficacy of talent cultivation. While previous research has widely substantiated the positive promotive effects of teacher emotional support on learning engagement (Liu et al., 2023), there remains a shortfall in the deep excavation of its underlying psychological transmission mechanisms. This gap is particularly evident in the insufficient exploration of the dynamic mediating role played by academic buoyancy which is a key self-regulatory capacity. Academic buoyancy refers to an individual's ability to effectively adapt and maintain positive developmental progress in the face of academic adversity (Martin & Marsh, 2008). It enables students to efficiently convert external emotional resources into psychological capital for overcoming challenges and persisting towards goals. Existing scholarship suggests that teacher emotional support can indirectly influence academic achievement through the pathway of cultivating buoyancy (Jowkar et al., 2014). Nevertheless, precisely how this chain of

effects operates on the multidimensional structure of learning engagement (i.e., cognitive, behavioral, and affective engagement) remains unclear, and empirical validation of this model within the English major context is especially absent. In light of this, the present study, collecting data from 262 English major students in higher education institutions, aims to thoroughly explore the mediating pathway structure of academic buoyancy linking perceived teacher emotional support and learning engagement. By elucidating its intrinsic operational mechanisms, this research seeks to provide evidence-based foundations for deepening emotionally responsive pedagogical reforms and cultivating resilient talent within English major programs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

2.1 Teacher Emotional Support and Learning Engagement

Teacher emotional support, constituting a crucial interpersonal element within the learning environment, specifically refers to students' perceptions of positive affective investment from their teachers, encompassing care, respect, understanding, positive feedback, and the fostering of a sense of belonging. Within the context of higher education foreign language learning, its dimensions are particularly salient. Firstly, academic caring is characterized by teachers' attentive feedback on written assignments (including highly targeted essay and translation feedback), patient guidance on oral output errors, and acute awareness coupled with targeted alleviation of anxiety stemming from language expression bottlenecks. This dimension concretely reflects a profound recognition of students' cognitive challenges. Secondly, interpersonal caring manifests through egalitarian and approachable interaction patterns both within and beyond the classroom (e.g., establishing inclusive classroom discourse communities, promptly recognizing individual emotional shifts and providing emotional validation/support), alongside authentic respect toward diverse cultural backgrounds and learning styles. This fosters a significant enhancement in students' psychological safety and classroom participation/integration (Fredricks et al., 2004; Tu, 20221).

Such multidimensional support distinctly differs from purely cognitive or instrumental instruction. Its core value lies in fulfilling learners' deep-seated emotional needs, thereby establishing teacher-student relationships grounded in trust, connection, and meaning-making. Particularly within English major contexts, where language acquisition itself is inherently characterized by high visibility (students often experience emotional anxiety due to potential errors in public expression, and the salience of implicit learning outcomes is more pronounced) and long-term commitment (e.g., extensive vocabulary memorization, sustained extensive reading, intercultural competence development), teacher emotional support plays an irreplaceably pivotal role in mitigating learning anxiety, creating safe spaces for expression, and sustaining high-intensity learning motivation.

Theoretically, Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) emphasizes the role of the expert (teacher) in providing emotional scaffolding within a supportive "zone of proximal development". Simultaneously, Self-Regulated Learning theory and Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) profoundly elucidate teacher emotional support as a core external factor in satisfying students' basic psychological needs (namely, relatedness, competence, and autonomy). This support ultimately catalyzes deep student engagement at cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels by influencing intrinsic motivation and reducing the psychological efficacy loss caused by frustration. Extensive empirical research robustly confirms the direct positive effect of teacher emotional support on learning engagement. For instance, Skinner and Belmont's (1993) seminal work demonstrated that teacher emotional availability is a core predictor of students' sustained behavioral engagement (e.g., effort, persistence) and emotional engagement (e.g., interest, value identification). Research specifically targeting foreign language learners further substantiates this conclusion, indicating that within Chinese educational-cultural contexts, students' perceived teacher emotional support exhibits significant positive correlations with their concentration in intensive reading classes, time and effort invested in autonomous listening, speaking, reading, and writing practice outside class, and their identification with the intrinsic value of English learning (Zhang & Xu, 2025). The underlying psychological mechanism is that teachers' sustained affective investment not only directly provides learners with energy replenishment and confidence reinforcement throughout their learning journey but also indirectly reduces the negative emotional load arising from the inherent high anxiety and uncertainty in foreign language learning. This reduction enables students to more effectively allocate cognitive resources to deep cognitive processing and strategic learning behaviors (Pekrun, 2006). Therefore, this study hypothesizes:

H1: Students' perceived teacher emotional support significantly and positively predicts their level of learning engagement.

