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Differentiated Professional Commitment Effect on Academic Engagement For Business School Students

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Abstract: The study reports the professional commitment and academic engagement situation of business school students in order to find the causal relationship. With classroom observation, individual interviewing and questionnaires investigation, it shows the business school students in different majors have different levels in professional commitment but not in academic engagement. It studies the characteristics of professional commitment for business school students and finds that continuance commitment is at the first place; normative commitment and affective commitment are at the next; ideal commitment is at the last. With regressive analysis, it illustrates the effect of professional commitment on academic engagement from the affective, normative and continuance dimensions. Ideal commitment is related but not a predictor to academic engagement. It is professional commitment not professional major induced the differentiated situation of academic engagement. Four strategies are discussed to improve the academic engagement for business school students.

Key words: Professional commitment, academic engagement, learning psychology, business school

INTRODUCTION

Business school is so popular for the university applicants that the admission marks of the majors here always reach the top of university. The study in business school needs the students thinking independently, exploring freely and innovating bravely. However, some of the students take less learning initiative in the business school than that in their high school: They would sit in the classroom just for required attendance as they are not interested in the academic contents; they engage in learning on the surface but actually play at their teachers and parents; they have to impose and cram themselves with a lot of unfavorable knowledge for reviews at the last moment dealing with exams. It is obvious that they could not truly reach the destination of learning.

The students make academic engagement not only when they are seriously present in the class and carefully finish their homework. It also actually brings them exciting learning experience and proud of acquiring the knowledge (Newman, 1992). The higher level of academic engagement leads to the most initiative and positive of learning. By contrast, the students would be sick and negative of learning when they have no interests or motives to study.

More than focus on finding a good job after graduation, the students in business school would love learning from within and be happy to engage in learning when they are satisfied and identified with the academic study and professional major from heart. It is necessary of business school to respect their learning psychology by

providing the education suitable for their minds and bodies developing. How to improve the level of academic engagement for business school students? Are the students differentiated in academic engagement as they differently major in international trade, finance, business administration, accounting and tourism management? How to encourage business school students making more academic engagement in the perspective of professional major?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Structure of academic engagement: Academic engagement contains three components of behavior, emotion and cognization. Firstly, behavior engagement refers to the involvement level of learning behavior for the benefit of mental adaption and academic achievements, such as concentration and persistence in learning. Secondly, emotional engagement examines the quality of emotional experience in study activities. At the high level, students are fully interested in the study with happy and positive experience. On the contrary, they would be anxious even angry at the study with passive and negative experience at the low level (Kindermann, 1993). Thirdly, cognitive engagement checks the application of cognitive strategies in study activities. At the high level, students would like to think more deeply, pay more efforts and take more challenges with strong study curiosity and desire to be better (Klem and Connell, 2004).

Measures of academic engagement: Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) develops U-trecht Work Engagement Scale for the Students (UWES-S) on the basis of work engagement with three dimensions of vigor, dedication and absorption. National Survey of Student Engagement (NNSE) of Indiana University in US is introduced in Tsinghua University in China to examine the time of students engaging in learning task and the feelings for school in the perspective of behavioral engagement (Luo *et al.*, 2009). These two measures above by students' self report are widely applied to study academic engagement. Concerning about the method, it is convenient to make statistical analysis with great numbers of sample. However, Zhou (2012) finds NNSE is not good at internal reliability referring to the students with specific major. In validity test, it also shows an opposite direction in some index of academic engagement with less explanation in factor analysis. Concerning about the research contents, UWES-S applies the platform of work engagement focus on the working of workers which is different from the circumstance of learning of students; NSSE focuses on the learning environment encouragement to students' behavioral engagement instead of the emotional and cognitive engagement. As a study on learning psychology, academic engagement research has various measuring methods besides students self report, such as classroom observation (Helme and Clarke, 2001), interviewing method (Conchas, 2001) and teacher grading method (Valeski and Stipek, 2001).

Factors to academic engagement: In the study of influencing factors to academic engagement for students, it could be divided into two parts: the internal factors of students' demographic features and personality traits; the external factors of school situation, teaching circumstance and companion group. As learning is a two-way process like a bridge binding the school and students, learning psychology should be studied at a relationship perspective mutually. Li (2012) finds there is a significant difference between arts students and science students in Northwest University. Shi and Wen (2012) find that students in business school have significantly better cooperative learning in the investigation of learning engagement in Tsinghua University. Does academic engagement of students vary in different majors really? And why it differs inside the business school? It is composed of not only the behavioral characteristics but also affective characteristics with involvement and cognitive characteristics with self-efficiency. Could the professional background affect the students' level of academic engagement? And what is the psychological path?

