

## Student Affairs Factors Affecting Students' Holistic Competencies of Private Colleges in Guangdong Province

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Received December 5, 2024; Revised January 30, 2025; Accepted February 16, 2025

### Abstract

The research aimed to 1) study the level of student affairs factors of private colleges in Guangdong Province. 2) Study the level of students' holistic competencies of private colleges in Guangdong Province. 3) examine student affairs factors affecting students' holistic competencies of private colleges in Guangdong Province. Moreover, 4) propose the guidelines for developing the Students' Holistic Competencies of Private Colleges in Guangdong Province. The sample consisted of 600 administrators and teachers from private colleges in Guangdong province. The statistics used in the research were percentage, frequency, mean, standard deviation, and path analysis. The qualitative sample consisted of 9 people. The data were analyzed by inductive interpretation and conclusion through content analysis. The research results showed that the student affairs factors affecting students' holistic competencies of private colleges in Guangdong province are administrators' distributed leadership, educational supervision, student characteristics, extracurricular activities, and assessment system. The level of students' holistic competencies of private colleges in Guangdong province was 3.589, with a mean and standard deviation of 0.848, which was high. The CFA model of student affairs factors affecting students' holistic competencies of private colleges in Guangdong province showed good model fit, especially indicating that the overall model was suitable. Student affairs to promote students' holistic competencies of private colleges in Guangdong province explored the feasibility of empowering students to take more leadership roles, enhancing cooperation between teachers and students, increasing school-enterprise integration, giving students more leadership power, and promoting collaboration inside and outside the school. Also, improving the educational supervision assessment and supervision

mechanism, promoting diverse development and respecting individual differences, giving full play to the positive role of extracurricular activities in students' growth, and establishing diversified assessment and improving training mechanisms.

**Keywords:** student affairs factors; students' holistic competencies; private colleges

## Introduction

According to the relevant provisions of the “Opinions of the Ministry of Education on Accelerating the Construction of High Level Undergraduate Education and Comprehensively Improving Talent Cultivation Ability (40 Articles in the New Era)” (2018), higher education institutions must actively adapt to the new needs of national strategic development and the new trends of world higher education development, firmly grasp the core point of comprehensively improving talent cultivation ability, and place undergraduate education at the core position of talent cultivation and the essential position of education and teaching. The forefront of education development in the new era is revitalizing undergraduate education, forming a high-level talent training system, and striving to create a new situation in higher education (Trani & Holsworth, 2010).

According to the Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China, higher education focuses on completing high school education. It cultivates high-level professionals with social responsibility, innovative spirit, and practical ability. The rapid expansion of higher education in China has brought unprecedented challenges to prepare a large graduate population in the ever-changing society of the 21st century. In order to prepare higher education students with the capabilities of the 21st century, it is necessary to develop the comprehensive capabilities of students in higher education to make higher education more appropriate and effective. There are two types of higher education institutions in China: public and private. Private higher education has expanded significantly worldwide in the past two decades, and China is no exception. Since 2008, the proportion of private colleges in China has remained at 28–29% in the higher education sector, and 2019, 17.69% of new students enrolled in private colleges. The number of private colleges and the number of enrollees have been increasing. Therefore, China's private colleges lack high-caliber personnel, financial support, and rights protection. Therefore, China's private colleges are generally considered alternatives to public colleges. There are 2.44 million postgraduates in China, of which only 2,556 are enrolled in private colleges. In addition, only high school graduates with relatively

low tertiary admission scores are considered for admission to these private colleges. There are 50 private colleges in Guangdong Province.

There are 50 private universities/colleges in Guangdong Province, accounting for 32.5% of the total number of universities in the province. There are over 680000 undergraduate and vocational students, accounting for 33% of the province. There are many private universities/colleges in Guangdong Province, with a large proportion of students. However, problems such as insufficient development, standardization, and a lack of the rule of law remain. These problems are reflected in the fact that the average student data of some schools does not meet the standards, the source of educational funds is single, the age structure of teachers is unreasonable, and the treatment of faculty and staff is low. Therefore, it is imperative to enhance the students' holistic competencies in private universities/colleges, because compared to public universities, students in private universities/colleges have a more direct impact on the operation of private universities. This is not only because the tuition fees paid by the former are the primary funding source for the latter's operation, but also because the quality of the former's education status is the fundamental factor for the success or failure of the latter's further development. In this sense, private universities/colleges should have emphasized student experience and development more. However, for a long time, people's attention to the "run by the people" (educational system and mechanism) has far surpassed the "live by the people" (quality of student development), incredibly ignoring the value demands of students in their inner world.

