

Research on the Integration Pathways of Hezhe Ethnic Group's Traditional Music Culture into the Curriculum System of Local Normal Colleges

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Abstract. The Hezhe people possess a unique musical heritage, most notably represented by the “Imakan” narrative art—hailed as a “living epic”—and folk songs reflecting their fishing and hunting traditions. These form a precious component of the Chinese nation's musical treasure trove. However, with societal changes and shifts in the environment for transmission, traditional Hezhe music faces severe challenges. Teacher education, particularly music teacher education, plays a pivotal role in cultivating future educators' musical literacy and awareness of cultural preservation. Currently, the integration of Hezhe music culture into the curricula of local normal universities remains inadequate, characterized by fragmented content, limited teaching methods, and a lack of depth. This paper aims to explore practical pathways and strategies for effectively incorporating the outstanding traditional music culture of the Hezhe people into the curricula of local normal universities.

Keywords: Hezhe ethnic group, traditional culture, music education, curriculum integration

1. Introduction

The unique musical traditions of each ethnic group serve as vital cultural markers and vessels of emotion within the diverse yet unified cultural fabric of the Chinese nation. These traditions not only enrich the diversity of Chinese culture but also provide a crucial foundation for the historical continuity and cultural identity of each people [1]. The Hezhe, a tribe whose ancestors lived alongside rivers and lakes for generations, have not only forged a distinctive fishing and hunting civilisation but also nurtured a rich and characterful musical culture. Hezhe music, with its distinctive melodies, lyrics, and performance styles, forms an integral part of the ethnic group's cultural identity. Among these traditions, the 'Imakan' narrative art stands out. Through its grand narrative structure, unique melodies, and distinctive vocal techniques, Imakan preserves the Hezhe people's historical memory, mythological beliefs, and reverence for their heroes. Recognised by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, it is a world-class treasure of oral and intangible cultural heritage. This art form serves not only as a symbol of Hezhe culture but also as a vital conduit for its transmission. Furthermore, traditional folk songs depicting the Hezhe's fishing and hunting life, festive customs, and love and marriage traditions, with their

simple melodies and vivid lyrics, unfold a vivid panorama of the ethnic group's existence and spiritual ethos. These musical works reflect not only the Hezhe way of life and cultural traditions but also embody their unique understanding of nature, society, and the human experience.

However, like many oral cultural heritages, the traditional music of the Hezhe people, particularly the 'Imakan' tradition requiring specific linguistic environments and master-apprentice transmission, faces significant challenges in its perpetuation. The number of practitioners fully versed in 'Imakan' is dwindling, with many now advanced in years. The younger generation exhibits limited interest in traditional music and has few opportunities to learn it, while the encroachment of modern popular culture further constricts its survival space. Against the backdrop of globalisation and modernisation, the survival and development of traditional culture confront formidable challenges. Many young people increasingly favour modern popular culture, overlooking the value and significance of traditional heritage. Against this backdrop, the intervention of the education system—particularly teacher training programmes cultivating future educators—becomes urgently vital for the rescue, preservation, and transmission of Hezhe musical culture. The education system can integrate Hezhe musical culture into students' learning processes through innovative curriculum design, teaching content, and pedagogical methods, thereby enhancing students' interest in and sense of belonging towards traditional culture [2]. Teacher trainees, as future educators, must not only acquire fundamental knowledge and skills in Hezhe music but also develop the capacity to translate this knowledge into effective teaching practice.

Teacher training students, particularly those specialising in music, alongside primary education students who may undertake elementary music teaching duties, serve as vital bridges connecting ethnic musical cultures with foundational education classrooms. Their comprehension, appreciation, and mastery of Hezhe musical knowledge and pedagogical skills directly determine whether Hezhe music can be transmitted and recognised among the next generation [3]. For local teacher training institutions situated within the cultural sphere of influence of the Hezhe people, integrating Hezhe musical culture into their curricula and cultivating relevant competencies among teacher trainees constitutes both a responsibility to serve local cultural development and an opportunity to enhance the distinctive character and quality of their music education provision. Consequently, this study focuses on the specific issue of 'integrating Hezhe musical culture into the curricula of local teacher training institutions', aiming to explore: What unique elements and values within Hezhe musical culture are particularly suited to teacher education? What specific obstacles currently exist in integrating Hezhe music into teacher training curricula? How can Hezhe musical elements be systematically and effectively incorporated into the course design, teaching content, pedagogical methods, and assessment frameworks of music and related disciplines?