HYPOTHESIS

The definition of professional commitment has the origin from the concept of organizational commitment. It refers to how much the individual student pays identification and acceptance on his major (Xue, 2007) and how much the student pays efforts on his academic study (Lian *et al.*, 2005). In the basis of structure by Lian *et al.* (2005, 2006), the professional commitment of business school students could be divided into four dimensions as affective commitment, continuance commitment, normative commitment and ideal commitment.

Affective commitment describes the student's interest and emotion on the major; continuance commitment demonstrates whether the student would like to insist on his academic study in professional major on account of his ability, job opportunity, professional wage and treatment; normative commitment shows whether the student identifies the standard and requirements of the major and whether the student would like to persist in his academic study in professional major due to obligation and responsibility; ideal commitment reflects whether the student believes he could achieve his ambition and play his specialty with the benefit from academic study (Lian *et al.*, 2006).

In the learning psychological contract, professional commitment helps the student to make clear of himself, his study and the relation between them. With the empirical research in business school, the study explores the students' academic engagement in the perspective of professional commitment with different majors of finance, accounting, international trade, business administration and tourism management.

The hypotheses are as follows:

- **H1:** The students in different majors have different levels in professional commitment
- **H2:** The students in different majors have different levels in academic engagement
- **H3:** The professional commitment positively affects academic engagement of students
- **H3a:** The affective commitment positively affects academic engagement of students
- **H3b:** The continuance commitment positively affects academic engagement of students
- **H3c:** The normative commitment positively affects academic engagement of students
- **H3d:** The ideal commitment positively affects academic engagement of students

RESULTS

Professional commitment of business school students:

Chinese college undergraduates generally have a low level of Professional Commitment (PC) (Wu and Lian, 2005; Luo *et al.*, 2008). The level of commitment from undergraduates in popular majors is significantly higher than that in unpopular majors (Yan and Long, 2008). Business school is obviously very popular for the high admission marks and great enrollment scale. It is necessary to analyze the business school students' learning psychology deeply from four dimensions of affective, continuance, normative and ideal commitment instead of the whole professional commitment. In the general investigation, it widely shows affective commitment is superior and continuance commitment is inferior (Lian *et al.*, 2005, 2006).

Different from the general inferior commitment of undergraduates, the investigation on business school reveals a high level of continuance commitment because the students have good prospect and expectation for job opportunity, professional wage and treatment in the future. 250 copies of questionnaire are issued, 228 effective copies are retrieved and effective is 91%. There are 37 copies from international trade department, 32 copies from business administration department, 28 copies from tourism management department, 66 copies from accounting department and 65 copies from finance department. Among four dimensions, continuance commitment has the highest marks at 3.63 (mean is 3) as Table 1 shows. On the dimension of Continuance Commitment (CC), marks decrease along with the major sequence of finance, accounting, international trade, business administration and tourism management. Students' continuance commitment of tourism management department is significantly different from those of the other four departments. Yet the difference between the other four departments is not statistically significant. On the dimension of Affective Commitment (AC), the decreasing major sequence is tourism management, international trade, business administration, finance and accounting with no statistically significance between five majors. On the dimension of Ideal Commitment (IC), the decreasing major sequence is finance, accounting, international trade, business administration and tourism management with students in finance department significantly different from the other four. On the dimension of Normative Commitment (NC), the decreasing major sequence is finance, accounting, business administration, international trade and tourism management. Students of finance department reveal significant difference

Table 1: Undergraduates characteristic of different majors in business school

Major	Total PC Mean	AC Mean	NC Mean	CC Mean	IC Mean
International Trade	3.14	3.12	3.18	3.45	2.82
Business administration	3.00	3.10	3.20	3.05	2.65
Tourism Management	3.00	3.25	3.15	2.98	2.61
Accounting	3.46	2.89	3.75	4.24	2.94
Finance	3.57	3.01	3.82	4.43	3.02
Business School	3.23	3.07	3.42	3.63	2.80

Table 2: Correlation analysis results

	Academic engagement
Professional commitment	0.548**
Affective commitment	0.675**
Normative commitment	0.531**
Continuance commitment	0.502**
Ideal commitment	0.433**

**Significant at level of 0.01

from the students of international trade, business administration, tourism management but no significant differences from students of accounting department.

As Table 1 illustrates, the continuance commitment level of business school undergraduates is at the first with normative commitment at the next; the affective commitment level is low but higher than the average; the ideal commitment is at the bottom. Among the five majors, finance department is the most popular with highest continuance commitment while tourism management department is the most unpopular with lowest continuance commitment. It is also exactly the same as the total professional commitment shows. H1 is supported that the students in different majors have different levels in professional commitment.

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