

Local engagements with China's family education policy: an analysis among parents and students in Shenzhen and Tianjin

Cara Chen^{1,a,*}, Aline Khoury^{2,b}

¹*Faculty of humanity, Shenzhen University, Yuehai Street, Shenzhen, China*

²*School of Advanced Study, University of London, London, UK*

a. Ccee0372@outlook.com, b. alinek.br@gmail.com

**Corresponding author*

Abstract: In this paper we discuss the role of parental participation in the educational journey of their children in two Chinese metropolises. We start by briefly addressing international policies for promoting parents' participation in children's school learnings and then discuss the recent China family education policy. We then discuss the findings of a study held with dozens of parents and students in Shenzhen and Tianjin cities, analyzing how students and parents have been reacting to this policy and how they interact more broadly in this learning journey at home and at the school space. The paper aims to promote further reflections on the importance of involving parents in education policy development.

Keywords: Education Policy; Parental Education; Chinese Education; Parental Participation.

1. Introduction: The Importance of Family Participation in Education and its Development in Key Contexts

Parents might have a long term impact in education processes which can promote a virtuous cycle throughout different generations. Cutting edge global schools are increasingly including in their practices the instruction of parents in order to stimulate natural learning at home, so it can be in constant complementation with the school learning. Studies like Sticht have underlined the impact of parental participation in education, demonstrating the differences in the domestic environment of privileged and average children, contrasting the quantity and quality of new words and concepts a child is likely to hear per week in these different environments [1]. He demonstrates how parents who are active in their children's education might play even a stronger role than limited school resources for teaching every child, and how the participation of these parents might even improve parenting empowerment in school programs - impacts which tend to be more sustainable overtime.

An analysis of parents' participation in education can be done through different perspectives. Venninen & Purola identify at least three different standpoints: the customer standpoint, which pays attention to parents' opinions and wishes; the partnership standpoint, which focuses on the mutual activities and concerns of school staff and parents in education; and the professional standpoint, which looks mostly into the staff's expertise for educating children [2]. A single school might have more than one of these perspectives and might have one of them stronger in certain domains and weaker in

others. Parents play a different role in students' education in each of these three perspectives. The customer standpoint and the professional standpoint often need to be combined to enable parents' participation in children's education. Schools might make efforts to manage this combination, constantly asking and giving feedback from and to parents, developing an atmosphere where school staff and parents communicate often and combine their abilities.

Another core policy concern in this discussion is how to support low-income parents to gain skills and education credentials while facing challenges for that, such as family obligations, work responsibilities and difficulty to access reliable child care. Eyster, Callan and Adams underline that low-income parents benefit from educational training in general, but face barriers to balance this with their work and further care responsibilities in the USA context. More than half of all low-income parents they analyzed were working but were not enrolled in any education activities because of workload and heavy family duties[3]. Overall, one third of parents were not attending any type of training and most of this group was composed of mothers, single parents, parents with little children and with more than one child. This underlines the importance of not only providing educational training for parents, but also to combine this with better provision of other essential policies such as child care and elderly care, as well as social protection support, to help low income parents to have the minimum conditions to attend education services and improve their skills.

Also, one should keep in mind that strategies to engage parents might be successful in some contexts but not in others, and that initiatives can be reshaped to adapt better to a situation. Mawjee & Grieshop analyze some interventions to facilitate parents participation in children's education at school [4]. One intervention was a newsletter box to improve the frequency and quality of communication between parents and the school - which showed only very limited results, with the box being ignored. Another intervention analyzed is a world map project developed in schools with students from very diverse nationalities and ancestries, inviting parents and students to fill in slips about their places of origin or ancestry. This more interactive and dynamic intervention was more successful and boosted parents' interest to participate in the school work, as well as teachers' motivation to keep on engaging parents. Still, some challenges were identified too, such as language and cultural barriers and lack of certain academic knowledge of parents with lower educational levels. Overall, it is important to analyze multiple interventions aiming to promote parents' participation so one can identify successful methods and experiment new methodologies for promoting this participation.

Despite the importance of involving parents in education and its core impact on children's development, it took a long time for family education to be formally considered in public policy around the world. Family education policy is still very uneven across the globe and with most policies being launched in the so-called developed countries. It is not only a private issue within the family, but also relates to the public sphere and national development. Therefore, many developed countries have noticed the importance of family education since the last century and introduced public policies to intervene in family education.

