



The Influence of Academic Tutors' Mentoring Behavior on University Students' Professional Commitment: Based on Universities with the Full Credit System Using SPSS and Mplus Software

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Abstract. Based on self-regulation theory, SPSS and Mplus were used to explore the relationship mechanism between academic tutors' mentoring behavior and university students' professional commitment through hierarchical regression and moderated mediation model. Hierarchical regression analysis results showed that academic tutors' mentoring behavior stimulates university students' professional commitment, both university students' feedback inquiry and feedback monitoring mediate the relationship between academic tutors' mentoring behavior and university students' professional commitment. Moreover, university students' perceived university learning climate moderates the aforesaid indirect effects of university students' feedback inquiry and feedback monitoring. The moderated mediation model analysis showed that university students' perceived university learning climate positively moderates the indirect effects of feedback inquiry and feedback monitoring on the relationship between academic tutors' mentoring behavior and university students' professional commitment. These conclusions provide theoretical and practical implications for universities with the full credit system.

Keywords: academic tutors' mentoring behavior · professional commitment · feedback inquiry · feedback monitoring · perceived university learning climate · hierarchical regression analysis · moderated mediation model

1 Introduction

Full credit system refers to the teaching management system based on the elective course system, which allows students to graduate after completing certain credits within three to eight years. Under the full credit system, the academic tutorial system refers to the system in which universities provide students with academic tutors to provide professional guidance for their academic development [1]. This system transforms the traditional

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teaching mode into a new self-regulated learning mode, aiming at cultivating university students' professional awareness and ability to independently discover, analyze and solve problems.

The research on the academic tutorial system has been concerned by scholars in recent years, but only a few studies have carried out theoretical and empirical analysis on the effectiveness of the academic tutorial system in practice. Although the positive influence of academic tutors' mentoring behavior on university students' growth has been preliminarily shown in the literature. However, the mechanism of the influence of the academic tutors' mentoring behavior on university students' professional commitment is not fully understood yet. Therefore, the theoretical construction and empirical analysis based on self-regulation theory are expected to provide theoretical and practical basis for enriching the understanding of the mechanism mentioned above in this study.

According to the self-regulation theory, self-regulation is formed by taking the feedback of the external situation as information of the gap between the ideal goal and the current situation, which can effectively adapt to the pursuit of personal goals [2]. Therefore, we proposed that the academic tutor's mentoring behavior is one of the important external situations that may stimulate the self-regulation of university students. In addition, the self-regulation theory holds that an individual's self-regulation process is affected by the amount of personal self-regulation resources [3]. Therefore, we proposed that university students' perceived learning climate is an important source of their self-regulation resources. In conclusion, by introducing university students' feedback seeking strategy as mediators and their perceived university learning climate as moderators to explore the mechanism of the relationship between academic tutors' mentoring behavior and university students' professional commitment, providing practical basis for improving the operational effectiveness of the academic tutorial system in universities with the full credit system.

2 Theory and Hypothesis

2.1 The Relationship Between Academic Tutors' Mentoring Behavior and University Students' Professional Commitment

Based on the existing literature, academic tutors' mentoring behavior refers to the behavior of academic tutors who invest time, knowledge and energy to provide support, guidance and feedback for university students' academic planning and professional skills improvement in universities with the full credit system [4]. While university students' professional commitment refers to the extent to which university students recognize and invest in their major [5]. According to the self-regulation theory, organizational management practices can promote individuals to self-regulate in order to adapt to and strengthen the pursuit of personal goals [2]. Therefore, in universities with the full credit system, academic tutors' mentoring behavior can guide university students to consciously make self-adjustment for professional development according their training goals, so as enhancing their professional involvement and commitment. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1. Academic tutors' mentoring behavior positively affects university students' professional commitment.

2.2 Mediating Roles of University Students' Feedback Inquiry and Feedback Monitoring

According to the feedback-seeking strategy, university students' feedback-seeking strategy refers to the strategies for university students to actively seek feedback on their realization of professional training goals, which includes two strategies: feedback inquiry and feedback monitoring [6]. University students' feedback inquiry refers to the strategy of direct inquiry that university students take the initiative to obtain feedback about the realization of their professional training goals [7]. University students' feedback monitoring refers to the strategy that university students monitor the environment to actively obtain feedback about the realization of their professional training goals [7]. According to the self-regulation theory, interpersonal trust formed by organizational management practices will encourage individuals to actively use feedback to obtain information about the realization of goals [8]. As academic tutors' mentoring behavior can promote interpersonal trust between mentors and their students, thus it can enable university students to freely obtain relevant information about the realization of their professional training goals from their academic tutors by means of feedback inquiry.

