

# Research on the Development Path of Rural Adolescents' Leadership Based on the Orientation of Psychological Resilience Training: From the Perspective of Human Resource Management

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**Abstract:** This study focuses on rural youth and explores the impact mechanism of psychological resilience on leadership development from the perspective of human resource management. By analyzing the current status and challenges of leadership development among rural youth, a leadership development model based on the cultivation of psychological resilience is constructed. A systematic pathway including a curriculum system, a practical platform, evaluation feedback, and resource integration is proposed, aiming to provide theoretical and practical references for improving the leadership of rural youth.

**Keywords:** Psychological resilience; Leadership development; Rural youth; Human resource management

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research background

With the acceleration of urbanization, rural adolescents face multiple challenges, such as relatively unadvanced educational resources and insufficient social support<sup>[1]</sup>. Data show that the average number of years of education for rural adolescents in China is only 7.78 years (lower than the national average of 1.68 years), and under the influence of traditional concepts, some families do not pay enough attention to education, resulting in a high dropout rate of adolescents and a lack of opportunities for career planning and leadership development. At the same time, rural youth need to balance the economic pressure on their families with their academic development, which makes it difficult to fully unleash their leadership potential. Mental toughness, as an individual's core

ability to cope with adversity, is the cornerstone of leadership development <sup>[2]</sup>. Studies have shown that leaders with high mental toughness can maintain rational decision-making in high-pressure environments and promote team breakthroughs through self-healing and adaptive learning. However, rural adolescents lack systematic mental toughness training due to resource constraints, and there is a general shortcoming in their stress tolerance and leadership literacy. For example, rural adolescents are prone to a negative mindset under the multiple pressures of academics, family responsibilities, and social expectations <sup>[3]</sup>. This weakens their willingness to actively participate in collective affairs and assume leadership roles. The current rural education system for leadership training is mostly limited to theoretical indoctrination, a lack of practice-oriented and resource integration. For example, the curriculum of agricultural vocational education is out of touch with the needs of modern agriculture, the teachers are weak, and mental toughness training is not included in the leadership training system. In addition, the leadership development of rural youth relies on fragmented activities (e.g., campus elections) and lacks systematic evaluation and continuous support mechanisms, making it difficult to form a sustainable leadership growth path.

## **1.2. Research significance**

This study integrates psychological resilience training with leadership development, constructing a systematic theoretical framework based on the perspective of human resource management. By combining psychological resilience models (such as Nishikawa's "Survival-Recovery-Development" three-stage theory) with leadership development strategies (like personalized training and practical platform building), it provides a new paradigm for rural adolescent leadership research, addressing the limitations of traditional educational models <sup>[4]</sup>. The proposal of a "psychological resilience-oriented" leadership training pathway effectively targets the practical pain points of rural education. Through resource integration, relying on human resource management methods, this study aims to establish a multi-party collaborative training mechanism (such as an enterprise mentorship system and rural practice bases) by linking government, school, community, and enterprise resources. Additionally, it focuses on enhancing adolescents' comprehensive competitiveness through parallel tracks of psychological resilience training (including emotion management and adversity coping) and leadership practice (such as project planning and team collaboration).

This research will contribute to promoting talent reserve construction under the rural revitalization strategy. Improving the leadership and psychological resilience of rural adolescents lays a foundation for their future participation in rural governance, innovation, and entrepreneurship. This, in turn, can alleviate the problem of rural talent loss and achieve a virtuous cycle of "talent nurturing the countryside." Based on the realistic difficulties faced by rural adolescents, this study uses psychological resilience as an entry point and combines it with the systematic thinking of human resource management. This provides both theoretical and practical support for addressing the shortcomings of rural education and cultivating a new type of rural leader, which has profound significance for promoting educational equity and rural revitalization <sup>[5]</sup>.

## **2. Current situation analysis and challenges**

### **2.1. Current situation of leadership development among rural adolescents**

#### **2.1.1. Scarce educational resources: dual deficiencies in the curriculum system and practical opportunities**

Currently, there is a widespread issue of an incomplete curriculum system in leadership education in rural areas. Although rural school youth palaces are positioned as important platforms for comprehensive quality development of adolescents, most schools lack a systematic leadership education curriculum. These programs often remain

at the level of scattered activity organization (such as speech contests or simple team games), making it difficult to form a coherent knowledge framework <sup>[6]</sup>. Furthermore, practical activities are severely limited. On one hand, resource constraints in rural areas make it difficult to support high-cost practices like Model United Nations or entrepreneurial projects. On the other hand, the traditional education model places more emphasis on examination skills, leading to the marginalization of leadership development. For example, a survey conducted in a rural boarding school showed that only 15% of club activities involve leadership training, and most of these are organized informally by teachers without professional design.

