

"Push" and "Pull" Factors Influencing Rural College Students' Grassroots Employment in the Context of the Rural Revitalization Strategy from the Perspective of Counselor Guidance

Ji LIU^{1*}, Jiasen PAN²

1. Physical Education College of Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang 330022, China; 2. The College of Fine Arts of Jiangxi Normal University, Nanchang 330022, China

Abstract This study focuses on the talent supply-demand contradiction in grassroots employment under the Rural Revitalization Strategy. It systematically analyzes the internal and external driving mechanisms behind rural college students' decisions to pursue careers at the grassroots level, exploring the "push-pull" factors and the guiding role of university counselors. Employing a mixed-methods approach combining literature review and in-depth interviews, the analysis reveals that urban employment competition pressure, high cost of living coupled with economic burdens, and household registration and social resource barriers constitute the primary "push" factors. Conversely, national policy support, emotional attachment to one's hometown and the need for value realization, as well as grassroots development opportunities and growth potential, serve as the main "pull" factors. University counselors play a significant guiding role in the employment decision-making process of rural college students. Through ideological guidance, information dissemination, capacity building, and psychological support, they enhance students' job-seeking capabilities and adaptability to grassroots work, thereby strengthening their identification with such career paths. This paper provides practical insights for counselors facilitating the return of rural college students to grassroots employment.

Key words Rural college students, Grassroots employment, Push and Pull factors, Counselor guidance, Rural revitalization

0 Introduction

The Rural Revitalization Strategy serves as China's overarching approach to addressing issues related to agriculture, rural areas, and farmers. It emphasizes the implementation of a new concept and measures for integrated rural development, encapsulated in the "Five-Pronged Approach" of "thriving businesses, pleasant living environments, social etiquette and civility, effective governance, and prosperity"^[1]. Since its implementation, the grassroots level has become a crucial front for absorbing talent and driving social development^[2]. With the ongoing advancement of the Rural Revitalization Strategy, the demand for high-quality talent at the grassroots level is becoming increasingly urgent. Nonetheless, rural college students still encounter numerous challenges in securing employment at this level. Cities, with their abundant resources, diverse development opportunities, and well-established public service systems, strongly attract rural college students to seek urban employment. However, practical difficulties such as intense competition and high living costs associated with integrating into the urban job market often deter them. This supply-demand mismatch results in a situation where many rural college students struggle to find employment, while talent needs at the grassroots level remain unmet, making the promotion of grassroots employment for rural students a pressing issue.

Employment constitutes the foundation of people's liveli-

hoods, impacting personal development, family well-being, social stability, and national prosperity^[3]. As a significant demographic, the employment situation of college students is of paramount importance^[4]. Domestic scholars have primarily focused their research on college student employment and entrepreneurship on the current situation, existing problems and their causes, and potential countermeasures, employing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. For instance, Liu Yu *et al.*^[5] concentrated on current issues in graduate employment, conducting in-depth analyses of the employment landscape and challenges to propose response strategies. Ma Haoxin^[6], guided by human resource demands, assessed the status quo of the labor market and students' employability/entrepreneurial skills, offering suggestions for capability enhancement. In contrast, foreign scholars have tended to emphasize theoretical research on employment, yielding substantial results such as Human Capital Theory and Career Development Education Theory^[7]. These studies provide theoretical guidance for college student employment from a macro perspective. Overall, there is a scarcity of research examining the grassroots employment of rural college students through the combined lens of Push-Pull theory and the perspective of university counselor guidance.

In the context of the Rural Revitalization Strategy, this paper, grounded in the perspective of counselor guidance, applies the Push-Pull theory to the study of rural college students' grassroots employment. It innovatively proposes a three-dimensional interaction model of "Push Factors-Pull Factors-Counselor Guidance". This model integrates push factors, pull factors, and counselor guidance to comprehensively and systematically analyze the decision-making mechanism behind rural students' choice of grass-

Received: August 19, 2025 Accepted: October 22, 2025

Supported by Jiangxi University Humanities and Social Sciences Research Project (GL23110).

* Corresponding author. Ji LIU, teaching assistant, master's degree.

roots employment, offering new research insights and approaches to address this issue.

