

The Impact of the Policy of Integrating General and Vocational Education on Parental Educational Anxiety and Strategies for Coping

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Abstract: *The Development of Inclusive Education Policies in General and Vocational Education and Its Impact on Parental Educational Anxiety and Coping Strategies* Inclusive development of general and vocational education is a vital component of educational reform. Research findings indicate that inclusive education policies provide more educational choices and career development opportunities, alleviating parental anxiety regarding traditional educational pathways. However, these policies have also triggered new sources of anxiety, such as uncertainty about emerging careers and the pressure of educational decision-making. The current trend of educational intensification is becoming increasingly severe, and parental educational anxiety persists as a collective mentality. Therefore, there is a growing need for more information and decision support to address educational anxiety. The question of how to reduce parental educational anxiety, promote student well-being, and advance the development of inclusive general and vocational education has become a prominent research issue. In light of this, this paper investigates the current status and influencing factors of parental educational anxiety in the context of inclusive general and vocational education policies. It analyses the origins of parental educational anxiety and how parents should navigate and adapt within the framework of inclusive education policy development. It explores new approaches to alleviate parental educational anxiety and proposes strategies and recommendations at the national, school, and parental levels to assist parents and educational administrators in better addressing parental educational anxiety issues.

Keywords: *Inclusive Education Policies; Educational Intensification; Educational Anxiety; Educational Choices*

1. Introduction

The call for educational development has been growing, with particular emphasis on its significance highlighted in the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. The connection between education, individual development, and family well-being has become increasingly intertwined, making education a crucial domain for every parent. As educational competition intensifies, the competition for high-quality educational resources has also become fiercer. Educational anxiety is pervasive among parents, having evolved into a societal symbol and a collective social problem. Educational anxiety is an inevitable issue during China's current period of educational reform and transformation, representing a societal mindset that cannot be ignored. Numerous factors contribute to parental educational anxiety, with national policies being one of the key drivers.

The introduction of inclusive education policies aims to promote the integration and development of vocational education and general education, aligning with China's social development needs and providing high-quality professional talents for societal advancement. This policy has brought about various changes and challenges, one of which is the exacerbation and emergence of parental educational anxiety. Although the "Vocational Education Law" underscores the importance of vocational education, the introduction of new policies has not effectively alleviated parental educational anxiety, leaving many parents struggling within the quagmire of educational anxiety.

Reflecting on previous research on educational anxiety, there remains a relatively limited body of work concerning the impact of inclusive education policies on parental educational anxiety and coping strategies within the context of vocational and general education integration. Understanding the effects of these policies on parental educational anxiety and finding effective coping strategies are of paramount importance for enhancing parental involvement in educational decision-making and reducing family educational pressures. Therefore, this paper asserts that with the introduction of inclusive vocational and

general education policies, it is essential to enhance research and investigation into the phenomenon of educational anxiety in this context. It is crucial to explore effective methods to alleviate parental educational anxiety, enabling parents to fully understand and embrace new education policies. This will provide feasible guidance for educational administrators, educators, and parents, ultimately reducing parental educational anxiety and promoting the effective implementation of inclusive vocational and general education policies.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research on Parental Educational Anxiety

Educational anxiety is not confined to domestic settings; different countries hold varying beliefs and perspectives on this phenomenon. Scholar Freud posited that genuine anxiety is, in fact, a natural and rational response, reflecting the perception of harm from unexpected events in the external environment and serving as an expression of self-preservation instinct^[1]. Kurt Goldstein's anxiety theory, on the other hand, suggests that anxiety arises from external pressures and threats, manifesting as tension, irritability, and worry. This adequately explains the reasons behind current parental educational anxiety. The introduction of new educational policies has brought about changes in the educational environment, leading parents to experience emotions such as anxiety, unease, and distress, as well as behavioral responses. Particularly for parents facing the choice of their children's educational path, the influence of factors such as academic pressure and external information interference deepens their level of educational anxiety. Furthermore, Ellis proposed cognitive anxiety, arguing that cognitive distortions include excessive inferencing of specific features of an event, magnifying negative experiences, maintaining a pessimistic outlook on event outcomes, adopting a self-centered perspective, and having absolute tendencies toward certain matters^[2]. This suggests that parental educational anxiety can also stem from cognitive biases, with one of the reasons being the incorrect perception of educational policies. Some scholars contend that educational anxiety is not purely negative and has a reasonable range. The current competitive environment motivates parents from all social strata to desire higher academic qualifications for their children, as it equates to upward mobility^[3]. However, in the present knowledge-based economy, the societal competition for educational resources will exacerbate further, intensifying parental competition for quality education resources and thereby deepening parental educational anxiety^[4].

