



A Case Study on Integrating Chinese Local Culture into Kindergarten Curriculum

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Abstract

Local culture, stemming from the specific regional environments where children reside, varies significantly across different regions. It is widely acknowledged that kindergarten curricula should closely align with the everyday lives of children. Consequently, the integration of local culture into kindergarten education has emerged as a highly contested topic in various Chinese kindergartens in recent years. This study focuses on the efforts made by S Kindergarten in Z County, which has introduced cultural resource courses centered around white tea. Utilizing S Kindergarten in Z County as a case study, the researcher employed a combination of literature review, interviews, and observations to investigate the current state of construction and implementation of local cultural courses in this kindergarten. The research findings illuminate several critical issues: Teachers' attitudes towards local culture misaligned with their understanding; The collection of local cultural resources lacks systematic organization; Children's interests and needs overlooked in curriculum implementation; Limited diversity in course evaluations.

Keywords: Chinese Local Culture, Kindergarten Curriculum, Integrating

Introduction

Local culture encompasses the material and spiritual aspects developed through the life experiences of people in a specific region (Zhang, 2012). In recent years, China has increasingly emphasized cultural heritage, making the integration of local culture into kindergarten curriculum an inevitable outcome in the field of preschool education.

This study focuses on the development of local cultural curriculum by conducting a comprehensive review of existing research. The researcher employed targeted keywords such as “local culture,” “traditional culture,” and “kindergarten curriculum” to gather, organize, and analyze relevant literature. Literature review revealed that research on integrating local culture into kindergarten curriculum is categorized into theoretical and practical studies. Theoretical research provides essential guidance for constructing local cultural curriculum in kindergartens. On the practical front, case studies, while specific to particular regions, offer valuable insights despite their limited generalizability due to cultural variations.

S Kindergarten has been actively implementing the Z County local culture curriculum. To investigate this integration, the researcher selected Z County S Kindergarten as the focal point, utilizing methods such as literature analysis, interviews, and observations. These methods were employed to comprehensively explore the current status of incorporating Z County’s local culture into the S Kindergarten curriculum.

Methodology

The researcher employed methods such as interviews, observations, and physical analysis to collect and analyze data. Initially, interview outlines were prepared, and structured interviews were conducted with the kindergarten director and five preschool teachers at S Kindergarten. The interview responses were transcribed and coded for analysis. Additionally, observation forms were utilized to record interactions between teachers and children during activities, and the physical analysis method was applied to organize and analyze selected works created by the children.

Analysis and Appraisal of Local Cultural Resources in Z County

(i) White Tea Culture

Z County has a rich heritage in tea production, a tradition dating back to the late Tang and early Song Dynasties. Presently, it stands as a prominent hub for white tea production, featuring a variety of renowned types including Baihao Silver Needle, White Mudan, Gongmei, and Shoumei. Among these, Baihao Silver Needle holds a distinct place as a traditional specialty of Z County (Lu, 2011).

Z County’s association with white tea is deeply ingrained in its history. The county earned its name due to its significance as a major white tea producer. Recent years have witnessed the local government’s heightened focus on the tea industry, leading to the establishment of the modern China White Tea City, dedicated to promoting white tea culture (Jiang & Xu, 2020).

The meticulous process of white tea production involves plucking, withering (allowing the tea leaves to naturally dry), drying, selection, and reheating. This method results in white tea adorned with a delicate layer of silver fluff and a subtle tea aroma.

The allure of Z County’s white tea culture extends beyond its production techniques. Local chronicles unveil enchanting legends, such as the tale of Miss Silver Needle, who transformed fairy grass into tea to combat a plague, leading to the tea’s christening as Baihao Silver Needle. Furthermore, the county boasts a treasury of over ten poems and ballads dedicated to tea, each verse echoing the charm of Z County’s white tea culture.

When brewing white tea, traditional vessels such as tureens, porcelain cups, or pots are recommended. The brewing process involves using hotter water temperatures. After brewing, allowing the tea to steep for two or three minutes before pouring enhances the full extraction of flavors (Chen, 2012).

