

A Study on Integrating Indigenous Resources into Kindergarten Curricula at Relocated Poverty Alleviation Resettlement Sites

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Abstract: *As a critical component of China's targeted poverty alleviation strategy, the policy of relocating populations from ecologically fragile or impoverished regions seeks to improve living conditions and promote long-term development. However, post-relocation communities often face persistent challenges related to social integration, cultural discontinuity, and identity reconstruction—particularly among young children in early education settings. This study explores the strategic integration of indigenous resources into kindergarten curricula at resettlement sites, aiming to enhance cultural sustainability and promote inclusive educational practices. Employing a mixed-methods approach—including literature review, field observations, and case studies—the research finds that embedding local cultural elements in early childhood curricula significantly strengthens children's sense of place and belonging while fostering their social-emotional development. Additionally, the process contributes to the professional growth of early childhood educators. The findings suggest that constructing context-responsive, school-based curricula rooted in local cultural assets offers a viable pathway for sustaining cultural identity, advancing social cohesion, and supporting early childhood education in relocated communities.*

Keywords: Indigenous resources, Targeted poverty alleviation relocation, Kindergarten curriculum, Sense of place, School-based curriculum.

1. Introduction

Targeted poverty alleviation relocation is a major initiative implemented by the Chinese government to address the problem of ecologically fragile regions being unable to sustain local populations, aiming to fundamentally improve the living conditions of impoverished communities (National Development and Reform Commission, 2016). However, relocation entails more than a change in living environment; it also involves deeper challenges related to social relationships, cultural identity, and community integration. For young children living in relocated communities, how to develop a sense of recognition and emotional connection to their hometowns in a new environment directly impacts the quality of their social development. The Guidelines for Kindergarten Education (Trial) emphasize that kindergartens should make full use of local social resources to help children appreciate the richness and excellence of Chinese culture and cultivate emotional attachment to their hometowns and the motherland (Ministry of Education, 2001). Therefore, exploring the integration of indigenous resources into kindergarten curricula at relocation resettlement sites holds significant practical value.

2. Curriculum Development in Kindergartens at Relocation Resettlement Sites

In recent years, with the continued implementation of the targeted poverty alleviation relocation policy, kindergartens at resettlement sites have grown rapidly in both number and infrastructure, becoming essential platforms for delivering early childhood education to children in relocated communities. However, key challenges remain regarding how to embed local culture and respond effectively to children's developmental needs within the curriculum. To better understand the current status of curriculum development in these settings, this section provides a systematic analysis from

two perspectives: the basic characteristics of curriculum construction and the practical application of indigenous resources.

2.1 Basic Characteristics of Curriculum Development in Resettlement Kindergartens

As key institutions for safeguarding the educational rights of children from relocated families, kindergartens at targeted poverty alleviation resettlement sites have gradually improved in recent years under strong national policy support. Guizhou Province, one of the regions with the largest relocation population in China, had established over 1,200 resettlement kindergartens by 2022, serving more than 150,000 children (Guizhou Provincial Government, 2022). For instance, the Central Kindergarten of Dingnan Subdistrict has developed a thematic curriculum titled "My Hometown," integrating indigenous resources into daily teaching activities. By showcasing local folk customs, traditional handicrafts, and natural landscapes, the program helps children cultivate a sense of cultural belonging. Research indicates that such practices effectively alleviate psychological adaptation challenges experienced by children due to relocation (Li & Wang, 2020).

However, many kindergartens at relocation sites still face challenges such as limited curriculum resources and content homogenization. Zhang et al. (2021) noted that some kindergartens rely excessively on standardized textbooks and neglect the educational value of local culture, resulting in a disconnect between the curriculum and children's lived experiences.

2.2 Practical Outcomes and Challenges in the Application of Indigenous Resources

The application of indigenous resources in kindergarten curricula at resettlement sites has begun to demonstrate its

unique educational value (Field Observation Data, 2023). The case of the Central Kindergarten of Dingnan Subdistrict illustrates that the “My Hometown” curriculum—developed through the integration of local resources—has significantly improved children’s language expression and social development. In particular, the thematic activity “Stories of My Hometown” enabled 85% of children to actively describe cultural characteristics of their place of origin. Moreover, teachers’ involvement in curriculum development has progressively enhanced their understanding of local culture and their capacity for pedagogical innovation. UNESCO (2019) emphasizes that incorporating local knowledge into education systems helps foster children’s cultural identity—a conclusion further validated by this study.

