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# Development of Management Guidelines to Promote Rugby Clubs in Secondary Schools at Shandong Province, the People's Republic of China

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## Abstract

**Background and Aims:** Rugby has gained increasing attention in secondary schools across China; however, in Shandong Province, its development is constrained by inconsistent management practices, limited resources, and the absence of structured operational guidelines. Strengthening club management is essential for ensuring sustainable growth, student participation, and sport quality. This study aimed to develop comprehensive management guidelines to promote rugby clubs in secondary schools in Shandong Province, based on established management theories.

**Methodology:** A mixed-methods design was adopted. Quantitative data were collected from 256 respondents—81 teachers and 175 students—from ten secondary-school rugby clubs through a validated questionnaire (IOC = 0.89). Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with five experts and a focus group discussion with seven specialists, followed by final verification using the connoisseurship technique. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyze the data.

**Results:** The current management situation was rated high in planning, organizing, and leading, but moderate in controlling. Based on the findings, 34 management guidelines were developed: 9 for planning, 9 for organizing, 9 for leading, and 7 for controlling. Experts confirmed that the guidelines are feasible, relevant, and suitable for strengthening rugby club operations in secondary schools.

**Conclusion:** The finalized guidelines provide a clear, evidence-based framework to support the sustainable development of rugby clubs in Shandong Province. These guidelines can also serve as a model for other regions seeking to improve school-sport program management.

**Keywords:** Management Guidelines; Rugby Clubs; Secondary Schools

## Introduction

Youth sports development has become a national strategic priority in China, reflecting government efforts to improve student health, strengthen school physical education, and



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cultivate well-rounded future citizens. Two major policy documents—the *Opinions on Deepening the Integration of Sports and Education to Promote Youth Health Development* (General Administration of Sport of China & Ministry of Education, 2020) and the *National Fitness Program (2021–2025)* (China State Council, 2021)—highlight the need to diversify school-based sports and expand youth participation nationwide. Within this policy context, rugby represents an emerging sport that aligns closely with national development goals due to its emphasis on physical conditioning, tactical decision-making, teamwork, and psychosocial growth. Globally, rugby is well established in countries such as England, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, where it is integrated into school sport systems and youth development pathways. International rugby organizations consistently emphasize the sport's role in developing discipline, cooperation, resilience, and strategic thinking among young athletes (World Rugby, 2020). In China, growing international exchange and broader public interest in diversified sports have contributed to increased visibility of rugby, creating favorable conditions for its introduction into secondary schools.

Shandong Province has shown strong momentum in school sport innovation, supported by national directives calling for integrated sport–education development and youth fitness enhancement (Liu et al., 2020; Wang, 2025). Secondary schools in the province have expanded physical education offerings and invested in teacher training and sport facility improvement as part of wider efforts to respond to national policy reforms. These conditions provide an important foundation for strengthening campus rugby development. At the school level, diversified physical education programs are essential for meeting students' varied interests and supporting holistic development. While traditional sports remain central to school PE curricula, they no longer fully satisfy student demand for engaging and meaningful movement experiences. Rugby offers distinct benefits by promoting physical fitness, teamwork, leadership, responsibility, and perseverance—qualities frequently emphasized in youth sport development research (World Rugby, 2020). Rugby participation can also support students' self-management skills and contribute to the formation of lifelong healthy behaviors.

Despite its potential, the sustainable development of school rugby requires structured management systems. Applying the POLC framework—planning, organizing, leading, and controlling—provides a systematic approach for diagnosing challenges and designing strategies that ensure program quality, safety, and sustainability (Carpenter et al., 2019). This structured approach promotes clear goal setting, effective organizational arrangements, strong leadership practices, and ongoing monitoring mechanisms.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is twofold: **(1)** to develop evidence-based management guidelines to promote rugby clubs in secondary schools in Shandong Province, and **(2)** to confirm



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the feasibility and applicability of these guidelines through expert evaluation. The ultimate goal is to enhance the quality and sustainability of rugby education and contribute to national youth sport development objectives.

