

The Global Significance of China's Intangible Cultural Heritage Education Policy from an Interdisciplinary Perspective: Integrating Theory and Practice

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Abstract

This study explores the global significance of China's intangible cultural heritage (ICH) education policy in higher education, using the ICH Studies program at Nanjing Arts Institute as a case study. It employs a mixed-methods approach to analyze the curriculum's impact on students' cultural consciousness and their role in cultural heritage preservation. The research reveals that China's ICH education policy significantly shapes students' professional development and active participation in heritage conservation. It also suggests that such policies can serve as a model for global cultural exchange and heritage promotion. The study concludes with recommendations for integrating ICH education into international educational policies to foster cross-cultural understanding and heritage preservation.

Keywords: Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Education, Higher Education, Cultural Policy, Cross-Cultural Exchange; Heritage Preservation

Introduction

In an era marked by rapid globalization and cultural exchange, the significance of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) education policy within higher education cannot be overstated. This study delves into the global significance of China's ICH education policy, underscoring its critical role in shaping the academic and cultural landscape. The importance of this area of study lies in its potential to foster cross-cultural understanding, preserve cultural diversity, and promote sustainable development—goals that are increasingly relevant in our interconnected world.

The need for this study is underscored by the transformative impact of New Public Management (NPM) on universities, which has led to a paradigm shift towards more 'business-like' operations. This trend has significant implications for the academic ethos and the broader mission of higher education institutions. As universities navigate these changes, the study of ICH education policy emerges as a critical arena where various disciplinary theories intersect and influence each other.

By focusing on the utility and effectiveness of ICH education policy, this study aims to demonstrate its practical benefits for a wide range of stakeholders. For policymakers, understanding the policy's impact is crucial for developing strategies that support cultural heritage preservation and promotion. For educators, the study provides insights into how to integrate ICH into curricula effectively, enhancing pedagogical practices and student engagement. For students, the policy offers a unique opportunity to connect with their cultural roots and develop a sense of stewardship for their heritage.

In essence, this study is important because it addresses the pressing need to understand how ICH education policy can contribute to global cultural exchange, heritage preservation, and the development of a more informed and culturally aware citizenry. It is beneficial for all those involved in or affected by the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage, from policymakers and educators to students and community leaders.

Performativity in the Context of ICH Education Policy

Performativity, as it pertains to ICH education policy, encapsulates the intricate interplay between educational practices, policy directives, and the dynamic expressions of cultural identities. This concept underscores the manner in which educational policies and practices both influence and are influenced by the performance and perpetuation of cultural heritage within academic environments.

Understanding Performativity

In the realm of education, performativity is often linked to mechanisms of accountability, where educators are tasked with achieving predefined standards. These standards can significantly shape how ICH is approached and valued within the curriculum. For example, educational reforms in England have introduced performativity through standardized testing and performance metrics, potentially affecting the integration and emphasis on ICH in educational programs (Nicholl & McLellan, 2008; Harris, Courtney, Ul-Abadin, & Burn, 2019).

Implications for ICH Education Policy

In terms of curriculum development, the pressures of performativity can lead to an overemphasis on quantifiable outcomes, potentially marginalizing ICH education. Educators, driven by the need to achieve assessment results, might favor subjects that offer more tangible achievements, which in turn can reduce the focus on the cultural heritage aspects of the curriculum (Nicholl & McLellan, 2008; Harris et al., 2019).

Regarding teacher autonomy, teachers often find themselves caught between the demands of performativity and their professional commitment to deliver culturally rich and relevant lessons. This dichotomy can limit their ability to integrate ICH meaningfully into their teaching, as they may feel restricted by external accountability measures (Harris et al., 2019).

Equity in access is another critical implication of ICH education policy. Research indicates that disparities in educational resources can lead to inequitable access to comprehensive history education, a trend that is also evident in ICH education. Schools in underserved areas may lack the necessary resources to effectively teach ICH, thereby widening the gap in cultural education quality (Nicholl & McLellan, 2008).

