

The Impact of Psychological Resilience of Left-behind Children in Chinese Junior High Schools on Their Learning Motivation and Coping Strategies

Shuhan Liu*

Xi'an University of Finance and Economics, Xi'an, 710061, China

Abstract. This study discusses learning motivation among left-behind junior secondary students in China. It uses a literature review of 14 peer-reviewed English articles. It analyses how left-behind students' psychological resilience and the environment they live in influence their learning motivation. Much research shows that left-behind students have lower motivation than non-left-behind students, and this pattern is linked to anxiety and a weakened self-concept. Research also indicates that support from schools and families can substantially improve left-behind students' motivation. At the school level, a positive phenomenon and strong relationships between teachers and students and among peers can significantly enhance their learning motivation, and teachers' emotional and academic support plays an important moderating role. At the family level, parental expectations and high-quality interactions between parents and children can foster their educational aspirations and self-efficacy, which indirectly strengthen learning motivation. Based on these findings, this article recommends joint efforts by schools and families: build supportive classrooms and strengthen home-school communication at the school level, and provide sustained emotional and learning support at home, together to promote the sustainable development of learning motivation among left-behind junior secondary students.

1 Introduction

With the rapid development of urbanization in China and the continuous migration of rural labour to cities, the issue of left-behind children has become increasingly significant. Due to parents working away from home for long periods, left-behind children generally lack parental companionship and guidance in family education. Especially during the junior secondary stage. At this stage, students transfer from child to adolescent, their academic tasks become more demanding, psychological independence gradually increases, and social relationships, as well as self-cognition, are in an important stage of development. However, for left-behind children, their growth environment is more likely to weaken their

* Corresponding author: 1931073273@xaufe.edu.cn

psychological resilience. Because of the long-term absence of parental companionship and support, they lack security when facing pressure and challenges. Therefore, in their learning process, they may be more likely to show weak goal orientation and less confidence in solving difficulties. Over time, a lack of psychological resilience gradually reduces their interest in learning, thereby affecting their learning motivation.

In this context, psychological resilience has become an important breakthrough point for research on enhancing the learning motivation of left-behind children in junior high school. Enhancing the psychological resilience of left-behind children is not only about hoping to cultivate their resilient qualities, but also about helping them to stick to their true demands, not fear difficulties, and be brave in hard times. For junior high school left-behind children, having good psychological resilience enables them to maintain their interests and goals even under the pressures of both family absence and academic stress. High-level psychological resilience can help them reduce anxiety and loneliness, enhance self-efficacy, and thus maintain a stronger enthusiasm for learning during the learning process [1-4].

Based on this, this essay proposes three related questions for discussion:

First, what factors influence the psychological resilience of junior high school left-behind children within individuals, families, schools, and society? Clarifying the factors that affect the psychological resilience of left-behind children in junior high school can help us understand the way psychological resilience is formed, thereby assisting these children in strengthening their psychological resilience fundamentally.

Secondly, how does psychological resilience influence learning motivation through emotional regulation, cognitive evaluation, and behavioral strategies? Analyzing the specific ways of this influence can provide support for left-behind children to maintain a positive learning attitude and motivation in the face of adversity.

Thirdly, what measures can schools, families, and society use to enhance the psychological resilience of left-behind children and thereby foster their learning motivation? Exploring these solutions not only helps to point out the feasible strategies but also provides theoretical support for improving the overall educational environment of left-behind children.

This article aims to explore the influence of psychological resilience on the learning motivation of junior high school left-behind students by solving the above three questions. It further analyzes the moderating roles of family, school, and social support in this process. Based on existing research, this essay will provide some feasible measures to help left-behind children keep a positive learning attitude and enthusiasm, in turn promoting academic development.

2 Literature review

As an important psychological resource, resilience has gradually become a key perspective for exploring the learning motivation of left-behind children. Existing research shows that left-behind children basically show lower levels of learning motivation compared with non-left-behind children, and this issue is closely related to their long-term lack of parental companionship and educational support. Lacking resilience makes some left-behind children more likely to lose a sense of purpose and lack perseverance when facing learning difficulties. However, not all left-behind children exhibit low levels of resilience. Some left-behind children still demonstrate positive resilience within negative environments, which indicates that there are significant differences within this group [5-7].

