

The Impact of Lack of Parents' Company on Children's Performance Based on China's Experience

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Abstract: The paper focuses on discussing how the length of time Chinese children stay in the company of their parents could affect their academic performance. The paper firstly reviews literature of Chinese and foreign scholars. Afterwards, it conducts a statistical description of relevant data in 2012, 2014, and 2016 from the CFPS database. According to study findings, the company of parents have a positive impact on children's academic performances in primary schools. It is necessary that parents provide adequate company to children during primary school years to improve their academic performances.

1. Introduction

Which factors related to children's academic performances have been widely discussed in the education field?. For a child's personal development, academic performances determine the probability of their admission to further education and access to educational resources. Children with better academic performances can accumulate more human capital. In turn, such accumulation leads to wide differences, which affect children's future development (Becker, 1993, pp.15-54). From the perspective of national development, the quality of national human resources in future generations could be impacted by this generation's study performance (gov, 2019).

In recent times, many scholars have discussed which factors are related to academic performances by looking at various perspectives such as family background, school policies, students' self-discipline, intelligence, school environment, and interpersonal relationships. As of now, there have been abundant academic achievements. (Woessmann, 2005; Duckworth and Seligman, 2005; Taras, 2005; Dandy and Nettelbeck, 2002; Davis-Kean, 2005; Macneil, Prater and Busch, 2009; Lawrence and Vimala, 2012; Chen, 2005). Amongst all of these factors, the length of time which children stay in their parents' company has significantly unique research values in China. Owing to the rapidly developing market economy, Chinese people's family and marriage concepts have changed considerably since the 1980s, and the divorce rate is rising as a result (Li, 2008). With accelerating industrial development and urbanisation, a large number of rural laborers are leaving behind their children and rushing into cities to seek non-farming jobs (Gao et al., 2018). According to the *China Family Development Report*, there were more than 20 million single-parent families in China in 2014. The All-China Women's Federation estimated in accordance to the data of the 6th census that in 2010, 61.0255 million rural children had at least one parent working outside agriculture. (gov, 2013) As a result, Chinese children with a partial family get along with the parent that keeps them company for much less time than their peers. This paper aims to find out whether the company of parents affects a child's academic performance, and if so, to what extent.. It is helpful to know the learning difficulties faced by such children and in response, put forward solutions.

This paper is divided into two parts. Firstly, the paper reviews the studies conducted by Chinese and foreign scholars on the durational impact of parental company on children's academic performance. Secondly, it collects data of 2012, 2014, and 2016 from the CFPS database which is classified in three ways: by year, by whether the parent is the mother or father, and by whether the child studies in a primary or middle school. The aim of this is to observe the relationship between the length of time parents keep their children company and the children's academic performances

through different classifications.. Lastly, the paper discusses different groups and guesses possible mechanisms.

2. Literature Review

Many scholars have found that the lack of company by parents correlate to children's academic performances. McLanahan, Tach, and Schneider (2013) reviewed the 47 studies on how the absence of fathers affects children's well-being and concluded that a father's absence lowered the rate for children to graduate from high schools. Gayly, Golan, and Soytaş (2018) adopted the instrument variable method and found that parents' time input in the first five years had significant statistical correlations to children's future studies. If a father who spends inadequate time on his child raises the time length to the national average, the likelihood for the child to graduate will increase by 13%. If a mother who spends inadequate time on her child raises the time length to the national average, the likelihood for the child to graduate will increase by 16%. Some Chinese scholars who conducted a field investigation in China drew similar conclusions. Ye Jingzhong et al., concluded that students who lived with their parents for a long time during the compulsory education years stipulated by the law had better academic performances than students who lived with only one parent or neither parents (Ye et al., 2006). His investigation showed that 10.6% of children without parental company thought their academic performances were on the mid-to-lower level; only 4% of children with parental company thought their academic performances were on the mid-to-lower level. 7.5% of children without parental company thought their academic performances were on the lower level, which outnumbered the same viewpoint from children with parental company which constituted 3%. Mengli and Yamauchi (2018) drew similar research findings to those of Ye Jingzhong. Agreeing to Ye Jingzhong's opinions, they used Ruric data and examined the effect of cumulative exposure to parental migration on children's health and education outcomes. According to study findings, the absence of fathers reduced children's Chinese score by 6.6 points, whilst the absence of mothers lowered the score by 8.6 points. Tao Ran studied the impact of parents' departure from home to work outside agriculture on children's academic performances with PSM. The idea upheld was that long separation from children was the main reason why children's study performances lagged behind others in primary and middle school years (Tao and Zhou, 2012). To some extent, these Chinese and foreign scholars all affirmed negative correlations between the lack of parents' company and children's academic performances. Despite this common conclusion, their explanations for such negative correlations vary widely. According to one explanation, one parent's long absence or both parents' separation makes it difficult for one parent to spend time with their children often. Thus the parent taking care of the children has to undertake the arduous tasks of household chores, farming work, care for the elderly, and bringing up children. If the parent is in such a busy state for a long time, the child that grows in such a family has to take out his or her time to assist the adult in taking care of younger siblings and housework. The parent that takes care of children can hardly spend their time and energy on educating children due to their responsibilities. Meanwhile, rural children seldom have access to good education and their academic performances are worse than those of other children (Ye et al., 2006; Hu and Li, 2009; Kandel and Kao, 2001). In the second explanation, family members who are capable of educating generally do not accompany children, whilst people with no or poor capabilities generally accompany children all the time. The quality of family education declines as parents who are capable of educating children spend less time accompanying children. For example, parents that work in the cities leave their children to grandparents or relatives. As a result, grandparents cannot tutor their homework and may exercise inadequate discipline (Fan, 2009). For another example, fathers are seen as better at stopping children's problematic behaviors but most parents do not strictly supervise such behaviors frequently; this stipulates a bad influence on children's study. (Yang and Dong, 2005; McLanahan, Tach and Schneider, 2013) In the third explanation, children can have difficulties focusing on studying, due to emotions stemming from missing one or two absent parents which stimulates helplessness. In the long run, children's curiosity for knowledge and ambition of forging ahead are

