

A Review of Integrating Qiang Children's Music into Primary Education: Challenges and Cultural Sustainability

Seni dan lirik lagu: Disfemisme dalam album Billie Eilish - Happier Than Ever berpandukan lensa Akal Budi Melayu dan Pragmatik

Qiuyue Deng, Shahanum Md. Shah*

College of Creative Arts, University of Technology MARA, Shah Alam· 40450, Selangor, Malaysia.

*Corresponding author email: shahanum@uitm.edu.my

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ABSTRACT - The preservation of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) has become an urgent global concern, particularly for marginalized communities. This review explores the integration of Qiang children's music into formal school curricula as a strategy for cultural sustainability. Drawing on interdisciplinary literature including ethnomusicology, educational policy, and indigenous pedagogy it synthesizes global and local perspectives on embedding traditional music into modern educational systems. Through thematic synthesis and comparative analysis, the study identifies key barriers such as cultural marginalization, limited institutional support, and a lack of culturally responsive educators. In response, it proposes actionable pathways including community-based teaching, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and the use of educational technology. The review presents a conceptual framework for Qiang music integration, offers policy and curricular recommendations, and outlines future research priorities. The findings aim to support educators, policymakers, and cultural practitioners in revitalizing and transmitting Qiang musical traditions across generations.

ABSTRAK - Pemeliharaan warisan budaya tidak ketara (Intangible Cultural Heritage, ICH) telah menjadi isu global yang semakin mendesak, khususnya bagi komuniti yang terpinggir. Ulasan ini meneliti pengintegrasian muzik kanak-kanak Qiang ke dalam kurikulum sekolah formal sebagai satu strategi untuk memastikan kelestarian budaya. Berasaskan literatur antara disiplin yang merangkumi etnomuzikologi, dasar pendidikan dan pedagogi peribumi, kajian ini mensintesis perspektif global dan tempatan berkaitan usaha memasukkan muzik tradisional ke dalam sistem pendidikan moden. Melalui sintesis tematik dan analisis perbandingan, kajian ini mengenal pasti halangan utama seperti peminggiran budaya, sokongan institusi yang terhad, serta kekurangan pendidik yang responsif terhadap konteks budaya. Sebagai respons, beberapa pendekatan praktikal dicadangkan termasuk

pengajaran berasaskan komuniti, pedagogi yang mengekalkan kelangsungan budaya, serta penggunaan teknologi pendidikan. Ulasan ini turut mengemukakan kerangka konseptual bagi integrasi muzik Qiang, mencadangkan penambahbaikan dasar dan kurikulum, serta menggariskan keutamaan penyelidikan pada masa hadapan. Dapatan kajian ini bertujuan menyokong pendidik, pembuat dasar dan penggiat budaya dalam usaha memperkasa serta mewariskan tradisi muzik Qiang kepada generasi seterusnya.

INTRODUCTION

The cultural heritage of the Qiang ethnic group, rooted in China's northwestern provinces, represents a vital strand in the fabric of national identity and intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Among its most distinctive expressions is children's music a rich oral tradition that conveys communal values, social memory, and intergenerational knowledge (Ma & Guo, 2024). However, amid rapid modernization, urbanization, and cultural homogenization, these traditional musical practices face mounting threats of erosion and loss.

In this context, integrating Qiang children's music into formal school curricula is not simply a matter of educational enrichment; it is an urgent strategy for cultural preservation and sustainability. Often overlooked in educational policy, children's songs serve as powerful tools of identity formation, emotional development, and cultural continuity. Their inclusion in classroom settings provides a bridge between heritage and pedagogy particularly critical for marginalized ethnic communities whose cultural narratives are often underrepresented in formal education (Campbell, 2017).

While global discourse increasingly supports the inclusion of indigenous and minority music in education, the practical integration of Qiang music into Chinese schooling remains limited and under-theorized. Although prior research affirms the role of music education in holistic child development (Brovchak et al., 2024; McDonel et al., 2024), few studies offer concrete models or policies tailored to the Qiang context. Key obstacles include a shortage of culturally competent educators, minimal institutional support, and the lack of accessible, localized teaching materials (Nousia & Batsis, 2023; van der Sandt, 2024).

This review aims to address these gaps by systematically examining both the challenges and opportunities involved in embedding Qiang children's music into primary education. Specifically, it seeks to: (1) identify structural and pedagogical barriers to integration; (2) analyze international models of indigenous music inclusion for transferable insights; and (3) propose actionable strategies rooted in culturally sustaining pedagogy, community engagement, and educational technology. To achieve this, the paper synthesizes interdisciplinary scholarship spanning ethnomusicology, indigenous education, curriculum policy, and cultural studies. Emphasis is placed not on listing studies descriptively, but on drawing thematic connections between Qiang-specific issues and comparative global case studies from Thailand, Australia, and South Africa. Central to this inquiry is the question: how can schools shift from being passive agents of cultural assimilation to active sites of resilience and revitalization? By mapping the conceptual, institutional, and practical dimensions of music integration, this study contributes to the broader discourse on sustaining intangible cultural heritage through inclusive and responsive educational practices. It aims to equip educators, policymakers, and cultural preservationists with insights and tools to support the revitalization and intergenerational transmission of Qiang musical traditions.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a narrative review design with elements of scoping and comparative analysis to explore the integration of Qiang children's music into formal education as a pathway to cultural sustainability. The approach is qualitative and interdisciplinary, combining thematic synthesis with global case comparison to identify patterns, barriers, and enablers relevant to the Qiang context. The methodology is summarized in Figure 1 and described in detail below.