1 Theoretical basis and research framework

1.1 Push-Pull theory The Push-Pull theory originated in the 1880s with British economist and sociologist Ravenstein, who proposed the basic framework of the "Laws of Migration". Subsequently, Donald Bogue and E. S. Lee expanded upon Ravenstein's work, ultimately forming the highly influential Push-Pull theory for studying population mobility and migration^[8]. In the context of employment, the Push-Pull theory posits that an individual's job choice results from the combined effect of push and pull factors. Push factors are those that encourage leaving the current environment, while pull factors attract individuals to a new environment.

1.2 Maslow's hierarchy of needs The renowned American philosopher, social psychologist, personality theorist, and comparative psychologist Abraham Maslow^[9] categorized human needs into five levels: physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Rural college students are influenced, to varying degrees, by these need levels when making employment decisions.

Grassroots employment may, to some extent, fulfill their physiological and safety needs by providing basic livelihood security and a stable work environment. Furthermore, if they can realize personal and social value at the grassroots level, it can also satisfy their esteem and self-actualization needs.

1.3 Research framework As shown in Fig. 1, based on the aforementioned theories, this paper constructs a three-dimensional interaction model of "Push Factors-Pull Factors-Counselor Guidance". This model organically integrates push factors, pull factors, and counselor guidance to comprehensively explore the decision-making mechanism for rural college students' grassroots employment. Within this model, push factors exert external pressure on rural students, nudging them towards considering grassroots employment. Pull factors internally attract them to actively seek such opportunities. Counselor guidance permeates this process; through ideological leadership, policy interpretation, capacity building, role model demonstration, and emotional mobilization, counselors moderate the influence of push and pull factors on the students' decision-making, encouraging their active engagement in grassroots work.

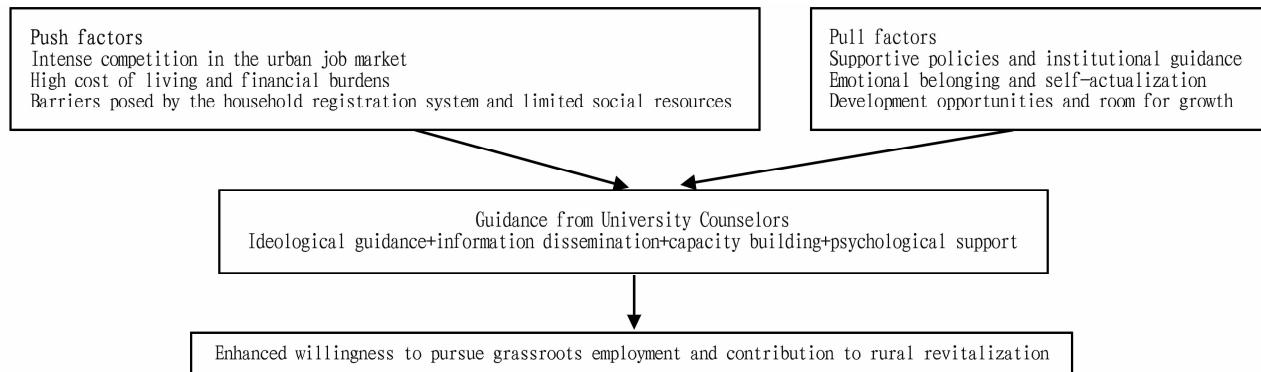


Fig. 1 The three-dimensional interaction model of "push factors-pull factors-counselor guidance"

2 Analysis on push factors in rural college students' grassroots employment

2.1 Pressure from urban employment competition Cities function as the economic and cultural hubs of a region, concentrating high-quality resources and attracting a large number of job seekers. In recent years, over ten million college graduates have entered the job market annually, including many talented individuals from key universities. For rural college students, despite possessing solid professional knowledge, limitations stemming from their upbringing environment and family support often result in potential gaps compared to their urban counterparts in terms of comprehensive quality, practical experience, and social resources. In the current highly competitive job market, rural students often face greater employment pressure, and the difficulty of securing desirable positions increases significantly. This is particularly true in popular sectors like finance and internet technology, where recruiters tend to favor graduates from prestigious universities or those

with substantial internship experience, potentially putting rural students at a disadvantage even at the resume screening stage.