In addition, according to the self-regulation theory, organizational management practices can stimulate individuals to consciously monitor the external environment to obtain feedback on the realization of personal goals, and the easier such feedback is to obtain, the more it can promote individuals to continue to adopt this way [8]. So, we proposed that academic tutors' mentoring behavior can help university students develop the awareness and skills of obtaining feedback information of professional goal cultivation through monitoring the environment, and thus improve their awareness and skills of feedback monitoring, which makes them believe that such feedback is easy to obtain. Therefore, they will be willing to continuously monitor the environment to obtain feedback on the achievement of their professional goals. In summary, this paper proposes the following two hypothesis:

H2: Academic tutors' mentoring behavior positively influences university students' feedback inquiry.

H3: Academic tutors' mentoring behavior positively affects university students' feedback monitoring.

The self-regulation theory shows that feedback seeking strategies (including feedback inquiry and feedback monitoring) can help individuals effectively identify the gaps and improvement ways between their current situations and ideal goals through direct inquiry and monitoring of the environment, so as to enhance individuals' adaptability and involvement to the pursuit of ideal goals [9]. So, university students can enhance their recognition and investment in professional development through feedback inquiry and feedback monitoring. Furthermore, under the full credit system, academic tutors' mentoring behavior can guide university students to pay attention to their professional development, and promote university students to consciously adopt different feedback-seeking strategies (i.e. feedback inquiry and feedback monitoring) to obtain relevant information about the realization of their professional training goals. Thus, it can enhance

the adaptability and input of university students to the pursuit of professional training goals. Therefore, the following two hypotheses can be obtained:

H4: University students' feedback inquiry mediates the relationship between academic tutors' mentoring behavior and university students' professional commitment.

H5: University students' feedback monitoring mediates the relationship between academic tutors' mentoring behavior and university students' professional commitment.

2.3 Moderating Effect of University Students' Perceived University Learning Climate

Nikolova et al. (2014) pointed out that individuals' perceived learning climate refers to individuals' perception of the policies, systems and practices of an organization aimed at promoting and supporting learning behaviors [11]. So, university students' perceived university learning climate is defined as their perception of the policies, systems and practices aimed at promoting and supporting learning behavior in universities in this study. According to the self-regulation theory, the more self-regulation resources individuals have, the more their self-regulation process can be accelerated and strengthened [3]. When guiding university students to seek feedback on their professional development through direct inquiry or monitoring the environment, university students who perceive a strong learning climate in universities think that their universities attach importance to and support learning behaviors. Therefore, the positive effect of the academic tutor's mentoring behavior to motivate these university students to use different feedback-seeking strategies (feedback inquiry and feedback monitoring) will be enhanced by these university students with more adequate self-regulation resources. On the contrary, the positive effect of academic tutors' mentoring behaviors on their application of different feedback-seeking strategies will be weakened. In conclusion, the following two hypotheses can be proposed:

H6: University students' perceived university learning climate positively moderates the relationship between academic tutors' mentoring behavior and feedback inquiry.

H7: University students' perceived university learning climate positively moderates the relationship between academic tutors' mentoring behavior and feedback monitoring.

Further, university students' perceived university learning climate can strengthen the mediating roles of university students' feedback seeking strategies (including feedback inquiry and feedback monitoring) in the relationship between academic tutors' mentoring behavior and university students' professional commitment. Specifically, university students with strong perceived learning climate in universities have more sufficient self-regulation resources, so the positive effect of the academic tutors' mentoring behavior to stimulate university students' self-regulation process (that is, the mediating process of university students' two different feedback seeking strategies) will be stronger. On the contrary, the positive effect of academic tutors' mentoring behavior in stimulating university students' self-regulation process will be weaker. So, the following two hypotheses can be obtained:

H8: University students' perceived university learning climate positively moderates the indirect effect of feedback inquiry between academic tutors' mentoring behavior and university students' professional commitment.

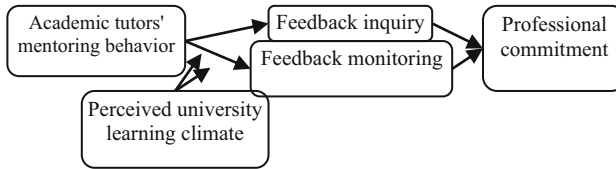


Fig. 1. Research framework

H9: University students' perceived university learning climate positively moderates the indirect effect of feedback monitoring between academic tutors' mentoring behavior and university students' professional commitment.

Figure 1 depicts the theoretical model of this study.

