

The Impact of Social Support on the School Adaptation of Left-behind Children in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the social support available to left-behind children in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region during their school adjustment process and its impact on their adaptive performance. It also proposes policy recommendations for further optimizing the social support system to enhance the school adjustment capabilities of left-behind children. A quantitative research method was employed, using a survey conducted among 400 left-behind children in Inner Mongolia. The survey assessed the social support these children received from their families, schools, and government policies, as well as their school adjustment abilities. Data analysis was carried out using statistical tools such as one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), Least Significant Difference (LSD) test, and multiple regression analysis. The results showed that social support, especially from family and school, had a significant positive effect on promoting learning adaptation and psychological well-being among left-behind children.

This research fills a gap in the study of left-behind children's school adjustment in Inner Mongolia, a remote minority region, and integrates social support theory, educational management theory, educational equity theory, and psychological adaptation theory. The study systematically analyzes how multidimensional social support influences the academic and psychological adaptation of left-behind children. This comprehensive perspective not only provides theoretical innovation for understanding the adaptation challenges of left-behind children but also offers theoretical guidance for future educational policies and school management practices. Additionally, the survey conducted with 400 left-behind children in Inner Mongolia provides detailed empirical data. These data not only confirm the positive correlation between social support and school adjustment but also offer a

solid foundation for future research in this area. Lastly, the study proposes recommendations for optimizing the support system to improve the school adaptation abilities of left-behind children, addressing gaps in their education. By creating a supportive environment for their growth, we can foster more outstanding talent among left-behind children.

Keywords: The impact of social support; school adjustment; left-behind children

Introduction

With the rapid urbanization in China, an increasing number of rural laborers are migrating to urban areas for work, leaving behind a large number of children who are forced to separate from their parents, becoming "left-behind children." According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics (2022), China currently has nearly 69 million left-behind children. Additionally, data from the Ministry of Education in Inner Mongolia (2022) shows that there are 25,039 rural left-behind children under the age of 16 in the region. Studying the educational issues of rural left-behind children is not only critical for the well-being of these children but also plays a positive role in improving the overall quality of education in rural areas and promoting educational equity.

Left-behind children typically face emotional support deficits, academic challenges, and psychological stress, which severely impact their school adaptation and future development (Zhao et al., 2015). However, most current studies on left-behind children focus on economically developed areas or urban settings, with limited analysis of remote regions like Inner Mongolia, which have unique cultural backgrounds and geographical conditions.

Wang and Cai (2017) explored the impact of parental migration on the well-being of left-behind children, finding that family support plays a crucial role in children's mental health and academic performance. Furthermore, Zhang and Zhang (2020) highlighted that emotional and academic support from schools significantly improves the learning adaptation of left-behind children. Despite these findings, most studies have focused on urban or relatively economically advanced regions, with little attention paid to the specific context of minority areas like Inner Mongolia. Zhao et al. (2015) emphasized the role of teacher emotional support and peer relationships in children's adaptation, but few studies have thoroughly explored the specific role of policy support. Therefore, understanding how family, school, and policy support can improve the school adaptation of left-behind children in resource-limited contexts is a pressing knowledge gap.

Left-behind children in remote regions like Inner Mongolia generally have lower school adaptation due to a lack of social support, which severely affects their academic performance and psychological well-being. If left unaddressed, this issue will further widen the educational resource gap between urban and rural areas. This study provides empirical data and policy recommendations to help the government and educational administrators better understand how social support can enhance the school adaptation of left-behind children, thereby promoting educational equity.

Through a field survey of 400 left-behind children in Inner Mongolia, this study not only reveals the main difficulties these children face in school adaptation but also specifically examines how social support—including family, school, and policy support—helps them overcome these challenges.

By delving deeply into this research question, this study contributes to the academic understanding of left-behind children and provides practical guidance for policymakers. Particularly in the context of China's push to promote educational equity, understanding and addressing the school adaptation issues of left-behind children will provide essential support for the educational development and social integration of remote areas.

Objective

1. To explore the relationship between social support and school adaptation among left-behind children in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.
2. To propose guidelines for improving the impact of social support on the educational adjustment of abandoned children in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

Literature Reviews

Social Support

Social support theory emphasizes the significance of interpersonal relationships and social environments on individual psychological growth and social adaptability. Social support is typically defined as the assistance provided by organized interpersonal networks, aimed at fulfilling individuals' expressive and instrumental needs in society, thereby reducing inappropriate motivations (Cohen & Wills, 1985). The fundamental functions of social support include material, economic, and emotional assistance from parents, relatives, friends, classmates, and colleagues (Taylor, 2011). Specifically, the effectiveness of social support relies on the relationship between the source of support and the recipient.

