

Causes and Recommendations for the Involution of Chinese Family Education

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Abstract: Addressing the phenomenon of involution currently observed in Chinese family education, this paper employs interviews and analyzes various dimensions including social background, traditional culture, educational systems, and family education concepts to elucidate the roots of involution in Chinese family education. Considering the adverse impacts of this involution on children's physical and mental development, comprehensive growth, and family relationships, targeted recommendations are proposed. Through collaborative efforts among society, schools, and families to optimize the allocation of educational resources, transform educational concepts, and improve family education practices, this study aims to create a healthier, more harmonious, and conducive educational environment for the comprehensive development of children.

Keywords: Family Education, Involution, Causes, Recommendations, Educational Concepts

1. Introduction

In recent years, a phenomenon known as "involution" has garnered widespread societal attention within Chinese family education. Parents have exceedingly high educational expectations for their children, starting from enrollment. They excessively pursue high scores, top rankings, and admission into prestigious schools, spending substantial sums on school district housing and sacrificing their weekends for their children's extracurricular tutoring. Children's academic performance has become the sole criterion for the success of family education, overshadowing the development of children's interests and talents. This leads to children experiencing immense pressure, physical and mental exhaustion, and even psychological issues [1]. In a highly competitive and stressful educational environment, involution means that educational expenses become a significant part of family outlays, resulting in overwhelming family education pressures; children suffer from lack of sleep, have no free weekends, and endure excessive psychological stress, affecting their healthy growth; and for society, it is not conducive to nurturing talents with innovative capabilities and learning skills [2].

The formation of this phenomenon in Chinese family education is not coincidental. Therefore, this paper delves deeply into the causes of the involution phenomenon in Chinese family education from multiple perspectives and offers corresponding recommendations to improve family education and promote the comprehensive development of children.

2. Analysis of the Causes of the Involution Phenomenon in Chinese Family Education

2.1. Social Background

With the rapid development of China's economy, education has become increasingly important as a pathway for individual advancement and social mobility. Particularly in first-tier cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen, having a high academic background and graduating from prestigious universities have become prerequisites for employment. Every year, Fortune 500 companies recruit from these top universities, where graduates are assured of employment with high salaries, while graduates from ordinary universities face greater challenges in finding jobs. In this social context, parents naturally have high expectations for their children's education. Even in families with less favorable economic conditions, parents strive to provide their children with better education to achieve upward mobility and escape poverty and adversity.

In today's society, academic qualifications, abilities, and social connections have become measures of one's success. To ensure their children's future success, parents feel compelled to plan their children's life paths in advance and increase investment in their education. This desire for success and concern for the future contribute to the involution of family education.

2.2. Traditional Culture

In traditional Chinese culture, valuing education and promoting scholarship has been a consistent tradition. The concept of "hoping for children to become dragons and phoenixes" is deeply rooted, with parents aspiring for their children to excel and bring honor to the family. Every parent hopes their child will be admitted to prestigious universities like the "985" or "211" schools. Families whose children achieve this become objects of envy among neighbors and colleagues. Traditional culture exacerbates the involution of family education.

2.3. Educational System

For Chinese students, the entrance examinations for senior and higher education are the two most important exams in their academic careers, both of which use a single score to determine admission to schools. Although the admission rates vary across the country, with generally about 50% of students being admitted to regular high schools, it still means that 50% of students will be eliminated from further education after the entrance exam. While the country vigorously develops vocational education, attending vocational schools due to poor exam performance implies a challenging path ahead. To ensure their children enter regular or prestigious high schools, parents are compelled to enroll them in various training programs and even one-on-one tutoring. The competition for admission to top universities remains fierce, leading students and parents to continually engage in involutionary behaviors to secure a spot in these institutions [3].

2.4. Family Education

Parents' educational attitudes and approaches contribute to the phenomenon of involution in family education. Some parents lack educational literacy and employ unscientific methods and strategies, excessively emphasizing their children's academic performance and exam-taking abilities while neglecting the cultivation of their children's character, emotions, interests, talents, social adaptability, and interpersonal skills. A one-dimensional approach to education, coupled with impatience and neglect, leads to children feeling resentful and resistant, thus undermining the effectiveness of family education. Parents also excessively rely on extracurricular tutoring and training institutions, outsourcing their children's education entirely to external forces, while disregarding the importance

and responsibility of family education. This educational approach not only subjects children to immense pressure but also limits their comprehensive development.

Parents' occupations also significantly influence the involution of family education. For instance, parents who are civil servants, doctors, or teachers often have higher expectations for their children's education due to the nature of their work. They hope their children will inherit their professions or enter better schools for a brighter future. This expectation exacerbates the involution of family education to some extent [4].