## Objectives

1. To develop the management guideline to promote rugby clubs in secondary schools in Shandong province, the People's Republic of China

2. To confirm the management guideline to promote rugby clubs in secondary schools in Shandong province, the People's Republic of China

## Literature Review

### 1. Middle School Rugby Education Practice

Rugby education in Chinese secondary schools remains in the early stages of development, characterized by limited curricular integration, insufficient teacher preparation, and uneven administrative support. These constraints resemble global challenges associated with the introduction of emerging sports into school systems, where lack of curriculum structure, inadequate professional training, and inconsistent institutional backing hinder widespread adoption (Bailey et al., 2013; Green & Houlihan, 2005). Many Chinese schools still offer rugby only as an extracurricular activity, reducing instructional time and limiting opportunities for progressive skill development. A persistent barrier is the shortage of teachers with formal rugby training or coaching certification. In the absence of structured professional development pathways, teachers frequently rely on theoretical instruction, which diminishes student engagement and practical skill acquisition (Light, 2010). Student participation is further constrained by misconceptions about injury risk and the lack of developmentally appropriate introductory formats. International youth sport research shows that modified entry-level formats—such as non-contact or tag versions of contact sports—significantly reduce participation barriers and increase accessibility and motivation (Light & Evans, 2013; World Rugby, 2020).

Competitive structures also remain underdeveloped. Weak intra- and inter-school competition systems limit athletic progression and reduce the visibility of rugby culture on campus. International experiences demonstrate that well-designed competition pathways and appropriate resource allocation are essential for sustainable youth sport development (Eime et al., 2013; World Rugby, 2020). Together, these insights highlight the need for systematic, school-based rugby development models in China.



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## 2. Rugby Club Management and Policy-Making Based on POLC Theory

The POLC management framework—Planning, Organizing, Leading, and Controlling—provides a comprehensive structure for designing and managing school sport programs (Carpenter et al., 2019). Planning involves setting goals, assessing needs, and designing age-appropriate training models. Effective planning ensures alignment between program objectives, school policies, and the developmental needs of students (Koontz & Weihrich, 2010). Organizing requires establishing management committees, defining responsibilities, and coordinating human and material resources. Research in youth sport administration demonstrates that structured organization and resource integration greatly improve operational efficiency and long-term program sustainability (Eime et al., 2013). Leading focuses on communication, motivation, and team culture. Empirical studies highlight that supportive coach leadership, student agency, and recognition systems enhance athlete engagement and cohesion (Horn, 2008; Cruickshank & Collins, 2015). Controlling includes monitoring program performance, ensuring safety, and implementing continuous improvement processes. Accountability systems—such as evaluations of training quality, participation levels, and athlete development—are essential for youth sport viability (Carpenter et al., 2019).

Overall, the POLC framework transforms school rugby club management from informal, inconsistent practices into an evidence-based, structured model aligned with international standards for youth sport management.

## 3. Model Building Methods and POLC Theory

Developing a management model for secondary-school rugby clubs requires integrating theoretical foundations with empirical data. Effective sport-management models must reflect organizational logic while responding to local conditions such as school resources, stakeholder expectations, and regional development priorities (Burton & Peachey, 2020). Model construction typically begins with a comprehensive literature review, followed by empirical inquiry through questionnaires, expert interviews, and focus group discussions. These methods provide essential insights into existing barriers, resource gaps, and operational needs (Eime et al., 2013). The POLC framework provides a systematic basis for structuring model components: planning (goal setting, resource analysis), organizing (roles, structures, partnerships), leading (motivation and culture-building), and controlling (evaluation, safety, quality assurance). Final model validation commonly involves expert review, iterative refinement, and alignment with established management and youth sport standards (Carpenter et al., 2019; Burton & Peachey, 2020).



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Through this structured, evidence-based methodology, the resulting rugby management model becomes practical, adaptable, and suitable for guiding sustainable rugby development in secondary schools.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this study is structured into three interconnected components: Input, Process, and Output. This framework integrates theoretical foundations, contextual analysis, and methodological approaches to develop management guidelines for promoting rugby clubs in secondary schools in Shandong Province.

