

The Influence and Response of Primary School Parents to Their Children's Learning Distress

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Objectives: Distress is an unsatisfactory state of mind, and anxiety is its main manifestation. This research studies the learning distress of pupils. **Methods:** (1) A questionnaire survey was conducted on 543 samples to get the data about students' learning anxiety. (2) Interviews with 5 participants with anxiety symptoms and their parents to get the stories behind the students' learning distress. **Results:** 64.1% of the students in the sample were found to have symptoms of high anxiety. The interview showed that pupils were dissatisfied with their learning environment, dissatisfied with their academic performance and learning status, and they felt very tired and bored, even afraid with their studies. **Conclusions:** Poor academic performance, too many extracurricular activities, parents' over-concern about grades, and uncomfortable parent-child communication are the reasons for the learning distress of pupils. Parents do not pay much attention to the learning mood of pupils. It is recommended that parents spend more time with the company and educational guidance to help children develop positive learning emotions.

Key words: primary school; learning distress; learning anxiety; parents
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INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 21st century, a watershed appeared in China's education reform. Before, Chinese school education was a test-oriented education model. This kind of education mode attaches importance to the scores of the students' study subjects and ignores the development of the students' personality; pays attention to the achievement but ignores the ability. The students who produce are regarded as representatives of "high scores but low abilities".

In order to implement quality education, the Ministry of Education of China issued the "Emergency Notice on Reducing the Overburden of Students in Primary Schools" (January 3, 2000). In 2001, with the approval of the State Council, the Ministry of Education issued the "Basic Education Curriculum Reform Outline (for Trial Implementation)" to encourage students to actively participate, be willing to explore, and be diligent in learning methods. These measures emphasize and protect the status of students as the main body of learning. Gutman & Vorhaus's¹ studies explain that the happiness of students is very important for

learning. They found Children with better emotional wellbeing make more progress in primary school and are more engaged in secondary school. People have high hopes for reforms, believing that these reforms will be beneficial to children's learning or can bring happiness to children.

However, the reform has been implemented for 20 years, but some recent studies have shown the problem of primary school students' learning distress is still very prominent. Primary and middle school students are dissatisfied with the current learning situation, some suffer from serious psychological distress, and even commit suicide more frequently.^{2,3} Wei Ping, Xu Chengwu et.al conducted a survey of primary and secondary school students in Anhui Province and found that students with learning anxiety accounted for 63.3% of the survey sample.⁴

McNaughton & Gray Claimed that distress, or anxiety,⁵ describes the unpleasant experience that occurs when things have not gone as planned; or when there is potential for things to not go as planned. In short, as Mirowsky & Ross said that distress is an unpleasant subjective state.⁶

Human learning and emotion are interdependent, which has been confirmed by relevant research. Bower predicted that emotional congruence can simplify cognitive processes.⁷ Positive emotions (such as enjoyment) are more likely to recall positive information (such as feedback after a successful test) than negative emotions (such as sadness). Schwarz suggested that we should focus on the information potential of emotions and consider that emotions themselves bring different information to learners.⁸ Positive emotions are signals of positive characteristics of a situation. Positive emotions promote learning but negative emotions can be harmful.⁹ The research of Saminathen, Plenty & Modin pointed out that higher average academic performance of students is significantly associated with lower psychological distress among students.¹⁰

Parents play an important role in the formation of children's learning emotions. The development of individuals is nested in a series of

environmental systems that influence each other. In these systems, the system and the individual Interaction and affect individual development¹¹. The interaction between children and parents is the main content of the family system. Bronfenbrenner maintains that because the child develops, the interaction with the environments acquires a complex nature.¹² In Haschel's theory,¹³ parents is also regarded as an important source of stimulus that affects students' emotions.

Letting children learn and live happily is an educational consensus and a proposition of educational philosophy recognized by everyone. The research we want to conduct is to discover the existence of pupils' learning difficulties in specific areas, explore the causes of pupils' learning difficulties, and make suggestions on how to reduce or eliminate pupils' learning difficulties. It is hoped that it can provide some educational and ideological help to promote the relatively pleasant learning of primary school students.

