

# ***Research on the Phenomenon of “Hidden School Dropout” of Rural Students in China***

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**Abstract:** Since the implementation of compulsory education, the overall quality of the population residing in rural areas in China has improved markedly. However, a considerable number of students still fail to complete their studies, resulting in a hidden dropout group. This has emerged as a significant challenge in the context of rural education in China. This paper defines the concept of rural hidden dropout and studies the three aspects of the phenomenon of “hidden school dropout” of rural students in China. It examines the factors that lead to rural students' hidden dropout, the negative effects of hidden school dropout, and the analysis of potential solutions to the problem of rural students' hidden dropout. The study identified four primary causes of hidden dropout in rural areas: economic factors, parental factors, limited educational resources, and the influence of the internet. It also demonstrated that hidden dropout in rural areas has a detrimental impact. In the following four aspects, respectively, which are individual, family, school, and society, measures can be taken to address the issue of hidden dropout in rural areas. These measures include establishing a comprehensive prevention mechanism, optimizing local teacher resources, and increasing the level of family involvement. The significance of this study lies in analyzing the reasons and impacts of hidden dropout in rural areas, thereby deriving corresponding countermeasures. This is beneficial for the development of rural education and improvement of overall educational level in China.

**Keywords:** hidden school dropout, rural students, education.

## **1. Introduction**

As a consequence of economic growth and the introduction of compulsory education, the proportion of rural students who leave primary and junior high schools before completing their studies is negligible. Nevertheless, a phenomenon known as ‘hidden school dropout’ exists among students in China. The term “hidden school dropout” is used to describe students who are officially registered as attending school but who have chosen to cease their studies for various reasons, including financial difficulties and a lack of guidance from adults [1]. Such students attend school infrequently. Despite their physical presence in the classroom, these students exhibit a lack of attention to the teacher and a reluctance to participate in class activities.

The measurement standards of dropout include school year definition, class hour definition and curriculum definition. The special meaning of the implicit dropout formed by the measurement standard of “ school status definition ” refers to the individual or group education status with early or

late performance of dropout, failing to complete the prescribed course of study at graduation, but still maintaining the school status [2]. The implicit dropout was divided into two types: forced and active. He believes that forced recessive dropout is the result of the joint action of schools and teachers for the purpose of improving the enrollment rate. Active recessive dropout is that students themselves actively choose to "muddle through" at school and often skip classes due to factors such as academic burnout [3]. The underlying issue can be attributed to the active relinquishment of education by both students and parents, largely influenced by the "new theory of useless reading." The allure of contemporary urbanization contributes to a sense of disconnection from rural communities among students, prompting a tendency to disengage from rural junior high schools. [4]. The results of an in-depth investigation and interview at a junior middle school in a central province indicate that the educational concepts of "useless reading" and "hopeless reading" contribute to the hidden dropout of students. A variety of factors contribute to the perpetuation of these negative educational concepts, including parents who prioritize educational competition, schools that foster an atmosphere of exclusion, and peer groups that prioritize justice. These factors collectively contribute to the difficulties faced by rural students in accessing development opportunities. [5].

In light of the findings from Wang's field investigation of select secondary vocational schools in the western region, it is evident that there is a need to promote both horizontal and vertical integration within the education system. Additionally, it is crucial to instill a value of literacy and reading proficiency, particularly among younger generations. Furthermore, it is imperative to reinforce the structural reforms on the supply side [6]. Ma classified the countermeasures and suggestions for improving the issue of recessive dropout into three categories. Firstly, in the social aspect, there is a need to reinforce the government's accountability and allocate greater resources to education. Secondly, within the family unit, it is essential to cultivate positive parent-child relationships, enhance the quality of family education, and enhance communication between the family and the school. Thirdly, within the school environment, there is a necessity to refine the management and evaluation systems of education, reinforce the development of teaching staff, and enhance the provision of psychological counseling.[7].

