

Excessive Anxiety of Chinese Parents about Education

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Abstract. Education is always the most concerning issue in raising a child. Research has demonstrated that diligence is believed to be the most changeable factor in improving one's social status. This study aims to answer the question of why Chinese parents are anxious about their children's education. Overall, environmental issues, both demographically and socially, have contributed significantly to parents' rush mentality. This analysis reviews past research to conclude that an excessive focus on early education can have adverse effects on children's behavior and may lead to the deterioration of the parent-child relationship. Parents should understand what a healthy parent-child relationship entails before devoting themselves to raising a child. Parental expectations often arise from comparisons with peers. While competition is somewhat unavoidable, it is possible not to pass on this anxiety to a child. Education should focus on nurturing a child's interests and then exploring the meaning and significance of life. Ultimately, education should lead to a sense of relaxation and composure.

Keywords: Education, parental anxiety, peer pressure.

1. Introduction

In the past, resources were limited, and students could only learn from textbooks. Nowadays, parental demands in education are increasing, and their financial investments affirm that such dedication comes with expectations. It appears that children who are not exceptionally talented are considered a failure. When education becomes an obsession, it becomes frustrating. Parents often project this frustration onto their children in a never-ending cycle. Another trend is that parents tend to exert considerable control over their children's minds in an attempt to make them feel guilty and unworthy due to the sacrifices made by parents themselves. These high expectations, particularly prevalent in the middle class and among the bourgeoisie, stem from the fact that only the elite can afford to invest so heavily in their children's education. Parents may claim to be willing to do anything for their children, but in reality, they use this sense of guilt to manipulate their children into doing things in return for their parents' selflessness. These circumstances demonstrate that parental distress is distorting the true meaning of education and can have more detrimental effects than we might think. This research aims to challenge the traditional perspective and propose that education can be approached in a more relaxed manner by providing children with space and control to grow.

The traditional educational concept is deeply ingrained. Even when the government attempts to alleviate pressure, measures like the "double reduction" policy have not been very effective in reducing educational stress in China. On the contrary, they unintentionally harm the interests of some organizations. Thus, the government's efforts should not be blamed when explaining the failure to alleviate parental anxiety. Instead, a shift in educational beliefs is the effective and necessary solution. Education must be reshaped mentally before it can be developed realistically.

By reviewing the work of other researchers, this research aims to provide the external conditions that have led to parental actions in society. Subsequently, it delves into the psychological factors created by these anxious parents. Previous studies have shown causality issues based on evidence from demographic and socioeconomic fields but have not elaborated on how oppressive educational practices can lead to a flawed parent-child relationship [1,2]. Therefore, this research is divided into two parts: Why do parents believe that education should start as early as possible? Why is the Chinese educational system flawed? This study substantiates the phenomenon of increasing anxiety among Chinese parents regarding their children's early education, extending beyond institutional support. Textual analysis is conducted using statistics and reports.

2. Academic Pressure

According to the latest United Nations Data, China's population is estimated at 1,425,671,352 at midyear. Taking all *Gao Kao* candidates in 2023, the 985 national average acceptance rate of Beijing is about 4.29%, while the 211-college acceptance rate of Beijing is around 13.99% [3]. Based on demographic situations, Chinese students faced fierce competition since they were born, but when looking toward to see the nationwide admission status, the national average acceptance rate is much lower than that of large cities. This testifies the huge population results in the limited distribution of resources, this environment is just unfair. China's huge population basis results in the limited educational resources.

2.1. Mechanism of Chinese Education

Chinese children experience exceptional levels of stress and exhaustion. That is attributed not only to the academic pressures imposed by the education system but also to indirect influences from parents affecting their daily lives. However, three primary factors have contributed to the surge in anxiety: the inflexible education system, an unequal distribution of resources, and the relentless demand from parents for their children to exhibit unwavering self-discipline.

