

A Study on the Development Dilemma and Countermeasures of Preschool Art Education in Rural Areas of Southern Sichuan

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Abstract: Preschool art education in rural southern Sichuan currently faces several developmental challenges, hindering the comprehensive development and aesthetic literacy of preschool children in the region. This study focuses on rural southern Sichuan and analyzes the challenges facing preschool art education in the region, including uneven resource allocation, insufficient teacher artistic literacy and teaching skills, and insufficient collaborative support mechanisms. To address these challenges, this study proposes three-dimensional solutions, aiming to provide a practical development path for rural preschool art education in southern Sichuan, thereby promoting equity in educational starting points and cultural heritage innovation.

Keywords: Rural Preschool Education; Art education; Dilemma and Countermeasures

1. Introduction

Preschool education is a vital component of the national education system and a crucial stage in laying the foundation for lifelong learning and well-rounded development. Currently, rural early childhood education is a weak link within this system. The development of rural early childhood education is a key pillar in implementing the national rural revitalization strategy and education equity policies. Its importance has been fundamentally established in policies and regulations such as the "China Education Modernization 2035" and the "Law of the People's Republic of China on Promoting Rural Revitalization." From the perspective of child development, rural early childhood education carries the foundational mission of fulfilling the fundamental task of cultivating morality and nurturing people. The "Guidelines for Learning and Development of Children Aged 3-6" establish development goals in five key areas: health, language, social development, science, and the arts. Rural early childhood education is a key mechanism for ensuring equal opportunities for comprehensive development for children in remote areas. Rural early childhood art education has also become a key component in fulfilling the national task of cultivating morality and nurturing people. Policies such as the "Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education in the New Era" and the "Notice on the Comprehensive Implementation of the School Aesthetic Education Immersion Action" have established the fundamental role of art education in early childhood. Providing high-quality early childhood education services to the general public, especially in rural areas, has become a new challenge facing government departments, government agencies, and educational institutions. Southern Sichuan, the shorthand term for the southern part of the Sichuan Basin, encompasses the five cities of Zigong, Luzhou, Leshan, Neijiang, and Yibin. It plays a crucial role in Sichuan's strategy to develop itself into a western economic powerhouse and is a crucial region within the Chengdu-Chongqing Economic Zone. It encompasses many rural and underdeveloped areas. Research on rural preschool arts education in this region can provide valuable insights for the balanced development of regional education.

2. The importance of promoting the development of art education for young children in rural southern Sichuan

2.1 Promoting the All-Round Development and Potential of Young Children in Rural Areas

Preschool education is the starting point of life education and has a profound impact on the development of children's cognition, language, emotion, social interaction and other aspects. Art education, such as painting, handicrafts, music, dance and other educational activities, is an important

way to open up children's wisdom. Art education is not only an important part of kindergarten education, but also the enlightenment stage of children's artistic development, covering subjects such as music, fine arts, literature, and drama performance^[1]. Through art activities, children can exercise their observation, imagination, spatial perception and hand-eye coordination. In the process of free creation, they learn to explore, experiment and solve problems, which is the earliest bud of innovative thinking. Childhood is a critical period for the formation of aesthetic interests. By contacting beautiful things such as nature and art, guiding children to feel the beauty of color, rhythm and form, they can initially establish their aesthetic views. This early aesthetic experience will have a profound impact on their future quality of life and spiritual pursuits. For rural areas with relatively scarce resources, art education, a low-threshold, highly open activity, is a key means to stimulate children's creative potential. Therefore, it is found that art education for young children in rural areas plays a foundational role in the individual development of children and is an important means to promote the comprehensive development of children and stimulate their potential.

2.2 Bridging the Urban-Rural Education Gap and Promoting Educational Equity

Educational equity is the cornerstone of social equality. Currently, there is a significant gap in urban and rural education, and art education is a particularly weak link. Vigorously developing preschool art education in rural areas ensures that rural children enjoy the same right to a comprehensive education as their urban counterparts and is a crucial measure to address their "starting disadvantages" due to their geographical location and family background. Rural revitalization requires a new generation of local talent with creativity, aesthetic appreciation, and cultural confidence. The imagination, hands-on skills, and innovative spirit fostered by preschool art education are precisely the core qualities needed for future rural development. At the same time, many rural kindergartens suffer from a "primary school-like" approach, prematurely indoctrinating children with knowledge and stifling their natural instincts. Promoting art education centered on play and experience is an effective way to correct this imbalance and improve the overall scientific nature and quality of rural preschool education. Therefore, vigorously developing preschool art education in rural areas is a crucial way to prevent the intergenerational transmission of poverty, promote equal starting points, and cultivate future talent for rural development and enhance the quality of care and education in rural kindergartens.