The rich research on hidden dropout in the academic circle has provided great inspiration and reference for this article, but there is still room for further research. Therefore, this paper studies the hidden dropout from three aspects to further enrich the knowledge of related fields, which are respectively: the factors, negative effects and countermeasure analysis to rural students' hidden dropout. The significance of this study lies in the analysis of the causes and effects of recessive dropouts in rural areas, so as to get corresponding countermeasures, which is conducive to improving the phenomenon of high dropout rate of rural students in our country, and more conducive to the development of rural education and improving the overall level of education. At the same time, the conclusion of this paper is conducive to improving and supplementing the existing academic research on the problem of hidden dropout, and enriching the academic research in the field of education.

## **2. The factors that lead to rural students' hidden dropout**

### **2.1. Economic factor**

Firstly, it is often the case that students from impoverished backgrounds are compelled to leave school without their studies being officially recognized. It is, however, noteworthy that as more rural schools are furnished with accommodation and more teaching positions are created, fewer students are now abandoning their studies due to the long distance. Due to financial constraints experienced by many families, parents are unable to provide the necessary financial assistance for their children's education. Despite the implementation of the state policy, "two exemptions and one supplement" [8] (The state provides free textbooks and waives miscellaneous fees to students from poor families in rural areas

during the compulsory education stage, as well as grants for certain living expenses for boarders.). However, this can only guarantee the students the most basic learning environment. A considerable number of economically disadvantaged rural students pursue compulsory primary and secondary education in order to receive subsidies and subsequently leave to pursue employment opportunities in urban areas following graduation. During their junior high school years, students may not be acquiring knowledge but may instead be developing ideas about dropping out of school.

## 2.2. Parental factor

Secondly, rural parents' neglect of children's learning is also an important factor that causes rural students' hidden school dropout. In recent years, the majority of families residing in rural areas have not had a single family member graduate from college. They lack an accurate understanding of the importance of the studying. Learning is a long cyclical affair, while working can be quick and profitable at any time. Furthermore, parents may be reluctant to invest in education when they observe that individuals without formal education can earn income through alternative means. Moreover, a considerable number of rural parents migrate to urban areas in search of more lucrative employment opportunities, leaving their children to be raised by their grandparents. This group of children are referred to as left-behind children. According to the "2023 Rural Education Development Report" which was jointly released by the China Rural Development Foundation and the China Education Policy Research Institute of Beijing Normal University., there are still 9.02 million left-behind children in our country. These children lack the education of their parents, and their grandparents are often very tolerant of them both in life and study. Furthermore, adolescents are particularly susceptible to the effects of neglect and a lack of guidance from their parents and grandparents. This can lead to a tendency towards rebelliousness and a lack of motivation to engage in academic pursuits, with adolescents instead becoming distracted by other interests.

## 2.3. Educational resource

Thirdly, the dearth of educational resources in rural areas is a significant contributing factor to the phenomenon of students dropping out of school without being identified. The teacher-student ratio in rural areas is larger than that in urban areas, indicating that a teacher must face more students in rural areas. It is not feasible for teachers to devote their attention to each individual student, given the larger number of students they are responsible for teaching. Simultaneously they can't get a detailed understanding of each student's family, study and psychological situation. Consequently, their primary objective is to maintain the majority of students' engagement with the learning objectives. Those students who have special situations that cannot be solved will have a dislike of school, resulting in hidden dropout phenomenon. In addition, the lack of teaching facilities and teaching equipment will cause the hidden school dropout of rural students. Rural schools do not have abilities to create many classrooms with different functions, such as gymnasium, laboratory, music room, computer room and art room. Furthermore, they cannot provide novel teaching equipment, such as smart blackboard, all-in-one computer, computer and teaching tablet. Although there is basic teaching equipment can be used in class, students may be depressed and envious of the novel teaching devices they saw on the Internet. This can lead to a reduction in students' positive affect at school and a decline in their interest in learning.

## 2.4. The influence of the internet

Fourthly, the influence of online information has resulted in the phenomenon of hidden school dropout among students. After the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the students have access to the Internet, and many students even have their own electronic devices. In *Report of the 5th National*

*Survey on Internet Use among minors* (2023) showed that 96.5% of rural minors have access to the Internet, and 87.0% of them have their own devices. The Internet provides a wider social platform for the rural students, enabling them to gain greater insight into the world. On the other hands, the Internet offers a plethora of information, both positive and negative information of varying quality. Rural students may be susceptible to the erosion of their traditional culture and values due to negative information and diverse cultures. Furthermore, students may have not energy to finish the assignments and focus the class because they indulge in the online games overnight, which resulting the hidden school dropout phenomenon.