weakening. As a result, children fail to excel in their academic performance. In turn, inadequate academic performance makes it easier for them to give up studying (Feng, 2019). In the fourth explanation, children who have been left behind, in particular, girls, need to spend more time on family affairs, which creates hindrance for their studies. (Meyerhoefer and Chen, 2010)

On the contrary, some scholars do not think there is causality between the lack of parents' company and children's poor performances. Jonson and Gähler adopted the regression approach in their study and concluded that there was the effect of separation. Björklund and Sundström studied data from the same country examined by Jonson and Gähler by using a siblings approach in the quasi-experiment. It was found that children whose parents had no separation during their childhood did not have educational advantages over siblings who have experienced parents' separation early in life. Björklund and Sundström attributed the inconsistency of experimental results to the inexistence of the effect of separation. Jonsson and Gähler failed to do better in controlling the variables of family backgrounds, such as family incomes and professions. When more effective experimental methods were used to control the variables of family backgrounds, the causality between the lack of parents' company and children's poor academic performances disappeared. Bernardi and Boertien (2016) were supportive of Björklund and Sundström, pointing out that children from single-parent families had worse academic performances than children from complete families. Also, it is not because one parent provides less company, but because the newly formed single-parent family has a income and as a result, decreases the supply of educational resources to children. Svanum et al. studied a large number of children aged between six and eleven. Among them, 5,493 children were from families with fathers, while 616 were from families without fathers. Svanum compared the academic performances and IQ scores of children from different types of families. It was found out there were wide cognitive differences between children with fathers and children without fathers when the SES state was not controlled. By comparison, there was no significant difference between both when SES was controlled. According to an analysis, families without a father figure tend to consequentially live with an inferior economic status than families that have a father figure. This can explain how children of different backgrounds receive different education.. Soren et al. reviewed 28 studies on the relationship between the absence of fathers and children's cognitive development since the 1970s. It was found that 16 studies thought the former played a detrimental role, 9 studies thought the absence of fathers had no impact on children's cognitive development and lastly, three studies though both were interactive (Svanum, Bringle and McLaughlin, 1982). Chinese scholar Zhang Liang (2017) studied the impact of parents' working outside outside agriculture and other factors on the schooling opportunities of Chinese rural students aged 10 and 15 with the Binary logistic regression analysis model. It was found that the above factors, also including family incomes and educational input, had no significant impact on children's odds of receiving schooling. On the contrary, age had a negative impact on the opportunities for further education. Among all samples, age had a coefficient of -0.646 and was significant at the level of 0.1%. Therefore, he concluded that age was the main influential factor for rural Chinese children to end their study. Conversely, children's drop-out was not statistically related to whether parents accompany children, whether children work outside, or whether parents supply educational resources. Zhu Kerong also surveyed primary schools and junior high schools in rural areas and concluded that the lack of parents' absence did not affect students' academic performances (Zhu Kerong (2002)). This paper upheld the viewpoint that 'A myriad of irrelevant variables needed to be controlled in the study.' It can be viewed that the general conclusions drawn by different studies varied widely. Some studies examined the lack of parents' company due to parents' working far from home away from agriculture. Some scholars thought that children had better performances because parents' incomes grew. Thus, Zhu affirmed the positive impact of parents' working away from home on children. Antman (2010) estimated that a father who went to work in America before the daughter was 20 benefitted the daughter to receive education for another 0.73 years. Several studies on Chinese children who were left behind also supported the following fact: parents who worked away from rural environments and could not accompany children did not lead to children's poor academic performances but played a positive role in promoting children's study. Bai et al.