The biggest source of pressure comes from an impractical education mechanism, namely *Gao Kao*. The Chinese *Gao Kao* system is inherently problematic. Through this rigid system, the essence of education risks being distorted [4]. Students neglected the meaning of education, resembling mechanic robots. The *Gao Kao* system evaluates an individual's abilities solely through a single examination. This approach is unreasonable because it is compulsory. Failure to meet the baseline and attain satisfactory results leads to either repeating the process or relinquishing one's academic pursuits during their prime years. The *Gao Kao* system suppresses one's individuality and creativity and neglects other crucial life skills such as perseverance, the ability to resist frustration, and problem-solving [5]. Students molded by this system are incomplete and unprepared to embrace societal challenges with confidence. The journey of being a student is difficult, especially amidst the challenges of adolescence. Adolescent students are under all kinds of pressure encompassing social pressure, peer and parental pressure. The significance of the college entrance examination not only fails to alleviate students' pressure but also imprints the most distressing memories of the learning process. In the realm of education, the government does not make the best consideration for students.

While China is not the sole nation to rely on a comprehensive assessment to determine university placements or life paths, a convergence of other factors renders this mechanism exceptionally ineffective.

Chinese parents invest a substantial part of themselves in their children's education, providing the best educational resources and displaying a willingness to make significant sacrifices [6]. While it is understandable that parents hold high expectations for their children's overall development, excessive and forceful measures can undeniably subject children to undue pressures. Education revolves around a competition where the objective is not only to attain a certain level of achievement but also to outperform other contenders. The notion that early education can guarantee future success and create a sense of safety has taken root, giving an absolute advantage to those who embark on it ahead of others. In a nation with a substantial population, the intensity of educational competition is heightened. As parents realize that not everyone can earn their desired level of education due to competition, this realization leads to educational anxiety to a great extent. As a result, the sizable population contributes to the prevalence of competitive educational psychology.

2.2. Educational Inequality

China's economic growth has exacerbated income inequality, impacting the unequal distribution of educational resources [7]. Education stands as a paramount investment, with the affluent segment of society prioritizing it by allocating significant resources to their children's learning. As parents have a strong demand to enroll their children in additional classes, the demand for quality educational

resources escalates. The affluent classes devote their money to pursue middle or upper-tier teachers, leading to an upsurge in fees for well-qualified teachers. Consequently, the pursuit of quality education becomes disproportionately emphasized, disrupting the equilibrium of educational resources. The privileged have ready access to superior resources, while those less fortunate are left with secondary options. The resulting outcome is a widening gap between the affluent and less privileged, as resources shift from equitable to disparate distribution. This phenomenon fuels parental anxiety, as they grapple with the multifaceted challenges associated with raising and educating their children.

Furthermore, elites are often produced through elite education, which requires the intelligence of the educated. However, those who have the opportunity to receive elite education make up only a small proportion of their peers, as it often demands significant economic resources. More and more students are opting to attend international schools, and this can be attributed to several reasons. International schools place a strong emphasis on the learning process rather than solely on academic examinations. They promote creativity, independence, and the uniqueness of each individual student.

Children raised through elite education tend to be confident and optimistic. They are pioneers, exploring the world with courage and possessing a rich inner world. They develop qualities that are challenging to acquire through regular education, such as resilience to pressure, a refusal to compromise in the face of failure, and high recognition in society.

Students in the Chinese education system often feel constrained because the purpose of studying is misguided [8]. They study to make their parents proud and for the sake of achieving high scores, but they may not internalize their academic accomplishments as personal growth. The current issue is that students are starting to rebel against the methods employed in Chinese education, which leads to a sense of disinterest in learning. These students are yearning for a Western-style education.

Children in standard educational systems may view the world in a one-sided manner, with a narrower perspective. By attending international schools, students can benefit from a broader range of opinions and reduce some of the pressures they face. People may be impressed by the outcomes of Chinese education, but they may not realize the stifling of natural instincts and mechanical repetition that often occurs. This is because many students' efforts are not channeled correctly toward self-development, leading to significant differences in their personal growth as adults. Elite education cultivates more talents and well-rounded personalities.

