

# ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE OF COLLEGE STUDENT PARTY BRANCHES IN CHINA: STATUS, INFLUENCING FACTORS, AND IMPROVEMENT PATHS

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**Abstract:** Introduction: Organizational life is a core mechanism through which Communist Party of China (CPC) organizations educate, manage, and supervise members. In universities, student Party branches are the most youth-proximate grassroots units, yet research has rarely assessed their routine quality using comparable indicators of standardization and effectiveness. Objectives: This study profiles the status and perceived effectiveness of organizational life in university student Party branches, identifies multi-level influencing factors, and develops evidence-informed improvement pathways. Methods: A mixed-methods design was employed. A stratified two-stage survey was conducted across 26 universities, yielding 638 valid questionnaires. Maximum-variation interviews were carried out in 59 on-campus student Party branches and more than 60 off-campus branches. Quantitative and qualitative evidence was integrated through triangulation. Results: Organizational life is generally routinized and positively evaluated, with high reported participation and effectiveness (92.93 percent rated it very or relatively effective). Nonetheless, prominent quality bottlenecks persist, particularly monotonous formats and weak alignment between content provision and students' study and work realities. The most frequently cited constraints are insufficient innovation in content and formats (43.42 percent) and inadequate systematic planning (42.63 percent). A supply-demand mismatch is evident: theoretical study dominates current provision (89.66 percent), whereas social practice is the most desired format (64.73 percent). Discussion: The findings indicate that improvement requires shifting from compliance-oriented delivery to an institutionalized quality loop linking planning, implementation, evaluation, and rectification. Strengthened coordination, youth-relevant format renewal, and embedded evaluation and incentive safeguards are pivotal to sustained effectiveness. The study offers a measurement-oriented basis for comparative assessment and a multi-level explanatory account of routine quality variation.

**Keywords:** Student Party branches; Organizational life; Higher education governance; Quality improvement

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Organizational life can be conceptualized as a set of institutionalized and recurring organizational routines through which grassroots units conduct member education, internal management, and supervision, thereby linking rule-based governance with everyday implementation at the local level [1]. Drawing on organizational routine theory, the quality of such recurring practices is consequential because routines simultaneously stabilize collective action and enable adaptation through ongoing enactment and revision [2]. Within Chinese universities, student Party branches represent highly grassroots yet youth-proximate organizational units; their organizational-life quality is therefore closely tied to grassroots organizational capacity, cohesion, and student political socialization processes on campus. Research on the structures and practices of ideological, political education in Chinese universities further indicates that campus political-educational work operates through multiple organizational channels and actors, shaping how student participation and learning are organized in practice, an institutional backdrop that directly conditions routine quality in student-facing grassroots units [3]. Against this backdrop, systematically examining the current status and determinants of organizational life in student Party branches and deriving actionable improvement pathways carries clear scholarly and practical value.

Existing international studies have tended to concentrate on macro-level governance arrangements and transformations in university political management, including how institutional mechanisms structure and regulate student politics and participation. Related work also examines motivations and consequences of Party membership among university students from the perspective of recruitment strategies, incentives, and selection effects [4]. Yet the "organizational life" of student Party branches remains insufficiently theorized and measured in international journal discourse, particularly regarding (1) its current conditions and quality deficits and (2) the determinants of standardization and effectiveness across institutions. This gap is salient because Chinese higher-education governance scholarship shows that organizational practices on campus are shaped by the interplay of hierarchical coordination and institutional leadership, which can produce systematic differences in how grassroots routines are enacted and improved. Accordingly, this study addresses three questions:

- (1) What is the status of organizational life in university student Party branches?
- (2) Which factors most strongly shape its quality and through what pathways?
- (3) What actionable improvement routes can enhance educational effectiveness?

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing scholarship provides several entry points for conceptualising the organizational life of college student party branches, understood here as the routine, rule-guided, and meaning-laden set of collective activities through which branches conduct member education, deliberation, supervision, and service. A useful lens is organizational routine theory, which treats recurring activities not as “mere repetition” but as patterned action that can simultaneously stabilise behaviour and enable adaptation when actors interpret, enact, and revise routines in practice [5]. Within Chinese higher education, this micro-organizational perspective is particularly relevant because governance and student work are embedded in a multi-layer institutional environment where formal rules, administrative coordination, and campus political-educational arrangements intersect. Recent higher-education governance research shows that leadership structures and responsibilities are often institutionally configured rather than purely managerial, shaping how grassroots units set agendas, allocate resources, and enact accountability [6].