2.3 Playing a Unique Role in the Inheritance and Innovation of Local Culture

Rural preschool arts education shouldn't simply replicate urban models, but rather develop distinctive approaches based on their own resources. For example, using natural materials (leaves, soil, straw, etc.) for creative work and embracing rural scenery as an aesthetic object is itself an educational innovation that can imbue rural arts education with unique vitality. Rural areas possess a rich local cultural heritage unmatched by cities, including folk songs, folk tales, paper-cutting, embroidery, local opera, and traditional festivals. Integrating this valuable intangible cultural heritage into preschool arts education, allowing children to become familiar with and appreciate local culture through hands-on participation, is a form of cultural inheritance. By learning local art forms, children can gain a deeper understanding of their environment and cultural background, fostering a deep sense of belonging and pride in their hometown. Therefore, developing preschool arts education in rural areas can play a unique role in the preservation and innovation of local culture, strengthening local sentiment and cultural confidence.

3. The Development Dilemma of Early Childhood Art Education in Rural Southern Sichuan

3.1 Unbalanced Resource Allocation

Southern Sichuan, a region characterized by a diverse population and unbalanced urban-rural development, suffers from relatively limited rural preschool education resources. Compared to economically prosperous urban areas, rural kindergartens face a significant weakness in their overall hardware infrastructure. Many buildings are old, classrooms are cramped, and many lack specialized rooms such as art rooms, science labs, and libraries, failing to meet the diverse learning needs of young children. In addition to a lack of dedicated venues for arts education, relevant art teaching equipment is also outdated and in short supply, primarily in basic painting tools, craft materials, musical instruments, and dance and theatrical props. Classrooms are difficult to create an artistic atmosphere, and space for displaying works is insufficient. Despite the national push for informatization in education, many rural kindergartens' electronic equipment and network infrastructure fall far short of standards, a stark contrast

to urban kindergartens, which have extensively adopted digital resources. This significant disparity in funding and hardware infrastructure is a prime manifestation of the imbalance in the allocation of educational resources.

3.2 Teachers' Artistic Literacy and Art Teaching Abilities Are Insufficient

Preschool teachers in rural areas of southern Sichuan also seem to be lacking in artistic literacy and art teaching ability. Pre-service training and post-service training are both important aspects that affect teachers' professional literacy and professional development. In terms of pre-service training, colleges and universities also have some problems in the training of normal students. Many colleges and universities focus more on the basic theories of the profession in their curriculum settings, and relatively few art courses are set up. Art courses such as fine arts, dance, and music have shorter class hours and lower credits in the entire curriculum system. Due to the limitation of class hours, these courses only reflect skill learning and are far from enough to cultivate students' artistic literacy. In the way of cultivating students' artistic literacy, the main goal is to master artistic skills and skills. For example, some teachers may pay too much attention to skills and performance, and ignore the guidance of students' perceptual cognition. This will not only lead to the fragmentation of teaching content, but also greatly reduce students' learning effect^[2]. At the same time, there is not much attention paid to whether the content of art education that focuses on whether students can truly understand it can solve problems in early childhood education practice. Most of the teachers of these courses come from relevant art colleges, and their majors are music, fine arts, dance, etc. They know very little about preschool education and lack professional knowledge of early childhood education. Therefore, the courses are mostly taught in the way of art majors, which makes it difficult to cultivate students' proper preschool art accomplishment.

From the perspective of arts education teaching capabilities, the ability to design and implement arts teaching activities is still lacking. Artistic skills such as singing, piano, art, and dance fall under the purview of subject knowledge. Only when they are integrated with knowledge of child development and teaching methods can disciplinary teaching knowledge in this field be formed. However, in daily learning, there are clear disciplinary boundaries between singing, piano, art, and dance. Normal school students have not yet mastered the skills of arts education centered on the comprehensive development of children. Some teachers who teach practical courses also lack basic knowledge of these subjects or have difficulty integrating and applying these contents. Their ability to apply these knowledge comprehensively is poor, resulting in poor teaching results. Finally, normal school students find it difficult to integrate the skills they have learned to design and implement effective arts education activities.

3.3 Insufficient Support for Coordination Mechanisms

Rural preschool art education has yet to establish a sound collaborative mechanism. Current developments in home-school collaboration, school-local government partnerships, and digital empowerment are crucial elements in fostering a collaborative mechanism for early childhood education. However, preschool education in rural areas currently lacks sufficient development in these areas, hindering the successful development of preschool art education.

