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# DEVELOPING AN EXPERIENTIAL WUYI CULTURE USING THEME-BASED INSTRUCTION MODULE TO PROMOTE CULTURAL IDENTITY AMONG PRESCHOOLERS IN CHINA



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UNIVERSITI PENDIDIKAN SULTAN IDRIS

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the cultural identity of preschoolers, focusing on their connection to Chinese and local community cultures, using experiential learning theory as the foundation. The research introduces the Experiential Wuyi Culture Theme-based Instruction (EWCTBI) module, designed to enhance preschoolers' cultural identity through hands-on, immersive activities based on the four-stage experiential learning cycle. The study follows the Design and Development Research (DDR) methodology, carried out in three phases. In the first phase, a needs analysis in Wuyishan City preschools, using interviews and observations, highlighted the need for a module focused on experiential Wuyi culture-themed activities. In the second phase, the EWCTBI module was developed with input from 12 experts through a Delphi panel, reaching consensus on eight aspects, including design, objectives, content, teaching strategies, and evaluation. Feedback from experts and teachers refined the module into its final prototype. In the third phase, the module was implemented and evaluated. Two teachers guided 32 preschoolers (aged 5-6) through 16 activities over eight weeks. Teachers received training to ensure effective implementation. The module's impact was assessed through observations, interviews, and a quasi-experimental method using the Wuyi Cultural Identity Scale for Preschoolers (WPCIS). Results from an independent samples t-test revealed a significant difference in cultural identity scores between the experiential and control groups, with a mean difference of 15.44 ( $p < 0.001$ ), confirming the module's positive impact. The EWCTBI module introduces innovations compared to traditional cultural education, such as its focus on experiential, theme-based activities that actively engage children rather than relying on passive learning. The study concludes that the EWCTBI module effectively integrates cultural identity education into early Chinese and Wuyi cultural instruction. It proposes a framework for experiential theme-based activities to foster cultural identity in preschoolers. While rooted in the Wuyi context, the module's design principles and experiential approach can be adapted to other regions or cultures, offering a potential model for developing indigenous cultural curricula across China. Future research is suggested to explore this framework in diverse cultural settings.





## **MEMBANGUNKAN MODUL PENGAJARAN BERASASKAN TEMA PENGALAMAN BUDAYA WUYI UNTUK MEMUPUK IDENTITI BUDAYA DALAM KALANGAN KANAK-KANAK PRASEKOLAH DI CHINA**

### **ABSTRAK**

Kajian ini meneroka identiti budaya kanak-kanak prasekolah, dengan fokus pada hubungan mereka dengan budaya Cina dan budaya komuniti tempatan, menggunakan teori pembelajaran pengalaman sebagai asas. Penyelidikan ini memperkenalkan Modul Pengajaran Berasaskan Tema Budaya Wuyi Berpengalaman (EWCTBI), yang direka untuk meningkatkan identiti budaya kanak-kanak prasekolah melalui aktiviti langsung (hands-on) dan mendalam berdasarkan kitaran empat peringkat pembelajaran pengalaman. Kajian ini mengikuti metodologi Design and Development Research (DDR), yang dijalankan dalam tiga fasa. Pada fasa pertama, analisis keperluan di prasekolah Bandar Wuyishan menggunakan temu bual dan pemerhatian untuk mengenal pasti keperluan modul aktiviti berasaskan tema budaya Wuyi yang berpengalaman. Pada fasa kedua, modul EWCTBI dibangunkan dengan input daripada 12 pakar melalui panel Delphi, mencapai konsensus dalam lapan aspek, termasuk reka bentuk, objektif, kandungan, strategi pengajaran, dan penilaian. Maklum balas daripada pakar dan guru memperhalusi modul tersebut menjadi prototaip akhir. Pada fasa ketiga, modul ini dilaksanakan dan dinilai. Dua orang guru membimbing 32 kanak-kanak prasekolah (berumur 5-6 tahun) melalui 16 aktiviti selama lapan minggu. Guru-guru menerima latihan untuk memastikan pelaksanaan yang berkesan. Kesan modul dinilai melalui pemerhatian, temu bual, dan kaedah kuasi-eksperimen menggunakan Skala Identiti Budaya Wuyi untuk Kanak-kanak Prasekolah (WPCIS). Keputusan daripada ujian-t sampel bebas menunjukkan perbezaan yang signifikan dalam skor identiti budaya antara kumpulan berpengalaman dan kumpulan kawalan, dengan perbezaan min sebanyak 15.44 ( $p < 0.001$ ), mengesahkan kesan positif modul tersebut. Modul EWCTBI memperkenalkan inovasi berbanding pendidikan budaya tradisional, seperti penekanan terhadap aktiviti berpengalaman dan berasaskan tema yang melibatkan kanak-kanak secara aktif berbanding pembelajaran pasif. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa modul EWCTBI berjaya mengintegrasikan pendidikan identiti budaya ke dalam pengajaran awal budaya Cina dan Wuyi. Ia mencadangkan rangka kerja untuk aktiviti berasaskan tema berpengalaman bagi memupuk identiti budaya dalam kalangan kanak-kanak prasekolah. Walaupun berakar umbi dalam konteks Wuyi, prinsip reka bentuk dan pendekatan berpengalaman modul ini boleh disesuaikan dengan wilayah atau budaya lain, menawarkan model potensi untuk membangunkan kurikulum budaya asli di seluruh China. Penyelidikan lanjut dicadangkan untuk meneroka rangka kerja ini dalam pelbagai konteks budaya.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEAT	Cultural Education Anthropology Theory
CISP	Cultural Identity Scale for Preschoolers
CV	Coefficient of Variation
DDR	Design and Development Research
ECCI	Early Childhood Cultural Identity
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ELT	Experiential Learning Theory
ETBI	Experiential Theme-Based Instruction
EWCTBI	Experiential Wuyi Culture Theme-Based Instruction
FSR	Full Score Rate
M	Mean
MD	Mean Difference
NAME	National Association for Multicultural Education
PCIQ	Parent Cultural Identity Questionnaire
PCIS	Preschoolers' Cultural Identity Scale
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TBI	Theme-Based Instruction
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural organisation
USNRC	United State National Research Council
WPCIS	Wuyi Preschoolers' Cultural Identity Scale
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development





