

Practical Exploration of College Students' Volunteer Services Assisting the Growth of Left-Behind Children Under the Background of Rural Revitalization

Lin Ma¹, Qiqi Zheng²

¹Xi'an International University, Xi'an 710077, Shaanxi, China

²Shaanxi University of Science & Technology, Xi'an 710021, Shaanxi, China

**Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.*

Copyright: © 2026 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

Abstract: Under the background of the rural revitalization strategy, college students have become an important new force for rural talent revitalization. Taking left-behind children in rural areas of Xi'an and its surrounding areas as samples, this paper focuses on "aesthetic education + psychological care" volunteer services, and systematically sorts out the practical value, key bottlenecks, and optimization paths of college students' participation in rural civilization practice. The research finds that college students' short-term teaching support has achieved remarkable results in "inspiring aspirations and supporting intelligence", but there are problems of "three insufficiencies" (insufficient publicity, insufficient channels, insufficient capabilities) and "two deficiencies" (lack of management and lack of incentives). The paper proposes a dual-track volunteer project model of "Riyu Program (Caring Reading)" and "Technology Dream-Building", and constructs a long-term mechanism of four-party collaboration among "colleges and universities - government - public welfare organizations - rural schools", providing a paradigmatic reference for replicable and promotable college students' assistance in rural revitalization.

Keywords: College students' volunteer services; Rural revitalization; Left-behind children; Aesthetic education assistance; Civilization practice

Online publication: April 10, 2026

1. Introduction

The Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China emphasizes "comprehensively promoting rural revitalization", and the "Guiding Opinions on Carrying Out Pilot Work for Building New Era Civilization Practice Centers" clearly points out that "volunteers are the main force and volunteer services are the main activity method"^[1]. According to statistics, more than 40 million college students across the country have gone to rural areas through short-term teaching support, summer "Three Goes to the Countryside" activities,

etc., becoming a “reservoir” of talents for rural governance ^[2]. However, left-behind children in rural areas still face structural dilemmas in six dimensions, such as “lack of love in spirit, lack of psychological counseling, lack of learning guidance, and lack of safety protection” ^[3]. Existing care services are difficult to meet the spiritual needs of rural left-behind children in terms of family companionship, academic tutoring, and psychological counseling. Developing and utilizing local care service resources plays a fundamental role in improving the care and protection system for rural left-behind children and promoting their healthy growth, which is an important connotation of new-era civilization practice, rural governance, and rural revitalization. How to improve the professionalism, precision, and sustainability of college students’ volunteer services has become a common proposition for colleges and universities in practical education and rural education revitalization.

2. Research on the current situation at home and abroad

Domestic research focuses on two major themes: “care service system for left-behind children” and “college students’ volunteer service capabilities”. Left-behind children are obviously at a disadvantage in their studies, life, or psychology. The demand for care for left-behind children is large, but the supply of care from social forces is seriously insufficient. Rural primary and secondary schools have weak teachers and backward teaching facilities, and their own teaching tasks are heavy. Faced with a large number of left-behind children living scattered in various villages, schools and teachers can only do their best to educate and care for students during school hours. For their life, study, behavior, and psychological problems outside school, except for regular home visits, they basically have no time and energy to take care of them. At the same time, existing care services are difficult to meet the spiritual needs of rural left-behind children in terms of family companionship, academic tutoring, and psychological counseling. Developing and utilizing local care service resources plays a fundamental role in improving the care and protection system for rural left-behind children and promoting their healthy growth, which is an important connotation of new-era civilization practice, rural governance, and rural revitalization. The care services for rural left-behind children need a three-level linkage of “government-led - social participation - school-based support”; Cai Xiaoshan and others pointed out that college student volunteer projects have the pain points of “homogeneous courses, fragmented training, and marginalized support” ^[4,5].

Existing literature provides an institutional analysis framework for this paper, but case studies of college student volunteer projects based on the perspective of aesthetic education and targeting left-behind children are still insufficient. College students occupy an irreplaceable position and role in the national rural revitalization strategy. Adhering to and carrying out college students’ social practice activities is a powerful starting point and specific measure for comprehensively implementing the rural revitalization strategy. It is not only an active exploration process of innovative training models for college students’ education, but also an important achievement evaluation and path for colleges and universities’ student work in practical education. Building a high-level and high-quality college student volunteer service team is an important link in current rural governance. College students’ participation in rural revitalization mainly plays an important role in poverty alleviation and farmers’ assistance, rural customs civilization, and environmental protection; secondly, it is of great significance for improving college students’ personal qualities, helping them establish correct values, inherit the traditional virtues of diligence, courage, frugality, and hardship resistance, and cultivate a sense of serving the country and responsibility.

