

# *An Academic Exploration of the Educational Assistance Pathways for Empowering Rural Revitalization in Xinfeng County, Northern Guangdong via Picture Books*

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**Abstract:** Educational assistance, as a key link to stimulate endogenous motivation in the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy, plays a crucial role. As an important area in the process of rural revitalization implementation, the northern part of Xinfeng County is currently facing the dual predicament of scarce educational resources and broken cultural heritage. The traditional assistance mechanism is difficult to continue. However, picture books, as a medium that integrates educational warmth, artistic aesthetics, and cultural vitality, have not yet bloomed their due brilliance on the fertile soil of rural education. This article aims to be based on the actual situation of rural education in Xinfeng County, Guangdong, and to explore the potential power of picture books in cultural heritage, educational equity, and psychological health by using picture books as a carrier. It proposes the development path of localized picture books and injects sustainable educational power into rural revitalization.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Structural shortage of educational resources**

Xinfeng County in northern Guangdong, a typical mountainous region, remains trapped in a dilemma of resource scarcity amidst the nationwide initiative leveraging education to revitalize rural areas. Compared to the shortage of hardware facilities, this structural deficit is even more pronounced in the imbalance of soft resources, including teaching staff, curriculum design, and cultural adaptability. Currently, rural schools in the region face an insufficient supply of teachers specializing in arts and reading guidance, who have not yet received adequate attention. Furthermore, standardized textbooks fail to address the personalized learning needs of rural children.

Picture books, characterized by their interplay of text and imagery, vivid storytelling, and profound cultural depth, possess the potential to bridge the gap in rural educational resources. However, their practical application falls significantly short of expectations, primarily due to two

factors: First, the limited number of picture books available in Xinfeng County schools predominantly feature urban life scenarios, creating a disconnect with the lived experiences of local children[4]. Second, teachers in the county lack specialized training in picture book-based pedagogy, resulting in missed opportunities to integrate language development, aesthetic education, social-emotional learning, and cultural heritage preservation into their instruction, thereby undermining the full educational value of picture books.

### **1.2. Discontinuity in Cultural Transmission and the Weakening of Community Cohesion**

In the context of accelerating urbanization, education in Xinfeng County is confronting dual challenges: weakening community cohesion and a rupture in cultural inheritance. On one hand, rural communities are experiencing demographic "hollowing-out" as young and middle-aged adults migrate for work, leaving behind primarily the elderly and left-behind children. This shift has led to a contraction of public cultural spaces and a decline in the frequency of collective activities, thereby eroding community cohesion and resulting in a state of "suspension" between education and the community. On the other hand, indigenous cultural practices, such as Hakka mountain songs and folk handicrafts, face a crisis of transmission. The outmigration of the younger workforce means that traditional skills held by the elder generation lack successors, while the predominance of standardized curricula in schools has led to the absence of localized cultural courses. Consequently, children's understanding of local dialects and customs is becoming increasingly blurred, and their sense of identity with their native culture is steadily weakening[5]. The current situation in this region is misaligned with the objectives of revitalizing rural areas through education. Although the Rural Revitalization Strategy emphasizes "education empowerment" and the "preservation of cultural roots," these goals lack sustainable vehicles for implementation in Xinfeng County's rural schools. Pervasive issues such as resource scarcity and structural shortages of teaching staff hinder the operationalization of these strategic priorities.

### **1.3. The assistance mechanism is unsustainable**

Institutional instability has emerged as a critical bottleneck constraining the advancement of educational equity and quality in Xinfeng County's efforts to leverage education for rural revitalization. This challenge manifests primarily in three interrelated dimensions:

First, assistance mechanisms exhibit excessive reliance on external resources while lacking endogenous driving forces. Educational support initiatives in Xin Feng County predominantly consist of temporary projects—such as donations of instructional hardware, short-term volunteer teaching programs, and one-off professional development workshops for teachers. However, the national Rural Revitalization Strategy explicitly emphasizes cultivating indigenous cultural vitality and sustainable local capacity[1]. While such externally driven interventions may address immediate needs, they fail to establish enduring support systems; consequently, educational progress reverts to its prior state once external assistance ceases.

