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Beyond Participation: Musical Appreciation and Emerging Cultural-Emotional Connection in Young Children Learning Minnan Nursery Rhymes

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Abstract

Visible enthusiasm in early-childhood heritage-music activities can be mistaken for musical mastery or cultural identification. This mixed-methods bounded implementation study examined how participation, developing musical appreciation, and emerging cultural-emotional connection were manifested during a seven-week Minnan nursery-rhyme module with 20 children aged 5–6 years in one natural Upper Kindergarten Class in Quanzhou, China. Data comprised 2,940 behaviourally anchored classroom-observation ratings, 1,400 formative ratings by a researcher and classroom teacher, observation notes, 560 anecdotal records, one teacher interview, and 20 parent interviews. Overall, 80.17% of observation ratings were Score 3, but domains differed: Attentive Listening and Engagement reached 95.89%, whereas Lyric and Dialect Participation reached 56.79%. Independent responses to simple meaning questions were uncommon (5.00% Score 3), and life-experience connections often remained prompt-dependent (31.43%). Researcher-teacher exact agreement was 84.43%, but weighted kappa was moderate (κ = .418). All 20 parents reported home singing, though autonomy differed. Emerging cultural-emotional connection was supported cautiously where cultural material linked with family, hometown, or personally meaningful affect. The findings support construct-specific evidentiary thresholds: participation can be meaningful before musical performance or cultural meaning-making becomes independent. The study contributes a construct-specific account that distinguishes participation, developing musical appreciation, cultural recognition, supported meaning-making, and selected instances of emerging cultural-emotional connection. It also offers an evidence-threshold approach that avoids equating prompted performance with independent competence or short-term affect with stable cultural identity.

Keywords: Early Childhood Music Education, Musical Appreciation, Heritage Music, Cultural-Emotional Connection, Minnan Nursery Rhymes

Introduction

Culturally situated music activities are often attractive to young children because they combine sound, movement, language, story, play, social interaction, and familiar or novel cultural images. In early-childhood settings, such activities can produce highly visible signs of engagement: children sing, clap, move, imitate, smile, point to pictures, join role-play, and request to repeat favourite material. These behaviours matter educationally, but they can also tempt researchers and practitioners to infer more than the evidence supports. Active participation does not automatically demonstrate accurate musical performance, independent lyric understanding, language proficiency, cultural understanding, or stable cultural identity. The distinction is especially important in heritage-music education, where positive classroom engagement is sometimes interpreted as evidence that children have already internalised cultural meanings or developed a durable sense of belonging.

Early-childhood music research has long treated children's musical responses as varied and developmental rather than reducible to complete singing accuracy. Studies of singing and classroom music suggest that young children may participate musically through partial vocal reproduction, bodily entrainment, affective response, or repeated engagement even when specific pitch, rhythmic, or linguistic demands remain unstable (Welch et al., 1991; Barrett et al., 2020). Custodero's (2005) work on observable musical engagement likewise shows that meaningful participation can be visible in attention, persistence, bodily involvement, and self-initiated musical behaviour. From a praxial or participatory perspective, musicking is an activity of listening, performing, moving, interacting, and making meaning rather than merely reproducing a finished musical product (Small, 1998; Elliott & Silverman, 2015). These perspectives support a broad view of participation, but they do not remove the need to distinguish participation from other constructs.

That distinction becomes more consequential when music carries local language and heritage content. Local songs can bring children into contact with words, images, customs, places, foods, festivals, family memories, and ways of life that are culturally specific. Heritage-oriented music education therefore has the potential to connect classroom music with place and community (Brook, 2013), while culturally sustaining perspectives emphasise meaningful relationships among language, family, lived experience, and cultural practice rather than symbolic exposure alone (Paris & Alim, 2017). Yet recognising a local object is not the same as explaining its meaning; repeating one heritage-language word is not the same as language acquisition; and enjoying a culturally themed activity is not equivalent to cultural identity. The safeguarding framework of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2003) similarly positions transmission as an ongoing cultural process rather than a one-off encounter.

Minnan nursery rhymes provide a particularly useful context in which to examine these distinctions. They are orally transmitted children's rhymes associated with Minnan-speaking communities and may be recited, chanted, or sung. Their language and musical organisation are closely connected to local dialect, and their themes frequently draw on family life, animals, games, festivals, food, labour, local places, and everyday cultural experience (Chen & Zhou, 2008; Chen, 2022; National Editorial Committee of the Collection of Chinese Folk Songs & Editorial Committee of the Collection of Chinese Folk Songs: Fujian Volume, 1996). When sung Minnan nursery rhymes are brought into kindergarten music teaching, children

encounter not only melody and rhythm but also dialect pronunciation, culturally situated imagery, movement, narrative, and opportunities for family association.

The present article reports the implementation and evaluation segment of a larger multiphase mixed-methods doctoral study that developed a Minnan nursery-rhyme teaching module for 5–6-year-old children in Quanzhou, China. The larger study used the ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation) model to organise instructional development, but the present paper does not revisit the detailed needs analysis, 14-to-7 repertoire screening process, or expert-validation results. Instead, it focuses narrowly on the seven-week bounded classroom case and asks what the implementation evidence can and cannot support about children's participation, appreciation, and cultural-emotional response.

This focus addresses a process-level gap. Much heritage-education discussion is normatively positive, but a publishable empirical account requires construct discipline. Children may participate actively while depending on teacher modelling for unfamiliar dialect lyrics; they may perform movement independently while sung phrases or beat maintenance remain unstable; they may identify tangyuan, red-brick houses, or festival imagery while still requiring prompts to explain cultural meanings; and they may sing a nursery rhyme at home without doing so spontaneously or accurately. Conversely, a child who listens quietly to a gentle song may demonstrate meaningful appreciation even without energetic movement. These differences are not peripheral exceptions. They are central to understanding how culturally situated early-childhood music learning manifests in a real classroom.

Contributions of the Present Study

Research on Minnan nursery rhymes has documented their repertoire, characteristics, language, and cultural content (Chen & Zhou, 2008; Chen, 2022; National Editorial Committee of the Collection of Chinese Folk Songs & Editorial Committee of the Collection of Chinese Folk Songs: Fujian Volume, 1996). In parallel, early-childhood music scholarship has shown that musical engagement may be expressed through attention, partial singing, bodily involvement, affect, and repeated engagement (Welch et al., 1991; Custodero, 2005; Barrett et al., 2020), while participatory and culturally sustaining perspectives emphasise music-making and the relationships among music, place, family, and cultural practice (Small, 1998; Elliott & Silverman, 2015; Brook, 2013; Paris & Alim, 2017). The present study does not claim these broad principles as new. Rather, it brings them together in an implementation-level examination of sung Minnan nursery rhymes with 5–6-year-old children and asks how different dimensions of response can be distinguished empirically.

