



The Research on Categories and Factors of Parental Anxiety Under Double Reduction Policy

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Abstract. With the cost of raising children and academic pressure exacerbating, parents and their children are susceptible to involution. In an effort to solve this problem, China introduces the “double reduction policy” which aims to relieve students’ pressure from studies and extra-curricular activities. One of the applied form is the implementation of the after-class service that enables students to experience self-reading, sports, extended trainings and recreations. However, extra time of children escalates the spontaneous competition in education among parents, thus causing more anxiety. A questionnaire survey, which is designed to explore anxiety categories and potential factors for them, is conducted in this essay. This survey verifies that anxiety usually lies in five categories: academic performances, future development, physical and mental health, character and safety. One of the main internal factors for such anxiety is that parents set high standards for children’s academic performances while material wealth and educational environment are included in external aspects.

Keywords: Double-reduction policy · Anxiety · Parental anxiety · Category · Factors

1 Introduction

In July 2021, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council issued the Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Off-Campus Training on Students at the Compulsory Education Stage. It is clearly stated that the policy aims to alleviate the current high level of parental anxiety and promote the healthy development of children and youth by reducing the burden of students (hereinafter referred to as the “double reduction”

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policy). After the policy has been in place for some time, a questionnaire survey on the “double reduction” reform was conducted by a research group set up by the National Research Centre for Education, China Institute of Education and Social Development, Beijing Normal University. The results show that 90.5% of parents agree with the “double reduction” policy. It is worth exploring how far parental anxiety has been alleviated after the “double reduction”, whether new anxiety factors have been created or the double reduction policy has been effective in addressing parental anxiety, and how to effectively overcome the parental anxiety that still exists today.

The educational mindset of parents has an important impact on the good development of students, but the educational anxiety is prevalent in the parent community. Educational anxiety refers to the emotional and behavioural reactions of parents who are overly concerned about the process and outcome of educating their children [1]. In the context of the “double reduction” policy, the parenting styles have been influenced to varying degrees by policy, and the parental anxiety has also taken on a slightly new dimension.

According to some existing research on the relationship between the “double reduction” policy and parental psychology. Some academics argue that while the double reduction policy has eased parental anxiety, it has also created new sources of anxiety for parents. Yu Yafeng and Yao Zhen believe that educational anxiety has changed to varying degrees due to parents’ traditional educational philosophy and educational evaluation mechanisms during the implementation of the “double reduction” policy. That is, school choice anxiety has been effectively alleviated, while anxiety about further education remains at a high level, and academic achievement anxiety has become the main form of parental education anxiety. It also suggests that parents’ educational anxiety should be dissipated specifically through reforming the education evaluation mechanism and the recruitment and examination system [2]. Zhang Pin and Lin Xiaoshan argue that, against the background of education remaining an important gateway to upward mobility, the difference in parents’ ability to perform parental duties after the “double reduction” has led to a greater variation in competitive anxiety between different classes, and the extra time children have after school has made the competition between “father” and “mother” even more intense [3]. Guo Yufei also believes that after the implementation of the “double reduction” policy, most parents’ anxiety due to their children’s heavy study load has been relieved, but “one-to-one tutoring” and “education inside the volume” have become new anxiety growth points. However, “one-to-one tutoring” and “educational information” have become new anxiety growth points. The existence of exam-oriented education and the reduction of learning tasks have become a pair of irreconcilable contradictions, and only by reducing examination skills while improving students’ comprehensive literacy can we achieve the effect of “double reduction” to reduce the burden and increase quality [4].

Some of these academics have also made effective suggestions to alleviate parents’ anxiety in relation to the “double reduction” policy. Xiao Hui believes that the most important thing to effectively alleviate parental anxiety is to continuously improve family education-related policies [5]. Wang Jiexiang and Ru Zongzhi argue that the “double reduction” policy has brought education equity to a new level, and that parents’ education anxiety has moved from a private matter’ to a “public matter”. To alleviate parental anxiety in education, schools and parents need to first understand parental anxiety and

the mechanisms of its formation, and then improve the home-school cooperation system. Secondly, it is necessary for parents to correct their educational attitudes and improve their educational literacy [6].

