

The Influence of Teacher Support and Parental Education on Social Adaptation in Left-Behind Children in Yanbian, China

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Abstract

This research addresses the impact of teacher support, parental education, and parenting styles on the social adaptation of left-behind children in Yanbian Chaoxianzu Autonomous Prefecture, China. Left-behind children, whose parents migrate to urban areas for work, frequently encounter emotional and social difficulties stemming from the lack of parental care. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey assessed 160 left-behind children from four middle schools regarding their social adaptation, teacher support, parental education, and parenting styles. The results indicate that teacher support, especially regarding involvement, structure, and autonomy, was the primary predictor of social adaptation, explaining 44% of the variance. Parental education significantly influenced outcomes, both directly and indirectly, via adaptive parenting styles. The study revealed that parenting styles mediate the connection between parental education and social adaptation, indicating that elevated parental education levels promote more supportive and structured parenting, thereby improving social adaptation in left-behind children. The distinctive socio-cultural environment of Yanbian, characterised by a fusion of traditional Confucian principles and contemporary educational methodologies, significantly impacted the children's social outcomes. The research indicates that enhancing teacher-student relationships and encouraging parental engagement, even amidst labour migration, are essential strategies for advancing the social welfare of left-behind children. These findings offer significant implications for educators and policymakers in formulating interventions to assist this at-risk population. Subsequent research ought to investigate these dynamics longitudinally and within varied cultural contexts.

Keywords: Left-Behind Children; Teacher Support; Parental Education Level; Parenting Styles and Social Adaptation

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of left-behind children in China has emerged as a significant issue due to swift urbanisation and widespread labour migration. In China, millions of children reside in rural regions while their parents are employed in urban centres (Wang et al., 2023; Zhang & Deng, 2022). Economic pressures erode conventional family structures in rural and ethnic minority regions, such as the Yanbian Chaoxianzu Autonomous Prefecture, rendering the situation especially apparent. Children abandoned often live with elderly relatives, resulting in emotional, social, and academic difficulties (Li, Xue, & Wang et al., 2023). Studies demonstrate that insufficient parental care during critical developmental stages can lead to negative outcomes, such as psychological disorders, inadequate academic performance, and difficulties in social adaptation (Liu et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2023).

Yanbian, home to a significant population of ethnic Koreans, provides a unique context for analysing the effects of labour migration on left-behind children. The cultural complexities of ethnic Korean families, along with the challenges of parental absence, complicate the social adaptation of these children in this region (Zhang & Deng, 2022). Recent studies have primarily focused on the emotional and academic challenges faced by left-behind children, whereas the impact of teacher support and parental education on their social adaptation has received comparatively little attention (Wang et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2017). To identify interventions that can enhance the academic and social performance of at-risk children, it is crucial to comprehend the influence of external factors such as teacher engagement and parental education on a child's capacity to navigate social contexts and academic environments (Liu et al., 2017; Lu et al., 2016).

Despite increased awareness of the difficulties faced by left-behind children, there is a scarcity of research investigating the relationship between teacher support and parental education in influencing their social adaptation, particularly within the distinct socio-cultural context of ethnic minority regions like Yanbian (Li et al., 2024). Social adaptation, encompassing children's ability to form positive peer relationships, develop emotional resilience, and adjust to the school environment, is crucial for enduring well-being and academic success (Wang et al., 2023; Zhang & Deng, 2022). The relationship between teacher support—specifically, autonomy support, structure, and involvement—and social adaptation is insufficiently studied in relation to left-behind children (Liu et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2023).

While previous studies have highlighted the emotional repercussions of parental absence and its impact on academic achievement, there is a lack of research investigating how teacher support might mitigate the social and emotional challenges faced by these children (Zhang & Deng, 2022; Li et al., 2024). The influence of parental education on parenting styles and its resultant effect on a child's social adaptation has been significantly overlooked in the existing literature (Li et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2023). Given that left-behind children are often raised by grandparents with lower educational attainment, it is essential to investigate how differences in parental education levels may affect parenting styles and, in turn, the social outcomes for these children (Wang et al., 2023; Zhang & Deng, 2022). The convergence of traditional Confucian values and modern educational frameworks in Yanbian may profoundly affect the social adaptation of left-behind children; nonetheless, this domain is insufficiently explored (Li et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2017).