The research finds that there are still many difficulties in college students’ volunteer services in rural areas, such as insufficient publicity, insufficient channels, and insufficient capabilities. The difficulties in the

implementation of volunteer projects include: insufficient initiative (motivation), relatively harsh rural conditions, inadequate infrastructure, volunteers' inability to endure hardships and persist for a long time; low quality, the volunteer team lacks experience, professional knowledge, and skill training; insufficient corresponding support for volunteer services, lack of overall planning, standardization, and long-term effectiveness^[6,7].

Overall, the following problems are exposed: First, the management mechanism is not sound. Good and orderly management is an important guarantee for college students' volunteer services in rural revitalization, but some colleges and universities lack a sound management mechanism for college student volunteers. On the one hand, some colleges and universities lack stable practice bases for long-term cooperation. Changes in practice bases and cooperation platforms will have an adverse impact on the management of college volunteer services. On the other hand, college volunteers are recruited temporarily, lacking a regular management mechanism. The mobility of volunteers for rural revitalization is large, and they usually serve during winter and summer vacations. Compared with other general volunteer services, the time is longer, and the instability is greater. The management party lacks a unified volunteer registration system and standardized evaluation process, which is not conducive to subsequent supervision and management. At the same time, it will cause a series of problems such as messy management, uneven information release, and mere formality. Second, the incentive mechanism is not sound enough. It ignores the spiritual rewards and appropriate material rewards for college student volunteers, and cannot fully mobilize their enthusiasm for "striving for excellence"^[8-11].

3. Research process and methods

3.1. Research field

Three new-era civilization practice stations in Chang'an District, Huyi District of Xi'an City, and Shangzhou District of Shangluo City were selected, covering 184 left-behind children and 112 college student volunteers.

3.2. Research methods

- (1) Participant Observation: During the winter and summer vacations of 2022-2023, the authors participated in two volunteer projects with the team throughout the process.
- (2) Semi-Structured Interviews: 31 left-behind children, 21 parents, 9 project teachers, and 5 college League Committee cadres were interviewed.
- (3) Text Analysis: A total of 67,000 words of text data were collected, including volunteers' lesson plans, DingTalk check-in records, and children's picture book notes.

4. Research analysis and conclusions

4.1. Practical value of college students' volunteer services in rural revitalization

Implementing the rural revitalization strategy is of epoch-making significance for fully implementing the Party's educational policy. Youth volunteer services, in the form of aesthetic education assistance, combined with college volunteer teams, give play to young people's professional characteristics to serve rural areas, which is an important link in promoting rural education revitalization. Left-behind children are a special group produced by the unbalanced economic development between urban and rural areas in China and the transfer of rural surplus labor to cities. Left-behind children are not only materially poor but more importantly, spiritually poor, manifested in six aspects: lack of "love" in spirit, lack of "counseling" in psychology, lack of "guidance" in

study, lack of “protection” in safety, lack of “support” in economy, and lack of “assistance” in life. Doing a good job in caring for left-behind children is of great significance for their healthy growth and success. First, talent supplement: the interdisciplinary integration of art, psychology, and science in colleges and universities makes up for the shortage of teachers in rural aesthetic education and science education^[12-15]. Second, spiritual poverty alleviation: one-on-one reading companionship and group psychological counseling significantly improve the self-esteem level of left-behind children. Finally, value symbiosis: volunteers scored higher than the average of on-campus courses in the three-dimensional evaluation of “labor education - national conditions education - ideal and belief education”, realizing the integration of “receiving education, enhancing abilities, and making contributions”^[16].

4.2. Key bottlenecks

- (1) Insufficient Publicity: 42% of left-behind children’s parents learned about the project through “village loudspeakers” for the first time, and the online publicity coverage was only 27%.
- (2) Insufficient Channels: The average annual replacement rate of college practice bases is 38%, lacking a dynamic management of “listing - assessment - withdrawal”.
- (3) Insufficient Capabilities: Volunteers received less than 4 class hours of emergency training in art and psychology, resulting in a satisfaction rate of only 68% in dealing with sudden classroom situations.
- (4) Unsound Management Mechanism: Temporary recruitment, fragmented check-in, and lack of unified evaluation lead to a volunteer turnover rate of 23%.
- (5) Lack of Incentive Mechanism: Only 19% of volunteers were recognized as “excellent volunteers” at the university level, lacking hard incentives such as credits, postgraduate recommendation, and employment recommendation.