2.2 Academic Resilience

Academic resilience refers to a dynamic psychological process and capability construct wherein learners successfully cope with, adapt to, and ultimately achieve positive academic outcomes when confronting significant setbacks, challenges, pressures, or adversities within the academic domain (Martin & Marsh, 2008; Ye et al., 2021). Within the context of undergraduate English majors, this resilience possesses specific and profound dimensions. It is exemplified in the adaptive competency complex students display when encountering typical barriers in language learning (e.g., comprehension frustration with difficult listening tasks, obstacles to producing precise expression, persistent plateaus in speaking proficiency, meaning deficits stemming from cultural gaps) or external learning disruptions (e.g., anxiety and burnout induced by heavy workloads). This complex

encompasses rapid emotional regulation, strategic seeking of support, efficient resource integration, maintenance of motivational beliefs, and persistence in goal-directed effort (Cassidy, 2016). Distinct from a sole focus on overcoming the final outcome of difficulties, academic resilience emphasizes the psychological and behavioral mechanisms operative during this adaptive process. Its core constitutive dimensions include: emotional regulation resilience (e.g., effectively transforming frustration from exam failures), behavioral engagement resilience (e.g., proactively increasing practice during critical learning phases, blocking out distractions), motivational belief resilience (e.g., maintaining belief in the incremental plasticity of language abilities despite performance setbacks), and social resource utilization resilience (e.g., skillfully leveraging teachers, peers, and course resources to overcome learning bottlenecks). These multidimensional capacities work synergistically to allow learners to sustain their developmental trajectory within the demanding process of foreign language acquisition.

The proposal of a mediating role stems from the theoretical need for deeper elucidation of the intrinsic mechanisms through which teacher emotional support influences learning engagement. Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) and the ecological systems perspective on resilience development (Ungar, 2012) jointly provide robust support for a mediating model. Teacher emotional support (e.g., warm encouragement, empathetic feedback, a safe atmosphere fostering unconditional error acceptance) functions as a key external protective factor. Its benefit extends far beyond immediate emotional comfort; it crucially helps students identify and reframe the meaning of adversity (shifting from “making mistakes is shameful” to “mistakes are opportunities for language growth”), cultivate efficacy in coping with adversity (e.g., instilling the perception “I can master this through effort” via detailed error analysis), heighten initiative in goal pursuit (e.g., activating intrinsic motivation through teachers’ specific recognition of minor progress), and expand strategies for mobilizing positive social resources (e.g., prompting students to seek help from trusted teachers when struggling rather than avoiding the situation). These processes fundamentally forge and bolster students’ academic resilience resource reservoir (Martin, 2013). Substantial empirical research reveals this psychological chain: Supportive teacher-student interactions rich in emotional support significantly buffer the impact of negative academic experiences (e.g., low grades, expression errors), effectively prevent the formation of learned helplessness, and, through the teacher’s transmission of a growth mindset (Yeager & Dweck, 2012), enhance students’ tolerance for and motivation to conquer challenges. Students possessing greater resilience naturally manifest stronger and more persistent learning engagement at the cognitive level (e.g., persisting with deep processing of complex reading materials), affective level (e.g., mobilizing positive emotions amidst speaking anxiety), and behavioral level (e.g., consistently investing in deliberate practice targeting weaknesses) (Wang et al., 2025).