Secondly, there is a significant discrepancy between the content of assistance provided and the actual needs of the recipients. The donated picture books predominantly feature urban life scenarios, making it difficult for local children to relate to or resonate with the content due to its disconnect from their lived experiences. Children in Xinfeng County, many of whom are left-behind due to long-term parental migration, suffer from a lack of family-based education and emotional support, thereby urgently requiring educational interventions to address gaps in their psychological and cognitive development. In practice, external aid projects have failed to objectively transform local natural landscapes, agricultural culture, and folk traditions into appropriate, localized picture book

educational resources[3]. Consequently, picture book-based teaching has become detached from reality, trapping rural education in a predicament of passively adapting to external standards.

Third, deficiencies in technological infrastructure and human capital undermine the sustainability of digital education support. Although contemporary picture books can be integrated with digital platforms (e.g., online reading systems) to enhance pedagogical effectiveness[7], the absence of localized technical support prevents these high-quality resources from meaningfully benefiting rural schools. Furthermore, most local teachers lack sufficient digital literacy, thereby impeding the implementation of online courses, remote teaching research activities, and other technology-enabled educational innovations. This situation epitomizes the phenomenon of "institutional mismatch" wherein externally introduced solutions prove incompatible with local contextual realities.

## **2. The Core Functions of Picture Book Education and Their Compatibility with Rural Revitalization**

### **2.1. The Function of Painting as a Carrier of Cultural Inheritance**

The inheritance of local culture constitutes the soul of rural revitalization in a given region. Xinfeng County in northern Guangdong Province boasts abundant cultural resources, and the unique characteristics of picture books enable the subtle transmission of these cultural essences, silently stimulating children's interest in and identification with their local heritage[3]. For instance, the "My Hometown—Xinfeng County" Picture Book Creation Competition, jointly organized by Guangdong University of Foreign Studies South China Business College and Xinfeng County, exemplifies such an initiative. Through participating in picture book creation, children draw upon their own life experiences and local knowledge to personally engage with the distinctive customs and landscapes of their hometowns, thereby enhancing their sense of cultural belonging and pride. By adopting this picture-book-based educational approach, schools not only activate the vitality of local culture but also extend the scope of its intergenerational transmission. Consequently, rural cultural confidence is reinvigorated, creating favorable opportunities for the synergistic advancement of educational and cultural revitalization[1].

Along the pathway whereby education drives rural revitalization, the significance of picture-book education for the inheritance of rural culture lies not merely in the presentation of content within the books, but more profoundly in the cultivation of cultural identity and national self-confidence[5]. For children, this internally generated sense of cultural 认同 (cultural identity) serves as a powerful intrinsic motivation to inherit and promote rural culture, empowering them to become young ambassadors of local heritage. In doing so, they lay a solid foundation for the continuity and sustainable development of rural culture.

### **2.2. Tools for Empowering Educational Equity**

**A Primary Goal of Rural Revitalization: Promoting Educational Equity through Picture Book-Enhanced Pedagogy.** Xinfeng County in northern Guangdong, a representative mountainous region, has long grappled with challenges such as scarce educational resources and an underqualified teaching workforce, resulting in compromised quality of early childhood education. Picture books, by virtue of their inherent characteristics, disrupt traditional "rote-learning" pedagogical models. Their integration of text and imagery, coupled with narrative-driven and contextually embedded design, effectively stimulates reading interest among rural children during their early developmental stages, while concurrently fostering imagination and linguistic expression capabilities[6]. On one

