THE INFLUENCE OF STUDENT-CENTERED MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF QINGDAO HENGXING UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT
This research aimed at investigating the influence of student-centered management practices on student engagement in the context of a Chinese private applied undergraduate university. The samples consisted of 450 valid undergraduate students enrolled at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology, Shandong Province, China. A self-administered questionnaire was used for data collection, adopting a proportionate stratified sampling method. Multiple regression analysis was employed for the quantitative data analysis. The results indicated that student-centered management practices were perceived at a high level ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.66$), and student engagement was at a moderate-to-high level ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.57$). Student-centered management practices showed a strong positive correlation with student engagement ($r = 0.581$, $p < 0.01$). Moreover, student-centered management practices significantly positively influenced student engagement ($\beta = 0.563$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 33.7% of the variance in student engagement. Among the five dimensions, student participation in decision-making, personalized student support, communication and responsiveness, and student development opportunities significantly influenced student engagement, whereas academic and developmental guidance did not show a statistically significant influence. This study offers practical implications for university administrators in Chinese private applied undergraduate universities to design more participatory, supportive, and development-oriented student management approaches, and supplements empirical evidence on student-centered management in higher education.

Keywords: Student-Centered Management Practices, Student Engagement, Higher Education, Private Undergraduate University, Multiple Regression Analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education is recently undergoing significant transformation as universities respond to changing student characteristics, technological advancement, increasing expectations for educational quality, and global competition (Astin, 1984; Kuh, 2009; Kahu, 2013). This transformation is particularly relevant to higher education institutions seeking to improve educational quality and student development. Traditional student management models tend to emphasize standardized supervision and administrative control, which may no longer be sufficient to meet the diverse developmental needs of contemporary students. Therefore, universities have increasingly adopted a student-centered management approach to place students' development, participation, needs, and educational experiences at the center of university management (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Zhang & Yang, 2025).

Within the Chinese higher education context, student engagement is increasingly important as universities seek to enhance educational quality, student development, and graduate readiness (Yin & Wang, 2016). Universities are expected to develop students not only in academic competence but also in behavioral participation, emotional connection, and cognitive investment. Student engagement reflects the extent to which students invest behavioral effort, emotional energy, and cognitive resources in learning and university life (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004). It has been consistently associated with students' learning experiences, persistence, development, and academic achievement (Kuh, 2009; Su & Liu, 2026).

However, a substantial proportion of student engagement research has focused on classroom practices, teacher support, academic self-efficacy, motivation, and digital learning environments, while fewer studies have examined the influence of institutional student-centered management practices on student engagement (Jiang, 2025; Wang & Zhou, 2025). Moreover, most existing evidence has been generated in Western and Korean higher education contexts, and the applicability of such findings to Chinese private applied undergraduate universities remains insufficiently examined (Park & Bae, 2024; Tantongsri, Chaiyawat & Sriyaporn, 2025). There are few studies revealing the relationship between student-centered management practices and student engagement in the context of Chinese private higher education. This research gap provides the rationale for the present study.

Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology provides an appropriate context for examining this issue because the study can investigate student management within an actual institutional environment where student-centered management reform is being progressively implemented. Accordingly, the present study aims to examine the influence of student-centered management practices on student engagement at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology. By linking student-centered management practices to student engagement, this study can offer empirical evidence and practical implications for university administrators to design more participatory, supportive, and development-oriented student management approaches.

This research aims at investigating the influence of student-centered management practices on student engagement in the context of a Chinese private applied undergraduate university.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Relationship between Student-Centered Management Practices and Student Engagement

Student-centered management practices are a modern educational management paradigm derived from humanistic educational philosophy and student development theory. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) proposed by Ryan & Deci (2020) provides the core psychological support for implementing student-centered management practices, emphasizing that individuals are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation when their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied. Astin (1984) proposed Student Involvement Theory,

asserting that student development is closely associated with the amount of physical and psychological energy that students invest in the academic and co-curricular experiences of the university. These two theoretical perspectives jointly suggest that institutional management practices which respect students' autonomy, provide personalized support, and build responsive communication can effectively promote student engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004; Zheng, Huang & Wu, 2023).