Some key examples of pioneer initiatives on family education policy were developed in the 80s in Scotland, the USA, France and Japan. "The School Boards Scotland Act" from 1988 encouraged the development of parent-teacher councils to help parents get involved in school education. Later on, the release of the "National improvement framework for Scottish education" required Scottish schools to promote measures to provoke parents to be deeply involved in their children's education. In 2018, Scotland released the policy "Learning together: Scotland's National Action Plan on home-school bonding, Parent Involvement, parenting and learning at home (2018-2021)", which aimed to ensure that parents are physically and emotionally involved in their children's educational journey. The USA released its first policy about early child education ('Head Start') in 1985, integrating home education into the school education system and requiring parents to get involved in school education. In France,

key initiatives in this area have been the National Seminar on Family Education Issues and REAAP - Réseaux D'écoute, D'appui et D'accompagnement des Parents (Network for Listening and Supporting Parents), a service providing training for parents to participate in their children's education. Japan's National Conference Report on Education Reform requested public organizations at the national and local levels to provide parenting lectures and counseling for all parents. More recently, some countries with a particularly multicultural population have seen the potential of parents' involvement in education to foster a more inclusive and diverse approach to education in schools. Also, teachers have been seen in such contexts as key bridges between the culture of pupils' households and the mainstream culture which tends to be promoted at school - with teachers proactively liaising with non-mainstream cultural families.

2. Contextualisation: Education Policy and Parents' Participation in Education in Contemporary China

Compared with the progress of family education policy in the world, China's family education policy implemented its first efforts in this direction quite later on. It was only in 2000 that China launched its first policy to intervene in family education. In 2021 the innovative and ambitious "*Family education promotion law*" was launched, providing specific guidelines and services for parents' education. A series of new family education policies have also started to be implemented following this law. Similar policies have been implemented since the 2000s but on a shorter scale, with many parents not being actively aware about them.

China has also launched key initiatives related to this matter recently. The Double Reduction Policies aimed to close the extracurricular cram school, to relieve some of the study pressure from students, and to bring family participation to the core of the educational path of children and adolescents. The Family Education Promotion Law provides guidance for parents, local governments and relevant organizations to carry out family education. Core initiatives include training for education professionals; regular courses for parents on education methods; invitation of parents to lessons in schools, as well as promotion and spread of schools for parents.

Meanwhile, many NGOs in China have become more active in claiming education policy and pressuring for improvements in this direction. Wang discusses agenda setting led by popular-pressure in China, underlining four core factors which make popular pressure forceful enough to change the policy agenda in the country: stakeholder consciousness, the associational revolution, the changing role of the mass media and the rise of the internet [5]. The rise of the internet impacts the influence of mass official media and provides more room for discussing public affairs and policies. Also, mass media and the internet enable public affairs and policy news to reach the public more fast and more broadly. As a result, online public discussion on policy making is growing in recent years, promoting more general public debate and consequently more pressure on policy makers to be accountable about their policy agenda setting. It is important to analyze public participation not only in the policy making process but also in its implementation, as a significant part of the success of a policy naturally depends on public reaction, adoption and enforcement.

The new 2021-2022 law for parents' participation in their children's school education in China received some positive reactions from the public so far, at least regarding its intention - though many are still uncertain about the feasibility of its full implementation given pressures faced by parents in professional, educational and socioeconomic dimensions. The law considers the family as the first school in someone's life, and parents as children's first teachers. There have been public expectations for this law (and the policies deriving from it) to reduce irresponsible and absent parenting and consequently even reducing juvenile delinquency related to troubled families. Much of the public also considers that the new law cooperates with the double reduction policy to reduce students' academic burden and promote students' holistic development. It is also expected for this policy to

support left-behind children and vulnerable groups, and to help to alleviate the increasing competitive pressure in the school environment in China.

On the other hand, there have also been negative reactions, claiming that this law overreaches into families' private lives, and that it could have the unintended effect of disincentivizing people to have children - at a time when China was trying to lift falling birth rates in several regions. Critical views also point out to the lack of practical support for people living in different regions - for instance, under China's hukou registration system, migrant workers are denied access to social welfare services outside their registered hometown, meaning they cannot enroll their children in schools if they move to other cities for work. Criticism also indicates that this policy might bring too many unnecessary obligations for parents, who already face too much pressure in their daily work. Finally, critical views also highlight the lack of enforcement mechanisms for this law to actually function- as it is more of a recommendation than a proper enforcing regulation (for instance, the final law does not indicate any penalties for parents failing to support home education as originally aimed in the law draft).

With this scenario in mind, in this paper we aim to evaluate the levels of commitment of parents and students in the two metropolis of Shenzhen (Southeast China) and Tianjin (Northeast China) to the guidelines for home education fomented by such Chinese policies recently, and how they react to the upcoming guideline of the new law of 2021-2022.