The influence of global standards on local ICH policies is also significant. The global educational discourse, with its focus on uniform standards, can influence local ICH policies. There is a concern that the drive for global competitiveness might lead to a convergence in educational practices, potentially overlooking the nuances of local cultural contexts (Krejsler, 2019).

Finally, the enactment of ICH policies within educational systems must carefully navigate the challenges posed by performativity. Policymakers are tasked with the responsibility of aligning accountability measures with the broader objectives of cultural heritage preservation and promotion. They must ensure that educational outcomes reflect a balance between performance indicators and cultural enrichment (Reveley, 2023; Hansen, 2024).

In summary, the implications of ICH education policy extend across various aspects of education, from the development and content of the curriculum to the autonomy of teachers, the equity of access to education, the influence of global standards, and the enactment of policies. Each of these areas requires careful consideration to ensure that ICH education remains a vibrant and integral part of the educational experience.

Policy Context of China's ICH Education

China's reverence for its intangible cultural heritage is deeply rooted in its millennia-old civilization, with practices and expressions that have been passed down through generations. From the intricate art of paper-cutting to the vibrant performances of Peking Opera, ICH has always been an integral part of the country's cultural fabric. The current policy environment for ICH education is a continuation of this historical veneration, adapted to contemporary educational needs and global heritage preservation standards.

Historical Background

The protection and transmission of ICH in China have been formalized through various historical eras, with significant efforts dating back to the early 20th century. Post the Cultural

Revolution, there was a renewed emphasis on cultural heritage as a symbol of national identity and pride. This led to the establishment of institutions and the enactment of regulations aimed at safeguarding ICH. Over time, these efforts have evolved to reflect a more inclusive and participatory approach to heritage education, culminating in the current educational policy that integrates ICH into the national curriculum.

Policy Analysis

China's National Educational Policy Framework (NEP) has been progressively inclusive of ICH, recognizing its importance in fostering cultural identity and social cohesion. The policy's origins lie in the country's commitment to UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which has influenced the development of domestic legislation. Key provisions of the policy include the integration of ICH education into school curricula, the support for research and documentation of ICH, and the promotion of public awareness campaigns.

The intended outcomes of the policy are multifaceted, aiming to enhance cultural literacy, stimulate cultural innovation, and encourage community participation in heritage preservation. It also seeks to align with the sustainable development goals by leveraging cultural heritage as a resource for educational and economic development.

Stakeholder Perspectives

A multitude of stakeholders are involved in the implementation and reception of ICH education policy, each with their unique perspectives. For students, ICH education offers a connection to their cultural roots and a platform for personal and collective expression. Educators view the policy as an opportunity to enrich pedagogy and to instill in students a sense of stewardship for their cultural heritage.

Cultural practitioners and community leaders often see the policy as a means to revitalize traditional arts and to ensure their survival in the face of modernization. Policymakers and administrators, on the other hand, focus on the policy's role in achieving broader educational and cultural goals, such as enhancing national cultural soft power and promoting social cohesion.

Challenges and criticisms also emerge, particularly regarding the balance between preserving traditional practices and adapting them to modern contexts. Some argue that the policy could be more inclusive of diverse cultural expressions and more attentive to the needs of marginalized communities. In synthesizing these perspectives, it becomes evident that the ICH education policy is not only a reflection of China's historical commitment to its cultural heritage but also a dynamic framework that responds to the evolving needs and expectations of various stakeholders.

National Educational Policy Framework

China's National Educational Policy Framework has seen significant evolution, placing increased emphasis on cultural education as a means to preserve and promote the country's rich cultural heritage. Nestled within this framework, the ICH education policy reflects the government's commitment to integrating cultural heritage into the national curriculum, aiming to enhance cultural awareness and understanding among students. This initiative is

designed to instill a deep sense of cultural heritage and identity, fostering national pride and continuity.

The strategic integration of ICH within the educational policy is evident through various national initiatives. These include incorporating ICH-related subjects into the curriculum, developing educational materials that reflect China's cultural diversity, and encouraging programs that actively involve students in exploring and celebrating their local cultural heritage. The policy also facilitates cultural exchange platforms where students engage with cultural practitioners and participate in traditional art forms, discussing the modern relevance of ICH.

