

Exploring the Pathway of Family Education: Insights from the Marital and Reproductive Values of University Students in China

Chao Zhang

School of Chinese Studies, Zhejiang International Studies University, Zhejiang Hangzhou 310023

Abstract: This study examines the formation of marital and reproductive attitudes among university students in light of diverse societal influences and changing cultural norms. Drawing on existing research, a shift towards individual values such as personal growth and emotional companionship over traditional familial obligations, influenced by factors including family background, educational experiences, societal norms, and cultural influences was revealed. Notably, a gender disparity exists, with female students exhibiting lower willingness towards marriage and childbirth. Thus, gender perspectives are crucial in educational interventions. Additionally, online platforms like anime and web novels complicate attitudes, necessitating multifaceted educational strategies. Efforts in marital and reproductive education should focus on longitudinal and systematic programs integrating values education across curricula levels. Personalized strategies addressing diverse student needs and gender-specific concerns are essential. This study highlights the complexity of shaping marital and reproductive attitudes among university students and underscores the importance of targeted strategies informed by individual, societal, and cultural factors.

Keywords: marital attitudes, reproductive attitudes, university students, educational interventions

Introduction

Marriage and reproduction play pivotal roles in societal development, shaping demographic structures, family dynamics, and cultural norms. In contemporary societies, particularly in the context of declining birth rates, understanding and guiding the marital and reproductive attitudes of young adults, especially university students, have emerged as crucial endeavors. The evolving landscape of values and perceptions regarding marriage and parenthood among this demographic not only reflects broader societal trends but also influences future population dynamics and familial structures^[1]. This paper aims to explore the current landscape and formation of marital and reproductive beliefs among university students in the context of low fertility rates, and to propose strategies for enhancing marriage and parenthood education tailored to this demographic.

This study aims to summarize the main characteristics of marital and reproductive attitudes among university students in China by analyzing relevant research literature. Following this, strategies for shaping marital and reproductive attitudes among university students are proposed, encompassing educational interventions, psychological support, advocacy, and policy recommendations. Finally, the paper will conclude with a summary of key findings and recommendations for future research and educational interventions in the field of marriage and parenthood education among university students.

This research contributes to the scholarly discourse surrounding contemporary marital and reproductive attitudes

among young adults, offering insights and practical recommendations for educators, policymakers, and researchers aiming to address the challenges posed by low fertility rates in modern societies.

1. Current Status of Marital and Reproductive Attitudes among Chinese University Students

By synthesizing findings from relevant studies, this analysis seeks to elucidate the prevailing characteristics of marital and reproductive attitudes within the Chinese university student population. Furthermore, this section explores the various factors that influence the formation of these attitudes among university students, including but not limited to family background, educational experiences, and societal and cultural influences.

Through quantitative surveys, most studies typically encompass topics such as romantic experiences, ideal ages for marriage and parenthood, preferences and intentions regarding marriage and reproduction, perceived utility and impediments to marriage and parenthood, attitudes towards non-traditional marital and reproductive behaviors, understanding of and demand for existing marriage and parenthood policies, as well as the impact of internet engagement on marital and reproductive attitudes^[2].

The marital and reproductive attitudes of university students can be characterized by three main points. Firstly, it is evident that university students still hold expectations towards marriage and family life, albeit with a shifting foundation of values supporting their marital and reproductive behaviors. In contrast to the traditional functions of marriage and reproduction focused on safeguarding familial lineage and continuity, contemporary youth emphasize the individualistic values of mutual support, personal growth, emotional companionship, and spiritual fulfillment within the institution of marriage^[3]. Marriage and parenthood are no longer perceived as predetermined life milestones but are rather viewed as means of realizing individual values, aligning with the concept of "individualized marriage" proposed by Cherlin^[4], where the family becomes centered around individual needs, with greater emphasis on emotional expression and fulfillment, rather than adhering to specific familial roles.

Secondly, the low inclination towards marriage and parenthood among university students is more likely attributable to impediments rather than a shift in attitudes. High costs associated with marriage and parenthood, potential conflicts with personal development, and competitive pressures are commonly cited as the primary hindrances^[5]. In the backdrop of societal transformation and rapid modernization in China, contemporary youth must confront the high costs associated with marriage and parenthood, compounded by structural changes in the labor market affecting education, mobility, and career prospects, exacerbating societal competition.

Thirdly, distinct gender disparities and social stratification are evident in university students' marital intentions. Female students not only exhibit significantly lower marriage intentions compared to their male counterparts but also express a preference for fewer children and perceive greater obstacles to marriage and parenthood, accompanied by lower perceived utility in childbearing^[6]. Furthermore, male and female students demonstrate differing concerns and expectations regarding marriage and parenthood policies: while males prioritize reducing the costs associated with marriage and parenthood, females are more concerned with individual development opportunities. Additionally, there exists a significant negative correlation between students' socioeconomic status and their inclination towards marriage and parenthood. Students with higher socioeconomic status perceive greater societal risks and corresponding impediments to marriage and parenthood.

