

Research on Education Guarantee of Rural Left-Behind Children under the Background of Rural Revitalization

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Abstract: This study analyzes the opportunities and challenges of ensuring education for rural left-behind children in China within the context of rural revitalization. By reflecting on the difficulties in providing educational support, it seeks to identify how the strategies of industrial, talent, and cultural revitalization can offer development opportunities. The goal is to use these opportunities to explore pathways for improving education guarantees for rural left-behind children. The aim is to optimize the development of educational rights for rural left-behind children, transforming their challenging circumstances through education. By expanding their future opportunities and hope, this will not only enhance their personal prospects but also contribute to the overall hope for rural communities, driving the vitality and momentum needed for the future revitalization of rural areas.

Keywords: Rural revitalization; Left-behind children; Education security

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1. The living situation of left-behind children in rural areas under the background of rural revitalization

With the progress of the times and the development of society, the process of new rural construction and revitalization is advancing rapidly, while agricultural production increasingly reflects a prosperous scene of industrialization, scale, and modernization ^[1]. However, with the promotion of new urbanization, part of the labor force rushes into the cities to work in order to support the heavy expenses of their family and improve the living standards of the family, which makes rural children either stay at home or follow the migrant children who “leave home” together with their migrant parents ^[2]. In particular, rural left-behind children, who face the challenges of incomplete family structures and a lack of family support, suffer from insufficient supervision, emotional nurturing, companionship, and education. As a result, they experience various developmental issues, such as poor life management, academic struggles, moral difficulties, and psychological imbalances, to varying extents. These

challenges place this group in a difficult situation, hindering their educational development as they grow^[3]. It can be seen that the research on the education security of rural left-behind children is related to the growth and future of children themselves, which is not only an urgent matter for the masses of society but also a prominent problem that we need to reform and improve.

2. The problems in the education security of rural left-behind children

2.1. There is a great disparity in the allocation of educational resources and the destination of educational results between regions

Since the 20th National Congress of the Party, China has increasingly prioritized educational support in remote areas of western China, as well as rural counties and grassroots regions. Significant progress has been made in improving access to educational resources and addressing the distribution of these resources, yielding remarkable results^[4-5]. However, due to the disparities in economic development between counties and the uneven distribution of rural education resources, if not effectively addressed and intervened, these gaps will only widen, further exacerbating the divide between urban and rural areas, as well as between different counties and schools.

This is specifically reflected in several areas. First, the intensity of investment in rural education needs to be strengthened. In terms of the teaching environment, rural schools and homes for children are often basic, with fewer resources. While the overall surroundings may be more spacious and picturesque than urban primary and secondary schools, there is a significant visual and sensory gap that affects the overall educational experience^[6]. In terms of supporting teaching facilities, rural schools struggle to provide widespread access to essential resources such as libraries, teaching tools, school playgrounds, running tracks, sports facilities, computers, equipment, and art teaching aids. The gap in supporting facilities between rural schools and their urban counterparts is particularly noticeable, making it difficult to achieve equity during the compulsory education stage.

Second, the development of modern information technology and smart platforms in rural areas lags behind that of urban areas, leading to a technical gap, insufficient functionality, and low usage frequency. Third, there is a mismatch in the distribution of educational resources, with issues of idleness and underutilization. Under the policy of “school withdrawal and integration”, rural areas face unstable student populations. As the household registration policy is optimized and urbanization advances, many rural students follow their parents who work in cities, resulting in the closure or consolidation of small rural schools. However, the schools with better teaching facilities and resources often remain underutilized or abandoned. In contrast, some small villages, lacking sufficient funding and resources, continue to operate with outdated and inadequate infrastructure. This coexistence of idle, abandoned facilities and underdeveloped schools creates a widening gap in educational development and makes it more challenging to improve educational security for rural children^[7].

2.2. The development of the main team responsible for education security is insufficient

As a key human resource for promoting the sustainable development of education, the responsible parties in education are vital to the revitalization of both the nation and the educational system. However, the lack of development momentum and limited capacity of these responsible subjects have become significant obstacles to the revitalization of rural education. Given that children undergo numerous physiological and psychological changes during their growth, the psychological and academic challenges faced by rural left-behind children have gained increasing attention. This complexity makes education more unpredictable and difficult over time, highlighting the urgent need to establish a cooperative education guarantee mechanism involving “family-school-

community”. In practice, however, this mechanism often encounters challenges, including the absence of key actors or a lack of capacity to fulfill their responsibilities effectively ^[8].

