

Exploration of the Integration of Traditional Henan Nursery Rhymes into Preschool Education Undergraduate Teaching

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Abstract

Introducing traditional Henan nursery rhymes into preschool education is an effective approach for local universities to cultivate talents with both indigenous cultural literacy and teaching competence. This paper focuses on the cultural value and educational function of Henan nursery rhymes, exploring their roles in cultural enlightenment, aesthetic construction, and curriculum practice. Based on a "culture–curriculum–practice" three-dimensional framework, this study proposes a teaching model encompassing cultural identification, creative expression, and educational transfer. Drawing upon research conducted across multiple kindergartens and normal universities, three teaching intervention models are developed: collaboration–exploration, psychological–behavioral, and task–goal. Results indicate that this approach effectively enhances the adaptability of nursery rhyme instruction and contributes to the construction of a localized aesthetic education system, offering theoretical and practical support for the integration of "cultural inheritance–artistic innovation–educational practice."

Keywords: Henan Nursery Rhymes, Preschool Education, Indigenous Culture, Children's Aesthetic Education, Pedagogical Innovation

Introduction

Traditional Henan nursery rhymes, as an essential component of Central Plains agrarian culture, contain rich regional cultural resources and unique aesthetic values (Guo, 2023). These rhymes not only reflect local linguistic rhythms, living customs, and social structures but also serve as cultural carriers embodying generations of collective memory and emotional identity (Ma, 2016). Effectively incorporating traditional Henan nursery rhymes into the training system of preschool education programs helps promote systematic development and optimal utilization of valuable cultural resources by local universities. Moreover, it plays an irreplaceable role in advancing cultural inheritance and promoting indigenous educational concepts (Feng, 2024). Particularly under the current globalized yet localized educational context, early childhood education increasingly emphasizes building cultural foundations

through curricular content and instructional practice reforms, aiming to cultivate educators with cultural awareness and practical teaching capabilities to better serve the sustainable development of local society and culture (Feng, 2024).

In recent years, with the continuous development of preschool education theory and deepening of practice, the integration of cultural elements has transitioned from a traditional “cultural supplement” phase to a multi-level integration stage embedded deeply within curriculum design, teaching methods, and evaluation systems (Wang & Lv, 2023). As a significant representative of local culture, Henan nursery rhymes demonstrate unique advantages in promoting children’s language ability, musical literacy, and socio-emotional development through systematic curriculum reconstruction and teaching experiments (Feng, 2024). Based on long-term teaching experiments and action research conducted between 2021 and 2024 in multiple local kindergartens and teacher-training institutions, this study explores teaching strategies and practical pathways for integrating Henan nursery rhymes into preschool education. Particular attention is given to how the “culture–curriculum–practice” triadic structure can effectively connect cultural cognition, artistic expression, and educational transfer. The study not only emphasizes the cultural value of nursery rhymes but also highlights the innovative application of teaching methodologies, integrating internationally recognized approaches such as Orff and Kodály to promote multisensory, multimodal learning experiences, thereby enhancing children’s musical creativity and cultural understanding.

Through systematic curriculum design and field teaching feedback, this research constructs a locally distinctive and operationally feasible teaching model, providing theoretical guidance and practical paradigms for the inheritance and innovative development of Henan nursery rhymes in preschool education. Additionally, the study explores teachers' evolving roles and capacity-building paths during the implementation of indigenous cultural curricula, emphasizing that teachers are not merely knowledge transmitters but also cultural conveyors and promoters of educational innovation. Ultimately, this paper aims to provide strong support for local universities in cultivating applied talents who possess both cultural literacy and teaching proficiency while promoting the deep integration of local culture and modern educational concepts, thus advancing the localization of preschool education and ensuring sustainable cultural heritage.

