

Research on the Predicaments of Professional Development for Rural Teachers

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Abstract: The disparities between urban and rural educational systems have increasingly highlighted the critical role of rural teachers. As a crucial component of the rural education system, rural teachers' professional development directly impacts the quality and future of rural education. In recent years, with the increasing disparity between urban and rural areas and the advancement of educational modernization, the predicaments faced by rural teachers in their professional development have become increasingly pronounced, necessitating in-depth research and resolution. This paper explores the modernization direction and predicaments of rural teachers' professional development, proposing pathways beyond the existing predicaments. It delves into the actual predicaments encountered in the professional development of rural teachers, including distorted development beliefs, imbalanced knowledge structures, misaligned skill cultivation, and the loss of local cultural heritage. Through the paths of returning to the local world, supplementing local knowledge, transforming local wisdom, and fostering local sentiments, strategies and approaches to surpass the modernization dilemmas in rural teachers' professional development are presented.

1. Introduction

The quality level of rural teaching personnel is closely linked to the quality of rural education, with the professional development level of rural teachers being a pivotal criterion for assessing their overall quality. It stands as a key factor determining the quality of rural education. Presently, promoting the professional development of rural teachers has become a core task in building the rural teaching workforce. The professional growth of rural teachers necessitates a harmonious integration of external policy support and their own proactive development. However, in reality, the intrinsic drive for professional growth among rural teachers is significantly lacking. There exists a notable deficiency in their desire for proactive development and self-driven growth, leading them into a state of self-contradiction and struggle concerning their professional development.

2. The Modernization Direction of Rural Teachers' Professional Development

2.1 Embracing the Concept of "Embeddedness in the Local Environment"

The professional growth of rural teachers must integrate seamlessly with the rural environment rather than stand independently or merely replicate urban teaching models. They should deeply comprehend the modernization mission of rural education, the specificity of students' cultural backgrounds, the wisdom of rural social practices, and the abundance of educational resources. This implies liberating themselves from the constraints of urbanized models and, based on rational imagination regarding the future rural society and educational mission, forming a concept of development that "embeds into the local environment." This notion encapsulates elements of "political, cultural, relational, and cognitive" aspects. In the "political" aspect, rural teachers are required to align with the strategies of the party and the state, intertwining their own growth with the mission of national education, and deeply understanding the fundamental objectives of education. Regarding "culture," rural teachers are expected to safeguard local culture, not being dominated by Western or urban cultures, but rather immersing themselves wholeheartedly and passing on the unique culture and wisdom of rural society. The "relational" aspect emphasizes establishing good relationships, seeking guidance from experienced teachers, understanding the situations of students and parents, and constructing an exchange model based on equality, respect, and understanding^[1].

2.2 Optimizing the Knowledge Structure based on Local Resources

The optimization of rural teachers' knowledge structure demands not only grasping unified, standardized, and procedural concepts of modern education but also delving into the characteristics of rural education, its unpredictability, and indigenous cultural knowledge. This optimization relies not solely on the standards and procedures emphasized by scientific and technological logic but also necessitates a continuous perception, understanding, excavation, summarization, and transformation of rural educational resources, thereby strengthening the indigenous nature of their knowledge structure. Specifically, rural teachers can comprehend regional characteristics by experiencing natural rural landscapes, fostering affection and emotions toward the countryside. They can deeply understand local culture and traditional customs, comprehending the unique culture and wisdom in rural life. Engaging in rural production practices enables them to learn practical skills and rural wisdom. Furthermore, by managing rural interpersonal relationships, they can comprehend the psychological needs and communication styles of rural residents. This does not negate modern knowledge and its legitimacy but emphasizes the background and characteristics of knowledge, fostering rational cognition of indigenous knowledge and its attributes. However, some teachers, influenced by urban culture, might habitually view rural culture from an urban perspective, potentially leading to the neglect and marginalization of local knowledge, presenting a challenge for rural teachers.