3 Research Methods

3.1 Data

Guangdong University of Finance and Economics is one of the typical universities that implement the full credit system and academic tutorial system in Southern China. Thus, university students in this university were invited to participate in the survey of this study. A total of 304 questionnaires were collected, and 264 valid questionnaires were obtained after deleting invalid responses. Among them, 91 (34.5%) were male and 173 (65.5%) were female. 107 (31.1 percent) of the 2018 class, 76 (28.8 percent) of the 2017 class, and 82 (40.1 percent) of the 2016 class. The subjects ranged in age from 18 to 23, with an average age of 19.90 ± 1.16 years. 175 (66.3 percent) majored in business administration, 35 (13.3 percent) majored in marketing, 34 (12.8 percent) majored in human resource management, 18 (6.8 percent) majored in logistics management, and two (0.8 percent) majored in accounting.

3.2 Method of Hypothesis Testing

This study mainly used hierarchical regressions to test theoretical hypotheses by SPSS22.0 with PROCESS macro. Firstly, the main effect model was constructed to verify the effect of academic tutors' mentoring behavior on university students' professional commitment. Secondly, feedback inquiry and feedback monitoring were included into the regression equation to test their mediating effect between academic tutors' mentoring behavior and university students' professional commitment. Finally, perceived university learning climate was introduced in terms of interaction term to test its moderating effects on both the relationship between academic tutors' mentoring behavior and university students' professional commitment and the indirect effects of feedback inquiry and feedback monitoring. Bias-corrected bootstrap was utilized to test the significance of the indirect effects.

3.3 Statistical Analysis Results

1) Reliability and validity analysis results.

Harmans' one-factor analysis was conducted to evaluate the common method variance of the latent variables in this study. The empirical results showed that the variance interpretation degree of the first common factor was 36.18%, which was less than the critical standard of 40% [10], indicating that there was no serious common method bias in this study.

In this study, SPSS22.0 and Mplus7.4 were used for reliability and validity analysis respectively. First of all, the reliability coefficients of the main research variables in Table 1 were all above 0.7. Secondly, as shown in Table 2, this study conducted confirmatory factor analysis of the five latent variables (i.e. academic tutors' mentoring behavior, professional commitment, feedback inquiry, feedback monitoring and university students' perceived university learning climate) and compared the fit index of different factor models. Empirical results showed that the five-factor model were obviously superior to all other nested models. Moreover, all the factor loadings were significant ($p < 0.001$) in the five-factor model. It could be concluded that there was good construct validity for the five latent variables in this study.

2) Correlation analysis results.

Table 1 shows that academic tutors' mentoring behavior is significantly and positively correlated with feedback inquiry, feedback monitoring and professional commitment, and feedback inquiry and feedback monitoring are also significantly and positively correlated with professional commitment, respectively. These results were consistent with the predictions of the study preliminarily.

3) Main effect analysis results.

As shown in Table 3, M2 shows that academic tutors' mentoring behavior positively affects university students' professional commitment, and H1 was supported.

4) Mediating effect analysis results.

As shown in Table 3, equation M3 shows that academic tutors' mentoring behavior positively affects feedback inquiry, so supporting H2. According to equation M3 and M5, the mediating effect of feedback inquiry between academic tutors' mentoring behavior and university students' professional commitment is 0.059, and the 95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI is [0.017, 0.105], thus supporting H4. M4 show that the academic tutors' mentoring behavior positively affects the feedback monitoring, so verifying H3. According to equation M4 and M5, the mediating effect of feedback monitoring between academic tutors' mentoring behavior and university students' professional commitment is 0.068, and the 95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI is [0.020, 0.116], thus proving H5.

5) Moderating effect analysis results.

Table 4 shows that the interaction terms of perceived university learning climate and academic tutors' mentoring behavior positively effects on feedback inquiry and feedback monitoring, respectively. When perceived university learning climate is stronger,

Table 1. Mean Value, Standard Deviation and Simple Correlation Coefficient of Main Variables