Scope and Data Sources

The review focused on literature published between 2005 and 2025, drawing on peer-reviewed journal articles, ethnographic reports, educational policy documents, and case studies. To ensure comprehensiveness and cultural sensitivity, sources were collected in both English and Chinese from major databases, including JSTOR, CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), ERIC, and Google Scholar. This bilingual search strategy facilitated the inclusion of locally grounded Chinese scholarship alongside internationally recognized research, thereby strengthening the contextual relevance of the analysis.

Literature Selection Criteria

The inclusion criteria emphasized relevance to the following areas:

- I. Qiang music and broader cultural heritage preservation;
- II. Children's music and educational practices in minority or indigenous contexts;
- III. Integration of ethnic or indigenous musical traditions into school curricula;
- IV. Policy frameworks for cultural heritage preservation, including those aligned with UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Convention.

The search initially yielded approximately 120 sources, which were screened based on titles and abstracts. After applying relevance criteria, 58 studies were selected for full-text review. Ultimately, 34 sources were included in the final analysis. This process is illustrated in Figure 1, which outlines the progression from identification to inclusion. Case studies were selected when they addressed either ethnic minority education in China or comparable indigenous music integration initiatives worldwide, such as those documented in Southeast Asia, Oceania, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Data analysis proceeded in two stages, first, a thematic synthesis approach was employed to identify and categorize recurring patterns across the literature. This process generated key thematic areas, including policy and institutional barriers, pedagogical strategies, teacher training needs, resource constraints, and community participation.

Second, a comparative analysis was conducted to examine how different cultural contexts have addressed similar challenges in integrating indigenous music into formal education. Representative cases included multicultural music education in Thailand (Chandransu, 2019), culturally sustaining pedagogy among Aboriginal communities in Australia (Chapman et al., 2018, 2019), and the revitalization of indigenous instruments in South Africa (Netshivhambe, 2024b). These international examples provided a basis for identifying transferable practices and for generating recommendations tailored to the Qiang context.

METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION AND LIMITATIONS

This review contributes a conceptual framework for embedding Qiang children's music into formal curricula by bridging local challenges with global insights. The combined use of thematic synthesis and cross-cultural comparison enhances the relevance and applicability of findings to education and heritage policy.

However, several limitations must be acknowledged:

- I. The review is not fully systematic; while rigorous in scope, it does not use a standardized quality appraisal tool for source selection.
- II. The number of included studies is relatively small, especially in relation to empirical data on Qiang-specific interventions.

- III. Some grey literature and community-based documentation may have been excluded due to accessibility limitations.

Despite these constraints, the methodology ensures cultural and educational relevance while offering a scalable model for future research and curriculum development.

