

# **Academic Credit System and Interpersonal Relationship: New Development in Contemporary Chinese Colleges**

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*After decades of exploration and development, the credit system has become the main trend of Chinese colleges' reform. Although the credit system has brought some progress to Chinese institutions, its implementation also leads to problems—for example, about teacher-student relationships, the teacher's lower requirements for students, poorer teacher-student relationships, and some students' means of retaliation to course evaluation; concerning classmate relationships, the fewer opportunities to communicate, a lowered sense of class belonging and inadequate class cohesiveness. The credit system's introduction has changed the overall relationship pattern between students and teachers at the university. This study takes ST University as an example, and the students in ST University as the main research objects to investigate the relationship between students as well as the relationship between teachers and students by using an anthropological approach and give some recommendations.*

*Keywords: course evaluation, credit system, higher education, interpersonal relationship*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Higher education is an integral component of national education, and the development of higher education represents an important factor in measuring the comprehensive strength of a country or region. The credit system reform, initiated at the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has been of great significance to higher education management reform in China. Due to the credit system's distinctive features regarding teaching management, scholars have primarily focused on how the system influences college students' education attainment. In contrast, the changes to interpersonal relationships under the credit system remain unexamined. This research is a follow-up study to explore the changing dynamics of interpersonal relationships in Chinese colleges that currently employ the credit system (Tian & Liu, 2015). It points out that the credit system's influence on interpersonal relationships in colleges must be noted so that the credit system could play a more positive role in the construction and development of a harmonious campus.

Interpersonal relationships in colleges affect students' attitudes towards school life and play an important role in students' education attainment. Besides, since college students are in a significant period of physical and mental development, maintaining good interpersonal relationships, especially classmate relationships, is crucial. Moreover, a good teacher-student relationship is an important aspect to promote the teaching quality of higher education, and it is also the basis to train highly-competent personnel. Some

previous research showed that credit systems in colleges play a significant role in strengthening teacher-student relationships.

Firstly, it helps to reduce the psychological distance between teachers and students. Under the credit system, students have the freedom to choose the courses and teachers they prefer, which enhances the dominant position of students and results in greater status equality between teachers and students. These changes are beneficial for students to express themselves, for teachers to understand students' true feelings and establish a sincere teacher-student relationship. Secondly, the credit system helps raise the prestige of teachers. Students' freely choosing teachers creates invisible pressure for teachers because they must demonstrate their overall consideration and understanding to students. In this way, teachers' affections towards students can be reinforced, and teachers' prestige and status can be greatly raised (Xu, 2011). Although the research results reviewed above are undoubtedly theoretical and practical, it is worthwhile to conduct more intensive studies on other relevant and salient issues concerning the credit system.

## **REVIEW OF THE CREDIT SYSTEM AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN COLLEGES**

As a teaching management system, the credit system should be studied from varying perspectives concerning its nature, educational theory and implementation strategies (Bie, 2013). For reference, the credit system in European countries results from external forces, which stresses the learning load and final results, and its dynamic mechanism, is a policy document with certain legal effects. In contrast, the credit system is driven by internal forces, which stresses teacher-student contacts and teaching input, i.e., its dynamic mechanism is the educational needs of the American public.

Therefore, according to the actual situation in China, the credit system should serve to coordinate between internal management restrictive forces of the higher education system and external demand reform forces of the market economy for positive interaction to generate the logic of the credit system in domestic colleges (Qin & Chen, 2013). Besides, different colleges' characteristics should be taken into consideration in the design and measurement of specific GPA (Xia & Fan, 2014). For particular colleges such as higher vocational colleges, students' employment status should be taken into full account for a credit system's rational arrangement (Wang, 2012). Some scholars also reach similar conclusions through research on independent colleges (Lv, 2013). The total required number of credits for undergraduate has decreased. Still, the number of courses has increased instead in recent years, which not only fragments the daily study time of the students but also threatens the internal unity of the knowledge system, resulting in the double fragmentation and bringing severe challenges to deep learning and independent research (Ding, 2020). While, without the reform and construction of the proper credit system, the training models' development for innovative talents in Chinese education cannot be achieved (Zhao, 2020).