Existing empirical studies have verified the positive correlation between student-centered management behaviors and student engagement. Tantongsri et al. (2025) conducted empirical research on private university students in Thailand and confirmed that student-centered institutional services, participatory management mechanisms, and developmental support can effectively stimulate students' campus participation willingness and learning investment. Park & Bae (2024) revealed that institutional management practices are the key influencing factors of student emotional engagement. Therefore, it can be concluded that student-centered management practices can have a positive relationship with student engagement. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is derived for this study:

H1: Student-centered management practices influenced student engagement.

Relationship between Student Participation in Decision-Making and Student Engagement

Student participation in decision-making is the core institutional guarantee of student-centered management and the fundamental difference from traditional management modes (Liu, 2026). When students are provided with opportunities to express opinions, contribute suggestions, and participate in campus affairs decisions, their sense of autonomy and institutional belonging is enhanced (Park & Bae, 2024). Student Involvement Theory holds that students who actively participate in institutional governance tend to invest more energy in their learning and campus life (Astin, 1984). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is derived:

H2: Student participation in decision-making influenced student engagement.

Relationship between Personalized Student Support and Student Engagement

Personalized student support is the basic service dimension of student-centered management, which aims to solve the problem of homogeneous and one-size-fits-all services in traditional universities (Wang et al., 2023). When universities provide assistance and services that respond to the different academic, developmental, and personal needs of individual students, students are more likely to feel cared for and supported, thereby increasing their emotional connection and behavioral investment (Guo & Zhang, 2024). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is derived:

H3: Personalized student support influenced student engagement.

Relationship between Academic and Developmental Guidance and Student Engagement

Academic and developmental guidance is the core functional dimension of student-centered management, which undertakes the core task of talent training in universities (Zhang & Yang, 2025). When students receive useful academic advice, career planning assistance, and personal development guidance, their cognitive engagement and learning motivation are expected to improve (Su, Liu & Qian, 2026). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is derived:

H4: Academic and developmental guidance influenced student engagement.

Relationship between Communication and Responsiveness and Student Engagement

Communication and responsiveness are the operational guarantee dimensions of student-centered management, which determine the efficiency and effectiveness of institutional management service delivery (Jiang, 2025). When universities communicate important information clearly and timely, and respond appropriately to students' requests and questions, information asymmetry is reduced and a harmonious campus interactive atmosphere is built, which enhances students' sense of belonging and engagement (Park & Bae, 2024; Wang & Zhou, 2025). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is derived:

H5: Communication and responsiveness influenced student engagement.

Relationship between Student Development Opportunities and Student Engagement

Student development opportunities are the extension and output dimension of student-centered management, which is the key carrier to realize students' all-round development (Jiang, 2025). When universities provide sufficient opportunities for students to participate in extracurricular activities, leadership cultivation, and skill development, students are more likely to invest energy in activities that contribute to their academic and personal growth (Fredricks et al., 2004; Su et al., 2026). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is derived:

H6: Student development opportunities influenced student engagement.

From the literature review, the conceptual framework can be drawn as shown in Figure 1.