adopted the difference-in-differences and propensity score matching approaches. 13,000 samples from 130 rural primary schools were studied. It was found that parents' working away from home had a positive impact on children's academic performances (Bai et al., 2017). Mo studied parents' remittances and children's dropout rate, which concluded that parents' working away from home effectively prevented children's dropout (reduced dropout by 60 percent). (Mo et al., 2013) Nowadays, foreign studies fail to combine this idea with the reality of China. Furthermore,, local studies in China have defects in experimental designs, which are somehow affected by endogenous trouble. It is necessary to know the impact and find effective accompanying modes through further studies.

The paper holds one opinion: 'Parents' company has a positive impact on children's academic performances in China.' First of all, most parents generally act as tutors and are in charge of tutoring children's study. Even if wealthy parents do not tutor children personally, they entirely entrust students' study to the tutoring center. Meanwhile, they take charge of following up children's learning schedule and holding frequent discussions with the tutoring center. In contrast to the above, parents that do not accompany children request grandparents or other guardians to take of children's daily life, therefore leading to the neglect in children's study. Also, a single parent that accompanies children fails to attach adequate attention to children's study. Childhood is a critical period for cultivating children's personalities and learning habits. Thus lacking the company from parents is bad for developing good personalities and learning habits. Even if there is access to educational resources and opportunities, children with improper attitudes to study or have personality defects cannot make full use of these resources.

This paper made a statistical description of the CFPS database organised and collected by the China Social Science Research Center of Peking University. CFPS is a large national database whose samples are representative nationwide. The data of this paper is abstracted from the children's questionnaire database in 2012, 2014, and 2016 respectively. The samples of the paper compose of children in primary schools and junior high schools. There are two reasons for choosing children in these two learning phases. Firstly, both stages include core classes such as mathematics and Chinese, and regular examinations. It is therefore easy to obtain relevant indicators. Conversely, kindergartens offer no examination of core classes of importance. In general, students and parents have no clear understanding of academic performance. Secondly, CFPS collects more samples from primary schools and junior high schools than from senior high schools. As a result, the validity of selecting samples from primary schools and junior high schools is higher than choosing from senior high schools.

This paper first collected evaluations of children's Chinese and math scores from parents. Next, it divided collected raw data into four levels, including excellent, good, fair, and poor. The paper then gave values to collected raw data (excellent=4, good=3, fair=2, poor=1). Eventually, the data was divided into different groups to calculate the average value.

Regarding the method, all samples were divided into three groups, including 2012, 2014, and 2016. Next, the data were classified into four groups by father, mother, Chinese score, and math score.

Table 1 effect of parents' staying together with the children on their performance in math and Chinese scores in 2012

	Average Length	Father/children in Math Score	Father/children in Chinese Score	Mother/children in Math Score	Mother/children in Chinese Score
Primary School	0-7 months	2.74	2.77	2.73	2.76
	8-12 months	2.85	2.83	2.83	2.82
Junior High	0-7 months	2.59	2.7	2.62	2.69
	8-12 months	2.61	2.66	2.59	2.67

Table 2 effect of parents' staying together with the children on their performance in math and Chinese scores in 2014

	Average Length	Father/children in Math Score	Father/children in Chinese Score	Mother/children in Math Score	Mother/children in Chinese Score
Primary School	0-7 months	2.85	2.84	2.79	2.79
	8-12 months	2.97	2.96	2.96	2.96
Junior High	0-7 months	2.56	2.72	2.52	2.7
	8-12 months	2.65	2.72	2.67	2.73

Table 3 effect of parents' staying together with the children on their performance in math and Chinese scores in 2016

	Average Length	Father/children in Math Score	Father/children in Chinese Score	Mother/children in Math Score	Mother/children in Chinese Score
Primary School	0-7 months	2.71	2.68	2.61	2.61
	8-12 months	2.8	2.76	2.82	2.78
Junior High	0-7 months	2.57	2.7	2.54	2.68
	8-12 months	2.49	2.62	2.53	2.64

