

# *The Role of Performance Games in the Enlightenment of Traditional Cultural Education in Preschool Education and Innovative Strategies*

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**Abstract.** The issue of how traditional culture can promote early childhood enlightenment education has received widespread attention. However, there are still shortcomings in better integrating traditional culture into the daily curriculum of kindergartens. Dramatic play, as one of the common teaching methods in kindergartens, aligns well with the enlightenment education of traditional culture for young children and offers innovative potential. However, the design of an excellent curriculum is dependent on the interconnectedness of three dimensions: the professional requirements for teachers, content grasp, and resource support. In response to the existing shortcomings, teachers need to enhance their deep understanding of traditional culture, grasp elements that align with children's cognitive characteristics and cultural connotations, and reasonably design these into dramatic play courses. Additionally, they must create a cultural environment for the curriculum and ensure resource support, providing a solid foundation for building dramatic play that is both beloved by children and effectively promotes their development.

**Keywords:** Traditional culture, performance games, teacher development, resource guarantee

## 1. Introduction

The "Outline" and "Opinions" issued by the Ministry of Education in recent years all propose that the excellent traditional Chinese culture will be all-round throughout "enlightenment education, basic education, and other fields" [1]. The significance of traditional cultural enlightenment to children is not only because of the policy proposal, but also from the developmental needs of children. Early childhood is a key enlightenment period for the initial formation of cultural identity, values, and aesthetic taste. According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, preschoolers are in the pre-operational stage and have a strong interest in action and emotional things. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory also emphasizes the critical role of cultural tools such as language and symbols, and social interaction in children's psychological development.

Based on these theories, the enlightenment of traditional culture in early childhood education has special value. Relevant documents emphasize that games are the basic way for children to learn. The emotional rendering and intuitive experience of performance games can enable children to develop

well in language ability, imagination, sociality, aesthetic performance, and creativity [1]. It is worth noting that the festival customs, art forms, and virtue education in traditional culture are all in line with the form of performance games, providing a vivid and operable carrier for children to better understand and experience these abstract symbols and spiritual cores.

At present, most teachers have begun to consciously integrate the excellent traditional Chinese culture into the curriculum teaching of children's daily life and have accumulated certain practical experience. However, there are still many problems in the teaching practice of integrating traditional cultural elements: first, the design of traditional culture courses is superficial; second, the experience of preschool teachers is insufficient, and the teaching method is relatively simple; third, Teachers generally lack high-quality and operable teaching design plans. Therefore, given the current problems, exploring the innovative strategy of performance games in traditional cultural enlightenment is the main direction of this study.

## **2. The enlightenment role and implementation status of traditional culture education in preschool education**

### **2.1. The enlightening role of traditional culture education in preschool education**

"Enlightenment" is the initial stage of education, and it is the core answer to "what to cultivate", "for whom to cultivate people," and "how to cultivate people" [2]. At present, many scholars in China have examined the value of enlightenment education of excellent traditional Chinese culture to the comprehensive development of children. Huo Liyan and other scholars accurately summarized it as the structural framework of "four beams and eight pillars", that is, the enlightenment education of traditional culture should do a good job in goal guidance, condition guarantee, process support, and effective results [2]. Based on these studies, the enlightenment of early childhood traditional cultural education lays a unique and important foundation for the growth of young children.

Firstly, the enlightenment education of traditional culture can shape young children's sense of cultural identity and belonging. Integrating traditional culture into kindergarten curricula is not merely about acquiring knowledge and culture; more importantly, it allows young children to gain a profound understanding of their national identity through activities, establishing an emotional connection with traditional culture during cultural interactions, and fostering a sense of cultural recognition. For instance, by learning about traditional festival customs and folk mythological stories, children can understand their ethnic group and the cultural layers and depth that this group encompasses. Young children's understanding of traditional culture should gradually extend from the superficial to the depths of their hearts, laying a foundation of self-confidence, openness, and inclusivity rooted in traditional culture.

Secondly, the enlightenment education of traditional culture can promote the initial shaping of children's morals and values. The moral education of traditional culture is based on the cooperation between specific life experiences and practical behaviors, utilizing stories close to children's lives to stimulate their moral and emotional resonance. For example, in "The Three Character Classic" and "Disciples' Rules," the lively and engaging story curriculum or etiquette practices encourage children to experience positive emotional feedback from moral behaviors and discomfort from immoral actions, thereby driving internal constraints and subtly influencing children's behavioral norms. Moreover, children's moral education can also be enhanced through labor education, patriotism education, and the celebration of traditional festivals and solar terms, thereby facilitating the infiltration of ideological and political education and promoting the healthy development of children's moral education [3].