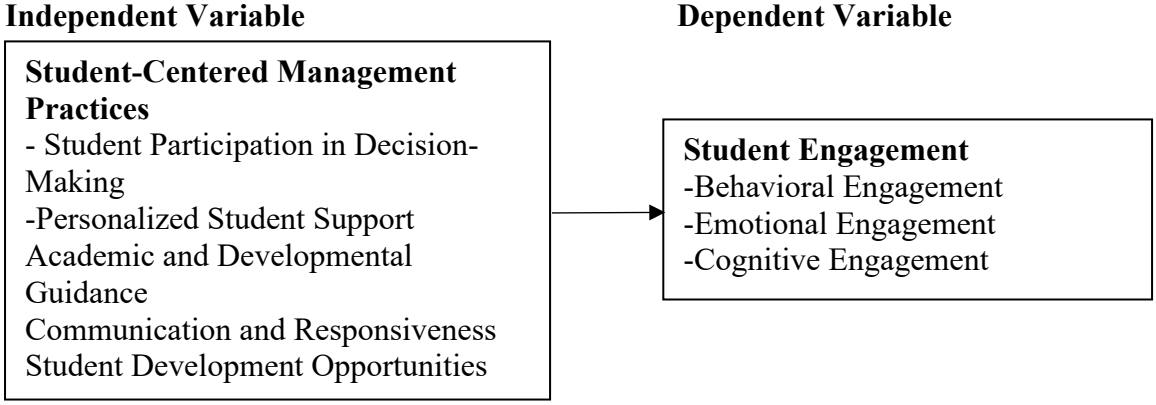


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework adapted from Jiang (2025)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In response to examining the effect of student-centered management practices on student engagement in the context of a Chinese private applied undergraduate university, the study was then designed to adopt a quantitative research approach. The population in this study consisted of full-time undergraduate students enrolled at Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology, Shandong Province, China. Due to the studied sample size calculation by Yamane (1973), the minimum required sample size was approximately 392 students at a confidence level of 95%. To compensate for invalid questionnaires, the researcher distributed questionnaires to 450 students, and a total of 450 valid questionnaires were returned. A proportionate stratified sampling method was used to ensure adequate representation of students from the four major faculties of the university.

A self-administered questionnaire was used as the research instrument, developed on the basis of the conceptual framework and the hypotheses raised in Chapter One. The questionnaire is divided into three parts. For the first part, it includes the demographic information such as gender, age, year of study, faculty, and whether students participate in university activities. Then, the second and the third parts are on a Likert scale with 1-5 rating-scales from 1 meaning "extremely disagreeable" to 5 meaning "extremely agreeable" to study student-centered management practices (SCMP) and student engagement (SE). Student-centered management practices consist of five dimensions: Student Participation in Decision-Making, Personalized Student Support, Academic and Developmental Guidance, Communication and Responsiveness, and Student Development Opportunities, with 4, 4, 4, 5, and 4 observed variables, respectively. Student engagement consists of three dimensions: Behavioral Engagement, Emotional Engagement, and Cognitive Engagement, with 4, 6, and 4 observed variables, respectively.

Before the instrument was applied for data collection, the item-objective congruence (IOC) and reliability test of the questionnaire through Cronbach's alpha were systematically conducted. From the investigation, the result revealed that the IOC was equal to (IOC requires expert-

panel ratings; not derivable from raw response data) and Cronbach's alpha was obtained at 0.901, illustrating the sufficient quality of the research tool (Polit & Beck, 2006; Hair et al., 2012).

Regarding data analysis, the descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis, were employed to summarize the respondents' profiles and the levels of the studied variables. Besides, the reliability of the questionnaire was examined through Cronbach's alpha coefficient. To test the research hypotheses, Pearson's product-moment correlation and multiple regression analysis were administered to examine the relationships between student-centered management practices and student engagement and to determine the influence of student-centered management practices on student engagement (Field, 2020). The hypotheses were evaluated at the .05 level of statistical significance, and the results are reported using standardized and unstandardized regression coefficients, t-values, and p-values. All the details are portrayed in the following section.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Respondents' Profiles and Studied Variables

Most of the respondents were female (235 people, or 52.2%) when compared with male (215 people, or 47.8%). Considering the respondents' year of study, the result indicated that the majority of the students were in their fourth year (171 persons, or 38.0%), followed by first-year students (129 persons, or 28.7%), second-year students (84 persons, or 18.7%), and third-year students (66 persons, or 14.7%). In terms of participation in university activities, most of the respondents had participated in university student activities during the past academic year (351 people, or 78.0%), whereas 99 people (22.0%) had not participated.

