

Exploring the current situation of parenting pressure in elementary schools under the double reduction policy

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Abstract: With the launch of the Double reduction policy, the burden of parents and primary school students has not been completely reduced, and many parents still have excessive parenting pressure and fear that their children are lagging behind in education, which not only affects parents' physical and mental health, but also causes certain harm to children's learning and growth. This paper analyzes the current situation and causes of parenting stress by literature research and interviews, and distills the four themes: educational expectations, reform of the secondary school entrance examination system, the disappearance of after-school training institutions, and the cost of after-school care by using the Colaizzi seven-step method, and proposes countermeasures in four areas: parental perceptions, evaluation system, out-of-school institutions, and school support, in order to reduce parenting stress and promote parents' physical and mental health and " and the implementation of the Double reduction policy.

Keywords: the Double reduction policy; parents; parenting pressure; coping strategies

1. Introduction

In order to bring education back to its essence and further reduce the burden of students and parents, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council issued the Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Homework and Out-of-School Training for Students in Compulsory Education on July 24, 2021, kicking off a new round of academic reduction. The Double reduction policy starts from both inside and outside the school to tackle the excessive academic burden of students, strengthen the role of school education as the main position, and break the dilemma of " involution" in education, with a view to building a good education ecology and nurturing students into well-rounded development of moral, intellectual, physical, social and aesthetic talents. The implementation of this policy has brought a lot of benefits to students and their families. The implementation of this policy has brought great changes to the lives of students and parents.

Based on the cognitive interaction perspective, the American psychologist Lazarus (1999)[1] defined stress as a particular relationship between an individual and the environment that is evaluated by the individual as a threat to physical and mental health and requires the mobilization of one's own resources to endure. Stress is the demand placed on the subject by changing environmental conditions (stressor) and the individual's response to it (stress reaction). Parenting stress is defined as a direct result of the triad of child role, parent role, and parent-child relationship (Abidin, 2006)[2], while parental mental health and well-being (Estes et al, 2009; Farmer & Lee, 2011)[3], child academic achievement (Oxford & Lee, 2011)[4], and parent-child relationship quality (Mitchell & Hauser-Cram, 2010)[5] are all associated with parenting stress.

Chinese parents' parenting styles are very different from Western historical traditions, economic development, habits, and values (Wang Li, and Fu Jingzhi, 2005)[6], and in the Chinese cultural context, Chinese parents are more repressed in expressing their emotions and therefore less likely to directly show their affection for their children in their words and actions (Wang Yan, and Zhang Lei, 2007)[7]. Under the pressure of parenting, parents may treat their children in an inappropriate manner despite being very fond of them (Zhou Hui, 2018)[8].

Our parents' way of thinking is directly influenced by the traditional culture of "family", and they see their children as an extension of their lives. In parenting, parents see it as a mission and

responsibility to raise their children to be useful, and their concern for them extends to all aspects of their lives, often intervening in their children's personal affairs, keeping track of their information, and even making decisions directly for them. This parenting style is likely to shape a relational self that can only be role players rather than rights holders, whose freedom is not based on independence because they cannot avoid having their lives closely intertwined with the others, and who are not autonomous because what they do or can do is rarely unrelated to the lives of others (Li Yongjun, 2019)[9].

"Educational anxiety" is widespread among Chinese parents. Surveys show that Chinese parents' anxiety and stress problems have become a group problem (Zhou Xu, 2021)[10]. In addition to interpersonal comparison, the highly selective nature of education in China has also led to the fear of "educational backwardness" among parents throughout the whole education system, causing people to spend a lot of financial, time and energy investment to improve the acquired educational resources. Moreover, traditional ideas of education influence parents' educational values, leading to unreasonable educational expectations and becoming an intergenerational transmission of family parenting styles that affect their children's future (Chen Huazai, and Xiao Wei, 2013)[11].

To sum up, this study will explore the current situation and causes of parenting stress in elementary school under the Double reduction policy by means of interviews, and propose corresponding strategies to call for social attention to parents' mental health, cultivate good parenting practices, and provide a good family environment for children's healthy growth and development.

2. Method

2.1. Research instruments and Subjects:

This study used semi-structured interviews with 10 parents from the same elementary school in an eastern coastal region of China, selected through random recruitment and invitation, and the specific information is shown in the following table 1.

Table 1: Basic information of interviewed parents

No.	Gender	Age	Education	Whether working	Child Grade
A1	female	30	Undergraduate	yes	1
A2	female	29	Undergraduate	yes	1
A3	female	34	Undergraduate	yes	2
A4	female	33	Undergraduate	yes	2
A5	female	32	Master	yes	1
A6	female	36	Undergraduate	yes	2
A7	male	34	Master	yes	2
A8	female	35	Undergraduate	yes	3
A9	male	39	Master	yes	5
A10	female	37	Undergraduate	no	5

2.2. Interview outline:

This study used a semi-structured interview outline, which focused on several aspects, firstly, an overview of the basic situation of parents, children and families, secondly, questions for the subjects to develop specific concepts and feelings about the Double reduction policy, and finally, questions about the current situation of parenting stress after the Double reduction policy. The questions were as follows: ① Briefly describe the basic information about the child. ② Do you understand the Double reduction policy? ③ What changes have been brought about by the Double reduction policy? ④ Has the Double reduction policy changed the distribution of responsibilities between parents and teachers? ⑤ How do you think students should allocate their time after school since the implementation of the Double reduction policy has enabled them to have enough time after school? ⑥ What do you think is the meaning of the Double reduction policy, and how does it manifest itself? ⑦ Has the Double reduction policy changed the stress of parenting for you? Each interview lasted 15-20 minutes, and the interview was recorded by audio recording software, and transcribed in time after the interview, and key information was extracted for analysis.