## APPENDIX LIST

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- V Approval of Human Research Ethics Committee Sultan Idris Education University





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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

#### 1.1 Introduction



The era of globalization binds people from different cultural backgrounds into an inextricable system through transportation, information, and economic networks. While connectivity fosters exchange, it simultaneously challenges the preservation of cultural diversity. As cultural boundaries either blur or intensify, which can at times result in antagonism, the need to preserve cultural heritage has become increasingly urgent. UNESCO's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) recognizes cultural diversity as a cornerstone of humanity and a driver of sustainable development. This principle is echoed in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which explicitly link cultural preservation to equitable progress (United Nations, 2015). Recent studies further emphasize that cultural heritage is not merely a relic of the past but a dynamic force shaping social cohesion and identity in multicultural societies (Lähdesmäki et al.,





2020; Silverman, 2022).

Globally, nations are grappling with balancing cultural preservation and globalization. For instance, Turkey integrates intangible heritage, such as traditional storytelling (meddahlık), into early childhood curricula to foster intergenerational cultural transmission (UNESCO, 2022). Japan's hozon (preservation) model emphasizes community-based cultural activities in preschools, leveraging local festivals and crafts to instill regional pride (Tobin, 2020). Similarly, Indonesia's pendidikan karakter (character education) framework incorporates indigenous arts like wayang puppetry into early learning, reinforcing moral and cultural values (Ardianto & Matsumoto, 2021). These approaches highlight a shared recognition that early childhood is a critical period for embedding cultural identity. However, disparities persist: while Turkey and Japan emphasize hyper-local traditions, the nationalized curriculum in Indonesia poses a risk of homogenizing regional diversity, a dilemma similarly evident in China's educational landscape.

In China, preschools traditionally emphasize national "umbrella" cultures, such as Confucian ethics or Mandarin-language traditions, which enjoy broad acceptance across regions (Li, 2022). Yet this focus often sidelines local cultures, particularly in ethnically diverse areas. For example, in Wuyishan City, a UNESCO World Heritage Site renowned for its tea traditions and Minyue heritage, preschoolers engage more with standardized national narratives than with localized practices (Chen & Wang, 2023). This disconnection risks alienating preschoolers from their immediate cultural environment, undermining the dual identity (national and local) essential for sustainable development (Zhang et al., 2021).





Cultural education during early childhood is pivotal for identity formation. Neuroscientific research confirms that ages 3-6 mark a sensitive period for social and cognitive development, during which preschoolers internalize cultural norms and values (Heckman, 2019). Pedagogies rooted in local heritage, such as place-based learning, enhance preschoolers' emotional connection to their environment while fostering critical thinking (Greenwood, 2021). Moreover, culturally responsive teaching has been shown to improve academic outcomes and social emotional resilience, particularly in marginalized communities (Banks, 2020). For Wuyishan, this implies that integrating regional tea ceremonies, dialect stories, and ecological practices into preschool curricula could bridge the gap between national frameworks and grassroots identity.



This study addresses early cultural identity development by incorporating elements of Wuyishan City's local culture in China. By integrating both Chinese national culture and distinct Wuyi cultural traditions into experiential theme-based instructional activities, we developed an innovative pedagogical framework: the EWCTBI module for preschool education. This intervention specifically targets the formative stage of cultural identity formation, aiming to strengthen preschoolers' connection to their regional heritage. The current section establishes the theoretical foundations of this research, delineates its methodological design, and contextualizes the study within broader discourses of cultural preservation and early childhood education (ECE).





## 1.2 Background of the Research

The United States National Research Council (USNRC) once pointed out human learning takes place in fields with specific cultural, social norms, and expectations (Zheng & Wang, 2005). American psychologist Howard Gardner, also pointed out that culture and customs affect preschoolers from birth or even before (Gardner, 1995). Preschoolers are destined to live in a specific culture from the moment they are born, and all the people and things they encounter affect them all the time. Therefore, culture affects the physical and mental development of preschoolers. Preschoolers can be nurtured by the culture to obtain enlightenment and build their spiritual world. In China, some scholars comparing the ethnic and cultural identities of preschoolers from different ethnic minorities such as Miao, Naxi, Tibetan, Shui, Yi, and Lahu in Southwest China discovered a weak sense of cultural identity and a degree of identity crisis among minorities preschoolers (Chen & Liu, 2006 ). This emphasized the need for ECE to be rooted based on the local cultural background so that education can reflect the local cultural characteristics.

Wuyishan City, located in northwest Fujian Province, China, is renowned for its natural beauty and cultural heritage, including its tea culture and Zhu Xi's philosophical traditions. Despite its UNESCO World Heritage status, the region faces economic challenges due to its remote location and reliance on tourism and tea industries. Rapid modernization and globalization have weakened cultural transmission, particularly among preschoolers, who lack systematic exposure to local traditions (Chen, 2022). Economic disparities further limit access to quality cultural education ( Wang et al., 2019). Developing an experiential learning module for Wuyi





culture is essential to foster cultural identity, preserve heritage, and address educational gaps, ensuring sustainable cultural and social development (Zhang & Liu, 2020).

Cultural diversity and cultural integration are the current global development trends. People who lose their local culture will gradually have a reduced ability to communicate with other cultures, thereby alienating their local culture from world culture (Berry, 1997). Cultural identity constitutes a fundamental element in the holistic development of preschoolers, significantly influencing their personal and social growth, particularly during their formative years. For preschoolers, engagement with Wuyi culture transcends mere academic endeavour; it serves as a cornerstone in the cultivation of a robust sense of personal identity. Empirical studies underscore that early immersion in cultural heritage facilitates preschoolers' comprehension of their origins, thereby nurturing a profound sense of belonging and self-awareness (Smith, 2020). In the absence of such pedagogical focus, preschoolers may encounter difficulties in constructing a coherent identity, potentially resulting in cultural disengagement and a diminished appreciation for their heritage. Moreover, the acquisition of cultural knowledge fortifies familial bonds, enabling preschoolers to meaningfully participate in familial traditions and narratives, thereby fostering a collective sense of historical continuity and shared identity (Johnson & Lee, 2021).