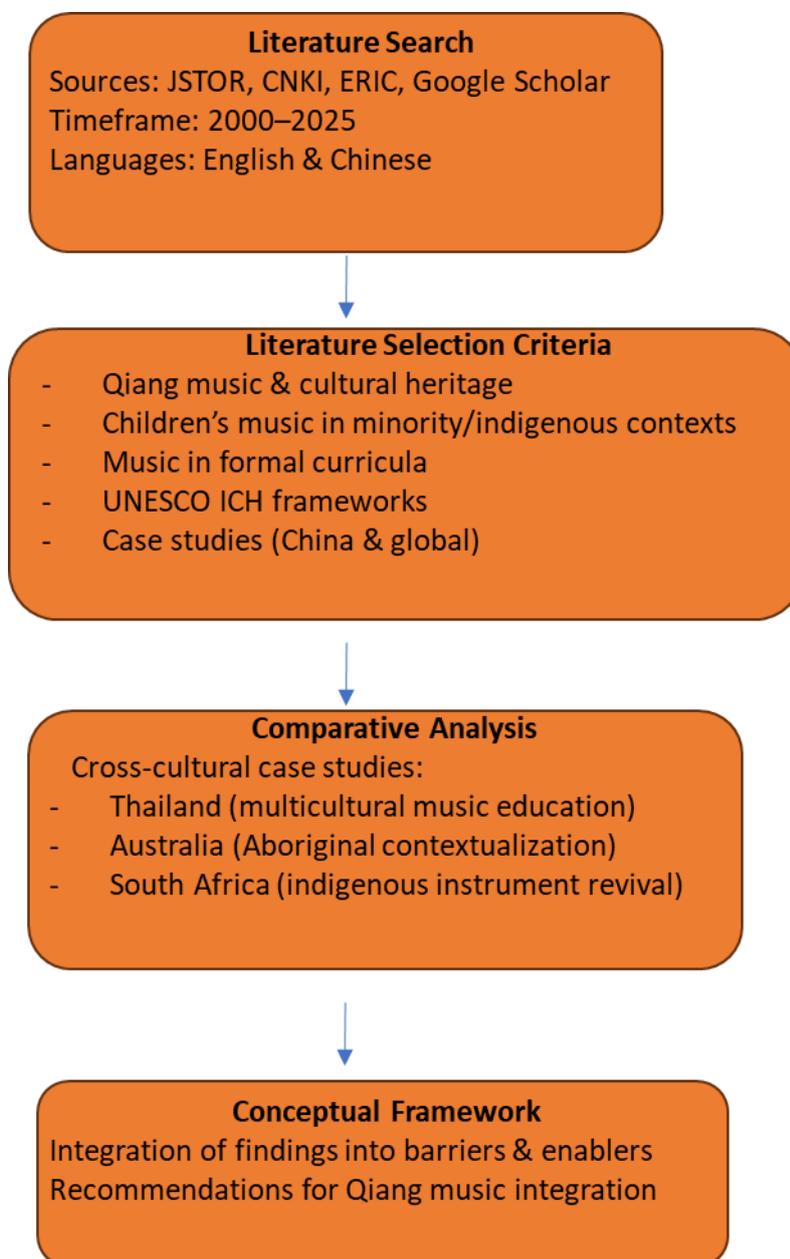


Figure 1: Methodology of the Review Paper

LITERATURE REVIEW

The integration of Qiang children's music into formal education has gained increasing attention as a culturally significant response to the broader challenge of sustaining intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Early studies on the Qiang ethnic group emphasize the distinctiveness of their musical traditions and highlight the urgent need to safeguard these practices through educational means (McDonel et al., 2024). As the discourse evolved, scholars began to identify key structural and sociocultural barriers to this integration. Cultural erosion driven by modernization, urbanization, and homogenized curricula

emerged as a dominant theme, with research noting how traditional practices have been increasingly marginalized in favor of standardized national content (Brovchak et al., 2024; van der Sandt, 2024).

A recurring theme in the literature is the lack of institutional support and the absence of coherent policy frameworks that facilitate the inclusion of minority cultural expressions such as Qiang music within school settings. This policy vacuum not only inhibits the transmission of heritage knowledge but also undermines efforts to affirm cultural identity among young learners (Nousia & Batsis, 2023). Consequently, music that once played a pivotal role in shaping childhood experiences within Qiang communities now faces the risk of extinction unless supported by educational reform.

More recent studies have shifted from diagnosing these challenges to proposing actionable strategies for overcoming them. One prominent solution is the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy, which encourages the use of students' cultural backgrounds as a foundation for meaningful learning. Such pedagogies have been shown to deepen student engagement and facilitate the transmission of heritage knowledge in ways that are respectful and empowering (Ju, 2024). Additionally, community involvement is increasingly recognized as a vital component of successful integration efforts, enabling co-creation of curricula with local musicians, elders, and cultural practitioners (Chandransu, 2019). The role of digital tools has also come into focus, as technological platforms can help document, preserve, and disseminate musical content that may otherwise be inaccessible (Nousia & Batsis, 2023).

Comparative case studies from other indigenous contexts provide valuable reference points. For example, Thailand's incorporation of multicultural music into public education (Chandransu, 2019), Australia's efforts to embed Aboriginal music in school programs (Chapman et al., 2018, 2019), and Africa's revitalization of traditional instruments in classroom settings (Netshivhambe, 2024b) all offer evidence-based models that can inform similar initiatives in the Qiang context. These examples consistently highlight the importance of community agency, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and policy alignment in promoting successful heritage integration.

The reviewed literature also reveals methodological diversity in how researchers approach the study of Qiang music and its educational potential. Ethnographic studies are particularly effective in capturing the lived experiences of Qiang communities, offering insights into the nuanced role of children's music in daily life and cultural transmission (Brovchak et al., 2024; McDonel et al., 2024). In contrast, quantitative approaches often focused on educational outcomes such as test scores tend to overlook the cultural dimensions and emotional resonance of traditional music (van der Sandt, 2024). Mixed-methods research, which combines both qualitative depth and quantitative breadth, appears to offer the most holistic perspective on integration challenges and outcomes (Chandransu, 2019; Ionova & Luparenko, 2022). The role of community feedback and participatory curriculum design is another important finding across multiple studies. Research demonstrates that successful programs are often those which actively involve local stakeholders in shaping teaching content, materials, and delivery methods. This participatory approach not only enhances the authenticity of music education but also reinforces cultural pride and intergenerational engagement within the community (Brovchak et al., 2024; Nousia & Batsis, 2023).

Theoretically, much of the literature frames music as a vital instrument of cultural transmission a view rooted in ethnomusicology and indigenous education studies. Scholars argue that traditional music carries embedded knowledge, social norms, and historical narratives that are central to cultural continuity (Ju, 2024; van der Sandt, 2024). Thus, the integration of Qiang music into school curricula is not merely a matter of curriculum diversification but a strategic effort toward cultural resilience in the face of globalization and cultural homogenization.