### **2.1.2. Inadequate social support: cognitive lag in families and communities**

Rural families generally perceive leadership as a matter of “power and status”, viewing it as a “gift for the few” and overlooking its value as a cultivable skill. Parents tend to focus more on academic performance and hold a conservative attitude towards their children’s participation in leadership activities, even seeing it as a “waste of time.” At the community level, the development of rural social organizations is inadequate, and there is a lack of mature institutions or public welfare projects dedicated to adolescent leadership development. This situation makes it difficult for adolescents to receive continuous social support.

### **2.1.3. Limitations in self-cognition: Lack of role models and insufficient self-confidence**

The developmental environment of rural adolescents is devoid of leadership role models. Teachers often orient towards “obedience to authority”, and the leadership behaviors exhibited by elders in families are predominantly “authoritarian” rather than “collaborative.” This results in a one-dimensional understanding of leadership among these adolescents. Research findings indicate that 70% of rural adolescents express uncertainty about “how to demonstrate leadership.” Furthermore, due to their prolonged state of passively receiving instructions, their sense of self-efficacy remains low.

## **2.2. Limitations of existing training models**

### **2.2.1. Emphasis on theory over practice: Disconnect from rural reality**

Current training programs often mimic urban models, focusing heavily on theoretical teachings such as leadership models and communication skills. However, they fail to integrate these theories with the actual rural context. For instance, a leadership course introduced in a rural school included content like “corporate strategy simulation,” which students generally found “difficult to understand” and “lacking practical significance.” Additionally, course designs often overlook the specific needs of rural adolescents, such as emotional support for left-behind children or a sense of identity with local culture, resulting in low participation.

### **2.2.2. Lack of systematic approach: Inadequate evaluation mechanisms and sustainability**

Most training programs consist of short-term activities (like a summer camp or a one-time lecture) and lack long-term tracking and feedback mechanisms. For example, a leadership training conducted in a county lasted only a month without establishing participant growth profiles, making it difficult to assess the effectiveness. Moreover, evaluation tools are often limited, relying primarily on questionnaires or simple ratings, while ignoring the dynamic changes in implicit abilities like psychological resilience.

### **2.2.3. Resource fragmentation: A multi-stakeholder collaborative network has not been formed**

Resources for rural leadership development are scattered among governments, schools, social organizations, and

businesses, but the collaboration mechanism among these parties is not well-established. Government-funded projects often focus on hardware construction (such as school facilities) while ignoring curriculum development and teacher training. Schools rely on short-term support from external institutions and lack independent training capabilities. Business participation is mainly through donations, and a sustainable cooperation model has not been formed. For example, a leadership project conducted by a rural school in partnership with a business was terminated due to funding interruptions, causing students to give up halfway.

## **2.3. Deeper challenges to the synergistic development of mental toughness and leadership**

### **2.3.1. Weak foundation of mental toughness restricts leadership practice**

Rural youth generally face the problem of insufficient emotional management ability. Left-behind children are prone to anxiety and withdrawal due to the long-term lack of emotional support; economic pressure has led to the formation of “learned helplessness” in some youth, making it difficult for them to take the initiative to assume responsibility in the team. This psychological state makes it easy for them to fall into the vicious circle of “not daring to try-failure-self-denial” in leadership practice <sup>[7]</sup>.

### **2.3.2. The gap between urban and rural education exacerbates the imbalance of leadership development**

Urban youth can be exposed to leadership training through extracurricular classes, international exchanges, and other channels, while rural youth are limited by economic conditions and have difficulty in obtaining the same opportunities. Research shows that the score gap between urban and rural youths in leadership assessment is 30%, and rural youths are more inclined to rely on authoritative decision-making rather than autonomous leadership <sup>[8]</sup>.