A strand of literature focuses on the institutional architecture through which universities coordinate political-educational work and student management, offering empirical descriptions that are directly relevant to branch organizational life. For example, Liu, Zhao, and Starkey map the structures and practices of ideological and political education in Chinese universities, including the roles of multiple actors and organisational channels that condition student participation and learning processes, providing a macro-to-meso backdrop for understanding why branch routines may vary across campuses [3]. Complementing this, system-level governance analyses emphasise how reforms that rhetorically endorse autonomy can coexist with strong hierarchical coordination, which may shape the “compliance–initiative” balance of grassroots organizational activities [7]. Related campus politics research also documents the presence of institutional mechanisms aimed at structuring student political participation and organisational incorporation, indicating that student-facing grassroots units operate within a dense set of expectations and monitoring logics [2].

However, the current international literature still leaves three gaps that motivate a dedicated review and empirical study of college student party branch organizational life: First, research often remains at the governance or policy-architecture level, with comparatively limited attention to routine quality [6,8]. Such as how meetings, study sessions, deliberation, and member development are actually enacted, experienced, and improved over time in student branches. Second, existing work seldom integrates a multi-level influencing-factor framework that connects institutional constraints (rules, hierarchy), organisational conditions (leadership capacity, role clarity, resource security, digital supports), and participant-level mechanisms (identity, perceived meaningfulness, peer dynamics) into a single explanatory model [9,10]. Third, Evidence on improvement tends to be normative rather than measurement-oriented, with insufficient operational indicators for “standardisation” and “effectiveness” that can be compared across universities.

Building on routine theory [5] and the higher-education governance literature [7,11], a more targeted agenda is to document the current status, identify key predictors of routine quality, and specify actionable improvement pathways for student branch organizational life.

## 3 RESEARCH METHOD

### 3.1 Participants

This study targeted student Party branches in Chinese universities as the study population and sampling frame and adopted a stratified two-stage sampling design. In Stage 1, universities were treated as primary sampling units and stratified by institution type; 26 universities were selected to ensure coverage of heterogeneous organizational contexts. In Stage 2, academic schools or departments were treated as secondary sampling units; within each selected university, departments were sampled, and questionnaires were administered accordingly [12,13]. The research team developed the Survey on the Effectiveness of Organizational Life in College Student Party Branches. After data screening, 638 questionnaires were retained for statistical analysis. To mitigate invalid responding and enhance data quality, the dataset was cleaned using standard procedures, including missingness screening, range and logical-consistency checks, and detection of aberrant and careless response patterns [14–16].

Building on the survey results, we conducted qualitative case interviews to enable methodological complementarity and triangulation. The interview guide (Interview Outline on the Implementation of Organizational Life in College Student Party Branches) was developed from the quantitative findings. Interview cases were selected using purposive and maximum-variation strategies to capture contrasts across university types, varying levels of organizational-life effectiveness, and both on-campus and off-campus branches. Fieldwork covered 59 on-campus student Party branches and more than 60 off-campus branches, and interviews focused on routine operating models, salient problems and underlying causes, innovative practices and transferable experiences, and improvement suggestions. Quantitative and qualitative evidence were integrated through triangulation and mixed-method integration principles to corroborate and deepen interpretations [17]. All interview materials were collected with informed consent, anonymized during processing, and used solely for research purposes.

### 3.2 Scale Development

The survey instrument was developed to operationalize a coherent logic chain, how organizational life is implemented, whether it generates tangible effectiveness, and how student Party members perceive and respond to it. Accordingly, the questionnaire comprises three core measurement domains:

- (1) Implementation of organizational life: process-oriented features including procedural standardization, frequency, formats, and content arrangements, as well as student participation (e.g., participation frequency, coverage, and engagement).
- (2) Effectiveness of organizational life: outcome-oriented indicators capturing perceived quality of organizational life, its contribution to strengthening branch organizational capacity and cohesion, and its effectiveness in member education and development (e.g., political literacy, organizational discipline, and capability building).
- (3) Perceptions and feedback of student Party members: knowledge feedback (learning gains and capability improvement); affective feedback (emotional identification with the Party organization and Party-member identity); behavioral feedback (behavioral improvement and role-modeling in daily practices); needs feedback (demands, suggestions, and improvement expectations regarding organizational life).

### 3.3 Data Processing

Data processing primarily relied on Microsoft Excel, IBM SPSS Statistics (version 27.0), and NVivo (version 14). Following research data integrity guidelines, raw data and coding rules were retained, and a structured data dictionary was maintained to ensure traceability and reproducibility across the full processing workflow. Prior to statistical analyses, the dataset was screened for evidently invalid or low-quality records. Consistent with recommended best practices for mitigating careless responding in online surveys, we conducted systematic checks for excessive missingness on key items, logical inconsistencies, and patterned responses indicative of insufficient effort, and only qualified cases were retained for subsequent modeling. The cleaned dataset was then analyzed in SPSS 27.0 to generate descriptive statistics and group comparisons, and to conduct psychometric diagnostics (including item analysis, internal consistency assessment, factorability checks, and exploratory factor analysis where appropriate). Reliability reporting followed current guidance that emphasizes transparent interpretation and, where feasible, complements coefficient alpha with additional internal-consistency evidence. Qualitative interview transcripts were anonymized and imported into NVivo 14 for iterative coding and thematic synthesis. Coding proceeded from initial codes to higher-order categories and themes, with analytic memoing used to support interpretive development and auditability. The integration of qualitative and quantitative evidence was conducted at the interpretation stage to strengthen inference credibility through methodological triangulation.