This research provides substantial contributions to the existing literature on left-behind children. It underscores the critical role of teacher support in the social adaptation of left-behind children, extending previous research that has predominantly focused on academic outcomes (Liu et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2023). Educators often serve as the primary adults in children's lives during the school day, making their role in fostering positive social interactions and emotional well-being crucial (Wang et al., 2023; Zhang & Deng, 2022). This study elucidates teacher support as a multifaceted construct—encompassing autonomy, structure, and involvement—showing its influence on the academic performance and social adaptation of left-behind children (Li et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2023).

The research investigates the impact of parental education and parenting styles on social adaptation, a subject that has garnered minimal focus in contemporary literature (Liu et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2023). Given the unique

family dynamics of left-behind children, where grandparents often assume caregiving responsibilities, it is essential to understand the impact of parental education on parenting styles to develop targeted interventions (Li et al., 2024; Zhang & Deng, 2022). This study examines the mediating role of parenting styles in the relationship between parental education and social adaptation, potentially offering new perspectives for the creation of family-orientated support programs (Wang et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2017). The Yanbian Chaoxianzu Autonomous Prefecture, which hosts a substantial ethnic Korean demographic, is the concluding location of the study. In this region, the integration of traditional cultural values and modern educational standards presents a unique opportunity to analyze the influence of cultural factors on the social adaptation of left-behind children. The results of this study may have broader implications for left-behind children in other ethnic minority regions in China and similar contexts globally (Zhang & Deng, 2022; Wang et al., 2023).

2 Literature review

Rapid urbanisation and internal migration in China, which primarily cause the issue of left-behind children, have garnered considerable scholarly interest due to the distinct social, emotional, and academic difficulties these children encounter. Many of these children, often living in rural areas, live with relatives while their parents work in distant urban areas. This separation during crucial developmental phases leads to numerous challenges, including diminished social adaptation, which impairs their capacity to establish healthy peer relationships and acclimatise to academic settings. Social adaptation denotes the capacity of individuals to acclimatise to social environments, sustain positive relationships, and proficiently navigate social contexts, including educational institutions and communities (Peng et al., 2023). Left-behind children frequently encounter difficulties in social adaptation due to emotional distress, isolation, and lack of parental support (Wang et al., 2023). Studies indicate that left-behind children are more prone to social isolation, bullying, and challenges in establishing friendships relative to their non-left-behind counterparts (Liu et al., 2017).

Teacher support plays a crucial role in mitigating the negative effects of neglect. Research has delineated three fundamental elements of teacher support: autonomy facilitation, organised guidance, and emotional engagement (Zhang & Deng, 2022). These elements of educator support can foster a nurturing atmosphere that promotes social interaction and assists marginalised children in enhancing their emotional regulation. Research has demonstrated that positive teacher-student relationships enhance the sense of belonging and social engagement of children left behind in educational settings. However, despite the extensive documentation of the beneficial impact of teacher support on academic achievement, further investigation is necessary to understand its role in promoting social adaptation, particularly in ethnic minority regions like Yanbian (Peng et al., 2023). Parental education profoundly affects parenting styles, which subsequently influence a child's social development. Elevated parental education levels correlate with authoritative parenting, defined by warmth, structure, and consistent discipline, which promotes improved social and emotional outcomes for children.

In contrast, reduced educational attainment may be associated with authoritarian or permissive parenting styles, which may fail to furnish the essential support for children to cultivate robust social skills (Wang et al., 2023). Parental education indirectly influences the upbringing of left-behind children, as they are frequently cared for by grandparents who may lack the same educational qualifications as the parents (Liang et al., 2023). In areas such as Yanbian, which has a substantial ethnic Korean population, traditional Confucian values exacerbate the social adaptation challenges faced by left-behind children. Cultural norms prioritising respect for elders and familial hierarchy may constrain children's autonomy and self-expression, potentially hindering their social skill development (Peng et al., 2023). Nevertheless, robust teacher-student relationships in Confucian educational contexts may serve as a compensatory mechanism, fostering social engagement and adaptation despite these difficulties (Wang et al., 2023). Left-behind children in China encounter significant difficulties in social adaptation, exacerbated by limited parental support, diverse parenting styles, and regional cultural influences. The significance of teacher support is essential in aiding these children in enhancing their social skills and emotional resilience; however, further research is required to comprehensively ascertain its effects in particular ethnic minority contexts. Interventions that address both educational and emotional support, such as community-based programs, demonstrate potential in enhancing outcomes for left-behind children.