2.2 Cost of living and economic burden Compared to rural areas, the cost of living in cities is significantly higher, especially regarding housing, food, and transportation. Regarding housing, high urban rent levels pose a challenge. Recent rural graduates often receive limited financial support from their families, while entry-level salaries are typically low, making it difficult to afford expensive rent. Consequently, many are forced to choose accommodation in distant or poorly equipped areas, leading to longer commutes, higher transportation expenses, and a reduced quality of life. Furthermore, daily expenses for meals, shopping, entertainment, and social activities are not negligible, further compounding their financial burden. Against this backdrop, some rural students are compelled to reassess the feasibility of long-term urban employment, consequently turning their attention to grassroots opportunities as a means to reduce living costs and alleviate economic pressure.

2.3 Household registration and social resource barriers The household registration system, a core factor influencing population mobility, distribution, and welfare, has profoundly shaped China's urban-rural dual structure^[10] and also affects the integration of rural college students into cities. Many cities impose varying levels of restrictions on the floating population regarding access to public services such as home purchasing, children's education, and healthcare. Even if rural students secure desirable jobs in cities, they might be unable to enjoy the same benefits as local residents due to their household registration status. From a social resource perspective, urban relational networks are complex. Rural students, with limited social resources and weak personal connections, often face more challenges in career advancement and project collaboration. Particularly in certain industries where internal referrals or personal introductions are key channels for obtaining quality positions, the lack of such social capital makes it harder for rural graduates to access these opportunities. This increases employment uncertainty and restricts their potential for career progression.

3 Analysis on pull factors in rural college students' grassroots employment

3.1 National policy support and guidance Rural college students represent a vital force in advancing the Rural Revitalization Strategy. To encourage their employment at the grassroots level, the state has introduced a series of policy measures. Economically, special subsidies for grassroots employment have been established, providing living allowances and settlement grants to rural students working at the grassroots level to alleviate their initial financial burdens. Regarding career development, the state has built a relatively comprehensive promotion system for grassroots talent, explicitly stipulating that outstanding performers in such roles receive bonus points or priority eligibility in civil service examinations and public institution recruitment. Simultaneously, local governments and relevant departments regularly organize training activities and learning programs to help rural college students at the grassroots level enhance their professional skills and overall competence, gradually forming a positive cycle where they "can stay, perform well, and develop quickly".

3.2 Emotional attachment to hometown and need for value realization One's hometown serves as an emotional anchor. Having grown up in rural areas, rural students harbor deep feelings for the familiar natural environment and cultural landscape of their homes. Witnessing the developmental constraints and talent shortages in their hometowns often sparks a desire to apply their acquired knowledge to contribute to their communities, achieving a unity of self-worth and social value. For example, some agriculture-related graduates, upon discovering that local specialty agricultural products are unsold due to a lack of scientific cultivation and market promotion, develop ideas for returning home to start businesses. By establishing cooperatives or utilizing e-commerce platforms, they promote these products, expanding sales channels and in-

creasing collective income for local farmers. This sense of responsibility and mission, rooted in affection for their hometown, has become a significant spiritual force driving rural students back to grassroots work and local development.

3.3 Grassroots development opportunities and growth potential With the continuous promotion of the Rural Revitalization Strategy, the grassroots level is also experiencing substantial development opportunities. Various regions are actively developing emerging industries such as specialty agriculture, rural tourism, and rural e-commerce, providing diverse employment opportunities and broad development space for rural college students. Leveraging their professional knowledge and innovative capacity, they can find suitable positions across various segments of these industrial chains. Grassroots work, characterized by its complexity and intersecting responsibilities, is challenging yet hones their comprehensive skills. This further enhances their core competencies in problem-solving, communication, coordination, and organizational management, laying a solid foundation for future career advancement and sustained development.

4 The role of counselor guidance in rural college students' grassroots employment

4.1 Ideological guidance: correcting employment perception biases Influenced by traditional career choice concepts, some rural college students view urban employment as the "ideal path", lacking a correct understanding of grassroots positions. As guides for students' ideological education, counselors can utilize various formats like thematic class meetings and employment lectures to elaborate on the policy background and practical significance of the Rural Revitalization Strategy, guiding students to reassess the value and development potential of grassroots employment. For instance, inviting outstanding alumni who have succeeded in grassroots roles to share their experiences and gains through campus talks can help students correct misconceptions using real-life cases, thereby strengthening their identification with grassroots careers.