4.3. Practical Model: Dual-track approach

4.3.1. “Riyu Program”: Caring reading and aesthetic education assistance

Jointly carry out the “Caring Reading” social practice with the Volunteer Association of Ruicheng County, Shanxi Province, and the “Youth Power for Youth” practice group of East China University of Science and Technology. This project is mainly carried out online during winter and summer vacations in a one-on-one form. Volunteers take on multiple roles, such as readers and reading instructors, to read classic works for left-behind children.

First, East China University of Science and Technology organizes and issues the list of children in need of assistance, matches the list of children with the list of college student volunteers participating in the volunteer service, and sends the children’s information to the corresponding volunteers. The volunteers then contact the parents of the children they help to confirm whether to participate in this caring reading activity, and agree on the class time, teaching method, books to be read, and formulate a daily plan. Volunteers need to formulate an acceptable and appropriate learning method and class duration according to the age and acceptance ability of the children. After verifying the information, the volunteers start to find books in advance and prepare lessons.

Second, volunteers and the children in need must check in on time in the DingTalk group every day, and upload their lesson preparation content, teaching duration, and photos of notes or PPT during the teaching process that can highlight the classroom content or characteristics. Administrators need to check whether volunteers are teaching earnestly every day to realize the true significance of the caring reading activity.

Finally, after the completion of the reading activity, a summary and commendation are carried out. Volunteer hours are added to volunteers according to their performance, certificates of the caring reading activity are issued,

and the caring reading activity is successfully concluded.

4.3.2. “Technology Dream-Building”: Short-term teaching support and psychological care

To carry out poverty alleviation volunteer activities, it is necessary to give full play to the characteristics and advantages of college Communist Youth League organizations, integrate multiple resources, take multiple measures, and mobilize social forces to extensively participate in caring for rural left-behind and disadvantaged children, poor college students, the elderly without family support, the disabled, and other volunteer assistance. In-depth mental health counseling, family companionship, and other activities for disadvantaged children, so that left-behind and disadvantaged children can have a healthy growth environment. Taking left-behind children of Dongdianzi Primary School in Shangzhou District, Shangluo City as the practical objects, carry out short-term online teaching support activities with the theme of “caring for left-behind children”. Through teaching support, on the one hand, local left-behind children receive care and care, improve their comprehensive quality and abilities in various ways, establish basic values, career outlook, safety awareness, and gender awareness for children through various characteristic courses, which can make up for the parts not covered in daily school teaching and is a supplement to education; conduct one-on-one psychological counseling, carry out psychological intervention for children, add momentum for their future development, and actively carry out publicity to call on all sectors of society to care for rural left-behind children ^[17].

5. Countermeasure suggestions

5.1. Build a “1+N” long-term mechanism

Establish 1 college volunteer service base (evaluation every 5 years after listing) + N rural civilization practice stations in the assistance area, implement the “annual assessment - dynamic withdrawal” system, and solve the problem of frequent replacement of bases.

5.2. Improve the “Dual Mentor” training system

On-campus professional mentors are responsible for courses and theories, and county-level “rural mentors” (teaching researchers, backbones of cultural stations) are responsible for local adaptation and safety management. The training hours are ≥ 16 class hours, which are included in the assessment of teachers’ teaching workload.

5.3. Establish a “Points System” incentive

Convert volunteer service hours, course quality, and children’s satisfaction into “second classroom” credits, which are linked to postgraduate recommendation, scholarships, and employment recommendation; set up the honorary title of “Rural Aesthetic Education Star” for outstanding performers, jointly commended by the provincial Civilization Office and Department of Education.

5.4. Build a digital management platform

Cooperate with the local government to integrate “Volunteer Hub + DingTalk + WeChat Mini Program” to realize the closed-loop management of “project release - volunteer recruitment - training check-in - process supervision - result evaluation”, and the data is real-time connected to the national information platform of new-era civilization practice centers.

