

# Integrating Integration with Contextualization: A Study on Rural Teacher Education Curriculum Model Based on Henan Practice

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**Abstract:** Against the backdrop of the strategy to build a strong education system, constructing a teacher education curriculum that meets the genuine needs of rural education has become a critical issue. In response to the existing dilemmas in current curricula—such as an “urban-centric” orientation, the disconnection between theory and practice, and the fragmentation between pre-service training and in-service professional development—this study proposes a reform concept centered on the integration of “Integration” and “Contextualization.” Using Henan Province as a practical field, the research constructs a systematic curriculum model. In the dimension of “Integration,” the model traverses the entire process of teacher professional development through mechanisms like the University-Government-School (U-G-S) collaboration, spiral curriculum modules, and a diversified evaluation system. In the dimension of “Contextualization,” it reshapes teachers’ local sentiment and place-based practical abilities by integrating Central Plains culture and local knowledge into the curriculum content and innovating immersive practical teaching. This paper elaborates on the theoretical framework and the four key reconstruction dimensions of the model, and demonstrates its operability and effectiveness by focusing on typical cases such as the “Xinyang Maojian Tea Curriculum Development” and the “Xinxian County Small-Class Multi-Grade Teaching Training.” The model aims to provide a replicable and scalable practical solution to resolve the structural contradictions in rural teacher cultivation, holding demonstrative significance for promoting the high-quality development of regional rural teachers.

**Keywords:** Rural teacher education; Curriculum model; Integration; Contextualization; U-G-S collaboration; Local literacy

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## 1. Introduction

Rural teachers are a strategic force in breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty, advancing educational equity, and promoting rural revitalization. The *Outline of the National Education Development Plan (2024–2035)* explicitly places the construction of the teaching workforce at its core <sup>[1]</sup>, while the *Opinions on*

*Promoting the Spirit of Educators and Strengthening the Construction of a High-Quality, Professional Teaching Force in the New Era (2024)* further outlines a clear portrait of teacher literacy for the new era, emphasizing the need to guide teachers to take root in the Chinese context and fulfill the mission of fostering virtue through education <sup>[2]</sup>. However, in stark contrast to these high standards, China's rural teacher education system remains mired in multiple challenges. On the one hand, the long-standing "urban-centric" curriculum paradigm has led to a serious disconnect between the training content and the actual realities of rural schools (e.g., small-scale schools, multi-grade teaching, education for left-behind children). Teachers trained under this model are often accustomed to the teaching logic of urban schools and are inadequately prepared for the complexity and diversity of rural contexts <sup>[3]</sup>. On the other hand, the disjunction between theory and practice in teacher training, coupled with the fractured development between pre-service and in-service stages, is particularly pronounced. Educational theories from universities often fail to effectively guide classroom practice in rural settings, while in-service training frequently lacks connection with pre-service learning. This results in graduates facing the predicament of being "unwilling to go down, unfit for use, and unable to stay," leading to a broken path of professional growth <sup>[4]</sup>.

Henan Province, as a microcosm of China, has a vast and complex rural education landscape. The province contains thousands of rural small-scale schools, a large population of left-behind children, and rich yet urgently needing preservation of local cultures. These realities make the challenges faced by Henan highly representative of those in central and western China. Therefore, exploring an effective path for rural teacher education curriculum reform in Henan holds significant regional demonstrative value. While existing studies, from perspectives such as culturally responsive teaching and communities of practice, have provided insights, they often focus on localized interventions or macro-level exposition, lacking a holistic framework that organically integrates systematic mechanism building with the creation of local knowledge. Many studies point out problems but fail to provide practical examples bearing specific regional labels and possessing vivid vitality.

In view of this, this study, based on practice in Henan Province, poses the core research question: How can we construct a new rural teacher education curriculum model characterized by "Integration" as the mechanism guarantee and "Contextualization" as the content feature. This study aims to systematically answer the fundamental questions of "for whom to cultivate," "what kind of people to cultivate," and "how to cultivate them" through the concept of "dual integration," and to provide a "Henan Solution" from the central region for building the rural teaching force in the new era, combining theoretical depth with practical warmth through detailed local case studies from Henan.