2.3. Analysis of results:

In this study, the interviews were analyzed using the Colaizzi seven-step method (Liu Ming, 2019)[12], and by taking the transcribed interviews and analyzing them word by word, important and meaningful statements related to the research questions were identified and excerpted, and the following four findings on the current state of parenting stress were summarized.

3. Current status of parenting pressure

3.1. Parents' educational expectations

The results of the interviews with parents revealed that all parents have certain educational expectations for their children, which leads to the assumption that one of the reasons for parenting stress is the parenting expectations for children. Influenced by traditional beliefs, many parents invest a lot of time, money, and energy in their children's education, do everything they can to get the best educational resources for their children, create the best educational atmosphere, and place all their life hopes on their children (Wu Xinying, 2019)[13]. Children carry too many expectations, so when the Double reduction policy emerged, it was an institutional requirement to reduce excessive academic pressure on children, but this reduction was at odds with parents' expectations of children's academic performance. Parents expect their children to achieve academic success, which inevitably leads to more academic pressure on children, and many parents even see education not simply as the cornerstone of a person's growth and development, but as a stepping stone to the next stage of education, each stage only to obtain a better education at the next stage, which leads to new parental pressure from academics.

3.2. Reform of the Secondary School Entrance Examination System

Interviews with parents revealed that the current reform of the secondary school examination system has created a sense of anxiety for parents. Parents who have high educational expectations for their children have to prepare for over-education so that their children do not end up as "normal" people who are not qualified for high school and college education in the middle and high school streams.

3.3. The disappearance of out-of-school training institutions

The disappearance of out-of-school training institutions following the Double reduction policy and the regulations on out-of-school training has created new parenting pressures for many parents. Parents who were interviewed learned that many of them were able to achieve better grades and higher levels of education than other students by paying a lot of extra time and money for tutoring, which in turn led to a better economic level and class hierarchy. The parents naturally apply the same way they succeeded back then, that is, investing more at a greater cost, and making their children pay more, in the expectation that they will be able to maintain or further improve their economic and social level when they become adults. But the disappearance of out-of-school tutoring has prevented many parents from allowing their children to move on in the same way that they originally succeeded on their own, and the failure of educational expectations has triggered new parenting pressures. Some parents may even be desperate enough to seek out informal, higher-fee, and harder-to-guarantee quality tutoring providers to put in their own effort for their children.

3.4. The Cost of After-School Care

Under the Double reduction policy, after-school care services have been introduced in elementary schools to reduce the educational burden on parents. The after-school care service is intended to help children complete their homework, and to increase their physical activity and learning in specialty classes. In a large number of hobby care classes, on the one hand, the lack of sufficient full-time teachers leads to poor quality of hobby learning in after-school care; on the other hand, training for quality hobbies requires extra time as well as money. As a result, many parents believe that the after-school care system simply extends the time students are in school, but does not use that time well enough to produce substantial benefits, and parents are still under strong parenting pressure.

4. Discussion

4.1. *Establishing a healthy parenting concept*

First of all, parents should educate their children with a calm and rational mind, focus their education on the physical and mental health and quality cultivation of their children, and abandon the utilitarian motivation of education, the crucial point of a human being is connotation, if the body and mind are not healthy, excellent academic performance will not make the child develop in the long run.(Wu Xinying, 2019)[13]Second, parenting stress in parenting education is due in part to excessive attention and involvement in the education and lives of their children. This behavior tends to make parents lose themselves, fall into anxiety, and generate too much pressure, which in turn leads to worry and disappointment about the future. Parents should correctly establish educational concepts, set reasonable educational expectations and goals; at the same time, parents should try to understand and trust their children as much as possible to avoid unnecessary feelings of malignant anxiety and maintain hope for the the future and life.

4.2. *Reinventing the evaluation system and pursuing diversified development*

We need to change the traditional education evaluation system and reshape it to meet the characteristics of the times and the development needs of students. At this stage, China's educational goals are being reformed to focus on both results and values, abandoning the idea that children are evaluated only by their academic performance, encouraging children's growth through process evaluation and multiple evaluations, calming parents' anxiety, and supporting children with a growing and tolerant perspective (Qian Jie, 2021)[14]. Parents should abandon the idea that "academics is the only development" and promote their children's multifaceted development. Society is not a single talent market, and social development needs to be promoted by various positions and professionals.

4.3. *Explore mechanisms to improve out-of-school training and tuition institutions*

A complete blanket ban on out-of-school tuition will expose more parents to new anxiety and pressure. In addition to proper guidance for parents' thoughts, stronger regulation and improvement and refinement of relevant institutions are needed. Additionally, the Double reduction policy focuses on improving the quality of education and teaching, ensuring that students can receive quality educational resources and educational services on campus to meet the expectations of parents and the diverse needs of students. In addition to tutorial institutions, the construction and expansion of interest training institutions also need to be emphasized. The combination of off-campus interest training and on-campus education ensures the cultivation of children who are well-rounded in moral, intellectual, physical, social and aesthetic development. Combine the innovative educational concepts and teaching models with the outdated nature of off-campus training, draw on their good experiences, and take advantage of off-campus training institutions' strengths in technology-enabled education on campus.

4.4. *Strengthening home-school cooperation and promoting joint participation of parents and teachers*

Education is neither just a matter for parents nor is it all the task of teachers. The right goal that should be set is the joint collaboration between teachers and parents to raise positive and healthy children. Strengthening communication between parents and teachers, promoting cooperation between parents and schools, and guiding mutual understanding between parents and children can reduce the creation and development of parenting pressure, and thus make more actions for building a better society.

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