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THE CULTURAL VALUE AND TEACHING PRACTICE OF INTEGRATING HENAN TRADITIONAL NURSERY RHYMES INTO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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Abstract

This study explores the educational significance of integrating Henan traditional children's songs into early childhood education. Drawing on the cultural features, musical forms, and pedagogical functions of Henan nursery rhymes, the paper proposes that their incorporation into preschool education can promote localized curriculum development, enhance the professional preparation of future kindergarten teachers, and foster young children's aesthetic perception and cultural awareness. The study further discusses teaching strategies based on diversified, progressive, and thematic instruction, showing how traditional songs can be applied across vocal, instrumental, movement, and appreciation activities. The findings suggest that the integration of Henan children's songs provides both a practical pathway for improving preschool music education and a meaningful approach to the inheritance of regional traditional culture.

INTRODUCTION

Across Henan province, countless catchy nursery rhymes and children's songs have been passed down for centuries. These melodies employ lively, humorous language to depict children's social lives and interpersonal relationships, while their enchanting tunes express the emotional shifts of young minds. A significant avenue for integrating traditional Henan nursery rhymes into contemporary society lies in their incorporation into early childhood education programs. This approach cultivates outstanding early years graduates with cultural autonomy, enabling them to deliver locally distinctive music education activities in kindergartens. Such initiatives assist children in recognizing and mastering exceptional traditional culture.

The integration of traditional music into early childhood education has been supported by extensive teaching practices and related research across historical periods and cultures. For instance, Rebecca Staples-Newell, PhD supervisor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) School of Education and researcher at the FPC Child Development Research Centre in the United States, along with others, published the book Early Childhood Education in 2007. This work systematically analyses early childhood education (including music education) across continents and nations worldwide. In the chapter concerning China, the authors not only emphasized that preschool education based on traditional Chinese music emerged as early as the Western Zhou Dynasty (i.e., the 'Six Arts'), but also divided the development of traditional Chinese music in preschool education during the 20th century into two phases: the 1920s to 1970s and the 1980s to 1990s. Rebecca Staples-Newell contends: "Traditional music encompasses

multiple aspects within preschool education planning, including singing instruction, musical rhythm and movement, musical perception, percussion instrument learning, and music appreciation." Practical research abroad on integrating traditional music into early childhood education have been pursued abroad for many years, with scholars collecting experimental data for academic research. For instance, in 1994, scholar Fitzer selected 30 American preschool children for an experiment: 15 participated in a 30-minute traditional music class weekly, while the remaining 15 received only standard curriculum. After 20 weeks of instruction, analysis of the children's scores demonstrated that those in the traditional music group achieved significantly higher results than their peers in the standard curriculum. This indicates that traditional music instruction effectively enhances children's word recognition abilities**.** Traditional nursery rhymes, as a vital component of traditional music, serve as an optimal entry point for early childhood education programs to implement traditional music teaching.

Literature Review

Research on early childhood music education shows that song-based learning is not merely an enrichment activity, but can support language, phonological, and emergent literacy development. A foundational study by Bryant et al. demonstrated that children's knowledge of nursery rhymes was associated with later phonological sensitivity and reading development, suggesting that rhythmic and rhyming verbal forms contribute to early literacy readiness. Subsequent work by Anvari et al. further showed that musical skills in preschool children were significantly related to phonological processing and early reading ability. Experimental studies also support this connection: Register found that an early intervention music curriculum improved prereading and prewriting outcomes, while Gromko reported gains in phonemic awareness among beginning readers receiving music instruction. Likewise, Bolduc showed that a structured music programme improved kindergartners' phonological awareness, reinforcing the view that music-based pedagogies can contribute meaningfully to early language development (Bryant et al., 1989; Anvari et al., 2002; Register, 2001; Gromko, 2005; Bolduc, 2009).

More recent preschool-focused studies have strengthened this evidence base and clarified the mechanisms through which music supports learning. Degé and Schwarzer found that a music programme significantly enhanced phonological awareness in preschoolers, while Bolduc and Lefebvre showed that nursery-rhyme-based instruction can simultaneously support musical processing and phonological development. Patscheke et al. extended these findings to children from immigrant families, showing that music and phonological training both improved phonological awareness, with music offering particular promise in multilingual contexts. Beyond phonology, Moreno et al. reported that short-term music training improved verbal intelligence and executive function, and Linnavalli et al. found that sustained participation in music playschool enhanced children's linguistic skills. Taken together, these studies suggest that nursery rhymes and song activities are especially powerful when they combine repetition, melody, rhythm, movement, and verbal play, all of which are directly relevant to early childhood classroom practice (Degé & Schwarzer, 2011; Bolduc & Lefebvre, 2012; Patscheke et al., 2016; Moreno et al., 2011; Linnavalli et al., 2018; Shang, 2026a).

