

# Study on Hidden Dropout of Students in Junior High Schools in Rural Areas of China

Yunfei Zhu

Graduate School of Education, Graduate University of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, 11000, Mongolia

## ABSTRACT

Free compulsory education has made "all children can go to school" a reality and eliminated the phenomenon of dropping out of school due to tuition and miscellaneous fees. However, at this stage, hidden dropout has risen to become the main contradiction in China's compulsory education. The article focuses on the problem of hidden dropout in rural junior high schools, and explains the impact of hidden dropout on personal development, students' families and society. The causes of hidden dropout are analysed in depth, including students' own factors, family factors, school education factors and social environment factors. Corresponding countermeasures and suggestions are put forward from the levels of school, family and society, with a view to providing theoretical basis and practical reference for effectively solving the problem of students' hidden dropout at junior middle school level in rural areas, as well as promoting the healthy development of rural education.

## KEYWORDS

Hidden dropout; Rural junior high school students; Causes; Negative impact; Coping strategies

## 1. INTRODUCTION

With the continuous development of China's education, the education situation in rural areas has received widespread attention. Despite the fact that the state and local governments have been increasing their investment in rural education, the phenomenon of students' hidden dropout is still prevalent in the junior high school stage. The so-called hidden dropout phenomenon refers to the fact that although students are registered in the school registration system, they are in fact off the normal learning track, manifesting themselves in chronic or frequent absenteeism, a serious lack of motivation, and a sense of confusion about the future of their studies.

The existence of the hidden dropout phenomenon not only has a negative impact on individual students, but also poses a serious challenge to the entire rural education system. It is of great significance to conduct an in-depth study on the phenomenon of hidden dropout in junior middle school in rural areas, to explore its current situation, causes and impacts, and to put forward corresponding policy recommendations accordingly: it helps to accurately grasp the actual situation of rural education, and provides a basis for the formulation and adjustment of education policies; it can provide an in-depth understanding of the key factors affecting the academic development of students, and provides a guide for the targeted adoption of interventions; and it can also help to improve the quality of education and improve the quality of life of students through the analysis and study of the phenomenon. Through analysing and studying this phenomenon, it is expected to find effective ways to improve the rural education ecology and promote students' healthy growth and comprehensive development.

## **2. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF HIDDEN DROPOUTS IN RURAL JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS**

In order to facilitate the study, the article focuses on the phenomenon of hidden dropout in three junior high schools in L city, western Liaoning province, and collects relevant data through classroom participant observation and interviews with teachers, students, and parents, in order to clarify the specific manifestations, scale, and extent of hidden dropout among students in the region. The results show that the phenomenon of hidden dropout has a wide prevalence and obvious characteristics among junior secondary school students in the region.

### **2.1. Specific Manifestations of Hidden Dropout**

The phenomenon of hidden dropout can be categorised into two types according to whether the students are completely disengaged from school or not. One is that students, although not cancelled in school, have in fact been completely separated from school activities. These students have made it clear that they will not return to school to take part in teaching and learning activities, and most of them have left their hometowns and gone out to work in urban areas, with a very few remaining at home to work in agriculture. The second type is students who have not completely left school, but whose actual study time in school has been greatly reduced, as shown by: attendance rates significantly lower than normal, with frequent unexcused absences; extremely low classroom participation, with poor concentration and lack of interest in the content of the classroom; and poor completion of homework, which is often not completed on time or in a perfunctory manner. The common characteristic of these students is that they are indifferent to their academic performance and are in a state of muddling through and waiting for graduation.

