

Teaching Practices of Local Music Tradition in Gansu's Preschool Teacher Education Program

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Abstract

Gansu Province, a multi-ethnic region with a rich musical heritage, provides valuable resources for preschool teacher education. However, the ways in which local music traditions are incorporated into preservice teacher training remain insufficiently explored. This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the teaching of local music in preschool teacher education institutions in Gansu Province. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with teacher educators and preservice teachers, classroom observations, and analysis of course documents. Thematic analysis was used to identify key patterns in current teaching practices. The findings indicate that local music is often positioned as a supplementary component of the curriculum, with limited pedagogical depth, inadequate teacher preparation, and underutilized cultural resources. In response, this study proposes context-based strategies, including strengthening the curricular status of local music, enhancing professional development for teacher educators, and developing locally grounded teaching materials. By clarifying how local music can be more effectively integrated into preservice teacher education, this study contributes to the sustainable transmission of Gansu's musical heritage and supports culturally responsive early childhood teacher education in multi-ethnic contexts.

Key words: Preschool Teacher Education, Local Music Tradition, Teaching Practice, Cultural Inheritance

Introduction

Local music traditions constitute an essential component of regional cultural heritage, reflecting the historical memory, cultural values, and ethnic identities of local communities. Unlike standardized or commercialized music forms, local music is deeply embedded in the everyday life, rituals, and collective experiences of specific cultural groups. Gansu Province, located in northwestern China, is a multi-ethnic region in which Han, Tibetan, Yugur, Dongxiang, Hui, and other ethnic groups have coexisted for centuries. This long-standing intercultural interaction has given rise to a rich and diverse musical landscape, including *Hua'er* (a folk song genre widely practiced in northwest China), *Qinqiang* (a traditional opera form rooted in Shaanxi and Gansu), Yugur folk songs, and Yellow River boatmen's songs.

These musical traditions are not only artistic expressions but also carriers of language, history, and cultural identity, making them particularly valuable resources for education.

Preschool teacher education plays a foundational role in shaping early childhood education because it determines how future teachers understand music, culture, and pedagogy. Preservice teachers' exposure to local music during their professional training directly influences whether they are able to introduce children to culturally meaningful musical experiences in preschool settings. From the perspective of culturally responsive education, early childhood music education should not rely solely on standardized repertoires or Western pedagogical models, but should also reflect the cultural contexts in which children grow up. In this sense, integrating local music traditions into preschool teacher education is not merely a matter of content selection, but an important way to connect education with community culture and cultural sustainability.

In recent years, China's educational policies have increasingly emphasized the importance of cultural inheritance and the integration of local cultural resources into school curricula, including teacher education (Wang, 2020). Policy documents and curriculum guidelines have repeatedly called for strengthening students' awareness of traditional culture and encouraging the use of regional cultural resources in teaching. However, a significant disconnect persists between these policy directives and their translation into effective, systematic classroom practice. This gap is particularly pronounced in regions like Gansu, where rich, non-standardized cultural traditions require specialized pedagogical approaches and resources that are not widely available or uniformly implemented. Consequently, the potential of local music as a vehicle for cultural transmission within early childhood teacher preparation remains largely under-realized.

The core phenomenon under investigation is the current state of pedagogical integration of Gansu's local music traditions within preservice preschool teacher training programs. Evidence suggests that this integration faces systemic challenges: local music is frequently relegated to a supplementary or elective status within the curriculum, rather than being treated as a core professional competency. Many teacher educators themselves have received limited formal training in these local traditions, leading to an over-reliance on generic music textbooks that offer scant attention to regional culture. This often results in teaching practices that are superficial—focusing on simple song reproduction without engaging with the deeper musical structures, cultural significances, or age-appropriate pedagogical adaptations required for early childhood settings. Furthermore, the ecosystem supporting such teaching—including systematic curriculum frameworks, specialized teaching materials, digital resources, and sustainable community partnerships—remains underdeveloped.

