Case Analysis and Educational Intervention on Smartphone Addiction Among Eighth-Grade Students

Huihui Yang
Yuwan Junior High School, Jingning County, Pingliang City, Gansu Province

Abstract: Eighth grade marks a critical period for adolescents' physical, mental and academic differentiation. Imbalanced physical development, unmet psychological needs and rising academic difficulty may easily trigger smartphone addiction, which causes classroom distraction, learning burnout and poor academic performance. Adopting classroom observation and semi-structured interviews, this paper conducts a case study of an eighth-grade boy named Xiao Han, who brought a mobile phone to school secretly, suffered from game addiction, performed poorly in class and fell behind academically. It analyzes contributing factors from four dimensions: physiology, psychology, learning and environment. Drawing on psychological theories proposed by Erikson, Weiner and Bandura, the paper explores the intrinsic relationships between addictive behaviors and adolescent development, learning motivation as well as emotion regulation. The research reveals that the main causes include underdeveloped prefrontal cortex, lack of real-world sense of worth, learned helplessness resulting from academic failures, and insufficient psychological support from families and schools. The student presented psychological problems such as avoidance goals, negative attribution, low self-efficacy and single emotion-coping strategies. Accordingly, a five-dimensional intervention framework is constructed: psychological reshaping, motivation reconstruction, behavior modification, emotional counseling and home-school collaboration. Two-month follow-up intervention verifies that this approach can mitigate smartphone dependence, optimize learning states, reverse negative perceptions and strengthen academic self-confidence. It offers practical references for online guidance of teenagers and psychological and academic support for underachieving students in primary and secondary schools.

Key words: eighth-grade students; smartphone addiction; adolescent psychology; learning motivation; home-school collaboration

1. Case and Research Methods

1.1 Case Overview

This study selects Xiao Han, an eighth-grade boy in this school, as the research case. The student has long suffered from smartphone addiction: he repeatedly ignored the school's mobile phone management regulations and brought a smartphone to school secretly, used fragmented time during class breaks, lunch breaks and self-study periods to play online games, and spent more than 3 hours per day on online entertainment on average. In class he was chronically mentally exhausted with unfocused eyes, his effective concentration lasted less than ten minutes, and he rarely took the initiative to participate in classroom interaction. After class his self-discipline was weak, he procrastinated over and dealt perfunctorily with assignments in all subjects, long failed to hand in work in weak subjects such as mathematics, physics and English, and his unit and monthly test scores declined continuously, so that he gradually became an underachieving student in the class.

Through continuous on-campus tracking observation for 8 weeks and comprehensive analysis of interviews with the student, his parents and all subject teachers, it was determined that the student had no serious conduct problems such as bullying or fighting, and that his core weaknesses were poor self-restraint and insufficient learning initiative. He was introverted and sensitive, habitually suppressed negative emotions, and was unwilling to proactively confide psychological pressure to teachers or parents. There had been no major change in the family; both parents were normally employed, but parent-child communication was limited to preaching, criticism and pressure over grades, lacking equal communication, high-quality companionship and professional psychological counseling. Peer relationships at school were peaceful with no intense interpersonal conflict, but his willingness to actively participate in class cultural, sports and labor activities was low, his sense of presence in the collective was weak, and his degree of integration was insufficient.

1.2 Research Methods

This paper adopts a qualitative case study, combining classroom participant observation and semi-structured in-depth interviews to collect first-hand data, and adheres throughout to objective recording and multi-source cross-verification. Classroom participant observation: covering four on-campus scenarios — classroom, class break, self-study and collective activities — for 8 consecutive weeks, records were made along five dimensions: mobile phone use, classroom concentration, assignment completion, peer interaction and outward emotion; a standardized observation record form was filled in daily to objectively preserve original behavioral material and avoid subjective assumption. Semi-structured in-depth interviews: interviewees were divided into three categories — the student, the parents and the subject teachers — and stratified interview outlines were designed in advance. The student was asked about academic feelings, game motivation, emotional distress and parent-child interaction experience; the parents were surveyed about family mobile phone management, daily communication patterns and educational difficulties; the teachers were asked about the student's classroom performance, subject weaknesses and personality characteristics. A single interview lasted 20–35 minutes; after completion, the interviews were transcribed and coded for categorization, so as to extract the deep psychological causes behind the behaviors.