For instance, Ji Caijun (2016) proposed a "Government–School–Family–Community–Society–Multi–Center Educational Support System for Left–Behind Children," emphasizing the collaborative role of government and community support to comprehensively improve the educational environment for left–behind children.

Jose M. Tomas (2020) explored the impact of different sources of social support on adolescents' well–being, highlighting the important mediating role of school adjustment in this process. The findings indicated that family support plays a crucial role in social support and adolescents' well–being, further emphasizing the necessity of strengthening social support.

Although these studies provide significant insights into understanding the effects of social support, further exploration is needed to optimize these support mechanisms within specific cultural and social contexts, such as the environment of rural left–behind children, to enhance their adaptability and psychological health.

School Adaptation

School adaptation is a crucial task in the development of children and adolescents and an important topic in educational psychology research. Scholars both domestically and internationally generally agree that school adaptation is not only a psychological ability of students but also a significant factor influencing academic success. Zhang Dajun and Jiang Qi (2006) define adaptation as the psychological and behavioral responses of individuals to environmental changes, emphasizing the importance of adaptability. Lin Yuan, Yang Zhiliang, and Huang Xin (2003) further note that school adaptation is specifically manifested in the ability to master learning and interpersonal skills, as well as the capacity to adhere to school norms.

In studying school adaptation, Berna Akcinar (2013) found that factors such as family socioeconomic status, parenting strategies, and children's social behavioral skills have a significant impact on school adaptation. These studies provide a foundation for understanding the multidimensional factors affecting school adaptation. However, research on the school adaptation of rural left–behind children remains insufficient, particularly regarding how to enhance their school adaptation through increased social support.

Rural Left–Behind Children

Rural left–behind children are defined as minors who remain in rural areas under the care of other guardians due to one or both parents working away from home (Li & Zhang, 2022). A notable characteristic of these children is the lack of direct parental care and education. According

to the latest statistics, the number of rural left-behind children in China was still substantial in 2022, reaching 25,039. Although this proportion is gradually declining, the psychological and educational issues faced by left-behind children remain prominent.

Research indicates that rural left-behind children exhibit significant differences in school adaptation, mental health, and social skills (Zhao et al., 2019). These disparities are often attributed to the absence of a stable family environment and insufficient social support (Xu et al., 2021). While some studies have attempted to explore the unique needs and challenges faced by rural left-behind children, there is still a lack of research on how to construct effective support systems to enhance their adaptability and psychological well-being.

Conceptual Framework

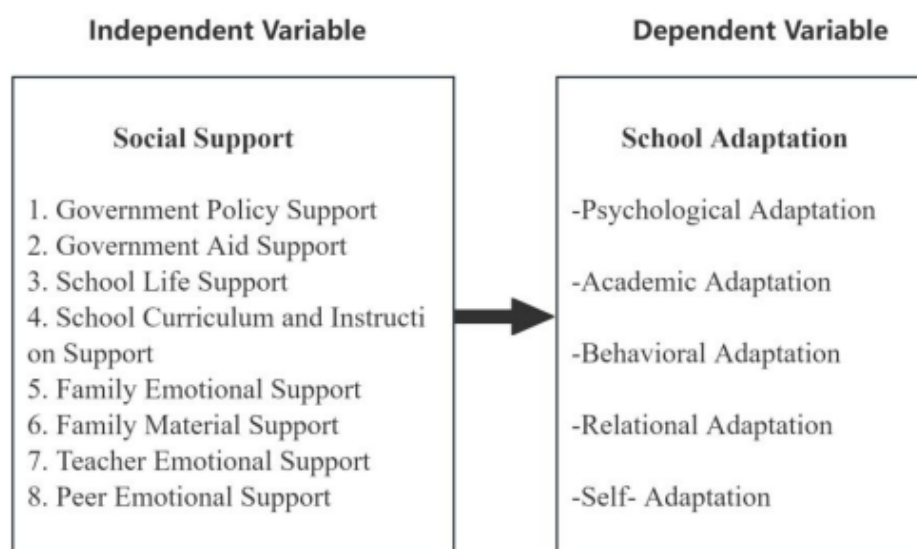


Fig 1. Conceptual Framework of Left-behind Children

The framework highlights how factors like government policy, school support, and family support play critical roles in these children's ability to adapt to school life. The framework is built on educational administration theories, social support theories, and theories of school adaptation, showing that left-behind children are affected by multiple layers of their environment, including emotional, material, and psychological support systems.

Methodology

The research on The Impact of Social Support on the School Adaptation of Left-behind Children in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region is quantitative and is no longer necessary for further research.

