

# Exploring the Practical Pathways for Integrating Traditional Henan Nursery Rhymes into Higher Normal Music Education

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## Abstract

Systematically integrating traditional Henan nursery rhymes into music education curricula in higher normal institutions is a crucial approach to promoting the living heritage of local intangible cultural resources. This practice not only enriches course content and facilitates the educational transformation of indigenous musical resources but also drives innovation in pedagogical philosophy, curriculum development, and teacher training. Due to their regional characteristics and educational value, Henan nursery rhymes demonstrate strong potential for teaching application. This paper outlines the project implementation pathways from multiple perspectives—educational objectives, curriculum design, field research, artistic reinterpretation, instructional application, and interdisciplinary collaboration—and evaluates its outcomes and challenges. The study aims to construct a new model of normal music education that integrates “cultural inheritance–artistic innovation–educational practice,” providing replicable experiences for similar regions.

**Keywords:** Traditional Henan Nursery Rhymes, Music Teacher Education, Cultural Inheritance, Curriculum Innovation, Fieldwork, Educational Practice

## Introduction

With the ongoing transformation of educational paradigms and deepening curriculum reforms, effectively incorporating excellent local traditional culture into higher normal education has become a critical issue in the development of teacher education in China (Wu, Wu, & Li, 2024). As an essential medium for conveying emotional and cultural values, music education inherently carries cultural significance (Han, 2025). Particularly within normal universities dedicated to training music teachers for primary and preschool education, cultivating students’ cultural awareness and local identity through professional learning has become one of the key tasks in curriculum-based ideological education and the modernization of pedagogy (Guo, 2024).

Nursery rhymes, as a form of folk literature integrating language, music, and folkloric elements, serve not only as vital resources for early childhood musical enlightenment but also as collective carriers of social emotion and cultural memory (He, 2025). Rooted in the rich agrarian civilization and regional customs of the Central Plains, Henan nursery rhymes exhibit features such as melodious tunes, simple language, lively rhythms, and life-oriented themes, reflecting distinctive Central Plains cultural genes (Ma, 2016). However, with changes in media ecology and children's aesthetic preferences, many traditional nursery rhymes face risks of cultural erosion and marginalization in educational contexts (Chen, 2019).

Therefore, integrating traditional Henan nursery rhymes into higher music education is not merely a reactivation of local intangible cultural heritage but also a profound response to the educational needs of indigenous culture (Guo, 2023). Based on music education practices in Henan's normal institutions, this study explores how traditional nursery rhymes can be transformed into operable and sustainable teaching materials and cultural assets through multi-phase linkages involving "curriculum integration–resource collection–instructional application–social dissemination," thereby advancing the localization and high-quality development of music education.

### **Literature Review**

In recent years, the integration of ethnic music and local culture into education has attracted widespread academic attention (Wang, 2021). Scholars generally agree that introducing local musical resources not only expands teaching content but also enhances students' cultural confidence and aesthetic literacy. For instance, Zhu (2024) argues that local music helps improve students' musical perception and aesthetic appreciation while fostering active identification with and curiosity about traditional culture. Li and Huang (2012) emphasize that offering courses on indigenous music in normal institutions is a key strategy for achieving educational equity and curricular diversity.

From an international perspective, both Orff and Kodály music teaching methodologies advocate musical enlightenment based on native language and local music, asserting that children develop musical abilities more naturally within familiar cultural contexts (Cary, 2012). These theories provide valuable references for the educational adaptation of traditional Chinese music.

Research on nursery rhymes primarily focuses on their linguistic enlightenment functions, aesthetic educational value, and social roles. Kenney (2005) regards nursery rhymes as a form of "implicit curriculum for children's socialization," playing an irreplaceable role in shaping emotional experience and transmitting social norms. Domestically, scholars such as Wang (2025) and Zhou (2024) point out that nursery rhymes serve as natural mediators between children and community culture, positively influencing early language development and behavioral habits.

Nevertheless, most current studies on the integration of nursery rhymes into education focus on preschool and elementary school settings. There remains a lack of systematic course development and pedagogical research on incorporating nursery rhymes into higher music teacher education. In particular, comprehensive studies on Henan's local nursery rhyme resources remain limited, with most existing literature confined to folklore surveys or textual

categorizations, lacking deep connections with higher education, especially music teacher training (Feng, 2025).

Thus, this paper attempts to fill this research gap by proposing a practical integration pathway for higher music education based on traditional Henan nursery rhymes. It explores the cultural value, artistic transformation routes, and educational mechanisms of nursery rhymes within local normal institutions, aiming to provide theoretical supplementation and practical reference for the integration of traditional music resources into modern education.