Research generally corroborates the pivotal mediating role of academic resilience. Cassidy (2016) found that perceived teacher care buffered the negative impact of academic stress on university students specifically by enhancing their resilience and positive coping capacities. Regarding foreign language learners, Yang et al. (2021) indicated that teachers’ supportive feedback (e.g., constructive rather than critical error correction) boosted students’ confidence in dealing with learning setbacks and their subsequent behavioral intensity of active engagement by reducing foreign language classroom anxiety. Falcon et al.’s (2023) study revealed that teachers’ emotional investment significantly enhanced language learners’ perseverance - an essential manifestation of heightened academic resilience - which was directly linked to increased time-on-task and concentration in listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities. Research within the Chinese higher education context has further delineated the mediating pathway: Teacher emotional support significantly reduced feelings of hopelessness (a marker of resilience deficiency) among English majors, enhanced their sense of control over difficulties and their willingness to overcome them (e.g., when faced with the intensive training pressures of advanced interpretation exams), and ultimately translated into more positive learning behavior patterns (Shen et al., 2024). Notably, this mediating effect holds greater explanatory power in higher education, where learning increasingly relies on students’ self-management abilities and intrinsic drive to overcome complex tasks, rendering it neither possible nor desirable for teachers to solve all problems for them. Consequently, the core value of teacher emotional support lies in catalyzing students’ internal resilience mechanisms, enabling them to maintain sustained commitment to language learning even in the absence of immediate external support (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Accordingly, this study proposes:

H2: Academic resilience plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between students’ perceived teacher emotional support and their learning engagement.

Based on the existing body of literature reviewed above, this study constructed the following research hypothesized model (see Figure 1).

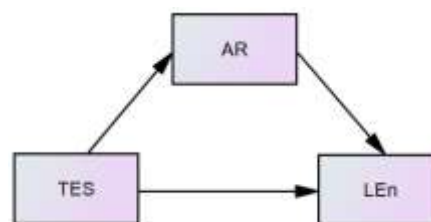


Figure 1. The research hypothesized model of teacher emotional support (TES), academic resilience (AR), and learning engagement (LEn).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants and Procedure

This study employed a convenience sampling method to recruit undergraduate English majors from a comprehensive university in Eastern China. Data collection was conducted via researcher-administered paper questionnaires. Following approval from course instructors, trained research assistants distributed the questionnaires collectively during class breaks. Participants received information regarding the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and anonymity/confidentiality assurances. Only those providing written informed consent proceeded with the survey, which required approximately 10 minutes to complete.

A total of 280 questionnaires were distributed and collected immediately upon completion, yielding 262 valid returns. Eighteen questionnaires were excluded due to incompleteness, resulting in a valid response rate of 93.57%. The final sample comprised 189 female students (72.14%) and 73 male students (27.86%), aged between 18 and 24 years ($M = 20.31$, $SD = 1.41$). Participants spanned all four undergraduate year levels: freshmen (24.81%), sophomores (30.53%), juniors (28.27%), and seniors (16.39%).

3.2 Instruments

All scales were validated using established translation and back-translation procedures. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Teacher Emotional Support (TES)

Participants' perceptions of the emotional care and support provided by their subject teachers were assessed using the 6-item Emotional Support dimension from the widely applied Perceived Teacher Support Scale (Tardy, 1985). The scale's core content encompasses several facets, including the teacher's understanding of and concern for students' individual needs, demonstration of genuine care during daily learning activities, respect for and affirmation of students' capabilities and efforts, and provision of positive encouragement and emotional reassurance when students encounter challenges. Representative items include: "My teacher genuinely cares about my feelings and emotional state" and "When I encounter difficulties in learning, I feel my teacher is willing to help me". Within the dataset of the present study, this subscale demonstrated good internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.898$).

Academic Resilience (AR)

Academic resilience was measured using Martin and Marsh's (2008) Academic Resilience Scale (ARS), comprising 5 items. Example items are: "I bounce back quickly after failing an exam" and "I handle study pressures well". The scale yielded good internal consistency reliability in this investigation ($\alpha = 0.848$), indicating adequate reliability.

Learning Engagement (LE)

Learning engagement was evaluated using the 9-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale for Students (UWES-S; Schaufeli et al., 2002), which assesses three dimensions: Vigor, Dedication, and Absorption. An example item is: "When I am studying, I feel full of energy". The overall scale exhibited excellent internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = 0.913$). Furthermore, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) supported its sound structural validity. All key fit indices met acceptable standards ($\chi^2/df = 2.782$, CFI = 0.965, TLI = 0.923, RMSEA = 0.075, SRMR = 0.057).