## 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 Descriptive Analysis

As shown in Table 1, the study obtained 638 valid responses. Regarding institution type, most respondents were from science and engineering universities ( $n = 386$ , 60.50%), followed by comprehensive universities ( $n = 234$ , 36.68%). Liberal-arts universities accounted for a small proportion ( $n = 18$ , 2.82%), and no respondents were from art universities (0%). The disciplinary composition mirrors this pattern: STEM majors accounted for 51.88% ( $n = 331$ ), humanities for 35.11% ( $n = 224$ ), and social sciences (e.g., economics/management/law/education) for 13.01% ( $n = 83$ ). In terms of grade level, master's students formed the largest group (46.24%,  $n = 295$ ), followed by juniors/seniors (40.13%,  $n = 256$ ); doctoral students (8.31%,  $n = 53$ ) and freshmen/sophomores (5.33%,  $n = 34$ ) were smaller shares, indicating that the sample generally has substantial exposure to and understanding of Party-branch organizational life. Politically, CPC members (including probationary members) comprised 72.41% ( $n = 462$ ), while activists and development targets together accounted for 23.04% ( $n = 147$ ). Regarding Party-branch roles, ordinary members comprised the largest group (51.25%,  $n = 327$ ), reserve forces accounted for 27.90% ( $n = 178$ ), and branch secretaries and committee members accounted for 20.85% ( $n = 133$ ), enabling analyses from organizer-participant and reserve role perspectives.

**Table 1** Sample Profile of Respondents (N = 638)

Variable	Category	N	%
Institution type	Comprehensive universities	234	36.68
	Science & engineering universities	386	60.5
	Liberal-arts universities	18	2.82
	Art universities	0	0
Major category	Humanities (literature/history/philosophy/arts)	224	35.11
	Social sciences (econ/management/law/education)	83	13.01
	STEM (science/engineering/agriculture/medicine)	331	51.88
Grade level	Freshman/Sophomore	34	5.33
	Junior/Senior	256	40.13
	Master's students	295	46.24

	Doctoral students	53	8.31
	CPC member (including probationary)	462	72.41
Political status	Development target	50	7.84
	Party activist	97	15.2
	CYL member	24	3.76
	Non-affiliated	5	0.78
Role in Party branch	Branch secretary	64	10.03
	Branch committee member	69	10.82
	Ordinary Party member	327	51.25
	Reserve force (activists/targets, etc.)	178	27.9

## 4.2 Current Situation Analysis

### 4.2.1 The overall situation of organizational life in college student party branches is generally positive

In terms of routinized implementation and institutional compliance, most college student Party branches appear to have developed stable operating rhythms: 55.64% reported that organizational life is conducted regularly and proactively as needed, 30.41% reported at least monthly implementation, and only 2.19% indicated it is basically not conducted. Consistently, compliance with the “Three Meetings and One Class” system was largely positive, with only 9.88% rating implementation as poor, suggesting broadly institutionalized execution across branches (Table 2).

**Table 2** Frequency of Organizational Life and Compliance with “Three Meetings and One Class” (N = 638)

Panel	Category	N	%
Frequency of organizational life	Regularly and proactively (as needed)	355	55.64
	At least once per month	194	30.41
	Basically not conducted	14	2.19
	Other / unspecified options	75	11.76
“Three Meetings and One Class” compliance	Poor implementation	63	9.88
	Non-poor implementation (all other options combined)	575	90.12

Regarding participant scope, organizational life is not confined to Party members only. A majority reported inclusion of development targets and activists (58.78%), and 15.36% reported further outreach to CYL members and non-affiliated students, whereas 25.86% remained limited to Party members and probationary members. This pattern indicates that organizational life often serves not only member education but also reserve-force cultivation and broader organizational outreach (Table 3).

**Table 3** Target Participants of Organizational Life (N = 638)

Category	N	%
Only Party members & probationary members	165	25.86
Extended to development targets & activists	375	58.78
Further extended to CYL members & non-affiliated students	98	15.36
Total	638	100

In terms of engagement and perceived effectiveness, participation is high and evaluations are favorable: 86.21% reported active participation every time and only 0.47% reported long-term non-participation. Meanwhile, 92.93% rated organizational life as “very” or “relatively” effective. These results suggest that organizational life is not only implemented consistently but is also widely perceived as effective, providing a solid basis for shifting from frequency coverage to quality enhancement (Table 4).

