



The Decline of Self-esteem and Family Education Mode of Students During the Transition from Primary School to Middle High School

A Study Among Chinese Students

Jinyun Miao^(✉) and Yifei Luo

Behavioral Science in Psychology Track, Duke Kunshan University, Suzhou 215600, China
{jinyun.miao,yifei.luo}@dukekunshan.edu.cn

Abstract. With the increasing pressure of social competition, parents and children pay more and more attention to academic performance, and people bond academic performance and teenagers' self-worth together. Through desk research, this paper analyzes the influence of family education patterns on children's self-worth at the transition stage from primary school to middle school based on the Satir Iceberg Model and offers recommendations for how to assist kids in academic performance and developing a healthy sense of self-worth.

Keywords: Self-esteem · academic achievement · parent's behavior and perception · Satir iceberg model

1 Introduction

1.1 Social Background

Teenagers are under a lot of academic pressure due to the rising competitive pressure brought on by the growing Chinese population and the rising social emphasis placed on academic qualifications. They and their parents have to pay more and more attention to grades. Many children and their parents, particularly during the transitional years from primary school to middle school, think that getting good grades will determine whether they are accepted into a prestigious university, land a good job, and go on to succeed in life. As a result, many families see these academic milestones as the sole predictor of their children's futures. However, we must understand that a person's overall character cannot be determined only by their academic performance. Parents need to correctly guide children's views on academic performance and give them a clear idea of self-worth.

1.2 Self-worth

The American Psychological Association (APA) defines self-worth as the belief that one is a capable, valued individual who deserves to be taken into consideration and treated with respect [1]. It is an inner feeling that you deserve good things. Psychologist Owens

believes that people with positive self-worth typically exhibit higher levels of confidence and self-esteem, while those with negative self-worth frequently criticize themselves and focus on their mistakes and shortcomings rather than abilities and strengths [2]. Based on the self-worth theory proposed by Covington, the self-worth model has four main elements: ability, effort, performance, and self-worth [3]. The first three interact to determine a person's level of self-worth. Competing with others can help us feel that we have achieved something remarkable, which makes us proud of ourselves and feel that we are uniquely valuable. Competitive academic performance as a display of achievement and competence is the primary standard by which many schoolchildren view their self-worth, and this perspective is likely to persist throughout adulthood.

1.3 Difficulties During Transition from Primary School to Middle High School

This study mainly focuses on the transition from primary school to middle school since this is a crucial and stressful time for most of the early adolescents. Students' psychological suffering is brought on by sudden changes in class difficulty, altered teacher-student and friend dynamics, and the emphasis on orienting achievement [4]. Teenagers' academic performance will suffer as a result, and they will lack motivation and stronger school ties [5]. Conflicts between parents and children can often arise at this point, reinforcing a negative bond between them. In order to enhance parent-child relationships and aid pupils in making this transition effectively, the Satir Iceberg model will be used in this study.

1.4 The Satir Iceberg Model

As one of the most famous family therapies, the Satir Iceberg Model focuses on the shift toward a more complete and fulfilling life [6]. The main goal of the paradigm is to encourage the shift from "Doing" to "Being." The top five metaphorical layers of the iceberg, which are behaviors, feelings, feelings about feelings, perceptions, and expectations, are collectively referred to as "Doing." Yearnings and self are two of the deeper layers of the iceberg that make up a person's "Being," which is their life force. Behavior is observable, measurable, and normative. This is the domain of right and wrong, justice and morality. Feelings are our direct emotional expression. Feelings about Feelings often include anxiety and fear of our underlying emotional experiences. Expectations are frequently formed by both our prior experiences and our family, friends, media, and so on. Perceptions are the assumptions we have, biases we carry, the ideas we have that make life worth living, and the ideas that we firmly believe to be true. Yearnings are our wishes, needs, hopes, and dreams. The self is more akin to people's complete life, from conception to death. It is being you. According to the Satir model, humans are born to be in the "Being" part, which is characterized by a positive life force that includes love, serenity, joy, and connection. However, the majority of people experienced situations at an early age that led them to believe they weren't good enough, which propelled them into the "Doing" mode where they struggled to be cherished, validated, accepted, and connected [7]. The Iceberg Model can be a method to help family members understand the deep needs of each other, replacing conflicts with peaceful communication.

2 Analysis

2.1 How Parents' Behavior Affect Children's Grade

When parents participate in their children's education, their feelings and behaviors may be transmitted to the kids, which could affect their academic performance, thus lowering their sense of self-worth. Parents' educational anxiety is a major problem in family education. Data in 2022 reveals that the proportion of parents' educational anxiety is 66.8%, which is a relatively high anxious level [8]. Parents' anxieties are highly influenced by traditional utilitarian education concepts such as "all things are inferior, only study is superior" [9]. The importance of a diploma in the job search is crucial in an environment of intense competition. Some parents may express their worry during a conversation with their children in an effort to let children understand the importance of studying, but at the same time, they may make children anxious. Some parents hope that their children can change their fate through education, so they ignore the rules of children's physical and mental development and learning, sending children to different cram schools. However, anxiety and continuous excessive study pressure will put kids under a lot of stress, cause physical and mental health issues, and lower their academic achievement [10]. Based on the Iceberg Model, parents' anxiety is a feeling, and they express it through behaviors such as talking about their anxiety and sending children to cram schools. When children absorb anxiety from their parents, they also feel anxious. The enormous pressure to study actually prevents the improvement of grades.

