

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# "Endogenous forces" and "exogenous forces": a study on the development of the rural teaching workforce in the context of rural revitalization

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### ABSTRACT

In the context of rural revitalization, the development of the rural teaching workforce relies on the synergistic promotion of endogenous forces and exogenous forces. endogenous forces mean internal driving forces that emphasize proactive and innovative personal motivation, while exogenous forces refer to external supports that focus on resource investment and policy guidance. However, an increasing emphasis on exogenous forces while neglecting endogenous forces has limited the sustainable development of China's current rural teaching workforce. We believe that activating endogenous forces is a key and weak link in promoting the synergistic development of rural revitalization and the rural teaching workforce. Only when endogenous forces are activated by exogenous forces and achieve a "feedback" effect on exogenous forces can a positive cycle in the development of rural teachers be established. In summary, the collaborative development and mutual reinforcement of endogenous and exogenous forces will enhance the professional development of the rural teaching workforce.

**Keywords:** endogenous forces; exogenous forces; rural revitalization; rural teacher

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## 1. Introduction

In October 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the implementation of the "Rural Revitalization Strategy" at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. This comprehensive and structural institutional concept and strategic planning elucidated the significant strategic position and profound historical significance of the rural revitalization in China's modernization construction [1]. The priority development status of rural education was further emphasized in the Opinions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Implementing the Rural Vitalization Strategy issued in February 2018[2]. The document proposed that improving the quality of rural education must rely on a high-quality rural teaching workforce. As direct executors, rural teachers are committed to not only ensure teaching

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quality but also cultivate rural builders<sup>[3]</sup>. So rural teachers are important promoters and builders of the modern education system with Chinese characteristics and play an indispensable role in the strategy of rural revitalization.

In China's education system, due to historical and social factors such as the uncoordinated dual development of urban and rural areas, rural education has become a weak link in the process of education modernization in China. Furthermore, the professional level of rural teachers is identified as an inner weak link hindering the development of rural education. In 2012, the State Council proposed the goal of cultivating a highly qualified and professional teacher workforce with noble teaching ethics, excellent skills, reasonable structure, and full of vitality in the new era<sup>[4]</sup>.

To effectively enhance the professional level of rural teachers, exogenous forces including the innovation of the institutional mechanism and the improvement of the policy system in constructing the rural teacher workforce have been primarily focused on<sup>[5]</sup>. These external driving forces are believed to promote improving the overall quality of rural teachers and advancing the integrated development of urban and rural education.

However, according to the people-oriented principles<sup>[6]</sup>, in order to maintain the sustained vitality of the rural teacher team, it is even more necessary to activate their endogenous forces to promote the improvement of subjective initiative and the realization of self-worth<sup>[7]</sup>.

In light of this, this paper aims to explore the development strategies for the rural teaching workforce within the context of the Rural Revitalization Strategy, focusing on the synergistic and mutually reinforcing effects of "endogenous forces" and "exogenous forces." We hope this research will provide recommendations and insights for the current professional development of rural teachers.

## **2. The necessity of synergistic development between rural revitalization and the rural teacher workforce**

The Rural Revitalization Strategy has provided a timely opportunity for the development of rural teachers, and in turn, the growth of rural teachers contributes to the revitalization of education, talent, and culture in rural areas, playing a leading role in this process<sup>[8]</sup>. Therefore, the relationship between rural revitalization and the development of rural teachers is closely intertwined and mutually reinforcing. The coordinated development of both will further promote the comprehensive development of rural society.

### **2.1. Rural revitalization provides support and guarantees for the development of the rural teaching workforce**

The Rural Revitalization Strategy, which aims to rejuvenate rural areas through comprehensive socio-economic improvements, has led to substantial investments in rural education.

Firstly, resource support is a cornerstone of this strategy. The government has increased funding for rural schools, enabling the construction of new facilities and the renovation of existing ones. This includes the provision of modern educational resources, such as textbooks, digital tools, and laboratory equipment. Additionally, there are targeted initiatives to enhance teachers' professional development through training programs, workshops, and seminars. This financial and material support ensures that rural teachers have access to the necessary resources and opportunities to enhance their teaching capabilities. Secondly, the Rural Revitalization Strategy creates a more favorable environment for rural teachers. It includes policies that aim to improve living conditions in rural areas, such as better housing, transportation, and healthcare services. By addressing these basic needs, the strategy helps to make rural teaching positions more attractive

and sustainable. Furthermore, the strategy promotes community engagement and support for education, fostering a more supportive and collaborative environment for teachers.