3. Conceptual Framework

This study proposes a conceptual framework that investigates the relationships among teacher support, parental education level, parenting styles, and the social adaptation of left-behind children in Yanbian, based on a literature review. The framework posits that teacher support and parental education level directly affect children's social adaptation, with parenting styles mediating these relationships (refer to Figure 1).

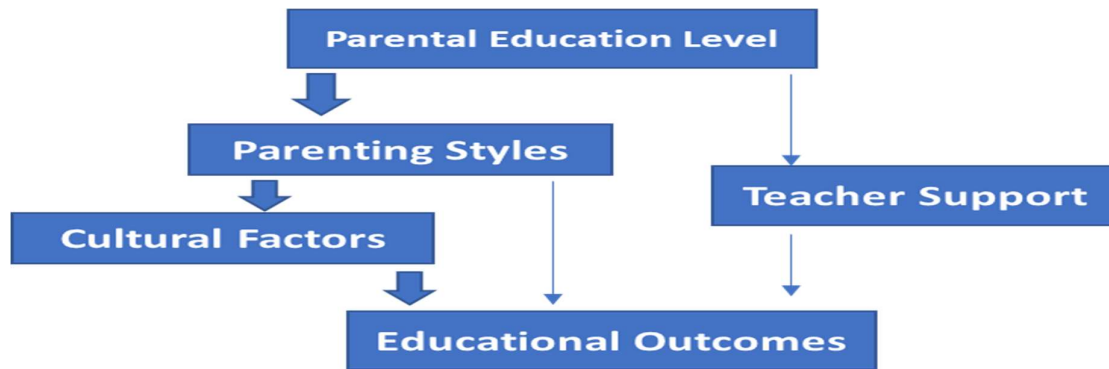


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Teacher Support: Elevated levels of teacher support (autonomy, structure, and involvement) are anticipated to positively impact the social adaptation of left-behind children. Educators offering emotional and academic support can mitigate the absence of parental involvement, facilitating children's development of robust peer relationships and enhancing their adaptation to school settings (Zhang et al., 2022).

Parental Education Level: According to scholars, parents' educational attainment influences the parenting style they employ. More authoritative parenting styles, predicted to enhance children's social adaptation, correlate with elevated parental education levels (Zhou et al., 2021).

Parenting Styles: Scholars suggest that parenting styles act as a mediating variable between parental education and social adaptation. Authoritative parenting is likely to enhance social outcomes, whereas authoritarian or permissive parenting may impede children's social adaptability (Liu et al., 2017).

Cultural Factors: The distinct cultural milieu of Yanbian, characterised by its emphasis on Confucian principles, may influence the interactions among these variables. This study looks at how culture shapes the dynamics of teacher support, parental education, and social adaptation (Lu et al., 2016).

4. Research methodology

This research employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey methodology to examine the correlations among teacher support, parental education levels, parenting styles, and social adaptation in left-behind children within the Yanbian Chaoxianzu Autonomous Prefecture, China. The cross-sectional approach is advantageous for collecting data at a single point in time, allowing for the analysis of relationships between variables such as teacher support, parental education, and children's social adaptation (Zhao et al., 2023). The target population consisted of left-behind children from four middle schools in Yanbian Prefecture, including 7 Middle School in Yanji City, 1 Middle School in Dunhua City, and 1 Middle School in Antu County. Sample size calculation suggested that a minimum of 160 participants was required to achieve statistical power (Zhang et al., 2024). A stratified random sampling method was used to ensure proportional representation of left-behind children from the selected schools, resulting in 160 students, evenly distributed by gender and age group.