First, the study makes a conceptual contribution by offering a construct-specific account of participation, developing musical appreciation, cultural recognition, cultural understanding, life-experience connection, and emerging cultural-emotional connection. These constructs are related but not interchangeable, and they are not treated as inevitable stages in a linear developmental sequence. In particular, emerging cultural-emotional connection is interpreted only in selected cases where culturally specific material is associated with family, place, or lived experience and is accompanied by personally meaningful affect or voluntary re-engagement. Recognition of a local object, enjoyment of a song, or repetition of a Minnan word alone is not treated as sufficient evidence of this connection.

Second, the study adds context-specific empirical detail to research on young children's participation in heritage-music learning. The observation profile was uneven: Attentive Listening and Engagement reached 95.89% Score 3, whereas Lyric and Dialect Participation reached 56.79%. Only 5.00% of ratings for independent responses to simple song-meaning questions reached Score 3, and independent life-experience connections reached 31.43%. These findings show how high levels of visible participation can coexist with continuing support needs in dialect, lyric, rhythmic, and semantic tasks. The study also documents musical appreciation in both energetic and quiet forms and differentiates home re-engagement by autonomy: although all 20 parents reported home singing, 17 described it as clearly spontaneous, two described mixed spontaneous and prompted singing, and one described mainly prompted singing.

Third, the study offers a methodological contribution by showing how multiple forms of evidence can be integrated without inflating the participant sample or treating related records as independent replications. The 2,940 observation ratings and 1,400 formative ratings remained repeated records nested within the same 20 children. Researcher–teacher formative assessment produced 84.43% exact agreement but a weighted kappa of .418, with substantial variation across lessons. Retaining this difference, alongside prompt dependence and adult-source limitations, makes disagreement and differing assessment thresholds visible rather than concealing them behind a single positive summary. The contribution is not a new mixed-methods technique, but a transparent, context-sensitive application of evidence integration.

Fourth, the findings offer a practical contribution for early-childhood heritage-music pedagogy. They support providing multiple routes into musical participation—listening, singing, movement, role-play, and group performance—while explicitly scaffolding unfamiliar lyrics, dialect pronunciation, rhythm, and cultural meaning. They also suggest that assessment records should identify whether a response was independent or prompted, distinguish cultural recognition from explanation, and recognise quiet listening and selective preference alongside more conspicuous movement. These implications are intended as analytically useful guidance for comparable teaching contexts, not as claims of statistical generalisability from one class.

Accordingly, the distinctive contribution of this article lies not in claiming that participation, musical engagement, or family–place connections have been overlooked by all previous research. It lies in showing, within a specific Minnan heritage-music implementation, how these dimensions can diverge, how support conditions shape what children demonstrate, and what evidentiary threshold is needed before classroom observations and adult reports can support claims about emerging cultural-emotional connection.

Accordingly, this article is organised by three questions derived from the evidence for the thesis's fourth and fifth research questions without changing the original study design. First, what patterns of observable classroom participation, independence, and task performance were documented across seven non-equivalent Minnan nursery-rhyme lessons? Second, how was developing musical appreciation manifested across child-generated classroom evidence and adult-reported classroom and home evidence? Third, under what evidentiary conditions did cultural recognition and life-experience associations support a

cautious interpretation of emerging cultural-emotional connection? By treating the 20 children, rather than the thousands of repeated ratings, as the participant sample and by retaining rater disagreement, prompt dependence, source dependence, and divergent cases, the study seeks to show that the strength of heritage-music research lies not in maximising positive claims but in matching each claim to the level of evidence that actually supports it.

Conceptual Framing

The conceptual framing combines sociocultural mediation, embodied and participatory music learning, a multidimensional conception of musical appreciation, and a graded evidentiary approach to cultural interpretation. These lenses are complementary but not interchangeable. They are used to explain different aspects of the observed classroom process rather than to construct a causal developmental model.

Sociocultural Mediation and Scaffolding

Sociocultural theory treats learning as participation in socially and culturally organised activity mediated by language, symbols, tools, teachers, peers, and family members (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). This perspective is particularly relevant to Minnan nursery-rhyme learning because the instructional content is simultaneously musical, linguistic, social, and cultural. A child does not encounter a dialect song as an isolated acoustic object. The song is mediated through teacher voice, peer participation, lyric charts, images, local cultural objects, audio and video, movement, questions, role-play, and family references.

Within this framing, teacher support is not an incidental correction added after learning has failed. Modelling, repetition, slowed pacing, short-phrase practice, mouth-shape cues, visual prompts, contextual questioning, and peer support are mechanisms through which participation becomes possible. The related concept of scaffolding is used here in the pedagogical sense developed by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976): support is adjusted to the learner's current performance and can be reduced when greater independence becomes possible. However, supported performance cannot be assumed to be equivalent to stable internalisation. A child who answers correctly after a picture cue or teacher question has demonstrated meaningful participation under support conditions, but the response should not be reported as fully independent cultural understanding.

Embodied and Participatory Musicking

Embodied perspectives locate musical meaning in the relation among listening, bodily movement, perception, emotion, and action (Leman, 2007). Participatory perspectives similarly foreground music as something people do together through singing, moving, performing, listening, and interacting (Small, 1998). In early childhood, clapping, stepping, gesture, role-play, group movement, and vocal imitation can therefore be substantive forms of musical participation rather than mere preliminary activities before 'real' music learning begins.

This perspective is useful for interpreting the module because bodily and social participation often provided accessible routes into songs whose dialect or melodic content was not yet independently secure. At the same time, embodiment should not be romanticised. A child can complete a movement sequence while singing only part of a phrase or losing a steady beat. Embodied participation may open access to musicking without

eliminating the need for focused vocal, rhythmic, or semantic instruction. The conceptual task is therefore to recognise the value of movement and performance while keeping them analytically distinct from mastery of every musical or linguistic demand.

Musical Appreciation as a Multidimensional Construct

In this study, musical appreciation is defined as a developing, contextually manifested form of musical engagement rather than as mature aesthetic judgement. It is examined through six interrelated dimensions: attentive engagement, affective response, song preference, initial musical discrimination, expressive response, and voluntary re-engagement. This definition draws on research that treats children's musical engagement as visible across attention, affect, persistence, participation, preference, and self-initiated musical behaviour (Custodero, 2005; Barrett et al., 2020).