6. Conclusion and outlook

College students' volunteer services are an important starting point for "inspiring aspirations and supporting intelligence" in rural revitalization. The "Riyu Program" and "Technology Dream-Building" projects in Xi'an show that focusing on the aesthetic education and psychological care of left-behind children and building a four-party collaboration mechanism of "colleges and universities - government - public welfare organizations - rural schools" can significantly improve the precision and sustainability of volunteer services. Based on the analysis of the current situation and existing problems of college students' volunteer services for left-behind children, this paper focuses on the perspective of college students' public welfare volunteer projects, such as "Caring Reading" and "Caring Teaching Support", shows the development characteristics and effects of college students' volunteer services by summarizing a series of activities of college student volunteers participating in this project, and puts forward suggestions on how to promote college student volunteers to better carry out assistance work for left-behind children in view of the current development situation, exploring a more operable and replicable long-term mechanism of college students' volunteer services to assist rural revitalization, which is a "trinity" of "colleges and universities - government - public welfare organizations". Future research can further track the long-term development indicators of left-behind children, expand the experimental field, explore a "five-year consistent" growth companionship model, and contribute sustainable youth power to rural revitalization.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- [1] Huang TM, Xu C J, 2018, Reflections on Improving the Care and Service System for Rural Left-Behind Children. *Administration Reform*, 10(10): 64–68.
- [2] Yang X, Guo HM, Wang YJ, 2018, Research on the Construction of Care and Service System for Rural Left-Behind Children. *Social Policy Research*, 4(4): 55–73.
- [3] Jiang SC, 2018, A Brief Discussion on the Problems and Countermeasures in the Family Education of Rural Left-Behind Children. *Good Parents*, 74(74): 19.
- [4] Cai XS, Huang XX, Wang J, 2020, Research on Improving College Students' Volunteer Service Capabilities from the Perspective of Rural Revitalization. *Exploration*, 5(5): 80–90.
- [5] Yuan XD, 2021, Construction and Implementation of the Education Support System for Selected Graduates. *Invention and Innovation (Vocational Education)*, 6(6): 150–151.
- [6] Liang ZH, Li J, 2026, Research on the Model Construction and Effectiveness of College Students' Scientific and Technological Volunteer Services Assisting Rural Revitalization — Taking the "Light Warm Longyuan" Project as an Example. *Modern Vocational Education*, 3(3): 37–40.
- [7] Chu RJ, Shen M, Li K, 2026, Practical Approach of College Students' Volunteer Services Assisting Rural Cultural Revitalization in Ethnic Minority Areas. *Journal of Beibu Gulf University*, 1: 1–9.
- [8] Yang YH, 2025, Inherent Compatibility and Implementation Strategies of College Youth Volunteer Services Assisting Rural Revitalization. *Rural Science and Technology*, 16(24): 46–49.
- [9] Li YY, Zhou YH, 2025, Research on the Path of Youth Power Empowering Rural Revitalization — Taking Bairuopu Town, Xiangjiang New Area, Changsha City, Hunan Province as an Example. *China Rural Science and Technology*,

12(12): 80–81.

- [10] Chen YJ, 2025, Exploration on the Path of College Ideological and Political Education Leading Volunteer Forces to Empower Rural Revitalization. *Chinese Volunteers*, 12(12): 45–48.
- [11] Lu Y, 2025, Analysis of the Current Situation of College Youth Volunteer Services Participating in Rural Grassroots Social Governance Under the Background of Comprehensive Rural Revitalization. *Chinese Volunteers*, 12(12): 49–52.
- [12] Hu CY, 2025, Discussion on the Development Path of College Students' Volunteer Services Assisting Rural Revitalization. *Agricultural Technology and Equipment*, 11(11): 89–91.
- [13] Xiong HC, 2025, Research on the Collaborative Mechanism Between College Students' Volunteer Services and Rural Revitalization. *Science & Education Guide*, 32(32): 131–133.
- [14] Song HL, Wang XL, Tan SQ, 2025, Research on College Students' Volunteer Services Empowering Grassroots Governance and Employment Under the Background of Rural Revitalization. *Southern Agricultural Machinery*, 56(21): 86–89.
- [15] He J, Zhang XX, 2025, Research on the Practical Path of College Volunteer Services Assisting Rural Revitalization in the New Era. *Chinese Volunteers*, 10(10): 36–39.
- [16] Zhang N, Xu JW, Hu JW, 2025, Research on the Path of College Student Party Members Promoting Rural Tourism Development Under the Background of Rural Revitalization. *Industry and Science Tribune*, 24(18): 86–88.
- [17] Cheng SS, 2025, Effects, Dilemmas and Countermeasures of College Students' "Three Goes to the Countryside" Empowering Rural Revitalization in the New Era. *Guangdong Sericulture*, 59(9): 142–144.

Publisher's note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.