A second major strand of literature concerns how music is actually positioned within early childhood education systems and teacher preparation. Lee Nardo et al. reported notable variation in the provision of music education across accredited American preschools, indicating that implementation quality depends heavily on institutional priorities and teacher capacity. Kim and Kemple similarly found that preservice early childhood teachers often value music but do not always view it as a central developmental tool, which can limit its pedagogical use. Bolduc and Evrard's examination of educators' practices from birth to age five showed that music activities are

widely used, yet teacher confidence and training remain uneven. Barry and Durham further argued that preservice teachers need stronger preparation to integrate music meaningfully into early childhood curricula, while Barrett et al. showed that practitioners' beliefs and values strongly shape whether music is treated as peripheral entertainment or as a substantive learning medium. This literature is highly relevant for studies of Henan nursery rhymes because it suggests that culturally grounded song resources are most effective when they are embedded in teacher education, curriculum design, and reflective pedagogical practice rather than added superficially (Lee Nardo et al., 2006; Kim & Kemple, 2011; Bolduc & Evrard, 2017; Barry & Durham, 2017; Barrett et al., 2019, Shang, 2026b).

A third line of scholarship is especially important for the present study: the cultural and identity-forming role of songs in early childhood education. Ruokonen et al. showed that music has broad significance in toddlers' early education environments, not only as an artistic activity but as part of everyday pedagogical interaction. Gluschankof's intercultural study of kindergarten musical expression highlighted that young children's music-making is shaped by cultural context and social environment. In a Zambian case study, Kalinde and Vermeulen argued that music in the mother tongue provides stronger cultural and educational relevance than relying exclusively on externally dominant song repertoires. Ilari et al. further proposed that singing can promote cultural understanding by helping children encounter both their own and others' musical traditions. Similarly, Casal de la Fuente and Gillanders showed that song occupies a meaningful place in early childhood curriculum policy and can be linked to aesthetic, linguistic, and cultural learning. From this body of work, it is reasonable to infer that integrating Henan traditional nursery rhymes into preschool teacher education is not only a matter of heritage preservation, but also a pedagogically defensible strategy for language-rich, culturally responsive, and locally grounded early childhood education. At the same time, the literature indicates a gap: while there is substantial international evidence on music, identity, and early learning, relatively little published work focuses specifically on Henan nursery rhymes within Chinese preschool education, which strengthens the rationale for the present study (Ruokonen et al., 2021; Gluschankof, 2008; Kalinde & Vermeulen, 2016; Ilari et al., 2013; Casal de la Fuente & Gillanders, 2022).