These deficiencies have direct and consequential implications. Preservice teachers often graduate with fragmented knowledge of local musical heritage and, more critically, with limited practical confidence and pedagogical skills to integrate this heritage into their future classrooms. This failure in teacher preparation ultimately diminishes opportunities for young children to access and identify with their own cultural heritage through music, thereby weakening the critical role of early childhood education in fostering cultural continuity and identity

Despite the acknowledged cultural wealth of Gansu and the policy imperative for its integration into education, there is a notable scarcity of empirical research that systematically examines the how and why behind this pedagogical shortfall. Specifically, there is a lack of detailed inquiry into: (a) the concrete teaching practices and curriculum designs currently employed in preschool teacher education institutions, (b) the perceptions, experiences, and challenges faced by both the teacher educators who deliver this content and the preservice teachers who receive it, and (c) the institutional and resource-based constraints that hinder more effective implementation. This lack of a detailed, evidence-based understanding of the on-the-ground realities constitutes a significant research gap.

It is within this context that the present study is situated and justified. This research is designed to address this gap by undertaking a qualitative investigation into the teaching practices of local music traditions in preschool teacher education programs across Gansu Province. By examining the interplay between curriculum design, actual classroom practices, and the lived experiences of key stakeholders, the study aims to move beyond a mere description of the problem. Its purpose is to identify the root causes of existing challenges and to generate context-sensitive, actionable strategies for improvement. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute to bridging the policy-practice divide, enhancing the quality of culturally responsive teacher education, and supporting the sustainable revitalization of Gansu's unique musical heritage through the powerful conduit of early childhood education.

Literature Review

Preliminary Integration into the Curriculum

Several preschool teacher education institutions in Gansu have begun to incorporate local music traditions into relevant courses, primarily through embedding content into existing subjects such as Preschool Music Education, Folk Music Appreciation, and Preschool Art Teaching Methods, rather than establishing independent local music courses. For example, in Preschool Music Education, instructors introduce fundamental knowledge of Gansu Hua'er and Qinqiang, play representative works, and guide students in learning basic singing techniques. In Folk Music Appreciation, special topics on Yugur folk songs and Huanghe boatmen's songs are included to help students understand the cultural context of local music.

Additionally, a limited number of institutions offer elective courses or public lectures on local music, inviting local folk artists to demonstrate performance techniques and share the stories behind musical works. This approach enriches students' exposure to local music and stimulates their learning interest.

Diversification of Teaching Methods

Teaching practices have employed varied instructional methods, moving beyond traditional teacher-centered approaches. Experiential learning is widely adopted: students attend live performances by folk artists, participate in local music events (e.g., Hua'er festivals), and learn to play traditional instruments such as the Banhu and Erhu used in Qinqiang. Case-based and discussion-oriented teaching are also utilized, whereby instructors present real-world examples of local music teaching in kindergartens and guide students in discussing how to adapt local music to suit young children's cognitive levels and aesthetic needs.

Initial Construction of Teaching Resources

Through collaborations with local cultural departments, folk art organizations, and kindergartens, some institutions have started to develop teaching resources for local music. These efforts include collecting and organizing classic musical works, preparing simplified teaching materials and multimedia courseware, and recording performances and interviews with folk artists to build a resource database. Furthermore, practical teaching bases have been set up in local kindergartens, allowing students to gain hands-on experience in teaching local music

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design to explore how local music traditions are taught in preschool teacher education programs in Gansu Province. This approach is particularly suitable for investigating educational practices situated in specific cultural and institutional contexts, as it allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and teaching realities.

Rather than testing hypotheses, this study aimed to document current practices, identify challenges, and generate contextually grounded strategies for improving local music instruction in preschool teacher preparation.

Research Sites and Participants

The study was conducted in three preschool teacher education institutions in Gansu Province that offer music-related courses for preservice kindergarten teachers. These institutions were selected because they had incorporated local music content, to varying degrees, into their training programs.