Moreover, parental concerns about face-saving contribute to the involution of family education. Influenced by negative social phenomena like comparison and competition, children's achievements are often seen as a family's glory. Consequently, when parents compare their children's achievements with those of their colleagues, friends, or in public social settings, those who aspire for their children to excel may intensify their efforts in their children's education. The concept of "not letting children fall behind at the starting line" prompts parents to expose their children to knowledge learning prematurely, while the notion of "success requires sacrifice" drives parents to pursue their children's success at any cost, further exacerbating the involution of family education [5].

3. The Impact of the Involution Phenomenon in Chinese Family Education

3.1. Impact on Children's Physical and Mental Health

In a highly competitive and stressful environment, children may feel overwhelmed by the expectations placed on them by their parents and society, leading to negative emotions such as inferiority and helplessness. Moreover, excessive academic pressure and extracurricular tutoring can deprive children of their rest and leisure time, resulting in physical and mental exhaustion and even affecting their normal growth and development. The involution phenomenon in family education has also led to psychological issues such as anxiety and depression among children. According to the "China National Mental Health Development Report (2019-2020)" released by the Institute of Psychology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, the detection rate of depression among Chinese adolescents is 24.6%, with mild depression at 17.2% and severe depression at 7.4% [6].

3.2. Impact on Children's Comprehensive Development

An excessive focus on academic achievements and prestigious educational backgrounds may restrict the development of children's interests and talents. Under the pressure of involution in family education, children may be forced to give up their personal interests and hobbies, devoting themselves entirely to exam-oriented learning. This not only can lead to a distaste and aversion to learning but also may hinder their potential and abilities in other areas.

3.3. Impact on Family Relationships

The involution phenomenon in family education can lead to strained family relationships. Under high competition and pressure, conflicts and contradictions might arise between parents and children. Parents may have excessively high expectations for their children's academic performance and behavior, while children may be unable to meet these demands, leading to tension and estrangement in parent-child relationships.

4. Recommendations to Alleviate the Involution Phenomenon in Chinese Family Education

4.1. Optimize the Allocation of Educational Resources

Firstly, there is a need to reform the existing educational system by breaking away from the singular evaluation criteria of exams and scores. Implementing diversified assessments that emphasize the comprehensive qualities and abilities of children can help alleviate parental overemphasis on academic performance. Simultaneously, optimizing the allocation of educational resources is crucial to ensure that every child has access to fair and high-quality educational resources, thereby reducing the pressure of family education involution. The government should increase investment in education and optimize the allocation of educational resources to enhance both the quality and equity of education. By increasing support for education in rural and impoverished areas, narrowing the education gap between urban and rural regions, and alleviating competition pressure in family education [7].

4.2. Strengthen Parental Education Guidance

Government and social organizations should strengthen guidance on parental education to help parents cultivate correct educational concepts and reduce educational anxiety. Through lectures, seminars, and other forms, providing parents with scientific educational methods and strategies can guide them to focus on their children's holistic development rather than solely academic achievements [8]. Parents should shift their focus from excessive pursuit of academic performance to comprehensive development. Emphasis should be placed on cultivating children's physical and mental health, social adaptability, interpersonal skills, and respecting their interests and talents [9].

4.3. Improve Family Education Practices

Parents should learn scientific educational methods and strategies, emphasizing the cultivation of children's autonomy in learning and innovative spirit. Avoiding excessive reliance on extracurricular tutoring and training institutions, allowing children to learn and grow in a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere. Additionally, parents should strengthen communication and interaction with their children to establish a good parent-child relationship [10].

4.4. Expand Diverse Educational Pathways

Encouraging and supporting diverse educational pathways such as vocational education, arts education, etc., provides children with more choices and development space. This not only can alleviate the pressure of academic competition but also enables children to find development paths that suit their interests and talents.

4.5. Enhance School-Home-Community Collaboration in Education

Family education and social education should complement and promote each other. By strengthening communication and collaboration among schools, communities, and families, a favorable environment for children's growth can be collectively created. Moreover, advocating for attention to family education issues from all sectors of society can jointly promote the healthy development of family education [11].

5. Conclusion

The formation of the involution phenomenon in Chinese family education is multifaceted, involving the combined effects of factors such as social background, traditional culture, education system, and parental education concepts. To alleviate this phenomenon, we need to address it from multiple perspectives, including optimizing the allocation of educational resources, transforming educational concepts, improving family education practices, and strengthening parental education guidance. Only by doing so can we create a healthier, more harmonious, and conducive educational environment for children. Additionally, we need to recognize that family education is a long-term and complex process that requires collaborative efforts from schools, society, and families to promote its healthy development.

6. Outlook

Faced with the phenomenon of involution in family education, we need the collective efforts and sustained attention of the entire society. Through reforms in the education system, optimization of educational resource allocation, and strengthening of parental education guidance, we are confident in gradually alleviating this phenomenon and creating a more relaxed and healthy growth environment for children. Moreover, we look forward to more research and exploration in the future, providing further wisdom and insights for the development of family education.

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