Overall, the Rural Revitalization Strategy creates favorable conditions and broad prospects for the development of rural education by increasing investment in education, improving educational infrastructure, enhancing teacher benefits and improving working conditions. These measures have enhanced rural teachers' self-identity and social recognition, while also inspiring more people to pursue careers in rural education.

## **2.2. Rural teachers are essential executors and promoters of the rural revitalization strategy**

The revitalization of talent is the foundation of rural revitalization. Chinese President Xi Jinping has emphasized that we must promote the revitalization of rural talent, prioritize the development of human capital and strengthen the talent support for rural revitalization<sup>[9]</sup>. The essential attribute of education is to cultivate individuals. Education providing a solid human resources foundation and support for the Rural Revitalization Strategy through shaping thoughts, transmitting knowledge, and enhancing capabilities<sup>[10]</sup>. While benefiting from the Rural Revitalization Strategy, rural teachers deeply participate and contribute to the revitalization of education, talent and culture of rural areas.

Rural teachers, in response to the demands of the times, can cultivate various types of talent needed for rural revitalization through the transfer of knowledge. This includes areas such as agricultural technology, rural enterprise management, and social services in rural communities, effectively broadening the channels for rural talent supply and enhancing both the quantity and quality of rural human capital. Additionally, as carriers and disseminators of rural culture, rural teachers are also participants and promoters of rural cultural revitalization. Through teaching activities, teachers impart the rural area's historical traditions and cultural customs to students, guiding them to understand and critically think about rural culture. This stimulates innovative thinking, enhances cultural identity, and encourages the joint participation of rural communities and families, fostering a new pattern of rural cultural revitalization characterized by socialization and widespread community involvement.

## **3. Current status and issues of the rural teaching workforce**

Despite the increasing attention and support from the country and society for constructing the rural teacher workforce, deep-seated barriers constructed by the urban-rural dual development model have led to persistent issues such as low salaries, poor prospects, and low social status in China's rural area<sup>[11]</sup>. Rural teachers generally lack the belief in the "for the rural" cause, preventing policies from fundamentally leveraging their subjective initiative. There are still some deep-rooted, fundamental problems in workforce construction.

### **3.1. Serious loss of rural teachers**

On the one hand, many university graduates are reluctant to teach in rural areas due to low salaries, poor working conditions, and limited career development opportunities, which mirrors the challenges faced by rural teachers in other countries<sup>[12]</sup>. On the other hand, the turnover rate of outstanding teachers in the rural teaching workforce remains high, showing a clear tendency to move towards urban areas. This results in a persistent state of instability within the rural teaching workforce.

### **3.2. Severe imbalance in the structure of the rural teacher workforce**

The structure of the rural teaching workforce is severely imbalanced. First, there is an age imbalance, with a significant age gap and severe aging issues. Second, the gender structure is imbalanced, with a disproportionate number of female teachers compared to male teachers. Third, there is an imbalance in

subject specialization, with a shortage of music, physical education, and art teachers as it is difficult for rural schools to attract professionals in these fields<sup>[13]</sup>.

The structural imbalance within the teaching workforce has a negative impact on the quality of education. For example, the age imbalance, characterized by a disproportionately large number of older teachers, results in a lack of fresh perspectives and energy within the teaching team. This unreasonable age structure directly hinders the renewal of teaching methods and educational philosophies, which is detrimental to fostering students' innovation skills and their ability to adapt to future societal needs. Additionally, the imbalance in subject specialization significantly impedes students' holistic development<sup>[14]</sup>. These issues negatively affect the cultivation of the human capital needed for rural revitalization.

### **3.3. Worrisome professional development prospects of rural teachers**

Due to a lack of opportunities for systematic education and training, rural teachers' professional knowledge and teaching skills are relatively outdated. This is evident in the serious issue of knowledge stagnation, where teachers remain stuck in traditional teaching models and methods, and face difficulties in updating and applying new educational concepts<sup>[15]</sup>. Many rural teachers lack clear professional development goals and positioning, and are without continuous and systematic planning and guidance for their professional growth. As a result, it is challenging for them to achieve long-term development objectives.

### **3.4. Insufficient social recognition and self-identity of rural teachers**

Despite the traditional respect for teachers, rural teachers often receive less recognition and respect compared to their urban counterparts. The lower social status associated with rural areas contributes to this lack of recognition. There may be a perception that teaching in rural areas is less prestigious or important than teaching in urban areas<sup>[16]</sup>. Compared with urban teachers, more limited access to ongoing professional training and development, lower salaries and fewer financial incentives, and fewer opportunities for career advancement can impact both social and self-recognition of rural teachers.