Table 1. Summary of the previous studies

Author(s) & Year	Research Focus	Methodology	Findings
McDonel, J. S., Rivers, D. C., & Parlakian, R. (2024)	Integration of math and music learning for preschoolers with focus on equity	Curriculum design & implementation	Enhanced early skills in low-income children, reducing disparities
Brovchak, L., Starovoit, L., Likhitska, L., Todosiienko, N., & Shvets, I. (2024)	Effect of arts integration on psychological development	Experimental observation	Improved academic, emotional, and social development
van der Sandt, J. (2024)	Role of singing in children's emotional and creative growth	Theoretical analysis	Singing fosters holistic development and should be included in curricula
Ju, D. C. (2024)	Significance of music education in Korean primary schools	Historical and conceptual review	Advocates restoring music classes to promote holistic learning
[Unknown Author] (2024)	Preservice teachers' preferences in horticultural education	Survey and curriculum development	Curriculum preferences vary by major; need for differentiated instruction
Nousia, A., & Batsis, D. (2023)	ICT integration in preschool music instruction	Qualitative analysis	ICT enhances skill development and engagement in early learners
Ionova, O., & Luparenko, S. (2022)	Holistic approaches to music education in Waldorf settings	Case-based study	Promotes age-specific, participatory development
Chandransu, N. (2019)	Integration of diverse music traditions in public schools	Curriculum design and classroom application	Broadened cultural and musical understanding
(Gao, 2023, 2025a, 2025b; Gao, 2024)	Family language policy and cultural identity	Sociolinguistic interviews	Bilingual preferences reflect societal pressures and aspirations
(Fang, 2024)	Framework for multicultural arts education	Case framework analysis	Promotes inclusive curriculum in response to anti-Asian bias
Litster, J. H. (2022)	Intercultural elements in film music	Musicological analysis	Fusion of Chinese and Western styles enriches narrative
Wu Zeying, Z. (2012)	Nationalism and student perceptions in China	Survey and attitude measurement	Education correlates with negative perceptions of Japan
Feng, A. (2005)	Evaluative analysis of bilingual policy in China	Policy review and theoretical critique	Parallel models impact minority and majority education differently
Dong, W. (2025)	Cultural influence on AI's effect in child development	Cross-cultural comparative study	Cultural context crucial for AI application in education
Rosidin, A., Herawan, E., & Nurdin, D. (2025)	Leadership and Total Quality Management in schools	Case studies and	Cultural leadership improves trust;

		stakeholder interviews	implementation barriers noted
Firek, W., Płoszaj, K., & Malchrowicz-Moško, E. (2025)	Tool validation in Polish education context	Instrument validation (CLASS-S tool)	CLASS-S found reliable for assessing teacher interactions
Liuyang, X. (2025)	Local culture in early education post-relocation in China	Ethnographic study	Enhances children's belonging and development
Kabadayi, A., & Skutil, M. (2024)	Teachers' perceptions of anti-plagiarism tools	Cross-national survey	Tools are supported but concerns about implications persist
Amalia, D. (2024)	Environmental awareness via religious education	Integration of ethics and environmental science	Supports ethical environmentalism through religious values
Netshivhambe, N. E. (2024)	Preservation through education	Cultural documentation and curriculum analysis	Encourages sustainability via indigenous music education
Joshi, A., Vinay, M., & Bhaskar, P. (2020)	Teachers' experience with pandemic-era online learning	Qualitative teacher surveys	Infrastructure and personal challenges affected teaching quality
D'Ignazio, C., & Klein, L. (2020)	Intersection of ethics, data science, and feminism	Theoretical framework	Advocates inclusive data practices to promote justice
Kwet, M. (2019)	Tech imperialism by U.S. firms	Critical political economy analysis	Warns against centralization of digital power
Asaah, G. D., & Kannan, C. (2018)	Justice-focused multicultural education	Conceptual and classroom-based exploration	Enhances student outcomes by affirming cultural identity
Diemer, M. A., Rapa, L. J., Voight, A., & McWhirter, E. H. (2016)	Developmental model to support marginalized youth	Developmental and psychological study	Critical consciousness boosts empowerment and resilience
McCarty, T. L., & Lee, T. (2014)	Culturally sustaining education for Native learners	Pedagogical framework and policy critique	Emphasizes sovereignty and decolonized education systems
Gay, G. (2013)	Culturally responsive teaching	Theoretical and applied analysis	Improves learning for diverse student populations
Milner, H. R. (2012)	Equity via opportunity gap lens	Policy and conceptual framework	Shifts focus from outcomes to systemic inequities
Lotherington, H., & Jenson, J. (2011)	New literacies for second-language learners	Classroom-based case studies	Enhances engagement and learning in L2 education
Mills, K. A. (2010)	Digital media's role in literacy evolution	Literature review	Curriculum reform is essential in the digital age
Chapman, S., Pascoe, R., & Wright, P. (2018)	Misalignment between policy and practice	Case studies from Western Australia	Curriculum pressures undermine effective implementation