**Table 4** Participation Level and Perceived Effectiveness (N = 638)

Panel	Category	N	%
Participation level	Actively participate every time	550	86.21

	Participate when interested	62	9.72
	Participate passively	23	3.61
	Long-term non-participation	3	0.47
Perceived effectiveness	Very effective or relatively effective	593	92.93
	Other evaluations (combined)	45	7.07

Motives are predominantly constructive and development-oriented: improving Party-mindedness (90.91%) and engaging in practice for serving the people (79.00%) were the most frequently selected reasons, followed by connecting with outstanding peers (64.11%) and expecting personal gains (62.38%). Overall, the motivational profile centers on value orientation and self-improvement while also reflecting organizational bonding and developmental incentives (Table 5).

**Table 5** Reasons for Participating in Organizational Life (N = 638)

Option	N	%
Improve Party-mindedness	580	90.91
Engage in practice for serving the people	504	79
Connect with outstanding peers	409	64.11
Expect personal gains/benefits	398	62.38

Participation modes are diverse and relatively balanced. Deliberation-expression activities such as democratic deliberation (72.57%) and theme-based speaking (56.74%) are common, while practice-service-experience activities such as Party Day events (53.29%), volunteering (48.43%), branch work participation (45.61%), and field visits with reflections (44.51%) are also widely reported. Such a multi-modal engagement structure may enhance attractiveness, meaningfulness, and sustainability of organizational life (Table 6).

**Table 6** Ways of Participating in Organizational Life (N = 638)

Option	N	%
Participate in democratic deliberation	463	72.57
Theme-based speaking	362	56.74
Party Day activities	340	53.29
Volunteering	309	48.43
Participate in branch work	291	45.61
Field visits and sharing reflections	284	44.51
Give Party lectures	237	37.15
Offer suggestions for branch development	173	27.12

#### 4.2.2 Problems in organizational life of college student party branches

The survey indicates that organizational life in college student Party branches is generally implemented well, yet a set of salient and structured problems persists in day-to-day execution. Regarding reported problems, the most frequently cited deficit is monotonous formats with low attractiveness and constrained participation (N=253, 39.66%), followed by insufficient alignment of content with students' study/work realities and members' needs (N=222, 34.8%) and a lack of continuity and systematization (N=185, 29%). Respondents also reported no branding/limited influence (N=163, 25.55%) and prominent formalism with superficial content and limited perceived gains (N=134, 21%). Although insufficient "Party flavor"/weak political salience (N=77, 12.07%) was less frequently reported, it remains substantively important, suggesting room to further strengthen political salience and political guidance in organizational life (Table 7).

**Table 7** Perceived Problems in Current Organizational Life (N = 638)

Reported problem	N	%
Monotonous formats; low attractiveness; low participation	253	39.66
Content is insufficiently aligned with students' study/work realities and members' needs	222	34.8

Activity content lacks continuity and systematization	185	29
No branding; limited influence	163	25.55
Prominent formalism; superficial content; little gain	134	21
Other	97	15.2
Insufficient “Party flavor”; weak political salience	77	12.07

Note: Multiple responses were allowed; therefore, percentages do not sum to 100%.

To clarify the “problem–mechanism” linkage, the survey also examined perceived reasons undermining effectiveness. The findings concentrate on two dominant constraints: lack of attractiveness/insufficient innovation in content and organizational formats (N=277, 43.42%) and lack of systematic overall planning (N=272, 42.63%). These leading reasons align directionally with the top-reported problems in Table 7—monotonous formats/low attractiveness (39.66%) and weak continuity/systematization (29%)—indicating that “attractiveness/innovation” and “system-level planning” are perceived not only as prominent problems but also as primary drivers of limited effectiveness. Meanwhile, respondents also cited insufficient attention at the ideological level (N=199, 31.19%), high academic pressure on branch secretaries with insufficient effort (N=172, 26.96%), and insufficient institutional design and safeguard mechanisms (N=121, 18.97%), suggesting that effectiveness improvement also depends on ideational emphasis, organizational inputs, and institutional safeguards (Table 8).

**Table 8** Reasons Undermining the Effectiveness of Organizational Life (N = 638)

Reason	N	%
Content/organizational formats lack attractiveness; insufficient innovation	277	43.42
Lack of systematic overall planning	272	42.63
Insufficient attention at the ideological level	199	31.19
High academic pressure on branch secretaries; insufficient effort	172	26.96
Insufficient institutional design and safeguard mechanisms	121	18.97
Branch members not active enough; fail to play an exemplary role	100	15.67
Other	98	15.36
Low convening rate by branch secretary; insufficient organizational capacity	62	9.72

Regarding commonly implemented formats (multiple responses), the supply structure displays a pronounced “learning-oriented + formal routine” profile: theoretical study (N=572, 89.66%) and formal routinized activities (organizational life meetings/“Three Meetings and One Class”/democratic appraisal) (N=519, 81.35%) dominate implementation. Practice- and experience-oriented formats are also widely used, including social practice (N=377, 59.09%), field visits/study tours (N=359, 56.27%), and public service & Party–mass interaction (N=324, 50.78%). Additional formats such as inter-branch co-building (N=279, 43.73%), micro Party classes/forums (N=265, 41.54%), and reading/knowledge contests/film viewing (N=254, 39.81%) are also reported, whereas arts & sports competitions (N=152, 23.82%) are less common. This supply profile provides an important contextual basis for the frequently reported “monotonous formats/low attractiveness” problem in Table 7: sustained dominance of a small set of high-frequency formats can plausibly reinforce perceptions of limited innovation (Table 9).