The definition deliberately rejects two reductions. First, enjoyment alone is insufficient. Smiling, excitement, or active movement is relevant affective evidence but cannot by itself represent the entire construct. Second, singing accuracy alone is insufficient. Children may appreciate a song through attentive listening, gentle humming, repeated requests, selective preference, or expressive movement even when complete vocal reproduction is not secure. The concept therefore accommodates both energetic and quiet forms of response. This is important in a repertoire containing both movement-oriented songs and the gentler Moonlight, Moonlight Bright.

Cultural Recognition, Understanding, and Emerging Cultural-Emotional Connection

Cultural evidence is organised by evidentiary thresholds rather than by a deterministic developmental staircase. Cultural recognition refers to identifying, naming, pointing to, selecting, or otherwise responding to local foods, buildings, objects, customs, animals, places, words, or visual material associated with a song. Cultural understanding requires more: a simple explanation of meaning, contextual function, or relation among song content, cultural material, and lived experience. Such understanding may still be scaffolded, and the amount of prompting matters when interpreting independence.

Life-experience connection is analytically richer when children associate a song with grandparents, family practices, festivals, home, community, local places, or hometown experience. Yet one prompted association does not establish durable belonging. The most cautious higher-order construct used here is emerging cultural-emotional connection. It is supported only when several elements co-occur: culturally specific material, a family/place/lived-experience association, and personally meaningful affect or voluntary re-engagement such as warmth, curiosity, closeness, pride, family memory, or a repeated return to the cultural material.

This construct is intentionally weaker than cultural identity. The seven-week study did not measure stable self-concept, durable group belonging, long-term cultural practice, or persistence across time and settings. Recognition is therefore not upgraded into understanding, language use is not upgraded into proficiency, and positive affect is not upgraded into identity. Culturally sustaining and place-oriented perspectives support the importance of connecting learning with family, language, place, and practice (Brook, 2013;

Paris & Alim, 2017), but they do not justify deterministic claims from short-term classroom exposure.

Taken together, these lenses produce a non-deterministic evidence model. Participation and engagement describe what children did in the classroom. Appreciation concerns the musical quality and continuity of their responses. Cultural recognition and understanding concern what local content children could identify and explain. Life-experience connection concerns whether cultural material became linked with family or place. Emerging cultural-emotional connection is reserved for stronger cases in which cultural material, lived association, and affective meaning co-occurred. The categories can overlap, but no arrow is assumed to lead inevitably from one to the next.

Method

Study Design and Bounded Implementation

The present article reports the bounded implementation/evaluation segment of a larger multiphase mixed-methods study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The implementation was treated as an embedded natural-class case rather than an effectiveness trial. One existing Upper Kindergarten Class in a participating kindergarten in Quanzhou comprised the implementation case. The class included 20 children aged 5–6 years, anonymously coded C01–C20. The empirical participant sample remained N = 20 throughout the seven weeks.

This boundary is methodologically important because the study generated large numbers of repeated records. Each child participated in seven lessons, producing 140 child-lesson occasions. The Classroom Observation Checklist contained 21 indicators, generating 20 × 7 × 21 = 2,940 indicator-level ratings. The formative assessment contained five lesson-specific indicators rated independently by the researcher and classroom teacher, generating 700 ratings per rater and 1,400 ratings in total. The paired unit for agreement analysis was the same child, lesson, and indicator, yielding 700 paired rating units. These repeated records were nested within the same 20 children and were not treated as enlarged independent samples (Kenny & Judd, 1986; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

The seven weekly lessons were also non-equivalent. A different nursery rhyme was taught each week, and the lessons differed in musical, dialectal, cultural, and activity demands. The sequence comprised The Rabbit's Eyes Are Like Agate, Letting the Chickens and Ducks Out, A Little Bird, Winter Festival/Winter Solstice, Ti-O-O/The Dark Sky, Jumping over the Fire Heap, and Moonlight, Moonlight Bright. Across the module, a relatively stable lesson framework was retained: contextual introduction, focused listening, lyric chart and dialect modelling, singing and movement, cultural connection, and reflection/summary. Teachers could adjust pacing, repetition, phrase length, movement difficulty, prompting, and activity emphasis according to the song and children's immediate responses. Because the weekly tasks were not equivalent tests, cross-lesson percentages were interpreted descriptively rather than as a standardised growth curve (Shadish et al., 2002).

Data Sources

Table 1 summarises the evidence clusters. The Classroom Observation Checklist used a behaviourally anchored 0–3 ordinal scale: 0 = behaviour not observed; 1 = observed only after repeated teacher prompts; 2 = observed with occasional prompts; and 3 = observed

independently and consistently within the relevant classroom task. Its 21 indicators were organised into five domains: Attentive Listening and Engagement; Lyric and Dialect Participation; Rhythm, Singing, and Movement Participation; Cultural Recognition and Meaning Connection; and Emotional Response, Appreciation, and Participation. One researcher-observer completed all checklist ratings and linked written notes. A fixed observer and common anchors supported procedural continuity, but there was no second checklist observer and therefore no inter-observer reliability estimate.

Formative assessment provided a second classroom evidence cluster. After each lesson, the researcher and classroom teacher independently rated five song-specific indicators using a three-level scale: Not Yet Demonstrated, Emerging, and Consistently Demonstrated. The five indicators varied across lessons in accordance with song-specific musical, linguistic, activity, and cultural objectives. The two raters also produced 560 anecdotal records in total, comprising one musical and one cultural anecdote per child, per lesson, per rater. Formative assessment was treated as process-oriented evidence rather than as seven repeated standardised tests (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

The qualitative evidence further included linked classroom observation notes, one post-implementation interview with the classroom teacher, and 20 post-implementation interviews with parents or primary guardians. Parent interviews addressed home singing, requests to listen again, preferences, expressive responses, attempts to use Minnan words or phrases, and connections with family or cultural experience. Teacher evidence addressed implementation, song differences, scaffolding, participation, dialect teaching, cultural response, and classroom adjustment. The teacher's interview evidence was explicitly treated as role-dependent because she was also the implementer and formative-assessment rater.