3. Methods Used for this Study and Key Characteristics of the Sample

In this study we aimed to analyze parents' participation in the education of their children in Shenzhen and Tianjin cities, and how it might be impacted by educational policies and school structure in their area. The methods we chose for this study were literature review to contextualize the social phenomenon analyzed, followed by a mixed-method approach with a survey collecting qualitative and quantitative information. Based on our preliminary literature review and identification of the core points to be investigated, we have designed a survey with multiple-choice questions divided in sessions addressing parents' views about their behavior regarding school activities; and their expectations about their children's performance and mental health.

Following methodological guidance from Patton & Sawicki in similar studies, we have passed through a problem-definition process with key steps such as verification of the initial problem statement [6]; use of the best available data to cut the problem down to size; definition of the problem from the perspectives of interested parties; identification of potential winners and losers; conduction of a first approximation of the analysis.

A challenge we faced is that the target of the evaluation changes in real time throughout the policy process, which is a common phenomenon in this area, as indicated by Hanberger [7]. As this was a case of real-time evaluation, we needed to deal with changes during the policy process. Besides, since a policy process may include many stakeholders, real-time evaluation is generally developed in multi-actor contexts. This means views and perceptions from different stakeholders had to be treated equally so that the evaluation can be as objective and accurate as possible. Thus, we used postpositivist policy evaluation for real-time evaluation, with multi-methodological approaches to policy assessments.

We have designed a survey for students with around 50 questions and a survey for parents with almost 50 questions which we promoted in the end of 2021 and early 2022 on digital platforms WeChat and Credamo, targeting people living in Shenzhen and Tianjin cities. Shenzhen is the major metropolis in Guangdong province in Southeast China (bordering Hong Kong) and with the fourth largest population of the country (around 17 million people). Shenzhen was the first special economic zone in China and is a global hub for technology, research, manufacturing, finance, transportation and ports. Tianjin is a coastal metropolis in Northeast China with an average population of 15 million people (around the fifth largest population in China) with global leading industries in areas such as petrochemical, textiles, car manufacturing, mechanical industries, and metalworking. Tianjin has also

recorded one of the highest GDP per capita in China and is recently investing in technology-oriented industries too.

These cities are quite advanced in terms of development and policy implementation. Shenzhen is the first city to get the Certificate of Equitable Development in Compulsory Education. Many famous universities have graduate schools or research centers in Shenzhen [8]. Tianjin was at the top of the rank for government funds for education per student in primary, secondary and senior secondary school [8]. Also, Tianjin municipality developed its own regulations with more details and practical rules for education inspection than the national standards, and this inspection guideline became a municipal law in 2014 [8]. Inspection legislation ensures the implementation of the educational inspection system, which enables reform in the educational management.

A total of 57 parents answered the survey - 30 parents in Shenzhen and 27 in Tianjin. In terms of gender the sample was quite balanced, with 24 fathers and 33 mothers. Most of them were aged in their late 30s and early 40s and more than half had educational level of undergraduate completed (54%) followed by around 19% with Junior College completed and 17% with Master level. Most of them (40%) had an average income between 20,000-50,000 CNY per month followed by 26% earning 15,000-20,000 CNY and 19% earning 9,000-15,000 CNY¹. These informations show a profile of families interviewed with a fairly decent socioeconomic and educational situation, but still with interesting characteristics which might influence their answers regarding their participation in the education of their children, which are going to be further explored in the next section regarding the findings.

As for students, a total of 35 students from Shenzhen between 13 and 18 years old answered the surveys, of whom 80% identify as female. Almost half of the students are around 18 years old and had just graduated from high school. The sample of students from Tianjin was too small to be analyzed with the same significance as the Shenzhen sample so we decided to analyze only the answers of Shenzhen students.

4. Main Findings of the Study and Key Implications

4.1. Findings of the Children's Questionnaire

As our research indicated that the effect of family education largely depends on the communication between parents and children, a major part of our surveys aimed to find out the children's willingness to communicate with their parents and the effectiveness of their communication. The following data demonstrates the children's willingness to communicate with their parents.

It can be seen that, in both the questions about sharing bad and good experiences with parents, only really few children said they do it often. It is relevant to notice that there was more tendency for children to share positive feelings than negative ones.

Table 1: Children's willingness to communicate with their parents.

Do you talk to your parents about difficulties, troubles and bad feelings you encounter in your daily life?			
I just talk to them about it when they ask me.		14%	
No I don't		26%	
Sometimes		49%	
Yes, often		11%	

¹ Values were 316-7904 dollars with the currency exchange rate for US dollars of 0,16 to 1 .in February 2022.

Table 1: (continued).

Do you normally take the initiative to share with your parents good learnings and feelings you have in school and in life in general?			
I just talk to them about it when they ask me.		6%	
No I don't		14%	
Sometimes		69%	
Yes, often		11%	

It can be seen that, in both the questions about sharing bad and good experiences with parents, only really few children said they do it often. It is relevant to notice that there was more tendency for children to share positive feelings than negative ones.