In the 21st century, employers expect new graduates to be job-ready by attaining new competencies on top of their academic qualifications. These competencies refer to soft skills such as management skills, work ethics, interpersonal skills, global awareness, and communication skills, which are commonly called the 21st-century competencies (or "attributes"). These attributes are essential for new graduates to find their first job and succeed in their future career development (Bridgstock, 2009).

Student affairs play a significant role in developing the holistic individual who is intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual. According to Love (2003), "student affairs professionals perform a varied mixture of leading, advising, counseling, educating, supervising, teaching, planning, and so forth". Student affairs professionals are responsible for helping every student to achieve educational goals. The professionals advise students on academic and social needs. Thus, for instance, they assist students with developing appropriate educational plans consistent with their individual

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academic, career, and personal goals. Student affairs professionals participate in academic advising, which is regarded as a more comprehensive process that includes an assessment of the psychological, interpersonal, and academic needs of students (Savarese, 2019). Professional counsellors, who are more knowledgeable in identifying students' difficulties, provide appropriate interventions, assistance, and referrals. Student affairs professionals offer co-curricular activities. These are meant to enhance the lives of students outside the classroom. Students learn to socialize and develop leadership skills by participating in different organizations. Through these experiences, students gain knowledge and skills through practical learning (Major & Mangope, 2014).

This study focuses on Student Affairs Factors Affecting Students' Holistic Competencies of Private Colleges in Guangdong Province, China. In recent years, with the progress of society, China's higher education has been moving towards internationalization and modernization. Traditional concepts and modern technology are fiercely colliding, and the internal education environment in China has changed, giving contemporary college students prominent characteristics of diversification. Especially for students in private universities, their thinking is more active and personalized. The outdated traditional model has reduced the efficiency of student affairs management and lagging ideological concepts, which significantly impacts and hinders the modernization and development of private universities. In this era, the management of student affairs in private universities in China has undergone new explorations, repositioning the selection of student affairs management models, achieving a transformation from "management" to "service", from "mandatory" to "guidance", and enhancing the overall abilities of students. By establishing management measures, fully mobilize students' learning enthusiasm and give full play to their prominent role.

## Research Objectives

1. To study the level of student affairs factors of private colleges in Guangdong Province.
2. To study the level of students' holistic competencies of private colleges in Guangdong Province.
3. To examine student affairs factors affecting students' holistic competencies of private colleges in Guangdong Province.
4. To propose the guidelines for developing the Students' Holistic Competencies of Private Colleges in Guangdong Province.

## Scope of Research

**Content of the study:** Student Affairs Factors Affecting Students' Holistic Competencies of Private Colleges in Guangdong Province

**Population and Sample:** 600 administrators and teachers from private colleges in Guangdong Province

**Area:** private colleges in Guangdong Province

**Time:** October 2023 to 2024

## Literature Review

1. Chan and Luk (2020), Chan et al. (2017), and Acar and Gündüz (2017) stated in their study that motivating students to develop holistic competencies involves encouraging them to grow not only in academic knowledge but also in social, emotional, and practical skills. A holistic approach to education values the entire individual. It aims to nurture their intellectual, emotional, physical, social, and moral growth how to improve students' holistic competencies by improving student motivation, including stimulating students' intrinsic motivation to develop, helping them set goals, providing them with regular and constructive feedback, supporting students to develop good interpersonal relationships, etc., and motivating them from many aspects. This is highly consistent with my research results. When motivation is nurtured, students develop as a whole person, improving both intellectually and in their emotional, social, and physical abilities, laying the foundation for their overall success and well-being.

2. Leigh (2007) argues that the assessment system plays a crucial role in shaping students' holistic competencies, which include a broad range of skills such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, emotional intelligence, and adaptability.