Table 1
Bounded implementation design and evidence clusters

Evidence cluster	Providers / sample	Record structure	Primary analytical function	Critical boundary
Classroom Observation Checklist	20 children	140 child-lesson occasions; 21 indicators each; 2,940 ratings with linked notes	Repeated descriptive evidence of participation, independence, and task performance	Same 20 children across seven lessons; one researcher-observer; ordinal scale; possible ceiling concentration
Formative assessment	20 children; researcher and classroom teacher	1,400 ratings; 700 paired units; 560 musical/cultural anecdotes	Lesson-specific performance and researcher-teacher correspondence	Five indicators varied by lesson; not seven equivalent repeated tests
Teacher interview	1 implementation teacher	One post-implementation interview	Practitioner interpretation of song differences, scaffolding, difficulties, and responses	Teacher was implementer, rater, and interviewee; role-dependent evidence
Parent interviews	20 parents / guardians	20 post-implementation interviews	Home singing, preference, re-engagement, family/place associations, Minnan-language attempts	Retrospective adult reports; no direct home observation or language test

Analysis

Ordinal classroom data were analysed primarily with frequencies and percentages, with medians used where useful. Pooled rating distributions described the rating corpus, not participant frequency. Child-level repeated-record profiles and lesson-specific summaries were retained to preserve variation. The seven lessons were not modelled as equivalent longitudinal measurement occasions, and no causal inference was drawn from later lessons having higher percentages than earlier lessons (Stevens, 1946; Sullivan & Artino, 2013; Shadish et al., 2002).

Researcher-teacher formative correspondence was examined with percentage exact agreement and linear weighted Cohen's kappa because the categories were ordered (Cohen, 1968). Exact agreement and kappa were interpreted jointly, particularly because strong concentration in one category can produce high raw agreement alongside lower chance-corrected agreement (Feinstein & Cicchetti, 1990). Lesson-specific coefficients were retained rather than collapsing the assessment into a single reliability label.

Qualitative observation notes, formative anecdotes, and interviews were analysed using a hybrid deductive-inductive thematic approach. Established constructs and observation domains provided initial coding categories, while recurrent behaviours, support conditions, divergent responses, and contextual patterns were retained inductively (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Adult-reported child expressions were kept identifiable as adult-mediated evidence rather than converted into direct child interview data.

Mixed-methods integration was conducted after the sources had first been examined separately. Integration considered convergence, complementarity, dissonance, and silence (Farmer et al., 2006; O'Cathain et al., 2010; Fetters et al., 2013). Importantly, agreement among related classroom records was not treated as independent replication because many records described the same child-lesson processes. Dissonance was retained when tools imposed different thresholds or when raters emphasised different aspects of a performance.

Ethics

The study followed institutional and kindergarten ethical requirements. Adult participation was voluntary; teachers and parents provided informed consent, and written parent or guardian consent was obtained for children's participation. Activities were explained to children in age-appropriate ways, and their willingness to participate was respected. Children were coded C01–C20, parents P01–P20, and the classroom teacher T1. Reporting avoided identifiable child-level narratives and did not use adult reports as direct standardised measures of children's ability or identity.

Results

Differentiated Participation Across the five Observation Domains

Across the 2,940 Classroom Observation Checklist ratings, 2,357 (80.17%) were Score 3, 534 (18.16%) were Score 2, 44 (1.50%) were Score 1, and five (0.17%) were Score 0. These are distributions of repeated rating records from the same 20 children, not frequencies from 2,940 participants. The overall concentration at Score 3 indicates that many target behaviours

were commonly observed independently and consistently within the relevant classroom tasks, but the domain pattern shows that this high prevalence was not uniform.

Attentive Listening and Engagement had the highest Score 3 proportion (95.89%; Table 2), followed by Emotional Response, Appreciation, and Participation (90.18%) and Rhythm, Singing, and Movement Participation (86.71%). By contrast, Cultural Recognition and Meaning Connection reached 69.64%, and Lyric and Dialect Participation reached 56.79%. The contrast suggests that orienting to music, joining activities, moving, and performing were generally more accessible than some lyric, dialect, and meaning-related demands.

Table 2
Classroom observation domains and Score 3 proportions

Observation domain	Repeated ratings[a]	Score 3 (n)[b]	Score 3 (%)
Attentive Listening and Engagement	560	537	95.89
Lyric and Dialect Participation	560	318	56.79
Rhythm, Singing, and Movement Participation	700	607	86.71
Cultural Recognition and Meaning Connection	560	390	69.64
Emotional Response, Appreciation, and Participation	560	505	90.18

[a] The ratings are repeated records from N = 20, not independent participants.
[b] Score 3 = observed independently and consistently within the relevant classroom task.

The high-score pattern also carried a ceiling limitation. Several indicators relating to movement, participation, curiosity, and engagement reached 97–100% Score 3. Yet Score 3 was simply the highest available behavioural category. It could include both a child who participated independently once the activity began and a child who sustained or creatively extended the behaviour. Once the highest category had been reached, the scale could not discriminate further. The ratings therefore represent high observed prevalence under the checklist criteria, not maximum musical ability.

Qualitative notes strengthened this interpretation by showing how strong participation could coexist with musical instability. In one Lesson 1 record, a child completed the rabbit movements while the sung phrase remained incomplete and the 2/4 beat unstable. Later records similarly showed children maintaining movement or role-play while still needing modelling, slower pacing, or tempo adjustment for vocal or rhythmic accuracy. High movement participation therefore did not imply full singing or rhythmic mastery.

Scaffolding and the Difference between dOIng and Explaining

The sharpest differentiation appeared in indicators that required semantic explanation or connection to lived experience. For indicator B4, ‘responds to simple meaning questions about the song’, only seven of 140 ratings (5.00%) reached Score 3, while 105 (75.00%) were Score 2. The dominant pattern was therefore response with occasional teacher support, not absence of response. By comparison, children were more independent in repeating Minnan words (65.71% Score 3), repeating short lyric phrases (73.57%), and matching the rhythm of spoken lyric phrases (82.86%). They could often participate orally and rhythmically before they could independently articulate meaning.

Indicator D3, ‘relates the song image to real-life experience when prompted’, showed a similar profile: 31.43% Score 3 and 66.43% Score 2. During Winter Festival/Winter Solstice,

children connected song content with making or eating tangyuan, but such links often followed questions or visual support. During Jumping over the Fire Heap, links with Spring Festival activities emerged through contextual questioning. In Moonlight, Moonlight Bright, classroom records included references to moonlight, red-brick houses, grandparents, old homes, and family experience, again with varying degrees of prompting.