Thirdly, the enlightenment education of traditional culture can stimulate young children's language development and aesthetic abilities. Policy documents such as the "Guidelines" and "Outline" propose that "through stories, nursery rhymes, games, and other means, help young children understand and respect ethnic culture." They also encourage the cultivation of children's language abilities and cultural identity through ancient poetry, nursery rhymes, and folk stories. This indicates that education in traditional culture for young children should employ diverse and rich content to develop their sense of language and language expression abilities, as well as to cultivate their sensitivity to colors, the delineation of lines, and an appreciation of aesthetics tied to the unique artistic forms of their nation.

Fourthly, the enlightenment education of traditional culture can cultivate the emotional and social development of young children. This form of enlightenment education, rooted in traditional culture and artistic expression, provides rich emotional experiences for young learners, fostering positive emotional experiences and healthy emotional attitudes. Such healthy emotional development promotes the social development of children, aiding them in better integrating into society and exhibiting higher motivation for learning, stronger social skills, and broader perspectives.

## **2.2. The current implementation of traditional cultural education enlightenment in preschool education**

In the context of national policy support and the emphasis on traditional cultural education, educators are increasingly placing importance on the enlightenment of traditional culture. Although some practical experience has been accumulated currently, it also reflects numerous shortcomings:

### **2.2.1. Superficial design in traditional cultural courses**

The classroom, as the primary platform for disseminating and learning knowledge, is also an important vehicle for promoting excellent culture; therefore, it is essential to comprehensively advance the curriculum construction of traditional culture [2]. However, influenced by traditional teaching concepts, the curriculum design of traditional culture often manifests as one of the components of collective teaching, rather than as a means to promote early childhood education.

On one hand, the design of many activities fails to establish important connections with the current lives of young children, leading to a disconnection between actual learning and the development of the children, resulting in insufficient understanding and weak learning outcomes. On the other hand, teachers lack creative abilities in curriculum design. The design of traditional cultural courses by teachers often focuses on common forms of activities, failing to effectively explore and convey the life wisdom and etiquette inherent in the culture, which could guide children to understand, engage in dialogue, and recreate using their thinking.

### **2.2.2. Teachers' inexperience and methodological monotony**

Chinese traditional culture possesses unique wisdom and cultural essence. However, currently, the cultural literacy and teaching abilities of preschool teachers are relatively weak, lacking a deep grasp of the core spirit of the culture and an understanding of its connotations. There is a general deficiency in the reserve of general knowledge related to traditional culture, and the understanding of traditional culture remains at a superficial level [4].

Furthermore, for traditional cultural courses with local characteristics, teachers also face issues such as low course levels and a lack of diverse practical strategies [5]. For example, in the Min Nan

cultural course, teachers continue to employ common instructional formats during implementation, which leads to a tendency for young children to misunderstand Min Nan culture or lack a comprehensive understanding of the historical and cultural connotations behind it [6].

### **2.2.3. The shortage of quality implementable teaching plans among educators**

Although the policy documents, such as the 'Opinions', 'Outline', and 'Guidelines', provide detailed objectives for the development of traditional culture, there is still a lack of practical implementation strategies on how to better integrate traditional culture into enlightenment education. The teaching remains at a level of "superficial gamification", which is insufficient to meet the needs of traditional cultural enlightenment education [7]. Although many kindergarten programs related to traditional culture have been developed, teachers still approach the deeper promotion of children's understanding and development of traditional culture at a rather superficial level, lacking high-quality and practical teaching strategies.

## **3. Performance games and their adaptability**

### **3.1. Implications**

Gamification refers to the incorporation of game elements into serious educational processes to enhance their educational effectiveness. Performance games, as a part of gamification, emphasize the game process itself as a form of performance behavior, focusing more on young children's expressiveness, immediacy, and physicality in the context of game performance. In 1994, the United States officially incorporated drama education into the educational system from kindergarten to high school. Ragibe Yesil1 and Ayşegül believe that role-play is a medium of social interaction, and that social drama games provide children with significant opportunities to 'exist', 'do', and 'produce' within a cultural context, allowing for the practice and development of young children's agency [8]. The educational philosophy regarding performance games in the country aligns with this concept. Common performance games include elements such as drama, dance, improvisation, and physical movement. Young children, as performers, engage in presentations within an environment rich in symbolic meaning and potential drama, in order to promote the development of various abilities in early childhood.