Before discussing the influence of psychological resilience on learning motivation, it is necessary to briefly define learning motivation. Learning motivation is typically divided into two categories: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. The first category is based on the student's interest in and satisfaction with the learning task itself, while the second depends on external rewards or punishments [8]. For junior secondary left-behind children, their

learning motivation often includes both intrinsic and extrinsic components, and the role of resilience may vary across these different types of motivation. Therefore, clarifying the basic categories of learning motivation helps to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how psychological resilience influences learning motivation.

Psychological resilience influences learning motivation in multiple ways. On the emotional aspect, high levels of psychological resilience can help students reduce negative emotions, maintain hope and optimism, thereby enhancing perseverance towards goals and enthusiasm for learning [3,9,10]. On the cognitive aspect, psychological resilience can prompt students to establish a positive academic self-concept, address challenges in learning, and strengthen self-efficacy [11]. At the behavioral level, students with greater psychological resilience are more willing to adopt learning strategies such as seeking help actively, reflecting and adjusting, and practicing continuously. These behaviors, in turn, further enhance learning motivation [1,12].

Despite the intrinsic factors affecting left-behind children, the external environment plays a crucial role in exploring the relationship between psychological resilience and learning motivation among junior secondary school left-behind children. At the school level, a positive school atmosphere and positive teacher-student and peer relationships can enhance left-behind children's adaptability and positive psychological experiences, such as hope and appreciation, thereby further strengthening their learning motivation [3,4]. At the family level, parental educational expectations and high-quality parent-child communication can foster educational ambitions and self-efficacy among left-behind children. These factors assist them in maintaining learning motivation in adversity [5-7]. At the social level, social support indirectly promotes learning motivation by enhancing positive psychological qualities or resilience in left-behind children, providing for their basic psychological needs, and increasing their well-being [2,13-15]. Meanwhile, individuals who can construct positive cognitions in the face of adversity are more likely to exhibit positive development and higher academic engagement. This indicates that resilience is a key factor influencing motivation [9,10].

In summary, psychological resilience influences learning motivation through three routes: emotional, cognitive, and behavioral. Its efficacy is further shaped by family, school, and society.

3 Factors influencing psychological resilience

Psychological resilience is not inborn, but rather a psychological quality shaped and refined throughout an individual's developmental journey. The level of psychological resilience may determine whether left-behind children in junior high school can keep good learning motivation when they are facing adversity. It has already been proven that the formation of psychological resilience is affected by individuals, families, schools, and society. The essay will further discuss the influencing factors of psychological resilience.

3.1 Individual level

For left-behind junior secondary students, positive psychological qualities and effective self-regulation are the foundation of resilience. Core psychological qualities such as self-efficacy, educational aspirations, and a sense of hope for the future enable these students to deal with adversity. Studies show that children with stronger hope are more likely to sustain their goals when encountering difficulties, while those who are able to construct positive meaning in adverse situations tend to demonstrate healthier developmental trends and greater learning engagement [3,9,10]. Resilience theory further emphasizes that self-regulation skills and personality traits provide essential support for the development of resilience [12]. Therefore,

the psychological characteristics of left-behind children play a crucial role in sustaining learning motivation when faced with difficulties.

3.2 Family level

Research found that the educational expectations of parents for their children and the high-quality interaction between parents and children may affect the children's educational ambitions and self-efficacy [5-7]. Students not only strengthen their sense of purpose through building educational ambitions, but also foster their psychological support when they are facing challenges, thereby indirectly increasing their psychological resilience level. Meanwhile, caregivers can provide emotional support and attention to make left-behind children feel safer, thereby helping they have more perseverance in studying [1]. These findings highlight that the expectations and support from the family play an irreplaceable role in the development of psychological resilience.

3.3 School level

Schools are the main place that supports children to study and live. The harmonious relationship between teachers and students, the peer relationships, as well as the great learning environment, are the significant external conditions for resilience formation. Studies have shown that a positive school atmosphere can foster motivation and affect students' mental state by promoting learning adaptation [4]. Teachers' emotional support and academic guidance are also important. Teachers improve children's sense of belonging and security to develop their resilience. In addition, excellent peer relationships offer psychological support when left-behind children face negative experiences, thereby further strengthening their resilience [3].

