



# Research on the Practical Difficulties and Optimization Paths of the Mentor-counselor Collaboration Model in Postgraduate Education

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**Abstract.** This study, based on the findings of the tripartite interaction determinism, reveals that the current tutoring-assistance coordination system has problems such as subject bias, communication failure, and institutional culture. Based on this, this paper proposes countermeasures from three aspects: individual, behavior, and environment.

**Keywords:** Guidance, Graduate student training, Counselor

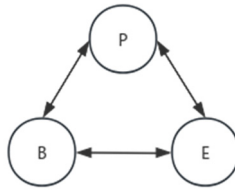
## 1 Introduction

In the current higher education system of China, postgraduate mentors and counselors are the two most crucial teams for talent cultivation. "Cooperation between guidance and assistance" has become one of the important reform ideas in higher education. How to leverage the educational roles of postgraduate mentors and counselors is a new requirement for improving the effectiveness of postgraduate education at present.

## 2 Research Framework and research Design

### 2.1 Theoretical basis and research framework

Bandura's ternary interactive determinism emphasizes that the individual, behavior, and environment form a dynamic interactive system: individual cognition is influenced by the environment and leads behavior, behavioral outcomes in turn shape individual cognition and change the environment, and the environment both constrains and provides conditions for the individual and behavior<sup>[1]</sup>. The triadic interaction determinism discards the limitations of the one-way causal determinism and advocates that there is a dynamic interactive relationship among individuals, behaviors and the environment (see Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** Tripartite interaction determinism

## 2.2 Research Design

In order to better sort out the educational effects of the domestic mentorship collaboration model, based on the ternary interaction determinism, this study adopts the programmed grounded analysis method for research. The coding process of programmatic rooting is divided into three levels of coding: open coding divides raw data into concepts with similar meanings; Spindle coding integrates the concepts derived from open coding; Selective coding distills the most general core categories on the basis of open coding.

To accurately and comprehensively reflect the situation of graduate student training, this study conducted data crawling on Red Note, an original social platform for young people in China, and carried out crawler analysis on key terms such as "graduate student", "mentor", and "counselor", extracting more than 100,000 words of original posts and comments. After a round of screening for invalid data, more than 70,000 words of grounded materials were obtained.

## 3 Coding Analysis Based on Grounded Theory

### 3.1 Grounded Theory Qualitative Analysis

Grounded analysis of the text materials obtained in this study yields the following results:

In open coding, this study first sorted out the comment data and finally obtained 20 categories, including "structural imbalance of mentor ability" and "collaborative ability of counselors", etc.

In the main axis coding, 16 sub-categories of the main axis coding were obtained based on the open coding. Further refinement and generalization of the main axis coding subcategories yielded six main categories, including competency level, role cognition, job performance behavior, interaction behavior, institutional environment, and social environment.

The purpose of selective coding is to distill the core categories from the main categories and establish the relationships between the categories in the form of logical block diagrams, thereby extracting the theoretical model of the study. This study integrates the problems existing in the three main bodies of mentor-assistant collaboration. In the mentor-assistant subsystem, the problems are manifested as institutional tension

driving behavioral misconduct, which in turn affects the cognition and development of graduate students; In the counselor subsystem, the lack of incentives weakens role identity, which leads to behavioral interaction barriers and performance difficulties; In the graduate student subsystem, academic ecological pressure and improper guidance from mentors work together on individuals, intensifying developmental anxiety and interpersonal stress.

After a comparative analysis of various categories, this study distilled the core category, "The Real Dilemma of mentorship," and around this core category, formed a model of the influencing factors of the real dilemma of the mentorship model, as shown in the following figure (see Fig. 2).