### **3.2. Implementation effectiveness**

Performative games can effectively compensate for the shortcomings of traditional cultural education in terms of activity implementation and teacher professional development for the multifaceted development of young children.

#### **3.2.1. Child-centered**

Performative games provide various avenues for young children to comprehend the connotations of traditional culture and to enhance their interest in and exploration of it. Taking the performative game of 'Inviting the Elder Madam for Five Generations' as an example, the teacher adopts a different approach from typical collective teaching; instead, based on the children's interest in the historical figure of Madame She, the teacher encourages them to collaboratively create scripts, communicate scenarios, and engage in complete and coherent performances of traditional operas.

### **3.2.2. Rich variety of forms**

Performative games provide various avenues for young children to comprehend the connotations of traditional culture and to enhance their interest in and exploration of it. Taking the performative game of 'Inviting the Elder Madam for Five Generations' as an example, the teacher adopts a different approach from typical collective teaching; instead, based on the children's interest in the historical figure of Elder Madam She, children are encouraged to collaboratively create scripts, communicate scenarios, and engage in complete and coherent performances of traditional operas.

The implementation of performance games in the curriculum compensates for the deficiencies in teachers' experience and teaching methods, and it also contributes positively to children's development in language skills, emotional expression, and enhanced social interactions. Children are encouraged to incorporate their favorite characters and elements of character dialogue into performance games, allowing them to autonomously create and expand narratives, thereby fostering their language abilities through familiar elements [9]. The integration of appropriate picture books with performance strategies not only aids young children in constructing cultural knowledge but also stimulates their social-emotional skills [10]. Performative games serve as a medium for social interaction, through which children actively create their culture, generating new knowledge from their prior understanding, thereby enabling the practice and development of self-agency [8].

### **3.2.3. Provide implementation pathways**

Currently, there are numerous courses that incorporate elements of traditional culture into dramatic play, providing teachers with concrete teaching references to better design and implement traditional culture. The curiosity of young children towards dramatic play drives them to actively explore the underlying stories, origins, and other cultural content; through dialogue with traditional culture, they internalize abstract cultural elements into their understanding. In this process, teaching transcends superficial engagement and develops into a positive cycle of 'learning through playing and playing through learning.'

## **3.3. Insufficiency**

### **3.3.1. Misalignment between course design and children's cognition**

Traditional culture is the overall manifestation of various ideological cultures and conceptual forms of different ethnic groups. Therefore, teachers should ensure that the teaching design and subject selection of performance games incorporating elements of traditional culture align with the developmental characteristics of children of different ages. Some traditional cultural elements that involve complex historical backgrounds and abstract values may exceed young children's comprehension in curriculum design, making it difficult for them to grasp the underlying meanings of these cultures. This can lead to confusion regarding their understanding of culture and even a sense of alienation from traditional culture, resulting in challenges during the implementation of performance games.

### **3.3.2. The professional preparation of teachers and the difficulty of implementation**

Teachers' understanding of the diversity, historical origins, and practical applications of traditional culture remains relatively superficial. When designing the teaching of relevant performing games, there are misunderstandings and confusion regarding the concepts of performance games and

gamification. Moreover, there is a lack of unique understanding and innovation concerning traditional culture, which makes it difficult to provide children with specific and practical experiences that present a comprehensive and rich performance game.

In the implementation of the game, the teacher's practical operation experience is relatively lacking, the use of teaching methods is not in place, and the timing and method of intervention are not well grasped, resulting in the presentation of performance games without particularly good results.

### **3.3.3. Performance games lack practical and operable teaching aids**

As one of the common game courses in kindergartens, the design of the teaching content for performance games should be targeted, and the accompanying materials and specific implementation props should be suitable for the characteristics of early childhood education. However, the teaching design related to traditional culture performance games is still in the exploratory and practical stage, with relatively few relevant studies. There is also a lack of excellent and referenceable materials and interactive plans. For example, difficulties arise in procuring props such as traditional musical instruments and seasonal customs, while DIY alternatives consume much time and yield unsatisfactory results. Teachers rely heavily on a superficial understanding of traditional culture and existing experiences to acquire the necessary materials for this course, which results in a lack of materials that limits the quality of course implementation.

