Review of Studies on Middle Class Education Anxiety

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Abstract. With the popularization of middle class education anxiety in the whole society over the years, an increasing number of people have shown their concern about the phenomenon, followed by some research on it by domestic and foreign scholars. In this paper, a literature review on the current research status of education anxiety shall be carried out from multiple aspects, including its definition, research process, research perspective, causes and countermeasures.

Definition of "Education Anxiety"

Given the small number of existing studies involving the concept of "education anxiety", there is still no consensus on it. As education anxiety belongs to social anxiety, the premise of its clear definition is to clarify the concept of "social anxiety". According to professor Wu Zhongmin, social anxiety refers to a stressful psychological state that is prevalent among members of society.⁹ As proposed by Pang Zhaocu, Wang Xinyang and Zhang Bolin, social anxiety refers to the anxiety, restlessness and nervousness of members in society due to their work, life, future or wealth.⁹ Zhao Xin argued that, the so-called social anxiety is the social psychological phenomenon formed when the stress, depression, dissatisfaction, irrational impulse and worry generated by various factors in the society spread to the majority of the group.³⁶

As suggested by the views of the foresaid scholars on "social anxiety", "education anxiety" as the object of this study might be summarized as a social psychological phenomenon formed when some parents' stress, depression, dissatisfaction, irrational impulse, worry and other stress psychology caused by various factors spread to the majority of the group in their children's education.

Research Course of Education Anxiety in China

As a type of emotion, education anxiety was studied in the field of psychology in the first place, with a brief history of only about 30 years.⁴ With test anxiety as the starting point, studies on education anxiety mainly focused on students' anxiety and restlessness caused by entrance examinations and other qualification examinations, which was referred to as "test anxiety" or "exam anxiety". The study of test anxiety was generally subject to the impact of two schools, namely the Iowa school with the drive theory as the core and the Yale school with the obstruction theory as the core. TAI (Test Anxiety Inventory), a questionnaire compiled by Yale scholar Spielberger, was first introduced by Chinese scholars to conduct factor analysis of the test anxiety of college students in China. Five factors that would trigger test anxiety of Chinese college students were identified.⁵

The problem of anxiety was not formally brought into the field of pedagogy until 1987, when Ye Renmin published in Foreign Education Dynamics a translation of "Test Anxiety: A Crucial Education Problem" by Hill et al.⁶ With the subsequent curriculum reforms in China, the society showed greater attention to educational participants, especially students, accompanied by scholars' concern on education anxiety. Since the seventh curriculum reform in 1992, learning anxiety had been accounted as one of the research hotspots, which was in line with the prevailing trend of "exam-oriented education" at that time. In contrast to most studies that explored students' characteristics, including personality, achievement motivation, and intelligence level, few of them examined the influence of family, society, and school on students' learning anxiety.⁷

In June 2001, the State Council promulgated the Decision on Deepening Education Reform and
Comprehensively Promoting Quality Education. The forward of quality education resulted in the expansion of focus of scholars’ engaged in the study of education anxiety. Moreover, the rapid development of economy and the acceleration of social transformation gave rise to unprecedented social anxieties such as competition, conflict, hostility and fear. This would for sure bring an impact on education and lead to the alienation of education, which in essence was education anxiety. At this point, educators and even parents were gradually included in the study of education anxiety, not only students; In terms of forms, various forms of educational activities were introduced into the study of education anxiety, not only learning anxiety or test anxiety; Also, not only a state, education anxiety tended to be recognized as a disease, i.e. "education anxiety", as it is frequently referred to nowadays.

Research Perspectives of Education Anxiety

At present, scholars' research on education anxiety is largely based on the classification of different individuals. Some of them are from a disciplinary perspective, such as math anxiety, which refers to the negative emotions such as restlessness, nervousness and fear when individuals are dealing with numbers, using mathematical concepts, learning mathematical knowledge, solving mathematical problems or taking math exams. In a large number of studies on math anxiety up to now, the causes, consequences and solutions of math anxiety are focused on most occasions, which on the whole conforms to the emotional goals stipulated in the mathematics curriculum standards of compulsory education in China.

Some scholars conduct discussion on education anxiety from the perspective of educational groups, in which the focus is on parents. As a special group in the education process, they take charge of the initial informal enlightening education for children and therefore indirectly participate in the whole educational process, implying the profound impact of their outlook on life, values and educational views on the growth and even the whole life of children. Given the special emotional connection with their children, parents' concerns about their studies and the resulting anxiety are actually understandable. Whereas, the anxiety of a great many of Chinese parents has gone way beyond the norm and has morphed into "education anxiety". Mainly due to excessive anxiety about children's education, the symptoms of parents' "education anxiety" include the fear of "education backwardness" throughout the whole process of education, the pressure of "heavy burden of education", and the worry of "education incompetence" in terms of educational results. This has led to high expectations of their children's education and the resulting improper educational behavior. Get to the root of it. It is the unfair competition for education, a limited and scarce resource in society, that bears the brunt. Educators are therefore calling for the guidance and treatment of parents who are as well victims, implying that parents’ enlightenment is a prerequisite for the solution of children's education problems.

