

Research on the Integration of Local Culture and Kindergarten Aesthetic Education

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Abstract

This study focuses on the paths and practices of integrating local culture with aesthetic education in kindergartens, aiming to explore its value in enhancing children's cultural identity, broadening their aesthetic experiences, and strengthening educational contexts. It also analyzes the current challenges in this practice and proposes systematic optimization strategies. Through a combination of literature research, field interviews, and case studies, this study systematically analyzes the integration practices implemented in five kindergartens in Zigong, Sichuan. The study finds that integrating local cultural elements, such as intangible cultural heritage skills and festivals and folk customs, into aesthetic education can help stimulate children's national sentiments, enhance their aesthetic creativity, and strengthen the life-oriented nature of education. However, current integration practices generally face multiple challenges, including insufficient teacher literacy, fragmented curriculum design, and a lack of resource systems. To enhance the effectiveness of this integration, the study recommends systematically advancing teacher training, curriculum construction, and resource development, aiming to build a local aesthetic education system that is regionally relevant, child-friendly, and educationally oriented. This study contributes to promoting the contemporary expression of local culture and the cultural return of preschool education, providing theoretical support and practical guidance for the localization of kindergarten curriculum.

Keywords: Local Culture, Kindergarten Aesthetic Education, Curriculum, Resources

Introduction

In theoretical discussions of aesthetic education for young children, Lou (1991) viewed it as a means of "artifying education and aestheticizing life", aiming to nourish children's minds, beautify their personalities, enhance their aesthetic abilities, and comprehensively develop their physical and mental health. He emphasized the close connection between aesthetic education and daily life. Zhang (2017) noted that aesthetic education for preschool children, through the forms of natural beauty, social beauty, and artistic beauty, fosters healthy aesthetic concepts and the ability to perceive, appreciate, and create beauty, thereby

promoting the development of their aesthetic sense. Chen (2017) argues that aesthetic education for young children should cultivate their aesthetic interests and abilities through aesthetic activities tailored to their physical and mental development.

While these scholars differ in their definitions, they all emphasize the crucial role of aesthetic education in fostering children's emotions, aesthetic appreciation, and creativity. Their perspectives reveal the multidimensional value of aesthetic education, encompassing emotional cultivation, aesthetic enhancement, creativity development, and its integration into daily life.

Aesthetic education plays a vital role in people's pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty, guiding them to examine nature, society, and humanity themselves with an aesthetic attitude (Pang, 2009). Since modern times, three distinct concepts of aesthetic education—weak aesthetic education, small aesthetic education, and broad aesthetic education—have profoundly influenced the practice of aesthetic education in early childhood in China. The weak aesthetic education concept views aesthetic education as a supplementary tool for other forms of education, while the small aesthetic education concept equates aesthetic education with art education. However, in the new era of development, people have gradually recognized the value of aesthetic education in comprehensive education, and the call for a broad aesthetic education concept has become even stronger. Kindergarten aesthetic education curriculum from the perspective of a broad aesthetic education concept should place greater emphasis on adhering to the laws of children's physical and mental development, focusing on cultivating children's perception, imagination, and creativity. By integrating aesthetic resources from nature, society, art, and science, a systematic aesthetic culture should be formed to guide children to gain positive aesthetic experiences (Zhang , 2024). Yu et al. (2023) believe that aesthetic education for early childhood in the new era has the value of stimulating aesthetic interest, strengthening personality , and achieving " goodness . " Yang (2016) pointed out that aesthetic education activities can not only promote the development of children's abilities and good qualities, but also shape their sound personality.

However, compared to research on aesthetic education at all levels of primary and secondary school, there is relatively little research on aesthetic education in kindergartens. While academic attention to the integration of local culture and kindergarten aesthetic education remains limited, this field holds significant research potential and room for development. Song (2024) demonstrated the success of integrating Bayu culture into the aesthetic education curriculum at the Experimental Kindergarten in Jiulongpo District, Chongqing. She argues that this integration represents not only a combination of art and culture but also an organic unity of aesthetic education and life, helping to stimulate children's aesthetic sensibility and creativity. Wan (2021) found that the integration of local culture not only improves educational quality but also lays a foundation for children's intellectual development. Chen (2023) further explored how to leverage local culture in aesthetic education and proposed implementation strategies, such as improving teachers' aesthetic teaching and fostering a local cultural aesthetic education environment, providing valuable insights for future research. Yang and Li (2023) discussed how to integrate excellent local traditional culture into kindergarten education, including creating an aesthetic education environment with local cultural characteristics and strengthening children's participation in