### **3. Negative effects of hidden school dropout**

#### **3.1. Personal aspects**

The hidden dropout phenomenon exerts the most significant and far-reaching impact on students themselves. First, due to the large population base of our country, we will use diversion means in the middle school entrance examination. After the high school entrance examination, only about 50 to 60 percent of students can enter ordinary high schools or private high schools to continue their education. And those rural students who have hidden dropout psychology in junior high school cannot play up the spirit of study and review, they do not have any competitiveness in the high school entrance examination. Therefore, they may lose the opportunity to pursue a systematic education, leaving them with the option of attending a vocational high school or entering the workforce directly. This outcome has a significant impact on their future career development and employment options. Due to the lack of necessary learning and social experiences, these students may have weaker social adjustment and interpersonal skills, which will lead to they have difficulty integrating into society and forming healthy interpersonal relationships. Hidden school dropout students may feel isolated, anxious or depressed when the classmates around them have their own goals and pursuits. Due to the lack of correct education and guidance, they are susceptible to developing erroneous values and behaviors.

#### **3.2. Family aspects**

Secondly, the presence of hidden school dropouts in rural areas has a significant impact on families, particularly those who are invested in their children's academic performance and future. First of all, as parents of children, they will feel guilty and helpless, a large part of rural parents are migrant workers, they hope to improve their families' living conditions and children's education opportunities through efforts. But they know that their children's absentmindedness and decline in performance will feel very helpless, and they will also reflect on whether they have neglected to pay attention to their children's learning while working outside, which may promote improvement. Because of their children's poor performance in school, parents may receive pressure and doubts from relatives, friends and fellow villagers, which will not only affect parents, even the whole family will be laughed at the dinner table or party. This affects their image and status in society. In addition to the mental impact, there is also an economic cost. Nowadays parents are willing to invest money for their children's education, such as buying textbooks, signing up for tutoring classes and online courses. If the child exhibits a hidden dropout psychology and demonstrates a lack of engagement in class and a lack of commitment to homework, it will result in a loss of the financial resources invested in education, , with no tangible return on that investment. Furthermore, parents must consider the implications of these circumstances and re-examine their perception of their children and the efficacy of their parenting strategies. They need to consider how they can more effectively support and guide their children's learning and growth and teach their children to think about their future.

### **3.3. School aspects**

The phenomenon of "hidden dropouts" among rural students will also have an impact on the school and other students in the school. The presence of hidden dropout students in the classroom, despite their physical presence, can have a detrimental impact on the learning environment. These students often display inattentiveness and a lack of participation in learning activities, which can lead to a decline in the teacher's mood and a reduction in the enthusiasm and teaching effectiveness. The presence of hidden dropouts complicates school management. Teachers and school directors need extra energy to track the progress of these students with invisible dropout psychology, understand their views on learning and guide them to realize their mistakes, so that they can voluntarily abandon the idea of invisible dropout and even supervise these students to get to school in time. The phenomenon of hidden dropouts may reveal the shortcomings of the teaching force in responding to students with special needs, and the need to strengthen teacher training and professional development. It is imperative that school management implement timely educational reforms and explore more effective teaching methods and student management strategies.

### **3.4. Social aspect**

The hidden dropout of students will bring burden to the society, and the hidden dropout of rural students will also affect the rural revitalization. In order to realize the strategy of rural revitalization, the government offers a plethora of policy incentives and financial assistance to students residing in rural areas. However, rural students who drop out of school are equivalent to occupying public free education resources but do not work hard and make use of them, which is a waste of resources and student quotas. Invisible dropout phenomenon is also not conducive to the cultivation of rural talents and the overall progress of rural society. At the same time, it will restrict the development of rural economy. Education is an important factor in improving the quality of the labor force and promoting economic development. The existence of hidden dropout phenomenon will affect the cultivation of talents in rural areas and restrict the development of local economy. In the event that invisible dropouts fail to return to the correct trajectory in time and fail to obtain the requisite knowledge and academic qualifications, they may require a greater allocation of social resources to address their employment and living problems in the future, which will increase social costs. On the other hand, the existence of invisible dropouts will bring positive effects. It has prompted the education sector and the community to think about how to effectively reform the education system to meet the special needs of rural students and regions.