### **2.2. The Scale and Extent of Hidden Dropout**

Through a survey of several rural junior high schools, it was found that a considerable proportion of students had different degrees of hidden dropout performance, and even that the proportion of chronically absent students in some schools was as high as 11.4 per cent. In terms of classroom performance, 30-50 per cent of students in each class are "present but not present". It is clear that the phenomenon of hidden dropouts is widespread in junior secondary schools in rural areas. The number of hidden dropouts is higher in individual schools, with some regional and school differences. In areas that are farther away from cities, economically backward, and relatively lacking in educational resources, the scale of hidden dropouts is relatively larger and more serious. At the same time, there are also differences between different grades, with the proportion and degree of hidden dropouts increasing as the grade rises. In terms of the gender ratio of students with hidden dropout, the proportion of boys is much higher than that of girls. This scale and degree of dropout reflects the serious challenges facing rural junior middle school education, and highlights the urgency of studying and solving this problem in depth.

## **3. NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF HIDDEN DROPOUTS**

### **3.1. Impact on Individual Students**

Hidden dropout has a long-term and far-reaching impact on students' personal development. Firstly, hidden dropout seriously hinders students' acquisition of knowledge and skills, leading to their low personal cultural quality. The lack of education restricts the development of their cognitive ability and thinking level, making it difficult for them to meet the requirements of modern society for talents. From the perspective of career development, hidden dropout significantly reduces the range of career choices and development space for students in adulthood, making it difficult for them to obtain better job opportunities and career advancement, which not only puts them at a disadvantage in the future

job market, but also challenges them in personal growth and social adaptation. In addition, the lack of systematic education affects the formation of students' values and morals and increases the risk of developing undesirable behaviours. Hidden dropout may also lead to psychological frustration and low self-esteem, and these negative emotions will adversely affect the physical and mental health and quality of life of dropouts, causing them to face more difficulties and challenges in their growth process.

### **3.2. Impact on Students' Families**

Hidden dropout not only has far-reaching effects on students' personal development, but also brings many negative consequences to their families. Firstly, hidden dropout makes families' expectations of their children's future fall through, and parents feel disappointed and anxious. This emotional blow may have a negative impact on the interaction and emotional support among family members, and in serious cases, it may trigger tensions and antagonism in parent-child relationships, which may easily lead to conflicts and disharmony within the family. In the long run, such strained family relationships not only affect the psychological health of family members, but may also have a negative impact on the child's self-identity and behavioural norms. Secondly, on the economic front, the restricted future development of children who are hidden dropouts will also affect the overall living standard and social status of the family to a certain extent. The child's lack of education makes it difficult for him or her to obtain good employment opportunities, which not only limits his or her own development, but may also reduce the economic income and social mobility of the whole family. Investments in early education become ineffective, forcing families to make greater sacrifices in future education and living expenses to cope with the various problems brought about by their children's lack of education, resulting in a heavier economic burden.

### **3.3. Impact on Social Development**

Hidden dropout has a far-reaching and complex impact on the development of society as a whole, and this impact is reflected in a number of ways. Firstly, hidden dropouts reduce the overall quality of the population, which is a major obstacle to the long-term development and progress of society. The lack of necessary knowledge and skills among the poorly educated group not only makes it difficult to adapt to the fast-developing technological and economic environment, but is also detrimental to the enhancement of social innovation and comprehensive competitiveness, thus becoming a bottleneck for social development. The phenomenon of hidden school dropout prevents a large number of young people from obtaining the education and training they deserve, leading to a shortage of high-quality talents in the labour market, which also hinders the sustained and healthy development of the entire society and economy. Secondly, hidden dropout will also increase the factors of social instability. Young people who have not received adequate education are more vulnerable to undesirable influences and may turn to crime or other undesirable behaviours because they have lost the direction and motivation to move forward, thus posing a threat to social order and stability, and at the same time increasing the cost of public security management. Thirdly, the phenomenon of hidden withdrawal from school also affects the degree of civilisation and cultural atmosphere of society, which is not conducive to the formation of a good social atmosphere. Education not only imparts knowledge, but more importantly fosters the quality of citizenship and a sense of social responsibility. Individuals who lack systematic education often have deficiencies in social behavioural norms and public morality, which negatively affects the progress of social civilization and the formation of good morals. Finally, hidden dropouts pose a major challenge to the achievement of educational and social equity and exacerbate social stratification. Education is an important means of achieving social equity, and the existence of the phenomenon of hidden dropouts means that some groups are unable to enjoy educational resources on an equal footing, which leads to the solidification of social classes and the widening of the gap between rich and poor. Vertical

mobility in society is reduced, and the phenomenon of social stratification is aggravated, which in turn affects the overall harmony and stability of society.