3. Smith (2017) conducted a survey and analysis of administrators of private colleges, and the results showed that the assessment system is a significant factor. The analysis showed that the assessment system in education and teaching positively affects students' holistic competencies.

4. Grandinetti (2022) used students from a university as research subjects and found that the assessment system had a significant positive effect on students' holistic competencies. This shows that students can further understand their ability level through diversified assessments. The

study proved that the assessment system positively impacts students' holistic competencies, and the findings of this paper further confirm this view.

5. Díaz-Iso et al. (2020) perceived extracurricular activities to confirm a significant positive correlation between the activities and students' holistic competencies. This confirms that this paper's findings are generalizable.

6. Bacolod (2007) believes that teacher satisfaction increases when educational administrators fully support teachers, high pay and performance standards are provided, teachers are appreciated for their teaching work, and they can cooperate harmoniously with their peers.

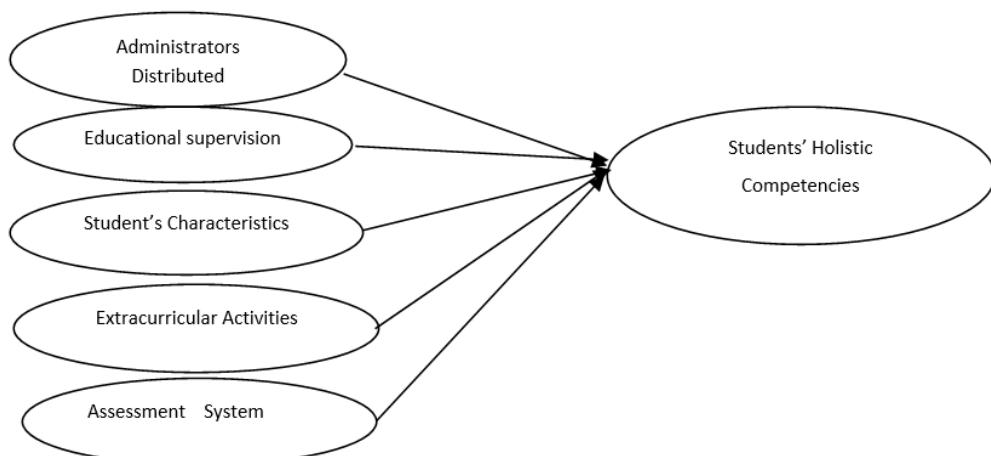


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

## Research Methodology

The research on Student Affairs Factors Affecting Students' Holistic Competencies of Private Colleges in Guangdong Province is quantitative and qualitative.

The population used in the quantitative research is the administrators, teachers, and students of 55 private colleges in Guangdong Province.

The sample used in the quantitative study is the administrators, teachers, and students of 600 private colleges in Guangdong Province, using the simple random sampling method.

The qualitative research sample consisted of 9 administrators and teachers, using purposeful selection.

### **Instruments used in the research**

The researcher used instruments to collect data because it is a mixed research method. The quantitative research instrument used a questionnaire, and the qualitative research used an interview form. It is divided into three parts as follows:

Part 1: The questionnaire on the personal status of the respondents is a checklist to ask for basic information of the respondents, including 1) the gender of the respondents, 2) identity, 3) the age of the respondents, 4) the highest educational level of the respondents, and 5) the work experience of the respondents.

Part 2: The questionnaire on the impact of student affairs management on the overall competence of students, which was created by the researcher, is divided into 100 aspects.

Part 3: Open-ended interview form: Guidelines for developing the overall competence of students in private colleges in Guangdong Province

### **Data Analysis**

This research used questionnaires as a quantitative research tool and interviews as a qualitative research tool. The data analysis in the research was as follows:

#### **Quantitative Research**

Data analysis in quantitative research involves analyzing the data using a computer program and using statistics such as mean, percentage, and sem.

#### **Qualitative Research**

The researcher analyzed the data by arranging it according to the relevant content. The researcher analyzed the data by arranging the data according to the content related to the guidelines for developing the holistic competence of students in private colleges in Guangdong Province, according to the objectives. The researcher analyzed the data by organizing and displaying it. The researcher presented the data by typing the content and sequencing the activities consistent with the spatial data collection and conclusion, interpretation, and verification of the accuracy of the research results by synthesizing, interpreting, and drawing conclusions from the data collected in this step. The researcher compared the interview content and discussed the results with the data from reviewing related documents. Then, the summarized and interpreted research results were compiled into the study results.