Beyond the individual and familial spheres, the instruction of Wuyi culture to preschoolers assumes critical importance in the preservation and safeguarding of cultural heritage. In an era marked by accelerating globalization, numerous traditional cultures are increasingly susceptible to marginalization or obsolescence. The





integration of Wuyi culture into ECE enables educational institutions to assume a pivotal role in the conservation of this heritage for posterity (Wang et al., 2019). Furthermore, the study of cultural history engenders in preschoolers an appreciation for the richness of their ancestral legacy, cultivating respect for cultural diversity and a nuanced understanding of societal progression. Such engagement not only enriches the cognitive and creative faculties of preschoolers but also instills a sense of global citizenship, thereby enhancing their capacity for critical thinking and cultural empathy (Brown et al., 2022). Conversely, the reluctance of educators to impart cultural heritage, or the neglect of this dimension within the educational curriculum, may precipitate a fragmented sense of identity among children and a weakened connection to their cultural roots, ultimately impeding their comprehensive development.



The development of a Wuyi cultural identity module for preschoolers addresses critical gaps in early childhood cultural education. Current preschool curricula often treat Wuyi culture superficially, reducing it to fragmented activities that fail to convey its historical and philosophical depth (Wang, 2019). This approach limits preschoolers' understanding of their heritage, preventing meaningful engagement with core values like tea culture philosophy and ecological wisdom (Smith, 2020). Additionally, teaching methods frequently mismatch preschoolers' learning needs. Preschoolers thrive through play, storytelling, and interaction, yet many programs rely on rote memorization and passive instruction, which disengage learners and may foster disinterest in cultural education (Johnson & Lee, 2021).

Resource shortages further hinder effective teaching, especially in economically disadvantaged areas. Many preschools lack trained educators, culturally





relevant materials, and adequate facilities, while urban-rural disparities exacerbate access inequalities (Brown et al., 2022). Globalization and digital media compound these challenges, as preschoolers increasingly prefer foreign cultural content, marginalizing local traditions and weakening cultural identity (Wang, 2019). Without intervention, this trend risks severing preschoolers' connection to their cultural roots, undermining their sense of belonging.

Family-school disconnects also play a role. Many parents lack the knowledge or prioritization to support cultural learning at home, leaving schools as the sole source of cultural education (Johnson & Lee, 2021). To effectively address these issues, the proposed module should adopt a systematic and engaging approach, enriched with resources and incorporating age-appropriate strategies such as games, storytelling, and interactive activities. It should also encourage family involvement to reinforce learning. By fostering a deep understanding and appreciation of Wuyi culture, the module can support preschoolers' holistic development and strengthen their cultural identity.

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory provides a framework for addressing these challenges through its four-stage cycle. Direct engagement with cultural artifacts (such as tools used in tea ceremonies) fosters profound emotional resonance, which serves as a foundational element in the development of cultural identity (Yan, 2009). Reflective observation then allows preschoolers to process these experiences through storytelling and dialogue, developing cultural awareness by examining the symbolic meanings behind traditions (Li, 2005). The abstract conceptualization phase enables preschoolers to systematize these reflections into





cognitive schemata, connecting personal experiences with broader cultural narratives (Huang, 2019). Finally, active experimentation through community-based projects transforms understanding into cultural behaviors, completing the identity formation process (Wang, 2012).

This experiential approach aligns with the tripartite model of cultural identity development. Sensory-rich concrete experiences and guided reflective observation foster cultural emotions and affective bonds (Ma, 2019), while abstract conceptualization builds cognitive frameworks for understanding cultural systems (Smith, 2020). Active experimentation then bridges these internal processes with observable cultural practices, as demonstrated in studies of festival-based learning that enhanced national pride (Su, 2019). The cyclical nature of this process ensures continuous refinement of cultural understanding through iterative engagement (Johnson & Lee, 2021).

Current educational practices often fail to leverage this holistic approach. Superficial treatment of Wuyi culture (Wang et al, 2019) and over-dependence on rote memorization (Johnson & Lee, 2021) neglect the experiential dimensions crucial for preschoolers' development. This gap is compounded by resource disparities (Brown et al., 2022) and competing global influences (Wang, 2019). An experiential learning module addressing these issues aligns with China's national policy mandating traditional culture integration in education (Ministry of Education of China, 2017), while responding to Berry's (1997) warning about cultural alienation in globalized contexts.





The proposed module's theoretical foundation bridges Kolb's learning cycle with cultural identity components: emotional engagement (concrete experience/reflective observation), cognitive internalization (abstract conceptualization), and behavioral manifestation (active experimentation). This integration offers a research-based solution to preserve cultural heritage while meeting preschoolers' developmental needs through play-based, multi-sensory learning experiences that connect school, family, and community contexts.

Every country in the world regards the protection of cultural ecology as an important aspect of education reform, placing emphasis on shaping individuals through their national culture in the educational process and internalizing this culture as a stable component within the physical and mental structure of the educated through appropriate educational approaches. This is because the growth and development of educated people promote the continuous inheritance and development of the national culture. The 'Opinions on Implementing the Project of Inheriting and Developing Chinese Excellent Traditional Culture' issued by the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council pointed out that the comprehensive integration of Chinese excellent traditional culture into education runs through enlightenment education, basic education, and vocational education, higher education, continuing education in various fields, build a system of Chinese culture courses and teaching materials for preschoolers by compiling Chinese culture preschoolers' books, carrying out a series of educational activities on 'Traditional Chinese Virtues for Young People,' and creating a series of picture books, nursery rhymes, nursery rhymes, animations. In addition, the 'Guidelines for Preschool Education (Trial)' (Ministry of Education of





Chinese, 2017) emphasizes preschools to make comprehensive use of various educational resources to create favourable conditions for the development of preschoolers by making full use of social resources to guide preschoolers to experience the richness and excellence of the motherland's culture.

