

# Research on Chinese Mother's Educative Proficiency: Review and Prospects

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**Abstract:** Mother's educative proficiency is critical to family education in the new epoch, and the key to the healthy growth of children, and the prosperous development of the nation. In recent years, Chinese scholars are discussing and representing on the connotation and structure, status quo, influencing factors, countermeasures among other factors of mother's educative proficiency. This article attempts to present and analyze the Chinese research on mother's educative proficiency and propose a prospect, to inspire future studies and practice on mother's educative proficiency. Chinese studies on preschool children mother's proficiency are under further exploration and development. Such studies reinforce people's recognition of the values and meanings of mother's educative proficiency, display the status quo and existing problems of mother's educative proficiency, analyze the factors influencing mother's educative proficiency, and provide some solutions. On one hand, these studies help enhance social and academic attention on mother's proficiency, and thus further promote the research on mother's educative proficiency. On the other hand, some outcomes also inspire the research on related subjects. Regional exploration of "mother's educative proficiency", such as urban-rural difference, foreign-domestic comparison, may further unveil the forming mechanism and influencing factors behind Chinese "mother's educative proficiency", while adopting international excellent ideas and methods may provide more possibilities in further improving Chinese "mother's educative proficiency".

**Keywords:** Mother's Educative Proficiency, Research Review, Prospects

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## 1. Introduction

From ancient times to present, a mother plays a crucial role in the entire society of China. Due to mother's special functions in fertility and nurture, mother undertakes the reproduction of humankind and the nurture of talents, plays a critical role in high quality talents training, and thus directly influences the social development and decides the integral quality of a generation, the comprehensive power of a country and the prosperity of a nation. Mother's educative proficiency is a question that has already won further attention from scholars, who are discussing and studying on the related questions such as: What is mother's educative proficiency? How is current mother's educative proficiency? How to improve mother's educative proficiency? This article aims at presentation and exploration on issues such as development

trends, research paths and achievements in research related to mother's educative proficiency in China, looking forward to providing enlightenments and references for research and practice on mother's educative proficiency in the future.

## 2. Description of Related Literatures

"Proficiency" is defined in *CIHAI* (a Chinese Dictionary) as one's daily learnings and cultures, which is some attitude, etiquette and quality of a person engaged in some activity. It is based on hereditary or gifted qualities and formed or developed gradually from later influences in life, telling the mature physical and mental features of a person's stable inside. The definition of "proficiency" in Chinese encyclopedia (*CIHAI*) mainly includes: the inherent characteristic of a person in physiology, the original nature of a matter, or the basic conditions for completing an activity. A person's qualities include natural, psychological,

cultural, and other aspects, based on hereditary factors, formed and developed in the interaction between environment and education, and once formed should be stable.

From above, “proficiency” means similarly as “qualities”, both are a general concept, not only the natural base of an individual person, but also the influence in life and cumulative culture in ordinary course; what’s more, both are inherent features of a person, and once formed should be stable. Therefore, this article presents and analyzes the studies on “*Mother’s Educative Proficiency*”, and on this basis learns from relevant research findings on “mother’s proficiency” and “mother’s qualities”.

### 2.1. Existing Literature

There are 27 articles and 52 search results on “*Mother’s Educative Proficiency*” included in the digital library of CNKI; and there are 108 search results on “*Mother’s Qualities*” in the same library. Disregarding irrelevant or repeated articles and results, 113 articles published in recent 30 years, and noticeably 62 articles published in recent 10 years. The number of publications is increasing, which reflects somehow the high attention on “*Mother’s Educative Proficiency*”. Although there are not more outcomes, this topic is winning more attentions and making further progress.

### 2.2. Research Status Quo

Of majority of researcher who are engaging in “*Mother’s Educative Proficiency*”, most of them come from higher education institutions, or to be precise, normal colleges or universities; and some researchers come from middle schools or kindergartens; and a few from other social organizations, like communities, women’s federation etc. Of research methods, there are mainly three methods, namely literature analysis method, questionnaire investigation method, interview method. Of research paths, the research includes several parts: the connotation and composition of mother’s educative proficiency, the value and meanings of mother’s educative proficiency, the influencing factors on mother’s educative proficiency, and the actuality and countermeasures of mother’s educative proficiency.

