Limited Development Space: Evaluation of the Main Obstacles for Chinese College Students' Unwillingness to Teach in Western Rural Areas

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Abstract: Expanding the development space for rural teachers in western China will promote college students to participate in the education industry in western rural areas and revitalize the education industry in western rural areas. The focus of this study is to evaluate the main obstacles that college students are unwilling to teach in rural areas of western China, and to explore effective ways to expand the development space of teachers in rural areas of western China. This is a mixed research method (qualitative and quantitative methods) involving a questionnaire survey of over 400 Chinese university students. The survey tool will use the commonly used Questionnaire Star app in China, and the questionnaire design specifically includes a scale of college students' intention to teach, a scale of willingness to teach in rural areas, a scale of main factors of unwillingness to teach in rural areas, and a scale of expectations for future career development. The sample is a random sampling survey of Chinese college students through online questionnaires, and the data is analyzed using SPSS software and thematic analysis. The research results indicate that the main factors that Chinese universities are unwilling to go to western rural areas are: low treatment, being too far from the city, relatively lack of educational resources, and limited career development. In addition, college students' demography variables, such as gender, parents' occupation, growth environment, and specialty, have a certain impact on college students' willingness to go to rural areas to teach. Improving the treatment of teachers in western rural areas, rationalizing and equalizing regional educational resources, and expanding the development space of rural teachers can effectively promote college students to study in western rural areas and revitalize education in western rural areas.
1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

At present, China is promoting the construction of Chinese path to modernization, putting forward the strategy of rural revitalization, giving priority to the development of agriculture and rural areas, promoting the integration of urban and rural compulsory education, and promoting the high-quality and balanced development of basic education. To achieve the overall sustainable development of the country and ensure the driving force of economic growth, rural development cannot be ignored, and the development of rural education is an important guarantee for promoting rural revitalization. In the past few years, China has vigorously promoted the standardization construction of rural schools, striving to comprehensively improve the basic operating conditions of weak rural schools, and investing a large amount of funds in the construction of playgrounds, sports facilities, information technology equipment, etc. Rural schools have made great progress in hardware facilities. However, the improvement of hardware conditions is only one of the foundations for enhancing the teaching quality of rural schools, and teachers are the key factor in ensuring the quality of rural education. Young college students are the source of future rural teachers, and improving their willingness to teach in rural areas is an important measure to promote the construction of the teaching staff in western rural areas in the future.

In 2012, the Chinese government issued the "Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of the Teacher Team", emphasizing that teachers are the foundation for the development of education and the key to improving the quality of education and running education that satisfies the people. In 2015, the Chinese government issued the "Rural Teacher Support Plan (2015-2020)", which demonstrated the importance of rural teachers at the national level. The plan proposed that "in the development of rural education, teachers are the key, and the construction of rural teacher teams must be given a strategic priority for development". In 2018, the state issued the "Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Comprehensively Deepening the Reform of the Construction of the New Era Teacher Team", which put forward new requirements for the construction of the teacher team. It insisted that "teachers bear the historical mission of spreading knowledge, spreading ideas, and spreading truth, and shoulder the responsibility of shaping the soul, life, and people of the times. They are the first capital for educational development.

Education is the basic project of Rural Revitalization. To ensure the quality of rural education, an important aspect is to attract young college students to teach in rural areas, stabilize the rural teachers' team, achieve the goal of rural teachers' being willing to go, staying and doing well, ensure that there are successors in rural education, promote educational equity, and promote the balanced development of high-quality education in urban and rural areas.

1.2 Research Purpose

(1) To understand the current situation of College Students' willingness to teach in western rural areas;
(2) To analyze the influence of individual subjective and objective factors on the change of teaching willingness of rural college students in Western China;
(3) To explore the impact of external objective factors on the teaching willingness of rural college students in Western China.
1.3 Research significance

1.3.1 Theoretical significance

This study examines the current situation of college students' willingness to teach in western rural areas, introduces various influencing factors of teacher job satisfaction into the model, and explores the explanation of external objective factors for the variation of college students' willingness to teach in western rural areas. This study enriches the research on the influencing factors of intention to teach, and theoretically analyzes the impact of different influencing factors on college students' intention to teach in western rural areas.