**Table 9** Common Formats of Organizational Life Currently Implemented (N = 638)

Common format currently implemented	N	%
Theoretical study	572	89.66
Organizational life meetings / “Three Meetings and One Class” / democratic appraisal of members	519	81.35
Social practice	377	59.09
Field visits / study tours	359	56.27
Public service & Party–mass interaction	324	50.78
Inter-branch co-building	279	43.73
Micro Party classes / micro forums, etc.	265	41.54
Reading / knowledge contests / film viewing, etc.	254	39.81
Arts & sports activities/competitions, etc.	152	23.82

Other	30	4.7
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For the most expected formats (multiple responses), students show a stronger “practice–experience–interaction” preference profile: social practice ranks first (N=413, 64.73%), followed by field visits/study tours (N=368, 57.68%) and public service & Party–mass interaction (N=359, 56.27%). Notably, theoretical study remains expected by a substantial proportion (N=356, 55.8%), yet its expected prevalence is markedly lower than its current prevalence (89.66%). This suggests that the issue is not that theoretical study is unnecessary, but that when theoretical study and formal routines dominate the supply mix, organizational life may be more readily perceived as lacking attractiveness and innovation (consistent with the leading reason in Table 8, 43.42%). Students also expect reading/knowledge contests/film viewing (N=320, 50.16%) and formal routinized activities (N=312, 48.9%) at moderate levels, and show stable preferences for arts & sports competitions (N=243, 38.09%), micro Party classes/forums (N=167, 26.18%), and inter-branch co-building (N=166, 26.02%). Juxtaposing supply and demand implies that, while maintaining political salience and institutional rigor, addressing the high-frequency constraints of “low attractiveness/innovation” and “weak system-level planning” likely requires more practice- and interaction-oriented designs and more programmatic continuity to enhance perceived gains, influence, and effectiveness (Table 10).

**Table 10** Formats Students Most Expect for Organizational Life (N = 638)

Most expected format	N	%
Social practice	413	64.73
Field visits / study tours	368	57.68
Public service & Party–mass interaction	359	56.27
Theoretical study	356	55.8
Reading / knowledge contests / film viewing, etc.	320	50.16
Organizational life meetings / “Three Meetings and One Class” / democratic appraisal of members	312	48.9
Arts & sports activities/competitions, etc.	243	38.09
Micro Party classes / micro forums, etc.	167	26.18
Inter-branch co-building	166	26.02
Other	14	2.19

### 4.3 Analysis of Influencing Factors

#### 4.3.1 Overall pattern

Integrating survey and fieldwork evidence suggests that the determinants of effectiveness are systemic and extend across planning, implementation, and monitoring/evaluation. Results from Question 22 show that the two most frequently cited constraints are insufficient attractiveness/innovation in content and organizational formats (43.33%) and lack of systematic coordination and scientific planning (42.54%), indicating that key bottlenecks lie both in “format/content quality and innovation” and in “overall design and programmatic coordination.” Meanwhile, insufficient ideological emphasis (31.24%) and high academic pressure on branch secretaries with limited time/effort (27.00%) represent major “cognition–input” constraints. In addition, insufficient institutional design and safeguard mechanisms (18.84%), inactive branch committee members with weak exemplary roles (15.70%), and limited theoretical literacy/organizational capacity of branch secretaries (9.73%) highlight gaps in organizational capacity and institutional support (Table 11). Overall, the pattern implies a multi-factor mechanism rather than a single-point failure.

**Table 11** Reasons Undermining the Effectiveness of Organizational Life (N = 638)

Reason	N	%
Content/organizational formats lack attractiveness; insufficient innovation	276	43.33
Lack of systematic coordination and scientific planning	271	42.54
Insufficient attention at the ideological level	199	31.24
High academic pressure on branch secretaries; insufficient time/effort	172	27
Insufficient institutional design and safeguard mechanisms	120	18.84
Branch committee members not active; fail to play an exemplary role	100	15.7
Branch secretary lacks theoretical literacy/organizational capacity	62	9.73

### 4.3.2 Ideational insufficiency

The share reporting insufficient ideological emphasis (31.24%) indicates that some grassroots actors do not fully treat organizational life as a core instrument for political guidance, member education, and organizational cohesion. Fieldwork evidence suggests that this often manifests as perceiving Party-building tasks as less quantifiable or less performance-visible, which can lead to ad hoc topic selection, routine content supply, and proceduralized implementation. Such orientations increase the likelihood of “scripted” and compliance-driven activities, thereby weakening sustained value guidance and identity-building functions and amplifying perceptions of low attractiveness/insufficient innovation (43.33%).