## 3. Paths of Research

### 3.1. Connotation and Composition of Mother’s Educative Proficiency

Few theories on “*Mother’s Educative Proficiency*” can be seen, that’s why no clear definition of its connotation, although different understanding and observations proposed by many different researchers. ZHANG Yibing said that we should be clear firstly that proficiency is not isolated, but integrated, and multi-faceted. From literature research, it’s not hard to find that researchers attempt to discuss the question “What educative proficiency a mother should have?” from several dimensions, like knowledge and skills, process and method, emotional attitude and values, and the answer mainly covers mother’s “educative concept”, “educative knowledge”

and “educative manner”. For example, BAO Yuyu (2017) considered that mother’s educative proficiency should include progressive parenting concepts, scientific parenting knowledge and useful education methods etc [1]. LÜ Qiufen (2010) also considered that a mother should let children develop healthily and intellectually, and a mother’s parenting proficiency should include knowledge on infant feeding and education [2]. Moreover, the general proficiency of educators may also influence the education, such as mother’s physical and mental conditions, moral culture, knowledge culture, behavioral custom and so on. ZHU Hailin (2002) considered that a mother in modern society should have loft, transparent spirits and character, higher cultural qualities, good physical qualities and mental qualities, and some scientific parenting proficiency [3]. MO Jianxiu (2007) mainly constructed the preschool children mother parenting quality model, mainly covering educative concepts, educative knowledge, educative capabilities, and educative qualities [4]; LI Jie (2019) on this basis added “educative behavior”, an external expression [5]. Along with progressing informatization and modernization, the family education under new era exerts higher requirements for parenting proficiency, that’s why modern mothers should also continue learning to reshape themselves, build up correct scientific and modern educative philosophy, master modern educative knowledge, understand modern parenting manner, in order to perform the real “modern family education” [6].

### 3.2. Value and Significance of Mother’s Educative Proficiency

#### 3.2.1. Promotion of Children Development

In family education, mother is the closest connection of children due to its special role in birth: a fetus before birth is affected by the actions of mother; after birth, an infant is highly dependent on adults, in particular the mother, and is attached to mother, because it’s immature in physical and mental aspects. Preschool period is a period of a person’s preliminary growth in physiology, psychology, emotions, behavioral habits, personality and sociality, during which a person is most malleable. In this stage, a person is most easily to be affected by the outer world, and education may have lasting or even lifelong influence. Mother is indispensable in children education. WANG Donghua said in his book *Discovering Mother* that “*Mother’s quality decides children’s quality*” [7]. Under mother’s nurturing and education, in the communication with mother, and in the process of imitating mother, children’s growth is greatly facilitated. For example, WU Xiaofen (2002) also clarified that mother’s quality has a key role in family education, mother’s words and actions will directly influence children’s behaviors, and a wonder love from mother will be a catalyst to children’s talents [8].

Researchers mainly discussed on the value and significance of mother’s educative proficiency on children’s growth in below aspects: Mother’s physical and mental conditions, emotions, knowledge and culture, behavioral habits and educative concepts have profound influence on children’s growth. DING Hong (2000) stressed that mother’s physical and mental qualities, cultural and moral qualities will

influence children's healthy growth. ZHANG Xiulan and WANG Hengjie (2013) respectively discussed this in terms of behavioral manner, moral quality, emotion and psychology, knowledge inspiration and values, and thought that mother has an indispensable role in the healthy growth of children [9]. LIANG Mingyue et al (2012), in discussing children's sexual education, mentioned mother's educative concept, capability and sense of responsibility play an important role in the healthy sexual development of children [10]. SUN Yanli (2019) believed that because mothers vary in educative methods, psychological quality and moral culture, children vary in accomplishment [11]. In addition, researchers explain the important role of mother's educative proficiency in many aspects, such as infant's cognitive development, emotional attitude development, behavioral habits development, moral quality development, personality, and sociality development and so on. For example, WANG Xiuhua (2000) pointed out that mother undertakes the major duty for children's moral education, and mother's cultural proficiency, mental quality, and moral quality are positively correlated with the outcome of children's moral education [12]. SUN Yanhong and WANG Chengxiang (2000) discussed the important influence of mother's qualities on children's social aspects, such as children's personality, behaviors, mental health and academic attainment and so on [13]. CHENG Xueqin and WU Yiquan (2016) mentioned that the loss of motherly education will severely impair children's development in social, linguistic and cognitive capabilities, and such destructive negative influence will last to even adulthood [14].