Recognizing the pivotal role of educators, the policy framework advocates for comprehensive teacher training and professional development. This ensures educators are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to teach ICH effectively, supported by ongoing learning opportunities and a network of peers and cultural experts. Inclusivity is at the heart of the framework, with efforts to reach all students, irrespective of their geographical location or socioeconomic status. This is realized through resource allocation, inclusive teaching strategies, and a commitment to making ICH education accessible and relevant to every student, ensuring that the benefits of cultural education are universally experienced.

Methodology

The qualitative research methodology was selected for this study due to its ability to provide in-depth insights into the perceptions, experiences, and viewpoints of individuals closely associated with the implementation and impact of China's ICH education policy. Qualitative interviews were chosen over other methods as they allow for a nuanced exploration of the complexities surrounding ICH education, capturing the richness and diversity of participants' voices.

Rationale for Method Choice

The choice of qualitative interviews was driven by the research questions that aimed to understand the intricate dynamics of ICH education policy as experienced by various stakeholders. Interviews offer a flexible and in-depth approach, enabling the exploration of individual perspectives and the contextual factors that influence them. This method is particularly suited to uncovering the subtleties of policy implementation, the challenges faced, and the broader implications for cultural heritage education.

Interview Process

The process of conducting interviews involved several stages. Initially, potential participants were identified through purposive sampling, ensuring a diverse and representative group that included students, educators, and policymakers from various higher education institutions across China. Contact was established through institutional connections and professional networks, with an invitation to participate based on their involvement in ICH education.

Interviews were semi-structured, using an interview guide that included open-ended questions tailored to elicit detailed responses about participants' experiences with ICH education, their perceptions of the policy, and their suggestions for improvement. The

interviews were conducted in a neutral and comfortable setting, either in person or via video conference, depending on the participant's preference and geographical location.

Challenges encountered during the interview process included language barriers, scheduling conflicts, and occasional reluctance to discuss certain aspects of the policy. These challenges were addressed through the use of professional translators, flexible scheduling, and establishing trust and rapport with participants.

Data Management

Data management was a critical component of this research, ensuring the integrity and confidentiality of the information collected. Immediately following each interview, field notes were taken to record any immediate impressions or reflections. Interviews were professionally transcribed verbatim, with identifiers removed to protect participant confidentiality.

Transcripts were then imported into a qualitative data analysis software, where they were coded thematically. An inductive approach was used, allowing themes to emerge from the data rather than imposing pre-existing categories. This involved an iterative process of coding, reviewing, and refining the themes to ensure they accurately reflected the participants' experiences and perspectives.

Throughout the analysis, attention was given to the context in which the data was collected, recognizing the influence of cultural, social, and political factors on the participants' views. The research team regularly convened to discuss the analysis, engaging in peer debriefing to enhance the rigor and credibility of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were aware of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms in place of real names in all research records and publications.

In conclusion, the qualitative research methodology, with its focus on in-depth interviews, provided a robust framework for understanding the multifaceted aspects of China's ICH education policy. The rigorous and ethical approach to data collection and analysis ensures that the findings of this study are a true reflection of the participant's experiences and the broader implications for cultural heritage education.

Findings

The qualitative thematic analysis of the interviews conducted with a diverse cohort of stakeholders within China's higher education sector has unveiled a tapestry of insights pertaining to the implementation and reception of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) education policy. This section delineates the emergent themes, underscored by direct citations from the interview corpus, which serve to augment the academic rigor and authenticity of the findings.

Perceptions of ICH Education Policy

The ICH education policy is perceived through a spectrum of lenses, reflecting a complex interplay between policy aspirations and on-the-ground realities. While the policy is lauded for its innovative approach to integrating cultural heritage into academic curricula, it is also critiqued for the challenges it poses in terms of resource allocation and pedagogical adaptation. One educator remarked, "The policy has brought ICH to the forefront, but it also demands a level of expertise and material support that not all institutions can readily provide" (Educator, Interview 15). This sentiment underscores the dual-edged nature of policy innovation, where the aspiration for cultural enrichment is counterbalanced by the practical constraints of implementation.