(ii) Analysis of the Educational Significance of Local Cultural Resources in Z County

Firstly, white tea culture embodies a practical and hands-on approach. In early childhood education, teachers can engage children in activities related to making, brewing, and serving tea, allowing them to gain hands-on experience. These interactive experiences fulfill their innate desire for active exploration and discovery, enhancing their practical skills.

Secondly, white tea culture encompasses values such as tea ethics, tea ceremonies, and tea art, reflecting profound cultural and aesthetic principles. During early childhood education, children can immerse themselves in the beauty of Chinese tea culture and the harmony of natural life. This exposure nurtures correct values and refines their aesthetic sensibilities, contributing to their overall character development.

Lastly, the tradition of “treating guests with tea” in white tea culture underscores the importance of etiquette in Chinese society. Through tea-related activities, individuals subconsciously absorb essential etiquette lessons, incorporating these principles into their daily lives. In early childhood education, children can establish fundamental behavioral norms and social etiquette by exploring tea customs, rituals, and techniques, paving the way for their future interactions in society.

(iii) Analysis of the Practical Application Value of Local Cultural Resources in Z County

First and foremost, integrating local cultural resources into the kindergarten curriculum enables children to develop a deep and intuitive understanding of their local culture. This integration sparks a genuine affection for their cultural heritage and hometown. By subtly planting the seeds of local excellence in their hearts, children’s sense of identity and pride in their cultural roots is nurtured.

Secondly, local cultural resources come in diverse forms, offering a wealth of content and variety. These resources serve as abundant materials for developing and selecting kindergarten curricula (Yang & He, 2015). Leveraging these valuable resources, preschool teachers can craft a wide range of engaging kindergarten courses, effectively enhancing the overall structure of the curriculum.

Lastly, integrating local culture into the kindergarten curriculum allows children to explore the essence of their cultural heritage from an early age. This experience deepens their connection with local traditions, fostering a strong identification with the local culture. Such early exposure is instrumental in preserving and promoting the unique cultural characteristics of the region. Preserving exceptional local culture is a noble mission, and kindergartens play a pivotal role in this endeavor. Integrating local culture into the kindergarten curriculum stands as a crucial method for the preservation and promotion of local cultural heritage.

Results

(i) Teachers' Attitudes Towards Local Culture Misaligned with Their Comprehension

Teachers recognize the profound importance of integrating local culture into the kindergarten curriculum. They understand that exposing children to cultural diversity is crucial. It is only through the comprehensive absorption of exceptional local culture and a deep understanding of their heritage that children can confidently navigate a diverse world and develop a strong connection to their hometown.

However, when teachers are asked about specific local cultural resources in Z County that can be incorporated for children's exploration, they often need to seek relevant information before providing detailed responses. This indicates that although teachers acknowledge the significant value of local cultural courses, their content selection tends to be superficial, revealing a lack of in-depth understanding of the local culture.

(ii) The Collection of Local Cultural Resources Lacks Systematic Organization

Z County boasts abundant local cultural resources, with S Kindergarten primarily focusing on incorporating white tea culture into its curriculum. However, during the interview with the kindergarten director, it was revealed that they have not systematically collected and organized information about white tea culture. Instead, teachers are tasked with selecting the content themselves. While this approach grants teachers greater freedom and flexibility in their teaching methods, it also leads to challenges. Without systematic organization, there is a risk of not comprehensively understanding white tea culture, resulting in fragmented and one-sided course content selection. Additionally, not every teacher possesses the expertise to effectively screen white tea culture content, significantly impacting the overall quality of the white tea culture courses offered.

(iii) Children's Interests and Needs Neglected in Curriculum Implementation

During the curriculum implementation, children lack opportunities for hands-on experiences. Given children's cognitive nature, which involves concrete thinking and learning through personal experiences and practical operations, it's crucial for them to engage in hands-on activities. Upon observing the white tea culture teaching activities, the researcher noticed that children primarily followed the teacher's instructions, completing tasks step by step. However, due to the large class size, individual guidance from the teacher was limited. For instance, when drawing a teapot, the teacher displayed her own drawing on the screen and asked the children to imitate it. When the children noticed differences between their drawings and the model, they would quickly discard their work and start anew. Throughout the entire teaching process, the teacher overlooked the children's interests, needs, and emotional experiences.