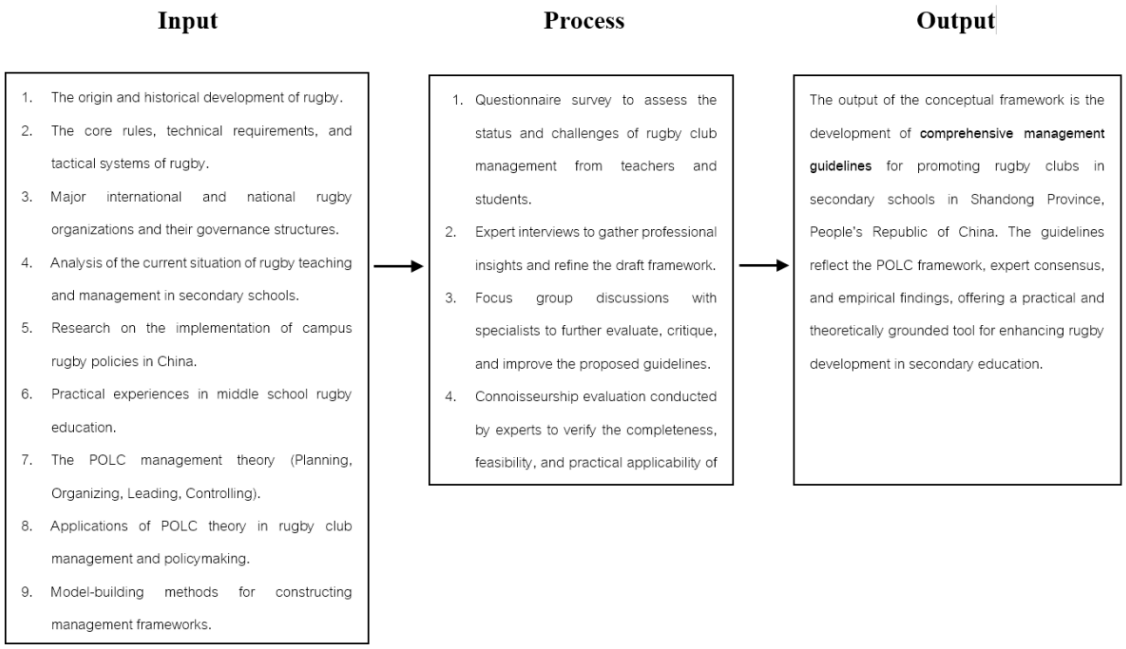



**Figure 1** Conceptual framework

## Methodology

### Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of members of rugby clubs in ten secondary schools in Shandong Province, including 81 teachers responsible for physical education and rugby instruction and 320 student athletes enrolled in rugby clubs during the 2024 academic year. The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table at a 95% confidence level, resulting in 81 teachers and 175 students selected as the study sample. Simple random sampling was used independently for teachers and students in each school to ensure representativeness and minimize selection bias.



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### Experts for Instrument Validation

A panel of five experts—two secondary school principals, one senior physical education teacher, and two rugby coaches or club managers—evaluated the questionnaire and interview guide using the Index of Item–Objective Congruence (IOC). All experts possessed at least twelve years of professional experience in education, sports management, or rugby coaching. Their assessments ensured clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives, leading to refinements before field application.

### Qualitative Interview Experts

For qualitative data collection, five additional experts (two school principals, one physical education teacher, and two rugby coaching or management specialists) participated in semi-structured interviews. Their insights into rugby development in secondary schools contributed directly to identifying key components for constructing management guidelines.

### Research Instruments

Four research instruments were developed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data for this study. Each instrument was created from a review of relevant literature and refined through expert validation to ensure content validity and alignment with the research objectives: 1. Questionnaires for Teachers and Students 2. Semi-Structured Interview Guide 3. Focus Group Discussion Outline 4. Connoisseurship Evaluation Form.

### Data Collection

A mixed-methods approach was adopted. Quantitative data were collected through online questionnaires distributed to 256 participants (175 students and 81 teachers) via the Wenjuanxing platform. Qualitative data were gathered through five expert interviews, followed by a focus group discussion with nine experts, who refined the draft guidelines. Finally, seven experts conducted a connoisseurship evaluation to confirm the accuracy, feasibility, and practical relevance of the finalized management guidelines.

### Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean ($\bar{x}$) and standard deviation (SD), interpreted according to Likert-scale criteria based on Best and Kahn (1998). Qualitative data from interviews, focus group discussions, and connoisseurship evaluations were analyzed through content analysis, which identified recurring themes and synthesized expert recommendations. This integrated analytical approach ensured a rigorous foundation for developing and validating the management guidelines.



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## Results

This research aimed to develop and confirm management guidelines for promoting rugby clubs in secondary schools in Shandong Province, the People's Republic of China. The results are presented in five parts: Part 1: Personal Data of Respondents, Part 2: Expert Interviews and IOC Validation, Part 3: Development of Draft Guidelines, Part 4: Suitability and Feasibility Assessment, and Part 5: Finalized Management Guidelines.

### Part 1: Personal Data of Respondents

A total of 256 respondents participated in the quantitative survey, consisting of 81 teachers and 175 students from ten secondary-school rugby clubs. Students accounted for 68.36% of the sample, ensuring a strong representation of learner perspectives. Teachers reported an average of 8.7 years of teaching experience, with many having 3–5 years of involvement in rugby-related school activities. This distribution provided a diverse and representative view of both instructional and student experiences within the rugby club context.

### Part 2: Expert Interviews and IOC Validation

Semi-structured interview items were developed based on the POLC management framework—Planning, Organizing, Leading, and Controlling. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire and interview guide were reviewed by five experts in educational administration, physical education, and rugby coaching using the Index of Item–Objective Congruence (IOC), with all items achieving acceptable IOC scores (≥ 0.80).

Following the validation process, five experts—including school principals, senior PE teachers, and licensed rugby coaches—were interviewed. Thematic analysis revealed several key issues affecting rugby club development: Unequal distribution of facilities and teaching resources. Shortage of trained rugby teachers and certified coaches. Lack of standardized curriculum and safety guidelines. Limited student participation due to safety concerns and low awareness. Absence of structured competition pathways to maintain student engagement. These findings directly informed the development of draft management guidelines.

### Part 3: Development of Draft Guidelines

Using data from the literature review, questionnaire findings, and expert interviews, draft management guidelines were created according to the POLC framework: **Planning** – Define clear development goals; assess teacher capacity and student interest; allocate funding for equipment, training, and safety resources; and align rugby development with overall school planning. **Organizing** – Establish a dedicated rugby management committee; define the responsibilities of administrators, teachers, coaches, parents, and students; coordinate the use of facilities and equipment; and form partnerships with local sports bodies. **Leading** – Implement professional development programs for teachers and coaches; motivate students through competitions,



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activities, and recognition systems; and promote rugby values to strengthen team culture. **Controlling** – Develop monitoring tools, safety checklists, evaluation instruments, and performance indicators; track participation rates and learning outcomes; and establish feedback loops for continuous improvement. These draft guidelines served as the foundation for expert validation.

**Part 4: Suitability and Feasibility Assessment**

A focus group of nine experts, including school administrators, physical education teachers, and rugby coaches, reviewed the draft guidelines. All participants had at least five years of relevant professional experience. The experts affirmed that the guidelines were appropriate, feasible, and relevant to the context of secondary schools in Shandong Province. Key recommendations included: Strengthening long-term teacher training systems. Prioritizing the creation of standardized rugby curricula. Ensuring age-appropriate safety measures and training plans. Developing structured competition systems to enhance motivation and progression. Minor revisions were incorporated based on their feedback to improve clarity and contextual fit.