Furthermore, the peer networks and community norms within different online circles shape students' perceptions of romantic relationships and family dynamics, thereby influencing their views on marriage and parenthood. There is a stronger negative correlation between university students' engagement with anime and online literature circles and their marital and reproductive attitudes. These platforms often depict content that abstracts or idealizes real-life scenarios, creating a contrasting parallel space that diminishes young adults' demand for and expectations of real-life experiences^[7].

2. Pathways for Constructing Marital and Reproductive Education Programs among University

Students

To assist university students in forming healthy marital and reproductive attitudes, the strategies containing implementation of education courses, provision of counseling and support services, and conducting advocacy and awareness campaigns are proposed, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 Strategies for Marital and Reproductive Education Programs

Strategies	Marital Attitudes	Reproductive Attitudes
Implementation of Education Courses:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Develop comprehensive courses covering communication skills, conflict resolution, family planning policies, and reproductive health. ◆ Utilize interactive teaching methods like case studies, role-playing, and group discussions. ◆ Emphasize the importance of respect, trust, and shared goals in marital relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Develop comprehensive courses covering reproductive health knowledge, family planning policies, reproductive psychological adjustment, and family reproductive planning. ◆ Utilize lectures, discussions, and practical activities to teach reproductive-related knowledge and skills. ◆ Emphasize the importance of responsible reproductive decision-making and the significance of reproduction for individuals and society.
Provision of Counseling and Support Services:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Offer individual and couples counseling services focused on addressing challenges in marital relationships and providing reproductive planning guidance. ◆ Provide resources for students to enhance their communication skills, conflict resolution strategies, and emotional well-being. ◆ Encourage proactive help-seeking behavior and emphasize the value of investing time and effort in maintaining healthy relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Offer reproductive planning counseling services to help students understand reproductive policies, family planning measures, and reproductive rights. ◆ Provide resources for students to make rational reproductive plans based on their personal and family circumstances. ◆ Encourage students to actively participate in reproductive planning and practice, fostering responsible reproductive attitudes.
Conducting Advocacy and Awareness Campaigns:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Organize multimedia campaigns, workshops, and community events to raise awareness about positive marital attitudes and family concepts. ◆ Promote messages emphasizing mutual respect, gender equality, and responsible family planning. ◆ Engage students through social media platforms, campus events, and peer-led discussions to foster a supportive environment for open dialogue on marital issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Organize campaigns, community discussions, and social media promotions to convey positive reproductive attitudes and family reproductive concepts. ◆ Promote messages highlighting the social responsibility of reproduction and the importance of family happiness. ◆ Encourage students to recognize the significance of reproduction for individuals, families, and society, fostering positive attitudes towards reproductive planning.

This structured approach ensures a comprehensive and targeted intervention for shaping both marital and reproductive attitudes among contemporary university students. Enhancing the development of marital and reproductive education among university students requires a clear delineation of educational content to establish a positive tone for marital and reproductive values education. Diversifying educational methodologies is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of marital

and reproductive values education, integrating rational and emotional education, combining common and individualized education, blending long-term and stage-specific education. Innovating educational platforms to incorporate multifaceted approaches in marital and reproductive values education is essential for fostering a conducive educational environment and expediting the establishment of a coordinated mechanism for supporting student development.

The foundation of marital and reproductive education for university students lies in fostering a dialectical unity between their understanding of the societal and personal values inherent in marriage and reproductivity. This necessitates a comprehensive perspective, elevated political stance, and broader mindset to grasp the profound significance of marital and reproductive matters. It is imperative to elucidate the formation of marital and reproductive values and the rationale behind their necessity.

Simultaneously, emphasis should be placed on emotional aspects. Recognizing university students as individuals with concrete thoughts, emotions, and beliefs, their marital and reproductive education must also address emotional factors. This entails actively guiding them based on their actual needs, emotions, consciousness, and beliefs, which may not always align with rational reasoning. Understanding the practical psychology, emotions, and material needs of contemporary university students is crucial, particularly in redirecting irrational inclinations towards materialism in romantic relationships, extreme individualism, and base interests^[7]. Enriching emotional experiences in life and reinforcing a sense of responsibility and accountability in romantic endeavors are essential for instilling positive moral habits in university students.