### 4.3.3 Implementation constraints

At the implementation level, lack of systematic planning (42.54%) and low attractiveness/insufficient innovation (43.33%) jointly rank at the top, indicating structural weaknesses in programmatic design, pacing, and format innovation. Resource/input constraints are also salient: respondents cite high academic pressure and insufficient time/effort 投入 by branch secretaries (27.00%), alongside inactive committee members (15.70%) and limited literacy/organizational capacity of secretaries (9.73%). These factors can produce “single-point” dependence on a small number of organizers, limiting collective engagement and quality assurance.

Critically, supply-side constraints align with participation-side time conflicts. Absence reasons show that the most prominent barriers are schedule conflicts with personal study/work arrangements (79.15%) and heavy coursework burden (45.92%). Even with procedural compliance, insufficient coordination and support can reduce participation through low time accessibility. Meanwhile, lack of interest due to monotonous formats (9.56%) suggests an observable linkage between perceived format quality and attendance motivation (Table 12).

**Table 12** Reasons for Missing Organizational Life Activities (N = 638)

Reason	N	%
Schedule conflict with personal study/work arrangements	505	79.15
Heavy coursework burden; no time to attend	293	45.92
Monotonous formats; not interested	61	9.56
Low disciplinary requirements; weak constraints	22	3.45
Low personal motivation	13	2.04

### 4.3.4 Monitoring and evaluation gaps

At the monitoring/evaluation level, insufficient institutional design and safeguards (18.84%) align with fieldwork observations of limited operability and weak closure across guidance–supervision–evaluation–incentives. In practice, assessments may overemphasize documentation and reporting while under-checking outcomes, participant experience, and educational outputs. Moreover, post-activity feedback mechanisms are often limited, constraining self-diagnosis and continuous improvement. Such institutional weakness can exacerbate the consequences of weak planning (42.54%) and low innovation (43.33%), impeding sustained performance improvement and branding.

## 5 DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Suggestions on countermeasures

#### 5.1.1 Strengthening the party’s overall leadership and enhancing the scientific coordination of organizational life in student party branches

Organizational life in college student Party branches is generally implemented well; however, the survey suggests persistent implementation gaps, including weak coordination, limited continuity, fragmented educational sequencing, and difficulties in building stable brand influence. Strengthening the Party’s overall leadership requires embedding organizational life into the university-wide Party-building framework and enhancing “scientific coordination” through institutionalized, proceduralized, and programmatic arrangements. This approach aims to achieve a sustainable alignment among political salience, standardization, and effectiveness, clarifying required routines while preserving room for grassroots innovation, so that organizational life can evolve from “being conducted” to “high-quality, sustainable, and replicable” practice.

On the one hand, university Party committees and competent authorities should strengthen top-level design by improving the institutional framework and long-term mechanisms and advancing organizational life in an annualized, modular, and checklist-based manner. This includes clarifying the “required routines” by defining annual core modules and priority tasks and developing an implementable, inspectable, and traceable task list. At the same time, grassroots branches should be encouraged to develop “optional innovations” aligned with their practical conditions and disciplinary features, promoting “organizational life +” initiatives that integrate organizational requirements with major political agendas, key commemorative dates, and faculty–student needs, while embedding school/discipline characteristics, traditional culture, and practice-based culture to move toward greater standardization, systematization, branding, and effectiveness. On the other hand, strengthened guidance and support are needed to help branches develop

annual work plans and process flowcharts that consolidate scheduling, formats, procedures, operational standards, venues, and responsible persons into a single “process map,” thereby improving operational stability and political seriousness through process visualization and responsibility clarification.

In addition, resource optimization should be used as a leverage point to build a “Party-building service community” and enhance the quality and mobilization capacity of organizational life through a systemic approach. First, universities should integrate internal and external Party education resources by fully utilizing Party education platforms, Party spirit education bases, and local Party school resources, especially institution-specific bases and practice platforms, to connect organizational life with member education and training, and to increase the use of field research, immersive on-site learning, and volunteer service to improve attractiveness and experiential engagement. Second, resource sharing and co-building linkages should be strengthened across branches, among student branches, between student and faculty/staff branches, and between on-campus and off-campus branches, following the principle of “organizational co-building, resource sharing, and activity interconnection.” This would enable joint design of scientific, systematic, and effective implementation plans, facilitating mutual learning, mutual support in cadre development, and mutual reinforcement of member growth. In particular, exemplary benchmark branches should be cultivated through case-based learning, exchange visits, and experience sharing, generating institutionalized practices that can be replicated. Building on this, initiatives such as “paired partnership actions” between administrative/faculty Party branches and departmental student Party branches can be advanced with institutional safeguards, combining the theoretical-practical strengths of faculty/staff branches with the vitality of student branches, and integrating Party-building with teaching and research, discipline development, ideological work among faculty, student development, and activity innovation, thereby continuously enhancing overall effectiveness and demonstration impact.