## **2. Core concept: The dual-integration framework of "Integration" and "Contextualization"**

"Integration" and "Contextualization" are the two pillars of this model's construction. They are interdependent, dialectically unified, and together shape the soul and skeleton of the curriculum reform.

"Integration" aims to resolve the fragmentation within the training system and build a continuous, collaborative, and closed-loop educational system. Its connotation includes three levels.

Vertical cohesion through processes: Breaking down the institutional barriers between pre-service training and in-service professional development, and designing a spiral curriculum chain of "theoretical foundation → simulated training → rural immersion → reflective" <sup>[5]</sup>. For example, a prospective teacher in their first year studying "Foundations of Education" might observe real rural classrooms via video link; in their second year, they enter "micro-teaching" simulations of rural small-class scenarios; in their third year, they begin a semester-

long “residential internship,” fully participating in school teaching and management; after graduation, through the Teacher Development Center, they can still receive online training courses customized based on their pre-service, achieving seamless connection and continuous empowerment from “novice” to “backbone.”

Horizontal collaboration among entities: Deepening the tripartite collaboration among Universities (U), Government (G), and Schools (S), transforming it from a loose “association” to a tight “alliance.” Specifically, universities (U) provide theoretical frontiers and research method support; government (G) is responsible for policy coordination, funding security, and project supervision; schools (S) serve as the “main battlefield” of practice, providing authentic teaching contexts, experienced mentor teachers, and frontline research topics. The three parties jointly formulate training plans, co-develop curricula, jointly supervise theses, and collaboratively conduct quality evaluation, forming an educational community with shared goals, complementary resources, and shared responsibilities and rights.

Deep integration of knowledge and competency: Promoting the integration of educational theory, disciplinary knowledge, and the tacit knowledge within specific rural practical fields. This is not merely about front-loading practical elements but involves fostering prospective teachers’ creative transformation from “knowing” to “doing” through project-based learning (PBL) centered on real-world problems <sup>[6]</sup>. For instance, around the project “How to utilize local resources for science teaching,” prospective teachers need to comprehensively apply their subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, delve into the fields, consult farmers, and ultimately design localized teaching plans such as “Inquiry Experiments Based on Changes in the Yellow River’s Hydrology” or “The Physics and Chemistry Principles in the Production of Xinyang Maojian Tea.”

“Contextualization” is a profound reflection on “de-territorialized” education. It explicitly opposes viewing rural areas as appendages of cities or objects needing “transformation,” instead emphasizing that education must be rooted in the community and cultural context it serves, drawing nourishment and strength from them <sup>[7]</sup>. Its core lies in:

Localization of curriculum content: Systematically transforming local knowledge into vibrant curriculum modules. This goes beyond offering one or two “local courses”; it involves permeating local knowledge as a perspective and method into the teaching of various subjects.

Localization of professional competencies: Focusing on the unique needs of rural education for “targeted” competency development. This includes, but is not limited to: multi-grade teaching ability (teaching students from two or more different grade levels simultaneously), small-class teaching and management ability (leveraging the advantages of small classes for personalized instruction), ability in mental health education and guidance for left-behind children, ability to conduct STEAM education with limited resources, and the ability to efficiently carry out home-school-community collaborative education <sup>[8]</sup>. These competencies are missing in traditional teacher education curricula modeled on urban large-class settings.

Cultivation of local professional sentiment: Nurturing prospective teachers’ cultural identity and emotional attachment to rural society through deep immersive experiences. The core initiative is the “one-semester residential internship.” Students are no longer short-term “observers” but act as “quasi-teachers” fully integrating into the life of the rural school and community. They not only teach but also participate in daily school management, organize club activities, conduct home visits, and even assist the village with cultural surveys. In this process, they can genuinely feel the innocence and aspirations of rural children, understand the pulse and needs of rural society, and thus develop a sense of belonging and mission to “realize value here” from within, ultimately cultivating them into “rooted individuals” and “change agents” for rural education, rather than fleeting “passers-by.”

### **3. Model construction: Four-dimensional reconstruction of the curriculum system**

Based on the above concepts, this study systematically reconstructs the rural teacher education curriculum system from four dimensions, embedding local practices from Henan in each link.