Literature Review

There has been extensive and in-depth academic discussion regarding the cultural transmission and educational linkage of nursery rhymes. Numerous studies show that nursery rhymes are not only key vehicles for children's early language acquisition and cognitive development but also bearers of abundant aesthetic functions, serving as important media for children's cultural identity formation and socialization (Pourkalhor & Tavakoli, 2017). Specifically, nursery rhymes promote children's language expression abilities, rhythm perception, and aesthetic appreciation through concise, vivid language, rhythmic patterns, and rich contextual depictions (Kenney, 2005). Domestic scholars further emphasize that nursery rhymes play an irreplaceable educational role in transmitting social values, regulating

children's behavior, fostering emotional development, and cultivating collective consciousness (Yu, 2025). These functions contribute not only to children's overall development but also subtly shape behavioral patterns aligned with societal and cultural expectations.

From an international perspective, child music education approaches such as the Orff and Kodály methods particularly emphasize engaging children through multisensory, multimodal participation to stimulate musical interest and creativity, achieving coordinated development of musical skills and comprehensive qualities (Cary, 2012). Both approaches stress the combination of bodily movement, language imitation, and musical games, highlighting the fun and practicality of music learning, significantly enriching the theoretical basis and operational methods of nursery rhyme instruction. Integrating these advanced teaching philosophies, nursery rhyme instruction in preschool education becomes not only a tool for cultural transmission but also an important vehicle for developing young children's multiple intelligences and innovation capabilities (Jiang, 2025).

However, current domestic and international research exhibits clear geographical biases, concentrating primarily on economically and culturally developed eastern coastal regions and some central provinces like Beijing, Hubei, and Zhejiang, with limited attention paid to Henan, which possesses rich agrarian cultural traditions and distinct regional characteristics in its nursery rhymes (Li, 2015). As an important symbol of Central Plains culture, Henan nursery rhymes feature a unique dialectic prosody system, strong folkloric contexts, and distinct social functions. These cultural genes not only reflect profound historical and cultural accumulation but also mirror specific social structures and humanistic spirits (Ma, 2016). Yet, systematic theoretical research, pedagogical model construction, and application exploration of Henan nursery rhymes in preschool education remain scarce, lacking representative practical cases and evaluation systems (Feng, 2024).

Therefore, conducting in-depth research on the application of Henan nursery rhymes in preschool education can fill the academic gap in the utilization of indigenous cultural educational resources while providing empirical support and theoretical guidance for constructing localized preschool curricula. Such research enriches the academic perspective on the integration of nursery rhyme cultural heritage and education, offering crucial practical pathways for local universities and normal colleges to train indigenous teachers with both cultural awareness and teaching capability. By combining regional cultural characteristics with modern educational concepts, promoting innovative transmission and effective instruction of nursery rhyme culture holds significant theoretical and practical implications for advancing the localization of preschool education and sustaining local cultural vitality.

Methods and Conceptual Analysis

This study adopts a qualitative research method combining action research and teaching experimentation, systematically observing and recording the intervention strategies, teaching feedback, and resource integration of Henan nursery rhymes in preschool education based on teaching practices conducted between 2021 and 2024 in multiple local kindergartens and

teacher-training institutions. During the research process, the authors primarily assume the role of "action researchers," implementing systematic interventions and reflections guided by the "culture–curriculum–practice" triadic structure.

As an essential part of Central Plains agrarian culture, Henan nursery rhymes exhibit strong dialect tones, folkloric contexts, and life logic. Songs such as *Tikua Pian* (*Kicking Tiles*), *Bai Bai Bai* (*Swinging Swinging Swinging*), and *Tui Mo Yan* (*Grinding Proverb*) reflect gaming culture, family ethics, and time memory, all demonstrating strong cultural "rootedness" (Ma, 2017).