3. Parental Demands

3.1. Diligence

Additionally, Chinese society places a disproportionately high emphasis on diplomas over other aspects [6]. 90% of Chinese parents consider diligence as substantially important, while only 34% of Japanese parents share this view when assessing one's ability [2]. Although Japan also has a similar exam structure for accessing good education in universities, the significant gap in the perception of diligence between these two countries raises intriguing questions. Why do these seemingly identical systems show such different attitudes toward diligence? While Japanese parents believe in the value of hard work they do not overly fret if their children fail to be admitted to prestigious universities. Instead, they encourage their offspring to lead meaningful lives and possibly inherit family businesses. On the one hand, Japan and China are both Asian countries, thus the cultural difference could be minimal. On the other hand, their access to higher education is filtrated from a national college entrance examination. In contrast, Chinese parents demonstrate a strong desire of expectation for their children's achievement. They believe that knowledge can shape destinies, and diligence determines social class.

Nevertheless, some might counter that the competitive pressure faced by teenagers is a global predicament, promoting the question of why Chinese parents present a distinctive challenge. This phenomenon can be attributed to the nascent stage of the Republic of China's development. The country lacks contemporary role models or educators who can advocate for a modernized parental

framework that aligns with present-day needs. While traditional teachings gradually wane in relevance in the realm of modern parental education, some conventional-minded parents still adhere to these antiquated beliefs. Consequently, as societal norms evolve beyond the tenets of Confucianism, parents find themselves at a crossroads, unsure of how to navigate the complexities of raising children in this “modern age.” They grapple with the daunting task of determining suitable modes of parental guidance, as the paradigms of appropriate continue to shift.

3.2. High Expectation

High expectations often result in significant psychological pressure, and parents' concerns stem from their anxieties related to these high expectations [9]. The concept of filial piety in Chinese culture emphasizes obedience and respect from young adults toward their elders. However, excessive parental control can lead to disobedience and unpleasantness, ultimately causing communication problems that are difficult to resolve.

In the past, many Chinese families had multiple children, and parents had limited time to individually care for each child. However, with resources now more concentrated, and parents' attention directed solely toward their children, the phenomenon of "helicopter parents" has emerged. Helicopter parents are those who constantly hover over their children, offering non-stop nagging and guidance. These pressures often result in ineffective communication between parents and children, leading to a lack of intimacy within the family [10]. While it's understood that every parent loves their children and has good intentions, helicopter parenting tends to have negative effects on children and family dynamics.

One consequence of helicopter parenting is the deterioration of family relationships. Parents may feel that their children do not follow their decisions, and children, in turn, may grow distant from their parents. Chinese parents often do not allow their children to relax and rest, focusing on constant preaching instead. However, it is important to recognize that no one can work hard all the time; everyone needs periods of rest and relaxation. In this context, poor communication can cause numerous problems for both parents and children. A notable example is the emotional turmoil that many Chinese students experience during their university years. Having been closely controlled by their parents throughout their childhood, they may not have had opportunities to develop resistance or coping mechanisms. Consequently, they may repress their emotions during college, only to become unruly and indulgent when they finally gain more freedom. This highlights some of the hidden issues within the Chinese education system.

Another contributing factor to high expectations is parents' desire to shield their children from the hardships they themselves have faced. Parents often feel tender and protective toward their children, wanting to provide them with the best possible quality of life. However, this places immense pressure on their children, as they are expected to strive for ambitious goals and elevate the family's social standing. Parents, on the one hand, do not want to see their hard-earned foundation crumble, and on the other hand, they hope for their children to enjoy a bright future.

4. Summary

Demandingly urging children to excel is generally counterproductive. Education should be a source of delight, fostering health and constructive growth. The primary aim of education in schools is self-nurturing, preparing individuals for integration into society. Education mirrors a country's cultural quality. Education expands human knowledge, enabling individuals to contemplate their relationship with the world, thus helping them avoid depression and stagnation when confronted with stress and anxiety.

It is important to note that this study offers a general overview of Chinese education and may be somewhat overly generalized in some aspects. The suggested approaches may appear somewhat idealized and may vary in practicality due to societal factors. Nonetheless, this study underscores the

importance of intimate relationship analyses, which allow scholars to combine insights from multiple fields for bold predictions and analyses.

Every individual in this world possesses unique characteristics and shapes their own destiny when they carefully consider its meaning. Comparisons are unnecessary because our uniqueness leads us down diverse paths with different endings.

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