(iv) Limited Diversity in Course Evaluations

Firstly, teachers often focus on the outcomes of activities while overlooking the evaluation of the process. They tend to neglect crucial aspects such as selecting appropriate forms of activity organization, observing children's behavior during the inquiry process, gauging children's interest in continuing the inquiry after the activity concludes, and preparing the necessary activity materials. During interviews with teachers, it became apparent that S Kindergarten lacks a comprehensive evaluation system. Currently, the evaluation of white tea culture courses relies heavily on qualitative methods, lacking a well-defined evaluation scale.

Consequently, quantitative assessments are scarce. The absence of a balanced approach between qualitative and quantitative evaluations at S Kindergarten results in subjective evaluation outcomes for the white tea culture courses.

Implications and Suggestion

(i) Enhancing Teachers' Cultural Literacy

Teachers play a central role in curriculum development, particularly when implementing local cultural courses where a specific understanding of the local culture is essential. Teachers can enhance their cultural literacy by consulting relevant literature, utilizing library resources, and engaging in field research. Considering the specific challenge faced by S Kindergarten regarding teachers' limited understanding of white tea culture, the kindergarten can employ the "go out and invite in" approach.

This method involves arranging visits for teachers to meet with elder members of the community who possess deep knowledge about white tea culture. Additionally, professionals passionate about tea culture can be invited to the kindergarten to elucidate the nuances of white tea culture. Furthermore, collaborating with experienced early childhood education professionals from universities can prove invaluable. These professionals can conduct specialized training sessions for preschool teachers, equipping them with theoretical knowledge about developing and utilizing local cultural curriculum resources.

By implementing these strategies, teachers can genuinely comprehend the importance of local cultural curriculum resources and acquire effective methods for developing and structuring the curriculum (Miao, 2019).

(ii) Establishing a White Tea Culture Course Resource Library

Establishing a local cultural curriculum resource library involves the comprehensive search for all local cultural resources applicable to the kindergarten curriculum, linking them to educational and teaching activities. It aims to uncover the educational value within these resources and integrate them into various educational activities. For S Kindergarten, this means systematically curating white tea culture materials to create a dedicated resource library.

To achieve this, S Kindergarten can follow a structured approach

1. Formation of a Screening Group: Assemble a team to establish screening principles and criteria, providing a foundation for subsequent data collection.
2. Content Screening: Utilize established criteria such as relevance to daily life, children's interests, integration, appropriateness, and contemporary and seasonal relevance Li (2021) to identify activities suitable for kindergarten.
3. Community Engagement: Encourage active involvement from children, parents, and community members in the construction of the white tea culture curriculum resource library. Their participation broadens the selection scope, ensuring a richer variety of cultural resources.
4. Content Refinement: Eliminate materials unsuitable for children's development. Include professional literature and exemplary activity cases. This curated content ensures that teachers can readily access the necessary information, enhancing their ability to conduct relevant educational activities efficiently.

By following these steps, S Kindergarten can establish a comprehensive white tea culture curriculum resource library. This organized approach not only enriches teaching activities but also enhances the overall educational experience for the children.

(iii) Emphasizing Experiential Teaching Methods

Experience entails active participation in activities, with experiential teaching placing a strong emphasis on the immediate world of children. It optimally utilizes resources close to their everyday lives, selecting topics and items that captivate their interest. This approach deeply respects children's unique experiences, comprehension, and interpretation of the natural and social world (Zhang, 2012). In experiential teaching activities, children are encouraged to engage multiple senses, enhancing their understanding of the subject matter through hands-on involvement.