These patterns make teacher mediation a substantive finding rather than a methodological nuisance. Across lessons, support included model singing, word-by-word and phrase-by-phrase repetition, slower pacing, mouth-shape cues, lyric charts, pictures, short videos, questions, and peer assistance. The central distinction was not simply between success and failure but between behaviours demonstrated independently and those demonstrated under supported conditions.

Formative Assessment and Rater Correspondence

The formative assessment generated 700 ratings from the researcher and 700 from the classroom teacher. The researcher classified 80.14% as Consistently Demonstrated and 19.86% as Emerging, with no Not Yet Demonstrated ratings. The teacher classified 88.86% as Consistently Demonstrated, 10.71% as Emerging, and 0.43% as Not Yet Demonstrated. Across both raters, 84.50% of the 1,400 ratings were in the highest category.

Of the 700 paired units, 591 agreed exactly, producing 84.43% exact agreement. The overall linear weighted kappa was κ = .418 (Table 3). Following Landis and Koch (1977) only as a descriptive reference, this falls in the moderate range; the assessment should therefore not be described as having uniformly high inter-rater reliability. Lesson-specific kappa values ranged from .169 to .853. Agreement was highest in Lesson 3 (97.00% exact agreement, κ = .853) and substantially lower in Lesson 7 (77.00%, κ = .169), demonstrating that correspondence varied by song and task context.

Table 3
Researcher-teacher formative-assessment agreement

Lesson	Exact agreement (%)[a]	Linear weighted κ[b]
1. The Rabbit's Eyes Are Like Agate	64.00	.232
2. Letting the Chickens and Ducks Out	86.00	.243
3. A Little Bird	97.00	.853
4. Winter Festival / Winter Solstice	80.00	.290
5. Ti-O-O / The Dark Sky	93.00	.657
6. Jumping over the Fire Heap	94.00	.717
7. Moonlight, Moonlight Bright	77.00	.169
Overall (700 paired units)	84.43	.418

[a] The researcher classified 80.14% of ratings as Consistently Demonstrated; the classroom teacher classified 88.86%.
[b] Overall κ is interpreted together with category prevalence and lesson-specific variation.

The direction of disagreement was also informative. Of the 700 pairs, 84 (12.00%) involved the teacher rating one category higher than the researcher, 24 (3.43%) involved the teacher rating one category lower, and one pair (0.14%) differed by two categories. This does not prove that the teacher was simply more lenient. Anecdotal records showed that researcher notes more often foregrounded temporary distraction, incomplete performance,

unstable rhythm, pauses, or the support required, whereas teacher notes more often foregrounded eventual task completion, participation, singing confidence, and continuation after support. Different attentional emphases and category thresholds are plausible explanations, but the dataset cannot establish a single cause of disagreement.

A particularly useful cross-instrument dissonance concerned cultural tasks. Formative cultural indicators were rated Consistently Demonstrated in 95.71% of records, whereas the observation checklist showed 69.64% Score 3 for Cultural Recognition and Meaning Connection, 31.43% for D3 life-experience connection, and only 5.00% for B4 independent meaning response. The two tools were not contradictory: the formative indicators were closely aligned with cultural content just taught and could be completed after explanation, pictures, video, or questioning, while checklist Score 3 required independent and consistent performance. The difference therefore revealed varying task thresholds and levels of independence.

Developing Musical Appreciation

The classroom evidence showed that appreciation was not reducible to overt excitement. Children listened attentively, sang or hummed, moved with the music, joined role-play, showed facial and bodily response, and reacted differently to contrasting musical characters. During Moonlight, Moonlight Bright, some children listened quietly, hummed softly, smiled, or swayed gently. These responses differed from the more energetic movements associated with lively, action-oriented songs, but they were not weaker simply because they were less conspicuous.

The classroom teacher independently described the same contrast in her post-implementation interview: 'The melody of Moonlight, Moonlight Bright is relatively gentle and soothing. The children listened quietly and attentively. Some swayed gently, and some hummed along softly' (T1, interview question 8). Because the teacher was also the implementer and rater, this report is not independent outcome evidence; its value is complementary. It adds practitioner interpretation to child-generated behaviours that were recorded contemporaneously in the classroom.

Parent reports extended the appreciation evidence into the home context. All 20 parents reported that their child had sung songs from the module at home, but autonomy differed: 17/20 (85.0%) described clearly spontaneous singing, 2/20 (10.0%) described a mixture of spontaneous singing and family prompting, and 1/20 (5.0%) reported singing mainly after family prompting. This pattern supports re-engagement beyond the immediate classroom task, but it does not justify saying that all children spontaneously 'transferred' learning. The home evidence was retrospective and adult-mediated rather than directly observed by the researcher.

Preferences were similarly differentiated. Parents identified a repeatedly sung or preferred song for every child: The Rabbit's Eyes Are Like Agate (7/20), Jumping over the Fire Heap (5/20), Ti-O-O (3/20), Letting the Chickens and Ducks Out (3/20), and Moonlight, Moonlight Bright (2/20). Eighteen children were reported to favour predominantly lively or movement-oriented songs, whereas two preferred the gentler Moonlight, Moonlight Bright. One parent relayed the child's description, 'This song is very gentle, like the night' (P18). This

is an adult-mediated report of a child expression, not a direct child interview quotation. The contrast nevertheless broadens the construct of appreciation by showing that selective preference can take both energetic and quiet forms.

Repeated listening added another dimension. All parents reported willingness to listen again, but three children reportedly did so only occasionally. Thus, continued engagement was common but heterogeneous in frequency and autonomy. Taken together, classroom and adult-reported evidence support developing musical appreciation across attention, affect, preference, initial discrimination, expressive response, and re-engagement, while preserving individual variation.

Cultural Recognition, Understanding, and Life-Experience Connection

Cultural curiosity and recognition were common in the records. Children looked closely at images, pointed to objects, named familiar items, and participated in culturally contextualised tasks involving tangyuan, red-brick houses, dripstone beasts, festival activities, local animals, food, and aspects of Minnan life. One classroom record documented a child leaning forward while viewing a dripstone-beast image and pointing to the place from which water flowed. This is meaningful evidence of curiosity and recognition, but it does not establish cultural understanding.

More substantive evidence appeared when cultural material became connected with lived experience. Children linked Winter Solstice content with family tangyuan-making, Jumping over the Fire Heap with Spring Festival activities, and Moonlight, Moonlight Bright with grandparents, red-brick houses, old homes, moonlight, or family warmth. These cases have a different evidentiary status from isolated object naming because they relate song content to personal or family experience. Yet many such links were prompted by questions, images, video, or contextual explanation, consistent with the D3 and B4 results.

