

Current status and improvement strategies of educational literacy among rural parents

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Abstract: Parents' educational literacy constitutes the core determinant of family education quality, exerting far-reaching effects on children's cognitive development, personality formation, social conduct and academic achievement. This study selected parents from rural areas in the eastern, central, and western regions of Shandong Province as research subjects. Through questionnaire surveys and interviews, it systematically examined the current state of rural parents' educational literacy across dimensions such as educational beliefs, knowledge, and competencies. The study analyzed existing issues and proposed targeted improvement strategies from the perspectives of the individual, the family, and the school, with the aim of providing practical guidance for optimizing the rural family education ecosystem.

Keywords: rural parents; educational literacy; family education

1 Introduction

Parental educational literacy serves as the fundamental guarantee for the effective implementation of family education. Its level directly determines the effectiveness of family education and has a profound impact on the physical and mental health as well as the comprehensive development of minors. Currently, family education in rural China remains in a stage of continuous improvement, and insufficient parental educational literacy has become a major factor constraining the enhancement of rural family education quality.

This study focuses on the educational literacy of rural parents and conducts an empirical investigation that holds both theoretical value and practical significance. At the family level, it can help parents update their educational beliefs, resolve practical challenges in family education, and support the healthy development of families and children; at the school level, it provides practical guidance for schools to conduct family education counseling and promotes home-school collaboration in education; and at the societal level, it contributes to optimizing the overall rural educational ecosystem and offers insights for advancing family education efforts in other rural areas.

2 Research design

This study employs a questionnaire survey to investigate the current status and challenges regarding the educational literacy of rural parents, and uses in-depth interviews to analyze existing problems and needs, thereby exploring pathways to enhance the educational literacy of rural parents.

The research area was selected from rural regions within the four cities of Yantai, Weifang, Jinan, and Heze in Shandong Province, covering different geographical types in the eastern, central, and western parts of the province to

ensure sample representativeness. The study employed a self-designed questionnaire covering five dimensions: parents' educational beliefs, knowledge, competencies, concerns, and needs, as well as their participation in family education guidance. A large-scale questionnaire survey was conducted among rural parents, yielding a total of 1,634 valid responses. Building on this, 18 parents representing various educational stages and 12 frontline teachers were selected for telephone interviews to deeply explore the practical issues underlying the questionnaire data, thereby providing an empirical foundation for subsequent problem analysis and strategy development.

3 Issues regarding the educational literacy of rural parents

3.1 One-sided educational beliefs

The educational views of some rural parents have not kept pace with the development of modern education, and traditional notions of education still hold a dominant position [1]. Survey results show that 68.3% of rural parents regard their children's academic performance as the core goal of family education, neglecting the children's holistic development in areas such as character, personality, and interests; 40.82% of parents endorse strict disciplinary approaches, which often overlook children's inner feelings and emotional needs, lacking respect and understanding for their children. At the same time, 36.6% of parents do not place sufficient emphasis on the inheritance of local rural culture; they rarely incorporate local cultural elements into their daily education, making it difficult to effectively foster a sense of identity and belonging to their local culture in their children.

3.2 Imbalance in educational responsibilities

Currently, rural families generally face an uneven distribution of child-rearing responsibilities, and a collaborative parenting model has yet to take shape. In most rural households, mothers bear the entire burden of family education, while only about one-third of families manage to have both parents participate jointly in their children's upbringing. It is relatively common for fathers to have low levels of involvement and to be absent from their parenting roles. The long-term absence of fathers can easily lead to issues such as distorted gender perceptions, incomplete personality development, and a weak sense of responsibility in children. Furthermore, the economic conditions of rural households also impose certain constraints on family education, resulting in unequal parenting conditions across different families. 76.87% of rural households have an annual income below 100,000 yuan, with nearly half of these earning less than 50,000 yuan. These limited financial resources make it difficult for some parents to access high-quality family education resources; they are unable to purchase professional parenting books or attend paid family education training programs, nor can they broaden their children's horizons through field trips or hands-on experiences.

3.3 Lack of knowledge and methods

On the one hand, rural parents clearly lack the necessary background to guide their children in scientific and cultural knowledge, making it difficult to meet their children's thirst for learning. Nearly half of the parents admitted that they are often unable to answer the various questions their children ask about scientific and cultural topics. This not only fails to provide effective support for their children's academic development but also, to some extent, weakens their children's enthusiasm for asking questions and exploring the unknown. At the same time, parents' prolonged inability to address their children's intellectual curiosities gradually erodes their educational authority in their children's eyes.

On the other hand, the methods rural parents employ in home education contain numerous unscientific elements that directly impact educational outcomes. Survey results show that 42.9% of parents use their cell phones in front of their children while they are doing homework. This behavior not only distracts children from their studies and hinders the development of good study habits but also severely undermines the parents' educational influence, making it difficult for them to set a good example for their children; 59.67% of parents habitually use material rewards to motivate their children

to study. Over time, this leads children to gradually view learning as a means to obtain rewards, thereby diminishing their intrinsic motivation for learning.

3.4 Insufficient home-school collaboration

Survey data indicates that parents consider the three most urgent areas for family education guidance to be the cultivation of children's moral character and habits, the development of study habits and interests, and mental health education. However, parents' demand for guidance on their personal growth stands at only 22.4%, indicating that they focus more on "how to educate their children" and have not yet fully realized that "their own personal growth" is the root solution to their children's issues.