Alexiadis, D. S., Apostolakis, K., Daras, P., et al. (2010)	Digital impact on literacy education	Review study	Stresses need for adaptive pedagogy and tools
Awokoya, J., & Harushimana, I. (2011)	Diversity and intercultural perspectives	Qualitative policy analysis	Suggests culturally relevant curricula for better integration
Hess, J., & Talbot, B. C. (2019)	Arts education as social justice tool	Critical discourse and teacher engagement	Encourages teachers to address real-world issues through music
Boddy, J., Brown, R., Durrani, N., et al. (2013)	Pedagogy in low-resource education contexts	Literature review	Identifies gaps and research needs in developing regions
Beuka, J., Calder, N. S., & Ngatulu, C. (2011)	Curriculum transition and local empowerment	Participatory research	Community-led changes promote ownership and sustainability

Conversely, the literature also outlines significant threats to this process. Cultural alienation among younger generations fueled by a lack of exposure to their heritage poses a critical challenge. Without intentional educational interventions, the detachment from traditional music may deepen over time (Brovchak et al., 2024). Inadequate training for teachers, many of whom lack the cultural competencies to teach Qiang music, further compounds the problem. Policymakers and educators must therefore consider long-term capacity building, curriculum reform, and institutional investment to support these initiatives (Chandransu, 2019; Ionova & Luparenko, 2022).

The existing body of literature converges on several key findings. First, Qiang children's music holds immense potential as a vehicle for cultural sustainability and identity formation. Second, integration into formal schooling is both necessary and feasible but requires the removal of systemic barriers and the adoption of culturally inclusive pedagogies. Finally, international models demonstrate that successful heritage education is built upon collaboration, responsiveness, and sustained policy commitment. These insights lay the groundwork for the present review's analysis of challenges and pathways, contributing to a more inclusive and resilient vision of education for the Qiang and other minority communities.

DISCUSSION

The literature suggests that integrating Qiang children's music into school curricula offers a compelling pathway to strengthen cultural sustainability and foster identity formation among Qiang youth. This review has examined the intersection of heritage preservation and educational practice, revealing a consensus that music serves as a powerful medium for transmitting cultural values, communal memory, and emotional expression (Brovchak et al., 2024; McDonel et al., 2024). The findings point to an urgent need for educational frameworks that embed local musical traditions to counteract the cultural erosion driven by modernization and globalization (Ju, 2024; van der Sandt, 2024). However, the literature also highlights persistent structural challenges such as inadequate policy support, limited institutional investment, and a shortage of culturally responsive educators which hinder the effective implementation of such initiatives (He, 2024; Nousia & Batsis, 2023). Critically, while many sources advocate for the integration of indigenous music, few provide empirical evidence of sustained implementation, particularly in the Qiang context. Much of the existing scholarship remains conceptual or aspirational. This gap indicates a need for more grounded studies that evaluate how specific interventions influence student engagement, cultural identity, and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

The review further identifies promising strategies drawn from international case studies. For instance, Thailand's multicultural music curriculum, Australia's contextualized Aboriginal music education, and South Africa's revitalization of indigenous instruments illustrate the importance of community collaboration, teacher training, and policy alignment (Chandransu, 2019; Ionova & Luparenko, 2022). This integration is not merely an educational concern but a broader cultural imperative that seeks to

maintain the richness of Qiang heritage in contemporary society. The implications of these findings extend beyond the Qiang community, highlighting the essential role of music education in promoting cultural diversity and inclusivity within broader educational contexts. As demonstrated through comparative case studies from other indigenous cultures, successful integration strategies often involve collaborative efforts that engage communities and incorporate feedback into program design (He, 2024; Xiang, 2024; Zhao, 2024). This insight presents actionable pathways for educators and policymakers to explore, particularly through culturally responsive pedagogy that fosters a sense of belonging and identity among students (Owuor, 2007; Rehman, 2024; Shizha, 2014).

Additionally, technological tools offer innovative methods for enhancing engagement with traditional music, enabling broader access and participation (Beckstead, 2001; Creech, 2019; Juntunen, 2017; Peluso, 2015). Despite the wealth of research, this review acknowledges several limitations. Notably, there is a dearth of empirical studies that evaluate the effectiveness of integrated programs specifically focused on Qiang children's music. Much of the existing literature builds on theoretical frameworks without providing substantial evidence of successful implementation in educational curricula (Kitson et al., 2008; Rogan & Aldous, 2005; Viennet & Pont, 2017). As such, there is an urgent need for future research to focus on case studies that not only document integration efforts but also assess their impact on student engagement and cultural awareness (Baddane & Ennam, 2024; Fitrianto & Farisi, 2025; Gumartifa et al., 2025; Mămăligă, 2024). Furthermore, exploring the intersection of technology and music education within the context of Qiang culture may yield valuable insights for developing adaptive and innovative teaching methods (Du et al., 2025; Qiang, 2024). In conclusion, the integration of Qiang children's music into educational settings presents a significant opportunity for cultural sustainability and educational enrichment. By addressing the identified barriers and leveraging actionable pathways, stakeholders can contribute to a more inclusive and culturally aware educational experience for future generations of Qiang youth. This literature review serves as a clarion call for sustained efforts in research and practice, emphasizing the need to embrace and preserve the rich tapestry of Qiang culture through the lens of education (Albritton & Farrelly, 2020; Chen, 2024; Ou, 2024; Tao & Tao, 2024). The survival of such cultural legacies is contingent upon proactive measures, making the integration of indigenous music in curricula not merely an option but a necessity in cultivating a vibrant and dynamic educational landscape (Bredlid, 2009; Dada, 2024; Hlalele, 2019; Netshivhambe, 2024a; Noyoo, 2007; Owuor, 2007). Generally, the literature supports the argument that Qiang children's music holds untapped potential as a culturally and pedagogically enriching educational resource. However, realizing this potential requires systemic change: the development of inclusive policies, investment in teacher capacity, participatory curriculum design, and thoughtful integration of technology.