Parent evidence reinforced the distinction between recognition and connection. Parents reported children's recognition of red-brick houses, dripstone beasts, Winter Solstice tangyuan, Jumping over the Fire Heap, writing-brush making, and other local-life content. In 7/20 parent interviews, however, formal cultural explanations clearly involved adult prompting. Connections with grandparents were explicitly reported in 7/20 families rather than universally. These frequencies are meaningful but should not be treated as evidence that every child formed the same intergenerational connection.

One of the strongest parent-reported cases associated Moonlight, Moonlight Bright with a grandmother's old red-brick house, moonlight, and family warmth. Analytically, this case combines specific local cultural material, family memory, and affective meaning. It therefore supports a more cautious interpretation of emerging cultural-emotional connection than does simple recognition of a 'red-brick house'. Even in this stronger case, however, the evidence remains parent-reported rather than direct child testimony.

Minnan-language attempts also required careful positioning. All 20 parents reported that their child had used or attempted at least one Minnan word or short phrase from the nursery rhymes at home. Some reports described contextualised use, such as a weather-related expression when the sky darkened or nursery-rhyme words used during family or festival

situations. These reports support attempted contextual reuse of cultural-linguistic material, but they do not verify Minnan-language acquisition. Five of 20 parents explicitly noted limitations involving pronunciation, song completeness, or rhythm, and there was no independent home observation, vocabulary-retention test, pronunciation assessment, or language-proficiency measure.

Integrated Evidence and the Threshold for Emerging Cultural-Emotional Connection

Across sources, the strongest conclusion concerned developing musical appreciation. Attentive engagement and embodied participation were frequently observed, qualitative records showed both energetic and quiet forms of musical response, and parent reports added preference and home re-engagement. These sources converged and complemented one another without constituting independent replications of a single standardised construct (Table 4).

Table 4
Evidentiary hierarchy for appreciation and cultural connection

Dimension	Representative evidence	Key finding	Interpretive boundary
Musical attention and affect	Attentive/quiet listening, singing, humming, movement, facial and bodily response	Appreciation appeared in energetic and quiet forms	Excitement alone is too narrow
Preference and initial discrimination	18 predominantly lively/movement-oriented preferences; 2 preferred the gentler Moonlight, Moonlight Bright	Selective preference broadened the appreciation construct	Preference was not uniform
Voluntary re-engagement	20/20 parent-reported home singing; 17 spontaneous, 2 mixed, 1 mainly prompted	Re-engagement extended beyond the classroom with differing autonomy	Adult-reported; no direct home observation.
Cultural recognition	Naming/pointing/responding to tangyuan, red-brick houses, dripstone beasts, festivals and local content	Concrete familiarity was readily visible	Recognition is not understanding or identity
Cultural understanding	B4 Score 3 = 5.00%; 7/20 parent interviews involved explicit prompting for formal explanations	Independent semantic explanation was uncommon	Supported response is not autonomous knowledge
Family/life connection	Tangyuan-making, grandparents, old homes, festivals, local life and family warmth	Some cultural material became personally meaningful	D3 was largely prompt-dependent; grandparent links explicit in 7/20
Minnan-language use	20/20 parents reported words/phrases at home	Attempted contextual reuse occurred	5/20 noted pronunciation, completeness, or rhythm limits; no proficiency test.
Emerging cultural-emotional connection	Cultural material + family/hometown/lived association + affect, curiosity, warmth or re-engagement	Selected cases supported a developmentally bounded interpretation	Not stable cultural identity or verified long-term belonging

The cultural evidence was more layered. Recognition of local cultural material was more readily observed than independent explanation. Life-experience connections were more

personally meaningful but frequently scaffolded. Emerging cultural-emotional connection was therefore interpreted only in selected cases where several elements co-occurred: specific cultural content, a family/hometown/lived-experience association, and affective meaning or voluntary re-engagement. Warmth, curiosity, family memory, hometown association, sharing with relatives, or repeated return to culturally meaningful material strengthened such interpretations.

The threshold also clarifies what was not sufficient. Enjoying a song, smiling during an activity, recognising tangyuan or a red-brick house, participating enthusiastically in Jumping over the Fire Heap, repeating one Minnan word, or answering correctly after an adult explanation were all meaningful forms of participation, familiarity, or attempted language use. None alone supported a claim of stable cultural identity. The data were silent regarding durable self-concept, long-term cultural belonging, sustained practice, and persistence across settings and time. The appropriate interpretation is therefore developmentally bounded manifestations of emerging cultural-emotional connection in some cases, not a uniform cultural outcome across the class.

Discussion

The study's central contribution is the distinction between visible participation and the levels of musical or cultural independence that participation can conceal. The seven-week case produced substantial evidence of engagement, but the analytical value lies less in the high overall percentage than in the differentiated profile underneath it. Attentive listening, movement, role-play, and group performance were commonly demonstrated, while unfamiliar lyrics, dialect meaning, rhythmic precision, semantic explanation, and life-experience connection more often required support. This pattern suggests that heritage-music pedagogy is most informative when it asks not only whether children participate, but how they participate, what they can do independently, and what forms of mediation remain necessary.

Contributions in Relation to Previous Research

Previous research has already challenged narrow definitions of children's musical learning. Developmental studies of singing and observable engagement recognise partial vocal participation, attention, persistence, bodily involvement, and affect as meaningful responses (Welch et al., 1991; Custodero, 2005; Barrett et al., 2020). Participatory perspectives likewise understand music-making through listening, moving, performing, and interacting rather than through the finished musical product alone (Small, 1998; Elliott & Silverman, 2015). The present study does not claim to establish these principles anew. Its additional insight is empirical and contextual: in a Minnan-language heritage-music setting, these accessible forms of participation were not evenly matched by independent lyric, dialect, and meaning-related performance. Attentive listening reached 95.89% Score 3, compared with 56.79% for Lyric and Dialect Participation; independent responses to simple meaning questions reached only 5.00%. The findings therefore specify where participation was readily accessible and where it continued to depend on mediation.

The study also extends the discussion of musical appreciation by demonstrating that it was not synonymous with excitement, loud singing, or vigorous movement. Quiet listening, soft humming, gentle swaying, facial response, and preference for a soothing song were also

meaningful forms of appreciation. Parent reports added evidence of re-engagement beyond the classroom, but the different levels of autonomy matter: 17 children were reported to sing spontaneously at home, two in a mixture of spontaneous and prompted circumstances, and one mainly after prompting. Thus, the study adds a distinction between reported re-engagement and unqualified claims of transfer. This is a more differentiated application of the broad engagement dimensions identified in earlier work, not a claim that earlier scholarship ignored children's affective or self-initiated musical responses.