Nonetheless, several challenges hinder the effective utilization of indigenous resources. First, there is a lack of systematic resource integration. Many kindergartens have not conducted in-depth exploration or proper classification of local resources, resulting in fragmented and incoherent curriculum content (Liu, 2022). Second, the professional competence of teachers limits curriculum quality. Survey data show that only 36% of kindergarten teachers in relocation sites have received specialized training in curriculum development. Some teachers also face cognitive constraints in translating local resources into teaching content (Teacher Interview Data, 2023). Finally, mechanisms for parental involvement remain underdeveloped. Due to economic pressures and cultural adjustment difficulties, many relocated families struggle to engage in home-school collaboration, thereby weakening the continuity of curriculum implementation (Ministry of Education, 2021). These issues indicate that the effective use of indigenous resources requires systemic support and the establishment of multi-stakeholder collaboration mechanisms.

3. Causes and Contributing Factors

3.1 Constraints of Policy Support and Resource Investment

Although national and local governments have increased support for basic education in the process of targeted poverty alleviation relocation, kindergartens—particularly those at resettlement sites—continue to face numerous policy-level constraints regarding the development and utilization of indigenous resources. In recent years, the Guidelines for Kindergarten Education (Trial) have emphasized the need for kindergartens to design curricula that reflect local characteristics (Ministry of Education, 2001). However, in practice, policy support for the use of indigenous resources remains vague and lacks concrete, operable implementation frameworks. Most kindergartens continue to rely on nationally or provincially standardized textbooks, with limited policy guidance or funding specifically allocated for local resource development (Yang, 2020).

Moreover, government financial support tends to prioritize infrastructure construction rather than curriculum development or teacher training. As a result, kindergartens lack the financial foundation necessary for developing curricula based on indigenous resources. For example, writing localized teaching materials, training teachers, and acquiring

the materials needed to implement the curriculum—such as folk cultural artifacts or traditional handicraft supplies—require additional funding. Yet most kindergartens in relocation areas face chronic shortages of such resources, making it difficult to sustain the development of local curricula (Li & Wang, 2019).

3.2 Insufficient Professional Capacity of the Teaching Workforce

Teachers are the core force in the development and implementation of curricula based on indigenous resources. However, kindergartens at resettlement sites currently face shortages in both the quantity and quality of their teaching staff. First, due to staffing limitations, many kindergartens employ an insufficient number of teachers, with some serving in temporary or part-time roles. This compromises the stability and continuity of curriculum development and implementation (Chen, 2021). Second, most teachers have received general early childhood education training but lack systematic knowledge of local culture and folk traditions. As a result, they struggle to effectively integrate indigenous resources into daily teaching. For instance, a survey conducted in a relocation kindergarten in Guizhou revealed that fewer than 30% of teachers possessed a solid understanding of local culture, and even fewer were able to apply such knowledge in curriculum practices (Zhang, 2022).

Furthermore, teachers often demonstrate low initiative in the development of local-resource-based curricula. Many remain accustomed to using standardized teaching materials and lack awareness or motivation to innovate using local resources. On one hand, this is linked to teacher evaluation mechanisms that overemphasize cognitive development outcomes while overlooking the importance of cultural identity and social-emotional development. On the other hand, the absence of effective pedagogical support systems leaves teachers without adequate guidance or incentives to engage in curriculum innovation, leading to a lack of motivation (Wang, 2020).

3.3 Tensions Between Standardized Curriculum Systems and Localization

China’s current kindergarten curriculum system is predominantly guided by national and provincial standards, with widespread use of standardized textbooks. While this unified approach contributes to educational equity, it poses limitations for the integration of indigenous resources (Zhao, 2021). In many resettlement kindergartens, standardized curricula are introduced without adequate localization, resulting in content that lacks regional characteristics and fails to evoke children’s emotional connection to their cultural heritage. For example, in a relocation site in Guizhou, the picture books, music, and art content used in the kindergarten are largely derived from urban contexts, while traditional stories, folk games, and crafts from local ethnic minority cultures remain largely absent from the curriculum (Liu, 2020).

Moreover, the development of indigenous-resource-based curricula is constrained by the existing assessment system. Current kindergarten evaluation frameworks emphasize

children's standardized development in areas such as language, cognition, and social skills, but lack assessment indicators for cultural inheritance or regional identity. As a result, kindergartens tend to favor established, mainstream curricula over the more demanding task of developing locally distinctive programs (Wu, 2019).