To sum up, the current study focuses on parental anxiety after the “double reduction”, analysing the reasons for the current anxiety and the corresponding measures to alleviate it, but less research has been conducted on the changes in the expression of parental anxiety before and after the ‘double reduction’. Therefore, in order to explore the changes in the categories of childcare anxiety and the reasons for them after the implementation of the “double reduction” policy. This paper adopts a sample questionnaire research method and intends to distribute questionnaires to more than 300 parents of children in compulsory education from Beijing, Sichuan, Liaoning and Shandong Provinces, then, Spss was used to analyse the findings. Because different sources of anxiety make parents’ anxiety manifest in different ways. Therefore, this questionnaire categorizes the types of anxiety into specific categories such as academic anxiety, future development anxiety, physical and mental health anxiety, character anxiety, and safety anxiety, and the authors will set the appropriate topics around these categories. The findings are then elaborated in two chapters, “Types and characteristics of parental anxiety” and “Causes and effects of parental anxiety”. Thus providing some realistic basis for alleviating still existing or newly arising parental anxiety.

2 Materials and Methods

2.1 Participants

This study randomly selected primary and junior high school parents as subjects in Beijing, Sichuan Province, Liaoning Province, and Shandong Province nationwide, and distributed 361 questionnaires through Questionnaire Star online, and after excluding incomplete information and creating questionnaires without serious answers, 361 questionnaires were validly returned (98% efficiency). Among them, 223 (61.8%) were elementary school parents, 138 (38.2%) were middle school parents; 299 (83%) were urban parents, 62 (17%) were county and rural parents; 227 (63%) were only child parents, 134 (37%) were non-only child parents; 21 (6%) were middle school-educated parents, 32 (8%) were high school-educated parents, 13 (4%), 295 (82%) parents with university education and above; 27 (7%) parents whose occupation is civil servant, 181 (50%) parents in institutions and state-owned enterprises, 75 (21%) parents in freelance profession, 78 (22%) parents in other professions; 77 (21%) parents with annual income below 100,000 RMB, 129 (36%) parents with 110–200,000 RMB, and 155 (43%) were parents earning more than \$210,000. The subjects’ flat age range was 25–50 years old.

2.2 Measurement

2.2.1 Parental Education Anxiety Scale

This study was conducted by Minqi He and Jinjin He (2020) based on the questionnaire formulation of the parental education anxiety level scale compiled by Haitang Han (2018) to understand parents’ anxiety status in five dimensions: academic anxiety, future

development anxiety, physical and mental health anxiety, character anxiety and safety anxiety. The survey was scored on a 5-point scale with 19 questions, excluding question 20 according to the needs of the study. 1 score means “very anxious”, 2 means “partially anxious”, 3 means “moderately anxious”, 4 means “not very anxious”, and 5 means “not anxious at all”. The higher the score, the higher the level of anxiety. The internal consistency coefficient of this study is >0.5 , which basically meets the requirements of the measurement tool.

2.3 Procedure

The researchers created a questionnaire that was released through Questionnaire Star and distributed to the subjects in the form of an online completion. All subjects completed the questionnaire in five dimensions: academic anxiety, future development anxiety, physical and mental health anxiety, character anxiety, and safety anxiety, and filled in basic personal information. Finally, the researcher viewed the data through online recall at Questionnaire Star and finally analyzed it to draw conclusions.

2.4 Data Analysis

This study investigated issues related to the effects of parental anxiety, and examined the effects of parental anxiety categories and causes of parental anxiety on parental anxiety under the double reduction policy through questionnaires, revealing the different effects of different anxiety categories and endogenous and exogenous causes of anxiety on parental anxiety. The data collected from the questionnaires were processed by SPSS 24.0, and used to explore the relationship between parental anxiety categories and endogenous and exogenous factors and other aspects of the content.

3 Results

3.1 Analysis of the Current Situation of Parental Anxiety After Double Reduction

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted on the dimensions of parental educational anxiety after double reduction, including academic anxiety 7–12, future development anxiety 13–15, physical and mental health anxiety 16–18, character anxiety 19, 21, 22 (excluding question 20), and safety anxiety 23–26. The results of the study showed that parents had above moderate levels of anxiety on all five dimensions, with some degree of anxiety. As the Table 1 shown, the mean value of academic anxiety was 2.13, future development anxiety was 2.19, physical and mental health anxiety was 1.77, character anxiety was 1.56, and safety anxiety was 2.42. For parents, the most prominent anxiety was in character anxiety, with concerns about physical and mental health coming in second place.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of study variables.