Participants included: Preservice preschool teachers who had completed at least one music-related course, and Teacher educators responsible for teaching preschool music, folk music, or related subjects.

In addition, classroom observations were conducted in selected music classes where local music content was included, in order to capture how teaching was implemented in actual instructional settings.

Data Collection Methods

Three qualitative data sources were used.

First, open-ended questionnaires were administered to preservice teachers to collect information about their learning experiences, exposure to local music, and perceptions of current teaching practices. These questionnaires allowed students to express their views in their own words.

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with teacher educators. The interview questions focused on how local music was integrated into the curriculum, the teaching methods used, the challenges encountered, and the availability of teaching resources. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent.

Third, classroom observations were carried out in music education classes that included local music elements. The observations focused on teaching content, instructional strategies, student engagement, and the use of teaching materials. Detailed field notes were taken during and after each class.

Data Analysis

All qualitative data, including questionnaire responses, interview transcripts, and observation notes, were analyzed using thematic analysis. The data were first read repeatedly to achieve familiarization. They were then coded to identify recurring patterns related to curriculum integration, teaching approaches, teacher expertise, and teaching resources.

Codes were grouped into broader themes, which were compared across data sources to ensure consistency. This process of data triangulation enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings by confirming that key themes were supported by multiple forms of evidence.

Findings

Based on questionnaire data, interviews with teacher educators, and classroom observations, three major aspects of the teaching practices of local music traditions in Gansu's preschool teacher education programs were identified: curriculum integration, teaching methods, and teaching resources.

Curriculum Integration of Local Music

The findings indicate that local music traditions have begun to be incorporated into preschool teacher education curricula in Gansu, but mainly in an embedded and non-systematic manner. In most institutions, local music content is integrated into existing courses such as *Preschool Music Education*, *Folk Music Appreciation*, and *Preschool Art Teaching Methods*, rather than being offered as independent courses.

Teachers reported that in *Preschool Music Education*, basic knowledge of Gansu Hua'er and Qinqiang is typically introduced, accompanied by listening activities and simple singing practice. In *Folk Music Appreciation*, students are exposed to Yugur folk songs and Huanghe (Yellow River) boatmen's songs, primarily through audio-visual materials and teacher explanation of cultural background. However, both questionnaire and interview data show that the depth of coverage varies considerably among instructors, depending on their personal familiarity with different local music genres.

Some institutions also provide elective lectures or short-term workshops on local music, often by inviting folk artists to demonstrate performance techniques and explain the cultural meanings behind their music. These activities were perceived by students as highly engaging, but they are not regularly offered and therefore do not constitute a stable part of the curriculum.

Teaching Methods Used in Local Music Instruction

The data show that multiple teaching methods are used in local music instruction, with an increasing emphasis on experiential and participatory learning. Classroom observations revealed that teachers frequently combine lectures with listening activities, video

demonstrations, and live performance demonstrations when introducing local music traditions.

Experiential learning was a prominent feature in many programs. Students were encouraged to attend local folk music performances, participate in events such as Hua'er festivals, and observe or try traditional instruments used in Qinqiang, such as the *Banhu* and *Erhu*. Teachers and students both reported that these experiences helped to enhance understanding of local music beyond textbook knowledge.

In addition, some teachers employed case-based and discussion-oriented approaches. For example, they presented examples of how local music is used in kindergartens and asked students to discuss how such music could be adapted to suit preschool children's cognitive and emotional development. Nevertheless, observation data indicated that most activities remained teacher-directed, with limited opportunities for students to design, perform, or create their own child-oriented local music teaching activities.

Development and Use of Teaching Resources

The findings suggest that the development of teaching resources for local music is still at an early stage. Through cooperation with local cultural institutions, folk art organizations, and kindergartens, some teacher education programs have begun to collect and organize local music materials. These include audio and video recordings of classic works, simplified teaching materials, and recorded interviews with folk artists.