China is a vast multi-ethnic country with all cultures of all ethnic groups and regions in China contain rich educational resources. This has led to the integration of traditional Chinese culture into education, emerging as a significant pathway for educational innovation. In recent years, development and research to enhance the cultural identity of preschoolers has been a hot topic and concern in Chinese preschool education circles. Therefore, in the construction of the preschool curriculum, local cultural resources should be used in the development of local culture and preschoolers' identity.



### 1.3 Problem Statement

Chinese preschool education system confronts a critical paradox in cultural heritage transmission, where national policy mandates for cultural integration clash with implementation realities at the local level. Despite the Guidelines for Preschool Despite policy directives from the Ministry of Education (2017) promoting the integration of traditional culture, empirical findings indicate persistent systemic shortcomings in nurturing dual cultural identities that reconcile national unity with regional cultural diversity. A 2022 Ministry of Education report indicates that while 87% of preschools implement standardized national cultural content such as





Confucian ethics, only 23% systematically integrate local cultural practices, with rates plummeting to 9% in culturally diverse regions like Wuyishan City (Chen & Wang, 2023). This disparity illustrates a misalignment between policy intentions and practical implementation, amplified by structural challenges, notably insufficient teacher preparedness and inadequate pedagogical training.

A critical yet understudied barrier lies in the inadequacy of teacher training programs for cultural transmission. Although 94% of preschool educators recognize cultural education's importance (Li, 2022), only 31% receive formal training in local heritage integration, and fewer than 15% report confidence in designing culturally rooted curricula (Wang & Li, 2022). Existing professional development programs predominantly focus on Western pedagogical frameworks, with 82% of training hours dedicated to standardized assessment techniques and classroom management, compared to 6% addressing cultural resource utilization (Ministry of Education, 2021). This training gap perpetuates a cycle of superficial implementation: teachers lacking expertise in indigenous knowledge systems default to symbolic activities like festival celebrations (73% of reported cultural activities) rather than embedding cultural concepts into daily pedagogy (Zhang et al., 2021). Compounding this issue, only 12% of teacher training institutions offer courses on regional cultural pedagogy, and fewer than 5% collaborate with local heritage experts to co-design training modules (Zhang et al., 2021). There is a notable scarcity of research focused on effective training models for fostering dual cultural identities, as evidenced by a recent meta-analysis that identified only 17 empirical studies on cultural competency training in Chinese early childhood education settings since 2010 (Liu et al., 2023).





Pedagogical approaches further dislocation with cultural transmission mechanisms. For instance, whereas traditional Minyue tea ceremonies employ inter-generational storytelling and kin-esthetic learning-practices shown to enhance identity through multi-sensory engagement (Zhang et al., 2021)-78% of preschool cultural activities rely on passive lecture formats (Wang et al., 2022). This contradiction persists despite neuroscience evidence that cultural identity formation during ages 3-6 requires embodied, repetitive experiences (Heckman, 2019). Resource fragmentation exacerbates these challenges, as two-thirds of preschools rely on self-developed teaching materials of inconsistent quality (Chen & Wang, 2023). This issue is compounded by the significant time burden placed on teachers to adapt national curricula to local cultural contexts. Empirical studies reveal that over 80% of teachers report insufficient integration of local cultural content in professional development programs, necessitating extensive efforts to modify standardized curricula to meet regional needs (Wang & Li, 2022).

Evaluation frameworks exhibit profound myopia, prioritizing standardized assessments of cultural knowledge retention (91% of institutions) over identity formation processes (Ministry of Education, 2021). This oversight ignores longitudinal studies demonstrating that early cultural engagement predicts adult social cohesion (Lähdesmäki et al., 2020), particularly when mediated by skilled educators. The case of Wuyishan City crystallizes these systemic failures: despite UNESCO recognition of its tea culture, preschools allocate cultural instruction in a 4:1 ratio favoring national over local content (Chen & Wang, 2023). Concurrently, 89% of parents report concerns about generational cultural disconnection yet lack guidance to reinforce learning at home (Wang & Li, 2022), exposing critical home-school





collaboration gaps.

This study addresses these gaps through an integrated intervention model that bridges policy aspirations and classroom realities. By synthesizing cultural transmission theory with teacher development research, the project advances 1) a dual-pathway identity framework balancing national-regional elements, 2) an experiential learning module leveraging Wuyi tea culture's multi-sensory dimensions, and 3) a teacher training protocol co-developed with local heritage practitioners. The model's emphasis on situated teacher learning and inter-generational engagement responds to China's urgent need for scalable solutions in cultural education, offering empirically grounded strategies for heritage conservation in globalizing societies.



#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

The main purpose of this research is to develop a experiential Wuyi culture theme-based instruction (EWCTBI) module of early cultural identity to provide teaching support for preschool teachers in order to carry out early cultural identity teaching through experiential Wuyi culture theme-based instruction activities. The current research is based on the design and development research (DDR) approach by Richey and Klein (2007), which consisted of three distinct phases with different objectives.



### Phase 1: Needs Analysis

1. To identify the needs for the EWCTBI module in the research context in order to explore the needs in the teaching and learning of cultural identity for preschoolers.

### Phase 2: Design and Development

2. To identify a suitable module design for the EWCTBI module through consensus.

3. To develop the EWCTBI module for preschoolers' cultural identity according to experts' opinion.

### Phase 3: Implement and Evaluation

4. To evaluate the usability of the EWCTBI module for preschoolers.

5. To evaluate the usability of the EWCTBI module for teachers .

6. To evaluate the impact of EWCTBI module on enhancing preschoolers' cultural identity.

## 1.5 Research Questions

The research questions of this study are as follows:

### A. Needs Analysis Phase

1. What are the needs in the teaching and learning of experiential Wuyi culture theme-based instruction for preschoolers?