3.4 Society level

Numerous studies have proved that there is a significant positive relationship between social support and psychological resilience [2]. Social support may indirectly enhance adaptation and learning motivation by satisfying fundamental psychological needs and improving self-esteem and well-being [13-15]. For left-behind children, community attention, policy protection, and accessible psychological services not only reduce lonely but also provide crucial psychological and emotional support, thereby enhancing resilience levels.

In summary, the formation and development of psychological resilience are influenced by multiple aspects. An individual's psychological qualities, family support, school environment, and the social protection system all work together to shape the psychological resilience of left-behind children. Understanding these factors not only helps clarify the origins of resilience but also establishes a theoretical framework for further discussion on how it influences learning motivation.

4 How psychological resilience influences learning motivation

Psychological resilience is a skill that can be cultivated by using internal and external resources [12]. For left-behind children in secondary school, psychological resilience is not only a capability to defend against risks but also a key resource for fostering learning motivation. Existing research indicates that psychological resilience primarily influences learning motivation in three ways: emotional, cognitive, and behavioral.

4.1 Emotions: emotional resilience and positive mindset

Left-behind children often experience anxiety and loneliness due to parental absence and academic pressures. These negative emotions reduce their interest and engagement in learning [1]. However, highly resilient students are more likely to experience positive emotions. For example, they could receive hope and thankfulness from others, and such emotions can help them to remain optimistic and confident about the future even in adversity [3,9]. Hope allows left-behind children to stick to their goals, while gratitude motivates them to give back when they receive support. These positive emotions, in turn, foster stronger learning motivation [10]. In addition, social support also has a promoting effect on psychological resilience. It can further enhance learning engagement by improving an individual's self-esteem and sense of happiness. [14]. These findings suggest that positive emotions serve as a crucial way through which psychological resilience influences learning motivation.

4.2 Cognitive: strengthening self-concept and goal orientation

Academic failure and learning difficulties often cause left-behind children to have self-doubt, leading them to adopt negative attributions and believe that they are not capable enough. In contrast, students with a higher resilience level are more likely to see setbacks as normal events in the learning process. This difference in cognition determines whether an individual can continue to move forward under pressure. A positive academic self-concept and high self-efficacy are closely associated with stronger motivation [11]. Psychological resilience enhances left-behind children's self-concept, fostering confidence and a sense of purpose in their studies. Moreover, students who can seek their own value and establish positive meanings in adverse circumstances are more likely to develop long-term educational aspirations and maintain their academic persistence. [10]. It can be seen that psychological resilience provides support for learning motivation by improving self-awareness and goal setting.

4.3 Behavior: flexible learning strategies and sustained engagement

Students with higher resilience are more likely to actively seek external support when they face challenges, such as asking teachers and peers for help, rather than solving problems by themselves. They also tend to reflect on their learning strategies, instead of persisting in ineffective approaches. In addition, students with high resilience are able to sustain patience and perseverance in repeating practice. By contrast, students with lower resilience are more likely to give up after failure. These behavioral differences have a direct impact on the strength of learning motivation. Through active seeking behaviors, flexible adjustment, and sustained effort, highly resilient students accumulate experiences over time, thereby reinforcing their motivation with each cycle of feedback and achievement [1,12].

Overall, psychological resilience shows a multidimensional influence on learning motivation. At the emotional level, it assists students in reducing anxiety and loneliness while stimulating positive emotions such as hope and gratitude, thereby enhancing learning motivation [3,9,10]. On the cognitive aspect, it strengthens self-concept and positive attribution, fostering a greater sense of purpose and persistence among students [10,11]. On the behavioral aspect, it encourages students to adopt positive learning strategies, accumulate and master relevant knowledge, and thereby enhance their learning motivation [12]. For junior secondary school left-behind children, the role of psychological resilience has particular significance. On the one hand, they face pressures from studies and daily life more than their peers; they must develop a greater psychological resilience, sustaining learning

motivation [1]. On the other hand, their environments may limit the development of psychological resilience, reducing their learning motivation [5,6]. Consequently, analyzing how psychological resilience influences learning motivation not only helps explain motivational differences among left-behind children but also provides theoretical grounding for developing targeted intervention strategies.