2. Multi-Dimensional Causes of the Student's Smartphone Addiction and the Psychological Logic of Adolescence

2.1 Four Major Causes of Addictive Behavior

Physiological level: at 13–14 years of age, the limbic system responsible for emotional perception has matured, and immediate stimuli such as game level-ups and battle victories continuously secrete dopamine, forming addictive positive reinforcement; while the prefrontal cortex, which governs rational thinking, impulse suppression and delayed gratification, has not yet fully developed, so there is an innate shortfall in self-control. Even though the student knew the harm of addiction, he still found it difficult to restrain his gaming behavior autonomously.

Psychological level: eighth-grade students experience a rapid awakening of self-awareness and a strong need for a sense of achievement, peer belonging and positive self-identity. This student had long suffered academic setbacks, found it difficult to obtain positive feedback from classes and examinations, had a weak sense of presence in the school collective, and received insufficient real-world psychological value supply. Online games have a low threshold and provide immediate feedback, can quickly fill the gaps in competence and belonging, and thus become a psychological compensatory carrier for the student to escape academic pressure and dissolve self-negation.

Learning level: the difficulty of eighth-grade subjects increases substantially and the coherence of knowledge is strengthened, so students with a weak foundation are very likely to develop knowledge gaps. Xiao Han's classroom absorption efficiency was low, and many attempts to make up for his shortcomings ended in failure; long-term negative learning experience gave rise to learned helplessness. To avoid continuous frustration, the student relied on games to numb himself, forming a vicious circle: weak foundation → inefficient listening → declining grades → avoidance of

learning → smartphone addiction → continuous expansion of knowledge gaps.

Environmental level: there was an obvious absence of the home-school educational support system. Family communication was dominated by accusation and preaching, academic anxiety was not channeled in time, and no stable and consistent mobile phone use rules had been established, with the standards of restraint changing at will with the parents' emotions. The school lacked stratified psychological counseling and academic assistance for underachieving students, and dealt with smartphone addiction only through superficial punishments such as confiscation and criticism, lacking cognitive correction and motivation reconstruction guidance, so that the deviant behavior continued to solidify and worsen.

2.2 Psychological Development Characteristics of Adolescence

First, heightened self-awareness and an imbalance between the demand for independence and the awareness of rules. Adolescent students desire autonomy and resent adult control; bringing a phone to school secretly is a manifestation of externalized independent demands and weakened reverence for rules. However, their cognition is one-sided and their capacity for stress resistance and long-term trade-off is insufficient, so they cannot foresee the negative effects of long-term addiction, such as academic decline and psychological closure.

Second, drastic emotional fluctuations and a lack of channels for emotional release. Adolescents are emotionally sensitive and unstable; negative emotions brought by academic pressure accumulate over time, and they have not mastered mature ways of relieving pressure such as sports, confiding and cultivating interests, so they tend to rely on games for low-cost emotional venting, gradually forming emotional dependence.

Third, a prominent need for peer belonging and a shift of social interaction to the online world. Students at this stage value peer evaluation more, and their friendship circles are mostly built through online games; smartphone addiction implicitly contains the motivation of integrating into the group and avoiding social isolation, which is a misplaced satisfaction of the need for belonging. Fourth, weak capacity for delayed gratification and preference for immediate entertainment. Willpower in adolescence is not yet mature, making it difficult to invest in boring learning tasks with long payback periods for a long time; the immediate pleasure of mobile phones continuously encroaches on time for learning and offline activities, inducing behavioral deviation.