Data were collected via a structured questionnaire, which consisted of two sections: demographic information and study variables. The School Adaptation Questionnaire for Secondary School Students (Cui, 2018) assessed social

adaptation in five areas: academic adjustment, peer relationships, attitudes toward school, routine adjustment, and teacher-student relationships. Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“not adapted at all”) to 5 (“fully adapted”). Teacher support was measured using subscales adapted from previous literature, focusing on three dimensions: autonomy support, structure, and involvement. Example items included "My teacher listens to my ideas" for autonomy support, "My teacher ensures I understand the material before moving on" for structure, and "My teacher cares about me" for involvement (Li, 2022). The overall scale reliability was found to be high, with Cronbach’s alpha at 0.851, indicating good internal consistency (Cui, 2018). Participants also self-reported their parents' education levels, and parenting styles were assessed through the dimensions of warmth, discipline, and autonomy, using items adapted from standardized parenting style questionnaires (Zhou et al., 2021).

The data collection process involved administering paper-based surveys in classrooms under the supervision of school staff. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from students and school officials. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26.0. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic attributes of the participants. Correlation analysis explored relationships among teacher support, parental education, parenting styles, and social adaptation. Additionally, multiple regression analysis was used to determine the predictive power of teacher support and parental education on social adaptation, while mediation analysis examined whether parenting styles mediated the relationship between parental education and social adaptation (Zhao et al., 2023).

5. Results

This study involved 160 left-behind children, with a mean age of 14.5 years (SD = 1.2). Among the participants, 52% were male and 48% were female. A majority of the students (68%) indicated cohabitation with a grandparent, whereas the remaining 32% resided with other relatives. Regarding parental education, 35% of participants stated that their parents had not finished high school, 45% stated that their parents had completed high school, and 20% indicated that one or both parents had attained higher education. The average teacher support score was 3.8 (SD = 0.7), with teacher involvement as the highest-rated dimension (mean = 4.1, SD = 0.6), followed by structure (mean = 3.7, standard deviation = 0.7), and autonomy support (mean = 3.5, SD = 0.8). The highest scores for social adaptation were recorded in peer relationships (mean = 4.0, SD = 0.6) and teacher-student relationships (mean = 4.1, standard deviation = 0.6), whereas the lowest score was noted in school attitudes and emotions (mean = 3.4, SD = 0.8). The overall social adaptation score was moderate to high, with a mean of 3.76 (SD = 0.5). Table 1 shows that there were strong positive correlations between teacher support and social adaptation ($r = 0.52, p < 0.01$), parental education level and social adaptation ($r = 0.40, p < 0.01$), and parenting styles and social adaptation ($r = 0.48, p < 0.01$).

Table 1. Correlation Matrix

Variables	Teacher Support	Parental Education	Parenting Styles	Social Adaptation
Teacher Support	1	0.43**	0.39**	0.52**
Parental Education	0.43**	1	0.45**	0.40**
Parenting Styles	0.39**	0.45**	1	0.48**
Social Adaptation	0.52**	0.40**	0.48**	1

A multiple regression analysis was performed to assess the impact of teacher support, parental education level, and parenting styles on social adaptation. The regression model was significant, accounting for 44% of the

variance in social adaptation ($R^2 = 0.44$, $p < 0.001$). Teacher support was identified as the most significant predictor of social adaptation ($\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$), followed by parenting styles ($\beta = 0.29$, $p = 0.002$) and parental education level ($\beta = 0.22$, $p = 0.01$). Table 2 elaborates on the results.

Table 2. Multiple Regression Analysis for Predicting Social Adaptation

Predictor Variables	B	SE	β	t	p
Teacher Support	0.35	0.07	0.40	5.00	<0.001
Parental Education Level	0.21	0.08	0.22	2.63	0.01
Parenting Styles	0.28	0.09	0.29	3.11	0.002

$R^2 = 0.44$, $F(3, 156) = 41.00$, $p < 0.001$

To determine whether parenting styles mediated the association between parental education and social adaptation, a mediation analysis was performed. The analysis indicated that parenting styles partially mediated this relationship, exhibiting a significant indirect effect ($B = 0.13$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that elevated parental education levels foster more effective parenting styles, consequently improving social adaptation. Ultimately, further analyses indicated that age and gender did not significantly affect the relationship between teacher support and social adaptation ($p > 0.05$). These findings highlight the significance of educator support, parental education, and parenting strategies in promoting social adaptation among left-behind children.