1.3.2 Practical significance

China pays more attention to the teaching effectiveness of primary and secondary school teachers towards students, and lacks attention to the welfare, survival status, and development space of teachers themselves, resulting in a low level of intention among college students towards rural teacher work. By understanding the current situation of college students' intention to teach in western rural areas and the degree of influence of different factors on intention, especially understanding the external objective factors that affect college students' intention to teach in western rural areas, policy suggestions are provided to improve college students' intention to teach in western rural areas, improve the professional attractiveness of rural teachers, and promote the development of rural education.

1.4 The research objectives

(1) Study the significant relationship between college students' willingness to teach in western rural areas and teachers' professional identity (including teacher development space).
(2) Ensuring the fairness of treatment for teachers in western rural areas can promote the improvement of college students' willingness to teach in western rural areas.
(3) Testing the Relationship between the Intention of College Students to Teach in Western Rural Areas and the Factors Influencing the Fairness of Treatment for Western Teachers
(4) Analyzing the biggest influencing factors of the treatment and development space of teachers in western rural areas on the willingness of college students to teach in western rural areas

1.5 Research questions

Corresponding to the research objectives, the main research questions of this paper are as follows:
(1) What is the current development status of teachers in western rural areas? What are the difficulties?
(2) How does the fairness of treatment for teachers in western rural areas affect the willingness of college students to teach in western rural areas?
(3) What are the main factors that hinder college students' willingness to teach in western rural areas?
(4) What are the effective measures to enhance the willingness of college students to teach in western rural areas?

1.6 Hypotheses

H1: The increase in salary and benefits for teachers in the western rural areas of H1 helps to enhance the willingness of college students to teach in the western rural areas.
H2: The optimization of the working environment for H2 rural teachers in western China helps to enhance the willingness of college students to teach in western rural areas.

H3: The improvement of the social status of H3 rural teachers in the western region helps to enhance the willingness of college students to teach in the western region.

H4: The improvement of education policies in the western rural areas of H4 helps to enhance the willingness of college students to teach in the western rural areas.

2. Review of Literature

So far, Chinese scholars have rarely studied college students' willingness to work as rural teachers. The relevant research mainly focuses on the current situation of rural teacher professional development, research on teacher job satisfaction, analysis of the reasons for the lagging development of rural teachers, and research on strategies for rural teacher development. The research objects include college teachers, vocational school teachers, primary and secondary school teachers, preschool teacher, special school teachers, etc. From the richness of the research objects, they include young teachers, rural teachers, backbone teachers, physical education teachers and other types. In terms of influencing factors of teachers' job satisfaction, researchers focus on Demography variables, other personal objective factors, personal subjective factors, school factors, principal factors, etc. In terms of research methods, relevant data is mainly obtained through investigation and research, and various analysis methods such as simple descriptive statistics, structural equation models, multivariate linear models, and multi-layer linear analysis are applied.

2.1 Current Situation of Rural Teacher Development

Wang An (2012) explored the development and changes in the geography, education, gender, profession, identity, and age structure of rural teachers in a western county over the past fifty years; [1] Li Yuansheng (2021) believes that rural education is still relatively backward, with problems such as insufficient educational resources, shortage of teaching staff, low investment in education, and outdated educational concepts; [2] Cao Xuechuan. On the Current Situation of Education Development and the Psychological Health of Teachers in Poor Rural Areas of Western China. (2019) believes that the psychological health status and influencing factors of teachers in poverty-stricken areas of western China have a direct impact on the efficiency and quality of education and teaching. [3] Zhang Yun. The Dilemma and Improvement of the Support System for Rural Teacher Professional Development. (2017) believes that the professional development of rural teachers depends on personal time and public space, professional development planning, and soft conditions Lack of effective support in mechanism innovation, evaluation and incentives; [4] Guo Jing. A survey of rural primary school teachers' sense of happiness - take XX Town, Juye County as an example (2018). Rural teachers have high work pressure, lack of school management, low social status, weak implementation of protective policies and other issues; [5] Wu Zhihui. How to Improve the Professional Attraction of Rural Teachers (2014) believes that rural teachers have a low willingness to stay, urban teachers lack communication motivation, and college students have a weak desire to teach in rural areas; [6] Wang Dongmei (2020) believes that the aging of the teaching staff and the inability of young teachers to "refuse to go" and "stay" are the current challenges faced by rural education; [7] Yu Haihong. Research on the Construction of Western Rural Teacher Teams (2012) believes that the core of the problem of western rural teacher team construction is the problem of "implicit mobility", which means that some rural teachers are on duty but ineffective, or are on duty but not on duty; [8] Wang Yanhong (2022) believes that there are problems with rural teachers being unable to leave, stay, and teach well. [9]
2.2 The impact of individual teacher factors on job satisfaction