As most scholars focus on the credit system's influence on learning situations, they fail to recognize how the credit system has brought changes to interpersonal relationships in colleges. Take the relationship between students, for example. Under the traditional semester system, the relationship is class-based. Students take lessons in the same classroom, which is the primary place for their education, communication and class activities during four years of college life. However, under the current credit system, although the class system is retained, the free elective system gives students more freedom. It is quite common for students to take courses in different departments, majors, and campuses. Despite the merits of this selection agency, it has also led to a decrease in class uniformity. Besides, inconsistent course arrangements, class times and locations result in weakened relationships between students and weakened class cohesiveness, which ultimately affect their peer-to-peer relationships (Que et al., 2010).

Interpersonal relationship in colleges involves not only interaction between students but also teacher-student relationships. Teachers in colleges should study both "teaching knowledge" and "teaching emotion" to ensure that the classroom is permeated with unique emotional chemistry between teacher and students. The emotional involvement of both teacher and students and their interaction is an important character of teaching activity (Tu, 2014), which would impact follow-up teaching and student development. However, the credit system changes the nature and function of the teacher-student relationship.

Concerning traditional education, teachers in the dominant position view lecturing as their mission while students take it as a rule to respect teachers and their teaching; however, under the credit system, students have the freedom to choose teachers, and as a result, the teacher-student relationship is intentional—or unintentionally—positioned as a market exchange relationship. Teaching has become analogous to a commodity, and both teachers and students take what they need. Their relationship ends once the exchange is completed. To a certain extent, it leads to a false positioning of the teacher-student relationship (Xu, 2011). In a sense, the credit system has altered interpersonal relationships in higher education institutions. Since the harmony of interpersonal relationships has a certain impact on members' happiness index within the college community, research into the new trend of changed interpersonal relationships in colleges under the credit system is undoubtedly of salient practical significance.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD**

According to the Chinese Ministry of Education's explanation, if the credit system is employed as a university's higher education system, it takes the credits students have obtained as the basic foundation of their performance and carries out management accordingly. The principle of a credit system is: students must pass the examination to get credit for the course (Tian & Zhou, 2012). Under this system, students are free to choose courses and teachers, each with a different timetable and learning progress and class time (Liu & Ran, 2011; Wang, 2010).

According to theoretical research and practical observation, we propose that the credit system fosters interpersonal relationships between teachers and students. On the one hand, students and teachers have more interaction to promote mutual exchange; on the other hand, students can get acquainted with other students from different schools to expand their social circles.

Based on qualitative research methods of business anthropology, including participant observation and in-depth interviews and quantitative research methods such as a questionnaire survey (Tian & Zhou, 2012), this research explores the influence of the credit system on interpersonal relationships in colleges. This study utilizes ST University as an example to elucidate how the credit system impacts teacher-student relationships and classmate relationships in higher education institutions. The data required for this research were acquired and analyzed through the qualitative and quantitative methods mentioned above. Also, constructive suggestions are made for further improvement and development of the credit system. The details of the credit system adopted by ST University are independent course selection as the mechanism, credit and GPA as units of account to measure the quantity and quality of students' performance, course credits, and GPA as the standard for graduation and getting a degree; for the convenience of course selection, in principle, 16 weeks are scheduled for theory courses, experimental courses and dispersed practice courses, and another two weeks for examination during each fall semester and spring semester.

### **Participant Observation**

Participant observation refers to an approach in which researchers directly observe the research subjects by their sensory organs and auxiliary means according to certain research objectives, outlines, or observation schedules. We observed student's and teachers' behaviors and expressions in multiple, kept an eye on their subtle actions, took instant records, summarized and analyzed the data after observation. In addition, the data collectors had a favorable advantage for participant observation—being college students, the data collectors were able to immediately integrate with respondents, allowing them to obtain reliable internal observations directly. Meanwhile, as ST University's dormitories gather students of different grades from different schools, we had immediate access to diverse observational data. Moreover, the observations were not confined to the classroom and campus life but also included various online virtual communities. During data collection, we tried our best to keep ourselves unperceived for fear that unusual behaviors might influence the data's validity.

### **In-Depth Interview**

An in-depth interview was a critical step of the research, which aimed to look into the credit system's influence on students' interpersonal relationships. To obtain the most authentic and valid information, the questions were designed and determined by business anthropological experts after discussing the research topics and content. About 100 undergraduates at ST University were selected for in-depth interviews, employing eight different dimensionalities, which were mainly open-ended.