In terms of home-school collaboration, there is a lack of regular communication mechanisms between home and school. 43.08% of parents occasionally communicate with teachers, while 24.54% rarely do so, lacking regular channels for interaction with teachers. Communication primarily focuses on academic performance, while topics such as children's interests and hobbies, peer interactions, and the preservation of rural cultural heritage are rarely addressed, indicating a lack of consensus between home and school regarding educational goals. Parents' participation in family education guidance and home-school collaboration is largely passive, with an active participation rate of less than 30%. Some parents frequently skip family education guidance activities due to busy work schedules or a lack of awareness, thereby shirking their educational responsibilities.

4 Strategies for improving the educational literacy of rural parents

4.1 Updating educational beliefs

Conduct tiered outreach to disseminate educational beliefs and dispel traditional misconceptions. Through formats such as specialized lectures delivered by experts in rural areas and analyses of family education case studies, modern educational concepts are introduced to parents, helping them recognize that family education should focus on children's holistic development rather than merely pursuing academic performance; at the same time, through accessible formats such as educational short videos, village broadcasts, and presentations in cultural halls, knowledge about the patterns of children's physical and mental development can be systematically disseminated, guiding parents to abandon a single, strict disciplinary approach and learn to listen to their children and respect their inner needs.

Establish platforms for collaborative parenting to address the issue of absent fathers. Village committees, in collaboration with local schools, should regularly organize special activities such as "Fathers' Parenting Salons" and "Parent-Child Research and Study Workshops", as well as other distinctive activities. They can invite exemplary fathers from rural areas to share parenting experiences, thereby weakening the traditional division of labor that views men as "the breadwinners" and women as "the homemakers". This guides fathers to actively engage in the entire process of family education and fosters a parenting model where both parents share the responsibility of raising their children.

4.2 Strengthening parenting capabilities

Establish a tiered and categorized system to deliver universal educational resources and precisely meet parents' needs. To address parents' needs regarding guidance on children's scientific and cultural knowledge, moral development, and mental health education, we have organized education experts and frontline teachers to compile easy-to-understand family education guidance manuals and produce a series of short video courses. Taking into account the economic realities of rural families, all learning resources are made available free of charge and distributed through multiple channels—including online learning platforms, village-level cultural service stations, and school-based parent education programs—to ensure that parents have convenient access to professional parenting knowledge [2].

We will offer hands-on, specialized family education training sessions to correct inappropriate parenting behaviors.

Specialized guidance will focus on leading by example, clearly encouraging parents to reduce their use of electronic devices during their children's study times to set a positive example. At the same time, we will educate parents on scientific and diverse motivational strategies, guiding them to reduce the frequency of material rewards and instead use verbal encouragement and emotional affirmation to stimulate children's intrinsic motivation for learning, allowing them to experience the joy of learning itself.

4.3 Strengthening home-school collaboration

Strengthen parents' awareness of their personal growth and incorporate the improvement of parents' educational literacy into the family education guidance system. In various family education guidance activities, methods such as case studies and concept presentations can be adopted to help parents recognize that "parents are their children's first teachers" and that improving their own educational literacy is the foundation for effective family education. Parents can be guided to actively focus on their personal growth and learning, and place equal importance on improving their own educational literacy and their children's upbringing.

Optimize the provision of family education guidance by schools to stimulate parents' intrinsic motivation to participate. Schools should reduce the use of group lecture-style guidance and instead introduce diverse formats such as individual counseling, small-group discussions, experience-sharing sessions, and parent support groups to provide targeted guidance services addressing the specific challenges and needs of different families [3]. Education authorities should establish a supervision mechanism to ensure that primary and secondary schools within their jurisdictions routinely conduct family education guidance, thereby solidifying the schools' leading role in home-school collaboration.

4.4 Building a support system

Establish a family education support system involving tripartite collaboration among the government, schools, and communities to ensure the enhancement of rural parents' educational literacy [4]. At the government level, increase targeted fiscal investment in rural family education, coordinate the construction of more family education guidance service stations and rural reading rooms, and equip them with professional parenting books and resources; village committees or neighborhood committees should leverage their grassroots organizational and coordination functions to plan and implement various family education outreach and practical activities; schools should leverage their teaching staff and professional educational expertise to provide parents with specialized and diverse family education guidance, with all parties working together to bridge the "last mile" in services aimed at enhancing the educational literacy of rural parents.

5 Conclusion

The educational literacy of rural parents is the core pillar of family education quality, and its improvement is key to advancing the development of rural family education. Through field research, this study has identified the practical challenges currently faced by rural parents in areas such as educational beliefs, division of responsibilities, knowledge base, teaching methods, and home-school collaboration. It proposes systematic improvement strategies from the perspectives of updating educational beliefs, building capacity, fostering home-school collaboration, and empowering multiple stakeholders. Enhancing the educational literacy of rural parents is not the sole responsibility of the family but rather a systematic endeavor requiring concerted efforts and collaboration among families, schools, and communities. Through targeted and inclusive guidance and services, parents can be encouraged to continuously update their educational understanding and enhance their parenting skills, thereby truly achieving mutual growth between themselves and their children. Only by continuously strengthening the foundation of rural parents' educational literacy can we resolve the various challenges in rural family education at their root and fully leverage the educational value of the family in the growth and development of rural children.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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