

Cultural Relevance in Preschool Art Education and Children's Self-Confidence in Multiethnic Contexts: Implications for Kindergartens in Jilin Province

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Abstract: Preschool art education in multiethnic contexts raises questions about how cultural experiences enter curricula and whether children's expressions are understood and acknowledged. This article examines possible relationships between cultural relevance and self-confidence and considers implications for kindergartens in Jilin Province, China. Theoretical analysis and a question-oriented narrative review integrate culturally relevant pedagogy, funds of knowledge and identity, sociocultural theory, self-efficacy, and self-determination theory. Targeted retrieval from public scholarly platforms, publishers, research institutions, and government websites supported bibliographic verification. Research supports treating family and language experiences as learning resources and identifies opportunities for multimodal expression through the arts. It does not establish an independent, sustained causal effect on Jilin preschoolers' self-confidence. An interpretive framework connects recognition of experience, expression and choice, supported challenge and response, and situated confidence. Children's interpretive authority, teacher feedback, peer relationships, and accessible materials condition these processes. Ethnic labeling, staged cultural displays, and uniform aesthetic judgments may undermine them. Kindergartens can begin with children's lived experiences, organize open-ended creation, accommodate diverse languages and expressive forms, and develop voluntary family partnerships and formative assessment. Cultural relevance should inform everyday participation rather than festival decoration. The proposed relationships and recommendations require local investigation.

Keywords: preschool art education; cultural relevance; multiethnic contexts; children's self-confidence; funds of identity; Jilin Province

I. Introduction

Preschool art education concerns perception and creation, but also how children understand their place in a group. Drawing, music, movement, construction, and dramatic play enable children to represent experiences, express preferences, and encounter others' responses. In multiethnic contexts, these experiences may involve different family languages, caregiving practices, local environments, festive memories, and aesthetic habits. Examining art education and self-confidence therefore requires attention to which experiences curricula acknowledge, which expressions others understand, and whether children can participate and revise their work, alongside activity frequency and product quality.

Culturally relevant pedagogy connects learning with learners' lives, extending beyond the addition of ethnic symbols. Ladson-Billings (1995) connects cultural competence with educational success and critical consciousness, suggesting that recognition must inform teaching relationships and learning expectations. Applying this perspective to preschool requires considering children's ages, play, and expressive capabilities; school achievement indicators cannot simply be transferred. Similar caution applies to the arts: introducing cultural content does not automatically create positive psychological experiences, and providing activities cannot substitute for examining participation.

Jilin Provincial People's Government (2020) identifies Han, Korean, Manchu, Mongolian, Hui, and Xibe populations, among others, with geographical variation across the province. This makes Jilin an appropriate context for discussing culturally relevant preschool curricula, but does not establish existing kindergarten practices or any group's confidence levels. Ethnic identity, household language use, and children's experiences do not correspond automatically. Families sharing an ethnic identity may have different artistic experiences through urban or rural living, migration, and caregiving arrangements.

Discussions sometimes conflate cultural identification, belonging, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and confidence, or interpret enthusiasm as developmental improvement. Harter and Pike's (1984) distinction between perceived competence and social acceptance highlights the need to specify domains and relationships, while arts research emphasizes differences among activities, contexts, and outcomes (Holochwost et al., 2021). This article asks: What educational relationships constitute cultural relevance in preschool art? Through which processes might it support confidence, and under what constraints? How can these explanations inform adaptable curricula and assessment in Jilin? Its contribution connects recognition of cultural resources, expressive authority, and situated confidence while distinguishing theoretical inference from empirical

II. Literature Review

A. From cultural content to culturally relevant educational relationships

Cultural relevance is defined here as meaningful connections between children's experiences and the content, participation arrangements, and assessment of art activities, with opportunities for children to interpret and change those connections. It concerns whether experiences enter classrooms, expressions are understood, and children's interpretations influence activity. This is an analytical definition, not a validated measurement construct. Ethnic patterns, traditional music, and local stories may provide resources, but their inclusion alone does not establish cultural relevance.

Culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies overlap but have different emphases. Ladson-Billings (1995) addresses cultural competence and educational equity; Gay (2018) emphasizes cultural experiences and communication in teaching; Paris (2012) foregrounds sustaining linguistic and cultural diversity. Ladson-Billings (2014) also challenges static understandings of culture. Together, these perspectives encourage preschool educators to understand children's contemporary lives rather than prescribe expression through adult-defined ethnic styles. "Cultural relevance" organizes this article's inquiry without treating the three traditions as interchangeable.

Multiethnicity does not imply identical linguistic diversity in every classroom or an absence of cultural experiences among Han children. Dialects, urban and rural life, family work, and migration may also shape understandings of materials and stories. Cultural analysis must attend to group relationships and individual variation. Asking minority children to display traditional clothing while treating others' experiences as an unexplained norm can impose unequal representational responsibilities. All children should have experiences to contribute and the option not to explain themselves through ethnicity.

B. Defining children's self-confidence

Self-confidence refers here to positive expectations of being able to attempt, express, and address difficulties within particular activities and relationships. Choosing materials, proposing ideas, seeking help, explaining work, and trying again may offer observational clues, but do not directly reveal internal beliefs. Quiet children or those who prefer watching may evaluate themselves positively; frequent public speakers may depend on adult approval. Expressive style and confidence must therefore be considered separately.