### **Questionnaire Survey**

A questionnaire survey is an approach by which a large-scale sampling survey is conducted on research subjects. Data are collected by designing comprehensive and clearly-structured questionnaires for students to fill in. It is a research approach that intentionally collects relevant, realistic conditions of research subjects and effectively obtains a large quantity of authentic data in a planned and systematic way. Based on acquired information and references and our observation, we designed a targeted questionnaire, which covered students' attitudes towards the credit system and towards course selection, towards teacher-student relationships and classmate relationships. Undergraduates at ST University were taken as research subjects, and the questionnaire included students' information such as gender, school, place of origin, financial condition, etc. A total of 380 questionnaires were distributed, with 348 returned, representing a response rate of over 90%.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

As an essential part of college life, students' interpersonal relationships and social interactions, such as emotional exchanges and social communication between students as well as peer-level communication between teachers and students, is particularly important for students' learning growth, integrated development and physical and mental health. Compared with the traditional education pattern, the credit system places greater emphasis on students' autonomy and dominance. Students are free to choose courses and teachers, which breaks the stereotype of classmate relationships and alters teacher's and students' traditional roles during their interaction so that students' interpersonal relationships show new patterns (Wu, 2010). This research will focus on students' interaction and communication under the credit system from two dimensions, (1) the teacher-student relationship and (2) the classmate relationship, and mainly adopts anthropological research methods, such as participant observation and in-depth interviews complemented by a questionnaire survey, to explore the trends concerning students' interpersonal relationships under the credit system.

### **Manifestation and Analysis of Teacher-Student Relationships in Specific Contexts**

For a long time, we have adhered to the teacher-oriented concept in conventional teacher-student relationships, which have been heavily influenced by traditional morality and culture. Traditional morality and higher education management systems used to function together to maintain the development of such an educational tradition. With the profound development of structural reform of higher education, based on a market-oriented economy, especially the implementation of the credit system, teacher-student relationships in colleges are being transformed in the new context. An urgent question for management personnel in colleges concerns how to optimally cultivate harmonious teacher-student relationships according to the actual situation in the large environment of a harmonious society. Although there are various aspects in terms of teacher-student interaction in colleges, teacher and student positioning under different contexts should comply with certain rules. However, we can always find some phenomena that violate standards.

**BOX 1**  
**DRANK A LOT OF BEER**

Scene 1

Time: 9:00-10:00 p.m. May 8, 2012; location: corridor of Dormitory #E.

Interviewer: I've heard that you had a night snack with teachers that evening!

Interviewee (girl): Yes! We had a good time with them (male teachers)! J and I drank a lot of beer!

Recorder: Wow, you're so lucky! How many teachers?

Interviewee: Three, and they're all very nice and talkative.

According to our observation and research, the phenomenon described in Box 1 is not uncommon on this campus. Compared with teacher-student relationships under the traditional system, communication between teachers and students under the credit system tends to be diversified, and the ways to improve relationships are not confined to classroom and teaching. Sometimes dining together is perceived as mainstream.

**BOX 2**  
**THE TEACHER IS VERY NICE**

Scene 2

Time: 8:00-9:00 p.m. May 9, 2012; location: campus road of ST University

Interviewer: Actually, I think many teachers in our school are very nice.

Interviewee: Yeah! For example, W is quite talented and teaches well. S is also very nice and kind to students. Besides, she gives us high scores!

Interviewer: Well, only D and I have much to talk about, and I usually chat with him. He is very humorous. I find that American teachers are all full of enthusiasm!

Interviewee: For me, I only get close to J, and he is easy to interact with.

Interviewer: Is the teacher bound to help you? If you do a bad job in your homework and team report, the teacher cannot help you.

Interviewee: The teacher is very nice, and he will surely give me a high score!

The phenomenon described in Box 2 is also quite common on campus. Under the credit system, some students intend to get high scores by fawning on their teachers so that their scores might not tally with the facts, leading them to speculate that they can gain academic rewards without significant labor.