Variables Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 displays the mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis of related variables. Class interval for data interpretation uses the reference from Best & Kahn (2006). The findings addressed those respondents who moderately to highly agreed on student-centered management practices, indicating that students generally hold positive perceptions toward the university's student-centered management reform. Meanwhile, students were encouraged to moderately agree on student engagement. In addition, skewness and kurtosis, which were considered for assessing normal data distribution, were acceptable since their values ranged between ± 3.00 (Curran, West & Finch, 1996; Kline, 2005).

Table 1 Mean, Standard Deviation, Skewness and Kurtosis of Related Variables

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Interpretation Level
IV1 Student Participation in Decision-Making	3.72	0.93	-1.10	0.03	High
IV2 Personalized Student Support	3.70	0.99	-0.99	-0.24	High
IV3 Academic and Developmental Guidance	3.71	0.97	-1.14	0.07	High
IV4 Communication and Responsiveness	3.70	0.90	-1.22	0.30	High
IV5 Student Development Opportunities	3.69	0.95	-1.15	-0.04	High
Student-Centered Management Practices (Overall)	3.71	0.66	-1.31	0.74	High

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Interpretation Level
DV1 Behavioral Engagement	3.65	1.00	-1.05	-0.14	High
DV2 Emotional Engagement	3.66	0.83	-0.94	-0.11	High
DV3 Cognitive Engagement	2.94	0.71	0.23	-0.28	High
Student Engagement (Overall)	3.45	0.57	-0.89	0.07	High

Note: IV1-5 refers to the dimensions of Student-Centered Management Practices, DV1-3 refers to the dimensions of Student Engagement.
Note: the means and standard deviations above are computed from the 450 valid undergraduate responses collected by the questionnaire (Qingdao Hengxing University of Science and Technology, 2026).

Model Assessment and Reliability Analysis

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed through Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which indicates the internal consistency of each scale. A scale is considered acceptable when its Cronbach's alpha is at least 0.70 (Field, 2020). The reliability coefficients for the independent variable, student-centered management practices, and the dependent variable, student engagement, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Reliability of the Questionnaire

Dimension	Number of Items	Cronbach's alpha	Skewness	Kurtosis
Student-Centered Management Practices (Overall)	21	0.901	-1.31	0.74
Student Engagement (Overall)	14	0.677	-0.89	0.07

Note: SCMP refers to the overall scale of Student-Centered Management Practices (SCMP1-SCMP21), and SE refers to Student Engagement (SE1-SE14). A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70 or higher indicates acceptable internal consistency.

Table 3 Pearson Correlations between the Dimensions of Student-Centered Management Practices and Student Engagement

Dimension of SCMP	r with SE	p
Student Participation in Decision-Making	0.415	< 0.001
Personalized Student Support	0.450	< 0.001
Academic and Developmental Guidance	0.308	< 0.001
Communication and Responsiveness	0.427	< 0.001
Student Development Opportunities	0.380	< 0.001

Note: SCMP: Student-Centered Management Practices. The correlation coefficient (r) indicates the strength and direction of the linear relationship between each dimension of student-centered management practices and student engagement. All correlations are statistically significant at the 0.01 level.

The results in Table 2 indicate that both the overall student-centered management practices scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.901) and the overall student engagement scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.677) demonstrate acceptable internal consistency, confirming the reliability of the measurement instrument. Table 3 further shows that all five dimensions of student-centered management practices were significantly and positively correlated with student engagement (r

= 0.308 to 0.450, $p < 0.01$), and the overall student-centered management practices showed a moderate to strong positive correlation with student engagement ($r = 0.581$, $p < 0.01$). These results provide the preliminary evidence for the subsequent multiple regression analysis.

