

Research on the Enrollment Policy for Rural College Students in Hunan Province and Its Optimization Path - A Case Study of Colleges and Universities in Hunan Province

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Abstract: After years of development, the enrollment policies for rural college students in Hunan Province's Colleges and Universities have evolved from the "One College Student per Village Program" to the "Farmer College Student Training Program", covering both junior college and undergraduate levels. Additionally, special programs have been implemented to help rural students gain admission to key universities, achieving remarkable results-such as increasing the enrollment rate of rural students and cultivating a large number of practical talents to support rural revitalization. However, challenges remain, including insufficient policy promotion, deviations in policy implementation, and inadequate supporting coordination. To address these issues, it is necessary to strengthen policy promotion and information sharing, improve implementation and supervision mechanisms, and enhance supporting measures and collaborative cooperation. These efforts will further optimize the policies, promote educational equity and rural revitalization, and provide a reference for the whole country.

Keywords: Rural College Students; Enrollment Policy; Rural Revitalization; Educational Equity

1. Introduction

Educational equity is a crucial cornerstone of social equity, which is related to the future development of every individual and the harmony and stability of society. In the current era, the concept of educational equity has been deeply rooted in people's hearts and has become a key indicator to measure the degree of civilization of a society. However, in the process of China's educational development, the gap between urban and rural education has always been a major factor restricting the realization of educational equity. There is a sharp contrast

between the abundant educational resources in cities and the relatively scarce ones in rural areas. This gap is not only reflected in hardware facilities, such as the construction of teaching buildings, laboratories, and libraries in schools, but also in many aspects, including teaching staff, educational quality, and educational opportunities. Due to the relatively backward economic development and limited financial investment in rural areas, educational funds are insufficient, making it difficult to attract and retain outstanding teachers. The overall quality of the teaching team is relatively low, teaching methods and means are relatively backward, and the educational quality cannot be effectively improved. This further affects rural students' access to high-quality education, limits their future development space, widens the gap between urban and rural areas, and forms a vicious circle [1]. Therefore, this study on the development of rural education in Hunan Province has important practical significance for promoting the realization of educational equity and advancing the economic and social development of rural areas in Hunan Province.

2. Analysis of the Current Situation of Enrollment Policies for Rural College Students in Hunan Province's Colleges and Universities

2.1 Development History of Enrollment Policies for Rural College Students in Hunan Province

The development history of Hunan Province's enrollment policies for rural college students shows an evolutionary path from partial pilot projects to full-scale promotion, from non-academic education to academic education, and from single-level coverage to multi-level coverage. In 2004, Hunan Open University took the lead in responding to the call of the Ministry of Education and launched the "One College Student per Village Program". This program

mainly enrolled junior college-level students in rural areas, made full use of the distance education resources of the National Open University system, and explored a feasible path for "local training" of farmer college students. Its core goal was to cultivate a group of practical talents who take root in rural areas, have high quality, and can lead the local social progress and career development, initially establishing a prototype for rural higher education talent cultivation [2]. This stage laid the foundation for the deepening of subsequent policies, but its coverage was relatively limited and the training level was relatively single.

In 2015, Hunan Province made an important upgrade to the program, expanding it into the "Farmer College Student Training Program". This marked that the policy coverage was no longer limited to "one per village", and at the same time, undergraduate-level enrollment was launched to meet the demand for higher-education talents at the rural grassroots level. A more significant change was that the program was elevated to a provincial strategic level, led by the Organization Department of the Provincial Committee, with the participation of the Department of Education, the Department of Finance, and the Department of Human Resources and Social Security, and incorporated into the overall plan of grassroots party building work. The teaching work was still undertaken by Hunan Open University (formerly Hunan Radio and Television University). This adjustment strengthened the organizational guarantee and resource investment for the policy, transforming it from a simple educational project into a comprehensive talent project serving grassroots party building and rural development.