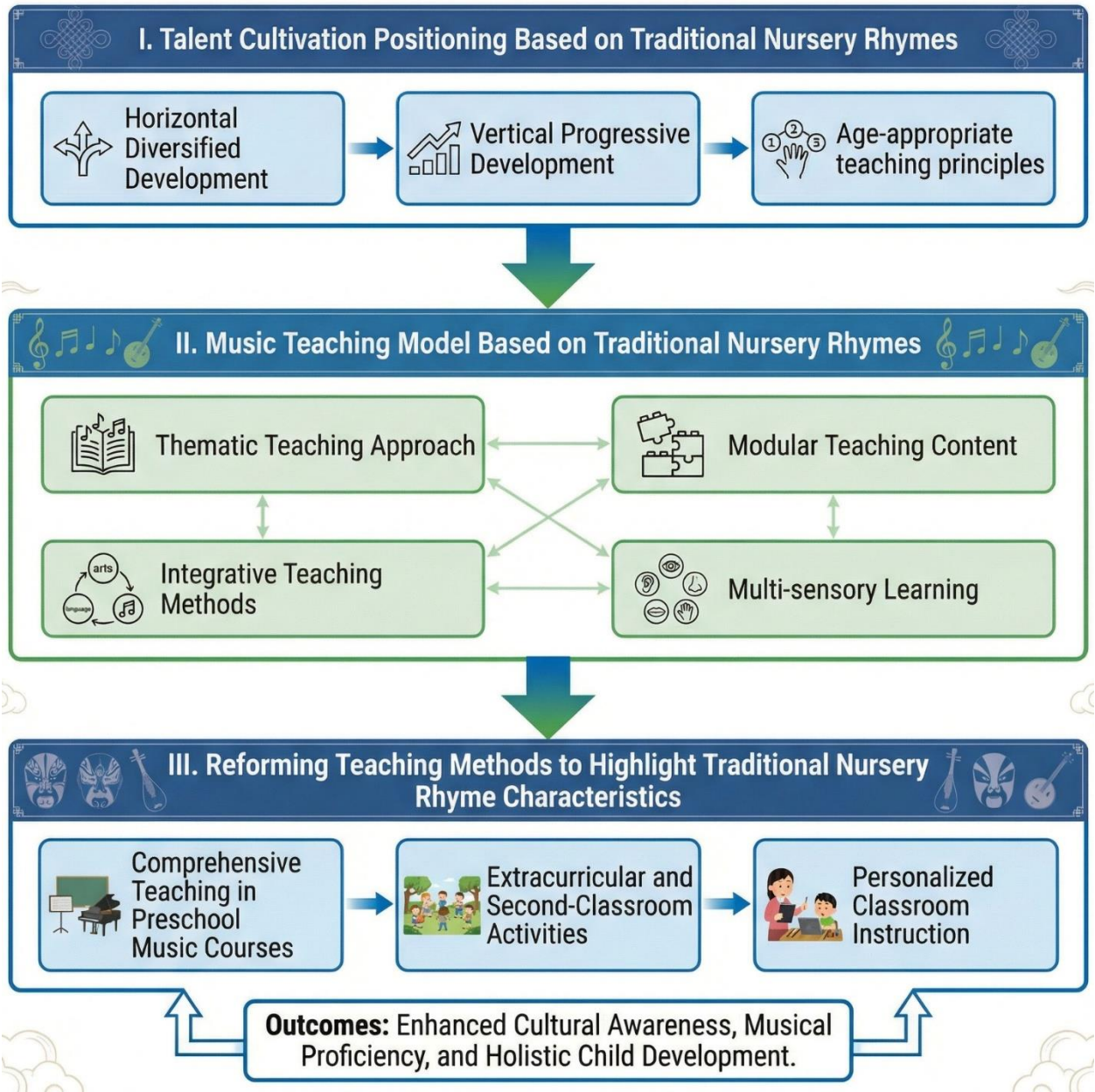


Figure 1 : Methodology

I. Talent Cultivation Positioning Based on Traditional Nursery Rhymes

Currently, music education within China's preschool education programs remains in an exploratory development phase. The systematization, localization, and characterization **of talent cultivation** are far from meeting societal needs. The homogenization tendency of talent cultivation models makes it difficult for universities to form unique advantages in preschool education. For example, many preschool music teachers introduce teaching methods such as Orff or Kodály into their classrooms, but they mostly copy them directly without localized course design. Because the context of musical arts is different, this not only reduces teaching effectiveness but also prevents

students from gaining localized "cultural immersion."

Students in preschool education majors are future kindergarten teachers. Teaching traditional nursery rhymes to them has significant practical value and feasibility. Once traditional nursery rhymes are continually introduced, China's preschool music education could fully develop its own "Orff" teaching method. Traditional nursery rhymes, which encapsulate the essence of Chinese traditional culture, can display regional characteristics through their flexible and diverse musical styles, greatly enhancing students' professional competence.

In the field of preschool education, many universities have already carried out classroom practices and academic explorations introducing traditional nursery rhymes. Based on the current reality and existing problems in preschool education teaching, it is urgent to explore a talent cultivation model based on traditional nursery rhymes, such as integrating traditional songs into vocal teaching so that preschool students can experience their artistic style, enhance aesthetic perception, and strengthen cultural identity. In the context of ongoing curriculum reform, integrating traditional nursery rhymes into the preschool education curriculum system and clearly establishing nationalized and localized talent cultivation goals can promote the characterized development of preschool education students, which has far-reaching significance. At the cultural level, this also represents cultural inheritance, forming a foundation for the continuous transmission of the excellent traditional culture.