With respect to heritage learning, place-oriented and culturally sustaining scholarship has already emphasised the importance of relationships among music, community, family, language, and lived cultural practice (Brook, 2013; Paris & Alim, 2017), while UNESCO (2003) frames heritage transmission as an ongoing process. The present study adds a more explicit evidentiary distinction for interpreting young children's responses in this context. Recognition of tangyuan, red-brick houses, or other local material was more readily observed than independent explanation: only 5.00% of B4 ratings showed independent responses to simple meaning questions, while 31.43% of D3 ratings showed independent life-experience connections. Selected cases supported an interpretation of emerging cultural-emotional connection when specific cultural material, family or hometown experience, and personally meaningful affect co-occurred. This threshold helps distinguish cultural familiarity and supported meaning-making from stronger claims about belonging; it does not establish stable cultural identity.

A further contribution concerns the interpretation of mixed-methods evidence in a small natural-class study. Mixed-methods literature provides established approaches for examining convergence, complementarity, and dissonance (Farmer et al., 2006; O'Cathain et al., 2010; Fetters et al., 2013). The present study applies this logic to a dense but participant-bounded dataset: repeated ratings were kept nested within N = 20, and researcher–teacher exact agreement (84.43%) was interpreted alongside weighted kappa (κ = .418) and lesson-level variation. The difference between high raw agreement and moderate chance-corrected agreement was not hidden, nor were classroom and parent reports treated as independent replications. The resulting insight is that evidence-source dependence, task thresholds, and rater perspectives are part of the substantive interpretation of young children's learning.

Taken together, these contributions refine rather than replace earlier accounts of musical participation and heritage connection. The study offers a contextually grounded explanation of how appreciation and cultural response may be visible at different levels of independence, and it identifies the pedagogical support and evidentiary caution needed when interpreting those responses. Its contribution is process-level and analytical, not a causal demonstration that the module produced lasting musical competence, language acquisition, or cultural identity.

Participation is Meaningful Before Mastery is Complete

The high prevalence of attentive and embodied participation should not be discounted merely because some lyric or meaning tasks were scaffolded. From an embodied and participatory perspective, moving, singing partially, clapping, role-playing, and joining a group performance are legitimate modes of musicking (Leman, 2007; Small, 1998). The observation and formative records showed that movement and performance often provided accessible

entry points into songs that also contained unfamiliar Minnan vocabulary, new metres, or culturally specific content. This supports a pedagogical principle of multiple routes into musical participation.

At the same time, the data qualify any assumption that accessible participation equals comprehensive competence. A child who could perform rabbit movements while a sung phrase remained incomplete illustrates this clearly. Similarly, very high movement ratings coexisted with lower results for phrase imitation, 2/4 metre, slow 4/4 movement, and some singing tasks. The implication is not that movement should be reduced in favour of drill. Rather, embodied participation can create a socially and musically meaningful entry point while focused listening, vocal modelling, rhythmic support, lyric scaffolding, and repetition address demands that require greater precision.

Scaffolding as a Condition of Meaning-Making

The B4 and D3 findings place sociocultural mediation at the centre of the interpretation. Children often repeated Minnan words, short lyric phrases, and spoken rhythms more independently than they explained meaning. Likewise, cultural objects could be recognised more readily than connected to life experience without prompting. Vygotskian theory helps interpret this gap because learning occurs through mediated participation and cultural tools rather than through isolated individual performance (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986). Teacher voice, images, lyric charts, family references, movement, questions, and peer participation formed part of the learning environment.

Scaffolding should therefore not be interpreted as evidence that learning 'failed'. In a five- or six-year-old child's encounter with unfamiliar dialect vocabulary or cultural material, supported response can be an expected feature of participation. The more important analytical question is whether the support condition is reported transparently. Wood et al.'s (1976) conception of scaffolding is useful precisely because it makes the amount and type of support visible. In the present study, Score 2 on the observation checklist represented behaviour demonstrated with occasional prompts, not absence of learning.

However, sociocultural theory also sets a boundary. Supported performance cannot simply be redescribed as internalised knowledge. The module lasted seven weeks, the songs were non-equivalent, and no delayed follow-up was conducted. The study can therefore show where mediation enabled participation and meaning-making, but not whether supported responses later became stable independent knowledge.

Appreciation is Multidimensional and Heterogeneous

The findings also broaden what counts as musical appreciation in early childhood. If appreciation were equated with excitement, dance, or loud participation, the two children who preferred the gentler Moonlight, Moonlight Bright might appear less engaged. Yet classroom and teacher records showed attentive listening, gentle swaying, soft humming, and quiet affect. Parent reports further showed selective preferences and differing re-engagement patterns. These responses are consistent with a view of musical engagement that encompasses attention, affect, preference, participation, and self-initiated return rather than one visible behaviour (Custodero, 2005).

The home-singing evidence is particularly instructive because it is positive without being uniform. All 20 parents reported home singing, but 17 described clearly spontaneous singing, two described mixed spontaneous and prompted singing, and one described mainly prompted singing. Three children only occasionally sought repeated listening. Reporting this variation avoids converting a common pattern into a universal claim. It also illustrates why 're-engagement' is a more defensible term than 'transfer' in the absence of direct home observation.

Appreciation, then, is best understood here as developing and contextually manifested. It was visible in multiple forms, but the data do not establish that every child reached the same depth, autonomy, or stability of appreciation. This construct-specific caution is important for early-childhood research, where positive adult descriptions can otherwise flatten meaningful individual differences.

Cultural Evidence Requires Thresholds

The distinction among cultural recognition, understanding, life-experience connection, and emerging cultural-emotional connection is a second conceptual contribution. Recognition of tangyuan, red-brick houses, dripstone beasts, festival imagery, or other local content was educationally meaningful because it indicated familiarity with culturally situated material. Yet recognition required a lower evidentiary threshold than explaining meaning or linking cultural material with lived experience.

The contrast between the 95.71% Consistently Demonstrated formative cultural ratings and the much lower independent checklist indicators illustrates this point methodologically. The formative tasks were completed within the support conditions of the lesson, whereas checklist Score 3 required independence and consistency. Rather than averaging these values or choosing one as 'correct', the study treated the difference as informative. It showed that supported cultural task completion can be common even when independent semantic explanation remains uncommon.