2.3 Strengthening the Teaching Capacity to "Respond to the Local Environment"

Rural teachers need to enhance their capabilities, moving beyond merely "adapting to the local environment" to being able to "respond to the local environment." This implies, based on a profound understanding of rural students' cultural characteristics, learning psychology, behavioral habits, and life experiences, adapting modern teaching methods to the local context. This enhancement aims to increase the affinity and local characteristics of teaching. "Responding to the local environment" requires rural teachers to elevate their teaching proficiency from various

perspectives, including identification, objectives, content, and methods. Identification response necessitates teachers genuinely acknowledging and accepting their identity within rural culture, avoiding the imposition of urban cultural values onto rural culture, boosting confidence in local culture, and actively affirming the simplicity, kindness, and purity elements inherent in rural society. Objective response requires teachers not to view aiding students in "moving to the city" or "achieving prosperity away from their hometown" as the sole objective. Instead, teaching should assist students in cultivating a symbiotic concept between rural and urban areas, understanding the interplay between urban and rural cultures, and nurturing students' love for rural society and culture. Content response entails integrating carefully chosen local knowledge into teaching content, aiding students in a deeper understanding of the attributes and value of knowledge through the comparison of universal knowledge and local knowledge. Based on rural cultural resources, teachers should develop school-based curricula and transform local educational resources into rich teaching materials. Method response urges teachers to employ teaching methods aligned with rural students' character traits, utilizing experiential, participatory, and collaborative teaching methods that rural students are receptive to, infusing modern teaching with rural characteristics^[2].

2.4 Cultivating an "Affection for the Rural" Educational Commitment

Revitalizing rural education relies on individuals deeply passionate about and identifying with rural culture, rooted in rural areas, rather than those physically present but mentally detached from the countryside. "Affection for the rural" is an inherent expression of rural teachers' emotions, manifesting as a love for the rural natural environment and cultural traditions, a steadfast belief in contributing to rural education, and a conviction in achieving the "rural dream" as part of the "Chinese dream." The vulnerabilities in geographical location, transportation conditions, educational resources, and economic status of rural areas increase the tendency for teacher migration. Only when rural teachers genuinely love and identify with the beautiful natural environment, the simple and friendly rural characteristics, the unique architectural art, and the profound philosophical wisdom embedded in rural life can they resist the influence of negative emotions. Rural teachers should willingly take responsibility for revitalizing rural education and leading rural societal development. By rooting themselves in rural settings, deeply engaging in teaching, incorporating technology into rural areas, and integrating value transformation into their own value system, they demonstrate a conscious commitment without the need for external compulsion. They need to not only enhance their exploration and understanding of rural knowledge, culture, and wisdom but also strengthen their belief in the "rural dream" to support the "Chinese dream." Through enhancing students' comprehensive qualities to bolster public scientific literacy, perpetuating and innovating rural culture, they can drive rural societal development through their educational proficiency.

3. Realistic Challenges in the Modernization of Rural Teachers' Professional Development

3.1 Distorted Development Beliefs, Professional Thinking Restricting Public Spirit Dissemination

Contemporary trends have isolated the development issues of rural teachers, transforming them into purely professional subjects, pushing them beyond their traditional experiential scope into a professional model akin to urban teachers. In this process, external technological forces and institutional demands overshadow the teachers' beliefs, identity, educational ideologies, and responsibilities under the veil of "professionalism." Emulating urban teachers' professional development patterns, adhering to similar professional standards, results in rural teachers being

engrossed in professionalism, limiting their vision within the "professional domain." This phenomenon manifests as "dedication to professional skills, while being indifferent to rural issues." This reinforces the standardization and uniform quality requirements for modern teachers.

Professionalism might lead to the disappearance of rural teachers' public spirit and the loss of a sense of public responsibility. Their professional consciousness might confine itself to professionalized and trivialized concepts, inundating their careers with numerous boundary-less and detached tasks, gradually concealing their public responsibility to guide rural societal development and uphold excellent rural culture. Rural teachers might shift from being "mediators" in rural public affairs to "transmitters" of professional knowledge, severing their ties with rural society, becoming rootless figures in the revitalization of rural education. They detach from the lived experience of rural culture, losing the emotional support rooted in rural life, transforming into "sojourners" rejected by professionalism and urban culture.