The table above mainly shows the following three features. Firstly, the group with over eight months' company from their mothers in primary school years had higher scores in math and Chinese than the group with less than eight months' company (the group with more than eight months' company represents a longer time duration of parental company, while the group with less than eight months' company stands for a shorter time duration). Regarding the Chinese score, the group with the longer duration of company was 0.06, 0.17, and 0.17 points higher than the group with a shorter duration in 2012, 2014, and 2016 respectively. Regarding the math score, the group with the longer duration of company was 0.1, 0.17, and 0.21 point higher than the group with the shorter duration in 2012, 2014, and 2016, respectively. In primary school, the group with more than eight months' company from the father had a higher score in Chinese and math than the group with less than eight months' company from the father. The group with the longer duration of company was 0.06, 0.12, and 0.08 point higher than the group with a shorter duration in 2012, 2014, and 2016, respectively. The group with the longer duration of company was 0.11, 0.12, and 0.09 point higher than the group with a shorter duration in 2012, 2014, and 2016, respectively. By comparison, the maternal figure that gives company to a child brings fewer advantages than the paternal figure.. Lastly, the junior high school with over eight months' company from parents had no advantage in academic performance.

The data processing has the following defects. Firstly,, the paper offers only data descriptions and has no quantitative regression model. There is no causality between parents' company and academic performances. It is thus impossible to talk about causality. Secondly,, the data only collects the evaluations of excellent, very good, medium, and poor academic performances. It is necessary to give values to four levels of performances and make descriptive statistics. This method is less accurate than measuring academic performances with a 100-point system. Lastly,, there is only a small range of academic performances, which are hardly different in the statistical description..

3. Discussions of Mechanisms

Primary school children who had a longer duration of company from parents had higher average scores than children with less company. The paper puts forward several reasonable assumptions about this situation. In the first estimation, parents act as a tutor or supervise children's study in primary school years. Children in primary school years are taught fundamental teaching contents

therefore most parents are capable of tutoring children's studies. Parents who entrust their children to tutoring classes can also identify the problems children have with their study and thus discuss with the tutoring center accordingly. At this stage, the situation described by Ye Jingzhong (Ye et al., 2006) may occur: if one parent works away, the other parent left at home will undertake arduous housework and have no energy to tutor students. Also, the situation described by Fan Xianzuo (2005) may occur: both parents are capable of tutoring work outside, while incapable grandparents are unable to tutor children. Children who are accompanied by their parents often receive more tutoring compared to children with less parental company. Thus they have higher academic performances on average. It also explains the phenomenon in which children that have experienced longer parental company in junior high school years had higher average scores than children with shorter duration of company. The academic performances of junior high school years become more difficult. As most parents are unable to provide direct guidance to their children, they can hardly guide them to the level needed. Meanwhile, junior high school children have better communication skills, which enable them to communicate their problems in study with teachers and tutoring centers more efficiently. Thus the advantages brought by the company of parents are considerably weakened. In the second explanation, pupils are psychologically "getting more independent". The lack of parents' company damaged children's psychological health in primary school years. These children were more likely to be anxious with people and seal their hearts from others (Hang and Li, 2007; Fan and Sang, 2005). It may make them too shy to communicate with teachers and ask for help when a problem arises, which consequentially affects their academic performance. In the third situation, children with inadequate company from parents are not supervised effectively. For example, the literature review shows that mothers are less capable of regulating children's problematic behaviors. (Yang and Dong, 2005; McLanahan, Tach and Schneider, 2013) In another example, left-behind children are likely to pretend to be studying to deceive their grandparents, who fail to find out the truth (Ye et al., 2006). It is thus more difficult to develop children's learning habits. As a result, the children experiencing a longer duration of parental company, on average, have higher scores than children with inadequate company from parents.

4. Conclusions

The paper reviewed scholars' studies and made grouped statistical descriptions for the data of 2012, 2014, and 2016 from the CFPS database. It was found that children whose parents accompanied them for a long time in primary schools had better average scores in Chinese and math than children whose parents accompanied them for a shorter time. This paper offered three possible assumptions for the result. In the first assumption, parents act as homework tutors or study supervisors when children are in primary schools. In the second assumption, children lacking company from their parents are more likely to be poor at communication and would experience difficulties communicating with teacher: in turn affecting their study performance. In the third assumption, children lack effective supervision and develop habits which are detrimental to their academic results. It is thus necessary for parents to realise the importance of their company to children's academic performances.

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