3.3 Data Analysis

This study utilized SPSS 21.0 to conduct reliability analysis (Cronbach's α coefficient), descriptive statistics, and Pearson correlation analysis. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed using AMOS 21.0 to examine the structural validity of the measurement scale. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was applied to test mediation effects. Additionally, indirect effect confidence intervals (95% CI) were computed employing the Bootstrap method with 5,000 resamples.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Common Method Bias and Validity Assessment

Common method bias was assessed using Harman's single-factor test; the variance explained by the first factor (31.72%) was below the 40% critical threshold. CFA indicated that the three-factor model demonstrated superior fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.37$, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.07). Both convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted, AVE > 0.50) and discriminant validity (the square root of AVE greater than all inter-construct correlations) met established psychometric criteria.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficients for the key study variables are presented in Table 1. The analysis included data from two hundred and sixty-two participants ($N = 262$). Teacher emotional support (TES) demonstrated the highest mean level ($M = 3.932$, $SD = 0.662$), followed by academic resilience (AR; $M = 3.781$, $SD = 0.813$) and learning engagement (LE; $M = 3.691$, $SD = 0.723$). Correlational analyses revealed statistically significant positive associations among all variables. TES was positively correlated with both AR ($r = 0.421$, $p < 0.01$) and LE ($r = 0.493$, $p < 0.01$). A similarly strong positive correlation was observed between AR and LE ($r = 0.556$, $p < 0.01$). These preliminary findings indicate that higher perceived levels of teacher emotional support are associated with greater academic resilience and learning engagement. Furthermore, greater academic resilience is significantly linked to higher learning engagement. The positive interrelationships observed provide foundational empirical support for further investigation of the hypothesized mediating role of academic

resilience in the association between teacher emotional support and student learning engagement.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations.

	Mean	SD	TES	AR	LE
TES	3.932	0.662	1		
AR	3.781	0.813	0.421**	1	
LE	3.691	0.723	0.493**	0.556**	1

Note: $N = 262$. TES, teacher emotional support; AR, academic resilience; LE, learning engagement. ** $p < 0.01$.

4.3 Assessment of Measurement Model

Discriminant validity of the measurement model was confirmed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, as displayed in Table 2. The square roots of the average variance extracted (AVE) for all constructs (TES: 0.819; AR: 0.794; LE: 0.769) exceeded their highest inter-construct correlation coefficients (TES-AR: 0.465; TES-LE: 0.531; AR-LE: 0.612). This demonstrates that each construct shared more variance with its own indicators than with other constructs, empirically supporting their discriminant validity. The results affirm that the latent variables—Teacher Emotional Support (TES), Academic Resilience (AR), and Learning Engagement (LE)—are statistically distinct and measure unique dimensions of the theoretical framework.

Table 2. Discriminant validity assessment (Fornell-Larcker Criterion).

	TES	AR	LE
TES	0.819		
AR	0.465	0.794	
LE	0.531	0.612	0.769

Note. Diagonal elements (bold) are values of the square root of AVE. Off-diagonals are latent factor correlations from CFA.

Following Teo and van Schaik's (2012) recommendations, convergent validity is established by factor loadings exceeding 0.7 and AVE values greater than 0.5. Convergent validity of the measurement model was established through three key metrics, as summarized in Table 3. First, all standardized factor loadings ranged from 0.703 to 0.873, exceeding the 0.70 threshold, signifying strong item reliability. Second, the average variance extracted (AVE) values (TES: 0.671; AR: 0.631; LE: 0.592) surpassed the minimum criterion of 0.50, confirming that each construct accounted for >50% of the

variance in its indicators. Third, high composite reliability (CR) scores (TES: 0.924; AR: 0.895; LE: 0.929) and Cronbach's alpha coefficients (TES: 0.898; AR: 0.848; LE: 0.913) significantly exceeded 0.70, evidencing robust internal consistency. Collectively, these results confirm adequate convergent validity and reliability across all constructs.

Table 3. Convergent validity assessment.

Constructs	Items	Standardized factor loadings	AVE	CR	Cronbach's alpha
TES	6	0.770-0.862	0.671	0.924	0.898
AR	5	0.703-0.873	0.631	0.895	0.848
LE	9	0.743-0.785	0.592	0.929	0.913

4.4 The Path Analysis

The hypothesized path model examining the relationships between teacher emotional support (TES), academic resilience (AR), and learning engagement (LE) was empirically tested. The results of the path analysis, presented in Table 4, provide statistically robust support for all proposed direct pathways.