CHALLENGES IN PRESERVATION AND CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

Efforts to integrate Qiang children's music into formal educational settings face a series of structural, pedagogical, and logistical barriers that hinder meaningful implementation. These challenges are multifaceted, ranging from policy-level limitations to classroom-level constraints.

Policy Gaps and Institutional Marginalization

A significant obstacle to the curricular inclusion of Qiang music lies in the absence of supportive national education policy. The current Chinese curriculum framework places heavy emphasis on standardized academic achievement and Mandarin-language instruction, often to the exclusion of regional or indigenous content. To date, there is no formal policy mandating the integration of ethnic minority music into the national K–12 system. As a result, cultural representation within schools tends to be inconsistent and, where present, often superficial or tokenistic (Gao, 2023, 2025a, 2025b; Gao, 2024). Studies have shown that music textbooks rarely include compositions from Qiang or other minority traditions, thereby reinforcing a monocultural narrative and contributing to the symbolic marginalization of non-Han cultures within the educational sphere.

Inadequate Teacher Preparation and Cultural Competence

Another critical challenge is the widespread lack of teacher training specific to Qiang music. Most educators receive no formal preparation in ethnomusicology, minority cultural studies, or culturally responsive pedagogy. Even in regions where Qiang populations are predominant, schools are often

staffed by teachers from Han-majority backgrounds, many of whom lack familiarity with local traditions or linguistic competence in the Qiang language (Brovchak et al., 2024; McDonel et al., 2024). This cultural disconnect can lead to discomfort, misrepresentation, or even avoidance of minority cultural content in the classroom. As highlighted by Ju (2024), effective integration demands comprehensive professional development programs that equip teachers with the tools to engage respectfully and accurately with local traditions. Such programs should involve collaboration with community-based knowledge holders, including Qiang musicians, elders, and linguists, to co-develop curriculum materials that are pedagogically sound and culturally authentic.

Resource Limitations and Accessibility Barriers

A significant challenge to the integration of Qiang children's music into school curricula is the limited availability of accessible teaching resources. While traditional songbooks, musical instruments, and audio recordings do exist, they are often confined to academic archives or remain within local communities seldom adapted for educational use. Moreover, few of these materials have been digitized, standardized, or translated into formats suitable for non-specialist educators (Fang, 2024). This lack of infrastructure creates a resource gap that hinders effective implementation. Even well-intentioned efforts may become inconsistent, overly improvised, or dependent on external specialists conditions that undermine sustainability and scalability. Without classroom-ready materials that are culturally authentic and pedagogically appropriate, the integration of Qiang music risks remaining symbolic rather than substantive.

PATHWAYS FOR CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY

In response to the challenges outlined, a number of pathways have been proposed and documented in the literature to facilitate the sustainable integration of Qiang children's music into formal education. These approaches emphasize pedagogical relevance, community participation, and the strategic use of technology as core mechanisms for cultural preservation.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), as conceptualized by Geneva Gay (2013), provides a foundational framework for engaging students from diverse cultural backgrounds by validating and incorporating their cultural identities into the learning process. Within the context of Qiang education, CRP offers a transformative model that transcends mere content inclusion and instead positions Qiang music as a core component of students' educational experience.

In practice, this would entail the development of bilingual instructional materials in both Qiang and Mandarin, the integration of storytelling and traditional narratives into music instruction, and the formal recognition of Qiang cultural festivals through school-based musical performances. Such approaches not only foster inclusivity and engagement but also contribute to identity affirmation and the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge.

Community Engagement and Participatory Curriculum Design

Sustainable cultural integration is unlikely to succeed without the meaningful involvement of local communities. A growing body of research emphasizes the importance of participatory curriculum design, in which parents, elders, cultural custodians, and local musicians are co-creators of educational content and pedagogical strategies (Netshivhambe, 2024a; Nousia & Batsis, 2023). These stakeholders bring lived expertise that is essential for cultural authenticity and pedagogical relevance.

Evidence from case studies in Thailand and Australia demonstrates the success of such community-engaged approaches. For example, curriculum co-development with elders and artists has been linked to improved student learning outcomes, increased cultural pride, and greater teacher confidence in delivering indigenous content (Chapman et al., 2018, 2019). These models highlight the potential of school-community partnerships to serve as vehicles for heritage revitalization.

