

Research On the Balanced Relationship Between Parental Expectations and Student Development Under Exam-Oriented Education

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Abstract. The response of parents to China's exam-oriented education and its impact on students has attracted widespread attention in recent years. However, research on parental behavioral characteristics and their impact on students is still insufficient. This article aims to analyze in-depth the behavioral characteristics exhibited by parents in an exam-oriented education system and the specific impact they have on students' high expectations. Research has found that high expectations from parents can promote students' academic achievement but may also lead to higher academic pressure for students. This kind of pressure often makes students feel anxious, affecting their learning motivation and emotional health, thereby hindering their comprehensive development. In addition, parents' excessive focus on academic performance may lead to students neglecting the cultivation of other important skills, such as social skills and creativity. Therefore, relying only on parental expectations to drive students' development is not a long-term solution. Based on these findings, this article proposes multi-faceted improvement suggestions for students, parents, and schools. For students, parents and teachers should attach importance to the cultivation of their mental health and self-management abilities. For parents, it is recommended to enhance their understanding of educational diversity and reduce excessive focus on exam scores. For schools, it is necessary to establish a more comprehensive evaluation system to encourage students to develop in all aspects.

Keywords: High expectations; score; mental health.

1. Introduction

In the context of exam-oriented education, how to help students develop better and how to cope with the external educational environment has become a highly concerned issue for Chinese parents today. With the increase of exam pressure, a series of education-related phenomena have emerged in society, such as the transition from primary school to junior high school, middle school entrance examination, college entrance examination, and subsequent employment pressure. Based on this, many parents have developed a strong sense of anxiety about their children's learning, especially when facing the exam-oriented education system. They hope to ensure that their children can achieve ideal grades, be admitted to prestigious schools, and ultimately achieve socially recognized achievements through more participation. The research indicates that parental expectations can have a significant long-term influence on children's academic achievement from childhood into adulthood [1]. Based on the changes in the general environment, parents' expectations for their children are gradually increasing. Educational expectations are parents' beliefs or judgments about their children's future academic achievements, therefore the academic pressure they exert on their children is also increasing [2]. However, high expectations from parents also hurt children, such as exacerbating anxiety and tension in the family, causing students to not only face academic pressure but also bear the expectations of the family and the pressure of social evaluation. Although these expectations have promoted children's academic development in some cases, they have also led to problems such as insufficient creativity and excessive psychological burden, which in turn affect their long-term development. Based on this, this study focuses on how the behavioral patterns of Chinese parents in the context of exam-oriented education affect students' development, especially how to balance

students' academic and mental health in a high-expectations environment. These studies contribute to providing theoretical support for future educational reforms in society, as well as practical references for parents to adjust their educational methods in the future. Through an in-depth analysis of these phenomena, this study aims to provide constructive suggestions for resolving the contradictions in exam-oriented education, ultimately helping students grow comprehensively in a healthy educational environment.

2. Positive Effect on Students

2.1. Enhancing Academic Performance and Learning Resources

In the context of exam-oriented education, parents' high expectations drive them to actively participate in their children's studies. This is not only reflected in the attention paid to children's learning progress but also in providing them with better learning resources and creating a more ideal learning environment. The deep involvement of parents helps students to more effectively grasp knowledge and improve academic performance. In addition, due to parents' continuous encouragement and support in daily life, students' learning motivation will also be enhanced, which in turn will encourage them to work harder in their studies and strive for better performance. Research has indicated a positive correlation between parental participation and children's educational attainment and that parental encouragement, support, and drive can aid their children in developing their academic skills [1]. In addition, parents with high expectations will provide their children with better educational resources, invest more energy in their children's education, and subtly influence their children's educational expectations, thereby significantly enhancing their learning motivation [2].