This data shows that children are not strongly willing to actively communicate with their parents. What is noteworthy is the gap between children's willingness to communicate about the bad and good feelings. Therefore, to try to find out the reason behind it, this was further explored in the question below.

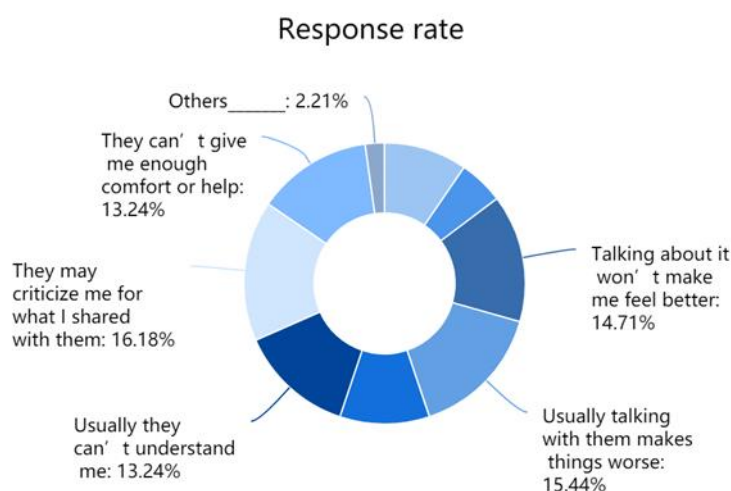


Figure 1: Why don't you share your troubles and bad feelings with your parents?

A curious phenomenon which happened with this point is that the alternatives were very equitably chosen - with almost all alternatives being chosen by around 15%. These data points to a problem: children do not feel they get enough comfort and positive emotional support from their parents, and sometimes they even find the type of support they get to be counterproductive. Many children claim that their parents choose to criticize them when they are expecting assistance. Effective family communication needs engaging talks and multiple topics. However, the data shows low frequency of engaging talks, as well as children finding that their parents are adopting inappropriate focus and are addressing boring topics. When asked about having engaging talks with their parents, most students replied they very rarely or never have this (as shown in Figure B).

When asked about the topics they most often talk about (figure C), academic performance and daily chores of the family count to almost a half of the answers. Only a few topics are about children's hobbies and books they are reading. Only 5% of the topics are about "Current events related to science, economics, politics, etc", and only 1% chose the topic "sex education". This points out to a difficulty for approximation between parents and children and for stimulating children's enthusiasm about

learning. This is neither beneficial for providing timely knowledge support and psychological comfort to children when they need advice on intimate issues.

Table 2: Frequency and topic of engaging communication.

How often do you have a engaging talk with your parents?	
Categories	Response rate
Several times a day	6%
Two to three times a week	20%
Once a week	9%
Once a month	20%
Two to three times a month	11%
Very rarely or never	34%

Table 3: Topics of engaging communication.

What topic do you always talk with your parents?	
Categories	Response rate
Your academic performance	19%
The daily chores of the family	26%
My hobbies and interests	10%
Parents' hobbies and interests	2%
The books you are reading recently	9%
General news of the country and the world	15%
Films, TV shows and series	13%
Current events related to science, economics, politics, etc	5%
Topics related to sex education	1%

As it is important to have some balance between parental participation, the survey asked about the participation of mothers and fathers specifically. The response were as follows.

Table 4: Frequency of active communication between father/mother and child.

Does your father take the initiative to communicate with you?	
Categories	Percent
Never	17%
Very rarely	37%
Yes, often	17%
Yes, sometimes	29%
Does your mother take the initiative to communicate with you?	
Categories	Percent
Never	11%
Very rarely	14%
Yes, often	20%
Yes, sometimes	54%

Students consulted indicate significantly more pro-activeness to communicate from mothers than from fathers (75% from mothers against 45% from fathers). This seems to indicate a lack of communication particularly from fathers, and an impact of gender in parenting roles which can be perceived by children.

Especially for adolescents, having independence and respect for their privacy greatly influences their personal development. The survey tried to find out if aspects like this were considered, asking if students feel they have space and autonomy to decide about some of the family affairs as well as their own affairs.

Table 5: Parents respectation for children.