Technological Integration and Digital Preservation

Technology presents an increasingly powerful tool for the preservation and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage. In the case of Qiang children's music, digital tools such as mobile applications, online

audio archives, and immersive technologies like virtual reality (VR) can be leveraged to document and transmit traditional musical forms in accessible and engaging ways (Sun, 2024; Zhang, 2025).

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has already shown promise in early childhood music education, particularly in improving auditory learning and supporting the documentation of oral traditions (Nousia & Batsis, 2023). For under-resourced schools in rural or remote areas, these digital platforms offer scalable and cost-effective solutions that can help overcome physical and linguistic barriers to access.

COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES

The integration of indigenous music into formal education is not unique to the Qiang context. Case studies from other multicultural and postcolonial settings offer valuable insights into best practices and common pitfalls, serving as reference points for locally adapted strategies in China.

Thailand: Multicultural Music Education in Public Schools

Thailand's successful incorporation of multicultural music into its national curriculum provides a model for inclusive music education. As documented by Chandransu (2019), the initiative involved the development of lesson plans that included indigenous instruments, dialect-specific songs, and culturally embedded dance forms. The program fostered cross-cultural understanding among students and promoted national unity through cultural diversity. The Thai case demonstrates how state-level policy, teacher training, and resource development can work synergistically to integrate minority music traditions into mainstream education.

Australia: Contextualizing Aboriginal Music in Education

The Australian experience with Aboriginal music education highlights the importance of contextualization. Chapman et al. (2018) caution that "content without context is noise," advocating for teaching approaches that embed music within broader cultural, geographical, and historical narratives. By incorporating storytelling, place-based learning, and community partnerships, Australian schools have created more respectful and impactful learning environments. This model emphasizes that indigenous music should not be treated as static folklore but as a living tradition connected to land, language, and identity.

South Africa: Revitalizing Indigenous Instruments and Pedagogy

In the African context, Netshivhambe (2024) explores initiatives to restore traditional music and craftsmanship within the South African education system. These efforts have been characterized by government-backed funding, cross-sector collaboration, and intensive teacher training programs. The integration of indigenous instruments into both classroom teaching and national music competitions has fostered cultural pride and skills development. South Africa's example underlines the role of institutional commitment and investment in revitalizing traditional music within modern educational systems.

Table 2. Comparative Case Studies of Indigenous Music Integration

Country	Curriculum Strategies	Stakeholder Involvement	Key Outcomes	Relevance to Qiang Context
Thailand	Integration of multicultural music, dialects, instruments, and dance into national lesson plans	Collaboration with educators and cultural experts, Ministry of Education support	Broadened student perspectives, improved cultural understanding	Shows benefits of culturally inclusive curriculum supported by national education policy
Australia	Contextualized Aboriginal music education using storytelling, geography, and history	Deep engagement with Aboriginal communities, elders, and artists	Enhanced cultural sensitivity, reduced tokenism in music teaching	Highlights importance of cultural context and lived experience in curriculum design

South Africa	Revival of indigenous instruments through formal music programs and competitions	Government-backed training, NGO partnerships, community-led initiatives	Reinvigorated traditional craftsmanship, stronger teacher training capacity	Demonstrates value of policy investment and multi-sector collaboration
China (Qiang)	Currently limited; lacks national curriculum inclusion or bilingual music content	Minimal involvement of Qiang community in formal education	Cultural erosion risk, lack of student connection to heritage music	Can benefit from models that combine policy reform, community engagement, and teacher training

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this review highlight several critical areas in which targeted policy interventions can facilitate the integration of Qiang children's music into formal education, thus promoting cultural sustainability. The lack of a coherent, systemic approach to indigenous music education combined with structural barriers such as insufficient teacher training, inadequate materials, and the marginalization of minority voices necessitates multi-level policy responses that are inclusive, culturally informed, and sustainable over the long term.

First and foremost, there is an urgent need for national curriculum mandates that require the inclusion of minority cultural music, including that of the Qiang people, within regional and national arts education frameworks. Such policies should move beyond tokenistic representations and instead embed indigenous musical traditions as integral components of the music curriculum. By formalizing their presence within educational standards, the state affirms the legitimacy and value of minority cultures, thereby encouraging schools to allocate time, resources, and pedagogical attention to these traditions. Complementary to curricular mandates is the need for substantial investment in teacher training. The successful integration of Qiang music into classrooms hinges on the preparedness and cultural competence of educators. Teacher development programs should include modules on ethnomusicology, minority languages, and culturally sustaining pedagogy, ideally supported by immersive experiences within Qiang communities. Partnerships between normal universities, local education departments, and community elders can facilitate mentorship models, wherein Qiang musicians and cultural experts guide teachers in the respectful and accurate transmission of musical knowledge. These training efforts not only enhance teacher confidence and capability but also prevent cultural misrepresentation.