## Research Results

Objective 1. The results of the student affairs factors of private colleges in Guangdong Province.

The descriptive statistical method of mean and standard deviation was adopted in private colleges in Guangdong Province. The levels of student affairs factors of private colleges in Guangdong Province were evaluated, including administrators' distributed leadership, educational supervision, students' characteristics, extracurricular activities, and the assessment system, with five observed variables.

**Table 1** Mean, S.D. interpretation of Variables

Items	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Kurtosis	Skewness	Remarks
Administrators Distributed Leadership	1.875	5.000	3.600	.794	-1.332	.048	High
Educational supervision	1.733	5.000	3.644	.871	-1.138	-.512	High
Student's Characteristics	1.825	5.000	3.567	.780	-1.150	-.184	High
Extracurricular Activities	1.625	5.000	3.571	.808	-1.234	-.118	High
Assessment System	1.825	5.000	3.583	.789	-1.257	-.029	High

Table 1 Research results found that the average administrators distributed leadership of these five variables was 3.600 (S.D=.794), educational supervision was 3.644 (S.D=.871), student's characteristics was 3.567 (S.D=.780), extracurricular activities were 3.571 (S.D=.808), assessment system was 3.583 (S.D=.789), students' holistic competencies were 3.589 (S.D=.848). The average was 3.567–3.644, which was interpreted as being on the high side. The results show that administrators distributed leadership, educational supervision, students' characteristics, extracurricular activities, assessment system, and students' holistic competencies of private colleges in Guangdong Province are high.

**Objective 2:** The Results of the students' holistic competencies of private colleges in Guangdong Province.

Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation (S.D.) were used to evaluate the students' holistic competencies in private colleges in Guangdong Province.

**Table 2** Mean, S.D. interpretation of Variables

Items	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Kurtosis	Skewness	Remarks
Students' Holistic Competencies	1.600	5.000	3.589	.848	-1.006	-.345	High

Table 3 research results found that the average students' holistic competencies of private colleges in Guangdong Province is 3.589, and the standard deviation is 0.848. The results show that students' holistic competencies at private colleges in Guangdong Province are high.

**Objective 3:** The results of student affairs factors affecting students' holistic competencies of private colleges in Guangdong Province.

This study first evaluated the structural model to test the influence of administrators' distributed leadership, educational supervision, student characteristics, extracurricular activities, and assessment system. Then, it conducted a path analysis of the relationship between the potential variables.

Table 3 shows the structural model's model fitting index. Figure 2 shows the structural equation model used in this study.

**Table 3** Fit index of the Structural equation model

Reference Indicator	$\chi^2/df$	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA	RMR	NFI	IFI	TLI
Statistical value	1.123	0.952	0.944	0.014	0.048	0.967	0.983	0.983
Reference value	$<3$	$>0.9$	$>0.9$	$<0.08$	$<0.08$	$>0.9$	$>0.9$	$>0.9$
Conclusion	Qualified	Qualified	Qualified	Qualified	Qualified	Qualified	Qualified	Qualified

Table 3: Research found that the CFA model test results show a good fitting effect. Specifically, the  $\chi^2/df$  value of 1.123 is well below 3, indicating a good overall fit of the model. The GFI and AGFI values are 0.952 and 0.944, respectively, higher than 0.9, indicating superior matching between the model and the data. In addition, the RMSEA value is 0.014, which is significantly lower than 0.08, indicating that the model error is small and the fitting effect is excellent. The RMR value is 0.047, which is also lower than 0.08, indicating the model has strong prediction ability. The NFI and IFI values of 0.967 and 0.983, respectively, are also higher than 0.9, indicating a significant improvement over the baseline model. Finally, the TLI value is 0.983, confirming the model's good fit.