The structure of disciplines and specialties among rural teachers is often imbalanced, with some subjects facing a shortage of qualified professionals. The distribution of teacher resources across rural schools is also uneven, with township demonstration schools typically receiving more comprehensive subject teachers. In contrast, some rural schools lack systematic education and training for teachers in subjects such as music, physical education, aesthetic education, ideology and politics, and English. As a result, these teachers often lack professionalism, passion, and the ability to engage students effectively, which hampers the development of students’ moral education, aesthetic education, and physical education ^[9].

The situation of rural left-behind children is largely caused by the urbanization wave, where parents move to cities in search of better living conditions and standards for their families. Due to various practical reasons, they are often left with no choice but to leave their children in the countryside, with most of them being cared for by grandparents. The ways parents interact with their children mainly fall into two categories: temporary companionship and long-term separation. Many rural migrant workers, especially those involved in agriculture, work outside the village during the off-season and return home during busy farming periods, resulting in intermittent and short-term company for their children. The other mode is long-term separation, where parents work far from home for extended periods and have little opportunity to return. In both cases, family education suffers, leaving the children at a disadvantage ^[10].

2.3. The subject content and service of education security are lagging behind

The integration of the “five education” disciplines is a key focus of current education reform and development. It represents an essential approach to promoting the balanced development of compulsory education and achieving the all-round growth of rural left-behind children ^[11-12]. In April 2022, with the promulgation of the Compulsory Education Curriculum Plan, the concept of “five education integration” and the educational goal of the comprehensive development of “morality, intelligence, physical fitness, the United States and labor” have been further highlighted ^[13]. However, in the teaching of compulsory education in rural counties, there are obvious deficiencies in the incompleteness and integration of “five educations”. The imbalance between moral education and intellectual education, the undervaluing of physical education and labor education, and the neglect of aesthetic education lead to teaching methods and content that focus primarily on exam-oriented subjects. This narrow approach overlooks the broader aspects of education that foster holistic development, ultimately diminishing the true essence of education. It is extremely unfavorable to the development of left-behind children in rural areas.

2.4. Incomplete after-school education services

Many rural schools have yet to fully understand the purpose of after-school services or secure a sustainable supply of human, financial, and material resources. As a result, the implementation of a rich and diversified curriculum often falls short. In many village primary and secondary schools, after-school services are limited to activities like independent homework completion, individual reading, and make-up lessons. However, other after-school activities aimed at fostering students’ interests and developing their comprehensive abilities are neglected due to various practical challenges. Although some rural demonstration schools offer sports, art, and popular science activities, the after-school services they provide remain basic and fall short of meeting the current diverse learning needs. Additionally, the quality of these services is often low, with activities being formalized

rather than tailored to the actual development and needs of left-behind children. The impact of these services on students' growth and well-being is limited, and there are significant discrepancies in the quality of services between schools and counties. To better align with the objectives of the new policy, these services need to be comprehensively improved ^[14].

3. Education security strategies for rural left-behind children in the context of rural revitalization

3.1. Develop the rural economy and accelerate rural modernization

Industrial revitalization has brought opportunities for the economic development of China's rural areas. By leveraging the policies related to industrial revitalization and exploring pathways for the prosperity of rural industries, it is possible to drive the rapid economic development of rural China and address the imbalances caused by the dual structure of urban and rural areas. Secondly, vigorously developing the rural economy helps to ensure the rational distribution of rural educational resources, to better enable rural left-behind children to enjoy educational rights and educational welfare, and provide sufficient ideological guarantee for training the successors of rural revitalization.

On one hand, the development of the rural economy can lead to a steady improvement in education security, providing left-behind children with better educational opportunities. On the other hand, as many parents of left-behind children migrate for work due to livelihood pressures, the growth of the local economy creates more job opportunities. This, in turn, can help attract migrant workers to return to their hometowns, addressing both economic and family support challenges. Taking the western region as an example, the area previously struggled with underdeveloped agriculture, leading to an economic downturn and significant labor force outflow. However, with the development of mineral resources, the integration of labor and technology has led to the creation of a green mining model. This model, which emphasizes resource conservation and environmental protection through technological advancements, has fueled sustained economic growth in the region and created employment opportunities. As a result, the economic stability has supported the smooth development of education, ensuring that educational opportunities for local communities, including left-behind children, are better secured.