## **4. Countermeasure Analysis of Solving rural students ' hidden dropout**

### **4.1. Establish a complete prevention mechanism**

The occurrence of recessive dropout behavior is a gradual process, initially manifesting at the psychological level and exhibiting strong concealment. Without timely attention and intervention, it may develop into irreversible behavior that becomes difficult to rectify. The prevention and control of hidden dropouts focuses on prior discovery and intervention, so it is necessary to establish a mechanism for identifying and intervening hidden dropouts. Specifically, it includes the following two aspects: First, establish the identification mechanism of hidden dropout behavior, which needs to strengthen the study and judgment of the performance and characteristics of hidden dropout students, and find the initial signs of hidden dropout behavior timely and effectively. Secondly, the intervention and help mechanism of recessive dropout behavior should be established. Specifically, on the basis of effective identification, special intervention departments should be set up, and special teacher groups should be set up to intervene.



## 4.2. Optimize local teacher resources

As the level of teachers plays an important role in the development of education, it is very important to optimize the construction of rural teachers, which needs to train excellent rural teachers. The implementation of educational ideas, the cultivation of individual spiritual freedom of students, and the correct starting point of learning motivation all depend on the correct guidance of teachers. On the one hand, we need to make information public, let the community know the learning situation and living environment of rural students through various channels, truthfully report the dropout situation of students, and let the community understand the urgent need for excellent teachers in rural schools, so as to retain rural teachers. On the other hand, we can also advocate retired urban excellent teachers to support education in rural areas, so as to give full play to their value. Of course, all this is inseparable from the management of government departments, government departments at all levels, especially grass-roots government departments, should improve the quality of teaching as an important indicator of government assessment of cadres, so as to effectively control the hidden problem of dropout in rural areas.

## 4.3. Increase the degree of family attention

Family plays a decisive role in the growth of children. Educating children is not only the responsibility of school teachers, but also the participation of families. Therefore, family education should be strengthened and education methods should be changed. In the process of the child's growth, we should not only care about the child in life, but also care about the child in thought, which requires parents to communicate with the child often and give the child more encouragement. When children encounter setbacks in study and life, then parents may not be able to completely solve, but must be actively treated, so as to help children build confidence and anti-frustration ability. Parents should also establish a long-term communication mechanism with schools and teachers, such as regular home visits or telephone contact, to facilitate the formation of a common education and guidance management mechanism, which is conducive to joint supervision of students who have hidden dropout behavior, so as to jointly pay attention to the growth of children's character.

## 5. Conclusions

The phenomenon of hidden dropout is a prevalent issue in rural schools, and it is becoming increasingly concerning. It has become a difficult point in rural education management, and it is not conducive to the upward development of rural students and families. Therefore, it is particularly important to study this aspect. This paper defines the concept of rural hidden dropout and studies the three aspects of the phenomenon of “hidden school dropout” of rural students in China. It considers the factors that lead to rural students' hidden dropout, the negative effects of hidden school dropout, and analysis of potential solutions to the problem of rural students' hidden dropout. The principal conclusions of this paper are as follows: Four primary factors contribute to the phenomenon of hidden dropout in rural areas: economic, parental, educational resource and internet-related factors. Secondly, the phenomenon of hidden dropout in rural areas exerts a detrimental influence on four distinct domains: the individual, the family, the school and the society at large. Finally, the following measures can be taken to address the issue of hidden dropout in rural areas: establishment a comprehensive prevention mechanism, optimization local teacher resources and an increase in the level of family attention. In conclusion, this study has identified several avenues for further investigation. The phenomenon of hidden dropout is a significant and valuable area of inquiry within the Chinese education sector.

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