### ***5.1.2 Emphasizing distinctiveness and practicality: innovating the content and formats of organizational life in student party branches***

In response to salient problems in student Party branches, most notably monotonous formats with low engagement and insufficient linkage between content and students’ study/work realities and members’ needs, grassroots branches should align problem-orientation with goal-orientation and innovate systematically across topic selection, content supply, organizational planning, and delivery formats. Substantively, organizational life should strengthen political salience, relevance, and distinctiveness; procedurally, it should enhance interaction, experience, and practical engagement. This shift supports a transition from “task completion” to “education-for-effectiveness,” and from “single-mode preaching” to “integrated practice,” ensuring focused themes, substantive content, innovative formats, and assessable educational outcomes.

Regarding content supply, organizational life should be aligned with the university’s fundamental mission of moral education and the requirements of intra-Party political life. A sustainable mechanism can be built through four key “integrations.” First, integrate major national commemorations, significant events, and current political themes, translating political requirements into learning scenarios that student members can understand, participate in, and experience, thereby strengthening resonance and awareness of the mission. Second, integrate with universities’ educational practice and core tasks, linking organizational life to “five-dimension education,” academic ethos, career development, and social practice, and exploring models such as “Party-building + teaching,” “Party-building + employment,” and “Party-building + rural revitalization,” so that organizational life remains politically grounded while addressing practical needs. Third, integrate with members’ ideological realities and feedback, combining external political requirements with internal reflection by tracking members’ concerns and expectations through surveys and conversations, thereby enhancing explanatory power and guidance. Fourth, integrate institutional and disciplinary characteristics to build branded initiatives, promoting “one school/department, one brand” practices that fuse professional learning and competence development with Party spirit cultivation, ultimately generating replicable and communicable models with stronger influence and identity recognition.

In terms of delivery formats, organizational life should unify political seriousness (“Party flavor”) with youth-friendly approaches: it must remain principled and rule-based while increasing engagement through innovative “optional initiatives.” First, diversify formats to enhance attractiveness. Building on required routines such as collective study, organizational life meetings, and “Three Meetings and One Class,” branches can adopt thematic Party lectures and micro-lectures, knowledge contests, “political birthdays,” red-site practice learning, integrity education visits, film-based seminars, speeches or recitations, and volunteer service. Digital tools can further expand “organizational life + internet” spaces, improving reach and resonance among young members. Second, strengthen interaction and critical reflection to raise participation. Case discussions, problem-oriented deliberations, scenario-based role assignments, and peer review of outcomes can increase dialogue and collaboration, shifting members from passive attendance to active thinking and co-creation, and reinforcing internal motivation, organizational driving force, and outward social influence. Third, emphasize practice and experiential learning to deepen educational impact. By organizing practice projects oriented toward serving peers, departments, and society, such as community volunteering, grassroots research, and rural fieldwork, members can internalize the people-centered stance and understand contemporary achievements through real-life contexts. Meanwhile, immersive learning at Party spirit education bases, revolutionary sites, and “Four Histories” programs can facilitate emotional resonance, rational reflection, and value identification, enabling self-education and self-improvement and upgrading organizational life from “didactic” to “experiential and practice-based.”

### ***5.1.3 Establishing robust quality evaluation and incentive-safeguard mechanisms***

Party-building work must translate “soft” efforts into tangible outcomes, and the core lies in using supervision and implementation to drive quality improvement through a measurable, comparable, and improvable governance loop. University Party organizations should establish a scientific quality evaluation indicator system to assess both procedural compliance and outcome effectiveness of branch organizational life, thereby providing precise guidance in political orientation and operational support. In parallel, the quality of organizational life should be incorporated into the Party-building accountability assessment and used as an important basis for recognizing advanced grassroots Party organizations and outstanding Party affairs workers, so that accountability reinforces responsibility and evaluation enables continuous improvement. The framework should adopt an integrated “process–capacity–outcomes–impact” orientation, covering key dimensions such as institutional mechanisms and implementation fidelity, political salience and Party-building climate, theme design and content supply, activity organization and member participation, project-based design and resource platforms, competence of Party affairs teams, innovation and branding, educational outcomes and contributions to institutional development, as well as public recognition and social influence, while avoiding material-oriented, form-over-substance evaluations through indicator operationalization and appropriate weighting.