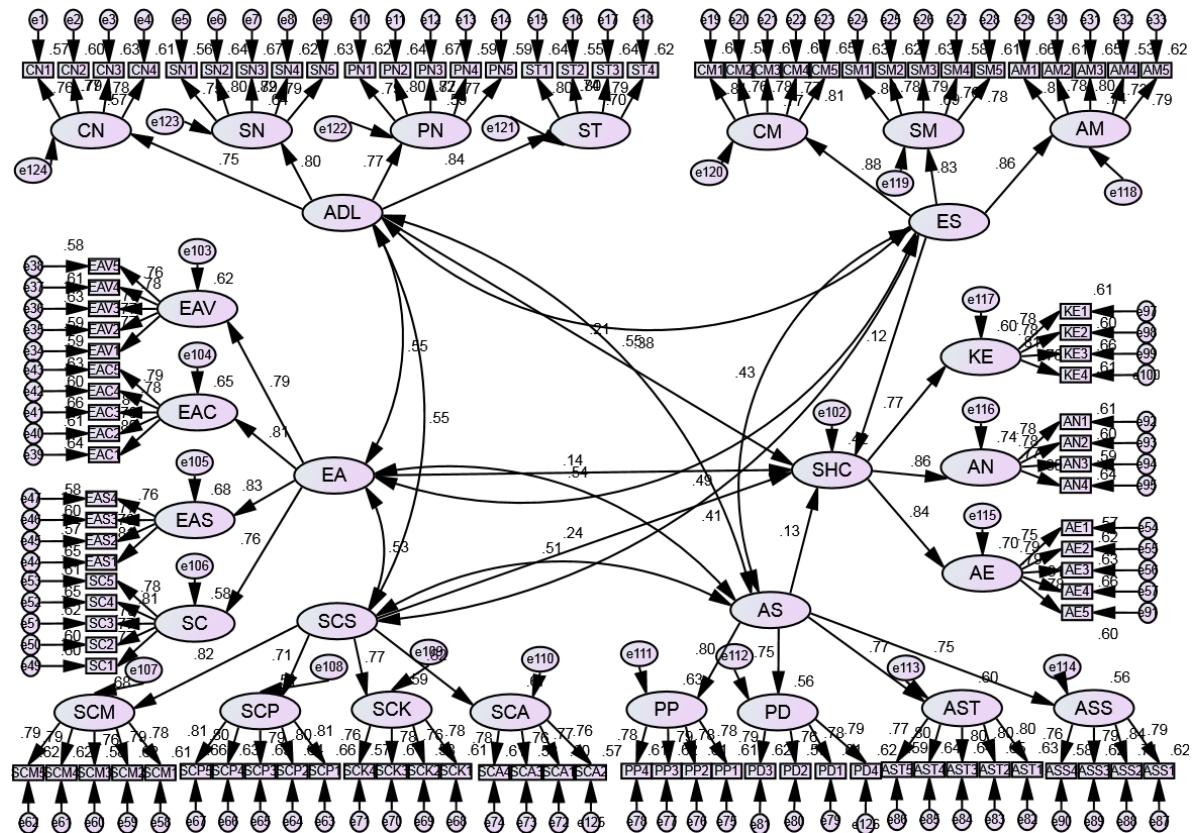


Figure 2 Structural equation model

Table 4 Structural Model Results

Variable		Unstd.	S.D.	S.E.	C.R.	P	
SHC	<---	ES	0.099	0.123	0.041	2.399	0.016
SHC	<---	ADL	0.221	0.207	0.066	3.338	***
SHC	<---	EA	0.137	0.138	0.061	2.24	0.025
SHC	<---	SCS	0.22	0.236	0.056	3.912	***
SHC	<---	AS	0.134	0.132	0.061	2.181	0.029

According to the preceding table, the standardized path coefficient of Educational Supervision on Students' Holistic Competencies is 0.123, which is statistically significant ( $P<0.05$ ). This indicates a noteworthy positive impact of Educational Supervision on Students' Holistic Competencies. The standardized path coefficient of Administrators' Distributed Leadership on Students' Holistic Competencies is 0.207, achieving significance ( $P<0.01$ ), which suggests a significant favorable influence of Administrators' Distributed Leadership on Students' Holistic Competencies. The standardized path coefficient of Extracurricular Activities on Students' Holistic Competencies stands

at 0.138, also reaching significance ( $P<0.05$ ), signifying a substantial positive effect of Extracurricular Activities on Students' Holistic Competencies. The standardized path coefficient of Student's Characteristics on Students' Holistic Competencies is 0.236, with significance ( $P<0.01$ ), indicating a significant favorable influence of Student's Characteristics on Students' Holistic Competencies. Finally, the standardized path coefficient of the Assessment System on Students' Holistic Competencies is 0.132, which is significant ( $P<0.05$ ), illustrating a meaningful positive impact of the Assessment System on Students' Holistic Competencies.