Nursery Rhyme Title	Embedded Cultural Elements	Educational Function
Bai Bai Bai	Senior-junior hierarchy, family ethics	Cultivating sense of order and social role awareness
Tikua Pian	Game rules and spatial imagination	Promoting gross motor development and rule consciousness
Tui Mo Yan	Agricultural timing, oral narrative	Enhancing language rhythm and understanding of life experience

Building upon Bruner's (1966) "spiral curriculum theory" and Howard Gardner's (1999) "theory of multiple intelligences," we reconstruct the nursery rhyme teaching process into a three-tiered systemic structure spanning cultural understanding and educational practice. Within this framework, the first emphasis is placed on "cultural identification" as the starting point of instruction. Teachers guide preservice students in analyzing the dialect syllables, symbolic meanings, and underlying regional customs and cultural logic within Henan nursery rhymes, establishing a foundation for cultural cognition. Next, the "creative expression" phase involves students applying internationally recognized child music teaching methods such as Orff and Kodály to restructure rhythms and design multimodal expressions of the rhymes—such as illustrating story pictures, choreographing movements, and staging situational enactments—to enhance teaching adaptability. Finally, the "educational transfer" phase involves designing complete instructional activities and implementing them in kindergarten placements for real-time execution and feedback, forming a closed-loop practice of nursery rhyme cultural instruction. This structure not only strengthens students' curriculum understanding and teaching abilities but also embeds local culture into the educational setting, creating a spiral growth path from culture to curriculum and from curriculum to practical outcomes.

Based on years of teaching observation and frontline kindergarten practice, the authors have identified three typical modes of musical activity intervention in the preschool education practice of traditional Henan nursery rhymes: collaborative–exploratory mode, psychological–behavioral mode, and task–goal mode. These modes not only effectively align with the traditional characteristics of nursery rhymes and children's cognitive features but also demonstrate strong adaptability and creativity in teaching practice. They are described below:

Collaborative–Exploratory Mode

This mode emphasizes co-creation between teachers and children, transforming the teacher from a one-way knowledge transmitter into a facilitator of collaborative learning. Children are guided to imitate, role-play, and repeatedly perform to grasp the musical language and cultural connotations of traditional nursery rhymes.

Teaching Case: Mian County Rhyme “Ban Deng Ban Deng Luo Luo” (Senior Class)

The teacher designs life scenarios related to the rhyme content, guiding children to mimic physical actions such as "sitting on a bench" and "stacking benches." Through repeated collaborative singing and role exchanges, children master song rhythm and emotional expression. Role rotation and performance feedback help students build rhythmic memory and contextual comprehension through repeated enactments.

Psychological–Behavioral Mode

This mode is grounded in children's psychological development mechanisms, using aesthetic expectation-building and suggestive action games to guide children through "listening–imitation–expression–feedback" processes to develop stable musical behaviors.

Teaching Case: Biyang County Rhyme “Luogu Ge” (Junior Class)

During instruction, the teacher uses rhythm-clapping games, movement imitation, and directive prompts such as “Follow me,” allowing children to experience the rhythmic beauty of the rhyme through repetitive rhythm responses. Combined with multimedia backgrounds and drumbeat design, children immerse themselves in rhythmic variation and emotional tension, naturally transitioning into song expression.

Task–Goal Mode

This mode emphasizes transforming nursery rhyme learning into concrete tasks, guiding children to acquire musical content by setting goals and progressing step-by-step.

Teaching Case: Zhumadian Rhyme “Butterfly Flying” (Middle Class) The teaching activity sets a scenario where "the butterfly flies to the garden." Students observe butterfly images, imitate fluttering movements, and follow teacher instructions to complete rhythmic stepping and directional changes, ultimately performing the entire song in segments. This task integrates rhythm, melody, and performance, effectively improving children's integrated musical expressive abilities.

These three intervention modes respectively reflect collaborative construction, psychological embedding, and goal-oriented teaching strategies, demonstrating strong integrability and scalability. Flexibly selecting or combining them according to the age group, nursery rhyme content structure, and teaching environment can effectively enhance the systematicness and effectiveness of nursery rhyme instruction.