The personality pattern of job satisfaction suggests that there is an individual tendency towards job satisfaction. For the same work and work environment, different individuals often exhibit different levels of job satisfaction. Some people consistently experience more job satisfaction than another group, which means that job satisfaction is a relatively stable individual tendency. Therefore, the job satisfaction of teachers is also related to individual qualities. For a certain group of people, even if the work environment changes, their job satisfaction still shows a higher tendency than other groups. In previous studies, Demography variables (including gender, marital status, whether or not an only child, age, teaching age, education, salary, housing, professional title, whether or not to hold, what kind of administrative position to hold, health status, etc.) and other personal factors that affect teachers' job satisfaction (such as teacher family social capital, home school distance, work family balance, social support, work enthusiasm, teaching efficiency, self literacy, work content, workload, social status, work pressure, sense of fairness, Organizational commitment, etc.). Feng Bolin's (1996) research suggests that male teachers have higher job satisfaction than female teachers, with age and teaching experience positively correlated with teacher job satisfaction, education negatively correlated with teacher job satisfaction, and low satisfaction among teachers teaching graduating classes and major subjects. Zhu Xinheng and Zhuo Yizhou (2005) conducted a study on university teachers over 45 years old and found that married teachers have high job satisfaction, and teaching experience has a positive effect on satisfaction. The impact of gender, age, and education is not significant. Chen Yinfei and Mao Ning (2010) believe that work pressure, development pressure, and life pressure all have an impact on teacher job satisfaction. Zhao Bihua (2011) conducted a study on the influencing factors of teacher job satisfaction and found that teaching experience, teaching efficacy, and satisfaction were significantly positively correlated, while gender, education level, and whether a homeroom teacher had no significant impact. Wang Zhenhong (2011) explored the relationship between Organizational commitment and teachers' job satisfaction, and believed that the two were significantly related. Wang Weiping (2015) believes that work family conflict is one of the important factors in reducing job satisfaction, and teaching efficacy and stress response play an important mediating mechanism in the relationship between work family conflict and job satisfaction. Li Wei (2017) and others conducted a comprehensive investigation on the personal influencing factors of teacher job satisfaction, and found that female teachers and unmarried teachers have high job satisfaction, while party members and backbone teachers have high job satisfaction. Education, teaching experience, and weekly class hours have a negative effect on satisfaction, while age, professional title, teaching subject, serving as class teacher, and family social capital have no significant impact on satisfaction. Gao Luan et al. (2015) believe that teachers' personal subjective factors, such as lifestyle habits, adherence to exercise, and work stress resistance, have a more significant impact on job satisfaction. Li Mei (2013) found through a survey that objective factors (gender, education level, teaching grade, workload, school location, etc.) did not have a significant impact on job satisfaction of new teachers, while subjective attitudes of teachers (work enthusiasm, self-efficacy, perceived work burden, development needs, etc.) had a significant impact on job satisfaction of new teachers. Cheng Suisuo and Chen Jianhai (2018) found that teacher personality traits, self-efficacy, external resource support, work conditions, and goal progress have a positive correlation with job satisfaction among young college teachers.

2.3 Reasons for the lagging development of rural teachers

Xiong Caiping. The balanced Development theory and implementation framework of China's basic education informatization (2005) proposed that the fundamental reason for the regional imbalance of the development of basic education informatization is that the “dual system” education
financial investment system does not adapt to China's national conditions that the economic development gap between regions is widening due to the adoption of the "gradient process" economic Development theory;\(^{20}\) Cao Rujun. On the Optimization of the Professional Development Environment for Rural Teachers [J]. Education Exploration (2006) believes that the issue of rural teacher professionalization is not only an individual development problem but also a comprehensive social problem. It requires rural primary and secondary school teachers to consciously establish a sense of professional development and create a suitable development environment; \(^{21}\) Jia Xuefeng. The Dilemma and Solution to the Professional Development of Rural Teachers from the Perspective of Urban Rural Integration (2022) believes that there are three difficulties in the professional development of rural teachers: lack of identity recognition, unclear professional self-positioning; Lack of display platforms and lack of professional ability training; Lack of teaching and research atmosphere, low level of professional knowledge; \(^{22}\) Wang Guoming. Research on the Dilemma of Rural Teachers' Replenishment from the Perspective of Cultural capital (2015) believes that, influenced by structural social and educational environmental factors, it is difficult for rural teachers' diploma capital to establish a link with the meaning and value of work, which is the deep reason for the plight of teachers' replenishment; \(^{23}\) Yang Liu. The Institutional Supply of Rural Teacher Team Construction (2022) believes that the structural shortage of rural teacher teams is relatively prominent, their quality and ability need to be improved, their development channels are relatively narrow, their professional attractiveness is not strong, and the mechanisms for admission, recruitment, communication, and exit are not yet perfect. The management system and mechanism are also not smooth, which are the reasons that restrict the construction of rural teacher teams; \(^{24}\) Zeng Benyou. 2.4 Countermeasures for the Development of Rural Teachers