## **4. Innovation strategies**

### **4.1. Teacher development**

Teachers are the builders and developers of the curriculum, and their understanding of culture and teaching abilities directly affect the effectiveness of the curriculum. Therefore, enhancing teachers' educational quality in traditional culture is a key focus, enriching teachers' knowledge of traditional culture and improving their teaching capabilities [11].

On the one hand, teachers must strengthen their cultural literacy. By conducting regular teaching training or offline professional seminars, a traditional cultural knowledge system can be established for educators, enabling them to comprehend the connotations of cultural symbols and their spiritual essence. This approach helps teachers avoid cultural transmission errors caused by their ambiguous understanding of teaching design. Additionally, teachers are encouraged to proactively explore local cultural resources, such as intangible cultural heritage and distinctive customs, to foster a more concrete and vivid understanding of local traditional culture among children, thus accumulating authentic materials for game design.

On the other hand, teachers focus on developing their professional competencies. The design of the curriculum should concentrate on the children's perspective, employing methods such as collaborative lesson planning and case analysis to help teachers transform abstract cultural content into game elements that can be perceived and understood by young learners. For example, complex traditional stories can be distilled into core themes that children can grasp, such as 'helping others' and 'courageous attempts,' encouraging children to understand the core content through performance games and fostering their ability to innovate independently.

## 4.2. Optimize content design

The design of the course content must ensure the accurate core of traditional culture while being based on the cognitive patterns and experiential characteristics of young children. It should create performance games that provide a space for independent creation, allowing cultural details to naturally integrate into the children's creations. This enables them to experience the charm of culture and develop a personalized understanding of it through their expressions.

Each culture has different requirements for young children's life experiences and cognitive levels, and the methods implemented through performing games vary accordingly. Teachers should design the curriculum with proper stratification. For instance, courses on traditional festivals and solar terms can focus on experiential customs, allowing children to imitate through exaggerated actions and engage with the festive atmosphere through physical experiences. Regarding traditional stories, it is advisable to present concrete segments while omitting complex mythological backgrounds, enabling children to connect with the cultural figures within the stories during role interactions. Furthermore, teachers should exercise discernment in relation to abstract concepts of traditional culture, ensuring that the selection of formats is flexible and engaging. For example, when explaining the relationship between the Earthly Branches and Zodiac animals, it can be cleverly transformed into a performing game, allowing children to naturally memorize the order of the Zodiac through their performance.

## 4.3. Resource assurance

Performance game teaching aids related to traditional culture should not only convey cultural characteristics, but also ensure that they are safe and easy to operate.

In terms of cultural understanding, teachers can link multiple forces to expand the resource dimension, so that the game can extend from "in the classroom" to "in life". For example, accurate information can be obtained through the official platforms of local intangible cultural heritage protection centers, museums, and other venues, while also exploring local traditional culture. It can invite inheritors to the garden to introduce knowledge to the children or guide them in correctly understanding traditional culture. Regarding the preparation of teaching aids, it can utilize rental methods or guide participants to create them manually, with the main objective being to provide children with a clear understanding of the cultural traditions and folk items introduced. Teachers can take children to local museums or relevant performance venues for on-site observation or experiences, laying a solid foundation for children to participate in performance games.

## 5. Conclusion

This study conducts an in-depth exploration of the practical pathways and shortcomings of performance games in the enlightenment of traditional culture for young children, and proposes systematic improvement strategies in response to the current issues. Teachers should focus on enhancing their understanding of the connotations of traditional culture, actively discovering local cultural elements, and guiding children to resonate with their local culture. The curriculum of performance games should select cultural elements that align with children's cognitive styles, incorporating traditional cultural elements that possess core cultural values while being appropriate for young children. Moreover, creative strategies should be employed to integrate these elements into the game plots and interactions. Additionally, it is essential to develop a diverse range of accessible, high-quality supporting resources to provide material support for curriculum

implementation, including costumes, props, music, operatic elements, and immersive cultural environments, thereby offering comprehensive support for the course. The theoretical framework constructed in this study provides foundational direction for practical exploration. While teachers seek diversified pathways for the curriculum, they must promote the collaborative development of practical exploration and theoretical research to better integrate traditional cultural elements into children's performance games. This approach aims to retain cultural integrity while catering to children's cognitive and expressive characteristics, allowing them to foster a sense of closeness to traditional culture through their gaming experiences.

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