Some scholars have studied education anxiety from the perspective of teachers. In view of teachers’ core position in the education system, the study of their anxiety has always been a critical part of research on teachers. With this regard, Chinese scholars have made a lot of explorations from different perspectives. For example, in terms of the causes of teacher anxiety, some studies adopt the perspective of the basic environment of education, while others introduce the perspective of educational changes. In the research on the results of teacher anxiety, scholars have generally reached a consensus that excessive teachers anxiety shall bring negative impact on themselves and even their students.

In addition, there are a large number of studies on education anxiety from the perspective of students, which might be subdivided into studies on differences in education anxiety among students of different school ages and genders, such as young children, primary school students, middle school students, high school students and college students. By introducing tools including the Chinese version of the Spence children anxiety scale, some scholars conducted a survey on 1,506 middle school students and reached similar conclusions. That is, except about 15% of them are prone to different types of anxiety, the anxiety level of junior middle school students was not significant as a whole. The current research on the anxiety of college students is mainly carried
out from two aspects, namely the investigation of college students' anxiety, and the analysis of the influencing factors on college students' anxiety.\[15\]

**Research on the Causes of Education Anxiety**

Among the few researches on the causes of education anxiety, the emphasis is mostly put on the causes of students' anxiety. It is believed by some scholars that students at different levels of learning anxiety tend to demonstrate different attributions to their learning results, which is correlated with their learning anxiety level in terms of incentive after-effect.\[16\] Based on this, a study on the group of college students was conducted by scholars and it was concluded that, there were significant differences in anxiety attribution among the sample students of different anxiety groups. Compared with those in the high anxiety group, students in the low anxiety group and the normal group were more inclined to choose the positive way of attribution. In other words, students in the high anxiety group were more likely to attribute their success to external and unstable factors, and such negative attribution shall gradually lead to a vicious circle, which might result in the lack of motivation for positive behaviors in the high anxiety group.\[17\]

**Research on Countermeasures of Education Anxiety**

Research on the countermeasures of education anxiety is mostly based on the negative status of education anxiety mentioned in the foresaid three sections. According to the source, the current research on countermeasures might be divided into two categories, that is, to the external environment of education and. Among them, strategies to the external environment of education mainly include the optimization of school management system, the change of parenting style, the adjustment of students' test method and proportion, the exploration of life and emotion education, etc.; Strategies to the internal of individuals include the change of cognitive style and way of attribution, the improvement of personality, the cultivation of rationality, psychological intervention, the development of self-esteem, introspection, etc.\[18\]

**Analysis of Existing Research**

As manifested in relevant literature, a majority of existing studies on education anxiety focus on different groups. By collecting a large number of primary data from key issues and hotspots, they provide a scientific and reliable basis for the understanding and adjustment of current education anxiety. Moreover, the current research engages in the anxiety of students of all school ages, while the anxiety of teachers and parents are as well involved in a small part of it. In addition, through the introduction of attribution and the disciplinary perspective, the scope of research on education anxiety has been expanded, with the connotation of education anxiety being further enriched from a new perspective. Nevertheless, there are still deficiencies in the existing researches on education anxiety. Firstly, the theoretical concept remains vague. The definitions of education anxiety are mostly borrowed from similar concepts in other disciplines, such as psychology and anthropology. Or, instead of accurately defining its depth and scope, education anxiety is addressed directly as a common sense term that is assumed to be familiar to all. Secondly, there is a lack of diversity in research perspectives and methods. As a review of the research of domestic scholars reveals, their researches are largely based on the current situation and cases of education anxiety. The anxiety scale or self-designed scale are adopted to carry out quantitative analysis, so as to disclose the degree and status quo of education anxiety. However, they fail to carry out systematic and comprehensive discussions on the ontology, structure, mechanism and characteristics of education anxiety. As it were, characterized by micro-subjectivity and practicality, the existing researches ought to be improved in terms of effective theoretical support and grasp of the whole. Thirdly, in terms of research methods, quantitative research is extensively adopted while qualitative research is rarely involved, which might be attributed to the influence of the discipline of psychology to a large extent. In view of the complexity of education anxiety, it is not conducive to a comprehensive and accurate
grasp of education anxiety to conduct quantitative research before identifying its connotation and denotation, when the knowledge of it is usually lacking in completeness. Hence, the countermeasures or suggestions proposed at this point may not fundamentally eliminate the problem in the long run, despite their short-term effectiveness.

References