Building on the evaluation system, incentive and safeguard mechanisms should be strengthened in parallel to routinize quality improvement through “positive incentives, demonstration effects, and feedback-driven rectification.” On the one hand, creativity calls and outcome showcases, quality competitions and honor-based incentives, cross-branch learning exchanges, and demonstrative site (benchmark branch) development can reinforce endogenous motivation and innovation, making high-quality practices replicable, scalable, and sustainable. On the other hand, a structured feedback-and-rectification mechanism should translate evaluation results into actionable improvement lists and targeted resource support, enabling a closed-loop cycle of “evaluation–feedback–rectification–re-evaluation.” With institutionalized incentives and process support, universities can expand the space for member education and training, enhance standardization and attractiveness, strengthen perceived gains, and stimulate participation and organizational identification, so that educational effects become deeper, more substantive, and more internalized.

## 5.2 Research Significance

This study examines the current status, influencing factors, and improvement pathways of organizational life in college student Party branches, generating clear theoretical, methodological, and practical significance. First, at the theoretical level, it conceptualizes organizational life as an institutionalized, recurring, and meaning-laden set of grassroots routines and emphasizes its dual role in stabilizing collective action while enabling adaptive improvement. In doing so, the paper advances an analyzable and comparable conceptual framework for an under-theorized topic in international journal discourse, routine quality, and effectiveness in student-facing Party branch organizational life.

Second, methodologically, the study employs a stratified two-stage sampling design across institutional types and combines a questionnaire survey (N = 638) with qualitative case interviews for triangulation. It also develops an instrument that operationalizes a coherent “implementation–effectiveness–member perception/feedback” logic chain, thereby strengthening the feasibility and replicability of moving from largely normative discussion to measurement-oriented empirical inquiry.

Third, in practical terms, while documenting that organizational life is generally implemented positively, the study identifies persistent, structured bottlenecks—including monotonous formats, limited alignment between content supply and students’ study/work realities and needs, weak continuity and systematization, and perceived formalism with limited gains—whose perceived drivers concentrate on insufficient innovation/attractiveness and inadequate systematic planning.

## 5.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite the stratified two-stage sampling design and mixed-method triangulation, several limitations remain. First, the achieved sample (N = 638) is structurally imbalanced across institution types, with responses concentrated in science-and-engineering universities (60.50%), and no respondents from art universities, potentially constraining generalizability to underrepresented contexts. Second, key constructs are operationalised through a questionnaire “implementation–effectiveness–member perception/feedback” chain and thus rely largely on self-reported perceptions, which may be susceptible to social desirability and common-method bias. Third, the evidence base is primarily cross-sectional and descriptive (descriptive statistics, group comparisons, and psychometric diagnostics), limiting causal identification and temporal mechanism testing. Although interviews covered 59 on-campus and 60+ off-campus branches, the qualitative evidence is dominated by interview narratives rather than process-tracing records or direct observation.

Future work can advance in four directions. First, strengthen representativeness by completing the intended strata (e.g., art universities) and expanding regional coverage while preserving the original sampling logic. Second, integrate multi-source data (organizational records, meeting minutes, process observation, activity outputs, and follow-up feedback) to improve replicability. Third, adopt longitudinal, quasi-experimental, or action-research designs to evaluate intervention effects, particularly whether a closed-loop “evaluation–feedback–rectification–re-evaluation” mechanism yields sustained quality gains. Fourth, develop and test a multi-level explanatory model linking institutional constraints,

organizational conditions, and participant-level mechanisms, addressing the documented gap in integrated multi-level frameworks and comparable indicators.

## 6 CONCLUSION

This study examines organizational life in college student Party branches as an institutionalized and recurring form of grassroots practice with political and educational functions. Drawing on mixed evidence from a questionnaire survey and qualitative interviews, it provides a structured assessment of routine quality, associated influences, and improvement-oriented governance implications. Importantly, the study reframes evaluation from whether organizational life is conducted to how well it is enacted, thereby moving the discussion from macro-level institutional description to diagnosable and comparable everyday governance.

The findings imply that effectiveness should be treated as a systemic outcome jointly shaped by institutional arrangements, organizational supports, and participation mechanisms, rather than as a function of activity frequency alone. Accordingly, sustainable quality enhancement depends on three institutional capacities. First, universities should strengthen overall coordination and process governance to improve planning, continuity, and traceability. Second, content and formats should be renewed in ways that are theoretically grounded and contextually relevant to students' learning and development, supporting deeper internalization and sustained engagement. Third, measurable quality evaluation and incentive-safeguard mechanisms should be institutionalized to enable an evidence-based feedback and rectification cycle that translates assessment outcomes into implementable improvement actions and targeted resource support. Overall, the study offers an actionable governance lens for improving routine quality in student Party branch organizational life and provides an empirical basis for further international research on how politically oriented educational routines operate and can be strengthened in Chinese higher education.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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