The population used in this study was the rural population in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

The sample consisted of abandoned children in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, where the exact population size was unknown. Therefore, the sample size was calculated using Cochran's (1997) formula, with a 95% confidence level and an acceptable error of no more than 5%. The sample size was 400 people using a simple random sampling method.

In the questionnaire design process, the content validity index (CVI) and item-objective congruence (IOC) were used to ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument.

Content Validity Index (CVI): The CVI was assessed through expert reviews to confirm whether the questionnaire effectively measures the intended constructs. According to the expert ratings, if a specific item's CVI value exceeds 0.8, it indicates that the item has good content validity.

Item-Objective Congruence (IOC): The IOC values for each item in the questionnaire were also determined through expert evaluation. The IOC reflects the relevance of each item to the research objectives, with values ranging from 0 to 1; a higher value indicates a greater contribution to the research objectives. All items had IOC values above 0.7, demonstrating strong relevance.

Additionally, the reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach's α coefficient, which yielded an α value of 0.89, indicating good internal consistency for the instrument.

Research process

Instruments used in the research The researcher developed the research instrument by the following steps:

1. Study documents and related research to collect data to create the instrument for the research.

2. Create a questionnaire for the research according to the research objectives. The questionnaire is divided into 2 parts: Part 1: Questionnaires regarding general information of the respondents, including age, permanent residence status, family income level, caregiver's education level, parents' workplace, the duration of time parents work outside the home, communication methods with parents, and attitudes toward parents working outside the home. This part uses a

list-based question format. Part 2: The questionnaire survey discusses the respondents' perception of social support using a rating scale. Most of the scale items related to social support in this study refer to the scale used by Zhao Leilei (2019) for abandoned children in rural areas. Therefore, this study will design questions according to different dimensions, each dimension consists of 6 items, totaling 60 items, and uses a 5-level Likert-type scoring method, using the criteria for selecting questions with an IOC value of 0.6 or higher. The questionnaire was then tested with a non-sample population of 30 people to analyze the data to find the quality of the questionnaire and its reliability. (Reliability) of the entire questionnaire by analyzing Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient (Cronbach, 1990). The analysis result of the entire questionnaire has a reliability value of 0.965.

The data collection research team went to collect data with a sample of 400 abandoned children in Inner Mongolia. The data collection was conducted in Inner Mongolia from March to December 2023. A total of 400 copies, or 100%, were returned. The data analysis and statistics used in the research were the analysis of the relationship between independent and dependent variables. Pearson's correlation analysis found a significant positive relationship between X and Y ($p < 0.01$, $r = 0.842$), indicating that the higher the score of X (the impact of social support), the higher the score of Y (school adjustment). Regression analysis In this article, a multiple regression model was built using GPS, GAS, SLS, SCAIS, FES, FMS, TES, and PES as independent variables and Y (school adjustment) as a dependent variable.

Result

Chapter 1: Exploring the relationship between social support and school adaptation among left-behind children in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
	B	Std. Error	Beta				
(Constant)	-20.437	4.014		-5.092	.000		
GPS	.857	.157	.168	5.472*	.000	.762	1.313
GAS	1.075	.153	.212	7.041*	.000	.792	1.262
SLS	.859	.130	.192	6.586*	.000	.839	1.192
SCAIS	.784	.144	.163	5.437*	.000	.798	1.253
FES	.750	.134	.166	5.582*	.000	.812	1.232
FMS	.817	.141	.176	5.810*	.000	.780	1.283
TES	.734	.141	.158	5.211*	.000	.783	1.277
PES	.857	.139	.182	6.147*	.000	.820	1.220

:The table shows that

This study explores the relationship between social support and school adaptation capabilities among left-behind children in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. The analysis indicates that government policy support (e.g., scholarships or educational subsidies, $\beta=0.857$, $p<0.05$) has a significant positive impact on the school adaptation of left-behind children. Such policies help children access more learning resources, facilitating their integration into the school environment. Similarly, government aid support (e.g., living allowances, $\beta=1.075$, $p<0.05$) greatly enhances their adaptability.

School life support ($\beta=0.859$, $p<0.05$) and instructional support ($\beta=0.784$, $p<0.05$) also significantly promote school adaptation. For instance, schools that provide good living conditions and teaching resources encourage more active participation in learning. Additionally, family emotional support ($\beta=0.750$, $p<0.05$) and material support ($\beta=0.817$, $p<0.05$) play crucial roles in the mental health and academic performance of left-behind children. Emotional support refers to the ongoing communication and emotional interactions from parents or guardians, which alleviate children's feelings of loneliness, while material support includes the provision of school supplies and living expenses.