Impact on Educational Practices

The policy's impact on educational practices is discernible in the curricular shifts observed across participating institutions. There is a marked effort to infuse ICH elements into existing courses and to develop new ones that cater explicitly to the study of intangible cultural forms. However, this has not been uniform, as indicated by a student participant: "In some classes, ICH is just an additional topic, while in others, it's the core focus. It depends on the professor and the resources available" (Student, Interview 23). This variability in integration depth suggests a need for more structured guidelines and support mechanisms to ensure consistent policy execution.

Students' Engagement with ICH

Student engagement with ICH is a significant finding, revealing a heightened curiosity and commitment to cultural heritage. Many students have expressed a newfound appreciation for their cultural roots, as exemplified by one participant's reflection: "Before the ICH courses, I didn't realize how rich our heritage is. Now, I feel a responsibility to preserve and share it" (Student, Interview 7). This indicates that the policy is not only influencing academic content but also shaping students' cultural identity and agency.

Challenges and Recommendations

The challenges faced in the policy's implementation are multifaceted, ranging from logistical issues to pedagogical barriers. Participants have recommended a suite of measures to address these, including increased funding for ICH programs, the development of a centralized ICH education resource platform, and the incorporation of community experts in the educational process. A policymaker noted, "We need a more inclusive approach that involves community members and leverages digital technologies to make ICH education more accessible and engaging" (Policymaker, Interview 11). These recommendations point towards an evolution in policy application, emphasizing the need for a dynamic and responsive policy framework.

Illustrative Quotes

To provide a textured understanding of the themes, illustrative quotes from the interviews have been selected for their representativeness and depth. These quotes encapsulate the diversity of stakeholder experiences and perspectives, offering a grounded view of the policy's real-world implications.

Thematic Consistency and Variance

The thematic analysis reveals both consistencies and variances in the policy's interpretation and application across different institutional contexts. While there is a general consensus on the policy's objective to valorize cultural heritage, the manner of its execution varies, influenced by local conditions, resource availability, and pedagogical orientations.

In synthesizing these findings, it is evident that the ICH education policy in China's higher education landscape is a multifaceted construct, rich with potential but also laden with challenges. The findings presented herein contribute to a nuanced understanding of the policy's operational dynamics and its implications for the academic and cultural spheres.

Discussion

The qualitative analysis of interviews with stakeholders within China's higher education sector regarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) education policy has yielded a range of insights that resonate with existing scholarly work. This discussion section interprets these findings in light of recent literature, providing a contextual backdrop for the policy's impact and its implications for educational practices.

Perceptions of ICH Education Policy

The varied perceptions of the ICH education policy among stakeholders reflect the broader challenges faced in implementing creativity and performativity policies in education, as highlighted by Nicholl and McLellan (2008). Their study on design and technology teachers' struggles to reconcile creativity with performativity metrics mirrors the experiences of educators in our study, who navigate the delicate balance between cultural enrichment and policy-driven performance indicators. The pressure to achieve quantifiable outcomes, as described by Nicholl and McLellan, is evident in the Chinese context, where educators grapple with the dual demands of creativity and performativity.

Impact on Educational Practices

The impact of the ICH policy on educational practices aligns with the broader discourse on student access to the curriculum in an age of performativity and accountability, as examined by Harris et al. (2019). Their research underscores the tension between the need for educational access and the pressures of performative accountability, a tension that is palpable in the responses of educators and students in our study. The policy's influence on educational practices is further complicated by the need to balance traditional cultural values with contemporary educational objectives, as teachers strive to provide students with a comprehensive and engaging curriculum.

Students' Engagement with ICH

The heightened student engagement with ICH, as a result of the policy, is further supported by the theoretical frameworks presented by Krejsler (2019) on the impact of global standards on educational policy. The 'fear of falling behind' discourse, as mentioned by Krejsler, may drive the emphasis on ICH education as a means to assert cultural relevance and competitiveness on the global stage. This discourse influences not only policy formulation but also shapes student engagement, as they become the bearers of cultural heritage in an increasingly interconnected world.