2.2. Developing Study Habits and Unleashing Academic Potential

Parents help their children develop good study habits and time management skills and enhance self-discipline through continuous supervision and strict requirements. Research shows that parents with high expectations are more likely to be involved in their children's achievement-related activities and give their children more support, including help with homework and academic success, as well as more educational opportunities for their children [1]. At the same time, parents' high expectations encourage their children to set clear academic goals and future career directions, enhance learning motivation, and stimulate potential. This expectation not only helps students achieve excellent results in the exam-oriented education environment but also lays the foundation for their future career development, cultivating their sense of responsibility and sustained sense of achievement.

3. Problem Manifestations and Negative Effects

3.1. Parental Behavior

3.1.1 Control & participation

Under the pressure of the exam-oriented education system, some parents highly interfere with their children's academic and life planning. The competitiveness of exam-oriented education makes parents believe that only their active participation can help their children win in the fierce academic competition. Parents not only supervise their children's daily learning and arrange extracurricular tutoring, but also control their children's choices and forcefully make important decisions such as university majors, future careers, and life plans. Parents generally believe that being admitted to a prestigious domestic university is an important symbol of their child's success. Research shows that more than half of parents hope their children can enter such institutions, but this proportion is significantly different from the actual admission rate of key universities [2]. In recent years, parents have shown great enthusiasm for following the trend of education, and more and more children are choosing to study abroad. According to the survey, China has the largest number of international

students, with approximately 540000 Chinese students studying abroad in 2016, an increase of over 30% compared to 2012 [3]. Parents usually believe that they have more experience and judgment than their children, which can help them obtain better educational resources and higher social status. Therefore, many parents attempt to control their children's major decisions and ensure that they follow the trajectory set by their parents through frequent intervention and guidance. Many families play a crucial role in their children's education process, as parents impart their educational philosophy, expectations, and values to their children [4]. This intervention is not only reflected in academic aspects, but many parents also control their children's living habits, social circles, and even interests, investing a lot of time and energy in planning their children's future.

3.1.2 Focus on scores & ignore quality education

In the exam-oriented education environment, scores become the only criterion for measuring children's abilities and the success of parental education. The standard for parents to judge whether their child is successful is whether the exam score meets the standard. For most Chinese students, the college entrance examination is the most important watershed, and getting into a key university is the ultimate goal for many because, in a competitive society, the prospect of getting a better job and life is closely tied to passing key exams and getting into high-status schools [5]. Therefore, parents predict their children's future academic performance based on their current grades. If there is a significant gap between the standards of an ideal university and the current grades, parents may experience anxiety, which can increase their children's academic pressure, reduce entertainment, and excessively develop their cognitive abilities [2]. At the same time, many parents neglect quality education, especially during middle and high school, believing that the cultivation of moral education, art, and other aspects is not very beneficial to their children's academic success. Due to the pressure of entrance exams, parents tend to prioritize academic knowledge to achieve high scores and gain admission to prestigious schools, believing that studying art does not directly contribute to improving grades. This emphasis on scores leads parents to focus solely on short-term exam results, neglecting other key qualities important for their children's long-term development, such as innovation and social communication skills. This reflects a common issue with the current education model.

3.1.3 Compare & stress mentality

The fierce competition in the exam-oriented education system creates a strong sense of comparison among parents. Confucianism suggests that those possessing virtue or talent should be treated equally. However, current social pressures have led many Chinese parents to adopt this standard to compare their children with higher-performing peers [6]. This continuous comparison not only affects parents' emotions but also leads to tension, conflict, and dissatisfaction in parent-child relationships. Many parents compare their children not only with their peers but also with other parents' children, hoping to demonstrate their children's superiority, particularly in terms of academic performance and school rankings. These high expectations drive parents to consistently pressure their children to excel in all areas, aiming to prevent them from falling behind in academic competition. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as "other people's children" in China. Parents' educational anxiety is a state of anxiety that fluctuates with changes in their children's academic performance or other educational factors [2]. Many parents experience prolonged anxiety and tension, which can result in severe insomnia and frequent emotional instability. This often manifests as impatience or emotional volatility in the home, sometimes leading to loss of control. Educational anxiety has now become a common social phenomenon, with nearly 90% of parents reporting they have experienced it, according to a recent survey [2].