The author believes that building a characterized preschool education system through traditional nursery rhymes first requires constructing a localized talent cultivation model, embedding traditional nursery rhymes into the preschool education curriculum system. This cultivates students' cognition and appreciation of traditional nursery rhymes and fosters their conscious awareness of cultural inheritance. Constructing a talent cultivation model based on traditional nursery rhymes must firmly consider the physiological characteristics and cognitive habits of children at different ages, which is a prerequisite for implementing a preschool education talent cultivation program. According to children's music development patterns, teaching should adhere to two basic principles: **(1) horizontal diversified development, and (2) vertical progressive development**.

Horizontal diversified development requires teachers to implement diversified teaching concepts throughout classroom instruction, aiming to strengthen children's musical perception**.** Through different classroom formats such as vocal performance, music appreciation**,** and instrumental performance—Henan traditional nursery rhymes should be applied in teaching practice, allowing students in preschool education programs to master the various forms and artistic styles of Henan traditional nursery **rhymes**, pursuing teaching methods that integrate multiple elements. Specific measures include:

- Teachers can leverage children's early perception of musical rhythm by introducing game-based nursery rhymes that are sing able and danceable, such as Patting Hands Song, Foot Circle Dance, Sifting Basket Song, *and* Throwing Beans. Children can sing while imitating animal movements or performing dance actions**.**
- Additionally, given that children aged 1–4 have difficulty concentrating, music appreciation classes can introduce more melodious traditional nursery rhymes**,** such as *Patting Beans*, *Moon Grandma Bright*, and *Weaving a Flower Basket*, assisted with simple images to deepen children's sensory understanding of nursery rhymes. This emphasizes a diversified teaching approach**,** combining dance, games, and rhythm with rich nursery rhyme material and other art elements, helping students in preschool education develop their strengths and characteristics**,** and promoting characterized teaching in their future kindergarten music classes.

Vertical progressive development requires teachers to design nursery rhyme teaching content suitable for children of different ages. Because children's cognitive abilities vary across age groups, preschool education students must be

aware of how to adjust teaching content accordingly. For example, for children aged 4–6, whose musical perception ability has significantly improved, kindergarten teachers should incorporate traditional nursery rhymes into daily teaching based on these developmental gradients. Teachers must also ensure continuity in teaching content, carefully selecting nursery rhymes for different age groups, ensuring that sing ability progresses from easy to difficult. This gradient-based teaching method helps preschool education students effectively understand children's cognitive characteristics at different ages and maintain the continuity of cognition and interest. Regarding the talent cultivation orientation for pre-school education, the path of nationalized development must be grounded in local contexts, and traditional Henan nursery rhymes provide an excellent entry point for this. This approach fosters distinctive development within the program. For frontline early childhood educators, integrating traditional Henan nursery rhymes with professional music systems and innovative teaching methods will further enrich and concretize talent development objectives. Clarifying this educational positioning lays a solid foundation for subsequent teaching reforms and promotes the transmission of Henan's traditional nursery rhymes under contemporary societal conditions.

II. Music Teaching Model Based on Traditional Nursery Rhymes

Teaching models embody the concrete implementation of talent cultivation approaches. The music teaching model for early childhood education programs must pursue a path of nationalization and localization, incorporating traditional music as a core component of musical education. Emphasis should be placed on fostering students' agency within teaching activities and enhancing their engagement in the learning process, thereby tangibly increasing their interest in and appreciation for traditional music. As preschool music education ultimately serves young children, researching how to integrate traditional nursery rhymes into music classroom teaching and exploring suitable pedagogical approaches constitutes a significant challenge.

The distinctive development of a music teaching model based on traditional nursery rhymes should emphasize a thematic teaching approach. By categorizing nursery rhymes according to different themes, styles, and functions, modular teaching content can be established, expanding each rhyme into a series of related topics. This allows students to systematically and comprehensively understand the diversity and stylistic variety of traditional nursery rhymes. For example, in vocal classes, teachers can select nursery rhymes with performative characteristics, such as *Patting the Beans*, *Happy Magpie*, and *Counting Melons*, allowing students to sing while incorporating actions and role-playing to experience the rhymes in their original context. In piano lessons, teachers can arrange nursery rhymes into piano scores with professional accompaniment, encouraging students to play and sing simultaneously. In dance classes, nursery rhymes can be integrated into movement games; for instance, game-based rhymes like *Weaving a Flower Basket* allow students to sing while hopping, turning, and playing, combining musical enjoyment with physical activity. This modular teaching approach enhances students' aesthetic reception of traditional nursery rhymes and helps preschool education students master classroom methods for early childhood music education, fostering both physical coordination and teamwork among children.