local community activities. Wang (2024) used Kunshan Bacheng as an example to explore the path of integrating local cultural resources into kindergarten aesthetic education, pointed out the problem of neglecting local cultural resources in current kindergarten aesthetic education, and put forward targeted improvement suggestions. Lu (2023) proposed strategies for using local cultural resources to carry out aesthetic education courses through practical research, including creating an aesthetic education environment and using local resources for theme activities. Zhang et al. (2024) proposed that kindergartens should improve their aesthetic education curriculum system by integrating aesthetic education resources, improving teachers' aesthetic education literacy, and building a scientific curriculum evaluation mechanism. Blomgren (2019) explored how collaborations between artists and educators in Danish kindergartens promote aesthetic education. They emphasized that within this collaborative relationship, artists and early childhood educators jointly explored and expanded the multifaceted meanings of aesthetics, transcending the boundaries of traditional artistic expression. They proposed concepts such as "Beauty Bubbles" to capture the nuanced experiences of children during aesthetic education. This research demonstrates that incorporating local cultural elements into aesthetic activities in early childhood education can enrich children's perceptual experiences and cultural understanding. Sotiropoulou-Zormpala (2019) studied how to integrate aesthetic education into the curriculum through art activities, thereby inspiring educators to adopt the spirit of "aesthetic teaching." She argues that by incorporating aesthetic theory into art education, teachers can design more diverse teaching activities, effectively promoting children's aesthetic and cultural cognitive development. Her research demonstrates that using aesthetic education as a teaching method, rather than simply a medium, can better promote the development of children's aesthetic abilities and promote the in-depth application of cultural elements in education.

Overall, scholars are increasingly interested in promoting the comprehensive development of young children through art and aesthetic education, and are increasingly recognizing the important role of local culture in aesthetic education. These studies not only validate the necessity of integrating local culture with aesthetic education but also provide valuable insights and references for future research and practice. However, while existing research provides a preliminary theoretical framework for integrating local culture with aesthetic education, specific implementation pathways, strategies, and effectiveness evaluation remain limited, lacking systematic and empirical support. While some studies have explored the integration of local culture with kindergarten aesthetic education, most remain superficially theoretical, lacking systematic practical approaches and empirical support. With the advancement of globalization, how to preserve and inherit local culture in education has become a pressing issue.

Research Significance

This study is of significant academic value. Current research on aesthetic education for young children focuses primarily on general aesthetic education theories and practical methods, with limited attention paid to them. Furthermore, there is a lack of systematic exploration of the deep integration of local culture with kindergarten aesthetic education. This study will explore how to effectively integrate local culture, with its national and regional characteristics, into kindergarten aesthetic education, thereby further enriching and developing research in this field based on previous studies. Furthermore, by integrating

aesthetic education with cultural heritage, this study will help deepen understanding of the multiple functions of aesthetic education, particularly in fostering cultural identity and national pride. Therefore, it possesses considerable academic innovation and theoretical contributions.

At the practical level, the integration of local culture provides children with a wealth of learning resources and experiential opportunities. This not only contributes to the comprehensive development of children's emotions, aesthetic abilities, and creativity, but also promotes their early exposure to and understanding of local culture, strengthening their cultural identity and national pride. This study also provides a practical operational framework and guidance for kindergarten teaching. By integrating local culture into kindergarten aesthetic education curricula, kindergartens can design curricula with local characteristics, thereby improving the quality and effectiveness of education, which is of great significance for the preservation and inheritance of local culture.

Research Methods

Documentary Method

The literature method will be used to systematically sort out relevant research on local culture and kindergarten aesthetic education at home and abroad, focusing on analyzing existing theoretical achievements, research methods and practical experience.

Interview Method

The interview method will mainly be used for in-depth communication with kindergarten principals, teachers, and parents. By designing a semi-structured interview outline, interviews will be conducted around the current situation of the integration of local culture and kindergarten aesthetic education, existing problems, and possible solutions.