**Part 5: Finalized Management Guidelines**

After final validation through **connoisseurship evaluation by seven senior experts**, the management guidelines were finalized as follows: **1. Planning:** Integrate rugby development into school strategic planning; define measurable participation and performance goals; allocate resources for equipment, safety, and teacher training; and conduct periodic needs assessments. **2. Organizing:** Establish a multi-stakeholder rugby management committee; clearly define roles and responsibilities; optimize the use of facilities and equipment; and strengthen cooperation with external sports organizations. **3. Leading:** Provide continuous professional development for teachers and coaches; build a strong rugby culture through competitions, workshops, and school events; enhance student motivation; and promote transparent communication among stakeholders. **4. Controlling:** Implement comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems; conduct routine safety inspections; assess student performance and club activities; gather feedback from teachers, students, and parents; and review program effectiveness annually to ensure sustainability. (Figure 2)



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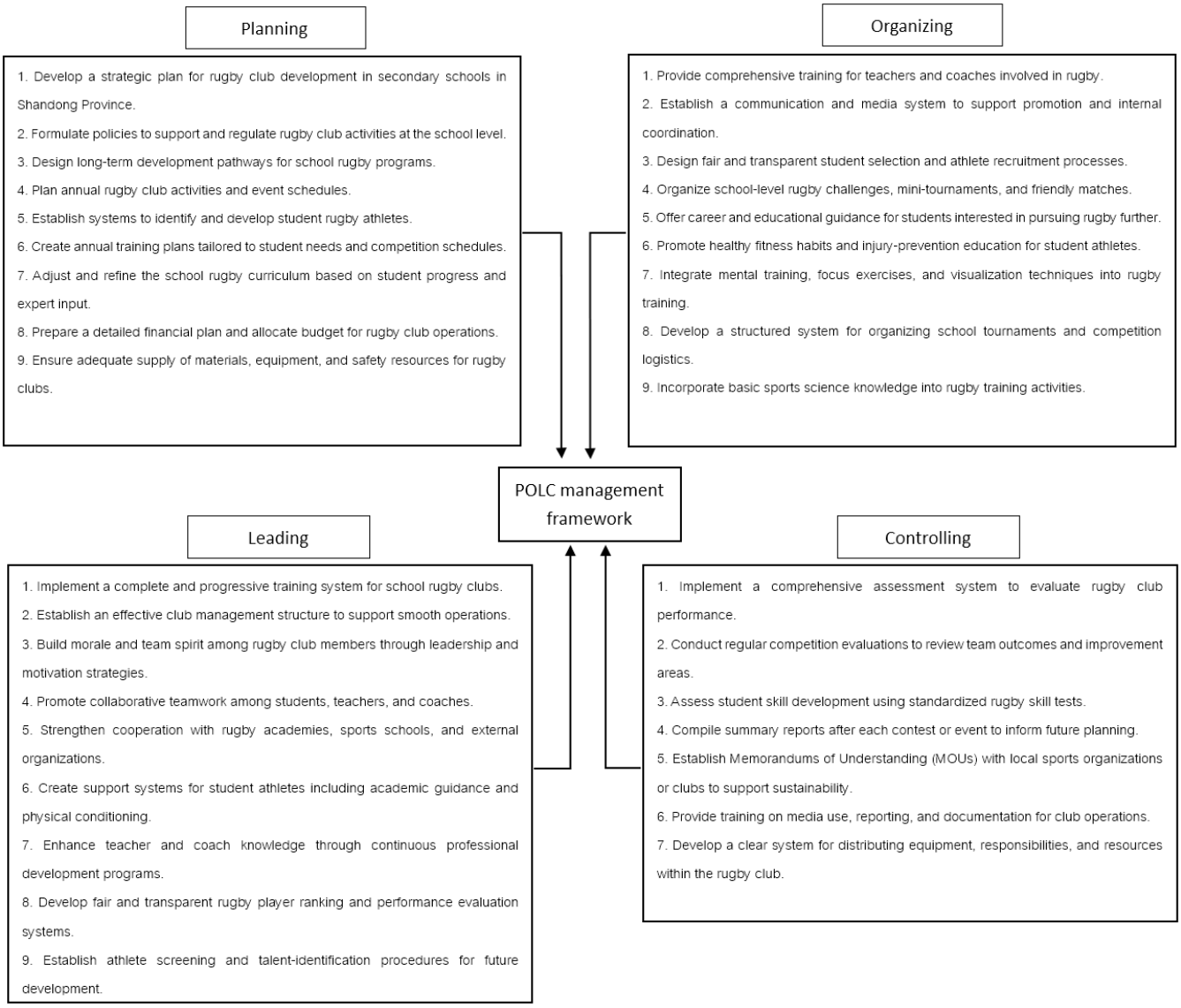