## B. Design and Development Phase

2. What is the appropriate EWCTBI module design for preschoolers according to experts' consensus?

3. How do experts and teachers view the EWCTBI module?

## C. Implementation and Evaluation Phase

4. How usable is the EWCTBI module for teachers?

5. How usable is the EWCTBI module for preschoolers?

6. Does the EWCTBI module have a significant impact on the cultural identity of preschoolers?

## 1.6 Significance of Study



The development of an Experiential Wuyi Culture Theme-based Instruction (EWCTBI) module holds trans-formative potential for stakeholders across early childhood education (ECE) and cultural preservation sectors. By addressing the interconnected needs of preschoolers, educators, cultural organizations, and policymakers, this research contributes to both pedagogical innovation and the safeguarding of intangible heritage. The significance of this study is examined through its implications for these key groups, supported by empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks.

Integrating Wuyi culture into ECE curricula offers preschoolers a multidimensional learning environment that bridges play, tradition, and identity





formation. Cognitive development is enriched through engagement with Wuyi art forms, such as tea ceremony storytelling and bamboo dance rhythms, which stimulate creativity and problem-solving abilities (Zhang & Liu, 2018). For instance, the repetitive yet adaptive nature of traditional Wuyi music has been shown to enhance pattern recognition and memory retention in preschoolers. Social-emotional growth is similarly nurtured through communal activities like festival reenactments, which require cooperation, empathy, and role-playing. According to Wang and Zhou (2019), preschoolers engaged in group rituals rooted in Wuyi cultural traditions showed greater emotional regulation and conflict-resolution abilities than those in more conventional educational environments.

Most critically, early exposure to Wuyi traditions fosters cultural identity. By embedding local folklore, such as legends of the Nine-Bend River or the symbolism of Wuyi rock tea into daily activities, preschoolers internalize a sense of belonging to their community. Li and Chen (2017) emphasized that such immersion helps preschoolers construct a "cultural anchor," a foundational awareness of their heritage that counters the homogenizing effects of globalization. This process not only preserves traditions but also equips children with the resilience to navigate multicultural environments.

The Design and Development Research (DDR) methodology provides educators with a structured yet flexible tool to design curricula that honor cultural specificity. Unlike top-down curriculum mandates, DDR encourages iterative collaboration between teachers and researchers, allowing adaptations based on classroom feedback (Reeves, 2018). For example, educators might initially pilot a





Wuyi tea-picking simulation play, then refine its complexity after observing students' motor skill challenges or engagement levels.

This approach also addresses a critical gap in teacher training. Many ECE professionals lack resources to authentically integrate regional cultures into standardized curricula. The EWCTBI module, grounded in Wang and Hannafin's (2019) principles of context-aware design, equips teachers with scaffold lesson plans that balance cultural authenticity with developmental appropriateness. By incorporating tactile materials like Wuyi pottery clay or olfactory experiences with local herbs, educators can create sensory-rich lessons that align with constructivist learning theories.



Heritage institutions face mounting pressure to make intangible cultural practices relevant to younger generations. The EWCTBI module offers a pragmatic solution by re-imagining Wuyi traditions as interactive educational tools. For instance, the ancient practice of daoyin (a meditative movement art) could be adapted into a preschool movement play emphasizing balance and mindfulness. Such adaptations ensure continuity without diluting cultural essence, fulfilling UNESCO's (2003) call for "living heritage" strategies that connect past and present.

Moreover, this research provides cultural organizations with data-driven insights into effective transmission mechanisms. By documenting preschoolers' engagement with Wuyi activities, such as their ability to retell folktales or replicate traditional brushstroke patterns, institutions gain measurable evidence that can be used to secure funding and community support. This aligns with global trends in





heritage preservation, where educational integration is increasingly prioritized over static museum displays.

As nations grapple with balancing cultural identity and global competencies in education, this study offers actionable models for policymakers. The OECD's (2019) Quality Beyond Regulations report underscores the need for ECE systems to reflect local values while meeting international standards. The EWCTBI module illustrates this balance by integrating Wuyi philosophical principles, including harmony with nature, into STEM activities, such as employing bamboo structures to convey engineering concepts.

Furthermore, the DDR framework provides a scalable template for regional curriculum development. Policymakers in diverse contexts could replicate its phased approach: 1) identifying core cultural elements, 2) co-designing activities with educators, and 3) evaluating outcomes through mixed methods. This systematic process mitigates the risks of symbolic "culture plugins" and ensures sustained implementation.

By situating Wuyi culture within a developmental and pedagogical framework, this research transcends academic boundaries to impact real-world practices. It empowers preschoolers as cultural inheritors, equips educators as curriculum innovators, aids cultural organizations as preservation advocates, and guides policymakers as systemic reformers. In an era of rapid cultural erosion, such interdisciplinary approaches are not merely beneficial but essential for sustaining the mosaic of human heritage.





## 1.7 Scope of Study

This study aims to explore methods for cultivating cultural identity among 6-year-old preschoolers through the experiential Wuyi Culture theme-based Instruction (EWCTBI) module. Preschoolers' cultural identity encompasses cultural emotions, cultural cognition, and cultural behaviors. However, other aspects such as the physical motor development and social skills acquired by preschoolers during the implementation of accompanying activities were not be assessed in this evaluation.

This study also underscored the importance of cultivating preschoolers' cultural identity through experiential Wuyi culture theme-based instruction. Therefore, extracurricular learning activities and other cultural theme-based instruction were not be within the scope of discussion. Furthermore, the study involves preschool teachers and preschoolers from a preschool in Wuyishan City, Fujian Province, China, thus preschools from other provinces and regions in China were not be included in this study.

For the design and development of the early cultural identity module, this study focuses on the teaching and learning of preschoolers' cultural identity. As a result, the activities proposed in the EWCTBI module was specially designed for the development of cultural identity among preschoolers. Although the module was interdisciplinary and involve the integration of content from other courses or areas, some areas, such as science and language skills, were not be studied. Moreover, as the module will be specifically tailored for 6-year-old preschoolers, the impacts of this module on younger or older preschoolers such as young toddlers or primary school





students were not be the focus of this study.