Do you think your parents respect your interests and hobbies?	
No	11%
Sometimes	54%
Yes	34%
To what extent do you think your parents respect your personal space?	
Categories	Percent
They do not respect my personal space.	20%
They sometimes respect my personal space.	51%
They strongly respect my personal space.	29%

It can be said that more than half of the students feel their interests and hobbies are respected by their parents sometimes. When it comes to personal space, a similar but a bit lower proportion believe their parents respect it. Most disrespect to interests and personal space were related to belittling children's hobbies, not admitting children's achievements and progress on their hobbies, checking children's chats/apps without asking for their permission, reading their diaries/composition/homework/examination paper without asking for permissions, entering children's room without knocking, messing with children's time schedule without apologizing, not letting children close the door of their room; demanding to see children's phone usage patterns, etc.

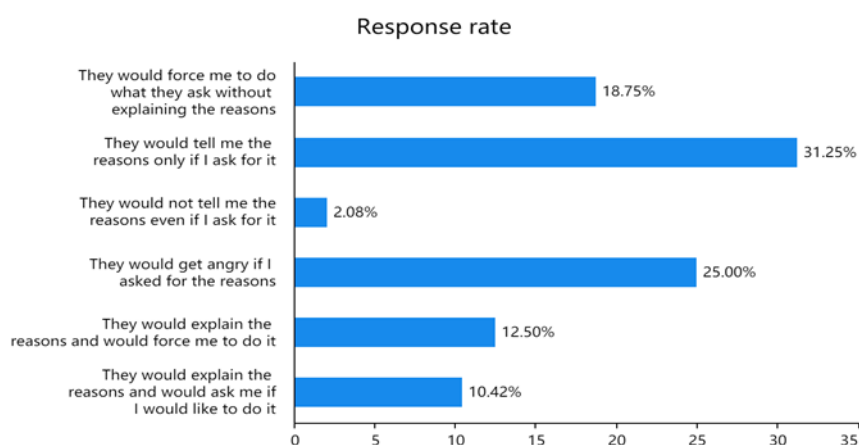


Figure 2: How do you usually feel when your parents are giving you advice?

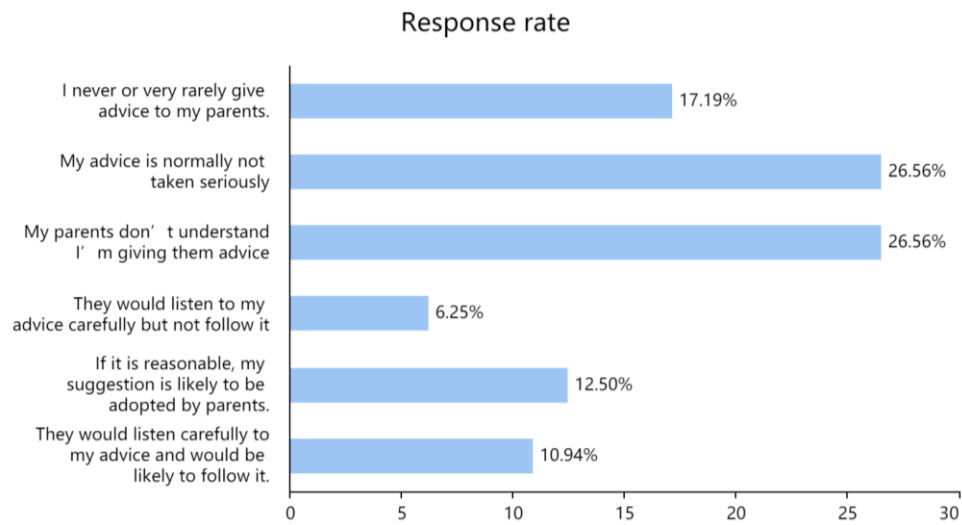


Figure 3: How do you usually feel when you are giving advice to your parents?

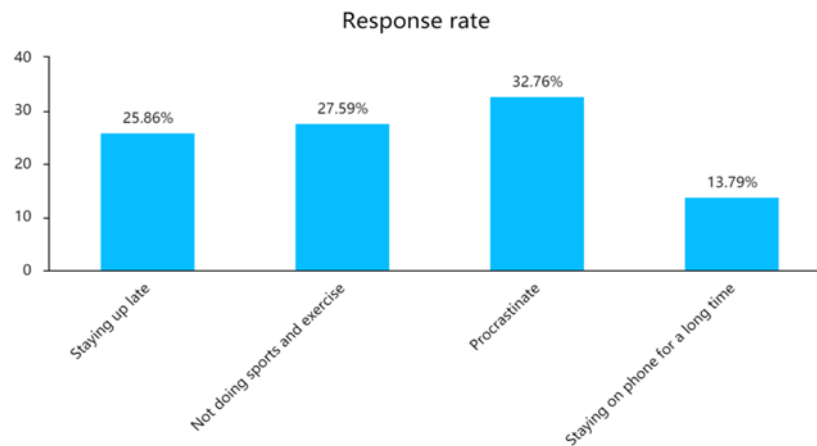


Figure 4: According to your observations, do your parents have the following habits?