The above records are dialogues between observers and their friends. Based on the above phenomenon, we find that students can choose teachers freely, and the teacher-student relationship becomes an important factor for course selection under the credit system. Some students even deliberately fawn on teachers to get higher scores, which might influence teachers' assessments on students' performance. Therefore, some students might become opportunistic.

Based on the above phenomenon, in-depth interviews were conducted to answer relevant questions. The question is designed as: "Compared with other traditional educational patterns, what do you think are the differences in terms of teacher-student relationships under the current credit system?" with follow-up questions such as: "Could you give your explanation of this phenomenon according to your own experience? What is the influence of such changes? What should be improved?" The authors summarized the answers as follows:

1. "I think the relationship between teachers and students in colleges is more alienated than that in high schools. After all, teachers leave once the class is over. It is very difficult for them to remember every student unless they are major teachers."
2. "Students choose their courses freely, so they are rather alienated from teachers. Teachers face students from different schools without a deep understanding of them. Students have different

courses each semester and have little exchange with teachers in class, let alone after class. Since there is no communication between teachers and students, it is difficult to improve their relationship."

3. "There is little exchange between teachers and students. Generally, teachers leave once the class is over. And we cannot find teachers after class."
4. "I think under the credit system, teachers seem to be put into the market. Only by doing better and catering more to students can teachers attract more students to select their courses. It is somewhat like the relationship between customer and commodity. But the precondition is various courses for us to choose from. There is little impact on optional and compulsory courses. And there might be some impact on those general-knowledge courses, but anyway, someone will choose them."
5. "Take general-knowledge courses as an example. There is little exchange with teachers. We neither answer questions in class nor ask questions after class and only meet with teachers in class. So we almost have no exchange with them."

From the above answers, we can conclude the main ideas are as follows: the relationship between teachers and students is relatively distant; since there is little exchange between them in class and after class, their relationship is not in harmony; students know little about teachers when choosing courses and ask for more detailed introduction of teachers under the credit system; it seems that teachers have to cater to students so that more students would choose their courses, which is akin to the relationship between customer and commodity; teachers' character and teaching style would also affect teacher-student relationships.

As previously mentioned, a total of 100 undergraduates in ST University were selected for in-depth interviews with questions of eight different dimensions, which were mainly open-ended. The five most representative interview records were selected as samples for analysis. From the interview, it can be found that most students think the teacher-student relationship is not good under the credit system. Compared with the traditional teaching pattern, the credit system leads to weakened teacher-student relationships. Through in-depth interviews, we find that teachers' character, teaching attitude, teaching method, quality of instruction also impacts the relationship between teachers and students.

**TABLE 1**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE ON CREDIT SYSTEM AND TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP**

Question	Option	Number	Percent
<b>The credit system helps improve the teacher-student relationship.</b>	agree, strongly agree	62	19%
	no idea	120	35%
	disagree, strongly disagree	161	46%
<b>If a teacher once offended students, students might retaliate during teacher evaluation.</b>	agree, strongly agree	85	25%
	no idea	127	37%
	disagree, strongly disagree	132	38%
<b>The teacher evaluation system makes some teachers loosen the management and requirements of students in the class.</b>	agree, strongly agree	145	42%
	no idea	110	32%
	disagree, strongly disagree	89	25%

\*Valid data.

Therefore, through in-depth interviews, we have learned that the credit system influences the teacher-student relationship, and the influence tends to be negative. To more deeply explore the influence of the

credit system on teacher-student relationships, a quantitative research method, a questionnaire survey was also employed and participant observation and in-depth interviews.

**TABLE 2**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE ON FAMILIARITY BETWEEN TEACHERS AND STUDENTS**

Question	Option	Number	Percent
<b>Which can best reflect your familiarity with your teachers?</b>	A. Quite familiar with a small part of teachers, also keep contact after class	19	7%
	B. General, but would ask teachers if there are questions about the study	43	15%
	C. Not familiar with most teachers, seldom contact after class, only greet them when meeting	120	41%
	D. Almost unfamiliar with all of them, and do not greet them when meeting	108	37%

\*Valid data.