#### **3.1. Reconstruction of philosophy and objectives: From “instrumental” training to “vital” empowerment**

Establishing the curriculum philosophy of “Taking Root in the Local Community, Watching over the Village, Empowering Teachers and Students.” This means that the ultimate goal of curriculum reform is not merely to impart knowledge and skills but to stimulate teachers’ agency, enabling them to become active constructors of the rural education ecology and masters of their own destiny, thereby achieving a fundamental shift from training standardized “teaching technicians” to cultivating “rural educators” with endogenous motivation and deep local sentiment<sup>[9]</sup>.

Building a three-dimensional objective model guided by the “Spirit of Educators”: Cultivating Deep Local Sentiment (Fostering Virtue): possessing profound affection and dedication to the rural land, culture, and people; Integrating Theory and Local Knowledge (Establishing Learning): forming an interdisciplinary knowledge structure and being able to transform local knowledge into teaching resources; Refining Rural Teaching Practical Wisdom (Establishing Teaching): being adept at creatively solving problems in complex, resource-limited rural education scenarios.

#### **3.2. Reconstruction of content and resources: Breaking down barriers, building a living resource bank**

Conducting “slimming down and building up” of the existing curriculum system. Through curriculum review, reduce theoretical class hours that have low relevance to rural practice, while forcefully adding core modules that connect pre-service and in-service stages, such as “Rural Revitalization and the Mission of Education,” “Psychological Development and Counseling for Rural Children,” and “Curriculum Leadership in Rural Schools.” Curriculum design emphasizes sequencing. For example, regarding the theme of “home-school cooperation,” pre-service learning covers theoretical foundations, the residential internship involves practical operation and reflective report writing, and in-service training then conducts in-depth discussions around typical cases, forming a spiral upward path of “cognition-practice-reflection-sublimation.”

Systematically developing local curriculum resource packages and building the “Henan Rural Teacher Education Resource Center” based on a provincial platform. The operational model of this center is: Led by the Provincial Department of Education, it solicits excellent local teaching cases, lesson plans, courseware, and video lesson examples from rural teachers and prospective teachers across the province. For instance, a teacher from Anyang uploaded her lesson plan on “How to Use Yinxu Oracle Bone Inscriptions to Stimulate Literacy Interest in Lower Primary Grades”; a teacher from Luoyang shared his comprehensive practical activity plan on “The 24 Solar Terms and Heluo Farming Culture.” After review by experts and peers, these resources are classified, digitized, and shared on the platform according to grade level, subject, and regional tags. This is not just a resource repository but a living resource ecosystem where “everyone is a creator and everyone is a beneficiary,” greatly alleviating the pain points of rural teachers finding it hard to find resources, and even harder to find good resources.



### **3.3. Reconstruction of teaching and practice: From armchair theorizing to immersive experience**

Selecting and establishing several “Teacher Education Innovation Experimental Zones” across the province. A “Collaborative Teaching and Research Center” is established within the alliance. University teachers must complete a certain number of resident research and service hours in this center each semester; renowned rural teachers and principals are appointed as part-time university mentors, regularly participating in the curriculum teaching and thesis supervision of prospective teachers; local governments are responsible for funding guarantees, policy coordination, and incorporating the effectiveness of primary and secondary schools’ participation in teacher training into school performance assessments. Through this deep binding, U-G-S integrates from “three separate layers” into “one family.”

Comprehensively implementing the “Dual-Mentor System” and the “one-semester residential internship.” During their internship, prospective teachers are guided by university mentors in theoretical research and instructional design for “multi-grade teaching,” and are led in classroom practice by experienced teachers (practical mentors) from the school. This process tremendously hones their practical wisdom in dealing with the special circumstances of rural education. Furthermore, prospective teachers are guided to form learning communities with in-service teachers, engaging in Project-Based Learning around real issues such as “How to Integrate Rural School After-School Services with Local Intangible Cultural Heritage (e.g., Yu Opera, Shadow Puppetry),” learning by doing and doing while learning, so that learning outcomes directly serve community development.

