

Comparative Study on the Professional Development Paths of Rural Teachers in China and the United States Based on Education Policies

Wendan Xue ¹, Ming Yi ²

¹ University of West Alabama, Livingston, AL, USA, 35470

² School of Training Shenyang Normal University, Liaoning Shenyang, 110034

Abstract

China and the United States have constructed distinctive policy support systems based on their own national conditions, and have shown different practical approaches in the construction of rural teacher teams. China's education policy focuses on top-down institutional planning, building a multi-level training network, and establishing a professional title evaluation mechanism, committed to creating institutional guarantees for teachers' professional development. The United States adopts a decentralization model, where each state formulates personalized support programs based on federal education laws, emphasizing the synergistic effect between teacher self-development and social resource integration. The different policy orientations have had a profound impact on the working environment and development space of rural teachers in both countries. This article mainly compares the career development paths of rural teachers in China and the United States based on educational policies.

Keywords

education policy; China and the United States; Rural teachers; Career path.

In recent years, China has implemented the "Special Post Program" and the "Rural Teacher Support Program", while the United States has introduced the "Every Student Success Act", which includes provisions for rural education. These policies have formed a dialogue relationship. However, current research has not systematically analyzed the institutional differences between China and the United States in related policies from multiple dimensions such as career access, professional support, and development channels. Due to this research gap, there is a lack of two-way reference when evaluating policy effectiveness, making it difficult to propose improvement suggestions with practical guidance value.

1. Differences in Policy Support and Local Decentralization

The two different institutional frameworks of centralization and decentralization have given rise to various management systems, shaping different resource allocation models and presenting diverse characteristics of career development ecology. This difference is extremely significant in the field of rural education between China and the United States, fully reflecting the characteristics of their respective political systems and revealing the practical logic of education governance under different cultural backgrounds.

The construction of the rural teacher team in China is steadily advancing under the top-down policy system, and a institutional framework with Chinese characteristics has been established. In recent years, the education regulatory authorities have implemented the Special Post Teacher Plan, which effectively alleviates the shortage of teachers in remote areas through targeted training and job security measures. In terms of building career development channels, the national unified professional title evaluation system has clarified the hierarchical path of teachers' professional growth, transforming factors such as teaching years and scientific research achievements into quantifiable promotion indicators. However, given the vast territory of our country, there have been significant regional differences in the implementation of policies. The developed eastern regions, relying on their local financial advantages, have added additional training programs and incentive mechanisms on the basis of the basic policy framework; However, underdeveloped areas in the western region often only meet the basic requirements stipulated by policies due to limited resource supply. This uneven development phenomenon is particularly prominent in the cross regional mobility of teachers and the allocation of school-based training resources. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a more refined dynamic adjustment mechanism.

The development of rural education in the United States presents a significant difference in governance patterns, with the core feature being that the decentralization system provides space for independent exploration. The federal government relies on special education laws to authorize in the form of funding support, and the specific implementation methods are entirely determined by each state. Under such institutional design, California has established a special certification system for bilingual teachers, while Texas has developed teaching competency standards that focus on agricultural practices, which are well suited to the economic and cultural characteristics of different regions. This decentralized management model has its advantages, as it can quickly respond to changes in the local education ecosystem. However, this model also has drawbacks, as it can easily lead to resource competition between neighboring areas and result in a siphon effect of high-quality teachers gathering in school districts with better conditions. In recent years, some states have attempted to establish regional teacher development alliances, share training resources, optimize mobility mechanisms, and strive to find a balance between preserving local characteristics and promoting balanced development.

2. Pre employment training and sustainable development model

In the theoretical framework of teacher professionalization, a cultivation system that integrates theory and practice should be established during the pre service education period, while a multi-level professional support network should be built during the sustainable development stage. From an international comparative perspective, different countries exhibit some common characteristics and unique development paths based on their own local education ecosystems.

China is gradually establishing an institutional system in the field of rural teacher training that is tailored to local characteristics. The targeted teacher training system selects young people who aspire to participate in rural education through public funded education. After receiving systematic and professional training in normal universities, these young people will be

directed to teach in designated areas. This model effectively ensures that the rural teacher team can be continuously and stably replenished. The government led "National Training Program" has established a nationwide continuing education network, enhancing the professional abilities of in-service rural teachers through diversified activities such as short-term centralized training and sending teachers to rural areas. However, there is a certain bias in curriculum design, with more emphasis on teaching skills training and insufficient attention paid to the cultivation of teachers' educational research abilities. In addition, there are relatively few ways for rural teachers to participate in academic further education. Although some universities have established education master's programs, the proportion of teachers who can truly complete their academic qualifications is not high due to prominent engineering conflicts and economic pressures.