Furthermore, because preschoolers develop dynamically, cultural identity was not measured in this study. Instead, the cultural identity assessment was used to indicate the impact of the EWCTBI module on preschoolers' cultural identity, and not to define their cultural identity. Lastly, this study did not compare the EWCTBI module with the traditional methods in the understanding of preschoolers of Wuyi culture knowledge and concepts.

## 1.8 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is established based on the variables under investigation and the research process. Constructed in stages, the conceptual framework aligns with the typical steps of a DDR study, commencing with an analysis of the requirements for teaching activities centered on experiential Wuyi culture theme-based instruction. This analysis identified the necessity to develop the EWCTBI module based on the gaps identified in existing literature.

The EWCTBI module is designed and developed according to the identified requirements to meet the needs of actual practice. The interrelationship between the first phase and the second phase of the current research is represented by the double arrow from the first variable to the other two variables. In the second stage, the variables of the design and development phase include expert consensus on the appropriate module design and subsequent review of the initial module. These two





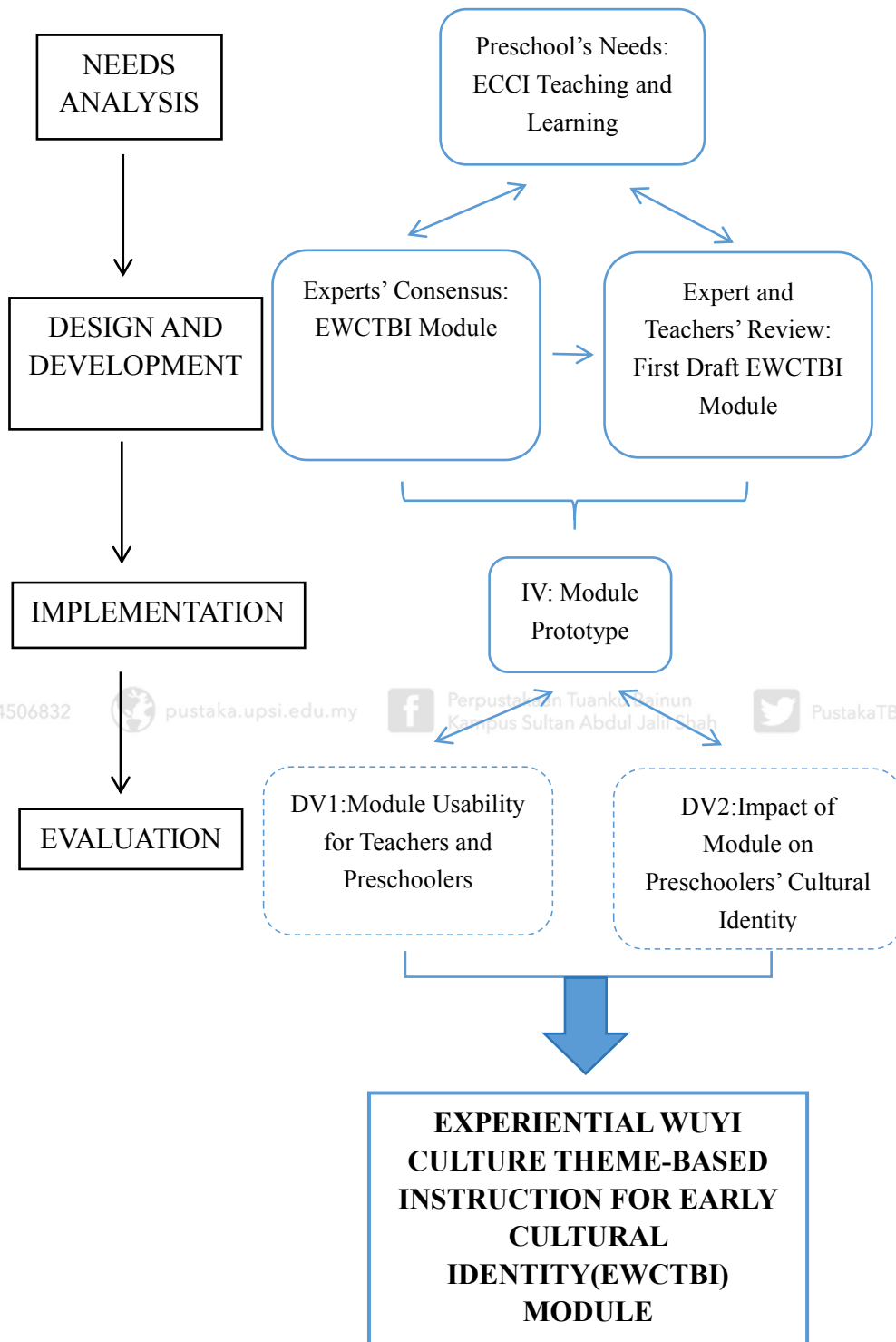
variables contribute to the development of the module prototype. The final phase is to evaluate the module prototype. These variables include evaluations of the module's usability by teachers and its availability to preschoolers, as well as its impact on preschoolers' cultural identity. The evaluation of this module forms the final stage of the study of the EWCTBI module.

The conceptual framework shown in Figure 1.1 illustrates the process by which various variables at different stages of the current study interacted, developed, and formed the final product of the study, which is the EWCTBI module. Figure 1.1 also displays how four different theories, namely Piaget's constructivist theory, Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theory, experiential learning theory and cultural education anthropology theory, supported the process of module development and the formation of the final module. The role of each supporting theory will be clearly described and explained in the next chapter.



**Figure 1.1**

*Conceptual Framework of the Study*



**SUPPORTING THEORIES**

1. Piaget's Process of Adaptation (1952)
2. Vygotsky's Concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (1978)
3. Experiential Learning Theory (1984)
4. Cultural Education Anthropology Theory (1987)



## 1.9 Limitations of Study

This study adopted the product and tool research under the design and development method proposed by Richey and Klein (2014). Due to the nature of this study design, the findings of this study are context-specific and less universal (Klein, 2014). This study was conducted in a preschool in Wuyishan City to help improve practices in the preschool, despite the imbalance of performance and training in the preschool. Therefore, the findings of this study may not represent the views of preschool teachers from other institutions and parts of China.