Table 1 and Table 2 show that, under the credit system, about 80% of students are not familiar with their teachers. Most students and teachers are not familiar with each other. Students and teachers even fail to greet each other when meeting. Besides, only 18% of students believe that the credit system helps improve teacher-student relationships, 35% claim they have no idea, and 46% disagree with the statement that "the credit system contributes to the interaction between teachers and students and improves teacher-student relationships." These results indicate that most students believe the credit system does not substantially help promote the teacher-student relationship.

Table 1 shows that over 40% of the students believe the teacher evaluation system makes some teachers loosen the management and requirements of students in the class. Only 25% disagree with the opinion. Thus, the course evaluation under the credit system has a great impact on classroom discipline, which is also an important manifestation of the teacher-student relationship. Therefore, classroom discipline under the credit system has a certain impact on the teacher-student relationship. We conclude the major factors affecting the teacher-student relationship as follows:

- 1) Course evaluation. Under the credit system, students are required to provide course evaluations at the end of each semester. Some students might evaluate according to their relationship with teachers and even retaliate. Therefore, the credit system seriously affects the teacher-student relationship.
- 2) Teaching quality. The teaching quality under the credit system might influence the communication between teachers and students and affect their relationship.
- 3) Classroom discipline. Over 40% of the students hold that the teacher evaluation system makes some teachers loosen their management and requirements in class. As an important manifestation of the teacher-student relationship, classroom discipline also influences the teacher-student relationship under the credit system.
- 4) Academic guidance. Under the credit system, students can choose courses freely. Students from different majors and different grades find it difficult to communicate with teachers, and they lack academic guidance from teachers.

### **Influence of Course Evaluations on the Teacher-Student Relationship**

Based on the above analysis of the observational data, the interviews and questionnaires, the primary conclusion can be made that the credit system significantly impacts the teacher-student relationship. Most students disagree with the viewpoint that "the credit system helps improve the teacher-student relationship," and they feel unfamiliar with their teachers, or even that their relationship with them is strange. Under the credit system, students are required to conduct teacher evaluations. Some students might evaluate according to their relationship with teachers and even retaliate. How do students view the teacher-student relationship

given that course evaluations are required, and what is the impact of course evaluations on the teacher-student relationship?

As seen from Scene 3 and the widely discussed article "College Students Scramble for 'Kind' Teachers—Reflection on the Standard of 'Good Teacher'" in Sohu Education from sina.com which states that "Public compulsory courses are different from specialized ones, as the same course is taught by different teachers. Therefore, everyone scrambles for 'kind' teachers at the beginning of each semester", the author uses an Internet buzzword "RP" (which means personal character) to describe the battle of course selection. The so-called good character means that the teacher is kind, gives high scores and a little homework.

### **BOX 3**

#### **STUDENTS EVALUATE THE TEACHER AS NICE**

##### **Scene 3**

Time: 8:00 p.m. May 24, 2012; students' Dormitory #E, tree hole in Shantou University.

Participant: XX from the School of Business, you are so inhumane! Let alone that you read PPTs in class, you even require us to debate in the 14<sup>th</sup> week and take an exam in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> weeks. What's worse, the content is not from the book but a qualification test. Are there any differences with taking an examination twice in succession?

It is learned that many students evaluate the teacher as nice, giving high scores, but always repeating what the book says, straying far away from the subject without much knowledge related to the textbook after a lesson.

The above record is from Sina Weibo (Sina Blog), a platform for public social comments, through which teachers and students of this university can voice their opinion. From the above information, students have a bad opinion of the teacher, and at least some students disagree with his teaching and evaluation forms. It is hard to imagine that the teacher can get excellent comments during his course evaluation.

According to the above observation, we gave in-depth interviews to related students with these questions: "Do you think the current teacher evaluation system in ST University is rational? If not, what needs to be improved?" as well as follow-up questions: "Could you talk about your standards and attitude during the evaluation of teaching quality based on your experience? What do you think are the influences of students' evaluation of teachers?" According to the interview, it can be summarized and concluded as follows:

1. "The teacher evaluation system is irrational. Students pay little attention to it and do not want to fill it in after the course is over; besides, teachers do not make improvements even if they fill it in. Students generally fill in the evaluations according to their preference of the teacher."
2. "The teacher evaluation system is quite irrational. It should be taken before the examination instead of after the examination. Those unqualified teachers should be fired. Sometimes teacher evaluations might influence scores. Therefore, students are somewhat subjective during evaluation. Some students give favorable comments and full scores to all teachers and do not evaluate according to reality."
3. "The evaluation of teachers' performance is too casual. We don't know whether teachers have seen their evaluation and comments and whether they have taken measures to improve. I think something like a hearing should be held so that students can make an on-site evaluation of teachers."
4. "I remember that a teacher for English was fired due to an overly strict evaluation. Although supervisory personnel would come to observe the class and the teacher would become especially enthusiastic, it was of little effect and could not essentially change his teaching pattern."
5. "It is irrational. Many students do not take the evaluation seriously, and there is no normalized evaluation standard. Such evaluation is even used as a means of retaliation by students."



From the answers received, the following keywords can be extracted: irrational, too casual, without improvement of teachers; with strongly subjective evaluation and hard to reflect the real situation; students are not informed whether their opinions are accepted; the role of supervisory personnel is not obvious; evaluation itself might become a means of retaliation by students.

Thus, the following conclusions can be made. Firstly, students are not serious about the evaluation system. Secondly, the evaluation system lacks relevant feedback. Since colleges and teachers unilaterally receive the evaluation results without feedback and non-transparent settlement and improvement measures, most students consider the evaluation invalid. Thirdly, supervisory personnel fails to play their due role. The classroom observers dispatched do not make a great difference as one or two observers have to audit all the problem courses in college. Due to their limited knowledge, it cannot be guaranteed that they understand every course, which leads to low validity of some teaching inspection reports without substantial effect on the improvement of courses.

According to the in-depth interviews, it seems that teacher evaluations do not play their proper role. For the research's preciseness and accuracy, we distributed questionnaires on the credit system and teacher evaluation to students to explore the relationship between course evaluation and teacher-student relationships using the quantitative method.

**TABLE 3**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE CREDIT SYSTEM AND TEACHER EVALUATION**

Question	Option	Number	Percent
<b>I pay little attention to the final teacher evaluation and don't think the evaluation greatly influences the teacher.</b>	agree, strongly agree	150	44%
	no idea	83	24%
	disagree, strongly disagree	113	32%
<b>Under the credit system, the teacher evaluation system weakens teachers' authority.</b>	agree, strongly agree	88	26%
	no idea	104	30%
	disagree, strongly disagree	153	44%

\*Valid data.

From the above table, it is learned that nearly half (44%) of the students believe course evaluation has little impact on teachers, and only 32% of students disagree with that statement. It can be seen that students are not serious about course evaluation.

In addition, most students disagree with the statement that "under the credit system, the teacher evaluation system weakens teachers' authority," and only 26% of students agree with that statement, which suggests that most students believe that their evaluation would not affect teachers' authority. Thus it can be concluded that most students believe course evaluation has little impact on teachers and gives teachers favorable or unfavorable comments randomly, which is likely to dampen teachers' enthusiasm and impair the teacher-student relationship.

The credit system not only affects the relationship between teachers and students but also the relationship between students.

### **Classmate Relationships Under the Credit System**

Previous research results show that under the traditional semester system, classmate relationships are class-based, and students take lessons in the same classroom, which is the major place for their learning, communication and class activities during four years' of college life; however, under the credit system, although the class system is retained, the free elective system gives more freedom to students, and it is quite common to take courses in different departments, majors and campuses, which leads to class fragmentation. Besides, inconsistent course arrangements, class times and locations result in weakened relationships between students and a lessening of class cohesiveness, which ultimately affects classmate relationships.

We delved deep into the actual situation to explore the influence of the credit system on classmate relationships.

**BOX 4**  
**TEACHER ASSIGNED HOMEWORK AT END OF THE CLASS**

Scene 4

Time: 10:10 a.m. April 24, 2012; location: PE class.

Teacher: Hand over your theory homework.

Just then, students began to whisper.

Student A: What?

Student B: Is there such a thing?

Student C: What? Is there any homework?

Student A: Definitely, there is, as you see, other students have handed their homework in.

Student D: You left early last class, didn't you? The teacher assigned homework at the end of the class.