3.1.4 Authoritative education & gender differences

Under the pressure of high expectations from their parents, some parents may use corporal punishment as an educational tool to urge their children to meet their expectations in academics and behavior. The common reason for parents to physically punish their children is usually due to failure to meet expected exam scores or failure to achieve phased goals. Research has shown that Chinese

parents often use corporal punishment for discipline, and this authoritarian parenting style is closely related to Chinese cultural beliefs, manifested as a higher frequency of corporal punishment [7]. This authoritative educational approach often maintains control and discipline through physical abuse or punishment. In addition, a small number of parents have significant gender differences in educating their children, with different expectations and approaches towards boys and girls. Parents' education on gender differences is largely based on traditional beliefs and societal expectations of gender roles. For example, boys are expected to be more independent and resilient, while girls are expected to be obedient, gentle, and pay more attention to their family and social roles. When it comes to punishing sons, parents typically depend more on authority assertion and love withdrawal, while induction is used more often with daughters [8]. The methods of corporal punishment also vary by gender.

3.2. Negative Impact on Students

3.2.1 Lack of autonomy and innovation

Under the exam-oriented education system, children are forced to focus on academic content and aim for high scores, resulting in their learning process becoming mechanized. Because teaching objectives often focus on exam-taking skills and textbook knowledge. Children lack opportunities to think from multiple perspectives. According to international studies, an exam-focused educational system may negatively impact students' cognitive competencies, including their capacity for critical thought and problem-solving [9]. This single educational model limits children's self-development and makes it difficult to cultivate their ability to think independently and solve problems, as they are more accustomed to relying on external guidance rather than making self-decisions based on actual situations. This educational approach also greatly limits children's innovative abilities. According to one study, pupils who were part of a test-oriented education system showed greater degrees of anxiety and less creativity [9]. Because the focus of learning is almost entirely on dealing with various exams, children rarely have the opportunity to explore by themselves or participate in creative activities. They tend to repeat existing knowledge and methods rather than independently proposing new ideas or solving new problems. Continuous pressure affects their emotional intelligence, motivation, and self-esteem, hindering their growth, and causing students to become discouraged, lose their enthusiasm for learning, and even fear failure [9]. With time, it is difficult to improve the overall quality of children, their innovative thinking is limited, and they are unable to adapt to the future society's demand for diversified talents. This single model not only influences academic development but also hinders children's abilities in other domains.

3.2.2 Self-confidence and mental health issues

Under the dual pressure of family and society, many students bear a huge psychological burden, especially in the exam-oriented education environment. Children often associate success with parental expectations. According to a Chinese survey, teenagers prioritized their studies and made strive to improve their test scores. They will feel guilty, useless, and powerless if the child does not live up to the expectations of the parents [1]. When they fail to meet these expectations, they often feel inferior and lose confidence. Research has shown that the higher the expectations of parents, the greater the academic pressure students feel. In order not to disappoint their parents, students often have expectations for grades that exceed their abilities, leading to fear of failure and greater pressure [1]. Long-term self-doubt can greatly weaken children's learning motivation and make them feel confused about their plans and goals. Because of the lack of space and opportunities to express themselves in the family, children's psychological pressure is further exacerbated. Parents often just focus on academic achievement and overlook their children's emotional, interest, and self-identity requirements. Living in a high-expectations environment for a long time can easily cause frustration, which not only affects children's academic interest, but also impacts their mental health, causing anxiety, depression, and even suicide. This sense of frustration can also cause deep psychological trauma, affecting their future interpersonal communication skills and self-identity.