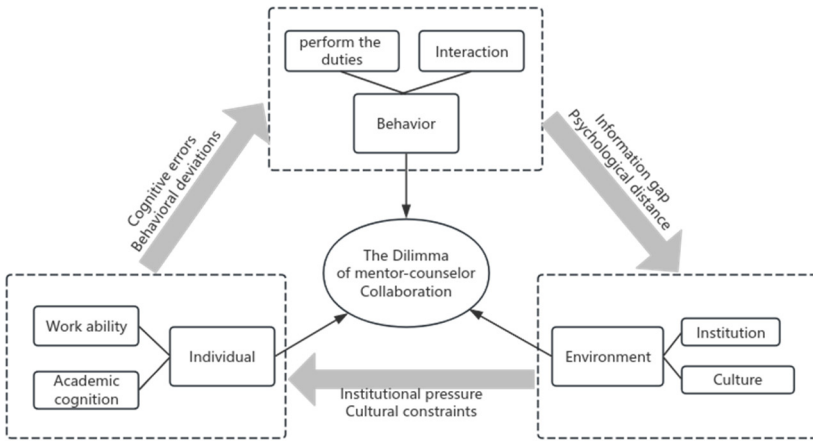


Fig. 2. Diagram of the contradiction model of mentor-assisted collaboration

### 3.2 Theoretical saturation test

This study repeated the coding operation on the remaining 20% of the text material and found no emergence of new concepts and categories, nor any new changes in the relationships between concepts and categories, proving that the above theoretical model passed the theoretical saturation test.

## 4 Theoretical Model Explanation of the Influencing Factors of the Mentor-assisted Synergy Mode

### 4.1 At the Individual Level: Deviation from the Main Role Leads to the Lack of Intrinsic Motivation for Synergy

At the individual level, the deviation in the ability level and role perception of mentors and counselors directly weakens the effectiveness of nurturing graduate students and leads to the attenuation of the intrinsic motivation of mentor-counselor collaboration.

Some mentors have degenerated from "academic guides" to "project managers", with a one-sided emphasis on academic output and a lack of concern for students' thoughts and growth. This instrumental-oriented positioning has led students to instrumentalize themselves<sup>[2]</sup>, and some graduate students refer to their mentors as "bosses", reflecting their acute perception of the nature of the relationship. In this situation, students often do not turn to their mentors for help when they encounter psychological or ideological confusions, and even hide them voluntarily because they think "he doesn't care about this", thus cutting off the information source of the mentor as a key link in collaboration.

At the same time, some counselors are not competent enough to respond effectively to students' needs and to build deep trust, which leads students to be reluctant to turn to them when facing academic pressure and career confusion, and also weakens the early warning and support function of counselors in the collaborative system. This not only exacerbates their predicament in performing their duties, but also makes them prone to career frustration, with the role identity of "life mentor" gradually being replaced by the self-perception of "clerk", further undermining the emotional and collaborative foundation of mentor-counselor collaboration.

#### **4.2 Behavioral Level: The Failure of the Communication Mechanism Leads to the Obstruction of the Collaborative Operation Path**

Abnormalities in the relationship between mentors and graduate students often manifest as the absence or excess of mentoring behavior, which is rooted in the bias of "research output first" orientation. Some mentors exert intense pressure on important research tasks, and some students report being strictly controlled in their schedules, "teachers even think we eat too slowly, and there is intense competition during lunch breaks," accompanied by the psychological pressure of being scolded at any time. In non-core tasks, the mentor may not provide guidance. Some graduate students say that the mentor "only cares about her project and money, and she even asks everyone to extend their graduation to work on her project to earn money." This goal alienation weakens students' sense of support and growth, deviating from the principle of holistic education<sup>[3]</sup>.

The negative performance of counselors is directly related to their ambiguous responsibilities and overburdened nature. Trapped by a large amount of administrative work, counselors have difficulty paying full attention to each graduate student, resulting in limited interaction, one-way communication, and an ineffective cycle of information and emotional support, weakening the role of counselors in the educational process.

#### **4.3 Environmental Level: The Distorted Institutional and Cultural Environment Leads to Prominent Structural Tension**

At the institutional level, the mentor evaluation system overly emphasizes research output and weakens the educational effect, forcing mentors to focus all their energy on projects and papers under the pressure of career development, thereby squeezing the investment in the all-round development of students; Counselors, trapped in heavy and trivial administrative work, have their professional development space compressed and

it is difficult for them to systematically carry out in-depth ideological and political education, thus weakening their key role in the all-staff education system.