3.2 Imbalanced Knowledge Structure, Rural Knowledge Disconnected from the Structural System

The elements encompassed within "modern knowledge," such as progress, science, and freedom, inadvertently attach a tag of backwardness and rigidity to "rural knowledge." Under this notion, the more solidly rural teachers grasp modern knowledge, the more they tend to believe in the completeness of their knowledge structure. Simultaneously, the responsibility of rural teachers in professional development to inherit and innovate rural culture gradually fades. Consequently, the path linking modern knowledge and rural knowledge to enhance the knowledge structure is obstructed. In the context of revitalizing rural education, modernizing the knowledge structure of rural teachers not only involves acquiring modern knowledge but also necessitates the exploration and refinement of rural knowledge to complement and enrich the entire knowledge system^[3].

In reality, the modernization of rural teachers' knowledge structure often deviates from rural elements and evolves into continuous acceptance of Westernized knowledge and urbanized educational experiences. Correspondingly, rural knowledge remains confined within the category of "local origin," unable to integrate into the cognitive structure of rural teachers. When the natural landscapes, topography, etc., representing local knowledge, elude the cognition of rural teachers, they find it challenging to cultivate patriotism towards the country and dedication to the rural areas through experiencing these splendid sceneries. Similarly, if indigenous wisdom such as local customs, cultural psychology, practical experiences, etc., fail to integrate into the knowledge structure of rural teachers, they cannot reduce the psychological distance with local people by understanding these rural traits. When the manifestation of local characteristics such as student psychology, parental expectations, and school missions cannot merge into the mental structure of rural teachers, they cannot better educate students by comprehending these educational ideologies and motivations and cannot employ teaching methods close to local customs and communication logics.

3.3 Misalignment in Skill Development, Overemphasis on Mastery and Application of Modernized Teaching Techniques

The belief in the objectivity, rationality, and verifiability of science and technology, along with its tremendous effectiveness in altering social production practices, shapes the dominant position of technological rationality in social life. However, this technological rationality inevitably restricts its proponents, engrossing them in utilitarian and instrumental aspects. In this trend, the vitality and expression of life significance and ultimate care get replaced by indifferent technology, causing individuals to become passive recipients of technology. In the concept of teachers' modernization,

the modernization of teaching techniques almost becomes the primary focus, sometimes surpassing the modernization of teaching itself. Rural teachers are viewed as technical operators, focusing on mastering universal technical principles and operational rules, eagerly attempting to familiarize themselves with the operational logic and norms of teaching techniques, methods, and procedures in the shortest time possible, seeking to enhance teaching competence by mastering mature, standardized, and uniform teaching techniques.

Consequently, there's a "lack of any difference between this Thursday's teaching and last Thursday's teaching, or any other given Thursday's teaching." The blind worship of technology reduces teaching to technical procedures, emphasizes the certainty and pre-setting of teaching goals and content selection. It inevitably emphasizes the identity of teachers as knowledge allocators, transmitters, and classifiers, propelling the uniformity, standards, and efficiency of the teaching process, shortening the cycle of internalizing knowledge and skills, aiming to mass-produce products with the same quality structure. When the professional competence of rural teachers is narrowly defined as technical application ability, their autonomy in professional development diminishes. They blindly accept the accuracy and scientific nature of what they learn, losing their critical awareness and ability to assess the rationality of knowledge and technology.

3.4 Loss of Rural Culture: Exhaustion of Educational Enthusiasm in the Spread to Rural Society

In the process of urban-rural integration, imbalances in economic, cultural, and social development have led to a gradual fading of rural teachers' identification with rural culture, diminishing confidence in and emotional connection to rural culture. This has resulted in the loss of rural culture and the depletion of rural sentiment. Under the dominance of urbanization, scientification, modernization, and consumerism, traditional rural culture is misconceived as conservative, backward, or even ignorant. The powerful influence of urban modern civilization neglects and confines rural culture and its values, thereby diminishing its unique cultural charm. Consequently, some rural teachers begin to doubt the existence of rural culture, denying its unique characteristics, losing their sense of identification with rural culture, and even harboring a disdainful, aversive, or evasive attitude toward rural culture and its values, leading to the disappearance of their enthusiasm for loving the rural land.