4. Recommendations for Applying Indigenous Resources in Kindergarten Curricula at Relocation Sites

4.1 Optimization of Curriculum Objectives and Deep Integration of Indigenous Resources

In developing kindergarten curricula at poverty alleviation relocation sites, the application of indigenous resources should be guided by the overarching goal of promoting children's holistic development, while also fostering cultural continuity and social adaptability. In the short term, curriculum objectives should focus on enriching learning content through the integration of local resources, thereby enhancing children's awareness and emotional identification with their native culture. For example, the "My Hometown" thematic curriculum at the Central Kindergarten of Dingnan Subdistrict incorporates local folk customs, traditional handicrafts, and natural landscapes to help children develop a sense of cultural belonging.

In the long term, efforts should aim at constructing a systematic curriculum framework rooted in local cultural assets, facilitating the deep integration of education and regional traditions, and ultimately forming a distinctive model of early childhood education. To achieve this, kindergartens should establish detailed curriculum development plans that outline clear pathways and implementation steps for resource integration, ensuring the scientific rigor and coherence of curriculum content.

Additionally, curriculum objectives must be designed with a strong emphasis on practicality and operability. This can be achieved by creating concrete thematic activities—such as "Stories of My Hometown" or "Traditional Festival Experiences"—that transform indigenous resources into perceptible and participatory learning experiences for young children. Furthermore, these objectives should align with the five developmental domains outlined in the Guidelines for the Learning and Development of Children Aged 3–6 (i.e., health, language, society, science, and art), to ensure that the application of indigenous resources contributes to comprehensive child development.

4.2 Enhancing Teachers' Professional Competence and Establishing Support Mechanisms

Teachers are the key agents in the development and implementation of curricula based on indigenous resources, and their professional competence directly affects curriculum quality. However, most teachers in relocation site kindergartens lack specialized training in curriculum development and the pedagogical use of local resources. To address this issue, kindergartens should establish a systematic teacher support mechanism that includes customized training, ongoing mentoring and feedback, as well as career

development incentives.

First, customized training should focus on the identification and pedagogical transformation of indigenous resources. For example, local cultural experts and inheritors of intangible cultural heritage can be invited to conduct training sessions, helping teachers understand the educational value of local resources in depth. Second, kindergartens can establish mentorship programs or teaching-research groups in which experienced teachers provide demonstration lessons and peer guidance to support professional growth. Finally, teacher participation in curriculum innovation should be incentivized through promotion mechanisms and performance-based rewards. Research shows that teachers' professional development not only improves curriculum quality but also enhances their sense of professional identity and enthusiasm for teaching.

4.3 Building Home-Kindergarten Collaboration and Promoting Parental Involvement

Parents are vital supporters of curricula based on indigenous resources, and their level of involvement directly influences the effectiveness of implementation. However, relocated families often face economic pressures and challenges in cultural adaptation, which limit their ability to engage deeply in kindergarten activities. To address this gap, kindergartens should establish diversified mechanisms for home-kindergarten collaboration that enhance parents' understanding of and support for the curriculum.

Specific strategies include: First, organizing regular parent workshops to introduce the objectives and content of the indigenous-resource-based curriculum, while encouraging parents to share hometown stories and traditional skills. Second, designing parent-child activities such as "Hometown Culture Exhibition Day" or "Traditional Handicraft Making" to promote joint participation in curriculum experiences. Third, leveraging digital platforms—such as official WeChat accounts or parent chat groups—to share curriculum updates and educational resources in real time, making it easier for parents to stay informed and engaged. Studies have shown that effective parental involvement not only improves the quality of curriculum implementation but also strengthens educational synergy between families and kindergartens.

5. Conclusion and Future Directions

This study has examined the pathways and practical outcomes of integrating indigenous resources into kindergarten curricula at targeted poverty alleviation relocation sites. The findings indicate that the effective use of local resources can significantly enhance children's sense of cultural identity and contribute to their cognitive, emotional, and social development. Moreover, such integration also promotes teachers' capacity for curriculum development and professional growth. Nevertheless, practical implementation continues to face key challenges, including inadequate resource integration, limited teacher competence, and low levels of parental involvement.

Based on the results, this study proposes the following recommendations:

First, optimize curriculum objectives and deeply integrate indigenous resources to establish a systematic curriculum framework.

Second, strengthen teacher professional development through customized training and support mechanisms.

Third, build robust home-kindergarten collaboration mechanisms to enhance parents' understanding and participation.

Fourth, improve resource integration and regional cooperation mechanisms to promote the high-quality development of indigenous-resource-based curricula.

Future research should explore sustainable mechanisms and evaluation systems for indigenous-resource curricula to provide more comprehensive theoretical and practical guidance for curriculum development in kindergartens at relocation sites. At the policy level, increased investment and targeted policy support are needed to ensure the dual goals of educational equity and quality improvement are achieved.

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