Observational Method

This study uses a combination of participatory and non-participatory observation to document the specific application of local cultural elements in kindergarten aesthetic education curriculum. Through classroom observations and activity logs, researchers will document in detail children's participation in aesthetic education activities and how teachers incorporate local cultural elements into their teaching. These observations will enable researchers to more accurately identify any problems in the integration process and collect data for further analysis.

Study Results

The Value of Integrating Local Culture with Kindergarten Aesthetic Education

(1) Promote the construction of children's cultural identity and the stimulation of national sentiment

Zhang (2023) pointed out that aesthetic education for young children is a way to connect the present and the future, and is an important way to shape children's selves and beautify their personalities. Local culture is both the collective memory of a group and a carrier of national values. Its symbolic system and ritual structure have a significant socializing function in children's emotional experiences. Incorporating cultural elements such as traditional festivals, ethnic stories, and handmade intangible cultural heritage into kindergarten aesthetic education can stimulate children's cultural interest and promote the early

construction of "cultural identity." For example, in the "Dragon Boat Festival · Painting Sachets" themed aesthetic education activity held by F Kindergarten, teachers used traditional totem patterns as a medium, combined with festival legends, handicrafts, and seasonal songs, to guide children to understand the cultural logic and symbolic meaning of traditional festivals. After the activity, many children took the initiative to retell the story of Qu Yuan at home and displayed the sachets they made in kindergarten. This emotional cultural expression indicates that children have begun to internalize "national culture" as part of their own experience at an early age. Cultural sociological theory also points out that the establishment of cultural identity is an important prerequisite for the self-construction and value identification of social individuals, and early childhood education is a critical window period for this construction.

(2) Expanding the diversity of children's aesthetic experience

The core goal of aesthetic education lies not only in cultivating skills but also in developing perceptual abilities and aesthetic judgment. Unlike standardized art activities, local cultural art forms such as paper-cutting, embroidery, and shadow puppetry possess strong local context and symbolic meaning. During these craft activities, children are not only exposed to asymmetrical compositions and ecological colors but also understand their cultural connotations through contextual storytelling, thereby fostering cultural resonance and creative expression in their aesthetic experiences. The introduction of regional aesthetic resources not only enriches the content of aesthetic education but also stimulates children's multi-sensory aesthetic participation, thereby fostering a culturally rooted aesthetic consciousness.

(3) Enhance the realism and life-like nature of aesthetic education activities

Wang (2001), in his translation of John Dewey's *Democracy and Education*, discusses empiricism as the core of Dewey's educational philosophy. In Dewey's view, life and experience are the soul of education; education is the child's life, continuous growth, and the transformation or reorganization of experience. Yu (2012) argues that children's "experience" can refer to both the process of interaction between children and others or things, and the perceptions, understandings, abilities, and emotions gained through these interactions. Children's cognitive development is characterized by distinct experiential and concrete characteristics. They construct knowledge structures through sensory engagement, hands-on manipulation, and social interaction. Therefore, if aesthetic education activities can break away from abstract artistic paradigms, return to the essence of life, and create a learning environment with contextual authenticity, they will be more conducive to the comprehensive development of children. Local culture is often deeply rooted in local life situations, naturally resonating with children's life experiences, providing a rich resource base for life-oriented aesthetic education. Taking the "Thing-Drying Field Art Festival" as an example, Kindergarten C leveraged the natural timing of the autumn rice harvest to create a straw art installation area within the school grounds. Children were invited to participate in activities combining creative art with agricultural experiences, such as straw weaving, rice field painting, and harvest simulations. Teachers explained cultural concepts such as "busy farming season" and "harvest," helping children connect visual art with real life. Observations of the activities revealed a high level of interaction and emotional expression within the straw installations, with teachers reporting that "aesthetic education has become more natural, authentic, and vibrant." From the perspective of the educational philosophy of "life is education," these

activities not only reconstruct the relationship between aesthetic education and everyday life but also embody John Dewey's principle of "continuity of experience," establishing coherence, meaning, and generativeness between educational content and children's experiences .