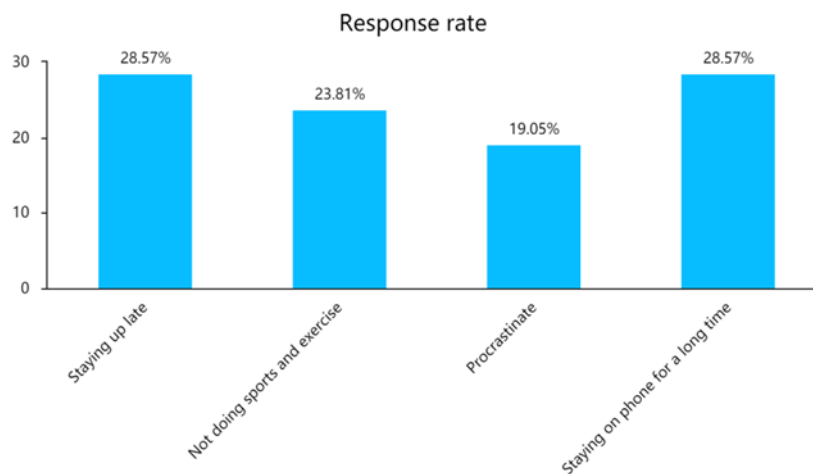


Figure 5: Do your parents often ask you to change the habits below?

It is concerning to see that, according to children's views, more than half of the parents often ask them to do things without explaining the reasons behind it - and might even get angry if children ask the reasons. This might have a negative impact not only in the space for communication at home but even hindering an inquisitive attitude of children to understand the reasons behind things - which is often an important attitude for an effective learning at school.

Also, many parents are still not clear about the difference between suggestions and requirements in their attitude towards their children.

Regarding advice from children to parents, it is concerning to see that 60% of children responded their comments are often ignored or have little impact on their parents' decision. Only around 23% of children feel that their advice is taken seriously and has some possibility of being considered. This hinders the possibility for children to notice their independence and role in the family, which might have impacts in their personal development.

The exemplary role of parents is also an extremely important part of family education. We have measured the correlation between parents' reading and children's reading. Pearson's correlation value between the two was 0.488, and showed a significance level of 0.01 - which might indicate a positive correlation between parents' reading and children's reading. This might indicate that parents reading more often might influence their children to read more often too, similarly to the findings of the authors indicated in the introduction of this paper.

Furthermore, nearly 80% of the children indicate that their parents' behaviors have impacts on their behaviors. However, as it can be seen from the following two charts, parents sometimes do not pay attention to this problem and set negative examples.

A relatively large percentage of the parents have the following bad habits: staying up late, not doing sports and exercise, procrastinating and staying on the phone for a long time, while they are asking their children to change the same bad habits without giving a good example by themselves.

4.2. Findings for Parents Questionnaire

This research chose 57 parents as samples to find out their recognition and ability about family education, and their opinions about the family education promotion law in China. Among the samples, 30 of them were from Shenzhen and 27 were from Tianjin. Nearly half of them were from age 25 to 35 (56%), then came to parents whose age were between 35 and 45(39%), the rest were parents aged between 46 and 55(5%). A pleasant characteristic of these samples is that the percentage of fathers and mothers were approximately equal, which allows us to more objectively assess differences in the involvement and the abilities of fathers and mothers in family education.

4.2.1. Parents' Participation in Students' Learning at Home

Parents' participation in further learning activities plays a key role in stimulating their children's curiosity, general knowledge, creativity, etc. To assess this dimension, we asked parents how frequently they engage with their children in activities beyond the school dimension per se, such as going together to more general cultural activities.

'Help the children with their homework' is chosen by 85% of parents as a habit they do regularly- either once a week or almost everyday, followed by 'Discuss with my children about the book they are reading recently' (77%) and 'Involve children in family arrangements' (65%). External activities were a bit less chosen than these activities at home, but still presented a significant frequency- 'Play outdoors and/or do sports with the kid(s) was chosen by 61%, 'Go to a bookstore or library with my child' by 43%. Particularly low frequencies were noticed for habits like 'Motivate my child to do voluntary work' (13%), and 'Go to the cinema and/or theater and/or exhibition with my child' (3%).

In the lowest frequency level ("Once or twice in each semester" and "Never or hardly ever"), from the mostly chosen one to the least chosen one, the activities parents do with their children at home are in the following orders: "Motivate my child to do voluntary work"(62%), "Go to the cinema and/or theater and/or exhibition with my child"(52%), "Go to a bookstore or library with my child"(20%), "Involve children in family arrangements"(13%), "Discuss with my children about the book they are reading recently"(10%), "Play outdoors/do sports with your kids (go to the park, go to the playground, etc.)"(9%), "Help my child with his/her homework"(6%).