Nonetheless, this study provided new evidence and establish an empirical foundation in the field of early cultural identity. The EWCTBI module was designed and developed based on the identified needs of preschool teachers when teaching early local cultures and was evaluated by experts involved in Delphi research. In addition, it is worth noting that the EWCTBI module provides guidance for stakeholders of preschoolers, which can be modified and customized according to the respective needs of preschools of different natures. Suggested activities were largely depend on the context of implementation, including the level of support received from the preschool management, the competence of teachers, the resources and space available, and the philosophy of the preschools.





## 1.10 Definitions of Terms

The key concepts relevant to this study will be clearly and specifically described in the following sections. Such operational definitions are intended to avoid ambiguity and vagueness, ensuring consistency and clarity in the understanding of these concepts.

### 1.10.1 Theme-based Instruction

Theme-based instruction is an educational approach that organizes teaching and learning around a specific theme or topic, integrating various subject areas and skills to provide preschoolers with a cohesive and meaningful learning experience (Lin, 2015). This method can be applied across various educational levels and settings, including language teaching, early childhood education, and higher education (Ghosn, 2013).

In this study, theme-based instruction refers to a collection of educational and teaching activities in preschools that are based on the actual conditions and cultural resources of the preschool and its surrounding area, focusing on a central content and aiming for the harmonious development of preschoolers in various fields within a certain period. From the perspective of thematic activity practice, the design of theme-based instruction is the arrangement made by preschools before or during the implementation of activities, based on preschoolers' dynamic life experiences, according to the preschool's Wuyi cultural resources for environmental creation and





material selection, including the arrangement of thematic activity objectives, implementation, and evaluation. It can be a certain period, lasting from several weeks to several months.

### 1.10.2 Preschool Theme-based Instruction

Preschool theme-based instruction is an educational approach that organizes teaching and learning around a specific theme or topic, integrating various subject areas and skills to provide preschoolers with a cohesive and meaningful learning experience (Bredekamp, 2017). This method is particularly suitable for ECE, as it fosters holistic development and encourages preschoolers to make connections between different subject areas (Ghosn, 2013).



In the context of this study, preschool theme-based instruction refers to providing preschoolers with an organized theme or concept within the scope of their own life experiences and understanding level. This theme or concept is closely related to preschoolers' life experiences and is within their comprehension level, enabling them to have the ability to carefully explore, understand, and explain the theme or concept in their own language. Consequently, preschoolers actively participate in teaching activities.





### 1.10.3 Experiential Theme-based Instruction

In general, "experiential learning" refers to a learning approach where learners engage in practical experiences or simulations in real or simulated environments, under the premise of setting learning objectives, and then achieve self-enhancement and reconstruction of knowledge, abilities, and attitudes through reflection and sharing insights (Li, 2005). Huang (2007) suggests that experiential learning involves learners directly participating in practical activities, acquiring new knowledge, skills, and attitudes through cognition, experience, and reflection during the practice process. Zhong (2012) argues that experiential learning involves individuals exploring and experiencing guided actions, followed by discussions, analysis, reflection, and a cyclic process of "thinking-action-thinking-action" or even "learning in action," representing a meaningful learning process. Preschool experiential theme-based instruction, based on the theory of experiential learning, are educational activities aimed at promoting the harmonious development of preschoolers, with active participation and wholehearted involvement as prerequisites, and emphasizing preschoolers' autonomous and self-experiences (Huang, 2019).

Therefore, experiential theme-based instruction in this study refers to educational activities centered around preschoolers, with the prerequisite of their active participation in practical activities. Guided by teachers, learning occurs through a cycle of "experience-observation-communication-behavioral application," aimed at facilitating preschoolers to acquire new knowledge, skills, and attitudes through practice.





#### 1.10.4 Local Culture

Local culture can be defined as the distinctive social customs and lifestyle patterns that develop within a specific geographical area. It encompasses not only visible elements such as language, clothing, architectural styles, and culinary practices, but also deeper aspects such as the values, belief systems, behavioral norms, and worldviews of community members (Dinnie, 2015). Local culture is formed through historical transmission and the accumulation of inter-generational experiences, evolving continuously through interactions with the natural and social environment (Li, 2017). Additionally, local culture faces challenges in the context of modernization and globalization, as it may be assimilated by external cultures or rejuvenated through innovation and integration.



In operational terms, local culture is defined as a dynamic and continuously evolving process, as opposed to a static or unchanging entity. This definition allows for a better understanding of how local culture influences individual and collective identity, as well as its role in shaping social behavior and community cohesion (Soini & Birkeland, 2016). By studying and respecting local culture, individuals can gain a deeper understanding of their place within historical and social contexts, thereby enhancing their sense of belonging and identity. Overall, local culture is a multifaceted concept that reflects daily life while bearing broader social and historical significance.





### 1.10.5 Wuyi Culture

Wuyishan City, located in Fujian Province in southeastern China, is renowned for its spectacular natural landscapes and rich biodiversity. As a significant mountain ecosystem in southeastern China, Wuyishan City is recognized as a World Natural and Cultural Heritage site due to its unique Danxia landform, abundant vegetation, and rare species of flora and fauna (Zhou & Zhang, 2020). The region not only boasts magnificent natural scenery but also possesses a profound cultural heritage, including the tea culture of Wuyishan City and religious cultural sites related to Taoism and Buddhism (Li, 2019). These natural and cultural elements collectively shape the distinctive local culture and ecological value of Wuyishan City.

Wuyi culture, originating from the Wuyishan City in China, is a significant part of Chinese culture. The definition of Wuyi culture is multifaceted, encompassing various elements such as folklore, gastronomy, arts, and natural heritage. According to a study by Li and Chen (2016), Wuyi culture is characterized by its rich folklore, including traditional customs, rituals, and festivals. In the realm of gastronomy, Zhang and Liu (2017) define Wuyi culture through its unique tea culture and local cuisine, which reflect the region's cultural diversity and richness. When it comes to arts, Liu and Zhou (2018) highlight the influence of Wuyi music, dance, and visual arts, which significantly contribute to the definition of Wuyi culture. In terms of natural heritage, Wang and Zhou (2019) emphasize the importance of Wuyishan City, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, in defining Wuyi culture.