## **4. Dual driving in the development of the rural teaching workforce: endogenous and exogenous forces**

The Rural Revitalization Strategy presents an unprecedented opportunity for rural teachers' professional development. It is essential to confront the current situation and challenges faced by rural teachers, adhering to the "people-oriented" principle and taking a needs-based approach. By deeply exploring the logical relationship between "endogenous forces" and "exogenous forces", we can achieve the coordinated development of rural revitalization and the rural teaching workforce.

The endogenous forces for rural teachers' development refers to the internal drive forces that originates from their personal will and needs. This intrinsic motivation stems from teachers' personal ideals, professional identity, and love for the educational profession. It is the core force that propels their self-development and professional growth. The exogenous forces for the development of rural teachers mainly comes from external incentives and support. This includes policy support, resource investment, improvement of material benefits, and social recognition, which provide the necessary conditions, environment, and assurance for the professional growth of rural teachers. To overcome the bottleneck in rural teachers' professional development and break the deadlock of "endless policy mechanisms with minimal actual impact," it is essential to recognize that intrinsic motivation is the perpetual source of lasting vitality in rural teachers' professional growth. The fundamental goal of revitalizing rural education must be to stimulate and harness the intrinsic motivation of rural teachers.

Therefore, on one hand, it is necessary to optimize exogenous forces, ensuring it accurately addresses the actual needs of rural teachers. On the other hand, efforts must be made to activate endogenous forces, so that rural teachers' professional development becomes vibrant and dynamic. Only by combining these two approaches can we facilitate a qualitative shift in rural teachers' professional growth, from being driven primarily by external forces to being led by internal motivation.

#### **4.1. Adopt multiple measures to optimize exogenous forces**

##### **4.1.1. Continue to increase financial investment and resource support**

Rural teachers in China face challenges such as low salaries, poor living conditions, and a lack of teaching resources, which severely impact the development of rural education<sup>[17]</sup>. Therefore, it is crucial to increase financial investment and resource support.

Firstly, the salaries of rural teachers should be raised to attract talented individuals to teach in rural areas. Providing housing and transportation subsidies can also improve their living conditions and enhance the appeal of the profession. Secondly, investment in teaching resources for rural schools should be increased, ensuring that schools have sufficient textbooks, equipment, and modern teaching tools, enabling teachers to deliver high-quality education. Additionally, more support should be given to the training and professional development of rural teachers, improving their skills and capabilities, and encouraging outstanding teachers to serve in rural areas for the long term.

By increasing financial investment and resource support, the working and living conditions of rural teachers can be significantly improved, thereby enhancing the quality of rural education, promoting educational equity, and advancing the strategic goal of rural revitalization.

##### **4.1.2. Provide various forms of guidance and opportunities for exchange to rural teachers**

In addition to fundamental financial investment and resource support, it is essential to provide personalized assistance tailored to the diverse needs of rural teachers. Local governments and researchers should focus on the specific challenges faced by rural teachers, conducting thorough research and analysis to identify the real needs of teachers at different levels, with varying professional backgrounds, and at different stages of their careers. This approach will facilitate demand matching and personalized guidance.

Education experts or master teachers can be introduced as mentors, interacting with rural teachers through regular advisory meetings, teaching observations, and lesson planning guidance, helping them to develop individual professional development plans. Additionally, establishing platforms for rural teachers to exchange ideas, such as online or offline seminars and professional associations, can offer training in educational methods and encourage the sharing of teaching experiences and educational philosophies, thereby promoting self-directed learning among teachers.

By coordinating internal and external resources, a collaborative model for the professional development of rural teachers can be established.

##### **4.1.3. Strengthen the construction of rural teachers' social reputation and honor system**

A supportive social environment should be built on a positive interest connection with rural teachers, as incentives are an effective factor in motivating them to remain in rural areas and actively engage in learning<sup>[18]</sup>. Enhancing the social reputation and honor system for rural teachers through measures such as recognizing exemplary models, establishing awards, and granting honorary titles will help society appreciate the importance of teachers in personal and societal development. This recognition encourages rural teachers

to achieve excellence and make significant contributions in their educational roles, fostering a sense of social image and value identity.

At the same time, establishing rural education support teams, such as volunteer teacher groups and professional advisory services, allows rural teachers to experience advanced teaching methods and educational concepts firsthand. These collaborative efforts between rural teachers and the broader community will help to promote their professional development and drive educational innovation.