Many scholars have explored and researched the factors influencing parental educational anxiety. Their research spans various levels, including social, economic, and individual factors, analyzing the relationships between parental educational anxiety and different factors, as well as the adverse effects of educational anxiety. Starting from the level of education, found that individual social status is related to educational attainment, and educational anxiety arises from the anxiety caused by differences in social status due to varying levels of education^[2]. Some scholars believe that parental educational anxiety arises from the uncertainty of the educational process and outcomes, constituting an irrational emotional state resulting from excessive anxiety about their children's academic performance and future prospects^[5].

Based on this, Han has used parental educational anxiety measurement scales to quantitatively analyze parental educational anxiety from five aspects, including educational choices and future prospects^[6]. It was found that parents, when participating in their children's education, exhibit mistrust and various abnormal psychological states regarding the uncertainty of educational outcomes, thereby leading to educational anxiety^[7]. Starting from students' academic anxiety and educational choices, factors leading to parental educational anxiety have been categorized^[8]. It was discovered that educational anxiety hinders the improvement of educational satisfaction. Some scholars have analyzed the current status, characteristics, and manifestations of parental educational anxiety through quantitative methods, proposing specific measures to address parental educational anxiety in the current environment^[9].

2.2 Research on the Policy of Integrating General and Vocational Education Development

Starting from the education sector, the integration of general and vocational education involves two major educational domains. It should be regarded as a crucial initiative for optimizing the entire education system, with the policy's focus placed on the basic education stage within regular primary and secondary schools^[10]. Diversified education is an important theme in China's education policy. The coordinated development of general education and vocational education is a fundamental principle that must be upheld in the current education sector. Implementing this development concept contributes to the

promotion of the integration of general and vocational education, providing a solid foundation for the diversified development of education^[11]. The division between general and vocational education is a product of the coordinated development of these two types of education. The newly proposed policy of integrating general and vocational education development represents an optimization and adjustment of the original policy. It aims to facilitate the complementary strengths of general and vocational education, ensuring substantial equality between these two types of education^[12]. The essence of the policy of integrating general and vocational education lies in clarifying the current focus of education development and promoting the simultaneous improvement of education structure and quality^[13].

2.3 Literature review summary

Research on parental educational anxiety has been on the rise, but it also has its limitations. In terms of research subjects, most studies focus on the behaviors and causes of parental educational anxiety, with relatively fewer studies delving into the psychological aspects of parental educational anxiety compared to research on student anxiety. Regarding research focus, most studies primarily explore the manifestations of parental educational anxiety, lacking in-depth analysis of its underlying causes. In terms of research methods, many studies examine educational anxiety through specific cases, and many quantitative analysis tables related to educational anxiety do not take into account the differentiation of parental educational anxiety.

Therefore, this paper, after carefully reviewing the literature and viewpoints of previous scholars and understanding the current state of research on educational anxiety both domestically and abroad, combines it with the new policy of integrating general and vocational education development. It conducts an in-depth study on the current status of educational anxiety. Starting from various stakeholders such as the government, schools, and parents, and based on the analysis of the logical relationships within the framework of multi-stakeholder management, it examines the new changes in educational anxiety under the background of the integration of general and vocational education, and explores the existing problems. Building on the correction of parental cognitive biases regarding educational policies, the paper proposes active coping strategies and the utilization of resources to alleviate parental educational anxiety.

3. Parental Educational Anxiety Under the Background of Integrated General and Vocational Education Development

3.1. Educational anxiety is a widespread phenomenon

The implementation of the integrated general and vocational education policy has made the future of education more uncertain. Parents feel confused and anxious about the direction of educational reforms and their impact on their children's future. They worry that policy changes may have adverse effects on their children's educational paths and opportunities, leading to an increase in their educational anxiety. Although the government emphasizes at the policy level that there is no distinction between vocational education and general education, parental educational anxiety still persists. While the integrated general and vocational education policy aims to reduce the academic pressure on children, improve the quality of school education, and promote high-quality education development, some parents may still find it challenging to alleviate their concerns. In the context of integrated education, where education is no longer solely based on exam scores, parental educational anxiety remains a strong catalyst. Parents are well aware of the demand for talent in society and hope that their children can access more high-quality educational resources. Various internal and external factors contribute to the deepening of parental educational anxiety.

3.2. Misconceptions about Diversified Development

The integrated general and vocational education development policy encourages diversified development, but some parents have misconceptions about how to implement and measure such diversity. They believe that only outstanding achievements in multiple fields can meet the policy requirements and societal expectations. This misunderstanding leads parents to attempt comprehensive support and cultivation in various aspects for their children, thereby increasing educational anxiety. Furthermore, the policy emphasizes the cultivation of students' comprehensive qualities and skills, including vocational skills and practical abilities. Some parents recognize the need to focus not only on academic achievements but also on their children's career development and employment prospects. This results in parents adding more attention and competitive pressure to their children's education, causing concerns

about whether their children will have sufficient competitiveness in the future job market. This, to a certain extent, exacerbates parental educational anxiety.