The Real Dilemma of Integrating Local Culture with Kindergarten Aesthetic Education

(1) Teachers' cultural literacy and ability to integrate aesthetic education need to be improved

One of the biggest bottlenecks in integrating local culture into kindergarten aesthetic education currently lies in the significant deficiencies in the cultural literacy and teaching translation skills of frontline preschool teachers. Survey data shows that across five kindergartens interviewed , over 67% of teachers admitted to a "lack of systematic understanding of local traditional culture" and a "difficulty in effectively translating cultural resources into teaching content." This phenomenon exposes structural problems within the current preschool teacher training system: a significant disconnect between cultural knowledge and teaching methods, and a lack of curriculum design skills that integrate cultural connotations with aesthetic education goals. For example, at Kindergarten H , despite the strong visual appeal and educational potential of Sichuan Opera face-changing, a highly representative intangible cultural heritage, most teachers only engage with the performance by hanging the masks on the wall during the creation of the environment . They lack a deep understanding of the operatic vocabulary and the folk culture behind them , nor do they possess the professional skills to translate these into age-appropriate, actionable aesthetic education programs. This phenomenon reflects the "cultural cognitive poverty" that teachers often face when engaging with local cultural resources in aesthetic education activities. From the perspective of teacher professional development, the current teacher training system fails to effectively encompass the core competency of "cultural transformation," a key skill for future curriculum localization. If teachers fail to make local culture accessible to children , this not only limits the in-depth development of the curriculum but also undermines children's understanding of local culture and the sustainability of its inheritance.

(2) The curriculum design lacks systematization and tends to be “ adult- oriented” and “performative”.

In kindergarten aesthetic education, local culture often exhibits a pronounced tendency toward adultization (Zhang ,2023) and performance. Activities are primarily designed to cater to festivals and showcases, lacking a coordinated design of educational objectives and curriculum structure. This bias results in fragmented and sporadic aesthetic activities, making it difficult to construct a sustainable, logical, and growth-oriented cultural learning path. Essentially, this phenomenon reflects a weak curriculum development philosophy among teachers , namely, a lack of instructional design skills guided by "core cultural themes" and a failure to develop a curriculum structure encompassing "perception-experience-understanding-creation." While curriculum standards advocate the principles of "life-oriented, localized, and child-friendly," in practice, the lack of systematic support and evaluation mechanisms often marginalizes cultural content to a "special agenda" of embellishment. This phenomenon not only undermines the educational value of local culture but also hinders the in-depth development of children's cultural cognition. In the long term, without restructuring the overall curriculum structure and integrating themes, the integration

of local culture into kindergarten aesthetic education will remain elusive, hindering its superficiality.

(3) Local cultural resources lack an age-appropriate teaching transformation mechanism

Effective cultural resources must undergo targeted educational transformation to become truly usable resources for kindergarten instruction. However, the current development of local cultural resources for preschoolers aged 3-6 is severely lagging. A systematic, guided, and locally relevant resource development system is lacking. This leads frontline teachers to rely on online materials and adult templates for a "collage-style" approach, creating a "comprehension gap" between the content and children's developmental characteristics. For example, in Kindergarten N's "Sichuan Opera Face Painting" course, teachers used adult mask patterns as templates. These complex, abstract patterns and densely distributed colors made them difficult for children to identify and lacked sufficient participation and creative space. Activity results showed that some children expressed fear during the process and even refused to participate. This stems from teachers' failure to reconstruct and translate cultural content in a child-friendly manner based on children's cognitive development levels, resulting in a misalignment between cultural resources, instructional design, and children's experiences. From a constructivist perspective, children's learning must be based on "understandable cultural experience." Cultural input should be child-centered and recoded through simplified images, situational interpretation, and storytelling to stimulate their interest in understanding and creative potential. However, some kindergartens currently lack professional curriculum guidance mechanisms and local teaching support platforms, and the educational function of cultural resources is lost during the transformation process.