Equally important is the development of high-quality, multilingual, and multimedia educational resources. Currently, Qiang music exists in fragmented oral forms or academic archives, inaccessible to most educators and students. There is a pressing need for the creation and dissemination of classroom-ready materials including songbooks, notated scores, video tutorials, and digital audio archives in both Mandarin and Qiang languages. These resources should be housed within a centralized, open-access national repository and made available to educators across diverse geographic and institutional contexts. Technology can play a transformative role in democratizing access to heritage content, particularly in under-resourced rural schools. Another crucial recommendation involves institutionalizing community-centered curriculum design. Educational policy must formally recognize and embed the role of Qiang cultural bearers such as elders, musicians, instrument makers, and storytellers within the curriculum development process. Rather than treating community knowledge as an extracurricular supplement, it should be positioned as a foundational element of learning. This participatory approach empowers communities, fosters student identity development, and increases cultural authenticity. Policies should establish mechanisms such as local advisory boards or school-community liaison roles that ensure ongoing collaboration between schools and Qiang stakeholders.

Finally, to ensure accountability and continuous improvement, education systems must implement robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. These mechanisms should go beyond standardized testing and instead incorporate culturally relevant indicators of success, such as student engagement

with cultural materials, identity development, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and teacher perceptions of efficacy. Evaluation tools could include ethnographic observations, student reflection portfolios, and community feedback loops. Such data would be invaluable in refining curricular content, adjusting teaching strategies, and shaping future policy directions. An effective policy response to the challenges of integrating Qiang children's music into education must be multi-dimensional. It requires top-down support in the form of curriculum mandates and funding, alongside bottom-up empowerment through community participation and localized teaching resources. These recommendations align with global best practices in indigenous education and, if implemented cohesively, can significantly advance cultural sustainability efforts for the Qiang and other minority groups in China.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The integration of Qiang children's music into school curricula represents a powerful strategy for sustaining intangible cultural heritage in the face of accelerating modernization, cultural homogenization, and generational disconnect. As this review has demonstrated, traditional music is more than an artistic form; it serves as a living archive of collective memory, social identity, and community cohesion. Its educational value lies not only in artistic skill development but in the cultivation of belonging, empathy, and historical consciousness among learners. Despite growing theoretical support for culturally sustaining pedagogies, empirical applications specific to Qiang musical traditions remain limited. Most existing studies explore theoretical frameworks or general cultural inclusion but stop short of engaging with the practical, day-to-day realities of integrating minority music into classrooms. This presents a significant gap in the literature and a fertile avenue for further research. Future studies should prioritize longitudinal research designs that assess the long-term impact of Qiang music integration on student learning, cultural identity formation, and community engagement. Such research should follow cohorts of students across grade levels to understand how sustained exposure to heritage music influences their perceptions of culture, diversity, and self-worth. Additionally, researchers should explore whether Qiang music education improves broader academic performance, classroom engagement, or social cohesion in ethnically diverse schools.

There is also a need for comparative studies that evaluate outcomes across different educational contexts urban versus rural, Han-majority versus Qiang-majority schools, and public versus private institutions. These comparisons can reveal how socio-cultural and institutional variables mediate the success of integration initiatives and can help identify scalable strategies that are adaptable to varying settings. Cross-regional comparisons within China, as well as international comparisons with countries that have implemented indigenous music education programs (e.g., Thailand, Australia, and South Africa), can further contextualize findings and contribute to a global dialogue on educational equity and cultural preservation. In addition, technological innovation represents a promising frontier for research. Investigating the design, implementation, and effectiveness of digital tools such as apps for learning Qiang songs, VR-based heritage experiences, or AI-driven music notation platforms can illuminate how technology might bridge generational and geographic divides. These tools not only facilitate access but also offer interactive, multisensory learning experiences that can be especially impactful for younger learners. Research in this area could explore usability, learning outcomes, and cultural appropriateness.

Equally important is the need for policy impact studies. Given that educational reform in China is often driven by central mandates, understanding how regional policies are interpreted and enacted at the school level is critical. Studies should examine the implementation fidelity of any new cultural curriculum mandates and assess how these policies influence teacher practice, resource allocation, and student experiences. Such research can inform policy refinements and contribute to evidence-based advocacy for minority cultural inclusion. In conclusion, this review offers an original contribution by synthesizing Qiang-specific scholarship with international perspectives on indigenous music education, and by framing children's music as a central mechanism for cultural sustainability. By positioning education as a site of cultural resilience rather than assimilation, the study advances broader discussions on inclusive education, cultural justice, and heritage preservation. Centering Qiang children's music within formal schooling not only supports the survival of a unique cultural tradition but also provides a model for sustaining minority cultures through responsive and equitable educational practice.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

Qiuyue Deng, Shahanum Md. Shah: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software. Qiuyue Deng, Shahanum Md. Shah: Data curation, Writing- Original draft preparation. Qiuyue Deng,: Visualization, Investigation. Qiuyue Deng,: Supervision. Qiuyue Deng,: Software, Validation. Qiuyue Deng, Shahanum Md. Shah: Writing- Reviewing and Editing.

AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

Data available on request from the authors.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI

The authors declare that no generative AI was used in the writing of the manuscript.

ETHIC STATEMENTS

Not applicable

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