2.3 Conflicts Between Deviant Behavior and Adolescent Development Tasks

According to Erikson's theory of personality development, the core conflict between the ages of 12 and 18 is ego identity versus role confusion, and the stage development tasks include consolidating academic learning, cultivating self-discipline, establishing a positive self-identity, developing real-world social interaction, shaping resilience, and establishing a sense of rules and responsibility. Smartphone addiction conflicts comprehensively with these tasks. First, it continuously interrupts knowledge accumulation and thinking cultivation, constantly widens the academic gap, and makes it impossible to complete the learning goals of this key stage of junior high school. Second, bringing a phone to school secretly, being slack in class and habitually fearing difficulties solidify bad habits such as procrastination, self-indulgence and withdrawal, hindering the development of self-management ability. Third, long-term reliance on virtual achievements to escape real frustration easily leads to an inferior and avoidant personality; excessive online social interaction weakens offline communication and collaboration ability, resulting in delayed socialized development of the adolescent.

3. Analysis of Learning Motivation, Attribution Style and Emotional Imbalance

3.1 Learning Motivation and Achievement Goals

The student lacked intrinsic motivation for learning and could not gain a sense of achievement from listening in class, doing exercises or exploring knowledge, showing an instinctive resistance to learning. External incentives had completely failed, and he developed psychological rejection toward parental urging and teacher persuasion; he lacked a clear growth goal, sustained positive reinforcement and nearby role models, and remained in a borderline state of

learning burnout with low investment and low participation for a long time. From the perspective of achievement motivation theory, the student exhibited a typical avoidance achievement goal: he studied only to cope with tasks and avoid criticism, had no desire to proactively improve himself, and escaped failure experiences through distraction and phone use whenever he encountered difficult problems.

3.2 Negative Attribution and Low Self-Efficacy

Combined with Weiner's three-dimensional attribution theory, Xiao Han showed a significant negative external attribution bias: when facing examination failures, he rarely reflected on controllable internal causes such as his own concentration, learning methods and after-class consolidation, and mostly attributed failure to external uncontrollable factors such as high course difficulty and poor classroom atmosphere. Negative attribution freed him from the responsibility for growth and deprived him of the internal drive to proactively adjust his learning state. Based on Bandura's self-efficacy theory, repeated academic failures led him to believe that he could not learn well, forming a deep-rooted low sense of self-efficacy and giving rise to learned helplessness, so that he proactively gave up investment in learning. Online games could only temporarily cover up frustration, yet deprived the student of opportunities to accumulate real-world success experiences and blocked the path to rebuilding confidence; anxiety occupied a large amount of cognitive resources and further reduced the efficiency of listening and problem solving.

3.3 Characteristics of Emotional Imbalance

Smartphone addiction is the external manifestation of the student's ineffective emotion regulation and unmet psychological needs. First, negative emotions such as academic anxiety, self-negation and inferiority and depression accumulated over a long period, with no safe and regular channel for release. Second, he was inwardly closed and deliberately avoided home-school communication, showing alienation and resistance toward educational intervention. Third, his means of emotion regulation were single and passive — he relied only on games to release pressure and had not mastered healthy ways of relieving stress. Fourth, his real-world emotional connection was weak; online virtual social interaction compensated for the real emotional support of parents and the class, and he lacked emotional investment in daily interaction at school and at home.

4. Systematic Educational Intervention Strategies

Following the principles of "psychological counseling first, cognitive reshaping as the foundation, motivation reconstruction as the core, behavior modification as the lever, and long-term home-school collaboration as the guarantee", a five-in-one intervention system was built.

Psychological and cognitive intervention: build an equal teacher-student relationship and accept negative emotions; carry out attribution training to guide the student to attribute failures to controllable factors such as effort and method; set stepped small goals to accumulate success experiences, supplemented by frustration education, so as to dissolve avoidance psychology.