First, a significant positive direct path was found from teacher emotional support (TES) to learning engagement (LE) ($\beta = 0.452$, $SE = 0.054$, $C.R. = 10.570$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that higher levels of perceived teacher emotional support are associated with significantly greater student learning engagement, holding other variables constant. The magnitude of this coefficient suggests a substantial direct relationship.

Second, the analysis revealed a significant positive direct path from teacher emotional support (TES) to academic resilience (AR) ($\beta = 0.410$, $SE = 0.035$, $C.R. = 7.637$, $p < 0.001$). This confirms that teacher emotional support is positively associated with students' development of greater academic resilience.

Third, a significant positive direct path was found from academic resilience (AR) to learning engagement (LE) ($\beta = 0.366$, $SE = 0.037$, $C.R. = 12.160$, $p < 0.001$). This demonstrates that students with higher levels of academic resilience also report significantly greater learning engagement.

Table 4. The path analysis of the hypothesized model.

Path	Path coefficient	S.E.	C.R.	P	Result
TES→LE	0.452	0.054	10.570	**	Strongly supported
TES→AR	0.410	0.035	7.637	**	Strongly supported
AR→LE	0.366	0.037	12.160	**	Strongly supported

Note: β = Standardized Path Coefficient; S.E. = Standard Error; C.R. = Critical Ratio. *** $p < 0.001$.

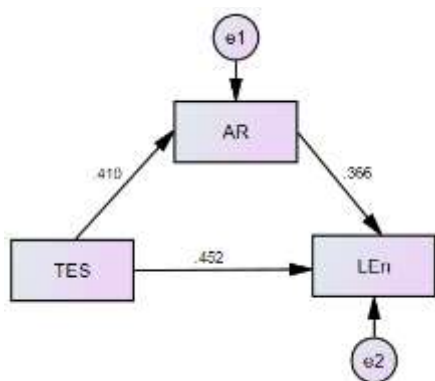


Figure 2. The final structural model.

4.5 The Mediating Effect Analysis

In accordance with the hypothesized model, which posited that the relationship between teacher emotional support (TES) and learning engagement (LE) is mediated by academic resilience (AR), a formal test of the indirect effect was conducted. Bootstrap structural equation modeling analysis (Cheung & Lau, 2008) was employed to examine the mediating roles of academic resilience (AR) and learning engagement (LE). The results, presented in Table 5, confirm the presence of partial mediation.

The analysis revealed a significant direct effect of TES on LE ($\beta = 0.452$, SE = 0.046, 95% CI [0.383, 0.565]). This finding indicates that teacher emotional support maintains a substantial positive association with student learning engagement even after accounting for the influence of academic resilience.

Crucially, the results demonstrated a statistically significant indirect effect of TES on LE through AR ($\beta = 0.159$, SE = 0.025, 95% CI [0.113, 0.210]). As the 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval did not encompass zero, the mediating role of academic resilience is empirically

supported. This signifies that higher levels of perceived teacher emotional support promote greater academic resilience among students, which in turn predicts enhanced learning engagement.

Decomposition of the total effect revealed that the direct effect accounted for approximately 73.98% of TES's influence on LE, while the indirect effect mediated by AR constituted approximately 26.02% of the total effect. This underscores that while teacher emotional support exerts a pronounced direct influence on student engagement, a meaningful portion of its impact operates indirectly by fostering students' capacity for academic resilience.

Table 5. Results of mediating effect analysis.

Items	Effect size	S.E.	95% CI	Ratio to total effect
Direct effect (TES → LE)	0.452	0.046	[0.383-0.565]	73.98%
Indirect effect (TES → AR → LE)	0.159	0.025	[0.113-0.210]	26.02%

In summary, the mediating effect analysis provides robust evidence supporting the hypothesized partial mediating role of academic resilience in the relationship between teacher emotional support and learning engagement. Teacher emotional support positively influences learning engagement both directly and indirectly by enhancing students' academic resilience, with the indirect pathway accounting for approximately one-quarter of the total effect.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 The Mechanism of Teacher Emotional Support's Impact on Learning Engagement