5 Measures to enhance psychological resilience

Psychological resilience can be cultivated and improved through intervention, instead of being unchangeable. Drawing on existing research, this paper explores solutions from three domains: school, family, and society.

5.1 School level

School is the main place for students learning and live. Firstly, it is necessary to build a positive and harmonious school atmosphere, which provides a secure and supportive environment to strengthen students' sense of belonging and security [4]. Secondly, educators should provide emotional care, as well as academic guidance, giving hope through encouragement and constructive feedback. Teachers could integrate psychological knowledge into teaching instructions that help students cultivate resilience in adversity, such as goal setting, positive classroom feedback, and peer assistance [3, 9]. Furthermore, constructing peer support groups can mitigate the impact of challenges through mutual assistance and strengthen student persistence.

5.2 Family level

Research shows that parental educational expectations and high-quality communication can enhance the educational aspirations and self-efficacy of left-behind children, thereby providing support for the formation of their psychological resilience [5, 6]. Therefore, even if the parents are not present nearby, they should maintain active communication with their children via telephone or online platforms, conveying clear and realistic educational expectations, giving emotional support, and confirming. At the same time, intergenerational caregivers should actively respond to the emotional needs of left-behind children, providing psychological support in daily life. Among intergenerational caregivers, grandparent guardianship is most common. As a primary form of family education for left-behind children, grandparents typically offer stable support and emotional companionship in daily care, partially compensating for the psychological void caused by parental absence. However, due to generational gaps and limitations in educational philosophies, they often lack proficiency in academic guidance and emotional counseling. [5, 6]. Therefore, providing opportunities for grandparents to receive educational training and guidance to help they shoulder the responsibility of emotional and learning support can be an efficient way to protect left-behind children's psychological resilience.

5.3 Societal level

Communities and social organizations can provide psychological counseling, after-school tutoring, and interest activities to create more resources and opportunities for left-behind children. Social support is positively related to resilience and indirectly promotes learning motivation by meeting fundamental psychological needs and enhancing well-being [13-15, 2]. Therefore, social policies should focus on the popularization of rural education and

psychological services. Through regular mental health screenings and interventions, people can aid left-behind children in a timely manner. Meanwhile, the educational resources between urban and rural areas should be balanced, so that left-behind children can receive diverse educational resources and mental support.

In conclusion, enhancing the psychological resilience of left-behind children requires multi-faceted collaboration. Schools assist students in constructing psychological resilience by adjusting the environment and atmosphere, as well as requiring teachers to provide support, while families do so through conveying hope and close communication, as well as emotional support. In addition, society provides external protection, such as delivering services. These three parties work together, preventing left-behind children from adversity, helping them keep a positive mindset, and in turn increasing their learning motivation.

6 Conclusions

This essay discusses the relationship between psychological resilience and learning motivation among left-behind children in Chinese junior secondary schools, and analyzes the role of individual psychological traits and external environments within this relationship. Findings indicate that psychological resilience, as a psychological factor, influences learning motivation through three pathways: emotional regulation, cognitive evaluation, and behavioral strategies. Concurrently, external factors such as parental educational expectations and parent-child communication, school atmosphere and teacher-student support, alongside social support and resource provision, influence the formation and development of psychological resilience, thereby indirectly affecting learning motivation.

Furthermore, drawing upon existing research, this paper proposes constructive recommendations for cultivating psychological resilience among left-behind children in junior secondary education. The aim is to enable these children to develop greater resilience, maintain a positive mindset in the face of adversity, and confront challenges head-on. Maintaining a positive mindset in academic pursuits is essential for sustaining learning motivation.

However, this study has certain limitations. Firstly, while the literature review method systematically synthesizes existing findings, it lacks empirical data to substantiate causal relationships. Secondly, most current research relies on cross-sectional surveys, with insufficient longitudinal tracking of psychological resilience and learning motivation development among left-behind children. Finally, existing research predominantly examines family and school contexts, with insufficient consideration of macro-level factors such as social policies and digital support.