This study seeks to provide local normal universities with more targeted approaches and practical solutions for curriculum reform. It aims to enhance trainee teachers' ethnic musical literacy and cultural transmission capabilities, promote the preservation, transmission, and innovation of Hezhe music culture, and offer valuable reference for integrating other ethnic minority music cultures into teacher education. Through such systematic integration, local normal universities can not only elevate their own educational standards but also contribute to the preservation and transmission of Hezhe culture, thereby fostering cultural diversity and sustainable development.

Amidst the tide of globalisation, safeguarding and perpetuating the Hezhe musical heritage constitutes not only a duty of respect and preservation towards this ethnic group's cultural legacy, but also a contribution to humanity's cultural diversity. Through the intervention of the educational system, we can inject fresh impetus and support into the transmission of Hezhe musical traditions, enabling them to retain their vitality within contemporary society. This endeavour not only enriches

students' cultural literacy and pedagogical capabilities but also provides crucial sustenance for the sustainable development of local cultures.

2. The educational value of the Hezhe ethnic group's traditional music culture

The distinctive feature of the Hezhe people's traditional music lies in its fusion of “narrative” and “living” qualities, epitomised by the “Imakan” tradition. This oral storytelling art form, characterised by its free-flowing cadence, colloquial structure, and improvisational delivery, conveys vast cultural information encompassing Hezhe history, mythology, ancestral legends, and heroic tales [4]. It has thus formed a uniquely ethnic oral historiography system. In societies lacking a written tradition, music serves as the primary vehicle for cultural memory, enabling ethnic groups to preserve historical identity and cultural continuity across generations.

The cultural function of 'Imakan' aligns closely with pedagogical concepts such as 'experiential learning' and 'cultural cognitive transfer'. It not only furnishes history curricula with vivid primary-source material but also offers teacher-trainees an exemplary model for understanding the relationship between history and culture, while honing their instructional delivery and narrative expression skills. By guiding students to deeply analyse recurring narrative patterns, value systems, and symbolic frameworks within Imakan, educators can transform it into teaching resources imbued with locality, emotional resonance, and participatory elements, thereby enriching the depth of historical education and enhancing the warmth of ethnic pedagogy. Hezhe music transcends mere historical memory, constituting a dynamic process of cultural expression. Through music, the Hezhe interweave past and present, individual and collective, myth and reality, forging a distinctive cultural narrative. This narrative serves not only as a recollection of the past but as an affirmation of contemporary cultural identity and guidance for future cultural development. Educators may harness this characteristic to aid students in comprehending cultural fluidity and diversity through musical instruction. For teacher training, Hezhe music offers a living cultural textbook. By analysing its narrative structures, emotional expressions, and cultural symbolism, students gain profound insights into the Hezhe social organisation, value systems, and historical evolution. This constitutes not merely musical study but a deep cultural inquiry, providing students with a multidimensional learning experience.

3. Cultivating cultural identity and developing local curricula: practical approaches

At present, local normal education stands at the crossroads of dual transformation. On the one hand, it shoulders the mission of serving regional basic education development and promoting local culture in the classroom [5]. On the other hand, it must also reflect the requirements of ethnic diversity education within curriculum reform. As a culturally resource-rich region in regional characteristics, Hezhe music culture serves not only as a symbol of ethnic identity but also as a vital source for localising curricula. From a cultural identity perspective, the reverence for nature, remembrance of ancestors, and emphasis on familial and communal bonds expressed through Hezhe music enrich contemporary education with profound ethical and emotional dimensions. Particularly under the 'Double Reduction' policy framework, the basic education system—which prioritises holistic development and comprehensive competency—requires greater integration of culturally rich and aesthetically compelling curriculum resources. For teacher trainees, mastering the pedagogical approaches and value concepts of Hezhe musical culture not only broadens the scope of their future teaching content but also enhances their comprehensive capacity to serve local communities and disseminate culture. From a curriculum development perspective, Hezhe music can serve as a vital

component of indigenous music courses, local elective programmes, and even integrated practical activities. For instance, within the Traditional Chinese Music curriculum, teacher trainees could design age-appropriate teaching content and performance practices centred on the Imakan oral tradition. Incorporating Hezhe festival songs and dances, fishing chants, and labour songs into primary music lessons would both align with educational objectives and facilitate cultural immersion. Developing such resource-based curricula not only cultivates teachers' professional competencies but also establishes sustainable mechanisms for the localised transmission of Hezhe culture.