Suggestion

(1) Reconstruct the teacher training system and enhance cultural integration and teaching transformation capabilities

As key actors in curriculum implementation, teachers' cultural literacy and curriculum transformation skills play a fundamental role in the integration of local culture and aesthetic education. Currently, there is an urgent need to address the source of teacher education, promoting the development of an integrated teacher training system encompassing "cultural understanding, curriculum reconstruction, and teaching practice" to enhance teachers' awareness of cultural integration and their innovative teaching abilities. At the university level, local cultural courses should be incorporated into professional curriculums. Through cultural fieldwork, regional art workshops, and case-based teaching, future teachers can develop a deep understanding of local culture and the ability to translate it into education. In-service teacher training, leveraging resources from local universities, cultural centers, and intangible cultural heritage inheritors, a regular "culture + education" collaborative training mechanism can be established. This will help teachers not only master basic cultural knowledge but also learn how to design engaging and educational cultural and aesthetic activities based on children's age characteristics, cognitive patterns, and curriculum objectives. At the same time, teachers should be encouraged to carry out research projects and teaching reflections based on local culture, forming a circular mechanism of "cultural understanding-teaching attempts-practice correction", so as to continuously enrich their own cultural teaching experience in real educational situations, and promote the cultural

education actions of "teachers as researchers" to gradually become normalized and professional.

(2) Constructing thematically integrated courses to enhance the systematic nature and internal logic of cultural learning

To overcome the dilemma of "adult-oriented" and "performative" activities, it is imperative to integrate local cultural content into kindergarten aesthetic education curriculum from the overall curriculum structure, achieving a transition from "ad hoc activities" to a "systematic curriculum." Specifically, thematic curriculum units should be constructed across disciplines and time periods, centered around core themes of local culture, such as "traditional festivals," "local skills," "folk totems," and "local stories," based on children's developmental stages. Curriculum design should follow a developmental path of "perception-exploration-understanding-expression," using diverse teaching methods such as storytelling, artistic manipulation, sensory experience, and role-playing to promote cultural learning from the shallow to the deep, from the superficial to the profound. For example, a course on the theme of "ethnic costume culture" could include four stages: "Pattern Observation-Material Exploration-Costume Making-Catwalk Performance." This would guide children from visual cognition to emotional expression and cultural creation, enhancing the coherence and internal logic of the curriculum. Furthermore, an evaluation system based on curriculum objectives and learning outcomes should be established. For example, through observation records, work archives, and child interviews, this system can capture the cultural understanding and aesthetic abilities developed by children during activities, avoiding the tendency to replace authentic learning with performance. Through thematic integration and scientific evaluation, we can truly achieve the deep integration and value embodiment of local culture in aesthetic education courses.

(3) Establish a local cultural children-oriented teaching resource system and improve the professional support network

Age-appropriate and accessible resources are key to integrating local culture into aesthetic education. To overcome the current fragmented and adult-centric nature of resource development, local education departments can collaborate with cultural institutions and universities to jointly develop child-friendly local cultural teaching resource packages for preschoolers. These packages should include teaching cases, activity guides, graphic materials, video resources, and extension suggestions. The content should be tailored to the cognitive development and aesthetic psychology of children aged 3-6. For example, simplifying the traditional shadow puppetry process into a three-step process of "silhouette-collage-projection," complemented by anthropomorphic storytelling and interactive animations, allows children to understand the cultural origins and artistic appeal of shadow puppetry through play. Furthermore, resource versions should be designed for different age groups to facilitate tiered instruction tailored to children's abilities. Regarding resource promotion, regional support platforms for local cultural aesthetic education can be established to organize activities such as resource sharing, demonstrations of teaching achievements, and collaborative lesson planning. This closed-loop mechanism of "local culture-resource development-teaching practice-experience feedback" can be established to enhance the professionalism and sustainability of cultural aesthetic education curriculum implementation.

Summarize

This study focuses on the integration of local culture and kindergarten aesthetic education. Through field research, it systematically explores the value implications, current challenges, and optimization paths for local culture in early childhood aesthetic education curriculum. The research demonstrates that local culture, as a cultural carrier of national memory and regional identity, possesses unique educational value. Integrating it into kindergarten aesthetic education not only enriches children's aesthetic experience and enhances their artistic creativity, but also subtly fosters cultural identity and national sentiment, a crucial step in achieving the fundamental goal of "cultivating morality and educating people." However, current integration practices still face multiple obstacles, including insufficient teacher professionalism, fragmented curriculum structures, and limited age-appropriate teaching resources, which hinder the full realization of integration. This study further proposes a systematic optimization strategy, focusing on teacher training, the construction of a localized curriculum system, and the improvement of resource development mechanisms. This strategy aims to promote the in-depth integration of local culture into kindergarten aesthetic education, thereby promoting the localization of curriculum content and the cultural upgrading of educational significance.

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