Several institutions have also established practice bases in local kindergartens, where preservice teachers can observe or conduct local music teaching activities. These practice opportunities were viewed positively by students, as they allowed them to experience how local music can be used in real preschool settings.

However, both teachers and students reported that most available resources are basic and scattered. Teaching materials are mainly limited to recordings and simple handouts, with few systematic textbooks, child-friendly teaching aids, or digital platforms for resource sharing. As a result, the use of local music resources in teaching remains inconsistent and highly dependent on individual teachers' initiative.

Challenges in Teaching Local Music in Preschool Teacher Education

Based on the findings presented above, several major challenges can be identified in the teaching of local music traditions in Gansu's preschool teacher education programs. These challenges are closely related to curriculum design, teaching practices, faculty capacity, and the development and use of teaching resources.

Lack of a Systematic Curriculum Structure

Although local music traditions have been incorporated into several courses, the findings reveal that curriculum integration remains fragmented and unsystematic. Local music content is usually embedded within existing subjects rather than organized into a coherent curriculum framework. As a result, the scope and depth of students' learning vary significantly depending on the instructor and the specific course they attend.

In addition, instruction tends to focus primarily on listening to and singing representative works, while cultural meanings, historical background, and pedagogical adaptation for preschool children receive relatively limited attention. This fragmented approach makes it difficult for preservice teachers to develop a comprehensive understanding of Gansu's local music traditions and to apply them confidently in early childhood education contexts.

Limited Student-Centered and Creative Learning Opportunities

Although experiential activities such as attending performances and observing folk artists are available, the findings show that most teaching remains teacher-centered. Students are often positioned as observers rather than active participants in the learning process. Opportunities to design, adapt, and perform local music for preschool audiences are relatively rare.

Furthermore, the use of educational technology in local music teaching is limited. Digital platforms, online resource sharing, and immersive tools such as virtual or simulated cultural environments are seldom used. This restricts students' opportunities to engage deeply with local music and to explore innovative ways of teaching it to young children.

Insufficient Professional Expertise among Instructors

The study also indicates that many teacher educators have a general background in music education but lack specialized training in Gansu's local music traditions. Their knowledge of local music genres, performance practices, and cultural contexts is often based on personal interest rather than systematic professional preparation.

The shortage of instructors with strong expertise in local music, as well as the limited involvement of folk artists in long-term teaching roles, further constrains the quality of instruction. Without adequate professional support, it is difficult to provide students with in-depth, culturally grounded, and pedagogically appropriate local music education.

Underdeveloped and Underutilized Teaching Resources

Although some teaching materials and practice bases have been established, the overall teaching resource system remains underdeveloped. Most resources are limited to audio and video recordings and basic handouts, while child-friendly teaching aids, structured teaching guides, and digital learning platforms are scarce.

In addition, resources are often isolated within individual institutions, with few mechanisms for sharing and updating materials across programs. This leads to duplication of effort and low overall utilization. Moreover, many existing materials are not sufficiently adapted to the cognitive and learning characteristics of preschool children, which limits their practical value for future teaching.

Strategies for Improving Local Music Teaching in Preschool Teacher Education

In response to the challenges identified above, targeted strategies are proposed to strengthen the integration of local music traditions in Gansu's preschool teacher education programs. These strategies aim to improve curriculum structure, teaching practice, faculty development, and resource utilization.

Establishing a Coherent Local Music Curriculum Framework

To address the problem of fragmented curriculum integration, it is essential to develop a systematic and structured local music curriculum for preschool teacher education. Clear learning objectives should be defined to ensure that preservice teachers acquire not only basic knowledge of Gansu's local music traditions but also the ability to apply this knowledge in early childhood teaching.