		Academic anxiety mean score	Future Development anxiety mean score	Physical and Mental Health anxiety mean score	Character anxiety mean score	Security anxiety mean score
Number of cases	Valid	361	361	361	361	361
	Miss	0	0	0	0	0
Average		2.1342	2.1874	1.7701	1.5614	2.4169
Standard deviation		0.56194	0.91234	0.52565	0.51340	0.74046

4 Discussion

Most of the causes of traditional parental anxiety are parents' excessive concern for their children's academic performance. In this state of mind, parents would choose too many extracurricular tutorials for their children, thus adding to the physical and mental burden of their children to a certain extent. However, after the introduction of the Double Reduction Policy, the causes of parental anxiety have changed accordingly. Therefore, to explore the causes of this change in anxiety, we conducted an empirical study of the current factors affecting parental anxiety according to the Factor Analysis Scale of the Structure of Parental Educational Anxiety [7], and analysed the results as follows.

4.1 Causes of Parental Anxiety

In recent years, socio-economic standards have risen significantly and competition has become more intense. Parents' expectations of their children have changed from the pursuit of "education" to "a high level of education". As a result, parents are willing to arrange various remedial classes for their children after school to obtain better educational resources for their children, urging their children to "carry the weight" in the fierce competition. The introduction of the "double reduction" policy has eased the pressure of extracurricular tutoring on children. However, the "overloaded kids" mentality of parents cannot be changed overnight. Modern parents' anxiety is not only about their children's performance at school, but also about the standard of education at home, their children's future development plans, and their physical and mental health. Generally speaking, the causes of parental anxiety today fall into two main categories.

4.1.1 The 'Ontological' Causes of Parental Anxiety

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, when lower-level needs are met, higher-level needs will arise. Therefore, when the physical and mental health of the child is ensured, parents will develop higher-level anxieties, namely educational anxiety and

future developmental anxiety, which will accompany the child throughout his or her growth process.

It follows that the parents' ontological and evolving anxieties will be present throughout the child's development.

4.1.2 “Exogenous” Causes of Parental Anxiety

Exogenous anxiety includes material preparation and environmental climate creation [8].

4.1.2.1. Material Conditions

The battle for quality education resources is behind the high popularity of “school district houses”. Parents want their children to have access to the best team of teachers, a learning environment, and networking resources. As a result, not only do parents have high standards of school choice, but they are also very strict about the division of classes in the same school. This has led to the emergence of new class substitutes, such as “class of the subject gods” and “class of the highs”. With the introduction of the “double reduction” policy, families with good material conditions are still able to find alternative or even higher costs to continue to provide their children with quality out-of-school education resources, while families with weaker financial conditions are unable to afford the high costs. As a result, the gap between the academic performance and competitiveness of children in these two types of families is gradually widening. This has forced even the less financially advantaged parents to invest more in education, which in turn has increased the burden on the family. This is the result of concerns about educational bias in terms of educational outcomes, whether their investment in education is achieving the expected economic benefits and whether schooling is taking into account all aspects of their children's development. Moreover, parents sometimes feel guilty and blame themselves for not being able to provide competitive educational resources for their children.

4.1.2.2. Educational Environment

The educational environment is made up of three types of environment: family, school and society.

In the home education environment, parents' level of education affects their confidence in education and their approach to education. For example, parents with a low level of education may feel frustrated and unmotivated in educating their children. The level of education also affects the individual's ability to screen and interpret information. Five of the parents interviewed who did not have higher education were still unaware of the content and purpose of the “double reduction” policy. This single-minded interpretation of the policy added to their confusion and disillusionment with education. This makes it difficult to adjust to the ideal state of “home-school education”.

The school is the primary place where children receive their education. According to the survey, 93.7% of parents want their children to have access to the best educational resources. 91.3% of parents want to know how their children are doing at school and whether they are receiving attention at school. The reason for this is that the child's learning at school is not in the parent's view and it is difficult for the child to give an

objective and comprehensive account of their learning at school, so parents have no way of knowing how their child is progressing and this adds uncertainty to their education. If parents can understand their child's learning and performance at school, they can also adapt their home education approach accordingly.