4. Analysis of Factors Affecting Parental Educational Anxiety

4.1. Limited Parental Self-awareness

Limited parental self-awareness and cognitive biases can lead to the emergence of educational anxiety. Survey data has shown that one of the most direct causes of parental educational anxiety is not knowing how to understand their child's learning. Many parents are unable to effectively engage in the educational process, cannot access existing educational resources, and as a result, may overly control their child's learning or invest too much in their child's education without a rational basis. The integrated general and vocational education policy provides more educational pathways and choices, requiring parents to make decisions among numerous options. This can lead to anxiety and uncertainty as they grapple with the strong demand for education and their narrow educational beliefs conflicting with the current competitive educational resources, further increasing parental educational anxiety. Furthermore, parents may have misconceptions about the essence of education and one-sided understanding of relevant education policies and their role in human development. The implementation of the integrated general and vocational education policy requires parents to shift away from traditional educational concepts and accept the importance of comprehensive qualities and vocational skills. This shift may cause some parents to worry and feel uneasy, uncertain about whether this new educational model can ensure their children's future development. Some parents tend to view education primarily as a utilitarian tool, and this cognitive bias contributes to the escalation of parental educational anxiety. The emergence of educational anxiety has societal roots, but it is also largely due to parents losing sight of the true essence of education in the midst of competition and neglecting its fundamental meaning.

4.2. Increased Expectation Pressure

The implementation of the integrated general and vocational education policy can increase parental expectation pressure on their children's education. Parents may worry that their children will face increased competition in education choices and career development, leading them to pay even more attention to their children's academic performance and career preparedness to ensure they can adapt to future career development demands. The policy's implementation may also result in the reallocation of educational resources and heightened competition. Parents might face the pressure of competing for high-quality schools, courses, and training resources, intensifying their anxiety and concerns. Parents are confronted with significant pressures and anxiety related to educational resources.

4.3. Information Uncertainty

We are currently in an age of information explosion, where information can be accessed through various channels. Parents have access to different educational information. However, the quality of information disseminated varies, and some parents may acquire a lot of incorrect educational information or biased educational commentary and policy interpretations due to a lack of sufficient analytical skills. This can lead to parental educational anxiety. The changes in the integrated general and vocational education policy and the lack of clarity in the implementation details may make it difficult for parents to understand the policy and obtain accurate information. Parents may struggle to grasp the changes and impacts of the policy, increasing their sense of anxiety and uncertainty.

As a result, the implementation of the integrated general and vocational education policy may lead to parents having an insufficient understanding of the education system and vocational education. They may be unsure how to help their children make the right choices in both academics and careers. This information uncertainty can contribute to parental anxiety.

4.4. Concerns about Social Class Regression

According to a survey conducted by CCTV Finance, education expenditure ranks first in household spending, showing a clear upward trend. The continuous changes in socioeconomic structures mean that an individual's access to education resources and level of education, to some extent, determine their position in the social hierarchy. Many parents have achieved social mobility through education and view it as a crucial pathway to upward mobility, helping their children attain higher social status.

The ongoing increase in educational spending indicates that parents are under significant educational pressure. Currently, most parents bear the burdens of work, housing, and the risk of major life changes due to factors such as aging and social developments. The pandemic has also heightened parental anxiety. The rise in education costs implies increased pressure on parents themselves, and educational anxiety is a reflection of their own anxieties. Therefore, parents try to alleviate their own anxiety by continuously increasing their investment in education. However, this sense of unease is prevalent among parents, especially among lower-income groups. Parents tend to exhibit greater anxiety regarding their children's education, as a result.

5. Paths to Alleviate Parental Educational Anxiety

5.1. Optimizing the Allocation of Educational Resources

Education is widely recognized as an essential and efficient means to achieve both social class consolidation and upward mobility. Parents aspire to access an ample amount of educational resources to provide a solid foundation for their children's future development. Therefore, from the government's perspective, there is a need to increase financial support for education, allocate educational resources rationally, and establish related systems to manage these resources. Region-specific policies should be developed to promote education's development as per the local context. Ensuring that students from different regions, social classes, and age groups can access high-quality educational resources and services is crucial to meeting parental demands in education. Furthermore, the condition of schools also influences parental educational anxiety. Generally, the better a student's academic performance and the more educational opportunities they have, the easier it is to alleviate parental educational anxiety. Schools can adopt an education philosophy that promotes collaboration among multiple stakeholders, including schools and families, and offer a wide range of after-school programs. By improving the quality and availability of these programs, schools can demonstrate to parents that they provide excellent educational resources, thus preventing parents from experiencing severe educational anxiety.