Rural adolescents’ leadership development is faced with multiple difficulties, such as a lack of resources, cognitive lag, and systematic insufficiency, and the core crux of the problem lies in the disconnection between the weak foundation of mental toughness and the practice of leadership. Without targeted intervention, rural youth will be difficult to realize their potential in rural revitalization, exacerbating the imbalance between urban and rural talent and development. In the future, it is necessary to build a synergistic training model of “mental toughness and leadership”, integrating multiple resources and strengthening the practice-oriented approach, to provide a sustainable growth path for rural youth.

## **3. Designing a leadership development path oriented towards psychological resilience**

### **3.1. Theoretical framework: SPA-LEAD model**

The SPA-LEAD model integrates the core elements of psychological resilience cultivation and leadership development, forming a closed-loop path of “Self-awareness — Practical Exposure — Adaptive Learning — Leadership Internalization.”

#### **3.1.1. Self-awareness**

Psychological resilience assessment: Evaluate adolescents’ emotional regulation, stress resistance, and other dimensions through standardized tools (such as the CD-RISC psychological resilience scale) to identify individual strengths and weaknesses.

Reflective journaling: Guide adolescents to record daily challenges and coping strategies, analyze emotional

responses through the “ABC model” (event — cognition — consequence), and cultivate cognitive reconstruction abilities.

### **3.1.2. Practical exposure**

Progressive leadership tasks: Design practical projects with increasing difficulty, ranging from class affairs management to community public welfare projects, to gradually enhance the ability to take responsibility.

Role-play training: Simulate crisis decision-making scenarios through situational dramas, sand table exercises, and other methods to strengthen the synergistic application of psychological resilience and leadership.

### **3.1.3. Adaptive learning**

Dynamic feedback mechanism: Combine mentor feedback, peer reviews, and data analysis to adjust the training program in real-time. For example, use AI tools to track adolescents’ emotional fluctuations and decision-making patterns in projects and provide personalized suggestions.

### **3.1.4. LEAD (Leadership dimensions)**

Communication skills: Cultivate listening and expression skills through activities such as debate competitions and community interviews.

Decision-making ability: Train rational analysis and risk assessment skills based on real cases (such as rural resource allocation issues).

Team collaboration: Emphasize division of labor, conflict resolution, and achievement of common goals in group projects.

Social responsibility: Design practical tasks based on the needs of rural revitalization (such as the protection of intangible cultural heritage and support for rural education) to strengthen value guidance.

## **3.2. Implementation steps**

### **3.2.1. Phase one: Basic capability building (6 months)**

Self-awareness courses: Conduct psychological resilience assessments and emotional management training, combining the “Resilience Flywheel” model (Awareness-Meaning-Connection) to enhance self-awareness.

Basic leadership practice: Through the experience of being a class group leader, learn basic skills such as task allocation and conflict resolution.

### **3.2.2. Phase two: Comprehensive capability improvement (6–12 months)**

Team collaboration projects: Organize the design of rural environmental volunteer activities, such as planning garbage classification schemes, to cultivate goal management and resource integration capabilities.

Social resource linkage: Cooperate with enterprises/NGOs to carry out mini entrepreneurial projects (such as agricultural product e-commerce promotion), and exercise decision-making and stress resistance in real business scenarios.

### **3.2.3. Phase three: Leadership internalization (12+ months)**

Community problem solving: Take the lead in rural development research and proposals, such as proposing solutions for the education of left-behind children or infrastructure improvements.

Mentorship: Match excellent alumni or entrepreneurs as long-term mentors to provide career planning guidance and psychological support.

## 4. Research results

This article conducted a practical verification of a rural Children’s Palace project in Jiangxi Province through case analysis. The data results are as follows.

### 4.1. Project overview

The rural Children’s Palace in a county of Jiangxi Province launched the “Leadership Development Program Oriented Towards Psychological Resilience” in January 2023, targeting 120 junior high school students and implementing it in stages through the SPA-LEAD model. The project cycle is 24 months, integrating government, school, enterprise, and community resources, focusing on improving adolescents’ psychological resilience and leadership.

### 4.2. Implementation process and data results

Psychological resilience improvement: Using the CD-RISC psychological resilience scale for pre- and post-testing, the average score increased from 25.2 (out of a total of 40 points) before the intervention to 36.5, an increase of 45%.

**Table 1.** Changes in mental toughness scores

Phases	Average score	Enhancement
Pre-intervention	25.2	/
Post-intervention	36.5	+45%

Leadership behavior improvement: Based on the MLQ-6S Leadership Scale, participants’ scores on the “Influence” and “Motivation” dimensions increased from 3.2 to 4.2 on a 5-point scale, representing an overall improvement of 30%.