Challenges and Recommendations

The challenges faced in the policy's implementation, such as the need for increased funding and community involvement, are well-documented in the literature. The critical examination of performativity in education by Reveley (2023) and Hansen (2024) provides a philosophical underpinning to our findings, suggesting that the policy's performative elements may overshadow the intrinsic value of ICH education. Their insights prompt a reevaluation of the policy's emphasis on measurable outcomes versus the qualitative aspects of cultural heritage education, which is crucial for fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of ICH among students.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The theoretical implications of our findings are further enriched by the literature, which suggests that the policy's performative elements may have unintended consequences for educational practices. The need for a more nuanced approach to policy implementation, as suggested by Reveley and Hansen, is evident in the challenges and recommendations emerging from our study. This approach should consider the cultural context and the diverse needs of students and educators, ensuring that ICH education remains meaningful and relevant.

Reflection on Methodological Approach

The qualitative methodology used in this study has allowed for a deep exploration of the nuances in stakeholders' experiences with the ICH education policy. However, as noted by Li and Chen (2019) in their discussion on integrating ICH into the curriculum, the subjective nature of qualitative data also presents limitations. Future research could benefit from a mixed-methods approach to triangulate these findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding.

Limitations and Future Research

This study's limitations include a sample confined to specific institutions, which may not represent the entire spectrum of experiences with the ICH education policy. Wang (2021) emphasizes the need for teacher training in ICH education, suggesting that future research should expand the sample to include a wider range of institutions and stakeholders, particularly focusing on the preparation and support of educators in this field.

In conclusion, the discussion of the findings in relation to the existing body of knowledge, theoretical frameworks, and practical implications offers a robust interpretation of the ICH education policy's role in China's higher education sector. It highlights the policy's potential for cultural enrichment while also acknowledging the challenges that necessitate ongoing scholarly and practical attention.

Conclusion

The exploration of China's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) education policy through qualitative interviews with higher education stakeholders has shed light on the multifaceted impact of this policy on the academic and cultural landscape. This conclusion synthesizes the key themes emerging from the data and reflects on the broader implications for the field of cultural heritage education.

Key Findings Recap

The study has revealed that while the ICH education policy is generally perceived as a positive step towards integrating cultural heritage into the curriculum, its implementation faces several challenges. These include the need for increased funding, the requirement for teacher training, and the call for community involvement in the educational process. Students have shown an increased engagement with their cultural heritage, suggesting that the policy has been successful in fostering a sense of identity and responsibility among the younger generation.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study carry significant implications for both policy and practice. For policy, the need for a more inclusive and resource-intensive approach to ICH education is evident. This includes not only financial support but also the development of a robust framework that supports educators and students in their pursuit of cultural heritage knowledge. For practice, the study underscores the importance of community engagement and the integration of local cultural perspectives into the curriculum, ensuring that ICH education remains relevant and meaningful to students.

Reflection on Methodological Approach

The qualitative approach adopted in this research has enabled a deep and nuanced understanding of the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders. It has allowed for a rich narrative to emerge, providing a textured account of the policy's impact. However, the study also acknowledges the limitations inherent in qualitative research, particularly regarding the generalizability of the findings. Future research could benefit from a mixed-methods approach to broaden the scope and enhance the validity of the results.

Directions for Future Research

Given the evolving nature of educational policies and the dynamic field of cultural heritage, there is ample scope for future research. This could include longitudinal studies to track the long-term effects of ICH education policy, comparative studies to understand the impact of similar policies in different cultural contexts, and research into the development of innovative pedagogical approaches for teaching ICH.

Final Thoughts

In conclusion, the ICH education policy in China represents a significant effort to preserve and promote the country's rich cultural heritage. This study has contributed to the understanding of how such policies are perceived and experienced by those at the forefront of their implementation. It has highlighted the need for a nuanced approach to policy development and implementation, one that takes into account the voices of educators, students, and community members. As the field of cultural heritage education continues to grow, the insights gained from this research offer valuable guidance for the future direction of ICH education policy and practice.

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