Since 2020, the policy has entered a stage of in-depth integration and institutional innovation. Hunan Province has combined rural talent cultivation with the national higher vocational enrollment expansion strategy, launched the "Village (Community) Talent Training Project", and included the trainees in the full-time higher vocational enrollment scope. In 2021, the "Farmer College Student Training Program", continued to be led by the Organization Department of the Provincial Committee, further clarified the training model of "academic education + vocational skills training". Through the network of Hunan Open University across the province, the program focused on cultivating grassroots backbones such as members of the

village "two committees", reserve cadres, and rural revitalization leaders. Meanwhile, since 2015, Hunan Province has implemented the National Special Program, Local Special Program, and University Special Program (collectively referred to as the "Three Major Special Programs") for rural and poverty-stricken areas, aiming to directly increase rural students' opportunities to enter key universities. By 2025, these special programs have been continuously implemented, with continuous optimization in enrollment scale and qualification review mechanisms, forming a three-dimensional policy system where special programs and targeted training programs operate in parallel and complement each other, jointly serving the national strategies of educational equity and rural revitalization.

2.2 Main Contents of Enrollment Policies for Rural College Students in Hunan Province

The current enrollment policies for rural college students in Hunan Province mainly consist of two parts: one is the "Three Major Special Programs" for regular college entrance examination candidates, aiming to increase the proportion of rural students admitted to high-quality universities; the other is the "Farmer College Student Training Program" for specific groups, aiming to 定向 cultivate practical backbone talents for rural grassroots. These two types of policies have complementary target groups and jointly form a multi-level and all-round support system. The specific contents of the "Three Major Special Programs" are as follows:

National Special Program: This program is undertaken by universities directly under the central ministries and commissions and key universities in various provinces (autonomous regions, municipalities directly under the Central Government). In Hunan Province, the implementation areas include 40 counties (cities) which were originally concentrated contiguous special hardship areas and national poverty alleviation and development key counties. Candidates must meet both "household registration" and "school registration" requirements: they must have a household registration in the implementation area for more than 3 consecutive years, and their father, mother, or legal guardian must also have a local household registration; they must have a school registration in a senior high school in the county

(city) where their household registration is located for 3 consecutive years and actually study there. During the admission process, candidates' scores must reach the minimum admission control score line for general undergraduate programs in Hunan Province. If the number of applicants is insufficient, scores can be appropriately reduced for admission according to the policy to ensure the completion of the enrollment plan.

Local Special Program: This program is implemented by key universities under Hunan Province, and the enrollment scope covers all rural household registration students in the province. Candidates only need to meet the registration requirements for the general college entrance examination in Hunan Province and hold a rural household registration, with no rigid requirements on the length of school registration. Its admission arrangements and score reduction policies are basically consistent with the National Special Program, providing more opportunities for rural students in the province to enter key provincial universities [3].

University Special Program: This program is implemented by universities directly under the Ministry of Education and other universities with independent enrollment pilot qualifications, covering 51 counties (cities, districts) in Hunan Province, including Chaling County and Yanling County. The eligibility requirements are similar to those of the National Special Program: candidates and their father, mother, or legal guardian must have rural household registration; candidates must have a household registration in the local area for more than 3 consecutive years and a school registration in a local senior high school for 3 consecutive years and actually study there. The admission score is generally not lower than the reference score line for special type enrollment in Hunan Province.

On the other hand, the "Farmer College Student Training Program" is a targeted training model. This program is led by the Organization Department of the Hunan Provincial Committee, jointly promoted by multiple departments including the Department of Education and the Department of Finance, and the specific teaching work is undertaken by the Hunan Open University system. It adopts a training model combining "academic education" (mainly providing open education at the junior college and undergraduate levels) and "vocational skills training". The enrollment targets are clearly rural

in-service personnel, including members of the village "two committees", party members, reserve cadres, and leaders in getting rich. Its training goal is to cultivate a group of practical talents who are "retainable, usable, educated, skilled, and capable of management", enabling them to directly serve rural grassroots governance and industrial development.

2.3 Implementation Effects of Enrollment Policies for Rural College Students in Hunan Province

The implementation of Hunan Province's enrollment policies for rural college students has achieved remarkable effects, mainly reflected in three aspects: increasing rural students' access to higher education, promoting educational equity, and providing solid talent support for rural revitalization. These effects are supported by specific quantitative data.

First, in terms of increasing access to education, the "Three Major Special Programs" have effectively increased the proportion of rural students, especially those from poverty-stricken areas, admitted to key universities. Taking recent data as an example, the number of rural students admitted through the special programs in Hunan Province has continued to grow. According to statistics, in 2023, the National, Local, and University Special Programs admitted approximately 12,000 rural and poverty-stricken area students in Hunan, an increase of nearly 50% compared with 2016 when the policy was initially promoted. In 2025, with the continuous expansion of enrollment scale and optimization of admission policies, this number is expected to further increase. These policies have accurately opened up further education channels for rural students in specific regions. For example, in the 40 former poverty-stricken counties covered by the National Special Program, the proportion of students admitted through the special program among those who reached the first batch of undergraduate admission scores has increased from approximately 15% in 2015 to about 28% in 2023, significantly increasing rural students' access to high-quality higher education.