Jiang Hong. Investigation and Research on the Dilemma of Policy Support for Rural Teacher Professional Development - Taking the Implementation of the Chongqing Rural Teacher Support Plan as an Example (2021), it is believed that to further promote the professional development of rural teachers, a dynamic management system for small-scale school staffing can be established, the policy for providing subsidies for rural teacher positions can be improved, the mechanism for ensuring high-quality digital resources in basic education can be improved, and the training and honor system for rural teachers can be improved; \(^{26}\) Pan Xiyu, Research on the Professional Development of Rural Primary School Special Post Teachers in D County, H Province (2021) Exploring feasible paths for the professional development of rural special post teachers from the institutional, school, and individual levels; \(^{27}\) Deng Huihui, Lin Hailong. Research on the Professional Development Strategy of Rural Teachers under the Background of Integrated Development of Urban and Rural Education (2020) proposes that the professional development of rural teachers needs to improve the appointment mechanism of rural teachers, construct a training system for urban and rural teachers, improve the welfare and treatment of rural teachers, and establish an honor system for rural teachers; \(^{28}\) Zhong Miling. Research on the Conventional Changes in the Policy for the Mobility of Urban and Rural Compulsory Education Teachers (2020) suggests building a mobile teacher team specifically engaged in inter school mobility between urban and rural areas, in order to achieve a paradigm shift in the policy for teacher mobility between urban and rural areas; \(^{20}\) Lin Dan, Zhang Xuan. Rationalization of Teacher Work Time and Space: An Important Precondition for the Balanced Development of Individual Teachers (2022) believes that it is necessary to actively promote the
construction of teacher work time and space by emphasizing the correct guidance of social public opinion, clarifying the basic boundaries of teacher responsibilities, achieving healthy and upward school management, and actively striving and adjusting for teachers themselves.\(^{[30]}\)

According to the survey, the factors that affect the willingness of college students to study in western rural areas are very complex. In addition to the development of teachers, there are other factors such as family background, career ideals, and professional differences. However, existing literature has overlooked this. Therefore, this article will use the method of survey questionnaires to attempt to conduct in-depth analysis, and also evaluate the impact of various factors on the willingness of college students to study in western rural areas from other aspects.

3. Methodology and Data

Given the limitations of the existing literature mentioned above, this study aims to understand the current situation of Chinese college students' willingness to teach in western rural areas, analyze the degree to which external objective factors and individual subjective factors explain the variation in college students' willingness to teach in western rural areas, and explore the impact of external objective factors on college students' willingness to teach in western rural areas. In this study, it is assumed that the increase in salaries and benefits for teachers in western rural areas, the optimization of work environments, the improvement of teachers' social status, and the improvement of educational policies all contribute to enhancing the willingness of college students to teach in western rural areas.

3.1 Methods

3.1.1 Participants and data collection

The current research aims to investigate the effects of personal and external factors on the willingness of Chinese college students to study in western rural areas. The participants were 495 college students from a full-time Research university in China. The participants were asked to use the questionnaire star and password in their WeChat applet to log in online. The questionnaire content of the questionnaire star included the list of research questions. Can participants click the 'submit' button to complete the survey only after answering all required questions. They are allowed as the time they need to complete their inventory, usually taking 15 minutes. Their participation is voluntary and they can withdraw from the study at any time. All data is anonymously saved and kept confidential. In the sample, approximately 27.7% are males and 72.3% are females. In terms of majors, approximately 28.5% of participants are in science and engineering, with humanities/social sciences majors accounting for 71.5%. The gender distribution of this sample is generally consistent with that of the subject population in the university.