**Figure 2** Management Guidelines for Promoting Rugby Clubs in Secondary Schools in Shandong Province

## Discussion

### 1. Planning

Effective planning is essential for promoting rugby clubs in secondary schools. Consistent with classical management theory, planning begins with assessing school readiness, resources, and student needs (Koontz & Weihrich, 2010). This aligns with evidence showing that successful youth sport programs require clear goals, long-term development pathways, and strong policy support (Bailey et al., 2013; Green & Houlihan, 2005). In Shandong Province, essential planning



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considerations include teacher expertise, safety infrastructure, and alignment with national directives such as the *Opinions on Deepening the Integration of Sports and Education* (General Administration of Sport of China, 2020). Internationally, countries like New Zealand, Australia, and England embed rugby development within school curricula, emphasizing progressive skill acquisition, player welfare, and values-based education (World Rugby, 2020). Rugby research also confirms that well-designed programs enhance students' physical fitness, discipline, teamwork, and resilience (Light, 2010; Till & Baker, 2020). Thus, planning should integrate both athletic and character-development goals.

**2. Organizing**

The organizing function translates plans into operational structures. Effective organization requires clear roles, coordinated resources, and communication processes (Carpenter et al., 2019). For Shandong schools, this includes forming rugby management committees, coordinating training schedules, allocating facilities, and establishing partnerships with community rugby clubs and sport bureaus. International practice reinforces these principles. New Zealand Rugby's *Player Development Framework* highlights the importance of school–community partnerships and accredited coaching for safe and effective delivery (New Zealand Rugby, 2018). England's Rugby Football Union (RFU) also demonstrates how targeted school support programs—such as the *All Schools Initiative*—increase participation through teacher training and club partnerships (RFU, 2019). Given China's limited number of trained rugby teachers, strong organizational systems can compensate for structural gaps and ensure consistent delivery across schools.

**3. Leading**

Leadership plays a central role in motivating students, shaping team culture, and ensuring continuity. Within the POLC model, leadership emphasizes communication, motivation, and relationship building (Koontz & Weihrich, 2010). Research shows that coach leadership strongly influences youth motivation, confidence, and persistence (Horn, 2008). Rugby-specific studies further highlight the importance of modeling values such as respect, discipline, and teamwork (Cruickshank & Collins, 2015). In Shandong schools, leadership priorities should include teacher–coach training, culture-building, student leadership opportunities, and parent engagement. Supportive leadership environments have been shown to improve student engagement and long-term participation in both contact and non-contact rugby (Light & Evans, 2013). Thus, leadership development must be an integral component of rugby club management.

**4. Controlling**

The controlling function ensures program quality, safety, and progress toward objectives. Effective control requires monitoring performance, evaluating outcomes, and making adjustments (Carpenter et al., 2019). For rugby clubs, control mechanisms include safety protocols, training



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load monitoring, skill assessment, and documentation of participation and event outcomes. World Rugby's *Player Welfare Standards* emphasize the importance of continuous safety monitoring, qualified coaching, and structured evaluation (World Rugby, 2020). In Shandong, standardized evaluation systems are necessary to ensure consistency across schools, identify improvement needs, and strengthen long-term sustainability.

Overall, the findings align with international evidence indicating that successful school rugby development requires strategic planning, organizational coordination, leadership development, and systematic control mechanisms. The guidelines developed in this study address each of these dimensions and were confirmed by experts as feasible and appropriate for secondary schools in Shandong Province. These guidelines provide a structured pathway for expanding and strengthening rugby education within China's evolving school-sport system.

## Recommendation

1. Adapt Rugby Instruction to Student Needs: Rugby training content, skill difficulty, and program objectives should be adjusted to match students' developmental levels and physical readiness, beginning with safe, age-appropriate formats such as tag rugby.

2. Strengthen Teacher and Coach Development: Schools should implement ongoing professional development to improve rugby coaching skills and instructional methods. Partnerships with universities, sports bureaus, and rugby associations can provide essential training and certification opportunities.

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