Student A, B, C (suddenly understand): Oh~~

After warm-up exercises, students exercise separately and in slight disorder. Student B furtively took out a blank test paper and a finished one from the teachers' folder when he was unaware, and then pretended to "go to the toilet." Student A and C also followed suit. Fifteen minutes later, Student B calmly replaced two finished test papers, and later, Student A and C also did similarly.

The phenomenon recorded in Box 4 occurred in that particular PE class and occurred with relative frequency in other courses—behaviors such as leaving early and plagiarism are generally quite common in colleges. The authors propose that the credit system is a major cause of this phenomenon. Students can choose the course they like freely under the credit system, which means that students of each class have courses together out of interest rather than major and grade. Therefore, mutual supervision between students is quite impossible, which further impacts students' learning efficiency and quality.

**BOX 5**  
**THE ELECTION RESULTS WERE INVALID**

Scene 5

Time: 7:30—9:00 p.m. May 25, 2012; location: D504, committee election of Class 9.

It was the last term of the committee election when only about 40 out of 120 students eligible to vote came to the proceedings. It was much fewer compared with before the implementation of the credit system. Several class committee members attempted to keep the atmosphere upbeat. Several candidates for the monitor position did not show much enthusiasm, and some positions were vacant, which made the atmosphere highly embarrassing. As it turned out, the election results were invalid because only one-third of the class was present to vote.

Similar phenomena to the one described in Box 5 occur at most schools of the university. Under the credit system, the class status declines, and the class cannot play its normal role. Since students are required to attend the class as in "day school" under the credit system and do not form such strong class consciousness as in high school, middle school, or even primary school, the sense of belonging declines and class cohesiveness is gravely insufficient. It can be seen that the credit system leads to a weak collective concept, as well as a lack of class cohesiveness.

**BOX 6**  
**WHY DOES OUR FREE TIME NEVER COINCIDE?!**

Scene 6  
 Time: morning on April 16, 2012; location: in a student's dormitory.  
 A: Girls, I've got a VIP card of "Music Online," and it's hard-earned. Let's go to KTV (karaoke) one day! (A shows the gold VIP card to her roommates joyfully)  
 B took a look at the card and said: Great, we have never gone to KTV together, and I've thought about it for a long time.  
 C: Wow, it's really quite cheap. When shall we go?  
 B: I have many courses on Thursday. I'm afraid it cannot be Thursday.  
 C: Thursday is OK. But I'm occupied on Friday.  
 B: I can't make sure whether I have time at the weekend, as I always have some unexpected work to do.  
 A: Well, it seems that we can't go out together again. Why does our free time never coincide?!

Similar phenomena to the one recorded in Box 6 took place in all the dormitories. Under the credit system, every student can choose their schedule and teachers, which grants students great freedom and alternatives. However, this system directly leads to different timetables and schedules for each student, so gathering together becomes more difficult. It indirectly affects communication between students. In addition to participant observation, we also further explored the influence of the credit system on classmate relationships by administering a questionnaire survey.

**TABLE 4**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE CREDIT SYSTEM AND CLASSMATE RELATIONSHIPS**

	Options	Number	Percent
<b>The credit system promotes classmate interaction and improves their relationship.</b>	agree, strongly agree	85	25.64%
	no idea	103	29.86%
	disagree, strongly disagree	157	45.5%

\*Valid data.

**TABLE 5**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE ON FAMILIARITY BETWEEN CLASSMATES**

Question	Options	Number	Percent
<b>How well do you know about your classmates?</b>	A. Am quite familiar with most classmates and know each other	82	24.55%
	B. Most classmates look familiar but don't know their names and have little communication	75	22.46%
	C. Know some classmates, communicate frequently and maintain a good relationship with them	115	34.43%
	D. Know some classmates, but with little communication	54	16.17%
	E. Almost do not know each other	8	2.39%

\*Valid data.

45.5% of students voted against the statement that "the credit system promotes classmate relationship," among which 31.88% of students "disagree" and 13.62% "strongly disagree." Compared with 25.64% on the pro side, it may be said that the con side achieved an overwhelming advantage. It can be concluded that the credit system hinders communication between students to some extent.

Table 5 also proves the above conclusion as it is found that only 24.55% of students are familiar with most classmates; 22.46% of students have some impression of classmates but are not familiar with them; 34.43% of students have close contact with a part of classmates; 16.17% students only know a small part of classmates with little communication.