Life-experience associations provided stronger evidence because they connected song material with family practices, grandparents, festivals, old homes, local places, or family warmth. Place-oriented and culturally sustaining perspectives emphasise precisely these relationships among culture, language, family, and lived practice (Brook, 2013; Paris & Alim, 2017). Nevertheless, the evidence remained heterogeneous and often scaffolded. Grandparent connections appeared explicitly in seven families, not all 20, and seven parent interviews involved explicit adult prompting during formal cultural explanation.

The term emerging cultural-emotional connection therefore functions as an evidentiary boundary rather than an aspirational label. It is used only where cultural material, lived association, and personally meaningful affect co-occur. A grandmother's old red-brick house linked with moonlight and family warmth provides a stronger case than naming a red-brick house from a picture. Yet even the stronger case does not establish cultural identity. The study did not examine durable self-concept, long-term belonging, or sustained cultural practice. This distinction is consistent with heritage education that values connection without treating short-term exposure as deterministic identity formation (UNESCO, 2003).

Rater Disagreement and Source Dependence as Methodological Information

The researcher-teacher agreement results show why disagreement should be treated analytically rather than hidden. An exact agreement rate of 84.43% might appear strong if reported alone, while κ = .418 and lesson coefficients from .169 to .853 reveal a more complex picture. Category prevalence contributed to the discrepancy between raw agreement and kappa, and the qualitative records suggest possible differences in rater emphasis. Researcher notes often foregrounded instability and support; teacher notes often foregrounded eventual participation and completion. These interpretations cannot prove why disagreement occurred, but they show that performance categories were applied from partly different perspectives.

The mixed-methods design gains strength from retaining such dissonance. Integration is not a vote in which the largest number of positive sources wins. Classroom ratings and notes were generated within the same observation process; formative ratings and anecdotes concerned the same child-lesson performances; and the teacher occupied multiple roles. Treating consistency across these sources as independent replication would exaggerate evidentiary weight. Instead, convergence identified recurring patterns, complementarity added contextual detail, dissonance exposed threshold differences, and silence marked what particular sources could not address (Farmer et al., 2006; Fetters et al., 2013).

This discipline is particularly important in small natural-class studies. Rich repeated records can produce a dense empirical picture without increasing the number of independent participants. The 2,940 observation ratings and 1,400 formative ratings describe repeated classroom processes in N = 20. Preserving this dependence makes the study less statistically expansive but more methodologically transparent.

A Contextually Rich but Non-Causal Account

Finally, the findings should be read as manifestations within one bounded classroom case. The study had no random assignment, comparison group, equivalent pre/post outcome measures, or delayed follow-up. The seven songs differed in tempo, lyric demands, cultural content, movement possibilities, and instructional tasks. Weekly percentages therefore cannot be used as a standardised developmental trajectory, and no pattern can be attributed causally to the module alone (Shadish et al., 2002; Yin, 2018).

This non-causal position does not make the evidence trivial. It changes the question. Rather than asking whether the module ‘worked’ in an experimental sense, the study asks what forms of musical and cultural response became visible, under what task and support conditions, and how different evidence sources constrain interpretation. For early-childhood heritage-music research, such process-level evidence may be especially valuable because it identifies where participation is accessible, where scaffolding remains necessary, what appreciation can look like beyond excitement, and what cultural claims require stronger evidence.

Limitations, Implications, and Conclusion

This study has several limitations that define the scope of its conclusions. First, the implementation involved one kindergarten, one natural Upper Kindergarten Class, 20 children, and seven weeks. The findings are therefore context-bound and are not statistically

generalisable to all kindergartens, teachers, or Minnan-speaking communities. Second, the seven lessons involved different songs and non-equivalent musical, linguistic, cultural, and activity demands. Cross-lesson variation cannot be interpreted as a standardised growth trajectory.

Third, one researcher completed all Classroom Observation Checklist ratings. Behavioural anchors and a fixed observer supported procedural consistency, but no inter-observer agreement estimate was available, and high Score 3 concentration limited discrimination among behaviours already meeting the top criterion. Fourth, formative assessment showed meaningful but imperfect researcher-teacher correspondence. Overall exact agreement was 84.43%, but weighted κ was .418 and lesson-specific values varied widely. The implementation teacher's concurrent roles as teacher, rater, and interview participant also created role dependence.

Fifth, parent evidence was retrospective and adult-mediated. There was no direct home observation, independent Minnan pronunciation assessment, vocabulary-retention test, or language-proficiency measure. Reports of home singing and word use therefore indicate re-engagement and attempted contextual reuse, not verified transfer or proficiency. Cultural identity was outside the temporal and measurement scope of the study.

These limitations imply several practical and research directions. Early-childhood heritage-music teaching should provide multiple participation routes—listening, singing, movement, role-play, visual support, and group performance—while also providing explicit support routes for unfamiliar lyrics, rhythm, dialect pronunciation, and cultural meaning. Assessment should distinguish independent performance from supported performance and should avoid treating enthusiasm as a proxy for all learning. Future studies could use multiple independent observers, more discriminating behavioural scales, equivalent targeted measures for selected constructs, multi-site implementations, and longitudinal follow-up. Directly observed family-context or language-use data could also clarify the persistence and accuracy of re-engagement beyond the classroom.

In relation to previous scholarship, the contribution of this investigation is therefore specific rather than universal. It provides an evidence-bounded account of how musical appreciation and cultural responses were manifested at different levels of independence during Minnan nursery-rhyme learning. It distinguishes observable participation from supported meaning-making and from selected family- or hometown-linked affective connections, while showing why repeated records, rater differences, and adult-reported evidence must be interpreted within their limits. These distinctions offer analytical prompts for future studies and practical guidance for assessment in comparable heritage-music settings; they should not be read as statistically generalisable conclusions from one class of 20 children.

The main conclusion is therefore deliberately bounded. In this seven-week case, children frequently participated attentively and bodily in Minnan nursery-rhyme activities, while the independence of their singing, dialect, semantic explanation, and life-experience connection varied by task and child. Developing musical appreciation was visible through energetic and quiet attention, affect, preference, expressive response, and re-engagement. Selected cases

supported emerging cultural-emotional connection when local cultural material was linked with family or hometown experience and personally meaningful affect, but the evidence did not establish stable cultural identity. Participation can be meaningful before performance or meaning-making becomes independent; recognising that distinction allows heritage-music education to be valued without asking the evidence to say more than it can.

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