### 3.2.2. Promotion of Social Development

The society is a collective of different individuals, in which the social development depends on personal development, while personal development depends on education, and in particular maternal education. It's clearly pointed out in the *Outline of the national Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)* that Chinese education aims to bring about qualified socialist citizens. The role of mother's educative proficiency in the society is reflected in mother's nursing of children. Friedrich Froebel said, "The fate of a nation is not in the hands of statesmen, but in the hands of mothers". The future of a country and a nation lies in children from one generation to another, while maternal education may promote children full development and bring about talents needed for the society. For example, TAO Zhiqiong (2012) believed that mother's proficiency would affect the formation of children's citizen quality, while children are the future of a nation, so the high attention on mother's proficiency is also care for the future and fate of a nation [15]. YAN Guoli and HAN Yinghong (1996) also pointed out that mother's educative proficiency and educative manner option will influence the formation of children's healthy personality, and mother's quality is one of factors to influence children's crime [16]. It's clear that mother's educative proficiency promotes social development depending on whether mother can positively influence children's morality, and thus drive the enhancement of

national morality culture and thus promote social peace and harmonious development.

### 3.3. Actuality and Problems in Mother's Educative Proficiency

By composition, mother's educative proficiency can be analyzed in some aspects, including mother's "educative knowledge", "educative concepts" and "educative methods", in which, "educative knowledge" includes not only mother's general knowledge, such as natural sciences, history and literature, but also mother's parenting knowledge, such as Education, Psychology, Hygiene; "educative concepts" refer to correct outlook on children, education and parenting; "educative methods" refer to educative capabilities, including mother's methods capabilities of communicating with children, observing and understanding children, handling and solving problems. WEI Wenhua (2019) pointed out that some mothers have obsolete educative concepts, simple educative methods and poor educative knowledge [17]. YUAN Yalan (2016) explained the parenting proficiency status quo of rural parents, such as lack of scientific parenting knowledge, one-sided parenting manner, unscientific parenting concepts and so on [18]. LI Jie (2019) also analyzed the problems in mother's preschool children education qualities in terms of educative knowledge, capabilities, concepts, and behaviors, for example, mother's educative common sense should be improved, mother's capability of understanding children should be enhanced and improved, mother's demonstrative role should be reinforced [6].

Furthermore, some scholars believe that mother's general proficiency will affect mother's educative proficiency; to put it plain, a physically healthy mother can better breed infants; a morally proficient mother is unlikely to show bad violence; more knowledgeable mother is easier to accept advanced educative concepts... Therefore, we can find that some scholars also discussed many problems in mother's own qualities in the research on status quo of mother's educative proficiency. For example, XIA Yue (2019) had questionnaire investigation and interviews with 7 mothers and 3 fathers and found that the first problem of parenting qualities is the low level of knowledge, including history, literature, natural sciences and other general knowledge, as well as low level of early childhood education knowledge [19]. In addition, some scholars also discussed mother's "educative awareness", as there are many negative examples of mother giving up nursing her children or giving up educating her children, the main reason is lack of educative duty and educative awareness. Under investigation and studies, LI Congna (2014) believed that the issues of Chinese mother's educative proficiency are lack of educative responsibility, biased educative concepts and alike [20]. LI Qun (2010) found in his investigation that 56.38% mothers denied parenting as their primary duty, and he pointed out that some mothers didn't have clear maternal duty and sufficient maternal awareness [21]. LI Juan (2006) also found from investigation for rural mothers that there is some deviation from mother's role cognition and some lack of mother's role responsibility [22].

### 3.4. Factors to Influence Mother's Educative Proficiency

Currently, there are a few research on the influencing factors or reason analysis of mother's educative proficiency. After investigation into existing research, it's found that the factors to influence mother's educative proficiency are mainly social and personal factors, detailed as below:

Mother's educative proficiency is result of the interaction between nature and attainment, and in particular the attainment after birth. However, due to female reproductive role, the society always deems maternity as the inherent gift of women, as the proverb goes: "A woman being mother is strong". The social common sense is a woman doesn't need a special training for mother. Some scholars believed that such gender system hidden in social cultures causes the nation and the society to neglect mother's training and thus impair the mother's educative proficiency. For example, XIA Yue (2019) pointed out that public consensus and traditional mindset are important factors affecting parents' educative proficiency [19], while some outdated concepts like "Wishing children to become great talents" or "Tough parenting grows good children" impair mother's educative proficiency. In addition, along with economic and technological development, the social pressure is growing onto families, plus the almost demonized "independent feminism", many women believe the success in business and in material is an expression of independence, so they invest a large amount of time and energy into business, and thus lack training opportunities, hard to increase their own parenting proficiency. The lack in laws and policies also impairs mother's educative proficiency, for example, there are insufficient organizations or teachers in respect of maternal education, and insufficient relating social programs and activities.