### Results of the hypothesis test

Based on the above analysis, Table 5 summarizes the results of hypothesis testing in this study.

**Table 5** Hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	Paths	Result
H1	Administrators' Distributed Leadership → Students' Holistic Competencies	Supported
H2	Educational Supervision → Students' Holistic Competencies	Supported
H3	Student Characteristics → Students' Holistic Competencies	Supported
H4	Extracurricular Activities → Students' Holistic Competencies	Supported
H5	Assessment System → Students' Holistic Competencies.	Supported

**Objective 4 :** Provide the guidelines for administrators' instructional leadership to promote teacher performance in public higher vocational colleges in Shandong Province.

Based on semi-structured interviews with nine experts, the research found that instructional leadership factors such as administrators' distributed leadership, educational supervision, student characteristics, extracurricular activities, and assessment systems impact students' holistic competencies in private colleges in Guangdong Province. It also proposed guidelines for instructional leadership factors that influence students' holistic competencies.

Guidelines for improving the students' holistic competencies of private colleges in Guangdong Province: First, administrators should delegate leadership responsibilities to teachers, encouraging a culture of shared decision-making. They should also establish strong communication pathways between administrators, teachers, students, and parents to ensure everyone is aligned on goals and values.

Second, encourage modern teaching techniques, strengthen social media campaigns to cultivate potential, and implement a system of regular classroom observations and constructive feedback to help educators refine their teaching practices.

Third, implement personalized learning strategies to acknowledge students' diverse learning styles, interests, and needs. Offer various extracurricular activities, allowing students to explore their interests and develop non-academic skills.

## Discussion

In summary, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for all the variables and their sub-dimensions in this study exceeded 0.85, peaking at 0.937, indicating that all variables exhibit high reliability overall. This provides a solid foundation for subsequent data analysis and model testing, ensuring the reliability and validity of the research findings.

Administrative distributed leadership has a significant positive impact on students' holistic competencies. It is found that in the path analysis of the administrators distributed leadership on the students' holistic competencies, the P-value is  $< 0.01$ , which indicates that the distributed leadership of administrators has a significant impact on the development of students' holistic competencies, and the standard path coefficient is 0.207, which indicates that the administrators' distributed leadership has a positive impact on the students' holistic competencies. Consistent with the research of Harris (2003), the inclusive and participatory nature of distributed leadership fosters a sense of shared responsibility, empowerment, and ownership among team members. Distributed leadership promotes innovative problem-solving, continuous learning, and adaptability to changing educational contexts by involving a broader range of perspectives and harnessing a group's collective intelligence. Shava and Tlou (2018), and Bush and Ng (2019) have analyzed the aspects of Cooperation, Supervision, Support and Participation, and further formalized the positive and significant effect of administrators distribute leadership on the development of students' holistic competencies. This paper differs from it by constructing a second-order structural equation model of administrators' distribution of leadership, which generally confirms the positive effect of administrators' distribution of leadership on the development of students' holistic competencies.

Educational supervision has a significant positive impact on students' holistic competencies. It is found that in the path analysis of the educational supervision on the students' holistic

competencies, the P-value is  $0.016 < 0.01$ , which indicates that the educational supervision significantly impacts the development of students' holistic competencies. (Treslan, 2006) From an operational perspective, educators might attribute this description to a school "in which teachers and students have ongoing opportunities to experience success, innovative learning is supported and encouraged, group potential is recognized and utilized, and cooperative effort is embraced and practiced".

Extracurricular activities have a significant positive impact on students' holistic competencies. In the path analysis of the extracurricular activities on the students' holistic competencies, the P-value is  $0.025 < 0.01$ , which indicates that the extracurricular activities significantly impact the development of students' holistic competencies. (Acar & Gündüz, 2017) In conclusion, in a world where physical inactivity and obesity are common, encouraging children to play sports, making children like sports, and getting children to adopt a lifelong sports habit is becoming more important to raise a healthy generation. Students can develop their analytical thinking by participating in extracurricular activities, and balancing academic and extracurricular activities helps improve their time management and organizational skills.