Influences from outside society also contribute to childcare anxiety [9]. There are two influences on the social environment: the balance of development across regions and social evaluation mechanisms. The gap between urban and rural areas and the gap between coastal and inland cities, resulting in varying levels of education, can create a psychological gap for parents. At the same time, the questionnaire shows that 74.7% of parents find it difficult to accept their children's attendance at vocational junior and senior secondary schools, mainly because social opinion is still biased towards vocational education and acceptance, and grades and examinations are still the most important educational objectives for parents. With increased competition, peer and cross-generational comparisons are common. This can lead to a sense of disparity or comparison in parents' mindsets towards education.

4.2 Impact of Parental Anxiety

Although parents' anxiety about schooling has been reduced since the implementation of the policy, overall parental anxiety remains at a moderate to a high level. This will have two implications.

4.2.1 Sense of Parenting Effectiveness

National and international research has shown that high anxiety parents demonstrate overprotectiveness, and hypersensitivity besides control over their children. High anxiety parents are overly controlling and protective of their children's social behavior, overly demanding and overly responsive to their children's needs [10].

Anxious parents expect their children's behavior and schoolwork to be exactly as the parents want them to be, and therefore have too much control over their children's lives. They have gradually developed into "helicopter parents" and "lawnmower parents". Parents rarely give their children any authority. The child gradually loses his or her autonomy and may become overly dependent on the parent, or the child may rebel against the parent, causing the parent-child relationship to deteriorate, frustrating the parents in the parenting process and reducing their enthusiasm for family education.

4.2.2 High Expectations Fall Short

Parents invest human and material resources and naturally want their children to stand out from their peers and show high expectations for their children's future development. However, many factors determine a child's achievement and development. Once parents realize that their child is not achieving at the desired level, a psychological gap can arise. This disappointment and frustration are also detrimental to the continued development of family education.

5 Conclusion

Since the “double reduction policy” is implemented, it has attracted extensive attention in society. It is because parents are eager to witness the conflict between study and health reducing under the guidance of policy. After years of implementation, educational stress remains due to ever-changing reasons. The education emphasis shifts towards the equipment of knowledge and skills which means parents not only hope their children to be educated but also be well-educated for compulsory education has been popularized. By analysis of internal reasons, children’s needs for basic education is secured with the economic development and the coverage of educational resources.

According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, parents will require for a higher education when fundamental education is obtained. Therefore, they expect their children to grasp more practical skills so as to strive for a better academic as well as future development. The external factor results from the unequal distribution of education resources and different social evaluation systems. Parental anxiety will bring children mental pressure, disturb teachers’ pedagogical plan and worsen parents’ financial burden, thus damaging the harmonious atmosphere in one’s family.

There are some suggestions to ameliorate parental anxiety. First, schools adjust syllabus to students’ current learning conditions, and carry out competency-based instructing system to satisfy students’ needs, as a result promoting learning efficiency and self-potency. Second, arrange lectures on psychology for parents and encourage more communication between teachers and parents in order to establish home-and-school cooperation. In this way, it can soothe negative emotions and help out parental anxiety. Apart from psychological consultation, parents are advised to lessen their expectations properly on children so that avoid being fell into “tiger parenting”. Instead, there are various ways to tackle with such anxiety such as sports, reading, socializing and hobbies.

This essay uses a questionnaire to find out what kinds of anxiety do parents have towards child-raising. Five categories of anxiety are listed: academic performances, future development, physical and mental health, behavior and safety. “double-reduction policy” has improved the problem to some extent though which is still exists among parents. However, the parental anxiety needs to be fixed with the help of all walks and further implementation of national policies. Next, relieve students’ burden from homework and after school training in compulsory education phase. Joint efforts are needed to create a favorable environment to reduce parents’ anxiety by continuing to improve the ecology of education. The survey lacks of multiple analysis views because this questionnaire doesn’t involve in other possibilities besides family and schools, which is confined to the potential factors between parents and children and the direct influence that policy may impose on. Since parental anxiety is not caused by policy completely, the questionnaire survey needs to be refined with a series of related social problems for the sake of better accuracy and comprehensiveness.

In the future, researchers are suggested to adopt quantitative research methods such as observations or in-depth interviews to discover a more objective conclusion through extensive exploration.

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