For instance, in the process of drawing a teapot, teachers can guide children to thoroughly observe, touch, and play with real teapots. By involving these sensory experiences, children not only grasp the structural composition and physical attributes of the teapot but also understand its functionalities by actually using it to make tea. Through these experiential activities, children's interest in drawing teapots is not only heightened but also nurtured creatively, enabling them to craft imaginative teapot designs based on their own sensory encounters.

(iv) Enhancing the Course Evaluation System

In order to enhance the course evaluation system, several key improvements can be made. Firstly, teachers should expand their evaluation beyond mere summary assessments and focus on process evaluation. This includes evaluating children's multiple intelligences and their levels of exploration during activities (Xue, 2022). For instance, in the "Building a Tea House" activity, children actively engage in listening to their peers' ideas and demonstrate a willingness to follow the group consensus. Teachers can provide specific feedback, acknowledging children's ability to collaborate and adapt, fostering positive behavior.

Moreover, a comprehensive approach incorporating both qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods is essential. Teachers can collaborate to establish a standardized evaluation scale for white tea culture courses, facilitating quantitative assessments of related activities. Simultaneously, employing the portfolio evaluation method allows teachers to systematically collect and analyze children's works related to white tea culture courses in the kindergarten. This combined approach, integrating quantitative data with qualitative insights, enriches the local cultural curriculum evaluation system, making it more robust and insightful.

Conclusion and Discussion

In conclusion, this study delved into the integration of Z County's rich white tea culture into the curriculum of S Kindergarten. Through a comprehensive analysis, several key findings emerged. Firstly, while teachers acknowledged the importance of local culture, there existed a misalignment between their recognition and their depth of understanding, emphasizing the need for improved cultural literacy among educators. Secondly, the lack of systematic organization in collecting local cultural resources, particularly related to white tea culture, hindered the curriculum's comprehensiveness and quality. Thirdly, the implementation of activities lacked experiential learning opportunities for children, reflecting a need for more

hands-on and sensory experiences. Lastly, the evaluation system, while qualitative, lacked depth and comprehensive assessment methods, suggesting a need for a more balanced and detailed approach.

These findings underscore several crucial implications. Firstly, enhancing teachers' cultural literacy through direct interactions with local cultural experts and specialized training programs could significantly improve their understanding and teaching methods. Secondly, the establishment of a curated resource library focusing on white tea culture could provide a structured foundation for future curriculum development. Thirdly, emphasizing experiential teaching methods, where children actively engage with tea-making processes, could enhance their understanding and interest in white tea culture. Lastly, a robust evaluation system that amalgamates qualitative and quantitative methods, ensuring both process and outcome evaluation, can provide a comprehensive understanding of the curriculum's effectiveness.

This study highlights the significance of integrating local culture not only in preserving heritage but also in enriching the educational experiences of young learners. By addressing the identified challenges and implementing the proposed strategies, S Kindergarten can create a more immersive, engaging, and comprehensive curriculum rooted in the unique cultural heritage of Z County. Such an approach not only fosters a deep connection with local traditions among the children but also aligns with the broader goals of cultural preservation and educational enrichment.

Culture is a spiritual force and the soul of a nation, which can subtly influence young children. Local culture is a specific reflection of the excellent traditional Chinese culture. Incorporating it into the construction of kindergarten curriculum is a concrete manifestation of traditional Chinese cultural education and a need for the development of the times. Integrating local culture into the kindergarten curriculum makes the curriculum more relevant to children's lives. Through this curriculum, children can better understand and recognize the culture of their hometown, thereby establishing a sense of identity with the local culture. This study takes the white tea culture of Z county as the entry point, explores the current situation of the development and utilization of local cultural resources in kindergarten curriculum, summarizes the existing problems based on data obtained from interviews and observations, and puts forward suggestions for further improvement. These suggestions enrich the practical experience of local culture integration into the kindergarten curriculum to a certain extent, providing operable suggestions for teachers to improve the curriculum and enhance its quality. It is hoped that with the improvement of the quality of local cultural courses, it can ultimately promote the overall development of children, especially deepening their understanding and recognition of their hometown culture.

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