In conclusion, Wuyi culture is a complex concept defined by its rich folklore, diverse gastronomy, unique arts, and natural heritage.

### 1.10.6 Wuyi Culture Theme-based Instruction

Theme-based instruction is educational and teaching activities organized around a central content or a theme (Yang & Cao, 2010). Therefore, in the design and development of Wuyi culture theme-based instruction, teachers can integrate Wuyi cultural resources as teaching materials to carry out a series of theme-based instruction for ECE. The development of Wuyi culture theme-based instruction includes the establishment of themes, content selection, organization, and the implementation of the teaching activities.



### 1.10.7 Cultural Identity

Cultural identity refers to an individual's sense of belonging to a particular cultural group, shaped by factors such as ethnicity, language, religion, and shared values (Phinney, 2010). This concept is crucial in understanding how individuals perceive themselves and interact with others within and across different cultural contexts (Nasir & Kirshner, 2010). In the context of preschool education, cultural identity may be reflected in preschoolers' familiarity with local customs, participation in traditional festivals, use of mother tongue, and recognition of culturally significant symbols or stories. For example, a child who learns and retells local folktales or engages in





traditional art forms such as calligraphy is actively participating in the formation of their cultural identity. Studies have indicated that a well-established cultural identity can enhance psychological well-being, self-esteem, and resilience (Phinney, 2010). Furthermore, it supports the development of empathy and openness, as children with a strong cultural foundation are more likely to appreciate and respect cultural diversity (Nasir & Kirshner, 2010). In summary, cultural identity serves as a vital component of a person's self-perception, influencing both psychological health and cross-cultural interactions from an early age.

#### 1.10.8 Preschoolers' Cultural Identity

Cultural identity in preschoolers refers to the early development of a sense of belonging and identification with a specific cultural group in preschoolers aged 3 to 6 years old (Kiang, Glatz, & Buchanan, 2017). This developmental stage is crucial as it lays the foundation for the preschooler's understanding of their place within their cultural context and shapes their values, beliefs, and attitudes (Sanders, 2018).

In the context of this study, preschoolers' cultural identity refers to the process and result of an individual preschooler acquiring a cultural self. It is the preschoolers' cognition of the cultural elements of the language, clothing, food, housing, rituals, social norms, and cultural values of the group they belong to. Based on this, preschoolers demonstrate their understanding and cognition of the culture through certain behaviors or behavioral choices, ultimately resulting in a sense of cultural belonging.





### 1.10.9 Preschool

Preschool generally refers to a preschool education or the education provided before preschoolers receive formal primary education. Preschool education refers to the provision of learning and developmental experiences for preschoolers aged between three and six years old, before they enter formal schooling (Lynch, 2015). It encompasses various educational settings, including nursery schools, preschool programs, and early childhood centers (Pianta et al., 2017). The primary goal of preschool education is to foster preschoolers' cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development, laying the foundation for their future academic success and overall well-being (Camilli et al., 2015). In the context of this study, public and international preschools, as well as childcare services for preschoolers under six years old were not included in the scope of this study.



### 1.10.10 Instructional Module

Instructional modules are self-contained, focused, and concise learning units designed to support specific learning objectives within a broader educational context (Koç & Yıldırım, 2017). They can be used in various educational settings, including face-to-face, blended, and online learning environments, and can be tailored to meet the needs of diverse learners (Abdelmalak & Parra, 2016). Instructional modules typically include a combination of content materials, learning activities, and assessments, all of which are aligned with the intended learning outcomes (Özdemir & Aziz, 2018). In the context of preschool education, instructional modules might





include storybooks, visual aids, interactive games, songs, and role-playing activities that are thematically organized and developmentally appropriate.

The primary goal of instructional modules is to facilitate student-centered learning by allowing learners to progress at their own pace, engage with the content in a meaningful way, and receive timely feedback on their performance (Koç & Yıldırım, 2017). Research has shown that well-designed instructional modules can improve student motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes (Abdelmalak & Parra, 2016). Moreover, the modular approach to instruction allows for greater flexibility in curriculum design, making it easier for teachers to adapt to the changing needs of their students and the demands of the 21st-century workforce (Özdemir & Aziz, 2018). For young children, this approach supports hands-on, experiential learning and can foster foundational skills through play-based and culturally responsive instruction.



In this study, the EWCTBI module is an instructional module. The module consisted of different forms of early cultural identity instruction around the theme of Wuyi culture. It was designed, developed, implemented, and finally evaluated in this study to be used by teachers in preschools for preschoolers. The module included teaching support for preschool teachers to promote Wuyi culture theme-based instruction, especially in early cultural identity teaching to develop preschoolers' cultural identity.





### 1.10.11 Instructional Design

Instructional design has emerged as a critical aspect of the educational landscape, encompassing the systematic process of creating, developing, and delivering instructional materials and experiences to facilitate learning (Reiser & Dempsey, 2017). This literature review aims to provide an overview of recent developments and research in the field of instructional design, focusing on studies published since 2015.

In the context of this study, the instructional design refers to: 1) analyzing the need for early cultural identity; 2) designing and developing the EWCTBI module, and 3) implementing and evaluating the EWCTBI module in an actual preschool setting. The product of this instructional design process is the EWCTBI module, which aimed to enhance the cultural identity of preschoolers through experiential Wuyi culture theme-based instruction.

### 1.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a brief introduction to the research background by describing the need and significance of this research and how the research can bridge the gap between actual practice in early childhood settings and the ideals realized by thematic activities. The need for this study, as well as how the findings of this study contributed to the existing body of knowledge and China's early childhood sector were also discussed.





A conceptual framework was developed and discussed, followed by a discussion of the scope of the study. This chapter also addressed the limitations of this study. The chapter concluded with the definitions of terms used throughout the research process. The next chapter discusses the relevant literature and theories that support this study.