4.2 Information dissemination: providing targeted employment information In the current era of information overload, rural college students often struggle to access or discern accurate and effective information about grassroots employment opportunities. As the primary personnel responsible for student employment, counselors must fully act as bridges, extensively gathering information on national and local grassroots employment policies, employer recruitment needs, and industry trends. This information should be promptly communicated to students through various channels like class groups, official social media accounts, and employment information websites. Counselors can provide personalized, one-on-one employment services tailored to students' specific majors and career intentions. For example, for students majoring in agriculture, emphasis should be placed on pushing positions like grassroots agricultural technology promotion or agro-processing. For those with entrepreneurial aspirations, information on grassro-

ots startup support policies and success stories can be provided to help identify suitable entrepreneurial directions.

4.3 Capacity building: enhancing employment competitiveness

Grassroots work often presents certain difficulties and challenges, requiring a high level of comprehensive quality and adaptability from rural college students. The sophomore and junior years are a critical period for cultivating students' professional abilities and overall quality. Counselors should leverage this stage to help students enhance their employability through diverse training and practical activities. On the one hand, activities such as regular career planning lectures, resume design workshops, and mock interviews can be organized to systematically develop students' job-seeking skills. On the other hand, students should be actively guided to participate in social practice, grassroots fieldwork, and volunteer services, allowing them to experience grassroots work in real contexts and gradually develop professional identity and psychological preparedness for serving at this level.

4.4 Psychological adjustment: alleviating employment-related psychological stress

During the decision-making process regarding grassroots employment, rural college students may face various psychological pressures, including anxiety about adapting to the grassroots environment and concerns about future career development. As facilitators of students' psychological well-being, counselors should proactively pay attention to these potential psychological issues among rural students, providing necessary psychological support and guidance in a timely manner. Through methods such as heart-to-heart conversations and group psychological counseling, students' resilience and perseverance can be further strengthened. When students encounter setbacks in their job search, counselors should patiently listen to their concerns, guide them to analyze the reasons step-by-step, summarize lessons learned, rebuild their confidence, and face the challenges of grassroots employment with a positive mindset.

5 Discussion and conclusion

5.1 Discussion

The decision of rural college students to pursue grassroots employment is the result of the interaction between both push and pull factors. High competition pressure, high economic costs in cities, and household registration/social resource barriers are significant push factors. For instance, applicant-to-position ratios for many popular jobs easily exceed 100 : 1, and rural students, often at a competitive disadvantage due to educational background and resource limitations, are compelled to turn their attention to grassroots opportunities. Simultaneously, policy incentives under the Rural Revitalization Strategy, emotional ties to hometowns, and grassroots development opportunities constitute strong pull factors. These include financial support like employment subsidies and settlement allowances, as well as the rise of industries like specialty agriculture and rural tourism, offering students from relevant majors (e.g., agriculture, tourism) vast avenues to utilize their talents. However, the effectiveness of these

pull factors is still constrained by issues such as inadequate policy implementation and the need for improvement in the grassroots environment, leading some rural students to hesitate about choosing grassroots employment.

Meanwhile, university counselors play a bridging role in this process. Through ideological guidance, they help correct the bias that grassroots employment is a "second-best option" and foster the value of "integrating personal growth with national strategy". Through targeted information dissemination, they address information asymmetry. Through capacity building and psychological adjustment, they enhance students' employability and adaptability to grassroots work. However, this employment support is not a solo performance by counselors alone, whose individual capacities are limited. Achieving high-quality grassroots employment for rural students requires the concerted efforts of the entire student affairs team, fully integrating relevant employment resources to provide effective support.

To further promote grassroots employment for rural college students, future efforts should involve multi-faceted coordination, including policy optimization, local support, institutional guidance from universities, and shifts in individual and family perceptions, to provide comprehensive support.

5.2 Conclusion Based on the perspective of counselor guidance and incorporating the Push-Pull theory, this paper systematically analyzed the push and pull factors influencing rural college students' grassroots employment under the Rural Revitalization Strategy, as well as the guiding role of counselors in this process. The study finds that:

(i) Urban employment competition pressure, cost of living/economic burdens, and household registration/social resource barriers constitute the push factors. National policy support, hometown emotional attachment/value realization needs, and grassroots development opportunities/growth space form strong pull factors. However, the effectiveness of the pull factors is constrained by issues like inadequate policy implementation and the need for environmental improvements at the grassroots level.

(ii) Counselors, as guides for student development, play a significant role in the grassroots employment of rural students through ideological guidance, information dissemination, capacity building, and psychological adjustment, effectively facilitating the formation of students' decisions to pursue grassroots careers.

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