From these data above, we can find out what kind of qualities parents care the most for their children, and what kind of important qualities most parents have ignored. Obviously, most parents care the most about their children's academic performance, which can be seen from the frequency they chose for the activity "Help my child with his/her homework". However, many parents ignored the cultivation of children's sense of social responsibility (With 62% parents choosing the lowest frequency on the activity: motivate my child to do voluntary work) and the input of extra-curricular knowledge (This is based on the data that 52% of the parents go to the cinema and/or theater and/or exhibition with my child in the lowest frequency level.)

Another important dimension to analyze is how parents communicate with their children. We asked parents about the topics they mostly talk about with their children; whether parents feel prepared to support the children appropriately; and whether parents have any drive to use scientific methods to communicate with their children. Regarding the topics discussed, the most addressed topics seemed to be the children's performance at school, political and social issues, and science issues. It seemed to be a good sign that 50% of parents discuss these three topics with their children with a significant frequency.

Table 6: The frequency of the daily topics that parent talk about with children.

Topics	Frequency	Percent (%)
Discuss how well my child is doing at school	Everyday or almost everyday	44%
	Once a week	34%
	Once or twice a month	12%
	Once or twice in each semester	8%
	Never or hardly ever	2%
Discuss political or social issues with your child	Everyday or almost everyday	4%
	Once a week	30%
	Once or twice a month	43%
	Once or twice in each semester	9%
	Never or hardly ever	14%
Discuss science issues with your child	Everyday or almost everyday	19%
	Once a week	33%
	Once or twice a month	39%
	Once or twice in each semester	5%
	Never or hardly ever	4%

In the second part, the research finds that more than 97% of the parents admire their children when the children do well at school or when the children are working hard; claim to support their children when they are facing difficulties at school; claim they encourage their children to be confident.

Table 7: Parents encouraging their children.

Behaviors	options	Percent (%)
I admire my child when they do well at school or when they are working hard	Disagree	2%
	agree	45%
	Strongly agree	53%
I support my child when he/she is facing difficulties at school.	Disagree	0%
	agree	30%
	Strongly agree	70%
I encourage my child to be confident	Disagree	0%
	Strongly agree	86%
	agree	14%

However, the questionnaire for children shows that most children don't think they've got positive and effective comfort and emotional support from their parents. So it can be deduced that most of the parents in our samples may need support in teaching them what kind of support and encouragement their children actually need and how to express their encouragement and support to their children effectively.

Table 8: Parents' method of communicating with children.

Behaviors	options	Percent (%)
I know how to communicate with my child well and we normally have a nice communication.	Disagree	4%
	Agree	50%
	Strongly agree	46%
When I identify a communication problem between me and my child, I try to consult materials/videos/readings/professionals about how to deal with this.	Disagree	12%
	agree	53%
	Strongly agree	35%
I try to learn about children psychology and education psychology to educate my child	Disagree	12%
	agree	56%
	Strongly agree	32%
use psychological methods and techniques to communicate with my children	Disagree	14%
	agree	54%
	Strongly agree	32%
I use psychological methods and techniques to analyze my child's mental condition.	Disagree	12%
	agree	60%
	Strongly agree	28%

One dimension of communication presented particularly concerning findings to which one needs to pay attention. To communicate with children in a scientific way, parents claim they would need to understand some educational theories and scientific knowledge. Ideally, when parents have communication problems with their children, they should consult a professional or consult materials

that provide knowledge and techniques for communicating with children. However, data shows that 12.28% of parents did not try to learn child psychology and educational psychology to educate their children. When they found communication problems with their children, these 12.8% parents also did not try to consult materials and professionals. So naturally, these parents do not use psychological and pedagogical methods in their communication with their children. We can reasonably speculate that these parents have communication problems with their children because they ignore scientific methods

Although the questionnaire for parents was sent in January 2022, almost all parents already heard about the new law. This suggests a strong interest from these parents in the matter or at least a fairly updated view of this area. Only about 10% of the parents claimed they were not interested in the law's guidance services owing to reasons such as: feeling that the law interferes in their intimate lives and personal rights; doubt whether the service will provide them with high quality tutors and effective lessons; doubt that the policy would provide enough vacancies for parents; skepticism about the frequency of the trainings so that parents can learn systematically and effectively; worries about having to pay too much fees for the services; losing their leadership of their children's education; worries that content learnt in the trainings would be too optimistic or theoretical and not entirely applicable to the real-life routine; and finally, difficulties for adapting to learn online.