3.2. Optimizing the allocation of educational resources and strengthening policy guarantees

In the context of rural revitalization, promoting the educational development of rural left-behind children requires the government to increase resource investment in education security for rural areas. Through enhanced financial support and effective policies, the government should continuously improve rural education infrastructure, reduce enrollment barriers for left-behind children, and increase educational coverage in rural regions. This will help ensure that these children have access to quality education and equal opportunities for development. At the same time, the government should develop comprehensive and targeted policies that direct resources toward rural private colleges and universities, such as teacher training programs and school subsidies. This would help alleviate the operational pressures faced by these institutions, enabling them to provide better educational services and contribute to the overall improvement of education in rural areas.

First of all, the government should increase the investment in rural education and improve the construction of rural infrastructure, such as building schools and children's homes, optimizing the teaching environment, and configuring libraries, playgrounds, and sports facilities in schools, to provide material guarantee for the

education of left-behind children and promote the all-round development of students' morality, intelligence, physical fitness and labor. Secondly, the government, in collaboration with village-level community units, should actively conduct visits and surveys to assess the educational challenges faced by left-behind children. By utilizing information technology, the government can integrate data on rural left-behind children and create a smart rural education platform. Through the information-sharing platform, communication and cooperation between families, schools, and communities can be strengthened. This platform would provide valuable information to support the formulation and implementation of educational policies, promoting the development of education for rural left-behind children. It would also facilitate the optimal allocation of educational resources, ensuring that support reaches those who need it most and enhancing the overall educational experience for these children.

Finally, to actively attract educational talent, the government should implement measures to revitalize the rural economy and encourage migrant workers to return to their hometowns for employment. This approach would not only stimulate the local economy but also help reduce the vacancy and underutilization of educational resources, ensuring a more sustainable and effective education system for rural areas.

3.3. Strengthening education and achieving collaboration among family, school, and community

The problem of left-behind children in rural areas is not only an educational problem, but also a social problem, which requires the joint efforts of schools, families and society, through the construction of a trinity of care and service network, to carry out an all-round education work to care for rural left-behind children. Family, school, and society form a united community in supporting rural left-behind children. At the family level, parents hold the undeniable responsibility of caring for and guarding their children. This requires parents who go out for work to keep in touch with their children, pay attention to their children's growth, care about their children's life, care about their children's psychology, and give the most basic family protection.

As far as schools are concerned, relevant schools need to actively implement the national compulsory education policy and student funding policy, strengthen the attention to the mental health of left-behind children, and guide them to face life and study positively and optimistically. It is essential to strengthen rule of law education for left-behind children, fostering safety awareness and helping students avoid risky behaviors. On the societal level, all social forces should actively engage in this effort, encouraging professional service organizations, public welfare groups, charity organizations, and volunteer services to join the educational team for left-behind children. A "family as the core, school as the focus, and society as the support" collaborative education mechanism should be established and improved, ensuring the healthy development of left-behind children. This approach will contribute to the steady advancement of the rural revitalization strategy.

3.4. Enriching educational services and promoting well-rounded development

Besides family, rural schools are the most important places for left-behind children to integrate study, entertainment and life. Classroom teaching helps expand the knowledge and perspectives of left-behind children, while after-school education plays a crucial role in guiding their ideological values and fostering a strong spiritual foundation.

First and foremost, to effectively educate left-behind children, policy goals should be grounded in a comprehensive understanding of their diverse educational needs. It is essential to implement differentiated teaching approaches that address these needs, ensuring that the educational development of left-behind children aligns with the demands of the new era ^[15].

It is important to adopt a classification approach, recognizing and addressing the unique circumstances of each left-behind child. Since left-behind children spend most of their time at school, teachers often become “surrogate parents” in their lives. Therefore, a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient; instead, targeted education should be implemented to cater to the specific needs of each child. Additionally, strengthening communication and collaboration between rural schools is crucial. By leveraging the unique advantages of rural resources—such as natural surroundings, local culture, and history—schools can create engaging educational environments. Organizing activities like speeches, singing, dancing, recitation, and other cultural and sports events will benefit the physical and mental well-being of left-behind children. These initiatives will enhance their quality of life and provide enriching after-school opportunities.

Under the framework of the rural revitalization strategy, policy objectives must build upon the significant achievements of rural education in the earlier stages. This includes enhancing school operation standards, promoting balanced and high-quality development of rural education, and increasing the training of rural teachers to boost their professional skills. Additionally, improving the overall quality of education, strengthening the system that ensures the educational needs of left-behind children are met, and reinforcing efforts to control dropout rates are essential. These measures will help address the comprehensive developmental needs of left-behind children, supporting their full growth and potential.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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