Finalized Model and Hypothesis Analysis

To test the research hypotheses, Pearson's product-moment correlation and multiple regression analysis were conducted. Multiple regression analysis was employed to determine the influence of the five dimensions of student-centered management practices on student engagement. The determining indicators, including the standardized and unstandardized regression coefficients, standard error, t-value, and p-value, were used for hypothesis testing, and the coefficient of determination (R^2) was considered to describe the influential power of the prediction model (shown in Table 4).

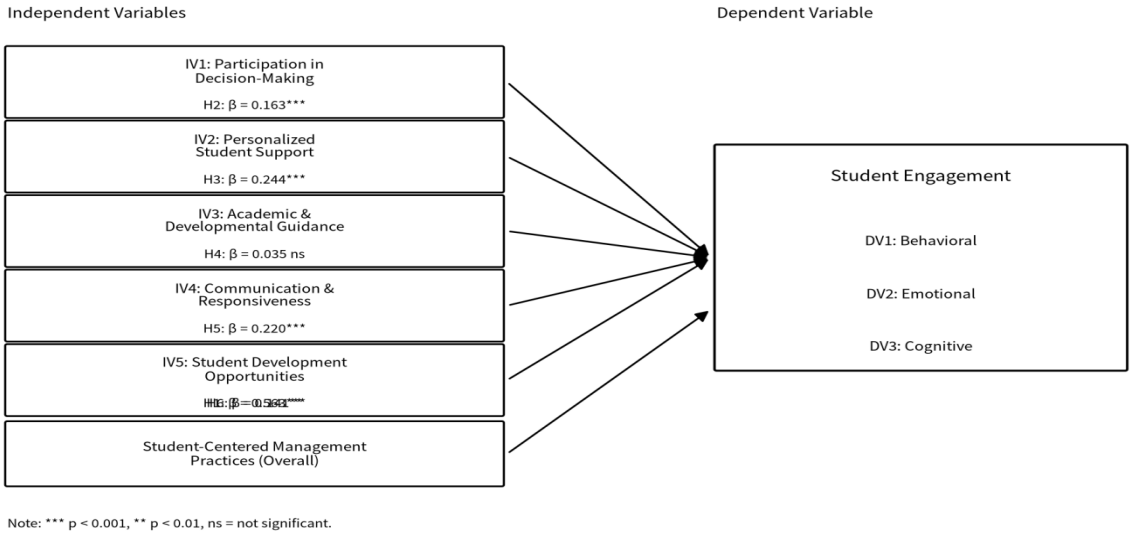


Figure 2 Finalized Model

Table 4 Standardized Estimate, Unstandardized Estimate, Standard Error, t-value, z-value, and p-value

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	b	S.E.	t-value	Result	Hypothesis Result
H1	SCMP → SE	0.563	0.473	0.033	14.428	< 0.001	Supported
H2	IV1 → SE	0.163	0.098	0.028	3.514	< 0.001	Supported
H3	IV2 → SE	0.244	0.139	0.025	5.465	< 0.001	Supported
H4	IV3 → SE	0.035	0.020	0.026	0.782	=0.435	Not Supported
H5	IV4 → SE	0.220	0.137	0.028	4.935	< 0.001	Supported
H6	IV5 → SE	0.141	0.082	0.026	3.150	=0.002	Supported

Note: β refers to the standardized estimate, b refers to the unstandardized estimate, S.E. refers to the standard error, SCMP: Student-Centered Management Practices, SE: Student Engagement, IV1-IV5 refer to the five dimensions of Student-Centered Management Practices. The H1-H6 estimates reported in Table 4 are obtained from multiple regression analysis of the 450 valid responses.