Differences in home-school co-education: In urban kindergartens, parents participate in art education in a variety of ways, including parent-teacher conferences, parent-teacher open days, and parent-child activities. Urban parents place a high value on art education, with the majority actively encouraging their children to pursue it. In rural areas, however, parents place less emphasis on art education, with only a small minority of rural parents actively engaging their children in art training. Rural areas are home to many left-behind children, raised by their grandparents, who often have more traditional educational perspectives, prioritizing academic achievement over artistic accomplishment.

Regarding differences in school-local government collaboration: Urban kindergartens are able to establish partnerships with art galleries, universities, and cultural institutions to carry out a wide range of art education activities. Universities also collaborate with urban kindergartens to develop distinctive art curriculum. In rural areas, however, school-local government collaboration is relatively weak. While rural areas are rich in natural and cultural resources, they lack effective collaborative mechanisms to transform these resources into educational resources. Rural kindergartens lack sufficient engagement with local communities and intangible cultural heritage inheritors, and lack a systematic collaborative model.

Regarding differences in digital empowerment: Urban kindergartens are generally equipped with advanced information technology, such as multimedia classrooms and smart interactive whiteboards,

enabling them to effectively utilize cloud-based art resource libraries. However, rural kindergartens face significant difficulties in accessing digital resources. The low penetration rate of smart classrooms in remote rural areas makes it difficult for rural kindergartens to effectively utilize cloud-based art resource libraries.

4. Strategies for Promoting the Development of Early Childhood Art Education in Southern Sichuan

4.1 Leveraging the Advantages of Local Resources and Folk Art Resources

From an overall perspective of resource allocation, rural areas are indeed inferior to urban kindergartens in many areas. From a macro perspective, increased funding is needed to improve operating conditions, integrate resources, and optimize layout. Increasing investment in both hardware and software for rural kindergartens to achieve a more balanced allocation of resources is the key to resolving this issue. Beyond increasing investment and prioritizing resources, rural areas can proactively explore their own strengths. For example, rural areas can better utilize local resources and popular cultural and artistic heritage, effectively integrating these resources into early childhood arts education. Leveraging local resources and traditional culture can help develop low-cost, effective, and locally appropriate kindergarten arts programs. Southern Sichuan boasts a wealth of traditional cultural resources, as well as unique folk art and local resources. Examples include Zigong's renowned tie-dyeing and colored lanterns, Neijiang's Zizhong puppetry, which has long been documented, Yibin's down-to-earth dough figurines and straw weaving, and Luzhou's Rain Altar colored dragon, a national intangible cultural heritage. Yibin also boasts the rich history of Nezha culture. Many of these elements can be incorporated into local early childhood arts education activities. Rural kindergartens can experiment with plant-based dyeing techniques, using Zigong tie-dyeing techniques to let children experience dyeing cloth, and using the surfaces of Luzhou Fenshui oil-paper umbrellas to create Yangtze River-themed paintings. They can also simplify Neijiang Zizhong puppetry into paper puppet role-playing, complemented by the creation of local nursery rhymes. They can also draw inspiration from Yibin Jiang'an bamboo reed crafts, using bamboo strips to create natural images, and design bamboo tube percussion instruments inspired by the Miao people's Lusheng (Lusheng) rhythms of the Mountain-Cai Festival. Furthermore, they can make full use of agricultural resources—weaving small animals from straw, painting stories on riverbank pebbles, and making dragon scales from corn husks—to dance with homemade "Rain Altar Colorful Dragon" cardboard props and learn to sing labor songs adapted from saltworkers' chants. In this process, children can engage with natural materials and folk elements, fostering a sense of local culture. By exploring these resources, we can better promote art education and enhance children's aesthetic appreciation. This not only involves developing local art curricula, but also integrating these resources into kindergarten environments.

In terms of resource utilization, in addition to strengthening activity design and environment creation, we can also strengthen the training of kindergarten teachers and promote collaboration between kindergartens and home-schools to better integrate and utilize folk cultural resources. Inviting folk art inheritors to the kindergarten to give lectures can help kindergarten teachers gain a deeper understanding of folk art. Folk artists can also guide teachers in the production of artwork, improve their artistic literacy, and promote practical art activities. Regular folk art and cultural activities can also be held to promote collaboration among families, kindergartens, and community-based organizations in early childhood art education, ensuring that kindergartens receive strong support from parents and the community in the use of art education resources.