## **4. ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES OF HIDDEN DROPOUT OF STUDENTS IN RURAL JUNIOR MIDDLE SCHOOL STAGE**

### **4.1. Individual Student Factors**

Firstly, the lack of learning motivation is the direct cause of many students' hidden dropout. Some students lack a clear understanding of the meaning and value of learning, and do not have clear learning goals and pursuits, resulting in low motivation for learning. Often unable to see the potential impact of education on their future lives, these students lack intrinsic motivation and gradually lose interest in their studies. As time goes by, they invest less and less in their studies, which in turn gives rise to a hidden tendency to drop out of school.

Secondly, poor psychological condition is another important factor. Rural junior high school students are in a critical period of physical and mental development, and are vulnerable to various psychological problems. Some students may suffer from low self-esteem, anxiety and depression, and these psychological problems may stem from a variety of factors such as their own personality, family environment or school experience. For example, financial difficulties at home, strained parental relationships, and lack of psychological support at school may have a negative impact on students' mental health. These psychological problems make it difficult for students to cope with learning pressure and interpersonal relationships, leading to a diminished sense of belonging to school and a gradual loss of motivation to continue learning.

In addition, low self-efficacy is also an important cause of hidden dropout. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's confidence in his or her ability to successfully complete a task. When some students encounter difficulties in the learning process, they lack the confidence and ability to solve problems, and are prone to retreat and give up. This low self-efficacy makes them resistant to learning and believe that they cannot successfully complete their studies, which leads to implicit withdrawal. The long-term experience of academic failure further undermines their self-confidence and learning motivation, forming a vicious circle.

### **4.2. Family Factors**

Firstly, some rural families have too narrow an understanding of education, emphasising the utilitarian nature of learning, for example, believing that studying is only for the purpose of obtaining a good job, and neglecting the cultivation of children's comprehensive qualities. This utilitarian concept of education makes children lack long-term motivation and goals in the learning process. In addition, some families are overly pampered or indulgent in the education process, all of which are not conducive to the development of good learning habits and morals, resulting in a lack of autonomy and sense of responsibility in their studies.

Secondly, the constraints of the family's economic situation are also an important factor leading to hidden dropout. Families in rural areas generally have low economic levels, a situation that directly affects students' access to learning resources and the optimisation of the learning environment. For example, economically disadvantaged families find it difficult to provide their children with adequate extracurricular tutoring and learning materials, leaving them without the necessary support for their studies. In addition, family financial pressure also puts students under greater pressure of living, and they may need to shoulder part of the family's financial responsibilities, which distracts their energy and time for learning, and in turn affects their academic performance and interest in learning.

Thirdly, family instability also has a negative impact on students' learning. Problems such as parental divorce and disharmonious relationships among family members often bring emotional distress and

psychological trauma to students. These emotional and psychological problems can weaken students' learning mood and stability, causing them to show a tendency of withdrawal and avoidance in their studies. The instability of the family environment not only affects students' psychological health, but also directly interferes with their learning concentration and persistence.

### **4.3. School Factors**

Firstly, the uneven quality of education is a notable problem. Many rural schools have weak teachers, rudimentary teaching facilities and single teaching methods, making it difficult to meet students' diverse learning needs. Under such circumstances, students often have poor learning results and gradually lose confidence in school education. The lack of high-quality educational resources makes it difficult for students to make academic progress, further aggravating their resistance to learning and ultimately leading to hidden dropout.