Teacher emotional support (e.g., concern for students' emotional well-being and academic progress, $\beta=0.734$, $p<0.05$) and peer support (e.g., assistance and encouragement from classmates, $\beta=0.857$, $p<0.05$) are also important factors in children's school adaptation. Children who receive attention from their teachers not only perform better in class but also enhance their self-esteem and sense of belonging. Likewise, positive peer relationships can help children integrate into groups, reduce feelings of isolation, and improve their adaptability.

Through these examples, the research demonstrates that multidimensional social support significantly enhances the school adaptation and mental health of left-behind children.

The regression equation is:

$$Y = -20.437 + 0.857 \times GPS + 1.075 \times GAS + 0.859 \times SLS + 0.784 \times SCAIS + 0.75 \times FES + 0.817 \times FMS + 0.734 \times TES + 0.857 \times PES$$

(Y=school adaptation, GPS=Government Policy Support, GAS=Government Aid Support, SLS=School Life Support, SCAIS=School Curriculum and Instruction Support, FES=Family Emotional Support, FMS=Family Material Support, TES=Teacher Emotional Support, PES=Peer Emotional Support)

In this study, the eight factors selected—Government Policy Support, Government Aid Support, School Life Support, School Curriculum and Instruction Support, Family Emotional Support, Family Material Support, Teacher Emotional Support, and Peer Emotional Support—each have a significant positive impact on the school adaptation of left-behind children. By enhancing these significant positive influencing factors, it is possible to effectively improve the school adaptation abilities of left-behind children in the region.

Chapter 2 proposes guidelines for improving the impact of social support on the educational adjustment of abandoned children in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

Data analysis reveals that multiple dimensions of social support—particularly family and school support—play a crucial role in the school adaptation of left-behind children. Additionally, policy support acts as a supplementary mechanism that becomes especially important in resource-scarce environments. Therefore, this study recommends that the government further improve the allocation of educational resources in rural areas and enhance the collaboration between families and schools to boost the overall adaptability of left-behind children.

Discussion

The results of the first objective found that the relationship between social support and school adjustment of left-behind children in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region was significant. Among the eight factors influencing educational support for left-behind children selected in this study, the scores of each factor were quite similar, indicating their overall importance. However, slight differences between factors reflected some valuable phenomena. Support factors had a significant positive impact on school adjustment, with varying strengths. Government assistance and school life support had the highest impact on comprehensive psychological and behavioral adjustment, consistent with the findings of Wen, Chengyu, and Thada Siththada (year) on 'A Model Development of Talent Training Mode for University–Enterprise Cooperation in Northern China.'

The second objective found that family material support and teachers' emotional support played important roles in relational and psychological adjustment. Effective integration of support factors can enhance the school adjustment of left-behind children, consistent with the research by Kansiri Chanchaen and Sukanya Nakramontree (2019), who studied the relationship between social support and the life skills of nursing students. Their sample included 84 first-year nursing students, with data analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and Pearson's correlation coefficient

($r = 0.470$, $p < 0.001$). The study concluded that social support positively correlates with life skills at a statistically significant level.

New Knowledge

Knowledge from the synthesis of research on The Impact of Social Support on the School Adaptation of Left-behind Children in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region can help those who study or develop school adaptations for left-behind children to improve teaching and learning, create value, support resources by producing efficient personnel who can create jobs and income to develop Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region to be strong and sustainable.

Conclusion

With the increasing attention to vulnerable groups and the implementation of policies such as education equity and the balanced development of basic education, it has become a hot issue in social science research. As administrators and promoters of education, we should actively explore solutions according to the actual situation of each region. For the education support of left-behind children, it is necessary to analyze the key factors affecting the education support of left-behind children. Through the active efforts of families, schools, the government, and social organizations, a comprehensive and multi-channel education support system should be built, to effectively make up for the deficiency in the education process of left-behind children and make up for the shortcomings in the education of left-behind children. To create a good growth environment for left-behind children, to cultivate more excellent talents

Suggestions

Government Leadership: Strengthen top-level initiatives by creating a guiding institutional environment. Research indicates that government support for left-behind children's families and schools can have a promoting effect. Governments at all levels can design relevant care policies and systems for left-behind children and provide financial and human resources for rural education. Due to its administrative and funding advantages, the government can play a leading role in the social support system for left-behind children's school adaptation.

School-Focused Aspect: Emphasize social and academic support to build a caring school environment. For left-behind children, focus on social and academic support within schools. Building a supportive school environment through collaboration between administrative support, teacher

support, and peer support can provide high-quality school support services. This approach can significantly aid in improving left-behind children's school adaptation.

Family Support: Focus on behavioral and relational guidance to create a nurturing educational environment. In terms of family support, consider the background factors related to caregivers and parents of left-behind children. Emphasize behavioral and relational guidance to foster a nurturing educational environment. This approach can contribute to better school adaptation for left-behind children.

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