**Table 2.** Leadership behavior assessment

Dimension	Pre-intervention	Post-intervention	Enhancement
Influence	3.0	4.1	+37%
Incentives	3.2	4.3	+34%

Practical achievements: 78% of the participants successfully planned and executed community activities (e.g., environmental protection promotion, non-heritage culture demonstration), and 12 of the team projects were recognized at the county level.

**Table 3.** Distribution of results of community activities

Successful planning projects	78%
Receive county recognition projects	10%
Total number of participating villagers	300+

### 4.3. Typical case: Intangible cultural heritage inheritance project

A student team, trained through the SPA-LEAD model, took the lead in planning the “Anyuan Tea Picking Opera Enters the Campus” event. The project included self-awareness (discovering team members’ communication

weaknesses through psychological assessments and conducting targeted scenario simulation training); practical exposure (completing the arrangement and performance of the tea picking opera under the guidance of intangible cultural heritage inheritors); and dynamic feedback (optimizing the event plan through community surveys, ultimately attracting over 300 villagers to participate).

#### **4.4. Analysis and insights**

The study reveals a significant synergistic effect in the development of adolescents' leadership. The improvement of psychological resilience not only enhances their self-confidence and ability to cope with challenges but also prompts them to take on leadership roles such as resource coordination and conflict resolution, achieving a role transformation from "passive adaptation" to "active construction." Based on this, by transforming the inheritance of intangible cultural heritage and the needs of rural governance into practical scenarios (such as the operation of intangible cultural heritage workshops and community event planning), adolescents not only enhance their cultural identity but also deepen their ability to value and activate local resources in the process of solving practical problems, forming a sense of belonging driven by "cultural mission." The effective operation of the training model relies on the support of a multi-party collaboration network. The government ensures resource supply with special funds, schools establish a theoretical framework with systematic courses, and intangible cultural heritage inheritors provide practical guidance. These three parties work together to build a sustainable development system integrating "funds, knowledge, and experience."

The study reveals that youth leadership cultivation needs to break through the limitations of single-skill training and realize the deep connection between individual growth and social value through psychological capital strengthening, local resource revitalization, and ecological collaboration. The project validates the effectiveness of the SPA-LEAD model in rural youth leadership development, which is centered on the deep integration of mental toughness building and local practices, providing a replicable paradigm for talent cultivation in the context of rural revitalization.

### **5. Research discussion**

From the perspective of human resource management, this study constructed an integrated framework for psychological resilience cultivation and leadership development among rural adolescents. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between the level of psychological resilience and leadership performance among rural adolescents. Among them, stress resistance and goal persistence played crucial mediating roles in leadership elements such as crisis decision-making and team coordination. By transferring training and development, performance evaluation, and organizational support mechanisms from HRM, the designed development pathway of "curriculum integration — practical empowerment — collaborative support" effectively addressed the shortcomings of fragmented resources and missing evaluations in traditional training models. Theoretically, this study broke through the disciplinary barriers between education and HRM, unveiling the dynamic regulatory mechanism of psychological resilience in leadership development. Practically, it provided a practical toolkit for cultivating rural talents to revitalize the countryside. Future research should further track the long-term intervention effects and explore personalized training models enabled by digitalization to continuously unleash the leadership potential of rural adolescents.

Through theoretical construction, practical validation, and data analysis, this study draws the following

conclusions.

The synergistic effect of psychological resilience and leadership is significant. Psychological resilience cultivation serves as the underlying support for the leadership development of rural adolescents. Through systematic intervention using the SPA-LEAD model, participants' psychological resilience scores increased by 45% on average, leadership behavior assessments improved by 30%, and 78% of adolescents successfully planned community activities. This verifies the facilitating role of psychological resilience in leadership practice.

The core value of a systematic pathway. Integrating the closed-loop pathway of “self-awareness — practical exposure — adaptive learning — leadership internalization”, combined with step-by-step task design and dynamic feedback mechanisms, can effectively address the shortcomings of scattered resources and missing evaluations in leadership training in rural areas.

The practical value of the human resource management perspective. By applying organizational behavior methods such as role-playing simulations, mentorship programs, and 360-degree assessments to adolescent training, this study provides a replicable model for the sustainable development of rural human resources.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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