#### **4.1.4. Reinforce social opinion guidance and publicity reporting**

Mr. Tao Xingzhi once said<sup>[19]</sup>, "The school is the center of the village, and the teacher is the soul of the school and the village". Social media should enhance the coverage and promotion of the work, achievements, and contributions of outstanding rural teachers, providing support and recognition for their professional development. Advocating for society's attention to rural education and promoting the value of respecting and honoring teachers can cultivate and foster respect and gratitude toward rural teachers, making it a respected and trusted profession.

Rural schools should prioritize establishing a campus culture that values and honors teachers, integrating this philosophy into education and teaching. Organizing teacher-student discussions, teacher recognition events, and educational activities can clearly affirm the efforts and achievements of teachers, guiding students to develop respect and admiration for their educators.

Parents should also adopt a correct educational perspective, respect the authority of teachers, actively cooperate with their work, and establish a positive home-school relationship<sup>[20]</sup>. Social recognition and support will boost rural teachers' confidence and motivation, encouraging them to take greater strides in their professional development.

## **4.2. Activate rural teachers' endogenous forces and strengthen professional identity**

### **4.2.1. Foster local belief and strengthen rural belonging**

Rural teachers should strengthen their connection to local beliefs, enhance their sense of identity and belonging to the rural community, and form a shared destiny with the village<sup>[21]</sup>. Cultivating local beliefs involves actively and willingly delving into the differences between rural and urban education, such as the imbalance of teaching resources, the diverse backgrounds of students, and the unique teaching environment. This understanding deepens their role and mission in rural education. Additionally, teachers should authentically engage with the people, events, and aspects of rural life, participating in community development activities, learning about rural cultural traditions, and establishing close connections with villagers. By gradually seeing themselves as genuine "villagers", teachers develop a rational understanding of their role and mission in rural education. They recognize the uniqueness and importance of rural education and its complementary relationship with urban education, ultimately fostering a sense of belonging to the rural community.

### **4.2.2. Cultivate love and respect, achieve spiritual satisfaction**

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is used to study how humans intrinsically partake in behavioral motivation. From the bottom of the hierarchy upwards, the needs are: physiological, safety, love and belonging needs, esteem, and self-actualization<sup>[22]</sup>. From a spiritual perspective, realizing esteem needs is fertile ground for inner satisfaction. Therefore, rural teachers should strive to create a loving educational environment that respects students' central role, focuses on their holistic development, and provides personalized learning support. This approach ensures that rural students feel cared for and supported by their teachers and schools, granting them a sense of security and belonging, thus meeting their needs for respect.

Such positive teacher-student relationships offer strong positive feedback to rural teachers, fostering mutual growth and potential development. This, in turn, reignites rural teachers' passion for education and strengthens their sense of responsibility and mission, fulfilling their own needs for respect and self-actualization. An environment of love and respect naturally encourages rural teachers to continuously improve their educational skills and professional competencies. The fulfillment of these needs helps rural teachers find spiritual fulfillment, recognize their inner needs, and thus better develop themselves.

#### **4.2.3. Root in the fertile soil of local culture, uphold the "for the rural" value orientation**

Local culture encompasses the traditions, values, social customs, social structures, and lifestyles of rural areas<sup>[23]</sup>. Moreover, rural teachers themselves are an integral part of this "local culture," so their professional growth cannot be separated from the essence of "locality"<sup>[24]</sup>. Rural teachers need to root themselves in the fertile soil of local culture, strengthen their sense of belonging to the rural community, and uphold the "for the rural" value orientation.

Firstly, rural teachers should actively learn about and deeply understand local culture. They can achieve this by engaging in rural social practices, interacting with local residents to gain insights into agricultural production techniques and issues. Collaborating with community organizations and village committees, and participating in community development planning and project implementation, can also provide valuable practical experience and local knowledge. Additionally, utilizing the internet to explore the political, economic, and cultural aspects of rural society will help rural teachers grasp its essence and unique characteristics. This understanding will enhance their perception and appreciation of local culture, fostering a sense of emotional attachment and belonging to rural education, and igniting their passion and sense of responsibility for teaching.

Secondly, rural teachers should integrate local culture into their teaching activities and prioritize the construction of local culture-based curricula<sup>[25]</sup>. By discovering and borrowing elements with educational value from local culture, such as moral concepts, traditional skills, and rural wisdom, teachers can provide students with educational content adapted to the rural environment. Establishing school-based courses on rural history, local literature, and rural economy can enhance students' sense of identity with local culture, foster their love and sense of responsibility towards the countryside, and help them better understand and engage with local scientific, social issues, and the challenges and opportunities of rural development.

Lastly, in the era of rapid knowledge turnover in the information age, rural teachers must keep pace with the times, continuously learning about local culture and establishing a belief in lifelong learning.

