



The SNS-mediated communication modes and Teacher-student Relationships in Internet Era:
Undergraduates' Perceptions From Four Chinese Universities

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INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization thinks that teacher-student relationship is the core of the education process. Research has shown that the teacher-student relationships are good to improve students' study motivation, academic achievement, emotional and social development, engagement, investment of students in their studies and growth. And good student-teacher relationships also can increase teachers' job satisfaction, ease their stress at work, reduce teachers burnout, enhance work passion and augment their work hours and career commitments. Good communication is vital to improve teacher-student relationships. In internet era, communication between students and teachers is taking place via social networking sites (SNS) such as Wechat and QQ in Chinese colleges. The SNS have been widely adopted and have changed the way teachers communicate with students. SNS-based communication effectively extended the scope and setting in which teachers and students communicate. Do SNS increase the frequency of communication between teachers and students and improve the quality of teacher-student relationship in Chinese colleges? This issue has not attracted widespread attention although the pedagogical benefits of SNS have been extensively discussed. Some scholars thought that teachers' role at large is changing in the internet era. This change may affect, in turn, mutual perceptions and beliefs [9], thereby changing student-teacher relationships in colleges.

Some researchers examined on the associations between student-teacher relationship and student-teacher Facebook-mediated communication in the middle schools [9], and on the status and influence of the supervisor-students relationship in universities [10]. But few papers investigate Undergraduates' perceptions of the student-teacher relationships and communication mode in Chinese colleges in internet era.

This paper examined 420 undergraduates' perceptions on teacher-student relationship and teacher-student SNS-mediated communication from 4 Chinese colleges. This study focused on the following research questions:

- (1) What are the characteristics of teacher-students communication via SNS in Chinese colleges?
- (2) What are undergraduates' attitudes towards SNS-mediated communication with teachers and the use of NSN for learning?
- (3) What are the differences in undergraduates' perceptions of student-teacher relationships, based on the following variables?

a) Types of NSN-mediated communication; b) Attitudes towards the use of NSN for learning.

MAIN PROCESS

Firstly, we conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 50 undergraduates. They were asked to express their views on three aspects: (1) communication, including in the main ways of communication between them and teachers; main contents of communication; frequency of communication outside the classroom; whether to add friends with teachers. (2) attitudes, including in towards SNS-mediated communication with teachers and the use of SNS for learning; (3) evaluation and expectation, including in the evaluation of the current situation of teacher-student relationships in universities; expected ideal teacher-student relationship; the effect of social media on teacher-student relationships in universities. Altogether, 420 undergraduates participated in this study. They were between 17-23 years of age (M=20, SD=1.8). There were 189 females (45%) and 231 males (55%). Participants were from four grades in four universities (Southwest Jiaotong University; Sichuan University; University of Electronic Science and Technology of China; Southwest University of Finance and Economics) in Sichuan in order to maximize reachout for varied participants.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

(1) The survey results show all of the participating undergraduates joined in the class-group, but only 6.67% the participating undergraduates have chatted with the teacher in private. 66.9% the participating undergraduates do not wish to have any of their current teacher as a SNS-friend. This conclusion provides evidence for the following views: "The teacher-student relationships becomes a simple way of "teaching" and "learning" formed according to the division of roles Professional relationship" (3) Overall, 91% of the participating undergraduates thought QQ or Wechat can be used for learning, 82.9% of them joined at least one of course groups. The survey show only 29.5% of the participating undergraduates thought social networks can promote the relationship between teachers and students. Though 68% of them prefer to communicate with teachers on SNS, but 66.9% do not wish to have any of their current teacher as a SNS-friend. This is a very contradictory state, which needs further study. (5) 69.6% of the participating undergraduates were dissatisfied with the current teacher-student relationships. Therefore 71.5% of them thought the current teacher-student relationship needs to be improved. But only 6.7% of the participating undergraduates communicated with teachers more than 1 times outside of class. 84.7% of them don't turn to teachers when they have any problems. Some researches thought democracy and equality, respect and trust, mutual assistance and cooperation, independence and innovation are the characteristics of the new university teacher-student relationships. This view is consistent with our findings.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we explored undergraduates' perceptions on SNS-mediated communication modes and student-teacher relationships. According to our research, we can draw the following conclusions:

- (1) Though Social Networking Sites (Wechat and QQ) are the most popular communication platform of undergraduates in Chinese universities, however, teachers and students rarely use it for communication in private.
- (2) The lack of communication between teachers and students is not caused by physical isolation, but more by undergraduates who believe that there is no need for communication.
- (3) The undergraduates have a positive attitude towards using NSN for learning.
- (4) The convenient communication modes did not play a great role in improving the teacher-student relationships.
- (5) The undergraduates understood the current situation and problems of the relationship between teachers and students, but they don't adopt proactive approach to improve it.
- (6) Building a good teacher-student relationship is the common wish of teachers and students.

Based on our research results, we suggest that future research on this topic can include broader and more diverse samples from different countries and regions, as well as different types of social networking sites. And it is necessary to understand undergraduates' views on this topic. More importantly, we need to focus on how to make full use of social networks to strengthen the communication between teachers and students in order to improve the relationship between teachers and students.