In the field of rural teacher training in China, a system tailored to local characteristics is gradually being constructed. The targeted teacher training system adopts the method of public funded education to select young people who are interested in dedicating themselves to rural education. After receiving systematic and professional training in normal universities, these young people will be assigned to the designated areas to teach. This model effectively ensures that the rural teachers can be continuously and steadily supplemented. However, in actual implementation, some regions have encountered problems: there is a certain degree of talent loss after the end of the service agreement period. The government led 'National Training Program' has established a nationwide continuing education network. It carries out various activities such as short-term concentrated training and sending teachers to rural areas to enhance the professional abilities of in-service rural teachers. However, there is a bias in curriculum design, with more emphasis on teaching skills training and insufficient attention paid to the cultivation of teachers' educational research abilities.

3. Career Promotion and Social Incentive Mechanism

The professional development mechanism for rural teachers plays a core role in ensuring the quality of grassroots education, and its policy design has a direct impact on the stability of the talent pool. Due to differences in social structures and educational philosophies among different countries, they exhibit unique characteristics in terms of career advancement and social motivation. This difference reflects the basic ideas of education governance in various countries, and also reveals the deep-seated contradictions in the process of institutional operation.

The support system for rural teachers in China takes basic guarantees as a key starting point and constructs a material incentive network that covers all stages of the teacher's career. Teaching experience allowance is distributed based on the length of work experience of teachers and becomes a stable component of their income; Teachers located at high altitudes or in remote areas can also receive specialized environmental subsidies. These institutional measures have effectively reduced the impact of economic factors on the career choices of rural teachers. In terms of professional development channels, targeted changes have been made to the standards for professional title evaluation. The requirements for academic achievements have been appropriately reduced, and more emphasis has been placed on examining the contributions of teachers in actual teaching and their years of service at the

grassroots level. However, the current promotion system that overly relies on administrative evaluation has significant drawbacks. Although the accumulation of teaching experience can ensure the gradual improvement of teachers' basic treatment, there are many difficulties in breaking through the institutional limitations of professional titles. After obtaining intermediate professional titles, most rural teachers fall into a bottleneck in their career development. This development dilemma has led some excellent rural teachers to choose to move to cities or simply switch careers. In recent years, the education department has attempted to establish an honor system for rural teachers, such as setting up honorary titles such as "Most Beautiful Rural Teacher", in order to provide teachers with spiritual incentives. But these are not substantial rewards, and their role in improving the career prospects of rural teachers is not significant.

The differentiated incentive model implemented in the United States emphasizes the integration of individual abilities and market mechanisms. The performance-based salary system directly links teacher compensation with teaching outcomes, and teachers who have obtained certification from the National Professional Teaching Standards Committee can embark on a fast track of career development. This ladder like promotion system provides a clear growth path for outstanding talents. Some state governments have launched a "career ladder plan" that divides teachers into five different levels: novice, skilled, and expert. Each level is matched with different salary benefits and professional permissions to motivate teachers to continuously improve their teaching level. However, this market-oriented incentive mechanism has structural issues. Due to differences in tax bases, there is a significant disparity in financial strength among different school districts. Wealthy school districts have the ability to provide teachers with generous salaries, while economically underdeveloped areas find it difficult to ensure that teachers receive higher incomes. This uneven distribution of resources makes it difficult for impoverished areas to attract high-quality teachers, and further widens the gap in the quality of education between urban and rural areas, forming a vicious cycle.

Conclusion

In summary, a cross-country comparative study on the career development path of rural teachers shows that there are core differences in policy design, which stem from the interaction between different educational governance traditions and social development demands. China's education policy has established a teacher development support network with Eastern characteristics, adopting institutionalized career ladder design and resource sinking mechanism. The advantage of this model is that it can ensure the professional stability and development expectations of rural teachers. The United States adopts a practical model based on market-oriented regulation and school-based empowerment, which focuses more on stimulating individual teachers' professional autonomy and innovation potential. The different policy orientations affect the professional growth paths of rural teachers in both countries and shape the inherent vitality of different educational ecosystems.

Reference

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