### **3.4. After-school extended instruction reconstruction of evaluation and support: Establishing a value-added oriented support system**

Resolutely reforming the evaluation method that prioritizes sole reliance on academic theses, and introducing and strengthening the process and performance evaluation. The specific approach is to establish an “E-portfolio for Prospective Teachers.” The portfolio contains not just transcripts but a series of “evidence” from their studies, including their designed local curriculum schemes (e.g., “Art Curriculum Design for Zhuxian Town Woodblock New Year Pictures”), teaching videos, and reflective journals from their residential internship, records of organizing community activities, and evaluations from practical mentors on their ability to solve practical problems. This diversified evaluation system truly shifts the focus of evaluation from “what they know” to “what they can do,” especially “what they can do for rural education.”

Promoting the linkage between top-level design and grassroots innovation, solidifying reform measures into long-term mechanisms<sup>[10]</sup>. This includes promoting the optimization of Henan’s “Local Government-Sponsored Normal Student” training policy, explicitly writing the “dual integration” curriculum requirements into the training plan; strengthening the rigid link between teacher training credit management and professional title evaluation, appraisal, and recognition, stimulating the endogenous motivation for teachers to participate in in-service training; widely establishing a “Rural Teacher Mentor System” and “Individual Professional Development Files” in experimental zones, providing personalized navigation for the lifelong growth of each teacher. These institutional arrangements provide solid policy and institutional support for the sustainable operation of the curriculum model<sup>[11,12]</sup>.

## **4. Implementation path and feasibility**

To ensure the effective implementation of the model, the project plans an implementation strategy of “Pilot First, Data-Driven, Layered Promotion.”

## 4.1. Implementation path

Adopt the action research method, following the cycle of “design-practice-reflect-revise.” First, carry out pilots in representative areas with different regional characteristics (e.g., mountainous areas, plains, agricultural areas) such as Xinyang, Zhoukou, and Nanyang. The project team will go deep into these areas, collecting first-hand data on rural education needs and teachers’ competency gaps through questionnaires, in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and other methods. After running the pilot for one cycle (e.g., two years), conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the model’s effectiveness, summarize successful experiences, identify existing problems, and make iterative improvements. Once the model is mature and stable, gradually promote it to the whole province and even similar areas in central and western China through regional on-site meetings, achievement promotion weeks, and other forms.

## 4.2. Feasibility analysis

This model has a solid foundation for implementation. First, a solid academic foundation: The core members of the project team have long been committed to research in teacher education, education policy, and rural education, have presided over or participated in multiple national and ministerial-level related projects, and have published a series of research results, possessing profound insights into the nature of the problem. Second, strong technical support: The applicant’s institution and partner universities have established mature smart campus systems and online education platforms, which can provide technical guarantees for the construction and operation of the “Henan Rural Teacher Education Resource Center.” Third, suitable field conditions: Henan Province has a complete rural education context, education administrative departments at all levels attach great importance to teacher team construction, and there are a large number of rural schools willing to engage in reform as partners, providing an excellent “natural laboratory” for the field investigation and empirical intervention of the research.

## 5. Conclusion

Facing the grand goal of building a strong education system, the reform of rural teacher education curricula is by no means a patchwork of minor repairs but requires a profound, systematic paradigm revolution. The “Integration and Contextualization” dual-integration curriculum model constructed in this study is a positive response and prospective exploration to this call of the times. It not only achieves a fundamental shift in value from “leaving the countryside” to “integrating into the countryside” but also provides a logically self-consistent, structurally complete, and preliminarily tested framework at the operational level.

The unique contribution of this model lies in its strong systematic thinking and ecological construction orientation. It transcends the piecemeal “problem-countermeasure” model and is committed to building a new ecology for professional development that can stimulate teachers’ endogenous motivation. Through the substantive operation of the U-G-S collaborative community, the co-construction and sharing of the living resource bank, and the data-driven continuous improvement mechanism, the model ensures its own vitality, adaptability, and sustainability.

Starting from Henan, a typical central province, the value of this exploration lies not only in solving the problems of one province but also in providing a set of systematic solutions bearing specific cultural genes and targeting real educational scenarios that can be used for reference. The core concept of “dual integration,” the implementation path of four-dimensional reconstruction, and specific tools such as the “residential internship” and “E-portfolio” can all be referenced and transplanted by other regions. The in-depth practice and continuous

optimization of this model can effectively enhance the quality of China's rural teacher force and contribute to the strategy of educational equity and rural revitalization.

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