Under the influence of capitalist logic and pragmatic values, traditional moral ethics and cultural customs that maintain stability in rural society have gradually disintegrated. Values such as respecting the elderly, loving the young, practicing humility, fostering neighborly harmony, and embracing frugality and kindness have come under pressure. Rural teachers face the impact of utilitarian trends, feeling helpless and confused, reducing their enthusiasm for inheriting and innovating rural culture and igniting rural sentiment. Some teachers vacillate anxiously between personal values and collective spirit, losing the courage and capability to lead public life and even exhibiting a phenomenon of silently leaving. Furthermore, rural teachers are affected by nihilism regarding responsibilities, leading to vague role perceptions and inadequate performance of duties. The disparities in work environments, transportation conditions, job evaluations, and salary treatments between urban and rural areas create psychological gaps for rural teachers. This easily induces professional fatigue and indifferent attitudes, which subsequently undermine their belief in the mission of rural revitalization, the conviction of advancing the "rural dream" through their "personal dream," ultimately resulting in the loss of love for the rural land and a sense of responsibility to serve it^[4].

4. Beyond the Predicament of Modernizing Rural Teachers' Professional Development

4.1 Returning to the Rural World, Manifesting Rural Teachers' Public Responsibility

Rural teachers need to return to the rural environment, discard the constraints of professionalism and utilitarianism, and actively participate in rural social governance and production practices to forge their identity as "new rural talents." Firstly, strengthening self-awareness and enhancing public consciousness and rural identity, enabling rural teachers to assume the responsibility of leading rural social development. Secondly, emphasizing value guidance, cultivating students' cultural qualities to love their rural heritage, adopting teaching methods closer to rural life, and motivating teachers to lead by example. In rural public affairs, the enhancement of teacher participation, refinement of relevant systems, rewarding and publicizing positive actions of rural teachers, and promotion of the emergence of 'new rural talents' are facilitated through policy support and cultural propaganda.

Rural teachers should strive to reintegrate into the rural environment, break free from professionalism and utilitarianism, and actively engage in rural social governance, establishing an identity as "new rural talents." Firstly, by reinforcing identity and enhancing rural sentiment and public responsibility, teachers can shoulder the mission of leading rural social development. Secondly, by emphasizing value guidance, fostering students' love for rural culture, employing teaching methods closer to rural life, and setting an example, we aim to strengthen teacher participation in rural public affairs. This involves improving relevant systems, encouraging proactive actions among rural teachers through rewards and publicity, and promoting the growth of "new rural talents" through policy and cultural initiatives.

4.2 Supplementing Local Knowledge: Enhancing Rural Teachers' Knowledge Framework

Local knowledge, when synergized with modern knowledge, reshapes the knowledge framework of rural teachers, enriches their spiritual world, nurtures their attachment to the rural environment, and plays a vital role in dissolving the constraints of technological rationality and the bias towards modern knowledge. By means such as showcasing documentaries of rural landscapes, producing knowledge handbooks about rural natural environments and topography, organizing excursions for rural teachers to explore the natural surroundings, engaging them in seminars on rural natural resources, and participating in quizzes related to rural natural environments, teachers comprehensively deepen their understanding and appreciation of the scenic beauty. This process activates the cultural emotions and ancestral connections of rural teachers towards loving and identifying with the local culture, enabling them to root themselves in the rural environment. Collecting, compiling, learning, and experiencing cultural customs and knowledge, including local history, historical artifacts, regional stories, group psychology, value systems, cultural arts, rituals, religious beliefs, marriage and funeral customs, and local community rules, helps rural teachers examine the rationality of community values, behavioral norms, and moral ethics from a local perspective, transitioning from being "outsiders" to becoming part of the community. By delving into rural social life and practical production, identifying, analyzing, understanding, and internalizing interpersonal interactions, behavioral patterns, production experiences, and life skills demonstrated by local residents, teachers can condense and summarize the rural wisdom embedded in production practices. This helps rural teachers swiftly acquire the ability to interact with local people. Additionally, through studying classics, analyzing cases, and firsthand experiences, understanding the regional and unique cultural psychology of students, recognizing differences between rural and urban students in learning beliefs, habits, strategies, and attitudes, and precisely grasping rural students' learning motivations and psychological tendencies, teachers can enhance

the accuracy and effectiveness of their cultural pedagogy^[5].