Results from participant observation and the questionnaire survey show that the credit system exerts many negative effects on classmate relationships.

## CONCLUSIONS AND MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The research results show that the credit system exerts a significant influence on the study of college students and has profound effects on their interpersonal relationships. About teacher-student relationships, the new teacher evaluation system has led to a change in the relationship status between teachers and students (Liu & Li, 2010). Thus teachers have lowered their students' requirements, which have led to poor classroom discipline (Jiang, 2008). Secondly, under the credit system, students mainly learn independently, which results in less exchange between teachers and students and poorer teacher-student relationships (Jiang, 2008). Finally, under the credit system, some students utilize course evaluation as a means of retaliation.

In contrast, other students pay little attention to it, resulting in an evaluation system that has become arbitrary. Therefore, the negative effect on teacher-student relationships caused by the credit system should be paid attention to. Concerning the problems mentioned above, recommendations are made as follows:

1. Change the mode of course evaluation. The current course evaluation system lacks normalization, and students' evaluation tends to be subjective, which hinders the teacher-student relationship's normal development. Process evaluation and face-to-face evaluation can be adopted to promote exchange between teachers and students further.
2. Establish a feedback system. After a course evaluation, students could see teachers' improvement and give them suggestions through a feedback system. As another important exchange between teachers and students, a feedback system could provide more opportunities for their communication.
3. Change the dimensionality of course evaluation. As most students find it difficult to understand the criteria, making the dimensionality of course evaluation easier would help reflect students' opinions more accurately and promote mutual progress of teachers and students and the harmonious development of the teacher-student relationship.

Concerning classmate relationships, due to free and dispersed courses and mixed dormitories, students have fewer opportunities to communicate with each other, leading to a lowered sense of class belonging and inadequate class cohesiveness. From the sociological perspective, there will be some impacts on their relationship if they cannot stay in the same class for a long time (Chen, 2004). Such impacts mainly include: (1) the credit system reduces exchange between classmates so that they are alienated; (2) the credit system weakens mutual supervision from students taking the same courses and thus impacts classroom discipline and learning quality (Xiao & Zheng, 2013). Concerning the above two problems, we make the following suggestions:

1. Students should be more proactive in making friends, and class committee members should regularly hold class activities. Under the present social context, interpersonal relationships are indispensable for success in careers. Also, class committee members should hold class activities regularly and get all students involved to increase their communication opportunities and promote their friendship.
2. Under the credit system, students' schedules and timetables are different, which is an ineradicable phenomenon. Therefore, the only thing we can do is to promote the advantages of the credit system. For example, the mixed-dormitory system enables students to learn more about other majors, which provides a wider range of ideas and perspectives to view the same question and have more room to find solutions.

3. Add major elective courses to enable classmates to have more opportunities to meet each other while they have more alternatives; in addition to daily class affairs, class committee members should play a greater role in enhancing communication between classmates and organizing activities to promote friendships.
4. Supervision of students should be strengthened with more inspection of study style. Because teacher-student relationships and classmate relationships are not close under the credit system, it is difficult to form effective mutual supervision. The credit system weakens classmate relationships, reduces encouragement and supervision between classmates, and leads to declined learning quality, which is inconsistent with colleges' objective to train excellent personnel. Therefore, it is recommended to (1) increase the frequency of inspection of study style; (2) step up efforts to check attendance rates and strictly enforce relevant punishment measures. Besides, students should change the mind of "muddling along" and mutually supervise each other with the responsibility for friends' future in mind.

This research combines participant observation, an in-depth interview and a questionnaire survey to ensure the data collected, but there are still limitations. Firstly, the sample size could be larger; secondly, the time of investigation was not accurately allocated as needed, which led to hasty in-depth interviews later on in the process; thirdly, the interviewers lacked the experience to carry out in-depth interviews; fourthly, this study focused on the investigation and research about students' cognition of the credit system, it is suggested that the teachers' cognition of the credit system should be investigated and studied in the future research to draw a more comprehensive and objective conclusion. Some information from the informants and some interviewees' expressions might have been ignored due to the limited interview experience of interviewers, and the information richness might have been affected since the method of inquiry was not perfectly satisfactory. These shortcomings can be addressed and avoided in future research.

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