Learning motivation reconstruction: implement stratified questioning and stratified assignments to lower the learning threshold; identify the student's strengths and provide timely positive incentives, jointly formulate phased learning goals, and activate internal and external learning motivation.

Behavioral regulation intervention: unify mobile phone control rules between home and school, with phones banned on campus and time-limited use at home; enrich offline activities such as sports, reading and clubs; optimize classroom mutual-help management and implement "study first, play later" to train the capacity for delayed gratification.

Emotional and social intervention: teach stress-relieving methods such as breathing regulation and emotional diaries; encourage participation in collective activities and build offline peer connections; guide parents to reduce accusations and repair the parent-child relationship through companionship and empathy.

Home-school collaborative intervention: maintain regular two-way communication about the student's overall state, flexibly adjust educational methods, abandon rough control, combine guidance with restriction, and form a long-term

and unified educational synergy.

5. Intervention Effects and Educational Reflections

5.1 Effects of Intervention Implementation

After two months of complete phased intervention, the student showed stable positive changes in five dimensions. At the behavioral level, he consciously observed the school's mobile phone management regulations and no longer brought a phone to school; entertainment time at home became controllable, and psychological dependence on games was greatly alleviated. At the classroom level, his mental outlook improved markedly, problems of distraction and burnout decreased significantly, and classroom participation and attention duration steadily increased. At the psychological level, inferiority and anxiety were effectively relieved, his willingness to communicate proactively increased, his attribution pattern tended to be rational, and his academic self-efficacy continued to improve. At the academic level, his initiative in autonomous learning increased, assignment quality improved, the downward trend in grades was curbed, and difficulty-avoiding behavior decreased markedly. At the emotional and social level, he was able to regulate negative pressure through sports and confiding, proactively participated in collective activities, and his sense of offline peer belonging was significantly enhanced.

5.2 Educational Reflections

Based on this complete intervention practice, five core educational implications are summarized. First, smartphone addiction among junior high school students is a behavioral norm violation on the surface, but its core is an imbalance of internal psychological needs; deviant behavior is an external signal that pressure has nowhere to be released and that self-worth is lacking, so education cannot merely control behavior but must simultaneously carry out psychological counseling and cognitive reshaping. Second, eighth grade is a watershed with a high incidence of adolescent psychological and behavioral problems; students' physical and mental development is imbalanced and their emotions are sensitive and fragile, so educators need to follow the laws of developmental psychology and eliminate label-based, one-size-fits-all rough management. Third, negative external attribution, low self-efficacy and lack of intrinsic motivation are the root of the cycle of academic avoidance; the core of intervention is to rebuild students' confidence and continuously create success experiences, so as to break the avoidance logic at the cognitive level. Fourth, mobile phone governance should adhere to the principle of combining guidance with restriction and substituting needs; mere compulsory prohibition easily intensifies adolescent rebellion, and only by supplementing the sense of achievement and belonging in real scenarios can virtual dependence be weakened at the root. Fifth, the transformation of adolescent behavior is long-term and repetitive; short-term preaching cannot achieve lasting change, and sustained companionship, positive feedback, clear rules and regular psychological support are the keys to correcting online addiction and reshaping a healthy growth state.

Conclusion

Smartphone addiction and academic decline among eighth-grade students constitute a composite problem formed by the superposition of multiple factors: adolescent physical and mental conflicts, academic cognitive obstacles, emotional regulation imbalance and the absence of home-school psychological support. Frontline educators need to rely on developmental and educational psychology theories to dig out students' deep psychological demands through surface behaviors, reshape self-identity through cognitive counseling, rebuild learning motivation through stratified assistance, correct inappropriate online behavior through standardized rules, and consolidate intervention effects through regular home-school collaboration, so as to guide adolescents away from online escape and game addiction, cultivate a confident and sound personality, and set them on a sustainable and benign growth trajectory.

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