A tiered curriculum framework can be designed. A foundational module such as *Introduction to Gansu Local Music* could provide students with an overview of major genres, historical development, and cultural meanings. An applied module such as *Local Music in Preschool Teaching* could focus on how to adapt local music for young children, including song simplification, movement design, and activity planning. In addition, a practicum module could allow students to implement local music teaching in kindergarten settings, thereby linking theory with practice.

Local music should also be integrated across the broader teacher education curriculum. For example, local music themes can be incorporated into courses on child development, preschool curriculum design, and art education, so that cultural heritage becomes a natural component of professional training rather than an isolated topic.

Promoting Student-Centered and Creative Teaching Approaches

To enhance student engagement and learning effectiveness, teaching methods should move beyond teacher-centered transmission toward more interactive and creative approaches. Project-based and inquiry-based learning can be introduced, allowing students to investigate local music traditions, collect folk songs, and design child-friendly teaching activities based on their findings.

Students could be guided to adapt Hua'er or Yugur folk songs into preschool-appropriate versions, or to design music-and-movement activities inspired by Qinqiang. Such tasks would encourage active participation and deepen students' understanding of both music and pedagogy.

At the same time, greater use of educational technology should be encouraged. Digital platforms can be developed to share audio, video, and teaching materials related to local music. Virtual or simulated cultural environments could also be used to help students experience local music contexts more vividly, especially when direct field visits are not feasible.

Strengthening Faculty Professional Development

Improving the quality of local music teaching requires strengthening the professional capacity of teacher educators. Targeted training programs should be organized in collaboration with local cultural institutions, art colleges, and folk music organizations. These programs can help teachers enhance their knowledge of local music traditions, performance practices, and culturally responsive teaching strategies.

In addition, involving local folk artists as part-time instructors or guest teachers can bring authentic cultural expertise into teacher education. Long-term cooperation mechanisms,

such as mentorship partnerships between folk artists and teacher educators, can help ensure continuity and depth in local music instruction.

Teachers should also be encouraged to conduct research on local music education and to participate in cultural heritage projects, which would further enrich their professional knowledge and teaching practice.

Developing and Sharing High-Quality Teaching Resources

To overcome the limitations of existing teaching materials, a comprehensive local music teaching resource system should be developed. This system should include audio and video recordings, musical scores, teaching guides, and child-friendly teaching aids such as picture books and simplified instruments.

A digital resource platform can be established to store, update, and share these materials among preschool teacher education institutions in Gansu. Such a platform would help avoid duplication, increase accessibility, and promote the effective use of resources.

Close collaboration with kindergartens is also essential. By involving preschool teachers in the development and testing of teaching materials, resources can be better aligned with the developmental characteristics and learning needs of young children, thereby enhancing their practical value in real teaching contexts.

Conclusion

This study examined the teaching practices of local music traditions in preschool teacher education programs in Gansu Province through questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. The findings reveal that although local music has begun to be incorporated into teacher training, its integration remains fragmented, teacher-centered, and constrained by limited professional expertise and underdeveloped teaching resources. These issues restrict preservice teachers' ability to develop a deep, systematic, and pedagogically applicable understanding of Gansu's rich local music heritage.

By analyzing current practices and identifying key challenges, this study provides an evidence-based foundation for improving local music education in preschool teacher preparation. The proposed strategies—including establishing a coherent curriculum framework, promoting student-centered and creative learning, strengthening faculty professional development, and improving the teaching resource system—offer a practical roadmap for enhancing the quality and sustainability of local music instruction.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the integration of cultural heritage and teacher education. By embedding Gansu's local music traditions into preschool teacher training, future kindergarten teachers can become active transmitters of regional culture, ensuring that local music is not only preserved but also meaningfully revitalized in early childhood education.

Nevertheless, this study has certain limitations. It focused on a limited number of institutions within Gansu Province and relied primarily on descriptive and qualitative analyses. Future research could expand the sample size, include comparative studies across regions, or adopt

longitudinal designs to examine how improved local music training influences teachers' classroom practice and children's cultural learning over time.

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