METHODS

Qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this study. The research data for this study comes from the students of a primary school in Huaihua city, China, as well as their parents. Huaihua city has a permanent population of 620,000 and a relatively large floating population. The per capita GDP in 2020 was more than 60,000 yuan. The city has some typical characteristics: it is located at the junction of many provinces, is a combined area of the central and western regions, has high population mobility, has the scale of China's fourth-tier cities, and is slightly behind the average economically.

Participants

Taking into account the possibility of completing the research based on questionnaires and interview tasks, we selected students in grades 4, 5, and 6 as well as their parents as participants in the study.

Measures

Anxiety is the main form of distress. This study used *Learning Anxiety Subscale in the Mental Health Diagnosis Test* compiled by Professor Zhou

Buchengof East China Normal University,¹⁴ which has 15 items, and the scale has good reliability and validity. After testing, the Cronbach coefficient of the questionnaire in this study is 0.740.

There are 15 questions here. The person who chooses a "yes" answer will get 1 point; those who choose a "no" answer will get 0 points. Participants with scores higher than 8 were identified as high learning anxiety. A score of 3-7 is defined as mild anxiety.

This study investigated 543 samples, including 272 boys and 271 girls, 193 fourth-grade students, 211 fifth-grade students, and 143 sixth-grade students. The age of these students ranges from 10 to 12 years old.

According to Glauser & Schere,¹⁵ Subjective feeling can be regarded as the conscious, experiential component of emotion. is generally used as a manipulation check in studying emotional processes. In order to explain the learning distress of primary school students and form educational intervention plans, we need more first-hand information, especially the relevant experiences and feelings of those students who are in learning distress and those around them. Therefore, we designed the interview.

This study selected 5 students who were identified as have learning anxiety as the subjects of the interview study. Their learning anxiety test scores are defined as symptoms. At the same time, they are also students who are identified by the head teacher and their parents as having typical emotional characteristics of learning anxiety. Their parents also agreed to sign an interview agreement and participate in research.

This research uses semi-structured interviews, which are designed to focus the conversation on the subject of learning anxiety as much as possible. However, in order to obtain more data that may be relevant, the interviewees are encouraged to provide further information that they consider valuable to this research.

This study uses Spss 22.0 to conduct a demographic analysis of the questionnaire survey

data. Use grounded theory methods to encode interview data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Learning Anxiety among Pupils. 89.6% of students in 543 samples were defined as being in learning anxiety. 64.1% of which are defined as being highly learning anxiety (See Table 1) . This result is consistent with related studies. For example, Wei Ping, Xu Chengwu, Liu Yan& Guo Wei⁴ conducted a study on primary and secondary school students in Anhui Province and found that 63.3% of the samples were learning anxiety. According to Zhang Xunluzi's¹⁶ research, most elementary school students in Kunming have problems with learning anxiety.

T-test results show that there was no significant difference in learning anxiety between boys (Mean=3.13) and girls (Mean=3.23). The results of variance analysis show that there are significant differences in learning anxiety in primary school students in grade (F=3.620, P<0.05), multiple comparisons found that there was a significant difference in learning anxiety between grade 5 and grade 6 (P=0.007 P<0.01). The fifth grade students got the highest score in learning anxiety. In the mother's education level, there were significant differences in students' learning anxiety. Pupils whose mothers were educated in high school had the highest scores for learning anxiety (See Table 2) .

Pupils' cognition of the purpose and meaning of learning. Tolman, E.C.¹⁷ found that purpose and cognition are determinants of animal learning. The understanding of the purpose and meaning of action can be said to determine not only the direction of individual action, but also affect the strength of individual action.

The pupils generally consider that the purpose of learning is to be able to enter university in the future. The significance of learning is that they can find a satisfactory job or make more money in the future. This seems to indicate that Chinese children's cognition of college entrance examination or university education has been cultivated since childhood.