Integrating Hezhe musical culture into curricula requires not only systematically constructing multi-tiered course structures but also relying on culturally resonant teaching strategies and resources, alongside stable support mechanisms and institutional safeguards. As dual vehicles for 'cultural transmission and teacher training,' local normal institutions should: strengthen the status of ethnic cultural courses in top-level design; deepen cultural participation experiences in teaching practice; and ensure sustainable course operation through institutional mechanisms. Only thus can Hezhe musical culture truly 'enter classrooms, minds, and hearts,' achieving the dual objectives of living transmission and educational innovation. Hezhe music serves not merely as a symbol of local culture but as a vessel for cultural identity. In education, music transcends mere knowledge transmission; it fosters cultural immersion and identity cultivation. Through integrating Hezhe musical culture into curricula, students learn not only music but also culture and identity. This identity encompasses not only recognition of Hezhe heritage but broader acceptance of multiculturalism, alongside understanding and respect for cultural diversity. In curriculum development, Hezhe music offers a rich repository of resources. Through music, students can explore diverse cultural perspectives and comprehend the profound connection between music and culture. This connection transcends mere knowledge transmission; it fosters cultural immersion and identity cultivation. Students learn not only music but also culture and identity by integrating Hezhe musical culture into the curriculum. This identity encompasses not only recognition of Hezhe culture but also acceptance of multiculturalism, alongside an understanding and respect for cultural diversity [6].

In summary, the educational value of traditional Hezhe music culture lies in its capacity to serve as a vessel for cultural memory, an instrument for expanding artistic understanding, and a medium for cultivating cultural identity. By integrating Hezhe musical culture into teacher training programs, educators can not only safeguard and transmit precious cultural heritage but also provide a unique pathway for innovating music education curricula, methodologies, and enhancing teacher competence. The educational value of Hezhe musical culture lies not only in its rich content but also in its profound impact on cultural identity and multicultural education [7]. Through music, students learn not merely knowledge but culture and identity. This identity encompasses not only recognition of Hezhe culture but also acceptance of multiculturalism, alongside an understanding and respect for cultural diversity. This identity encompasses not only recognition of Hezhe culture but also acceptance of multiculturalism, alongside an understanding and respect for cultural diversity.

4. Practical approaches and strategies for integrating Hezhe ethnic music culture into the curriculum system of local normal colleges

Local normal institutions bear the dual responsibility of cultivating indigenous teachers and serving regional educational development. The integration of Hezhe ethnic music culture into the curriculum should transcend fragmented, superficial approaches such as merely 'offering an elective course' or 'occasionally introducing a particular song'. Instead, it should achieve an educational pathway 'from

knowledge to competence, from experience to inheritance' through holistic course planning, modular structures, and in-depth objectives.

Firstly, from a curricular structure perspective, the integration of Hezhe music culture should form a three-tiered system: foundational, advanced, and practical. The foundational tier can be introduced through general education courses such as "Introduction to Ethnic Music" and "Appreciation of Chinese Ethnic Music", cultivating all teacher training students' basic understanding of Hezhe music. Through these courses, students can not only grasp the fundamental characteristics of Hezhe music but also comprehend its historical context and cultural significance. This content extends beyond simple musical appreciation to include in-depth exploration of the cultural context, historical origins, and role within ethnic life [8]. The advanced tier should feature specialised electives or modules such as 'Thematic Studies in Hezhe Musical Arts' and 'Appreciation and Performance of Imakan Art' within music education, early childhood education, and primary education programmes. This enhances students' systematic understanding of Hezhe musical structure, stylistic features, and performance characteristics. These courses can delve into technical details, performance styles, and cultural significance of Hezhe music, offering students a more profound learning experience. Through such studies, students not only acquire specific performance techniques but also comprehend the unique status and influence of Hezhe music within ethnic culture. At the practical level, courses such as 'Local Music Curriculum Development' and 'Ethnic Music Education Internship' can be offered to facilitate students' transformation of acquired knowledge into educational resources and teaching competencies. These courses enable students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world teaching scenarios, cultivating their pedagogical practice skills. Through participation in actual music teaching activities, students can develop locally applicable music teaching materials or design music-themed educational activities, thereby converting theoretical learning into practical teaching abilities.

Secondly, the curriculum content should emphasise dual objectives: cultural interpretive capacity and educational transformative power. Hezhe music transcends mere compilations of 'folk songs' or 'melodies'; it embodies ethnic history, mythological traditions, productive-living experiences, and value systems. Curriculum content must transcend the superficial level of merely 'learning to sing a song,' delving instead into the narrative, social, and emotional functions embedded within the music. Through a sequence of 'listening—singing—analysing—performing—teaching,' students not only acquire musical skills but also comprehend the cultural logic and educational significance underlying the music. This trinity of 'content—meaning—teaching' in curriculum construction will assist future teachers in achieving 'cultural embedding' rather than 'cultural decoration' in their instructional designs.