### **Methods and Conceptual Analysis**

This study centers on the cultural inheritance and educational transformation of traditional Henan nursery rhymes within the framework of higher music teacher education. Drawing upon qualitative action research combined with teaching experiments, it systematically observes, records, and reflects on the processes of collecting cultural resources, integrating them into curricula, innovating artistically, and disseminating them pedagogically during teaching practices conducted between 2021 and 2024 across several normal institutions in Henan. Guided by the “culture–curriculum–practice” triadic integration theory, the study emphasizes the interaction between theory and practice, the activation of cultural value, and pedagogical innovation. The study identifies four main objectives centered on the cultural inheritance and educational transformation of traditional Henan nursery rhymes:

First, focusing on cultural preservation and value transmission, the project seeks to protect and revitalize the intangible cultural heritage value of Henan nursery rhymes, ensuring their continuity and dissemination in the contemporary context.

Second, innovating the curriculum system locally, the project aims to enrich the content and forms of music education in higher normal institutions by developing localized curriculum modules. By integrating traditional nursery rhymes into modern music teaching theories, and drawing upon Bruner’s (1966) spiral curriculum theory and Gardner’s (1999) theory of multiple intelligences, the project constructs a systematic curriculum covering cultural cognition, artistic creation, and teaching practice, facilitating the educational conversion of local cultural resources.

Third, enhancing the comprehensive capabilities of pre-service teachers. The project emphasizes improving students’ fieldwork skills, artistic innovation abilities, and classroom instruction competencies. Through activities such as field investigations, resource organization, musical adaptation, and lesson planning, students are trained to effectively integrate traditional culture into future teaching, fostering a virtuous cycle between cultural inheritance and educational application.

Fourth, deepening cultural identity and educational mission. Through long-term cultural engagement and teaching experiences, the project strengthens pre-service teachers’ emotional connection to Henan’s local culture and sense of responsibility, encouraging the formation of educational philosophies rooted in locality and dedicated to rural service, thus achieving unity between cultural self-awareness and professional commitment.

Based on these objectives, the study constructs a multidimensional practical pathway encompassing cultural inheritance, curriculum development, resource construction, artistic innovation, teaching practice, and interdisciplinary collaboration, outlined as follows:

### *Curriculum Integration*

Curriculum design serves as the foundational component for integrating traditional culture into higher normal education. The project introduces specialized elective courses such as Field Collection and Practice of Henan Nursery Rhymes and Appreciation of Local Folk Music, offering students dedicated spaces to deeply understand and engage with Henan folk music. Meanwhile, leveraging curriculum reform opportunities in core courses like Chinese Ethnic Music, Music Teaching Methods, and Early Childhood Music Education, the project embeds Henan nursery rhymes as thematic modules within the teaching system, achieving mutual integration between "local resources" and "core curriculum." Instructional design emphasizes the combination of theory and practice, balancing content delivery with skill development. Students are encouraged to analyze nursery rhymes from multidimensional perspectives including cultural background, lyrical semantics, musical characteristics, and aesthetic meanings, enabling them to build a systematic understanding of local music. Specialized courses such as Field Collection and Practice of Henan Nursery Rhymes and Appreciation of Local Folk Music establish cross-disciplinary platforms linking local culture with professional education. Additionally, thematic modules on Henan nursery rhymes are integrated into core courses like Chinese Ethnic Music and Music Teaching Methods, promoting the educational transformation of traditional music culture.

### *Field Research and Resource Development*

Fieldwork constitutes the first-hand research site for traditional nursery rhymes and an essential method for students to connect with folk culture and cultivate practical skills. The project organizes student groups to conduct systematic recording work in culturally diverse regions such as southern, northern, and eastern Henan. Recorded materials include oral performance texts, dialect phonetic characteristics, singing contexts and functions, and performer backgrounds, ensuring cultural contextual integrity. Following fieldwork, the project team collaborates with faculty and students to edit audio recordings, transcribe scores, and classify texts, gradually building a digital resource database containing audiovisual, textual, and dialect annotations. Based on this, supplementary school-based textbooks and teaching handbooks are developed, promoting the deep integration of teaching content and local cultural resources. Students are organized to conduct original recordings of nursery rhymes in southern, northern, and eastern Henan, interviewing folk performers and documenting their singing styles and dialect features. Audio, score, and visual materials are then compiled into a digital resource library, alongside school-based textbooks enriched with dialect pronunciation notes and singing guidance.

### *Artistic Reinterpretation and Educational Transformation*

At the artistic level, the project adopts a "protective recreation" approach, guiding students to adapt original nursery rhymes appropriately, including rhythm reconstruction, choral arrangements, Orff rhythmic patterns, and children's song-and-dance choreography. Emphasis is placed on preserving cultural meaning while enhancing teachability and artistic appeal. Diverse expressive methods are encouraged, such as using rhythm cards, body percussion, and improvised accompaniment for classroom reproduction. In terms of

educational transformation, students are guided to incorporate their creative works into kindergarten and lower primary school teaching activities, designing playful, engaging, and participatory music lessons that effectively link “folk tradition” with “classroom practice,” thereby enhancing the vitality of traditional music in modern education. Musical processing involves arranging traditional nursery rhymes into choral compositions and rhythmic patterns, integrating modern teaching approaches such as Orff methodology to enhance teaching applicability and artistic expression. At the instructional level, child-friendly singing and game activities are designed, simplifying complex musical elements into accessible classroom content.