Participant 1 express "studying is for one's own future, not for others". Participant 3 said, "Study hard

can be admitted to a good university, then I can find a good job in future.” (All pupil names used in the examples have been changed)

Most of the students interviewed are not satisfied with their own learning status. The reason for the dissatisfaction of the learning state is the self-evaluation of the learning result due to poor academic performance. "My study status is not good because I did not get good academic results"

(Participant 2)."I am not satisfied with my study status because of poor academic performance" (Participant 4).The student participants were able to clearly perceive their own learning status and expressed more subjective dissatisfaction with their own learning status. But they did not express too much about how to change. They just think that poor academic performance is an unpleasant thing.

| Score | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|-----------|------------|
| 0-3 | 40 | 7.4% |
| 4-7 | 155 | 28.5% |
| 8-15 | 348 | 64.1% |
| Total | 543 | 100% |

| | | Mean | Std. Deviation | F | P |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|------|----------------|------|-------|
| Grade | 4 | 8.43 | 3.16 | 3.62 | 0.027 |
| | 5 | 8.86 | 3.11 | | |
| | 6 | 7.95 | 3.26 | | |
| Mother's level of education | Below high school | 8.55 | 3.18 | 3.25 | 0.039 |
| | High school | 8.62 | 3.12 | | |
| | college degree or above | 7.35 | 3.25 | | |

In today's China, the material conditions of urban families are relatively rich, and the children's life world does not care of the problem about food and clothing. They simply accepted the so-called stress instilled in them by adults, but they

did not experience it personally. This kind of pressure is not real to children, and it is unwilling to be very strong, so it is difficult for them to motivate them to study hard. Students don't have a real reason to learn, so they don't like learning. They also don't have the enthusiasm for too much change in the bad learning

situation. In fact, Participant 1 mentioned "It feels like I'm just studying for grandma and dad."

Facts about pupils taking extracurricular tutoring classes. Dissatisfaction with the environment lies in the large number of extracurricular classes, and the content of extracurricular classes is not their voluntary choice. Participant 1 said "Grandma arranged too many courses for me. She took care of me everything, even squeezing toothpaste". Participant 5 tells us that "the off-campus tuition classes are forcibly arranged by my mother to attend." Participant 2 said, "I don't understand why I have to arrange so many extracurricular classes for me. There are too many classes and too little rest time, I feel very tired and annoying."

Although Participant 3 is also dissatisfied with his academic performance, he does not object to the extracurricular classes arranged for him by his parents. He believes that studying in extracurricular classes can help him improve his academic performance. But when asked if he would like to go to extracurricular, He said she was really not interested in extracurricular classes and felt a little tired. He just doesn't object to the arrangement, but he is not really willing to participate in extracurricular classes. He expressed that he was even a little afraid of going to extracurricular classes because he always couldn't understand it.

It can be inferred that the extracurricular learning that these students are forced to participate in does not help improve their academic performance, but it makes them feel tired and afraid. The extracurricular arrangements had more to increase the learning distress of these pupils.

Suggestions and expectations of pupils to their parents. In order to confirm whether students believe that their parents are the cause of their learning distress, while avoiding the moral sensitivity of direct questioning, we designed the interview to ask students to state their expectations and suggestions for their parents. From their answers, look for relevant clues.

Participant 1 said, "I hope my mother can spend more time with me to study. And I don't want her to keep mentioning my grades, and don't talk about studying while I'm playing. I'm very annoyed by this." She said that she did not want to live with her father, the reason is that the father often beats her in order to learn. Participant 1 asserted that "When I grow up, I will never find a boyfriend like my father."

Because of being forced to arrange extracurricular courses, Participant 2 said, "I hope parents don't force me to personally intend." Participants 3 told us that he wanted his father to drink less. Because his father would criticize his poor academic performance when he drank.

Student participants expressed that their parents spend too little time with them in their studies, and that their parents are more concerned with their children's studies and academic performance. It can be inferred that the lack of or uncomfortable emotional communication between some family members had led to negative characteristics of students' learning emotions.