The present study empirically elucidates the dual-channel mechanism through which teacher emotional support enhances learning engagement among English majors. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, structural equation modeling revealed a robust direct effect of teacher emotional support on learning engagement ($\beta = 0.452$, $p < 0.001$). This finding aligns with theoretical frameworks positing that affective teacher-student interactions create immediate motivational and cognitive conditions conducive to sustained academic investment. Within the distinctive context of foreign language acquisition—where learners routinely navigate linguistic vulnerability, performance anxiety, and cultural dissonance—the direct pathway suggests that emotional support functions as real-time scaffolding (Prananto et al., 2025). Teachers' empathetic feedback and psychologically secure classroom climates mitigate the cognitive load imposed by language anxiety (Pekrun, 2006), freeing mental resources for deep processing of complex target-language input. Simultaneously,

validation of learners' efforts satisfies core psychological needs for relatedness and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000), fueling intrinsic motivation for resource-intensive activities like extended reading or deliberate speaking practice.

Crucially, however, the direct path accounted for only a portion of the total effect, implying the operation of supplementary processes. The significant partial mediation by academic resilience (indirect effect $\beta = 0.159$, 95% CI [0.113, 0.210]) reveals a second, transformative channel: Teacher emotional support cultivates students' capacity to withstand future adversities, which subsequently sustains engagement through inevitable learning plateaus. This resonates with Martin and Marsh's (2008) conceptualization of resilience as a buffer against domain-specific challenges. For English majors grappling with advanced proficiency barriers (e.g., accent reduction or pragmatic competence acquisition), emotional support strengthens resilience via three interconnected mechanisms:

(1) Reframing Setbacks: Teachers' constructive framing of errors as growth opportunities ("This syntax mistake reveals a useful learning point for formal writing") reshapes students' attributional patterns, replacing shame with strategic persistence.

(2) Efficacy Development: Personalized encouragement builds metacognitive confidence ("Your progress in organizing arguments shows you can master IELTS Task 2 essays"), enabling learners to tackle high-stakes tasks with behavioral tenacity.

(3) Resource Activation: Trust established through consistent care lowers barriers to help-seeking, promoting adaptive resource use (e.g., requesting writing center consultations after critical feedback).

The 26.02% mediation ratio signifies that emotional support's potency lies not merely in momentary affect regulation but equally in fortifying students' longitudinal adaptive systems. This is particularly critical in tertiary language education, where dwindling external supervision demands autonomous resilience. The coexistence of direct and indirect pathways further implies that while emotional support provides immediate "fuel" for engagement (direct effect), its enduring value manifests through fostering students' "internal engines" for navigating subsequent obstacles (Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Ultimately, this dual mechanism underscores a pedagogical imperative: Supporting English majors' engagement transcends transient encouragement; it requires fostering enduring psychological assets. Emotional scaffolding must be deliberately integrated with resilience-building practices—such as structured reflection on incremental progress or explicit strategy modeling after failures—to convert affective security into sustainable academic commitment.

5.2 The Mediating Role of Academic Resilience

This study robustly confirms our second hypothesis (H2), demonstrating that academic resilience (AR) serves as a significant partial mediator in the relationship between perceived teacher emotional support (TES) and learning engagement (LE) among English majors ($\beta = 0.159$, $p < .001$; CI [0.113, 0.210]). Crucially, AR accounted for a substantial proportion (26.02%) of TES's total effect on LE. This compelling finding illuminates a vital internal psychological channel through which externally received emotional support is transformed into sustained academic investment (Bandhu et al., 2024). Moving beyond merely correlating external support with outcomes, the significant indirect effect underscores that TES operates, in part, by cultivating students' intrinsic capacity to navigate adversity (Tian & Zhang, 2025). Specifically, teacher-provided safety nets (e.g., understanding responses to errors, consistent encouragement) fundamentally alter students' appraisal of and response to inevitable academic challenges inherent in mastering a complex skill like English. TES fosters AR by validating students' efforts and struggles, thus mitigating the debilitating effects of setbacks (e.g., plateauing progress, critical feedback) and enhancing their sense of self-efficacy in recovering from and persevering through difficulties. In essence, emotional support equips students not merely with comfort during hardship but with the durable psychological infrastructure to withstand and rebound from hardship, thereby conserving cognitive and motivational resources essential for continued deep engagement.