6. Discussion

This study highlights the significant influence of teacher support, parental education, and parenting styles on the social adaptation of left-behind children in Yanbian, China. Teacher support was identified as the most critical factor in promoting social adaptation, emphasizing the role of teachers in creating structured and supportive environments. These findings align with previous studies that demonstrate how teacher engagement helps mitigate the emotional and social challenges faced by left-behind children, improving their overall well-being (Liu et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2023). Parental education was also found to have a substantial effect on social adaptation, both directly and indirectly through positive parenting styles. Higher parental education levels correlated with adaptive parenting practices such as warmth and autonomy support, which contributed to better social outcomes for children.

This corresponds with the literature on the importance of familial background in children’s social development (Zhang et al., 2020). The mediation analysis revealed that parenting styles partially mediated the relationship between parental education and social adaptation. This supports Baumrind’s (2013) framework, which asserts that supportive parenting improves children's ability to navigate social environments effectively. Even in the absence of parents, adaptive caregiving can provide the emotional security necessary for left-behind children to cope with their circumstances (Peng et al., 2023). The lack of moderating effects from demographic variables such as age and gender further suggest that teacher support and parental education positively impact left-behind children across different groups. These results reinforce calls for teacher training programs that focus on the emotional needs of at-risk children, as suggested by Li (2022), and for policies that promote parental involvement in rural regions to enhance the social well-being of left-behind children (Liang et al., 2023). Although the cross-sectional design limits causal inferences, this study contributes valuable insights into the factors that influence the social adaptation of left-behind children. Future research could expand on these findings by conducting longitudinal studies and exploring additional regions in China.

7. Conclusion

This study emphasises the significant influence of teacher support, parental education, and parenting styles on the social adaptation of left-behind children in Yanbian, China. Teacher support emerged as the most important factor, underscoring the importance of fostering and structuring teacher-student relationships in helping these children overcome social challenges. Parental education significantly influenced child development, both directly and indirectly through adaptive parenting styles, indicating that educated parents are more capable of creating supportive environments for their children. The mediating effect of parenting styles demonstrates that positive parenting practices are essential for amplifying the influence of parental education on social outcomes. These findings highlight the necessity of a holistic strategy that involves both familial and educational settings to enhance the welfare of left-behind children. Policymakers and educators must prioritise interventions that enhance teacher-student relationships and promote parental involvement, especially in rural regions, to more effectively address the emotional and social needs of this vulnerable population. Subsequent research ought to build upon these findings by examining longitudinal effects and exploring various cultural and regional contexts.

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Appendix

Teacher Support

- 1 My teacher listens to my ideas.
- 2 My teacher makes sure I understand the material before moving on to new topics.
- 3 My teacher cares about me as a person.
- 4 My teacher supports me in setting my academic goals.
- 5 My teacher is approachable when I have questions.
- 6 My teacher provides constructive feedback on my academic performance.
- 7 My teacher encourages me to think independently.
- 8 My teacher helps me solve academic problems on my own.
- 9 My teacher understands my academic challenges.
- 10 My teacher creates a structured learning environment that helps me stay on track.

Parental Education & Parenting Styles

- 11 My parents value education and encourage me to do my best in school.
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12 My parents provide me with the resources I need for school (books, supplies, etc.).

13 My parents talk to me about the importance of school and academic success.

14 My parents are actively involved in my academic life (e.g., help with homework, talk to my teachers).

15 My parents encourage me to pursue my interests and passions in education.

16 My parents use a balance of discipline and support when guiding me.

17 My parents show warmth and affection toward me.

18 My parents give me the autonomy to make decisions about my education.

19 My parents are consistent in their rules and expectations.

20 My parents' level of education has influenced how they support my education.

Social Adaptation

21 I feel comfortable with my academic responsibilities at school.

22 I have a good relationship with my peers at school.

23 I feel accepted by my classmates.

24 I enjoy going to school.

25 I feel confident about my ability to succeed academically.

26 I can handle changes in my school routine without much difficulty.

27 I have a good relationship with my teachers.

28 I am able to manage stress related to my schoolwork.

29 I feel emotionally supported by my teachers and peers.

30 I adapt well to new challenges and expectations in school.