Second, in terms of promoting educational equity, the implementation of the policies is not only about providing quotas, but also about ensuring that resources truly benefit the target groups through strict procedures. Hunan Province has continuously strengthened supervision in the qualification review process.

For example, in the 2025 special program enrollment, it collaborated with public security departments to use big data technology to verify candidates' household registration migration records, focusing on cracking down on speculative behaviors such as "empty school registration" and "separation of person and registration". This measure has achieved obvious results: the elimination rate in qualification review increased in 2023 due to strict verification, effectively maintaining the fairness of the enrollment order. From the perspective of macro data, the gross enrollment rate of higher education for rural household registration students in Hunan Province has increased from less than 35% in 2015 to more than 58% in 2023, and the gap with the provincial average level has gradually narrowed. This proves that the policies have played a key role in narrowing the urban-rural educational gap and ensuring fair competition opportunities for rural students [4]. Finally, and most notably, the "Farmer College Student Training Program" has directly provided a large number of "retainable and usable" practical talents for rural revitalization. By the end of 2023, the program had trained and sent more than 150,000 graduates to over 20,000 administrative villages in the province, basically achieving full coverage of administrative villages. Most of these graduates chose to take root at the grassroots level after graduation. According to the follow-up survey data of graduates in the past 5 years, among 40,379 graduated students, approximately 77.2% (i.e., about 31,200 people) served as village cadres, enriching the grassroots governance force; at the same time, 55.6% (i.e., about 22,400 people) became leaders in rural industrial development or model households for getting rich by virtue of the skills they learned. In 2023, to further ensure the training quality, the full-time junior college enrollment also implemented a dual-track review mechanism, where the Education Examination Institute reviews the college entrance examination registration qualifications and Hunan Network Engineering Vocational College specifically reviews the application qualifications [5]. These high-quality talents are active in the frontline of rural construction, becoming "never-retreating" rural leaders, which has greatly promoted the local industrial upgrading and the modernization of social governance. To sum up, Hunan Province's enrollment policies for rural college students

have not only proven their success in expanding access to education and promoting educational equity with quantifiable data, but also achieved significant talent benefits and socio-economic benefits through the targeted training model, providing strong human capital support for the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy.

3. Problems Existing in Enrollment Policies for Rural College Students in Hunan Province's Colleges and Universities

3.1 Policy Promotion and Information Asymmetry

Although Hunan Province has made great efforts in the enrollment policies for rural college students, there is still insufficient policy promotion. Information in some rural areas is relatively blocked, resulting in some rural students and their parents not having a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the relevant policies. For example, some rural students in remote areas may not know whether they meet the application requirements for the special programs, or do not understand the specific development opportunities provided by the "Farmer College Student Training Program". This information asymmetry causes some eligible students to miss the opportunity to enjoy policy preferences, affecting the coverage of the policies and the expansion of the beneficiary groups [6]. In addition, the singleness of promotion channels also limits the communication effect of the policies to a certain extent. At present, promotion mainly relies on schools and grassroots organizations. However, some schools in rural areas have limited teaching staff, and their interpretation of the policies is not accurate and in-depth; the promotion work of grassroots organizations also has problems such as insufficient personnel and insufficiently diversified promotion methods, which makes it difficult to meet the needs of rural students and their parents for policy information.

3.2 Deviations in Policy Implementation

During the policy implementation process, there are some deviations in implementation. Taking the special programs as an example, although Hunan Province has strict regulations on the qualification review of candidates, in actual operation, some localities may not conduct strict qualification review for candidates in pursuit of

indicators such as enrollment rates, resulting in some ineligible students being admitted to the special programs and occupying the admission opportunities of truly rural students. This phenomenon not only damages the fairness of the policies, but also affects the credibility of the policies. At the same time, some colleges and universities do not attach enough importance to the special programs in the enrollment process, and there are problems such as unreasonable distribution of enrollment plans and insufficient enrollment promotion. Some colleges and universities regard the enrollment of special programs as a task, without fully recognizing its important significance for promoting educational equity and promoting rural revitalization, resulting in a greatly reduced enrollment effect of the special programs [7]. In addition, when some localities implement the "Farmer College Student Training Program", the selection of trainees is not scientific enough, and they do not fully consider the actual needs of rural areas for talents, leading to a certain disconnect between the trained talents and the actual needs of rural development.