Furthermore, the integration of the curriculum system must consider its appropriateness and adaptability across different disciplines and grade levels. For teacher trainees preparing to teach music in primary and lower secondary schools, emphasis should be placed on simplifying and translating complex Hezhe musical knowledge into age-appropriate teaching content. For those training to teach music in upper secondary schools and higher education institutions, more in-depth training in music theory and performance techniques should be provided. This curriculum adaptation for distinct educational stages is pivotal to ensuring Hezhe music not merely enters classrooms but is effectively utilised [9]. Through such adaptation, students can apply Hezhe musical knowledge meaningfully across educational levels, achieving comprehensive educational coverage.

Finally, curriculum development must guard against the tendency to reduce culture to mere symbols. Rather than mechanically adding a few songs merely to increase ethnic cultural elements, an educational rationale should underpin the curriculum: using music to guide students in

understanding local culture, ethnic history, musical diversity, and cultural pluralism. This enhances educators' cultural interpretive skills for diverse teaching approaches. This shift—from merely having a curriculum to ensuring its quality, and from content padding to deep cultural embedding—is the fundamental pathway to effective integration.

5. Conclusion

Effectively integrating Hezhe ethnic music culture into the curriculum systems of local normal colleges is the essential pathway to achieving the dual objectives of promoting ethnic cultural inheritance and enhancing the educational literacy of teacher trainees [10]. Driven by the principles of cultural diversity education, ethnic unity policies, and intangible cultural heritage protection strategies, normal education must shoulder the contemporary mission of developing regional cultural resources and exploring innovative educational approaches.

From an educational value perspective, Hezhe musical culture—as a composite cultural resource integrating ethnic memory, artistic expression, and cultural identity—holds significant pedagogical merit. Its narrative, everyday, improvisational, and culturally symbolic qualities provide rich and unique material for music education, interdisciplinary teaching, and localised education, aligning with trends in multicultural education and holistic development. This musical heritage not only serves as a repository of Hezhe history and culture but also functions as a vital tool for cultivating students' cultural comprehension and aesthetic sensibilities. Through in-depth engagement with Hezhe music, students can develop profound insights into ethnic cultures, thereby enhancing their own cultural literacy and pedagogical capabilities. However, within the current educational framework, local normal institutions still grapple with issues of 'marginalised indigenous culture' and 'fragmented ethnic content' in their curricular structures. Hezhe musical culture currently occupies a position as merely 'supplementary material' or 'decorative content' within curricula, failing to ascend to a position as a vital component within the course structure. The lack of systematic teaching design, clear teaching objectives, and evaluation mechanisms constitutes the fundamental obstacle to its integration. This marginalisation not only restricts the educational potential of Hezhe musical culture but also weakens students' sense of identity with and understanding of their indigenous culture. To achieve the effective integration of Hezhe musical culture, local normal universities must undertake systematic reforms in curriculum design, ensuring Hezhe music occupies a prominent position within courses. This necessitates not only structural adjustments to the curriculum but also innovative teaching methodologies to guarantee students gain rich cultural experiences and profound learning outcomes in the classroom. Concurrently, refining assessment mechanisms is crucial for safeguarding course quality and student learning effectiveness.

In summary, integrating Hezhe musical culture into curricula represents not only a necessary response by local universities to traditional heritage but also a critical pathway for contemporary education systems to enhance cultural inclusivity, pedagogical depth, and curricular vitality. Through systematic planning and immersive teaching, Hezhe music can not only be “brought to life” within teacher training classrooms but also “transmitted” to future generations of the ethnic group. This cultural integration not only aids students in understanding and embracing indigenous culture but also enhances their cross-cultural comprehension and educational practice capabilities, thereby laying a solid foundation for their professional development and societal contributions. Furthermore, incorporating Hezhe musical culture assists local normal universities in elevating their educational distinctiveness and social influence. By integrating Hezhe musical culture into the curriculum system, institutions can not only improve their educational quality but also contribute to the preservation and transmission of local culture. This cultural integration not only fosters

collaboration between institutions and communities but also heightens schools' sense of social responsibility and cultural influence. Through such systematic incorporation, local normal universities can elevate their educational standards while contributing to the preservation and transmission of Hezhe culture, thereby promoting cultural diversity and sustainable development. In future educational development, the integration of Hezhe musical culture represents not only a vital direction for educational reform but also a significant mission for cultural preservation. Only through such systematic, profound cultural integration can the comprehensive advancement of education and the enduring transmission of culture be genuinely achieved [11].

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