hand, picture books, as a low-cost and easily accessible high-quality reading resource, can be leveraged to construct a localized picture book resource system. This system provides richer reading materials for rural schools, communities, and families, serving as a crucial instrument to bridge the urban-rural educational divide when educational resources are scarce, thereby offering equitable educational opportunities for rural children. These picture books encompass domains such as language initiation, local cultural awareness, and psychological well-being. The development of a graded reading resource library further facilitates meeting the diverse reading needs of children across different age groups[6]. On the other hand, as a lightweight educational tool, picture books—through theoretical training, classroom implementation, and iterative feedback—help rural teachers enhance their abilities in interpreting picture books and integrating interdisciplinary content. This approach alleviates negative emotions among students arising from standardized instruction and provides supplementary teaching materials aligned with the cognitive development patterns of rural children, complementing standard instructional materials[4]. The "Picture Books + Teachers" support model not only elevates teachers' pedagogical proficiency but also establishes a solid foundation for the sustainable development of rural education.

The implementation and application of picture book education provide rural children with high-quality educational resources comparable to those available to urban children, thereby narrowing the gap between urban and rural education. While enhancing the cognitive and learning capabilities of rural children, picture book education also drives the overall improvement of rural education quality, cultivating essential talent reserves and providing sustained support for the Rural Revitalization Strategy.

### **2.3. The therapeutic value of mental health**

Picture books, as a psychological intervention medium for safeguarding the mental health of rural children, demonstrate significant therapeutic efficacy. In Xinfeng County, northern Guangdong Province, a substantial proportion of children are left-behind, confronting psychological challenges such as emotional deprivation due to parental absence and tendencies toward low self-esteem. Functioning as gentle guides for the soul, picture books provide crucial emotional support and psychological counseling, thereby facilitating healthy development. Through themed picture books focusing on emotional regulation and life education, complemented by interactive activities such as teacher-student shared reading and peer role-playing, children are encouraged to open up and articulate their inner experiences under guided facilitation. This process effectively alleviates feelings of loneliness and anxiety stemming from parental separation[4]. The therapeutic function of picture book-based education serves as a vital support mechanism for the mental well-being of rural children. Under its influence, these children are better equipped to cultivate positive and optimistic mindsets, enabling them to navigate life's challenges more effectively. Concurrently, this contributes to fostering a harmonious and stable social environment, thereby supporting the broader objectives of rural revitalization.

### **2.4. Potential for Industrial Linkage**

In addition to its role in inheriting rural culture, picture book education offers new pathways for rural industrial development. As cultural and creative products, picture books possess high cultural added value and significant market potential. Developing locally themed picture books and related derivative cultural products can transform rural cultural resources into economic assets, thereby promoting the growth of the rural cultural industry. Based on picture books, a three-tier curriculum system comprising "picture book creation–curriculum development–product transformation" has

been established in Xinfeng County, northern Guangdong. This model further facilitates the deep integration of educational empowerment and industrial revitalization[1]. For instance, corporate sponsorship of picture book creation and the establishment of shared reading communities for urban and rural children contribute to developing sustainable support mechanisms. Such initiatives not only provide financial support for rural educational revitalization but also attract greater social resources toward rural areas, injecting new momentum into rural economic development. Moreover, picture book education fosters creativity and aesthetic literacy among rural children. Through activities such as picture book creation and handicraft making, children stimulate innovative thinking and develop entrepreneurial awareness. This "education–industry" linked development model offers new perspectives for the sustainable development of the rural economy and broadens the pathways for rural revitalization.

In summary, picture books play an irreplaceable role in sustaining local culture, ensuring equitable access to educational resources, nurturing psychological resilience among rural children, and activating synergistic development across related industries[4]. The core values embedded in picture book education provide enduring endogenous momentum for the rural revitalization process in Xinfeng County, effectively coordinating and promoting local cultural prosperity, substantial improvement in educational quality, and high-quality socioeconomic development.