Further concerns from parents include the slow pace of the policy to provide training for parents; disruption of the family's routine and schedules; lack of alignment of the policy with the competitive approach of high school and university entrance exams - which focus exclusively on the final grade numbers and not on the holistic learning process. Parents recommend that the policy should be implemented in a flexible and gradual way.

5. Conclusions and Prospects

This research has highlighted the importance of parents' participation in the education paths of their children, starting with a contextualization of key policies aiming to stimulate such parental participation, and then addressing this matter in the context of two leading cities in China. Though we acknowledge that the samples are modest owing to the limitations for applying a large scale survey and long-term analysis, the findings collected already provide interesting food for thought for discussing this matter.

According to the research for parents and their children, it can be identified that in Shenzhen and Tianjin, most parents have noticed the importance of family education and are trying to educate their children in a more scientific way, but at the same time, they are trapped in a condition of not knowing how to communicate with their children better, and what kind of family education method they should learn from. Under such circumstances, China's promulgation of a series of policy and law has met the needs of family education development in a timely manner.

In July 2021, China officially announced the double reduction policy. Its main contents were reducing the amount of students' homework and reducing students' extracurricular remedial classes, letting students have more rest and more space to develop their own hobbies and to have physical exercise. In October 2021, China passed the Family Education Promotion Law, which clarifies the main responsibility of parents for their children's education, pointing out the direction for family education, and proposing a collaborative model in which schools and society work together to promote the development of family education.

Despite the timely introduction of laws and policies on family education, we can see from the survey that there are still many areas for improvement and leaks that the public is worried about. First, it is difficult for parents to break away from the educational perspective of trying their best to make their children get good grades in the long term because of the performance-oriented college entrance examination and social discrimination against vocational education. Although the double reduction

policy has been implemented for more than half a year, parents still communicate with their children mostly about "grades" and "school performance", and rarely discuss other topics with their children. Some children mentioned in the "Words to Parents" in the questionnaire, "I am very grateful to them for raising me, but they only care about my study every day, which puts too much pressure on me and gives me a lot of mental torment." Parents were also providing extra comments such as "I support the law but I am afraid it can hardly be implemented well. As long as my child needs to have the entrance exam, I might never stop giving him pressure and may hardly have the ability to care for other things."

Moreover, there are many burdens for parents to receive effective family education instruction. In our research, 20% of the parents are concerning about having extra pressure such as an extra cost to learn about family education, not having enough time after work, and the mental pressure which may come after a long but ineffective learning progress. About 10% of the parents worried that they don't have enough time to receive family education services, 19% of the parents have a concern of can not apply the knowledge learned in the service well, approximately 8% of the parents are worrying about the qualification and professionalism of the teachers giving family education services, nearly 2% of the parents are afraid of their long term plan being disrupted by some mandatory laws and policies, or the law and following policy will interfere with private affairs too much.

Therefore, the following aspects should be considered for an appropriate and efficient implementation of this policy.

1. The policy encourages and promotes the improvement and establishment of the authoritative system of family education theory, so as to provide a solid theoretical foundation for the relevant talents guiding family education.

2. Promote the specialization of family education guidance services and talents: Establish specialized family education counseling institutions, recruit full-time professional family education counseling talents; Perfect the cultivation and evaluation standards of relevant talents, as well as the welfare system of family education guidance talents.

At present, most family education guidance takes school as the main platform, and a few parents will pay attention to specialized family education guidance institutions and community service points. However, schools have already borne a great burden on students' education, and if they take the main responsibility for guiding family education, it is likely that the two goals can not be balanced.

3. Promote the construction of supervision and feedback mechanism for family education guidance, so that to make the services more effective, and attract more families to participate in.

4. Due to parents' natural trust and authority worship for schools, if possible, in the early implementation of the policy, family education institutions can operate their services in this mode: professional institutions can provide services to both the school and the family directly and parents choose the channels for receiving services voluntarily. At the same time, the service institutions supervise and guarantee the practical effect of parents' receiving guidance and family education practice.

5. Special guidance and attention to special groups and regions are needed. For special families such as single-parent families, families with economic difficulties, families with left-behind children, and families with disabled parents or children, customized family guidance services and social assistance should be provided according to the family situation, and the role of family education resources of society and schools should be exerted as much as possible. For special areas, such as areas with relatively poor economy, difficult transportation, and education itself lagging behind most cities, special teams should be sent for landing guidance and long-term tracking.

It is also important for parents to establish certain obligations to accept family education and guidance services, and appropriately formulate reward and punishment measures. For example, it is stipulated that parents who are unwilling to receive family education services must receive expert evaluation of their family education status at a certain frequency. If the assessment is lower than the

qualified standard, they will have to accept the family education guidance recommended by experts within a certain period of time.

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