As to personal factors that influence mother's educative proficiency, many scholars find through investigation that, mother's educational background and profession have significant influence on mother's educative proficiency. For example, LI Lingyan and PANG Lijuan et al (1997) found that mother's educational background and profession have significant influence on mother's educative concepts, and pointed out that with varying educational backgrounds, different mothers will have different understandings of child development and child education; due to varying professions and personal experiences, different mothers will have different views on parenting [23]. TAO Sha and LIN Lei (1994) found that mother's educative manners are significantly different as their educational backgrounds are varying; for example, poorly educated mothers are prone to doting, punishment, despotism in parenting, while well-educated mothers are prone to democracy in parenting [24]. WU Minbo and TAO Zhiqiong (2011) [25], ZHU Chunhong and DU Xueyuan (2008) [26] and other scholars also pointed out mother's educative awareness is positively correlated with mother's profession and educational background. In addition to two points above, education is a conscientious activity that only humankind is engaged in, some scholars pointed out that only mothers are conscientiously and actively taking part in

educational activities, performing educative behaviors, updating educative concepts, and thus developing their educative proficiency. Obviously, mother's self-conscience and learning ability are also important factors influencing mother's educative proficiency.

Apart from social and personal factors, very few researchers also discussed the influence of family on mother's educative proficiency. On one hand, mother's educative proficiency is affected by her original family conditions, such as parents' educational backgrounds, educative manner, educative concepts, family economy, family atmosphere and so on. On the other hand, mother's educative proficiency is also affected by the new family conditions, such as resident address, family economy, husband-wife relationship and so on [6], for example, since there are many pregnancy training agencies and early education centers in urban areas, so mothers in good family economy living in urban areas may have more opportunities to invest in education, while mothers in poor family economy living in rural areas may have to work out of home, and hand over children education responsibilities to elder family members, and few chance to promote educative proficiency.

### 3.5. Countermeasures to Improve Mother's Educative Proficiency

As for how to improve preschool children mother's educative proficiency, researchers give different suggestions, which through literature research, can be summarized in different aspects, from nation or society, through schools or kindergartens, and to families or individual persons:

#### 3.5.1. Nation or Society

A nation and a society have always established official, authoritative operating procedures and systems, rich educative resources and organizing capacity, therefore they are leaders of maternal education and also key forces to improve mother's proficiency. First of all, the nation and the government should further concern maternal education, and promulgate more policies to publicize and control, and help social authorities to jointly secure and monitor the conduction of maternal education. For example, BAO Yuyu (2017) proposed the construction of social security system [1] in consideration of institutional security mechanism, practice platform and service support system. Secondly, social authorities should play their roles, for example, education authorities, women's federations, communities, healthcare and disease control authorities, should go deep into mothers' groups, attempt to provide external chances and social conditions for improving mother's educative proficiency, through publicity, assistance and training etc. LÜ Qiufen (2010) clearly pointed out that government should pay high attention to mother's parenting proficiency, women's federations and related education authorities should take specific actions to improve mother's parenting proficiency through training [2]. Since 2007, Ningbo Municipal Women's Federation and Municipal Bureau of Education jointly launched the "Mother's Proficiency Program" to offer regular training to mothers

under 18 years, and various forms to create educational opportunities and learning conditions for different kinds of mothers. There are many other similar “*Mother's Proficiency Programs*” in China, with some large-scale formed and certain outcomes obtained. Obviously, such programs are very important for mothers to build up proper educative philosophy, to learn about scientific educative methods, and to improve mother's educative capabilities.

### 3.5.2. *Schools or Kindergartens*

Mother's educative proficiency is an achievement from long-term accumulation; therefore, some scholars believe that the attainment or improvement of mother's educative proficiency cannot be achieved by random, irregular, one-time educational outreach activities. They believe that mother education shall be included in current schooling system, to form a special education category. MO Jianxiu (2007) proposed that the education for mothers shall be included into adult education system, the fixed education base shall be set up, and the training for professional faculty [5] as well. She also discussed in terms of educative objective, content, method and form, to provide a blueprint of improving mother's educative proficiency on the basis of school education. LI Congna (2017) also proposed improvement of mother's educative proficiency under supports of colleges and universities and discussed the importance and feasibility of conducting mother education for college's female students [20]. ZONG Meifang (2015) attempted to improve mother's educative proficiency by building the faculty, conducting specific education events, creating mothers' class, and guiding how to read [27]. Furthermore, kindergartens are not only venues easy to organize and conduct mother education, but also one of the important organizations to improve mother's proficiency. *Kindergarten Education Guidelines (Trial)* pointed out that “*Families are important partners of kindergartens, so kindergartens should obtain the understanding, support and active participation of parents, and actively help parents improve their educative capabilities*”. Obviously, kindergartens are on the duty of educating parents and improving mother's educative proficiency. In the context of kindergarten-family joint education, parents can interact and communicate with professional teachers by many means so that obtain more scientific educative concepts and educative methods, and further improve their own educative proficiency. JIAO Xiaoling (2009) pointed out that kindergartens should generalize scientific educative knowledge to parents and enhance family-kindergarten joint education by many means [28]. CHEN Xian, ZHENG Xiaojie and YANG Yixi (2020), on the basis of practice, introduced the specific strategy of local kindergartens to improve mothers' educative capabilities and qualities through kindergarten-family joint parenting lessons, such as “*Parenting Growth Camp*”, “*Mother's Charm Festival*” and so on [29].