Future studies should employ multi-wave longitudinal tracking and mixed-method designs to elucidate the dynamic interplay and causal mechanisms between psychological resilience and learning motivation. Concurrently, small-scale intervention trials could be conducted to test the efficacy of resilience-building interventions in enhancing learning motivation. Furthermore, attention should be paid to the potential of balanced urban-rural educational resources and digital technologies in supporting the psychological development of left-behind children.

In summary, psychological resilience not only safeguards left-behind children against adverse environments but also serves as a key factor in fostering learning motivation and academic development. Only through concerted efforts by schools, families, and society can left-behind children strengthen their psychological resilience within constrained resources and complex environments, thereby achieving sustainable academic progress.

References

1. B. Wang, L. Ye, L. Lv, W. Liu, F. Liu, Y. Mao, Psychological resilience among left-behind children in a rural area of eastern China. *Children (Basel)* **9**, 1899 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.3390/children9121899>
2. H. Huang, X. Wan, Y. Liang, Y. Zhang, Q. Peng, Y. Ding, G. Lu, C. Chen, Correlations between social support and loneliness, self-esteem, and resilience among left-behind children in mainland China: A meta-analysis. *Front. Psychiatry* **13**, 874905 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.874905>
3. L. Zhang, S. Roslan, Z. Zaremohzzabieh, K. Liu, X. Tang, Y. Jiang, Z. Mohamad, A serial mediation model of negative life events on school adjustment of left-behind adolescents in rural China: The central role of hope and gratitude. *BMC Psychiatry* **23**, 588 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-023-05102-2>
4. K. Zhao, N. Chen, G. Liu, Z. Lun, X. Wang, School climate and left-behind children's achievement motivation: The mediating role of learning adaptability and the moderating role of teacher support. *Front. Psychol.* **14**, 1040214 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1040214>
5. X. Chen, T. Hesketh, Educational aspirations and expectations of adolescents in rural China: Determinants, mental health, and academic outcomes. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* **18**, 11524 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182111524>
6. Y. Huang, H. Gong, Educational expectations of left-behind children in China: Determinants and gender differences. *Appl. Res. Qual. Life* **17**, 2501–2523 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-021-09987-7>
7. Y. Hou, Aiming high or falling short? Longitudinal study on educational aspirations of Chinese adolescents. *Br. J. Sociol. Educ.* **46**, 255–275 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2024.2444450>
8. E.L. Deci, R.M. Ryan, An introduction. In: *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior* (Springer, Boston, MA, 1985), pp. 3–10. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-2271-7>
9. X. Zhang, S.A. Ray, X. Liu, D.M. Smith, W. Hou, What makes left-behind children resilient? And how? The role of hope on the resilience of Chinese left-behind children. *Child. Youth Serv. Rev.* **153**, 107092 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2023.107092>
10. X. Chen, R. Chen, L. Zhang, Y. Li, Positive development patterns in left-behind adolescents: Do resilience and making sense of adversity have beneficial effects? *Psychol. Res. Behav. Manag.* **17**, 2121–2133 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S454385>
11. F. Yang, Z. Xia, Perceived discrimination and academic self-concept among left-behind children in China: The role of school belonging and classroom composition. *Child. Youth Serv. Rev.* **155**, 107294 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2023.107294>
12. A.S. Masten, Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *Am. Psychol.* **56**, 227–238 (2001). <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.227>
13. Z. Fan, X. Fan, Effect of social support on the psychological adjustment of Chinese left-behind rural children: A moderated mediation model. *Front. Psychol.* **11**, 604397 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.604397>

14. Y. Shi, Assessment of effect of perceived social support on school readiness, mental wellbeing, and self-esteem: Mediating role of psychological resilience. *Front. Psychol.* **13**, 911841 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.911841>
15. H. Miao, H. Sun, X. He, Z. Zhang, Q. Nie, C. Guo, Perceived social support and life satisfaction among young Chinese adolescents: The mediating effect of psychological Suzhi and its components. *Curr. Psychol.* **40**, 6164–6174 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-020-01130-3>