### **3. Integrative Embedding and Empowerment Pathways: Leveraging Picture Book Education for the Revitalization of Xinfeng County.**

#### **3.1. Deep Integration of Picture Book Education with the Realities of Rural Education**

To enhance the practical effectiveness of education, picture book-based pedagogy must be deeply aligned with the local realities of Xinfeng County in northern Guangdong Province and systematically integrated into rural educational practices. Characterized by "image-dominated storytelling supplemented by textual explanation," picture books significantly lower the threshold for children's reading comprehension, thereby offering particular pedagogical value for young learners and students from families with limited educational resources. However, in practice, while most village primary schools in Xinfeng County have achieved compliance in terms of "hardware infrastructure," there remains a notable deficiency in adaptive "soft resources"—particularly reading materials that correspond to the cognitive development stages and emotional needs of rural children. To genuinely embed picture book education effectively, Xinfeng County must prioritize the introduction and development of "locally contextualized picture books". This could involve collaborative creation among local cultural practitioners, teachers, and students, intentionally incorporating indigenous elements such as regional landscapes, Hakka cultural traditions, and agricultural festivals into narrative content[3][5]. Through such co-creative processes, both children and educators can deepen their appreciation of their homeland and foster a stronger sense of cultural identity. Concurrently, within the framework of the national curriculum, schools and teachers should actively explore the organic integration of picture book-based instructional modules. Innovative pedagogical approaches—such as project-based learning and themed reading weeks—can enhance classroom engagement and experiential learning, thereby improving overall instructional efficacy. Picture books should not remain transient "outsiders" in rural education; rather, they ought to become an integral component of the local educational and cultural ecosystem.

### **3.2. Activating Child Development and Community Synergy through Picture Books as a Medium**

Picture book education should be systematically integrated into formal instructional frameworks, fully leveraging its empowering potential to synergistically advance both individual child development and rural community revitalization[1]. At the individual level, thematic picture books focusing on emotional regulation, nature cognition, and social interaction enable children to effectively learn strategies for managing emotions, broadening their horizons, and enhancing expressive and imaginative capacities, thereby contributing substantively to the holistic development of their competencies. Regarding community cultural construction, picture books can serve as a pivotal nexus fostering tripartite collaboration among families, schools, and communities[6]. By utilizing public spaces such as township cultural centers and village comprehensive service hubs, schools in Xinfeng County may partner with local communities to establish "Picture Book Reading Corners" or organize initiatives including "Parent-Child Picture Book Co-Reading Workshops" and "Rural Picture Book Theater Performances." Concurrently, systematic training programs for local teachers and volunteers should be implemented to strengthen the educational functions and cultural vitality of communities across spatial dimensions. Furthermore, cultural practitioners may develop integrated "Picture Book Plus" experiential projects—such as agricultural activity-based picture book experiences and intangible cultural heritage craft sessions linked to picture books—that align with local agricultural product promotion and rural tourism development. These initiatives not only provide children with rich cultural nourishment but also catalyze novel consumption models in rural areas, thereby driving dual enhancements in economic and cultural benefits[3].

### **3.3. Systematic Advancement and Sustainable Mechanism Design**

To elevate picture book education from superficial "integration" to profound "empowerment," systematic planning and institutional design are imperative. While local education bureaus establish a multi-stakeholder collaborative mechanism encompassing government, schools, society, and families, they must clearly delineate respective responsibilities and modalities of resource investment to prevent picture book education from devolving into short-term initiatives or fragmented practices. At the school level, it is essential to strengthen teachers' professional development[4]. Schools should enhance educators' theoretical comprehension and practical competencies in picture book pedagogy through targeted training programs, while simultaneously incentivizing teachers to autonomously develop localized instructional strategies and curriculum resources. Furthermore, exploring an operational model integrating "philanthropic donations, low-cost services, and industry reinvestment" can enable enterprises to attract social capital and corporate social responsibility initiatives. This approach ensures the sustainable renewal of picture book resources and the long-term advancement of educational activities[6].

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