Parents' Participation in pupils' Learning. It is very important for parents to participate in the children's learning and life. There are research findings that father's participation can make children more optimistic and less concerned about trivial matters and suspiciousness; father's greater participation in education can improve mental health.¹⁸

In today's society, the pace is getting faster and faster, and people's life and work pressures continue to increase. Many parents of elementary school students are in the golden age of their careers, so they neglect to educate their children¹⁹. The parents generally indicated that they do not have much time to accompany their children due to occupational or work reasons, especially they lack mutual company for their children. Even the children's study and life are all arranged by the grandparents (Participant 1, Participant 4), and the parents hardly participate.

Parents are dissatisfied with their children's academic performance, affirmed that their children's academic performance is not very good or very poor. Moreover, they believe that these children have some learning habits problems, such as delays in

completing learning tasks, inability to complete homework independently, and inability to arrange time reasonably. The parents are very frustrated, even some parents say, "This child was abandoned by our training, is it necessary to open a trumpet to upgrade and fight monsters?" (Online game language, here refers to a new child) (Father of participant 4).

For various reasons, such as too tight working hours and too many tasks, although parents are still responsible for their children, they are increasingly unable to influence their children's experience.¹¹ Not only that, even more and more parents do not realize their influence on the growth of their children. They are dissatisfied and even criticize their children's learning, but they are not aware of the responsibilities of their parents. These parents rarely really examine their own problems. If a comment elicits a negative emotional reaction, students are more likely to reject or ignore the comment.²⁰

Parents' expectations for their children's studies are generally to improve their academic performance. Except for the grandmother of participant 1, who hopes to help the children's performance to be the first in the class through extracurricular tutoring, the other parents' desire is that their children's academic performance can reach the average of the class level. Some parents have put forward expectations from their learning attitudes or habits. For example, children can study hard and complete learning tasks independently. Only the parents of participant 4 has put forward requirements on values and morals.

Parents most common hope is to improve their children's academic performance, and a very small number of parents express their hope that their children's personality and habits will be improved. Parents seem to turn a blind eye to their children's learning distress. Parents believe that the children's poor academic performance is due to the fact that the children do not study hard and do not obey the arrangements of parents and teachers.

It can be inferred that parents often only see the fact that their children's academic performance is poor, and the children's learning emotions are not

respected by parents. As Zhu Yongxin clarified,²¹ Chinese parents are mostly concerned about becoming talented rather than adults. They are more concerned about their children's current academic performance and believe that excellent academic performance is the most solid foundation for their children's bright future. This kind of "only academic achievement theory" deserves attention. This kind of conceptual change may take a long time.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study once again shows that there are serious learning distress among primary school students, and there are particularly many students with learning anxiety. This is an old question but it is worthy of further research. Factors such as poor academic performance, too many extracurricular arrangements, uncomfortable parent-child communication and parents' excessive concern about academic performance have caused pupils to acquire anxiety, fatigue, and fear in their learning activities, and they have learning distress.

Parents seldom realize that their views and behaviors on learning have brought negative emotions to children's learning, and they lack attention and thinking about their children's learning emotions. Although students in learning distress express dissatisfaction with their own state, they seem to take little action to change this state because they could not find motivation. The intervention of pupils' learning distress needs further research.

The company of parents is the best education for children, inter-generational care is an emotional abandonment of children. Parents need to spend more time with their children. While paying attention to their children's academic performance, parents must also consider their children's learning emotions. Parents can guide children to discover their learning emotions and encourage self-adjustment. Educational methods of excessive punishment and beating and scolding may lead to disharmony and inwarm parent-child relationship. If parents guide their children to develop self-fulfilling learning concepts and a sense of social mission, this may be more conducive to children's positive learning emotions.

Study Limitations.

This study conducted in-depth interviews with students and their parents, which can clearly reveal the causes of primary school students' learning distress. However, there is a lack of third-party participation. If interview materials with teachers, other relatives, neighbors, and student companions are added, the reliability of the interpretation of the research results will be increased.

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