In the information age, characterized by a complex and diverse online environment, there is a growing need to enhance the specificity of marital and reproductive education for university students. On one hand, it is essential to strengthen common education by comprehensively advancing the guiding role of "ideological and political education" in healthy marital and reproductive values, continually enhancing the effectiveness of ideological and political work in soul-cultivation, and ensuring the inclusiveness and wide coverage of the educational targets.

On the other hand, emphasis should be placed on individualized education to improve precision and effectiveness. Firstly, precise content entails understanding the current status of university students' views on relationships and marriage, regularly tracking their ideological dynamics and educational needs, and focusing on the specific ideological perplexities faced by university students. This includes addressing questions such as whether to engage in romantic relationships during university, how to approach romantic relationships, establishing appropriate views on romance, managing romantic setbacks, understanding the concept of family, and achieving personal life values, thus identifying key areas for intervention^[8]. Secondly, precise targeting should be considered in terms of a notably lower willingness to have children among female students compared to male counterparts. Therefore, attention should be paid to gender perspectives in reproductive values, with a focus on humanities students, female university student cohorts, groups inclined towards late marriage or no marriage, groups inclined towards late parenthood or no parenthood, and individuals holding negative views towards reproductive values. Efforts should be made to grasp the common educational aspects while effectively identifying and addressing specific issues. Thirdly, precision in pathways is crucial. Leveraging online ideological and political education and big data, particularly in utilizing the important domain of online ideological and political education, is essential for accurately understanding the educational needs and ideological dynamics of university students. This enables the provision of scientific and precise guidance strategies for family education.

Marital and reproductive education requires both horizontal integration and vertical alignment, emphasizing key aspects at each stage while maintaining a unified approach between stages. The formation of marital and reproductive values is a gradual process, which inherently makes marital and reproductive values education a long-term, systematic, and complex endeavor. It necessitates coordinated efforts to integrate marital and reproductive values education across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education.

On the other hand, the emphasis of family education should vary across different stages; for instance, in primary and secondary schools, the focus is on instilling initial understanding of the life cycle and fostering love for family and filial piety. In the early years of university, the focus should be centered on ethical aspects of romantic relationships,

interpersonal communication, and ethical considerations. In the later years of university, guidance should be provided on balancing career development and family planning. Tailored teaching methods should be employed based on students' psychological and physiological developmental characteristics, with a comprehensive teaching plan that effectively addresses the balance between reinforcing key concepts and avoiding redundant repetition. Curriculum development, course design, educational objectives, and teaching methods should reflect a progressive and sequential approach, promoting structured and progressively advancing marital and reproductive education.

3. Conclusion

This paper has examined the formation of marital and reproductive attitudes among university students in the context of diverse societal influences and changing cultural norms. Through an analysis of existing research literature and practical examples, several key findings and insights have emerged. With the exhibition of a shift in marital and reproductive attitudes, university students emphasize individual values such as personal growth, emotional companionship, and mutual support over traditional familial obligations. Factors such as family background, educational experiences, societal norms, and cultural influences play significant roles in shaping these attitudes. Moreover, there is a notable gender disparity in marital and reproductive attitudes among university students, with female students displaying lower willingness towards marriage and childbirth compared to their male counterparts. This underscores the importance of considering gender perspectives in educational interventions aimed at shaping marital and reproductive values. Additionally, the influence of societal and cultural factors further complicates their marital and reproductive attitudes. The prevalence of online platforms, such as anime and web novels, can both reflect and reinforce certain attitudes towards marriage and reproductivity, highlighting the need for comprehensive and multifaceted educational strategies.

Efforts in marital and reproductive education among university students should focus on several key areas. Firstly, there is a need for longitudinal and systematic educational programs that span across different educational stages, integrating marital and reproductive values education seamlessly into primary, secondary, and tertiary curricula. This holistic approach ensures the continuity and effectiveness of educational interventions. Secondly, personalized and targeted educational strategies should be employed to address the diverse needs and perspectives of university students. Emphasizing both rational and emotional education, as well as addressing gender-specific concerns, can enhance the relevance and impact of educational interventions. Thirdly, collaboration between educational institutions, policymakers, and societal stakeholders is essential to create a supportive environment for marital and reproductive education. This includes fostering partnerships with community organizations, promoting media literacy, and advocating for inclusive and comprehensive sexual education policies.

Conflicts of interest

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

Funding

This paper is the result of the 2024 Annual Project of Zhejiang Education Science Planning (Higher Institutions) "Research on the Construction of Marital and Reproductive Values among University Students in Zhejiang Province and the Development of Marriage and Parenting Education." (Project No. GH2024SCG380) and the result of the Boda High-level Project Cultivation Special Program, "Construction of Marital and Reproductive Values among Young People in Zhejiang Province and the Development of Supportive Policies for Childbirth." (Project No. 2024GCC3).

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