

Exploring the Training Model for Preschool Education Students' Ethnic Culture Curriculum Design Ability Through University-Kindergarten Collaborative Practice: A Case Study of the Course Local Culture and Early Childhood Curriculum Development

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Abstract: This study explores a reform-oriented training model aimed at enhancing preschool education students' ability to design ethnic culture-based curricula. Taking the course Local Culture and Early Childhood Curriculum Development at Guangxi Normal University for Nationalities as a case study, the research examines how university-kindergarten collaborative practices can foster students' cultural understanding, curriculum construction ability, and professional identity. Rooted in the educational demands of rural and ethnic regions in Guangxi, the course integrates localized cultural resources, participatory teaching strategies, and real-life practice. The findings suggest that curriculum reform aligned with indigenous cultural elements not only enhances student engagement and competence in curriculum design but also addresses broader issues of educational equity and cultural preservation. The paper offers practical strategies for curriculum innovation in teacher education programs across ethnic minority regions.

Keywords: Preschool education; ethnic culture; curriculum development

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1 Introduction

In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the need for culturally responsive education in early childhood settings, particularly in ethnically diverse regions. Preserving indigenous culture while promoting developmentally appropriate pedagogy has become a dual imperative in teacher education. However, many pre-service teachers lack both the knowledge and the experience necessary to integrate local cultural elements into curriculum design. This is especially true in regions like Guangxi, China, where the preschool education workforce is primarily composed of local students with limited exposure to structured curriculum development grounded in ethnic culture. This paper presents an innovative model that combines localized cultural learning, curriculum theory, and collaborative practice with kindergartens to train students in designing culturally rich and pedagogically sound curricula.

2 Background and Rationale

Guangxi Normal University for Nationalities, located in an ethnically diverse region of southwest China, offers a preschool education program that reflects the institution's commitment to grassroots education and cultural preservation. The course Local Culture and Early Childhood Curriculum Development serves as a key component of this mission. Recognized as a first-tier undergraduate course, it addresses three core challenges: (1) insufficient cultural identity and educational commitment among students toward rural kindergartens, (2) fragmented understanding of Guangxi's local culture, and (3) disconnection between theoretical learning and curriculum practice.

In response to these challenges, the course was redesigned to include rich local resources (e.g., museums, traditional

crafts, folk festivals), structured theoretical learning, and hands-on practice in rural kindergartens. This paper details the curriculum design, implementation process, and outcomes of this reform, offering a replicable model for culturally integrated teacher education.

3 Course Design and Teaching Reform Strategies

3.1 Integration of Local Ethnic Culture

The course content is organized around four thematic modules—Guangxi’s History, Guangxi’s Aesthetic Traditions, Guangxi’s Living Geography, and Guangxi’s Rituals and Customs. These modules draw from rich cultural resources such as local museums, ethnic heritage workshops, traditional folk stories, seasonal festivals, and indigenous art forms like Zhuang brocade weaving. In addition, students are encouraged to conduct cultural mapping exercises in their own communities to discover underrepresented local traditions. By doing so, they develop a deeper understanding of cultural diversity and strengthen both cultural identity and content ownership in early childhood contexts.

3.2 Theory-Practice Integration

In the theoretical phase, students are introduced to curriculum development models, early childhood pedagogy, cultural theory, and design thinking methodologies. These frameworks provide a structured foundation to support curriculum planning and evaluation. They also offer guiding principles for adapting local culture to the developmental needs of young children. In the subsequent practice phase, students apply these models in real-world settings by entering partner kindergartens—primarily located in rural or ethnic minority communities. There, they design, implement, and reflect on theme-based curriculum units rooted in indigenous cultural elements, ensuring a meaningful bridge between theory and classroom application.

3.3 University-Kindergarten Collaborative Model

The program employs a “dual-site” learning model, where theoretical knowledge is gained on campus and applied in practice-based partner kindergartens. These partner schools are carefully selected based on their openness to innovation and cultural relevance. Each student team collaborates with in-service teachers, not only to refine their curriculum plans but also to receive constructive feedback and mentorship during implementation. Regular meetings, peer reviews, and co-teaching sessions are integrated into the partnership model. This collaborative process fosters professional growth, deepens community engagement, and helps students align theoretical frameworks with the practical needs and constraints of real-world early childhood education environments.