### 3.5.3. *Families or Individuals*

The improvement of mother's educative proficiency is a

result of both internal and external factors, and along with technological progress and updating knowledge, mother's educative proficiency shall also advance with the epoch. Mothers as the educators should always learn to adopt state-of-art technology and methods, update family education concepts, master modern scientific parenting methods, and build good examples for their children; progress with the times and grow with children by continuous learning and self-improvement. Some scholars also proposed relating improvement strategies from mother's perspective, for example, LI Congna (2014) mainly starting from the construction of a new mother's educative outlook proposed the shaping of “*Learning Type*” mothers, who are supposed to update educative concepts in learning further, reserve educative knowledge, and improve educative capability [23]. LU Aihua (2020) pointed out that mothers should be aware of self-education, aware of the importance of good conduct and example, should enhance communication with children, fully guide children and select scientific guidance approaches [30]. CHEN Xueqin (2005) pointed out, from family education perspective, that mothers should create good family atmosphere, establish children's development outlook, and improve their qualities [31].

## 4. Research on Chinese Mother's Proficiency: Comments and Prospects

### 4.1. *Conclusion*

To sum up, Chinese studies on preschool children mother's proficiency are under further exploration and development. Such studies reinforce people's recognition of the values and meanings of mother's educative proficiency, display the status quo and existing problems of mother's educative proficiency, analyze the factors influencing mother's educative proficiency, and provide some solutions. On one hand, these studies help enhance social and academic attention on mother's proficiency, and thus further promote the research on mother's educative proficiency. On the other hand, some outcomes also inspire the research on related subjects.

### 4.2. *Research Limitation*

However, there are still many shortcomings, shown as below:

In quantity, currently there are a few research specific to “mother's educative proficiency”, and a considerable number of articles are mixed with “family education”, “parents' qualities” and “adults' education”. Most of the literature are articles published on journals, and very few are graduation theses by Master or Doctor. Other articles are of reference value, but mostly general verbiage, lacking theoretical supports. Solid theories are fundamental to such research and practices.

The methods adopted in existing research are mainly questionnaire method and interview method, most of them monotonous. The statistics for research are simple, lacking

prudent data analysis and true example support, and quality of articles are not optimistic.

The perspectives of existing research start mainly from pedagogy, lacking multi-disciplinary studies. The topic “*Mother’s Educative Proficiency*” may involve psychology, sociology and other fields, or the integration between different fields, worth further discussions.

Current research is not clearly phased. By sorting, it’s found that most research are concentrated on preschool education phase. There is very few research on primary school, middle school or college/university phases, however, mother’s educative proficiency exerts profound influence on children, therefore, it’s necessary and valuable to research on mother’s educative proficiency in different phases.

Most research focus on connotation and values, status quo and countermeasures. Most connotation research are summaries on ordinary experiences, lacking theoretical supports; there are less status quo and problem research, not empirical and scientific; there are more countermeasure research, but mostly broad, only summarizing experiences, without practically considering the epochal characteristics, lacking timeliness and operability.

#### 4.3. Prospects

In existing research, the evaluation and measuring system, regional studies, theoretical construction and international comparison in relation to “mother’s educative proficiency” are very valuable, but they are scarce or even not existing. Regional exploration of “mother’s educative proficiency”, such as urban-rural difference, foreign-domestic comparison, may further unveil the forming mechanism and influencing factors behind Chinese “mother’s educative proficiency”, while adopting international excellent ideas and methods may provide more possibilities in further improving Chinese “mother’s educative proficiency”. Additionally, influencing factors analysis, accurate measurement standards and complete evaluating system can also help enrich the theories, and enhance national mother’s educative proficiency. Meanwhile, the evaluation, manner of evaluation, and measures of evaluation may also exert higher requirements for researchers, worth future studies.

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