The relationship between parents could be another factor that leads to children's low academic grades. Several studies have demonstrated a connection between academic achievement and family conflict. Family conflict predicts a drop in achievement, and young individuals from high-conflict families are two to four times more likely to have a lower GPA than their classmates [11]. According to a case study, Wang claims that parental conflict is likely to cause youngsters to feel uneasy and afraid [12]. The idea that "if I get high grades, my parents won't fight" may lead children to want to appease their parents through their academic performance. However, when children's grades are not ideal, they will have a fear of learning, a low sense of self-worth, and a desire for parents' understanding and support. However, because of conflicts and quarrels, parents cannot pay attention to their children's internal needs in time, resulting in children being unable to escape negative emotions. Sometimes children will find that when they get sick, their parents will stop fighting and care about them, thus, their desire for love is satisfied. They assume that not going to school is a solution to family problems, and subsequently suffer from study-weariness. Long-term negative emotions and study-weariness directly lead to a decline in academic performance. Parents' anxiety and bad parental relations could bring a lot of stress to children, resulting in a great decline in their grades. Children who see a drop in grades begin to question their ability and performance and develop a diminished sense of self-worth.

2.2 How Parents' Reaction to Children's Grade Impact Children's Academic Performance

Children's self-worth might also be impacted by how parents respond to the grade after it is posted. There is a line in a traditional Chinese chant: "I am a good father,

and I spank my kids.” It is a common phenomenon for Chinese people to discipline children by beating and scolding them, but this parenting style can be very harmful to children. Anthropologist Diana Baumrind published a study that divided parenting styles into four categories: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful [13]. Authoritarian parenting is a restrictive style that aims to demand absolute obedience from children. In order to keep everything under control, parents give their kids a lot of rules and expect them to abide by them strictly. They do this out of fear that their kids will choose a path that is totally different from what they expect, and they want to make sure everything is under their control. When children receive grades that fall short of their expectations, parents become very angry and punish them harshly, such as by beating or reprimanding them. When the kids achieve good scores and return home, the parents might not be supportive or encouraging because they think that whatever the kids learn is insufficient and that they should put more effort into their studies. These parents’ acts may bring their kids huge anxiety, withdrawal, and unhappiness, and they are prone to antagonistic reactions when they encounter setbacks with peers because they want to protect themselves. During adolescence, children brought up with authoritarian parenting styles are less self-regulated and adaptable, but sometimes they do better in school because they have to work hard to avoid punishment. They also have less antisocial behavior at school because they are completely controlled by their parents and have no thoughts of their own. When it comes to self-worth, these children may totally relate it to good grades because it is the only thing they are taught to care about. They are living for their parents instead of themselves.

On the contrary, authoritative parenting is a flexible parenting style in which parents carefully explain the proposed limits to their children and are open to working with them to adjust the rules as necessary [13]. Parents treat children with a positive attitude, respond to children’s needs and behaviors in a timely and enthusiastic manner, and respect and encourage children to express their own opinions and viewpoints. Parents praise their children when they succeed and encourage them when they fail. Children with this kind of upbringing are independent, good at self-control and problem-solving, and have a strong sense of self-esteem and self-confidence. Once they realize that they have great ability and performance, children will produce a relatively high sense of self-worth.

2.3 How Parents’ Perception Toward Grade and Their Expectations Influence Children’s Academic Performance and Self-worth

Children’s attitudes and behaviors toward studying, grades, and self-concept are causally influenced by their parents’ judgments and expectations about learning and achievement [14]. First, children’s performance will be influenced by how parents explain success and failure in terms of talent or effort. For instance, researchers examined how the mother’s judgments about the mathematical prowess of children of various sexes affected her children’s self-concept and later learning behavior in one case study [15]. The finding shows that mothers of boys attribute boys’ success to talent and boys’ failure to a lack of effort. However, mothers of girls tend to blame their children’s failure on a lack of talent and attribute their success to efforts. Then, the results indicate that girls are more prone to think that arithmetic is more difficult and that they lack the aptitude to become proficient

in it. Additionally, those girls are likely to adopt the same perspectives on success and failure in mathematics learning as their moms, attributing success to work and failure to ability [15]. Thus, we can see how the gender stereotypes contained in the parental iceberg are transmitted to children. They learn their parents' belief and internalize into their self-evaluation and thus change their inner motivation.

Second, parent's expectations can encourage their children's academic involvement [16]. Therefore, in order to maximize their children's potential, parents should set realistic expectations for them and have faith in them. However, if parents' expectations are based on their opinions of their kids' capacity to handle schooling, advising them they should have higher expectations of their kids could not result in a shift in their attitudes [17]. This illustrates how each family's treatment plan is customized for their unique situation and each layer of the iceberg should be deeply understood.