Secondly, the impact of school management style on students should not be overlooked. Overly strict management may cause students to feel psychologically depressed and tense, and they are unable to learn in a relaxed and pleasant environment, which not only affects their learning results, but may also lead to psychological problems. On the contrary, overly loose management may lead to a lack of self-discipline and discipline, loose learning discipline and a gradual loss of interest and motivation in their studies. Such imbalance in management may easily cause students to lose direction in their studies and increase the risk of hidden dropout.

In addition, the lack of personalised education is also an important factor leading to hidden dropout. Many rural schools fail to pay sufficient attention to the characteristics and needs of each student, and the education model is too one-size-fits-all, failing to provide targeted education and guidance. Some students feel neglected and left out in such educational environments, unable to receive the attention and support they deserve, and are gradually disengaged from their studies. The lack of respect and understanding of individual differences in schools leads to students not being able to give full play to their potential in the learning process and losing interest and motivation in learning.

### **4.4. Social Environment Factors**

Rural socio-environmental factors also play an important role in the emergence of the hidden dropout phenomenon among students at junior high school level. Firstly, the influence of traditional employment concepts cannot be ignored. In many rural areas, there are still some traditional concepts, that studying is not the only way out, and that early entry into society to work and earn money can also have a good development. Such concepts have a subtle influence on the importance students and their families attach to education, leading some students to believe that it is not necessary for them to continue their education, thus giving rise to a tendency to drop out of school in a hidden way.

Secondly, bad social trends have a negative impact on students' values. Some negative social trends, such as hedonism and comparison, may have a misleading effect on students' values. After coming into contact with these bad customs, students are prone to doubt the significance of learning and think that short-term material enjoyment is more important than long-term investment in education. Such misguided values cause them to gradually lose interest and commitment to their studies, leading to the phenomenon of hidden dropouts.

In addition, inadequate social support systems in rural areas are also an important reason. Many rural areas lack a comprehensive support system for students' education, for example, there is a relative lack of after-school tutoring institutions and mental health counselling institutions. When students encounter difficulties or psychological problems in the learning process, they are unable to obtain timely and effective help and guidance. This lack of a support system makes students often feel isolated and helpless in the face of academic pressure and psychological distress, further increasing the risk of hidden dropout.

## **5. COUNTERMEASURES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF HIDDEN DROPOUT OF STUDENTS AT JUNIOR SECONDARY LEVEL IN RURAL AREAS**

### **5.1. School Level**

Optimising the curriculum: schools should design a more targeted and attractive curriculum system according to the actual situation and needs of rural students. For example, practical courses and interest groups should be added to stimulate students' interest and initiative in learning. At the same time, the content of the curriculum should keep up with the development of the times and combine with the future development of students to ensure the effectiveness and foresight of education.

Strengthening the development of the teaching force: Enhance the professional quality and teaching standard of teachers by recruiting outstanding teachers, providing professional training and improving their remuneration. Encourage teachers to adopt diversified teaching methods, pay attention to individual differences in students, and tailor teaching to the needs of each student to ensure that each student can fully develop.

Establishing a personalised education system: to gain an in-depth understanding of each student's learning characteristics, interests and psychological needs, and to formulate personalised learning plans and development programmes for students. Services such as academic counselling and psychological counselling are provided to help students solve their learning and life difficulties and enhance their motivation and confidence in learning.

Improving teaching facilities and environment: Increase investment in teaching facilities in rural schools to improve teaching conditions, such as upgrading teaching equipment and building libraries and laboratories. Create a favourable campus cultural atmosphere, enhance students' sense of identity and belonging to the school, and promote their all-round development.

Strengthening school management: establishing a scientific and reasonable management system to regulate students' behaviour and create a good learning atmosphere. Strengthen communication and cooperation with parents, pay joint attention to students' growth, form a joint force between home and school, and ensure that the effect of education is maximised.

Carry out career education: Help students understand the characteristics and requirements of different careers, and guide them to establish a correct view of career and life planning. Through career education, students' intrinsic learning motivation is improved and they are given clear learning goals and directions.