4.3 Transforming Rural Wisdom: Enhancing Rural Teachers' Teaching Responsiveness

Rural teachers need to infuse rural wisdom into culture, teaching objectives, content, and teaching methods to address the teaching challenges within a culturally consistent environment. To achieve a shift in identity response, transitioning from being "strangers" to "acquaintances," rural teachers must engage extensively in rural society, participate in rural affairs, and deeply understand rural culture to establish closeness with the rural environment, laying a solid emotional foundation for "closeness between teachers and students." Targeted response requires a shift from "going to the city" to "returning to the countryside." Teachers must steadfastly focus on rural teaching objectives to foster students' love for their homeland. This requires teachers to value the development process of rural culture, evoke students' cultural confidence in the rural environment, evoke students' attachment to the countryside, and outline students' future development directions in rural areas. Concerning content response, there should be a shift from "away from the land" to "returning to the land." Teachers should break away from sole reliance on textbooks, actively absorb local knowledge, explore diverse avenues for understanding rural educational resources, and innovate curriculum content. Regarding methodological response, it should move from "modern" to "rustic." Teachers should comprehend the characteristics of rural students and employ teaching methods that are more motivating and dialogical. Simultaneously, teachers should cleverly integrate rural wisdom into teaching, create a more familiar and approachable rural teaching environment, emphasize comparisons and connections in the teaching process, and help students establish a cognitive foundation for modern knowledge.

4.4 Cultivating Rural Affection: Fostering Rural Teachers' Cultural Characteristics

Rural teachers need to approach rural communities, residents, and students with deep affection, cultivating cultural traits rooted in and dedicated to the rural environment. To enhance teachers' enthusiasm in participating in public affairs and consolidate their sense of existence in the rural areas, teachers must actively engage in rural community life. They should build confidence and combine personal development goals with the strategies for rural education revitalization, fostering a sense of responsibility toward serving the rural environment. Simultaneously, establishing effective participation mechanisms, expanding teachers' channels for expressing opinions on rural revitalization and education, and continuously strengthening teachers' presence in rural communities are essential. Broadening the impact of technology outreach to rural areas is crucial for strengthening teachers' attachment to the countryside. Teachers should integrate their acquired knowledge with rural affairs such as agriculture, technology dissemination, and cultural leadership, obtaining a sense of cultural belonging through interaction with rural residents, thereby deepening their sense of identity with the rural environment. Additionally, ensuring material and spiritual support for teachers' participation in rural affairs, enhancing recognition and rewards for teachers, further strengthens their emotional attachment to the countryside. Enhancing interaction between teachers and rural society fosters closeness between teachers and the rural environment. Teachers should understand local culture, respect public demands, discard stereotypes when interacting with parents and students, genuinely care about students' growth and mental well-being, and listen to and guide students' psychological pressures. Through an attitude of respect, understanding, and care, promoting positive communication between parents and students is encouraged.

5. Conclusion

The research on the predicament of rural teacher professional development highlights both the direction of modernization and the practical challenges. Even with teachers' efforts to integrate into rural areas, we need to optimize their knowledge structure by utilizing rural resources, strengthen their teaching abilities to meet rural needs, and cultivate their feelings towards rural areas, challenges continue to persist. Overcoming these hurdles requires rural teachers to reconnect with the rural environment, supplement local knowledge, transform rural wisdom, and nurture an affectionate bond with the countryside. By doing so, they can seamlessly integrate into rural communities, meet the educational demands, and contribute positively to the modernization of their profession.

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