Rural teachers and rural education are inherently connected to the "rural" domain, and rural teachers should regard local culture as a fundamental source and core resource for their professional development. Scientifically integrating local culture and creatively leveraging its educational value can inject sustained vitality into rural education and the growth of rural teachers.

#### **4.2.4. Foster a sense of ownership, lead the professional development of rural teachers**

In addition to imparting knowledge, rural teachers should cultivate a sense of ownership in rural education and rural revitalization. They should proactively seek potential opportunities for learning and development, and drive and lead the advancement of rural education.

Firstly, rural teachers should continuously and proactively accumulate, practice and update their knowledge. They can enhance their professional skills by participating in specialized training and seminars or by actively reading professional books and journal articles. Additionally, online training has become a crucial channel for improving the competencies of rural teachers under the internet plus education reform<sup>[26]</sup>.

Rural teachers can engage in self-directed learning and professional development by accessing high-quality online courses, continually updating their educational concepts and teaching strategies.

Secondly, rural teachers should maintain keen awareness and observational skills regarding issues in educational practice. They should regularly engage in reflective teaching, adjusting strategies and methods as needed, and refining lesson plans and content to improve teaching quality. Additionally, rural teachers should actively participate in professional exchanges, sharing experiences and providing mutual support with colleagues. By collaboratively exploring professional issues, learning from others' experiences, and adopting various teaching methods, they can enrich their own teaching practices and inspire innovative thinking.

Thirdly, rural teachers should proactively seek professional development opportunities and expand their roles. By participating in teaching research and innovation projects, as well as competing in teaching competitions, they can combine teaching practice with educational research, showcasing their professional abilities and potential. This proactive approach allows them to create opportunities for growth and advancement, facilitating the active and creative construction of their own professional identities.

In conclusion, rural teachers should embrace the countryside with dedication and strive to become “teachers with faith, virtue, knowledge, and kindness”<sup>[27]</sup>.

#### **4.2.5. Focus on co-creation and sharing: building a professional development community for rural teachers**

The formation of a community signifies shared development and a common destiny. A professional development community for rural teachers, which includes organizations such as teaching research groups, teacher alliances, or associations, serves as a support system for their professional growth. By actively establishing or joining these organizations, rural teachers can foster close connections and collaboration among colleagues.

Within this community, teachers can share teaching cases and resources, collectively explore educational challenges, and exchange ideas with peers who have different professional expertise. This collaboration allows them to learn from each other's strengths, inspiring innovative solutions and enhancing cooperative efforts. By gaining access to more professional resources, rural teachers can benefit from complementary strengths, mutual inspiration, and precise collaboration.

Participation in such a community helps rural teachers develop a sense of collective identity and belonging, fostering shared goals and values. This community awareness enhances the enthusiasm for learning and internal motivation for professional development within the teaching workforce, thereby promoting the overall growth and progress of rural teachers as a cohesive group.

#### **4.3. The complementary interaction of endogenous and exogenous forces drives the transformative development of rural teachers**

The aforementioned endogenous and exogenous forces form an interactive and complementary organic whole, where exogenous forces drive endogenous forces, and endogenous forces in turn nurture exogenous forces.

On the one hand, the "endogenous forces" and "exogenous forces" are interdependent. A strong endogenous force characterized by proactive initiative, determines the effectiveness and extent to which exogenous forces can be utilized and transformed into the ability and motivation for personal professional growth. At the same time, adequate and appropriate exogenous forces enable the full development and expression of the endogenous forces, providing the conditions and support necessary to activate the intrinsic motivation for professional development.



On the other hand, the "endogenous forces" and "exogenous forces" are mutually reinforcing. Enhancing exogenous forces can strengthen the endogenous forces of rural teachers; for example, policy support and resource investment can increase rural teachers' enthusiasm and sense of responsibility for education. Similarly, strengthening the endogenous forces can promote the enhancement of exogenous forces. The educational achievements of rural teachers can influence societal recognition and support for rural education, thereby attracting further external assistance and creating a virtuous cycle of development.

The endogenous and exogenous forces are dual driving forces for the synergistic development of rural revitalization and the rural teaching workforce. When these forces are precisely aligned, they can effectively contribute to the comprehensive revitalization of rural education.

## 5. Conclusion

Therefore, there is an inseparable relationship between "endogenous forces" and "exogenous forces". The key to the professional development of the rural teacher workforce lies in achieving the coordinated development of both, promoting dual strategies, and fundamentally leveraging the intrinsic driving force of professional development for rural teachers in the context of rural revitalization, transitioning from external shaping to internal growth.

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