Variable	BA	LM	MM	HR	GRA	SEX	AGE	MF	FI	FM	LC	PC
BA												
LM	-0.379***											
MM	-0.548***	-0.106										
HR	-0.539***	-0.104	-0.150*									
GRA	0.677***	-0.293***	-0.370***	-0.363***								
SEX	0.090	-0.373***	0.166**	-0.030	-0.003							
AGE	0.543**	-0.146**	-0.344***	-0.300***	0.754**	-0.027						
MB	-0.073	0.109	-0.074	0.109	-0.070	-0.022	-0.009	(0.948)				
FI	-0.210**	0.198**	-0.030	0.144*	-0.053	-0.184***	-0.027	0.469**	(0.874)			
FM	-0.176**	0.172**	0.075	0.021	-0.067	-0.079	0.008	0.475**	0.691**	(0.828)		
LC	-0.006	0.049	-0.126*	0.120	0.020	-0.071	0.076	0.836**	0.446**	0.416**	(0.937)	
PC	-0.171**	-0.021	0.055	0.168**	-0.127*	0.075	-0.073	0.210**	0.373**	0.381**	0.179**	(0.806)
M	0.663	0.068	0.133	0.129	1.909	0.655	19.902	2.810	2.444	2.652	2.971	3.155
SD	0.474	0.253	0.340	0.336	0.841	0.476	1.156	0.960	0.962	0.856	0.988	0.571

Note: BA = Business Administration, LM = Logistics Management, MM = Marketing Major, HR = Human Resource Management, GRA = Grade, SEX = Sex, AGE = Age, MB = Academic Tutors' Mentoring Behavior, FI = Feedback Inquiry, FM = Feedback Monitoring, LC = Perceived University Learning Climate, PC = University students' Professional Commitment, M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation. The diagonal line was the reliability coefficient. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. The English abbreviations of each variable were also applicable to Tables 1, 2, and 3

Table 2. The Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Model	χ^2	df	χ/df	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	SRMR
Five factors: MF; FI; FM; LC; PC	687.151	289	2.378	0.072	0.926	0.917	0.042
Four factors: MF; LC; FI + FM; PC	836.040	293	2.853	0.084	0.900	0.889	0.043
Three factors: MF + LC; FI + FM; PC	1007.629	296	3.404	0.095	0.869	0.856	0.047
Two factors: MF + LC; FI + FM + PC	1291.157	298	4.333	0.112	0.817	0.800	0.067
One factor: MF + FI + FM + LC + PC	2041.980	299	6.829	0.149	0.678	0.650	0.120

Table 3. Results of Main Effect and Mediating Effects Testing

Variable	PC				FI		FM		PC	
	M1		M2		M3		M4		M5	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
BA	-0.904*	0.401	-0.969*	0.393	-1.913*	0.580	-1.281*	0.527	-0.517	0.376
LA	-0.862*	0.432	-0.982*	0.425	-1.231	0.627	-0.760	0.570	-0.702	0.401
MM	-0.785	0.411	-0.831*	0.403	-1.536*	0.595	-0.801	0.541	-0.505	0.383
HR	-0.601	0.413	-0.704	0.406	-1.376*	0.599	-1.137*	0.544	-0.344	0.385
GRA	-0.066	0.073	-0.056	0.072	0.174	0.106	0.025	0.096	-0.082	0.068
SEX	0.083	0.080	0.073	0.078	-0.272*	0.116	-0.084	0.105	0.122	0.074
AGE	0.043	0.046	0.035	0.045	-0.006	0.067	0.075	0.061	0.024	0.043
MB			0.121***	0.036	0.457***	0.053	0.423***	0.048	-0.005	0.039
FI									0.129**	0.049
FM									0.160**	0.054
R ²	0.062		0.103		0.311		0.282		0.219	
ΔR^2	0.062*		0.041**		0.200***		0.218***		0.116***	
F	2.433*		3.641***		14.410***		12.495***		7.105***	

academic tutors’ mentoring behavior has strong positive effects on feedback inquiry (simple slope = 0.403, SE = 0.107, $p < 0.01$) and feedback monitoring (simple slope = 0.450, SE = 0.097, $p < 0.001$). While when perceived university learning climate is weak, academic tutors’ mentoring behavior has significant positive effects on feedback inquiry (simple slope = 0.214, SE = 0.105, $p < 0.05$) and feedback monitoring (simple slope = 0.265, SE = 0.095, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, both H6 and H7 were confirmed.

This study built a moderated mediation models to test how the indirect effects of feedback inquiry and feedback monitoring between academic tutors’ mentoring behavior and university students’ professional commitment were moderated by perceived university learning climate [11]. These regression equations were constructed as follows, and

Table 4. Moderating Effects Testing Results Of Perceived University Learning Climate