Mode Name	Teaching Mechanism	Applicable Age	Exemplar Rhyme	Instructional Focus
Collaborative– Exploratory	Co-construction, role play	Senior Class	Ban Deng Ban Deng Luo Luo	Rhythm mastery, language expression
Psychological– Behavioral	Suggestive game, imitation-driven	Junior Class	Luogu Ge	Auditory guidance, body movement
Task–Goal	Task-guided, goal- feedback	Middle Class	Butterfly Flying	Integrated ability and creativity

Discussion and Conclusion

Integrating Henan nursery rhymes into preschool education goes far beyond simple cultural supplementation or textbook introduction—it represents an important pathway toward building a locally rooted teacher competency development system and aesthetic education system. As carriers of Central Plains agrarian culture, Henan nursery rhymes embody rich linguistic rhythms, folk traditions, and social values. These cultural elements infuse preschool education with profound cultural depth and emotional identity, fostering children's formation of cultural self-identity and enhanced sense of belonging (Ma, 2017; Feng, 2024). Through systematic curriculum reconstruction and teaching intervention, Henan nursery rhymes can be effectively integrated into preschool teaching practices, enabling organic connections between cultural cognition, artistic expression, and educational application for both teachers and students.

To achieve effective implementation of Henan nursery rhyme culture, multidimensional innovation is necessary. On one hand, deeper cultural interpretation must be pursued to strengthen cultural recognition and inheritance, ensuring nursery rhymes function not merely as teaching materials but as important tools for cultural cognition and emotional education. On the other hand, innovative practical pathways should integrate theories of multiple intelligences and modern music teaching methods, such as the multimodal expression strategies of Orff and Kodály, to promote multisensory engagement and creative expression among children (Gardner, 1999; Orff, 1973). Furthermore, teacher training systems should focus on the organic integration of the "culture–curriculum–practice" triad, strengthening teachers' understanding of local culture and enhancing their instructional capabilities so they can design, implement, and reflect upon indigenous cultural curricula.

Simultaneously, establishing a scientific and comprehensive evaluation mechanism is crucial. A full-cycle evaluation system covering cultural cognition, teaching practice, artistic expression, and educational outcomes should be constructed to ensure effective monitoring and feedback throughout the teaching process, promoting systematic student development and driving continuous curriculum optimization. Through multilevel, multidimensional evaluation mechanisms, teaching quality is safeguarded while fostering deep integration of cultural heritage and educational innovation.

This study offers both theoretical and contextual contributions to the fields of early childhood education and indigenous cultural pedagogy. Theoretically, it expands the application of Bruner's spiral curriculum theory and Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences by integrating them into a localized cultural framework, demonstrating how traditional folk content such as Henan nursery rhymes can be structured into a pedagogically rich, multi-tiered teaching system. The proposed "culture–curriculum–practice" triadic model presents

an innovative lens through which educators can conceptualize the transmission of indigenous knowledge as both a cognitive and aesthetic process. Contextually, this research fills a notable gap in the literature by focusing on Henan—an underrepresented yet culturally rich region—and showcases how local nursery rhymes can become powerful tools for nurturing cultural identity, linguistic competence, and artistic sensibility in young learners. By linking regional heritage with modern pedagogical strategies, the study provides a replicable model for other regions seeking to preserve intangible cultural assets while enhancing the quality and relevance of preschool teacher training.

In conclusion, the integration of Henan nursery rhymes into preschool education realizes a trinity model of "cultural inheritance–artistic innovation–educational practice," offering a feasible pathway for local universities to cultivate applied talents equipped with both cultural literacy and teaching proficiency. In the future, further exploration of the educational value of nursery rhyme culture and expansion of its practical applications will help advance the synergistic development of local culture and preschool education, promoting modern cultural heritage and innovative development, and contributing to the construction of a preschool education system with Chinese characteristics.

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