5.2. Shifting Educational Mind-sets

Educational anxiety is intertwined with various factors related to students, families, and society. Parents, as the primary subjects of educational anxiety, need to have a clear understanding of the current educational environment. First and foremost, parents should cultivate healthy and positive educational philosophies. In addition to focusing on their child's academic performance, they should also prioritize their child's personal growth. Concentrating solely on a child's grades can lead to constant stress for the child and make it challenging for parents to alleviate their own educational anxiety. Parents should pay attention to their child's physical and mental well-being as well as their overall character development. If a student's physical and mental development is compromised, it can indirectly contribute to parental educational anxiety.

Furthermore, parental involvement in a child's education has become commonplace, but it's essential to avoid excessive interference in a child's academic life. Excessive concern about a child's education and life can, to a certain extent, trigger parental educational anxiety. This excessive concern stems from a strong desire for control over a child's life and future development. If a child deviates from the path planned by the parent, it can lead to parental worries about the child's future. Additionally, it might stifle the child's interests. Therefore, setting reasonable educational goals and expectations, and listening to a child's genuine thoughts and desires, can help parents maintain a reasonable level of educational anxiety.

5.3. Creating a Social Environment for Comprehensive Integration of General and Vocational Education

Due to the influence of traditional educational ideologies, many parents still have reservations about vocational education and find it challenging to understand the importance of comprehensive integration of general and vocational education. Therefore, it's essential to provide comprehensive educational information and guidance. This can be achieved by establishing information platforms or consultation services that offer parents detailed explanations and implementation guidelines about the policies related to the integration of general and vocational education. Schools and educational institutions can engage in regular communication with parents, offering accurate and transparent information about educational policies to reduce information asymmetry. To create a favorable social environment for the comprehensive integration of general and vocational education, various stakeholders, including the

government, schools, and society, should collaborate to extensively promote and publicize the policies related to this integration. This will help parents better understand the policy changes and their impact on their children's education.

Parents should also understand the essence of education, recognizing that each child can only achieve full development by finding the educational approach that suits them best. Additionally, multiple stakeholders should work together to improve both general and vocational education pathways, promoting resource complementarity between the two. By making vocational education an equally attractive option, it can fundamentally alleviate parental educational anxieties.

5.4. Emphasizing Personalized Education and Diverse Development

The multifaceted development of students is crucial, and parents who solely focus on their children's academic performance often push themselves and their children to extremes. This not only fails to alleviate educational anxiety but also exacerbates students' academic stress. It is essential to prioritize students' comprehensive qualities and their overall development. To reduce parental anxiety about making the "best" choices, parents must change their inherent beliefs and guide their children toward holistic development.

At the national level, the government should formulate sound educational policies and continually optimize the educational environment according to societal development needs. This will create a conducive educational ecosystem and encourage schools and educational institutions to offer diversified educational courses and activities that cater to students' various interests, needs, and abilities. At the school level, institutions should shift away from a mechanism that evaluates students solely based on academic performance, reduce students' academic burdens, and promote their comprehensive development. Schools can also establish parent support groups or platforms for parental education exchange to allow parents to share experiences, solve problems, and provide mutual assistance and support. From the perspective of parents, they should pay more attention to their children's emotional well-being and prioritize their personality development as a primary task. Parents should strive to shift from being results-oriented to being character-oriented, thus promoting their children's holistic development, both physically and mentally.

6. Conclusion

The implementation of the policy of integrating general and vocational education has had various impacts on parental educational anxiety. Parents often face challenges such as information uncertainty, difficulty in assessing education quality, and unequal distribution of educational resources when making educational choices for their children. These factors exacerbate parental educational anxiety. Furthermore, parents also worry about and feel uncertain about their children's future development, further increasing their anxiety. While the policy of integrating general and vocational education provides more educational opportunities and choices, it has also brought about issues such as the pressure of the college entrance examination, unequal distribution of educational resources, and this has in turn triggered parental educational anxiety. In the current educational context, educational anxiety is prevalent among parents, with the primary concern being their children's future prospects.

Therefore, exploring methods to alleviate current parental educational anxiety symptoms is not only beneficial for reducing students' academic stress and promoting their comprehensive development but also for advancing the optimization and reform of relevant educational policies to better serve the needs of educational development. It is essential to approach the issue of parental educational anxiety holistically and examine the phenomenon from a comprehensive perspective, facilitating practical efforts to alleviate such anxiety, promote the smooth implementation of the policy of integrating general and vocational education, and foster the healthy development of the education system.

Future research can further expand the sample size and employ various research methods to delve deeper into the mechanisms and pathways through which the policy of integrating general and vocational education affects parental educational anxiety. Additionally, comparisons between different regions and population groups can help explore individual differences and influencing factors related to parental educational anxiety, leading to more specific strategies for addressing these concerns.

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