Lastly, what the child believes the parents want from him or her may not actually be what the parents intended. They show that if parents and children are unable to effectively communicate and understand one another's icebergs, their misunderstandings may ultimately damage parent-child relationships. Infants develop their own identity, feeling of value, and distinctive personality in a family-based setting, according to the authors of the book *The Satir Model*, and they will repeat their early experiences for the rest of their life [18]. Children evaluate their own value in relation to family norms. Unfortunately, a toddler's verbal expression is not yet very good for comprehending others or expressing oneself. The youngster might suffer inadvertent harm as a result of the parents' careless behavior. To be more conscious of one another, it is therefore necessary to comprehend each other's iceberg structure in the later of their life.

3 Strategies

Parents can employ a number of measures to support their children through this difficult transition while also preserving a positive family dynamic.

3.1 Creating a Secure and Reliable Home Environment

Establishing a safe and stable home environment to foster intellectual development is part of providing good parenthood in the home conditions element [19]. For families with conflicts, couples can use peaceful dialogue instead of quarrel, as far as possible to create a relatively comfortable learning environment for children. Parents can analyze the source of their anxiety through the Iceberg Model, find ways to reduce their anxiety, in order to control their anxiety, so as to let children relax and feel secure.

3.2 Parent Education Program

Numerous psychological strategies, including the Adlerian approach, parent effectiveness training, and behavior modification, have been created and are used in parent education [20]. Although the frameworks and underlying ideas of each approach vary, their shared objectives are to assist parents in developing more harmonious relationships with their kids, teach parents how to deal with kids more skillfully, and help kids change

their behavior. Therefore, training programs like this can guide parents to a suitable and correct education pattern like authoritative parenting style that have a positive impact on children. Also, knowing scientific parenting information can help parents who are worried about how to teach their children feel less anxious.

3.3 Offer Timely Tutoring but Refrain from Serving as Their Exclusive Representative

Parents perform similar duties to instructors, albeit in a more covert and indirect manner [21]. Parents should not rely on beating and scolding to increase the pressure on their children to improve their grades. They should provide effective guidance to their children, just as authoritative parents do. For instance, placing kids in a cozy yet demanding atmosphere is a better method to stimulate their cognitive abilities. During the learning process, knowledge and skills will be passed on via instruction and communication [21]. Furthermore, parents should assist their children less and less as their talents advance.

3.4 Strengthen the Collaboration with Teachers

The excellent home-schooling relationships give parents a way to learn about their kids' actual academic performance and perspectives, therefore help parents adjust their expectations of kids. As was previously noted, parents' expectations can stimulate students and tap their kids' potential. As a result, parents should be able to modulate their expectations of their children reasonably since low expectations might hinder students' effort and unrealistic expectations might give them too much pressure. When it comes to establishing mutually trustworthy connections, open communication can be used between parents and teachers [19]. Parent-teacher conferences are also a good way to catch up on the kids.

3.5 Target Structure

One of the universal and practical parental techniques, the target structure, can be used to educate and develop children's capability. This structure was developed by scholar Epstein, specifies six interconnected activities that parents should be aware of and that are good for kids' academic achievement [15]. The TASK structure contains cerebral exercises that can assist kids in quickly adjusting to the harder coursework once they enter middle high school. By letting the kids take part in family decision-making and interact with other family members or peers, the authority and group structure helps them develop their sense of autonomy, responsibility, and collaboration. The reward structure emphasizes that parents should pick an appropriate strategy to motivate kids to study, particularly as they become mature. Along with reward, evaluation—the parental measurement for monitoring performance crucial for boosting children's motivation and assisting them in moving forward. The sixth structure is concerned with scheduling time. Since some of the students are too young to be self-disciplined, they might be in a huddle when the workload goes up. Therefore, parents could moderately support their kids' time management to help them complete school and extracurricular activities to meet quality and quantity standards.

4 Conclusion

Contemporary Chinese families are faced with a fiercely competitive social environment in the whole transition process from primary school to middle school. Parents' anxiety and relationship, parents' reactions to children's grades, as well as parents' attribution patterns and expectations will affect children's grades and thus their sense of self-worth. The Satir Iceberg Model is used to analyze the thought patterns behind the behavior of parents and children, and how this thought pattern affects the child's deep self-worth. Five recommendations are provided from the perspective of family atmosphere, the relationship between parents and children, as well as the home-school relationship to support children pass through the transition phase, maintain a friendly parent-child relationship, and establish correct self-worth.

What society can do to help solve this issue is to establish some professional parental programs which timely provide parents educational suggestions and courses on how to be good parents. At the same time, the government can promote the concept of scientific parenting and call on parents to actively participate in these programs. From the school's perspective, teachers can help by showing greater concern for students' mental health than for their academic performance, especially during their first year during the transition. Institutions may also implement courses or counseling services that provide pupils a chance to address their confusions and seek assistance. For kids, asking for support and being open with parents about their real feelings are not something to be ashamed of. Therefore, active communication is always highly recommended. However, the above suggestions lack real-world inspection. Thus, case studies regarding the feasibility could be conducted in the future.

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