4.2 Improving the Artistic Quality and Teaching Ability of Normal School Students

The cultivation of artistic literacy of undergraduate students in preschool education requires both "artistic nature" and "teacher-oriented nature"^[3]. Students majoring in preschool education should have both artistic knowledge and skills and the ability to engage in art education. At the same time, they must understand the growth patterns of young children and master their artistic learning characteristics. The curriculum setting of art education in preschool education majors in colleges and universities needs to restructure the curriculum structure and appropriately increase the proportion of art courses so that students can be exposed to as many art courses as possible. In addition to increasing the proportion of art courses, while offering art knowledge and skills courses, art appreciation courses such as music, fine arts, dance, literature, and art films should also be added to ensure the diversity of art courses.

The current teacher structure problem of art courses in preschool education majors in colleges and universities can be optimized from different aspects: on the one hand, some teachers of art preschool education majors can be introduced. Such teachers must have good artistic skills and have some understanding of the relevant knowledge of preschool education majors. At the same time, in order to effectively connect the art course learning of colleges and universities with the art education activities of kindergartens, front-line kindergarten teachers can be hired to take on the teaching tasks of art courses in colleges and universities. At the same time, in order to ensure the artistic quality of their professional course teaching, teachers of preschool education theory courses can also be selected to participate in art literacy training. In addition, it is also possible to organize preschool education professional skills competitions such as *preschool* teaching aids production competitions and storytelling competitions to improve art teaching capabilities. With the development and changes of society, the methods and content of art education are also constantly changing and updating, so the practice methods of courses also need to be continuously updated and improved^[4]. It is also possible to establish more off-campus training bases for participation in practice to help normal school students apply what they have learned.

4.3 Establish a Multi-Subject Coordination Mechanism

Establishing a multi-faceted collaborative mechanism can systematically address educational challenges by integrating resources from multiple parties, including families, schools, communities, governments, businesses, and technology platforms, to build a unified, collaborative system with a unified goal and a division of labor. This approach, at its core, breaks the traditional single-subject supply model and fosters three key types of synergy.

First, regarding home-school co-education, rural kindergartens face challenges with low parental involvement and outdated parenting concepts. This can be addressed by organizing "Grandparent Farming and Handcrafting Experiences" and utilizing localized activities like straw weaving and folk clay sculpture to reduce intergenerational cognitive barriers. Parent Art Workshops can also be used to shift utilitarian perspectives on education.

In terms of school-local cooperation, we can introduce some expert teams to establish a "Rural Revitalization Expert Service Team" to carry out on-site guidance in the village. In addition to carrying out regular training, we can also effectively support surrounding rural areas with the city as the center, drive rural development with urban development, strengthen exchanges and cooperation between urban and rural kindergartens, gradually promote excellent music teaching activities and methods to kindergartens in rural areas, and put forward practical and constructive suggestions for the development of art teaching activities in rural kindergartens^[5]. Or we can work with urban areas to develop an "urban and rural art education community" to pair up and help rural art education develop. Relevant institutions can also take the lead in establishing an aesthetic education practice base based on local cultural resources.

In terms of digital empowerment, external support can be introduced (such as corporate donations of equipment), and with the help of advanced digital information technologies such as the Internet and cloud computing, an integrated preschool education resource platform can be built to establish cloud-based art courses. At present, the wave of digital reform is unprecedented in its rapid iteration speed, wide coverage, and profound impact. It is promoting profound changes in preschool art education in terms of curriculum development, teaching methods, curriculum ideological and political education, and teacher-student interaction. The impact on preschool art education is significant and far-reaching^[6]. Preschool art education should seize the opportunity and, through the adoption of various measures, ultimately achieve optimal resource allocation and educational equity improvement, forming an educational ecology of "multi-participation, complementary advantages, and dynamic sustainability."

5. Conclusion

Promoting the development of rural preschool art education is of great significance. It is an important way to promote the all-round development and potential of children in rural areas, bridge the urban-rural education gap, and promote educational equity. At the same time, promoting rural preschool art education plays a unique role in the inheritance and innovation of local culture.

Although current rural early childhood art education faces numerous challenges, particularly in southern Sichuan, where preschool art education faces challenges such as uneven resource allocation, insufficient teacher artistic literacy and teaching skills, and inadequate collaborative mechanisms, we believe that by leveraging local resources and folk art resources, improving the artistic literacy and

teaching skills of normal school students, and establishing a multi-stakeholder collaborative mechanism, we can gradually narrow the gap between rural and urban kindergarten art education. This will lead to more balanced development of art education for preschool children in both urban and rural areas across China. Rural kindergarten conditions will gradually improve, and the quality of art education will continue to rise. In the future, as the rural revitalization strategy deepens, rural kindergartens should seize opportunities, continuously innovate development models, strengthen internal development, provide rural children with better-quality and equitable preschool education services, and make greater contributions to the comprehensive revitalization of rural areas.

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