The assessment system has a significant positive impact on students' holistic competencies. It is found that in the path analysis of the assessment system on the students' holistic competencies, the P-value is  $0.029 < 0.01$ , which indicates that the assessment system significantly impacts the development of students' holistic competencies. Leigh (2007) argues that the assessment system plays a crucial role in shaping students' holistic competencies, which include a broad range of skills such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, emotional intelligence, and adaptability. Smith (2017) conducted a survey and analysis of private college administrators, and the results showed that the assessment system is a significant factor. The results were analyzed, and they showed that the assessment system in education and teaching positively affected students' holistic competencies.

## Conclusion

Administrative distributed leadership has a significant positive impact on students' holistic competencies. From the research of this paper, it is found that in the path analysis of the administrators distributed leadership on the students' holistic competencies, the P-value is  $< 0.01$ ,

which indicates that the distributed leadership of administrators has a significant impact on the development of students' holistic competencies, and the standard path coefficient is 0.207, which indicates that the administrators' distributed leadership has a positive impact on the students' holistic competencies. How administrators distribute leadership in schools can profoundly impact the development of students' holistic competencies, including academic skills and social, emotional, ethical, and life skills, and can help students thrive in various life contexts. Educational supervision has a significant positive impact on students' holistic competencies. From the study of this paper, it is found that in the path analysis of the educational supervision on the students' holistic competencies, the P-value is  $0.016 < 0.01$ , which indicates that the educational supervision significantly impacts the development of students' holistic competencies. The standard path coefficient is 0.123, which indicates that the educational supervision can promote the development of the students' holistic competencies. However, the degree of this effect is not very high, because the supervision by the educators is affected by various factors. The influence of the promotion on the development of the students' holistic competencies is more limited. Student characteristics have a significant positive impact on students' holistic competencies. From the study of this paper, it is found that in the path analysis of the student characteristics on the students' holistic competencies, the P-value is  $< 0.01$ , which indicates that the student characteristics have a significant impact on the development of students' holistic competencies, and the standard path coefficient is 0.237, which indicates that the student characteristics can promote the development of the students' holistic competencies, the higher the path coefficient, the greater the degree of influence. Extracurricular activities have a significant positive impact on students' holistic competencies. From the study of this paper, it is found that in the path analysis of the extracurricular activities on the students' holistic competencies, the P-value is  $0.025 < 0.01$ , which indicates that the extracurricular activities significantly impact the development of students' holistic competencies. The standard path coefficient is 0.138, which indicates that the extracurricular activities can promote the development of the students' holistic competencies. The assessment system has a significant positive impact on students' holistic competencies. From the study of this paper, it is found that in the path analysis of the assessment system on the students' holistic competencies, the P-value is  $0.029 < 0.01$ , which indicates that the assessment system significantly impacts the development of students' holistic competencies. The standard path coefficient is 0.132, which indicates that the assessment system

can promote the development of the students' holistic competencies, while the higher the path coefficient, the greater the degree of influence.

## Suggestions

By establishing a multi-level, multi-role leadership model, strengthening supervision of the education process, respecting the development of students' characteristics, carrying out rich extracurricular activities, and improving the evaluation system, students in private universities in Guangdong Province can achieve all-round development, improve their comprehensive abilities, and be fully prepared for their future career development. First, empowering students to take more leadership roles. Second, the educational supervision assessment and supervision mechanism should be improved. Third, promote diverse development and respect individual differences. Fourth, give full play to the positive role of extracurricular activities in students' growth. Fifth, diversified assessment should be established, and the training mechanism should be improved.

## New Knowledge

The research highlights the concept of holistic competencies, which encompass problem-solving abilities, creativity, teamwork, leadership, and lifelong learning. Given Guangdong's role as a significant economic hub in China, private colleges in the region play a crucial role in equipping graduates with skills relevant to the evolving job market. The study offers valuable insights into how student affairs initiatives can enhance student development and proposes strategies for improving educational policies in private institutions.

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