At the social environment level, the pressure of online public opinion has made the interaction between teachers and students tend to be conservative. In the face of possible public opinion risks, mentors have to choose to keep their distance from students and find it difficult to build deep trust with them; The counselor said, "There are a lot of posts criticizing the counselor on Red Note. Has this become a fashion too?" exacerbating the mutual distrust between the counselor and the student. The evolution of an individualized society has given rise to the "atomization" tendency of graduate students, with an expanded sense of rights and a weak sense of responsibility, and their interactions with counselors are strongly utilitarian: they only cooperate when it comes to matters related to their own interests. This imbalance of rights and obligations not only intensifies the passivity of the counselor's work, but also reduces the foundation of trust and the cooperative relationship between the two sides[4].

Through the above analysis, it is found that mentor-counselor collaboration is a dynamic structural system, and there are a series of profound and complex tensions and contradictions in the current construction of mentor-counselor collaboration[5]. Based on this, this study constructs a theoretical model of the existing problems of the mentorship model to present its complex and dynamic evolution path. First, the deviation in ability level and role perception among graduate students, mentors and counselors directly leads to the lack of intrinsic motivation for mentor-counselor collaboration; Secondly, negative performance of duties leads to blocked interaction, creating a poor interaction mechanism that further shapes the isolation among the three; Ultimately, the imbalance of incentive systems solidifies role behavior and cognition, the online public opinion crisis intensifies psychological estrangement among the three, and the atomized social culture provides a deeper behavioral reinforcement explanation framework for the estrangement among the three, forming a negative feedback loop.

## **5 Suggestions for the Optimization Path of Mentor-auxiliary Synergy**

In the process of graduate student training, the mentor should attach importance to nurturing responsibility, balance academic output and personality shaping, and dissolve the mentor-student barrier through individualized guidance and in-depth communication; Counselors need to strengthen their professional identity and service awareness, and build a bond of trust through ideological guidance and growth assistance; Graduate students should also take the initiative to break the "atomization" tendency and participate in mentorship and mentoring interactions with an open and responsible attitude to jointly promote the formation of a collaborative and progressive educational ecosystem.

At the behavioral level, building institutionalized communication mechanisms is the key to breaking the mentorship dilemma<sup>[6]</sup>. Build a smooth "mentor-assistant" communication channel and achieve a dual-wheel drive of academic guidance and ideological leadership through regular information sharing and joint analysis. Regulate teacher-student interaction simultaneously, and ensure that guidance is substantive and

effective through mechanisms such as fixed guidance time, process documentation, and anonymous feedback, and avoid formalism. Innovate the "assistant-student" interaction carrier and encourage counselors to shift from transactional responses to proactive embedding and in-depth interviews at key nodes, thereby building trust and providing pre-support.

In terms of the mentor-student matching mechanism, an information-transparent two-way selection platform should be established and a "two-way adaptation period" should be set up to provide flexible space for matching optimization; In the evaluation system of mentors, the effectiveness of education should be incorporated into the core of assessment, and observable qualitative indicators should be used to guide mentors to fulfill their primary responsibility of fostering virtue and nurturing talent. In response to the generalization of counselors' responsibilities, process reengineering should be carried out to reduce burden and increase efficiency, while strengthening professional training to clarify their position as "student development experts"<sup>[7]</sup>.

## 6 Conclusion

The Mentor-counselor Collaboration Model is a new educational model in which both graduate mentor and counselors jointly participate in the cultivation of postgraduate students. Based on the Tripartite interaction determinism, this study analyzes the existing problems in the application of the collaborative model of guidance and counseling, and ultimately arrives at an analytical framework consisting of three dimensions. It also puts forward countermeasures and suggestions from three aspects: subject, behavior, and environment.

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