Based on the regression analysis of the 450 valid undergraduate responses, Table 4's hypothesis results are summarized as follows: H1 (student-centered management practices influenced student engagement) was supported at a statistically significant level ($\beta = 0.563$, $p < 0.001$). H2 (student participation in decision-making) was supported ($\beta = 0.163$, $p < 0.001$). H3

(personalized student support) was supported (β = 0.244, p < 0.001). H4 (academic and developmental guidance) was not supported since its p-value was .435, which is higher than .05. H5 (communication and responsiveness) was supported (β = 0.220, p <0 .001) and showed a strong predictive effect. H6 (student development opportunities) was supported (β = 0.141, p = 0.002).

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

After addressing the study objective aimed at investigating the influence of student-centered management practices on student engagement in a Chinese private applied undergraduate university, the findings summarized that student-centered management practices positively influenced student engagement at a statistically significant level of .001. Among the five components, student participation in decision-making, personalized student support, communication and responsiveness, and student development opportunities significantly influenced student engagement, whereas academic and developmental guidance did not show a statistically significant direct influence. According to the study result, it can be discussed that when universities place students' development, participation, and needs at the center of their management, students are more likely to invest behavioral effort, emotional energy, and cognitive resources in learning and university life, which consequently enhances their overall engagement.

The discussion portrayed in this study was also consistent with the study done by Tantongsri et al. (2025), who revealed that student-centered institutional services and participatory management mechanisms can effectively stimulate students' campus participation willingness and learning investment in Thai private higher education. In addition, there were similar results from the study conducted by Park & Bae (2024), who found that institutional management practices are the key influencing factors of student emotional engagement and that responsive school services and harmonious teacher-student interaction can enhance students' institutional belonging. This is also consistent with the study by Ryan & Deci (2020), who claimed that satisfying students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness can facilitate intrinsic motivation and sustained engagement.

Nevertheless, the non-significant result of academic and developmental guidance in this study deserves particular discussion. A plausible explanation is that although the university has set up academic guidance services, students may perceive that the actual service output cannot match their real needs; formal guidance arrangements have not been effectively transformed into individual student engagement improvement. This conclusion is consistent with the argument that service implementation quality rather than service existence determines student outcomes (Su et al., 2026), and further enriches the practical application scenarios of Self-Determination Theory in private university student management reform.

The study found in this article can provide two main contributions: managerial and theoretical issues. For managerial contribution, administrators in Chinese private applied undergraduate universities can acknowledge and confirm that student-centered management practices can significantly improve student engagement. Therefore, they could emphasize expanding student participation channels in campus affairs decision-making, building a transparent student suggestion feedback mechanism, and fully respecting students' subject status in campus governance (Ryan & Deci, 2020). They should also optimize personalized differentiated support services and build an efficient two-way responsive communication mechanism, since communication and responsiveness showed the strongest predictive effect. For theoretical contribution, the study can confirm that student-centered management practices are an important institutional environmental factor affecting student engagement in Chinese private higher education, thereby extending the applicability of Self-Determination Theory and Student Involvement Theory to the Chinese private university context. In addition, this study

can add to the few literatures on studying the relationship between student-centered management practices and student engagement in private applied undergraduate universities. However, this study has some limitations that must be considered that can potentially lead to an improved future. Begin with the limitations related to the research approach were taken into account since this study had emphasis on adopting a quantitative approach. Consequently, future research may utilize other research approaches, for example, qualitative concepts. Through the use of in-depth interviews, focus groups, and other qualitative data collection techniques, it may be possible to gain a deeper insight into how student-centered management practices strengthen student engagement. Another consideration of likely limitation may focus on a single university being selected, which may create the impossibility of generalizing the research result to other universities. As a result, based on the discussion, future research may extend the study towards multiple private universities in different regions of China and employ comparison analysis across them, as well as comparative research with Thai private universities to explore cross-cultural differences. Lastly, the possible limitations may involve the profound variables employed in this study. The other determining factors such as digital campus construction, smart management reform, psychological need satisfaction, and institutional belonging seem to have a possible trend in establishing successful student engagement, and future research may incorporate mediating and moderating variables to clarify the internal mechanism and boundary conditions of the research model.

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