Variable	FI				FM			
	M1		M2		M3		M4	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
BA	-1.972**	0.578	-1.895**	0.575	-1.308*	0.528	-1.233*	0.524
LA	-1.256*	0.624	-1.130	0.622	-0.772	0.570	-0.649	0.568
MM	-1.583**	0.593	-1.514*	0.589	-0.823	0.541	-0.755	0.537
HR	-1.459*	0.597	-1.349*	0.595	-1.176*	0.546	-1.069	0.543
GRA	0.168	0.105	0.172	0.105	0.022	0.096	0.027	0.095
SEX	-0.249*	0.116	-0.220	0.116	-0.073	0.106	-0.044	0.105
AGE	-0.015	0.067	-0.011	0.066	0.071	0.061	0.075	0.060
MB	0.303**	0.097	0.309**	0.096	0.352***	0.088	0.358***	0.088
LC	0.179	0.094	0.208*	0.095	0.082	0.086	0.111	0.086
MB*LC			0.091*	0.043			0.089*	0.039
R ²	0.321		0.333		0.284		0.299	
ΔR ²	0.210***		0.012*		0.220***		0.015*	
F	13.341***		12.639***		11.205***		10.778***	

'C' represented the control variables of this study in the following three equations.

$$FI = \beta_0 + \beta_1 C + \beta_2 MB + \beta_3 LC + \beta_4 MB * LC + \varepsilon_1 \quad (1)$$

$$FM = \beta_0 + \beta_1 C + \beta_2 MB + \beta_3 LC + \beta_4 MB * LC + \varepsilon_2 \quad (2)$$

$$PC = \beta_0 + \beta_1 C + \beta_2 MB + \beta_3 FI + \beta_4 FM + \varepsilon_3 \quad (3)$$

Firstly, the Hayes' moderated mediating index for H8 is 0.012, and its 95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI is [0.001, 0.029]. When perceived university learning climate is strong, the mediating effect of feedback inquiry mentioned above is 0.052, and its 95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI is [0.013, 0.105]. When the perceived university learning climate is weak, the mediating effect of feedback inquiry mentioned above is 0.028, and its 95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI is [0.000, 0.068]. So H8 was supported.

Secondly, the Hayes' moderated mediating index for H9 is 0.015, with a 95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI of [0.001, 0.035]. When perceived university learning climate is strong, the mediating effect of feedback monitoring aforesaid is 0.072, and its 95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI is [0.021, 0.138]. When perceived university learning climate is weak, the mediating effect of feedback monitoring aforesaid is 0.042, and its 95% bias-corrected CI is [0.010, 0.088]. Thus, H9 was verified. In conclusion, all hypotheses in this study were supported by the survey data.

4 Conclusions and Discussions

4.1 Research Conclusions

Based on the self-regulation theory and an investigation of 264 university students in Southern China, this paper used hierarchical regressions and moderated mediation models to do hypothesis testing and empirically found that the academic tutors' mentoring behavior positively affect university students' professional commitment. University students' feedback inquiry and feedback monitoring play a mediating role between academic tutors' mentoring behavior and university students' professional commitment. University students' perceived university learning climate not only positively moderates both the relationship between academic tutors' mentoring behavior and feedback inquiry and the relationship between academic tutors' mentoring behavior and feedback monitoring, but also it positively moderates the indirect effects of feedback inquiry and feedback monitoring on the relationship between academic tutors' mentoring behavior and university students' professional commitment.

4.2 Research Discussions

1) Theoretical Significance.

Firstly, based on the self-regulation theory, this study clarified the relationship between academic tutors' mentoring behavior and university students' professional commitment in universities with the full credit system. This study provided a new way for enhancing the understanding of the influence of academic tutors' mentoring behavior on university students' professional commitment in existing studies. Secondly, academic tutors' mentoring behavior positively predicts university students' professional commitment through the mediating effect of two feedback-seeking strategies (including feedback inquiry and feedback monitoring). This conclusion strengthens the explanatory power of self-regulation theory to explain the effect of academic tutors' mentoring behavior on university students' professional commitment. Finally, university students' perceived university learning climate strengthens the positive and indirect effects of university students' two aforesaid feedback seeking strategies in the relationship between their academic tutors' mentoring behavior and their professional commitment. It expands the view of self-regulation theory [3], which lays new theoretical basis for promoting the research on the boundary conditions of the influence of academic tutorial system on the university students' professional development in universities.

2) Practical implications.

Firstly, universities with the full credit system should further optimize the allocation of resources of the academic tutorial system, and improving the power of academic mentors' mentoring behavior, so as to promote university students to form a high degree of recognition and commitment to their major. Secondly, academic tutors in these universities should guide students to actively seek and obtain relevant information about their professional development through feedback inquiry and feedback monitoring, so as to enhance university students' enthusiasm and investment in professional development.

Thirdly, these universities can improve their educational management policies, systems and practices referring to the construction of university learning climate, so that university students can enhance the perception that their universities highlight and support learning behavior.

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