3.3 Insufficient Policy Supporting Measures and Coordination

The enrollment policies for rural college students in Hunan Province involve multiple departments, but there are still some deficiencies in policy supporting measures and coordination. For example, in the "Farmer College Student Training Program", although it is led by the Organization Department of the Hunan Provincial Committee and jointly implemented by multiple departments including education and finance, in actual operation, the communication and coordination mechanism between various departments is not perfect, and there are problems such as delayed information sharing and unsmooth work connection. The work of the education department in enrollment and teaching management lacks effective coordination with the financial support of the finance department and the talent selection and use of the Organization Department, leading to some loopholes and problems in the policy implementation process [8]. In addition, the insufficient supporting measures of the policies also affect the implementation effect. For example, in the implementation of the special programs, although rural students are provided with opportunities to enter key universities, there

is insufficient support for their study and life after entering the universities. Some rural students face many difficulties in their studies and life in Colleges and Universities due to family economic difficulties, while the relevant policies have insufficient supporting measures in the funding system and psychological counseling, which affects the study and development of rural students in Colleges and Universities and also weakens the attractiveness and influence of the policies.

4. Optimization Paths of Enrollment Policies for Rural College Students in Hunan Province's Colleges and Universities

4.1 Strengthen Policy Promotion and Information Sharing

To effectively expand the coverage and accessibility of Hunan Province's enrollment policies for rural college students, it is necessary to focus on breaking the information barriers in rural areas. Currently, we can learn from the experience of the U.S. "Upward Bound" program and Australia's Remote Area Higher Education Support Scheme to build a multi-channel, all-round, and precise policy promotion and information sharing system. The "Upward Bound" program, part of the U.S. Federal TRIO Programs, has significantly improved the effectiveness of information transmission by assigning program coordinators to work in high schools with a concentration of low-income families for a long time, establishing stable connections with students and their families, and providing one-on-one further education guidance. Based on this, Hunan Province can, on the one hand, make full use of digital means. Beyond setting up special columns on government official websites and official WeChat accounts, it can develop dedicated mobile applications or cooperate with mainstream social platforms (such as Douyin and WeChat Channels) to produce a series of animations, short videos, and live Q&A sessions in local dialects. These materials, presented in a way that rural students and parents like, dynamically interpret the application procedures, preferential terms, and successful cases of the special programs and the "Farmer College Student Training Program", ensuring the readability and attractiveness of the information [9]. On the other hand, it is necessary to strengthen the depth of offline outreach. We can

learn from the role of "Outreach Practitioners" in the UK's "Widening Participation" policy and establish a volunteer team in Hunan Province composed of college admissions officers, outstanding rural college students, and grassroots educators. This team regularly goes to township middle schools and villages to hold policy workshops, campus open days, and home visits. In particular, systematic policy training should be provided to senior high school teachers to cultivate them into "the first responsible persons for policy promotion", enabling them to accurately and timely integrate policy information into daily teaching and further education guidance. At the same time, a feedback mechanism similar to the "one-stop" education information portal in Ontario, Canada should be established, with a free hotline and online consultation platform set up to promptly collect and answer questions from rural families, forming a closed loop of "promotion-feedback-optimization". This will fundamentally eliminate information asymmetry and ensure that policy dividends are not diluted by the information gap [10].

4.2 Improve Policy Implementation and Supervision Mechanisms

To ensure the fairness and implementation of the policies, it is necessary to introduce more strict standards and more transparent mechanisms in the implementation and supervision links. Internationally, when the UK implements the "Contextual Admissions" policy, universities will refer to background information such as the overall scores of the applicant's high school and the socio-economic index of the community where the applicant lives, and give appropriate consideration to applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, the entire process is supervised by a national unified data standard and an independent Office for Students to prevent the abuse of the policy. In the qualification review of the special programs, Hunan Province can learn from this experience and build a multi-department joint review mechanism based on big data. In addition to the existing three-level review by schools, county-level, and provincial-level education departments, it should link the household registration data of public security departments and the economic status information of social security departments to establish a unified "rural student identity verification platform". This