3.1.2 Data analysis

As shown in Table 1, in this study, gender, profession, race and parental education were included in the survey to control the impact of Demographics on the outcome measurement. As shown in Table 1, according to the Categorical variable of this study, the main factors that affect college students to go to the west to teach (students can choose more than one when completing the questionnaire) are: teaching this lifestyle (career ideal) 46.05%, work freedom 34.21%, work intensity 31.58%, wage income 30.26%, work duration 26.32%, career conversion opportunities 22.37%, job challenges 18.42%, and so on, which are all related to each other. It is worth noting that 42.11% of other factors also have a significant impact. The survey data are all true and valid.
4. Results

Table 1 summarizes descriptive statistical data. The results indicate that 46.05% of college students have a common impact on their intention to study in western rural areas, including teaching as a way of life (career ideal), 34.21% of work freedom, 31.58% of work intensity, and 30.26% of salary income. Factors such as 26.32% of work hours, 22.37% of career transfer opportunities, and 18.42% of job challenges also have a certain range of impacts. Among other factors, most students majoring in science and engineering are unwilling to go to rural areas in the western region to teach. It can be concluded that the most critical factors affecting the willingness of college students to pursue education in western rural areas are the lack of ideal career development space (difficulty in meeting career ideal requirements, insufficient opportunities for career transformation), unfriendly work environment (longer working hours, less work intensity), and low wages and benefits (which in turn affect quality of life and social status). From statistical data, it can be seen that there is a positive correlation between career development space, work environment, and salary benefits, and the intention of college students to study in western rural areas, while other correlations are relatively weak.

Therefore, in order to strengthen the construction of the teaching staff in western rural areas and attract college students to come to teach in the west, the government must increase investment, improve the conditions for running schools in western rural areas, increase the material treatment of teachers, and provide channels for teacher development and promotion.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, the results of this study indicate that external objective factors such as career development space, work environment, and salary benefits have a significant impact on college students’ intention to study in western rural areas; Compared to cities or eastern regions, there are also objective differences in these three aspects in western rural areas. Students believe that western rural areas are relatively closed, economic and social development is relatively lagging, material treatment is relatively low, and the working environment is relatively poor. There is not much room for development, and efforts are difficult to be proportional to expectations. Therefore, the willingness to go to western rural areas for education is naturally not high. In addition, among the other factors that account for a large proportion, one of the most important is that college students majoring in science and engineering are mostly unwilling to go to the western rural areas for teaching. This is because they choose a major in order to have a certain development in the field of industrial manufacturing or scientific research. The western rural areas are clearly an agricultural oriented environment, which
naturally does not meet their career choice intentions.

5.1 Implications for practice

The findings of this study have important practical significance for promoting rural education work. Firstly, it is necessary to understand the willingness of college students to go to western rural areas from the perspective of subjective and objective relationships. The subjective intention of students in choosing a career is consistent with external objective conditions. To increase the willingness of college students to teach in western rural areas, it is necessary to formulate some supporting education policies in western rural areas, create a comprehensive external factor that is conducive to expanding the development space, improving the work and living environment, and increasing wages and benefits for teachers in western rural areas.

Secondly, the results of this study also reveal that subjective factors such as job freedom and career expectations have a significant correlation with students’ intention to choose a career. Therefore, it is recommended to guide students in their correct life values in career selection education and ideological and moral education in universities, emphasizing both reality and emotions. Education is a great cause that emphasizes emotions and dedication, and high-quality teacher team construction requires continuous supplementation of young college students with aspirations, so that education in western rural areas can develop in the long run.

5.2 Limitations and directions for future research

There are several limitations that need to be addressed, and future research directions need to be pointed out. Firstly, although research has shown that external objective factors such as career development space, work environment, and salary benefits have a significant impact on the intention of college students to study in western rural areas, the classification of these variables is still relatively rough, only explaining the overall factors, while more subtle factors and differences cannot be summarized, affecting the accuracy of the explanation. Therefore, researchers are encouraged to investigate the variables of this study in specific academic subjects.

Secondly, the sample for this study mainly comes from a university in a small western city, where most of the college students themselves come from rural and western areas. They have a stronger willingness to improve their material living conditions and overcome survival difficulties, and perhaps their desire for the city is stronger when choosing a career. The future research object can be extended to university students in larger cities, as their material living conditions are relatively superior and may have a different imagination of the peaceful and beautiful countryside. Therefore, there should be a certain difference in the intention to teach in the western region.

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