4 Implementation Process

4.1 Preparation and Cultural Exploration

Students begin by conducting in-depth field research in their hometowns or surrounding communities, using qualitative methods such as interviews, participant observation, and documentation of folk tales, rituals, and oral histories. These findings are analyzed and discussed in class workshops to identify culturally rich yet age-appropriate themes for preschool settings. Faculty members guide students in translating abstract cultural concepts into tangible educational activities. This initial stage not only enriches students’ cultural awareness but also equips them with research skills, critical thinking, and the ability to contextualize content for young learners.

4.2 Curriculum Design and Planning

Working in small collaborative teams, students use the data gathered from their cultural explorations to design theme-based curriculum units tailored to early childhood developmental stages. The design process includes the creation of culturally inspired learning environments, visual and material aids, thematic activity plans, and child-centered assessment tools. Students are encouraged to integrate storytelling, music, games, and hands-on crafts rooted in local culture. Faculty mentors support iterative revisions of the curriculum to ensure alignment with national early childhood standards, cultural relevance, and pedagogical soundness. Teams also prepare teaching scripts and reflection guides for use during

implementation.

4.3 Kindergarten Practice

Student-designed curriculum units are implemented in authentic classroom settings over a 3–4 week period, during which students are embedded within kindergarten teaching teams. Each group is responsible for delivering key instructional activities, facilitating cultural exploration among children, and documenting classroom responses and learning outcomes. Adjustments are made in real time based on children's engagement levels, feedback from cooperating teachers, and situational needs. The process includes team debriefings, classroom observations, and activity evaluations. This hands-on phase enables students to confront real-life teaching challenges and strengthens their confidence in adapting curriculum in diverse settings.

4.4 Reflection and Assessment

At the conclusion of the course, students engage in structured reflection sessions that include written portfolios, peer feedback exchanges, and joint seminars with kindergarten teachers. These activities focus on analyzing what worked well, what challenges were faced, and how cultural content impacted children's learning experiences. Reflection prompts include questions about teacher identity, curriculum values, and cultural interpretation. Final assessments incorporate multiple dimensions: depth of cultural research, clarity and creativity of curriculum design, instructional effectiveness during practice, and critical insight during reflection. A combination of instructor grading, self-assessment, and kindergarten mentor feedback is used for holistic evaluation.

5 Outcomes and Impacts

The reform has produced significant outcomes across multiple dimensions. Students developed a deeper appreciation for local culture, which in turn strengthened their cultural identity and instilled a greater sense of educational responsibility toward rural and minority communities. Through active participation in the full cycle of curriculum design and classroom implementation, they gained practical skills and increased confidence in planning and delivering culturally relevant educational content. The integration of fieldwork, collaborative curriculum design, and real-time teaching not only enriched students' professional experience but also demonstrated an effective model of experiential learning in teacher education. Additionally, partner kindergartens benefited from the influx of innovative curriculum ideas, while local communities witnessed their cultural heritage being honored and revitalized within early childhood education settings, enhancing the reciprocal relationship between universities and local educational institutions.

6 Challenges and Future Directions

Despite the positive outcomes achieved, several challenges continue to hinder the full realization of the reform's potential. One significant issue lies in the limited development of systematic frameworks for structuring and evaluating local cultural content in pedagogically meaningful ways. In addition, some kindergartens face constraints such as inadequate resources, limited teacher training, or a lack of openness to curriculum innovation, particularly in rural or underdeveloped areas. To address these concerns and enhance the sustainability of the program, future efforts will focus on multiple strategic directions. These include the development of a digital cultural resource bank specifically designed for preschool curriculum use, the enhancement of professional development programs for in-service mentors with an emphasis on ethnic culture integration, and the promotion of interdisciplinary collaboration with academic departments such as art, music, and anthropology to broaden curriculum perspectives. Furthermore, the establishment of longitudinal research will enable continuous tracking and evaluation of both student outcomes and the long-term impact on participating kindergartens, ensuring data-informed improvement and wider applicability of the model.

7 Conclusion

This paper presents a reform model that addresses a critical gap in teacher education: the ability to design culturally grounded early childhood curricula. By embedding Guangxi's local culture into the course structure and enabling practical

application through university-kindergarten collaboration, the course has demonstrated how teaching reform can align cultural preservation with educational innovation. This model is particularly relevant for teacher education institutions in ethnically diverse and underdeveloped regions seeking to enhance both curriculum quality and cultural sustainability.

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