platform realizes cross-verification of data and automatically warns of abnormal situations such as "separation of person and registration" and "empty school registration", thereby shifting the review from being mainly based on manual judgment to being data-driven, improving rigor and efficiency. At the same time, an independent supervision and accountability channel must be established. We can learn from the way the U.S. College Board handles SAT fraud: those who falsify qualifications will not only have their admission qualifications revoked, but also be included in the integrity file, and units and individuals who are derelict in their review duties will be publicly notified and seriously held accountable as a warning. For colleges and universities, We can learn from the practice of Australian universities when enrolling students from remote areas and require them to publicly release annual enrollment reports for students in the special programs. These reports should detail the basis for quota allocation, selection criteria, support measures, and students' academic performance, and be subject to public supervision. This will force Colleges and Universities to increase their attention and improve enrollment efficiency [11]. For the "Farmer College Student Training Program", its selection mechanism can learn from the model in Germany's "Dual System" education where enterprises and schools jointly formulate training programs. A demand demonstration committee involving township governments, agricultural cooperatives, and leading enterprises should be established to jointly formulate selection standards and training directions based on local industrial planning and talent level needs, realizing "training on demand" and avoiding the disconnect between talents and positions from the source.

4.3 Strengthen Policy Supporting Measures and Collaborative Cooperation

The ultimate effect of the policies depends not only on the admission link, but also on the continuous and systematic support after admission and the collaborative cooperation of various departments. Hunan Province can learn from the concept of "student support ecosystem" promoted by OECD countries and build a full-chain support system covering academic, economic, psychological, and career development aspects. First, in terms of inter-departmental collaboration, we can follow

the example of Japan's "Local Creation" talent program, which is jointly promoted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, and local governments. A fixed and high-level inter-departmental joint meeting system should be established. Led by the Organization Department of the Provincial Committee or the Department of Education, regular meetings should be held to bring together departments such as finance, human resources and social security, and agriculture and rural areas, as well as training institutions such as Hunan Open University. These meetings will jointly review the progress of the "Farmer College Student Training Program", share students' academic and employment data, and collaboratively solve problems throughout the process from fund allocation to job matching, ensuring a seamless connection between the "training-employment" links [12]. Second, in terms of supporting measures, the support for special program students after they enter the university is crucial. In terms of economic support, we can learn from the "scholarship + loan" mixed funding model in Nordic countries. On the basis of the existing scholarships and grants, a "rural revitalization special interest-free loan" or "tuition reimbursement" program for rural students should be established. It is stipulated that if students serve in the grassroots level of Hunan for a certain number of years after graduation, part or all of the debt can be waived. This can not only alleviate the economic pressure, but also guide the return of talents. In terms of academic and psychological support, all colleges and universities should be required to establish a "rural student support center". Learning from the "Student Success Center" of the University of California system in the United States, this center provides one-stop services for rural students, including cross-cultural adaptation, academic counseling, and career planning, and assigns mentors with the same background to provide peer guidance. This helps rural students overcome the disadvantage of "cultural capital", enhance their sense of belonging and accomplishment. Finally, for the "Farmer College Student Training Program", the finance department needs to establish a dynamic adjustment mechanism for performance-based funding, linking funds to output indicators such as the grassroots service effect and entrepreneurial success rate of graduated

students; the organization department needs to open up the talent promotion channel, institutionally linking students' performance with village-level organization elections and grassroots cadre selection, forming a closed loop of "selection-training-employment". This will truly enhance the attractiveness and long-term influence of the policies and forge a core talent team that can settle down, stay, and be useful for rural revitalization.

5. Conclusion

The enrollment policies for rural college students in Hunan Province's Colleges and Universities have achieved remarkable results in increasing the enrollment rate of rural students, promoting educational equity, and supporting rural revitalization. However, there are still some problems with policy promotion, implementation, and supporting coordination. By strengthening policy promotion and information sharing, improving policy implementation and supervision mechanisms, and enhancing policy supporting measures and collaborative cooperation, the implementation effect of the policies can be further improved. This will not only help more rural students realize their college dreams, but also provide solid talent support for rural revitalization, promote the all-round development of rural economy and society, and promote the in-depth integration of educational equity and social progress, providing a useful reference for the educational reform and development of Hunan Province and even the whole country.

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