Moreover, the prominence of AR as a mediator holds particular significance within the demanding context of tertiary English language studies. Language acquisition involves constant exposure to potential failure in performance contexts (e.g., speaking anxiety, incomprehension), identity negotiation across cultures, and persistent, effortful skill-building with delayed proficiency gains (Papi & Khajavy, 2023). Emotional support alone mitigates immediate distress; however, its enduring contribution lies in building AR, which functions as an internal buffer against these recurring, domain-specific stressors. AR enables students to convert TES-derived security into proactive coping strategies. When faced with adversity, resilient learners can effectively regulate negative emotions (preventing anxiety from derailing focus), maintain motivation and confidence in their long-term potential ("growth mindset"), persist through challenging tasks like extensive reading or revision (behavioral tenacity), and strategically leverage resources (e.g., reaching out to teachers or peers, revisiting coursework). This adaptive capacity prevents temporary setbacks from escalating into disengagement patterns. The mediation effect underscores that for English majors, teacher emotional support achieves its most powerful and sustained impact on learning engagement by nurturing students' inner resources for self-regulated recovery and persistence.

5.3 Practical Implications

The robust empirical confirmation of academic resilience (AR) as a significant mediator (26.02% mediation ratio) between teacher emotional support (TES) and learning engagement (LE) offers crucial directives for pedagogical enhancement within English tertiary education.

Firstly, educators should explicitly integrate resilience-building scaffolding into routine pedagogical practice. This entails transforming TES beyond transient encouragement into structured interventions that cultivate students' adaptive capacities: (1) implementing reframing protocols for language errors (e.g., framing pronunciation slips as natural stepping stones to fluency, annotating written work with growth-focused comments); (2) embedding explicit efficacy-development routines (e.g., guiding students to co-set incremental learning goals, highlighting micro-progress in targeted linguistic sub-skills); and (3) institutionalizing resource activation pathways (e.g., creating low-threshold peer tutoring channels, modeling strategic help-seeking behaviors after setbacks). Such intentional integration ensures TES becomes a catalyst for developing autonomous psychological assets essential in self-directed language studies where teacher proximity dwindles.

Secondly, recognizing that language acquisition inherently involves navigating identity vulnerability and high-stakes output anxiety requires programmatic reforms. Departments should systematically establish culturally attuned, resilience-oriented ecosystems. This includes mandating discipline-specific resilience training modules addressing domain-typical adversities like accent frustration, communicative breakdown anxiety, or cultural intelligibility barriers (Scheuch et al., 2021). Faculty professional development must also emphasize double-loop feedback competency by balancing linguistic correctness with psychologically restorative communication that affirms learner vulnerability while activating adaptive coping (e.g., pairing corrective feedback with mastery-oriented strategies). Crucially, as TES indirectly fuels engagement via resilience ($\beta = 0.159$, $p < .001$), universities must foster relational climates valuing psychological safety by prioritizing collaborative over competitive discourse, integrating metacognitive reflection spaces post-assessments, and training faculty to recognize emotional exhaustion symptoms (Huang & Liu, 2025). Synthesizing emotionally supportive teaching with intentional resilience architecture empowers learners to transform support into sustainable resourcefulness—their ultimate “internal engine” for LE across the arduous journey of foreign language mastery.

6. CONCLUSION

This study conclusively demonstrates that perceived teacher emotional support (TES) significantly enhances learning engagement (LE) among English majors through a dual-path mechanism: a direct positive effect and a substantial indirect pathway mediated by academic resilience (AR). It verifies that TES not only provides immediate motivational

fuel but crucially fosters students' adaptive capacity to navigate linguistic and cognitive adversities inherent to EFL learning at the tertiary level. The findings offer robust theoretical grounding for positioning resilience cultivation as a core objective within language teaching frameworks and provide actionable insights for designing emotionally intelligent pedagogical interventions tailored to the specific vulnerabilities of English majors.

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. Firstly, the reliance on convenience sampling from a single university limits the generalizability of the findings; future research should employ stratified random sampling across diverse institutions. Secondly, the cross-sectional design precludes definitive causal claims; longitudinal studies tracking the dynamic interplay of TES, AR, and LE over time are essential. Finally, while validated scales were used, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce response biases, and future work could benefit from incorporating objective engagement metrics (e.g., learning analytics) and multi-informant assessments. Exploring potential moderators like cultural background or learning stages could further refine the model.

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