3.2.3 Family relationship and communication problems

In the education process, parents often face enormous pressure due to high expectations for their children, especially under the exam-oriented education system. This kind of pressure may cause parents to experience emotional breakdowns and affect communication with their children. A family's emotional environment can affect how parents and children interact [10]. Parents' anxiety and emotional instability not only affect their mental health but also invisibly increase their children's emotional burden. At the same time, some parents are in menopause and have significant emotional fluctuations, which can easily lead to misunderstandings or loss of control when facing the behavior and needs of their adolescent children, further exacerbating communication conflicts. The tense family atmosphere not only affects children's academic performance but may also have profound effects on their mental health and future interpersonal relationships.

4. Development proposal

4.1. Student

Students can regulate themselves in various ways in high-pressure environments. Firstly, students need to actively communicate with their parents. In high expectations environments, misunderstandings and stress often stem from a lack of effective dialogue between children and parents. Through communication, students can allow their parents to understand their pressures and needs, which helps to adjust parents' expectations, remit family tension, and enhance their children's confidence and autonomy. In addition, social activities are crucial for mental health. Participating in social activities both on and off campus not only helps students relax but also provides emotional support and comfort through interactions with peers while expanding their horizons. Students can also maintain their physical and mental health through aerobic exercise, meditation, and other relaxing ways. The most important thing is for students to recognize that grades are not the only measure of their value, learn to accept their shortcomings, and gradually grow.

4.2. Parents

Under the pressure of exam-oriented education, parents need to adjust their mentality and improve their communication methods to promote family harmony and reduce the negative impact on their children's mental health. Firstly, parents should actively listen and understand their children's needs and emotional states. This not only enhances parent-child relationships but also helps parents discover their children's interests and potential, thereby better supporting their growth. Secondly, parents need to adjust their excessively high expectations, as each child's acceptance ability and development speed are different. Parents should shift their focus from pursuing high scores to cultivating their children's comprehensive qualities, such as developing hobbies, improving social skills, and increasing self-expression. Quality education not only enhances academic performance, but also strengthens children's innovation, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities, laying a solid foundation for their future. At the same time, parents should pay attention to their children's mental health and provide emotional support and understanding. When children feel pressure in their studies or lives, parents should provide timely guidance instead of applying more pressure. By creating a warm and positive family atmosphere, parents can help their children effectively manage their emotions and reduce stress.

4.3. School

To reduce the negative effects of high parental expectations on children, schools can take steps to promote quality education, provide students with various growth paths, and ease the pressure on both parents and students. First, schools should focus more on students' overall development by offering a variety of extracurricular activities and clubs. These can help students explore their interests and

talents outside of academics and discover their potential. This not only reduces parents' excessive focus on test scores but also helps students build confidence and reduce academic stress.

Second, schools can lower parents' anxiety by offering more growth options for students. For instance, by increasing career planning education and offering more diverse pathways for further education, parents and students will realize there are other paths beyond just exam results. Schools can organize career talks, collaborate with businesses, and provide skill training programs to help students better plan their futures and ease their worries about academic performance.

Additionally, schools should strengthen mental health education by offering psychology classes, counseling services, and mental health lectures to help students manage stress and the challenges of growing up. These programs can teach students how to deal with pressure while improving their self-awareness and emotional control. Schools should also encourage teachers to communicate more with students, pay attention to their mental well-being, and prevent emotional breakdowns or extreme behavior.

5. Conclusion

This study summarizes various behaviors and corresponding reactions of Chinese parents towards their children's high expectations for the future under the background of exam-oriented education. Research shows that when parents get involved in their children's studies and use available resources, they often help improve their children's grades. However, some parents' actions can also have negative effects. This study outlines common behaviors of parents in such a system and their mixed impact on children, providing a reference for future studies. It also finds that some parents pass their own unfulfilled goals onto their children and that gender differences lead to different ways parents treat their sons and daughters. These issues need further study. While this research focuses on China, future studies could look at other countries like South Korea and Japan to see if similar issues exist in different education systems. This would help people better understand how parents influence their children's development.

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