### **5.2. Family Level**

Strengthening parents' awareness of education: Through organising parents' schools and family education lectures, parents' awareness of the importance of education is raised and traditional education concepts are changed. Let parents understand the key role of family education in their children's growth, actively participate in their children's education process, and jointly promote their children's growth and development.

Improve the home learning environment: Parents should create a quiet and comfortable learning environment for their children, encourage them to read and study more, and cultivate good learning habits and self-discipline. A good home learning environment can effectively improve students' learning efficiency and interest in learning.

Strengthen parent-child communication: Parents should establish good communication channels with their children, pay attention to their children's learning and living conditions, and find and solve their children's problems in time. Respect the child's ideas and opinions, cultivate the child's independent

thinking ability and sense of autonomy, so that the child grows up healthily in a harmonious family atmosphere.

Setting a good example: Parents should set a good example for their children through their words and behaviour. Demonstrating positive attitudes and values, they should guide their children to establish a correct outlook on life and values, and cultivate in them a sense of responsibility and enterprising spirit.

Participate in school education activities: Parents should actively participate in parent-teacher conferences and parent-child activities organised by the school, keep in close contact with the school, learn about their children's performance in school, and work together to promote their children's development. Home-school co-operation is an important way to improve the effectiveness of education.

### **5.3. Social Level**

Improve the distribution of educational resources: Increase investment in education in rural areas, reasonably distribute educational resources, and narrow the gap between urban and rural education. Improve the treatment of teachers in rural schools, attract outstanding talents to teach in rural areas, and improve the overall level of rural education.

Strengthen education publicity: widely publicise the importance and significance of education through various media channels, and create a good atmosphere in which the whole society attaches importance to education and supports it. Correct some bad education concepts and employment concepts in the society, and guide the society to look at the development of rural students correctly.

Establishing educational support mechanisms: The government and social organisations should establish educational support mechanisms to provide financial aid and assistance to students from rural families with financial difficulties. Teaching activities and volunteer services should be carried out to provide manpower and intellectual support to rural schools to ensure that every student can enjoy fair educational opportunities.

Promoting vocational education: Taking into account the actual situation in rural areas, vigorously develop vocational education and provide rural students with more vocational skills training and employment opportunities. Let students see that they can also realise their own values and life goals through vocational education, and enhance their motivation to learn.

Improve education laws and regulations: Strengthen education legislation to guarantee rural students' right to education. Violations of education laws and regulations should be dealt with seriously, so as to maintain fairness and justice in education and ensure that every student can enjoy the opportunity to receive education.

Establishment of a mental health support system: Society should establish a comprehensive mental health support system to provide rural students with mental health advice and counselling services. It should relieve students' psychological pressure and improve their mental health so that they can better cope with various challenges in learning and life.

Strengthening community education: give full play to the role of the community in education, and organise colourful community education activities, such as cultural lectures and science exhibitions, so as to enrich the after-school life of rural students and improve their comprehensive quality. Community education is an important supplement to the overall development of students.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

After an in-depth study and analysis of the phenomenon of hidden dropout among rural junior high school students, we clearly understand the multifaceted causes of this phenomenon, involving the

individual student, family, school education and social environment. We found that hidden dropout not only has a negative impact on the development of individual students, but also has many negative effects on families and society. Therefore, it is necessary for schools, families and society to work together to take effective countermeasures and suggestions, and to work together to reduce or even eliminate this phenomenon, so as to provide rural junior high school students with better learning environments and development conditions.

In the future, there is a need to further deepen and expand the research on the hidden dropout problem of rural junior secondary school students. This includes exploring in greater detail the specific conditions and differences between different regions and schools, so as to provide more basis for the development of more targeted solutions. In addition, the effectiveness and sustainability of the solutions also need to be tracked and evaluated over time, so as to continuously improve and optimise the relevant measures. Through continuous research and endeavours, it is expected that the quality of rural junior secondary education can be practically improved and the healthy growth and all-round development of students can be promoted.

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