Exploring a music teaching model based on traditional nursery rhymes also requires integrative teaching methods**,** combining related courses to reinforce the artistic characteristics of nursery rhymes across preschool education classrooms. This approach promotes holistic development, maintaining high student engagement. For example, teachers can encourage scenario-based music teaching practice, intentionally creating aesthetically rich and child-centered learning environments. By integrating singing, dancing, games, and multimedia, students can engage multiple senses—auditory, visual, tactile, and kinesthetic—promoting

aesthetic perception and enabling children to internalize and transfer learning experiences.

Chinese traditional music often integrates singing, dancing, and instrumental performance into a single art form. To develop a preschool music teaching system with national characteristics, students must experience traditional music directly through sight, sound, touch, and movement, appreciating its natural artistic qualities and embedded cultural values. Integrating multiple teaching methods strengthens students' multi-dimensional understanding, allowing them to discover, feel, and express beauty.

III. Reforming Teaching Methods to Highlight Traditional Nursery Rhyme Characteristics

Traditional nursery rhymes have unique disciplinary and curricular advantages in preschool music education and closely align with the professional competencies of future kindergarten teachers. Therefore, in innovating talent cultivation models, reforming teaching methods to emphasize traditional nursery rhymes is a crucial pathway to achieving the goals of distinctive preschool education talent development. Implementation can proceed in several ways:

1. **Comprehensive teaching in preschool music courses:** Integrate nursery rhymes into vocal, piano, music appreciation, Chinese traditional music overview, and Chinese music history courses. Guide students to create Henan-specific dance movements for nursery rhymes, accompany them with ethnic instruments, and encourage multi-modal activities combining singing, playing, and dancing. This integrated approach enhances students' autonomy, creativity, and interest in learning traditional nursery rhymes while providing practical methods suitable for children's developmental needs. In kindergartens, this method strengthens children's understanding of musical elements such as melody, pitch, rhythm, and beat through immersive experiences.
2. **Promoting extracurricular and second-classroom activities:** Enrich campus culture and support individualized student development by organizing nursery rhyme-based extracurricular activities. Examples include nursery rhyme singing groups, instrumental accompaniment groups, children's musical dramas, campus competitions in folk songs, nursery rhymes, and dance, and forming Henan-traditional-nursery-rhyme-focused choirs. Local folk singers can be invited for lectures and performances to provide authentic exposure, enhance students' emotional connection to traditional music, and cultivate pride in national culture and hometown identity.
3.
4. **Personalized classroom instruction:** Combine oral and apprenticeship-based folk teaching methods with professional classroom instruction. With ongoing theoretical research and curriculum reform, preschool music teachers' teaching philosophies and their interactions with children are evolving. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences highlights that teachers possess different types of intelligence, including musical intelligence, which encompasses the learning, performance, and appreciation of traditional music. Gardner also emphasizes individualized education, encouraging teachers to transform limited instructional units into diverse learning opportunities.

Conclusion

Henan traditional nursery rhymes are rich and diverse in content and form. By analyzing and integrating these rhymes, teachers can invite folk tradition bearers and kindergarten music educators into the classroom for individualized, face-to-face instruction. This allows students to understand oral teaching methods, differentiate between personalized and professional music instruction, improve instructional relevance, expand professional classroom applications of traditional music, and enhance mastery of nursery rhymes in kindergarten music teaching.

The renowned Hungarian music educator Kodály once said, "Music education is the shortest path to folk songs." Early childhood education marks the beginning of a person's life, and preschool education bears the important responsibility of inheriting and promoting Chinese traditional

music. Preschool music education is an especially important channel for passing on traditional nursery rhymes. As music teachers in preschool education programs, we have the responsibility to integrate locally characteristic music teaching resources into our classrooms and artistic practices, actively advance the reform of talent cultivation models in preschool education, promote the renewal and development of traditional music education in the new era, and construct a new landscape for the sustainable development of traditional music culture.

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