#### *Teaching Practice and Social Dissemination*

To evaluate teaching outcomes and promote broader societal engagement, the project includes multi-stage practical components. First, pre-service teachers design lesson plans based on collected nursery rhymes and conduct micro-teaching sessions and peer reviews, forming a three-step closed-loop training process: “lesson plan design–classroom simulation–teaching optimization.” Second, events such as “Rural Melodies Concerts,” “Campus Intangible Cultural Heritage Festivals,” and “Local Nursery Rhyme Teaching Exhibitions” are held to move nursery rhyme creations beyond the classroom and into public spaces, transforming students’ teaching achievements into socially perceivable and shareable cultural products. Collaborations with local cultural centers and community education institutions further extend traditional nursery rhymes into society through parent-child music workshops and ICH-in-community initiatives, enhancing cultural interactions between normal institutions and the broader community. Pre-service teachers are required to design complete lesson plans around collected nursery rhymes and undergo trial teaching. Meanwhile, events such as “Rural Melodies Concerts” facilitate the social promotion of nursery rhymes from classrooms to campuses and communities.

#### *Interdisciplinary Collaboration*

The project emphasizes interdisciplinary integration and technological empowerment, exploring a composite dissemination model combining “music + language + technology.” With linguistic support, in-depth analysis of Henan dialect features in nursery rhymes is conducted, leading to the development of accompanying pinyin systems and phonetic annotations to assist non-native students in accurately mastering pronunciation and singing techniques. From a digital arts perspective, collaborations with the fields of animation and computer science have produced micro-animated music videos, interactive mini-program games, and AR-based learning kits. These innovations extend nursery rhyme instruction beyond traditional print and classroom settings to online and mobile platforms, thereby diversifying both the channels of dissemination and modes of participation. Additionally, invited intangible cultural heritage bearers host “Artist-in-Classroom” workshops, enhancing students’ immersive and authentic cultural experiences, and fostering an innovative ecosystem integrating “technology + tradition + education.” Interactive mechanisms are established with linguistics, animation, and digital technology disciplines. Invited intangible cultural heritage artists conduct singing and composition workshops, while collaborations with literature departments explore Henan dialects. Digital carriers such as animated MVs and mini-programs are utilized to enhance the fun and interactivity of nursery rhyme dissemination.

Stage	Core Content	Specific Pathway 1	Specific Pathway 2
Cultural Inheritance Foundation	Clarify goals and value positioning	Emphasize ICH protection and cultural awakening	Integrate local cultural education into professional training programs
Curriculum Integration Design	Curriculum system incorporation	Offer courses such as Collection and Practice of Henan Nursery Rhymes and Folk Music Appreciation	Embed thematic modules in Chinese Ethnic Music and Music Teaching Methods
Field Research Implementation	Obtain original materials	Organize field recordings of original nursery rhymes in southern, northern, and eastern Henan	Establish a digital resource library, compiling audio, scores, dialect pronunciations
Artistic Reinterpretation and Transformation	Artistic innovation	Adapt nursery rhymes into choral, Orff rhythm, instrumental forms	Design singing activities and classroom games suitable for children
Educational Application and Output	Classroom application	Students design lesson plans and conduct trial teaching	Host events like Rural Melodies Concerts to promote campus and community engagement
Cross-Disciplinary Expansion	Innovative dissemination	Invite ICH artists to host singing and workshop sessions	Combine linguistics, animation, and mini-program technologies to enhance dissemination

## Conclusion

This study finds that systematically integrating traditional Henan nursery rhymes into higher normal music education effectively revitalizes intangible cultural heritage while strengthening pre-service teachers' professional competencies. Through multi-stage practices—including curriculum development, fieldwork, resource curation, artistic reinterpretation, and instructional implementation—the project enhances students' cultural identification, artistic creativity, and teaching skills. The embedded "culture–curriculum–practice" triadic model supports a comprehensive learning process, facilitating deep engagement with local music traditions and enabling students to translate cultural understanding into pedagogical action.

Key findings highlight the value of interdisciplinary collaboration, field-based learning, and technological innovation in transforming folk music into adaptable teaching content. Field investigations and resource digitization promote authentic exposure to cultural materials, while artistic adaptations—such as Orff-inspired rhythmic patterns and child-centered choreography—demonstrate how traditional nursery rhymes can be modernized for classroom use. Moreover, lesson planning, microteaching, and community exhibitions foster a feedback-rich learning cycle that bridges classroom practice with public cultural engagement.

Based on these findings, the study recommends expanding curriculum space for regional music resources, establishing long-term university–community partnerships for folk music

transmission, and developing digital platforms for ICH-based music education. Institutions should further invest in interdisciplinary course design and capacity building for music educators, ensuring that local cultural heritage is sustainably integrated into teacher training systems. Future research may explore comparative models across provinces or examine how digital learning tools enhance accessibility and engagement in folk music pedagogy.

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