Self-esteem concerns evaluations of personal worth, self-efficacy concerns capability for particular tasks, and belonging concerns relational acceptance. Bandura (1977) provides a basis for examining capability expectations through successful experiences, modeling, and feedback, without equating every positive classroom emotion with efficacy. Harter and Pike's (1984) pictorial measure assesses perceived competence and social acceptance rather than general self-concept. "I can do this," "others will listen," and "I have value" may relate without representing the same construct.

Reluctance to speak may reflect teachers' unfamiliarity with a home language, inaccessible activity cues, or public assessment practices. Attributing it to low confidence overlooks classroom constraints. Situated confidence is consequently the main analytical unit. Cultural identification and belonging are experiences that may shape participation; demonstrated skill is recorded separately. Their relationships are not assumed to follow a fixed sequence. Comparing ethnic groups using translated scale scores likewise requires examining item meanings and expressive conditions, not translation alone.

C. Funds of knowledge and identity within sociocultural perspectives

Moll et al. (1992) treat families' everyday knowledge and skills as educational resources, challenging deficit views. Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014) describe funds of identity as resources people actively use to understand and express themselves. The distinction matters: a family object that adults consider culturally important may not be something a child chooses for self-expression. A bus image, animal sound, or family game may reveal current experience more effectively than an assigned ethnic pattern.

Sociocultural theory understands language, images, tools, and interaction as mediators of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Rogoff (2003) locates development within participation in cultural activities, rather than adding culture to an otherwise uniform process. Art materials consequently carry social meanings: the same song or fabric can have different familiarity and relational memories for different children. Teachers need to understand why materials are used and how interpretations receive responses, alongside supplying resources.

Familiar content need not displace new artistic experiences. Cultural relevance can bridge existing rhythms, images, or stories and unfamiliar materials and forms. Comparing approaches with peers may expand participation. The question is whether new experiences preserve the legitimacy of existing expression or require children to abandon family experiences as evidence of learning. Cultural continuity and educational challenge

can coexist.

D. Capability expectations, psychological needs, and participation

Ryan and Deci (2020) connect motivation with support for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Here, autonomy concerns genuine choices, competence concerns challenges with accessible support, and relatedness concerns respectful responses. These needs offer theoretical connections to confidence without making motivation, need satisfaction, and confidence identical outcomes. Enjoyable activities may encourage continued attendance without changing expectations about unfamiliar tasks.

Lundy (2007) emphasizes that expressing views requires an audience and appropriate influence. Applied to art, this distinguishes invitations to display work from interpretive authority. A child's explanation may have little influence if a teacher immediately replaces it with a prescribed narrative. Cultural pedagogy helps explain which experiences are recognized; sociocultural perspectives explain how expression develops; efficacy and psychological needs illuminate experiences of participation. These are complementary explanations, not an empirically supported mediation pathway.

III. Method

Theoretical analysis and a narrative review were used to clarify concepts, compare evidential scope, and develop educational explanations rather than estimate an overall effect. Targeted retrieval and bibliographic verification were completed on 5 October 2026. Sources included public scholarly webpages, journal publishers, institutional repositories, public PubMed and ERIC records, and websites of China's Ministry of Education, Jilin Provincial People's Government, and international education organizations. Search leads concerned culturally relevant pedagogy, preschool art and belonging, funds of knowledge and identity, perceived competence, and socioemotional arts outcomes. Citation trails supported theoretical retrieval. Exhaustive searching of subscription databases is not claimed.

Priority was given to artistic expression, family and language experiences, and participation in ordinary preschool education. School-age cultural pedagogy, general motivation theory, and arts reviews informed concepts and boundaries. Clinical art therapy, adolescent self-esteem, and teacher efficacy cannot directly establish preschool children's confidence outcomes. Policies informed educational aims and local context, not intervention effectiveness. Sources were selected for relevance, verifiability, and the specific judgments they could support, irrespective of whether findings were positive.

Public full texts informed understanding of arguments and contexts where available. For abstract-only or institutional records, interpretation was restricted to explicitly reported designs and findings; unreported samples and analytical details were not reconstructed. Authors, dates, volumes, pages, and DOIs or official links were cross-checked. Synthesis distinguished research directly addressing preschool culture and art, adjacent reviews and theory, and normative policy materials. Table 1 compares representative sources' interpretive scope rather than providing comprehensive quality ratings.

SANRA's attention to research questions, search transparency, literature support, and reasoning informed reporting, without treating it as a mandatory education standard (Baethge et al., 2019). No unverifiable screening counts, independent coding agreement, or quality scores are reported. No Jilin kindergarten or child data were collected. The framework and classroom illustrations are theoretical synthesis and recommendations. Selective retrieval, language coverage, and restricted access to some full texts constrain conclusions.

IV. Themes and Findings

A. What current evidence supports and leaves unresolved

Research directly connecting culture, art, and preschool participation informs expressive opportunities. Ajodhia and Cohen Miller's (2024) integrative review examines arts-informed pedagogy, learning communities, and belonging among minoritized young children, identifying inclusive possibilities alongside sparse research. D'warte and Woodrow (2023) show how creative methods in Australian and Chilean early education projects make children's and families' knowledge and identity resources visible. These methods illustrate how experience enters educational relationships, but do not establish a causal effect of culturally relevant art curricula on children's confidence.

Drawing research also suggests interpreting meaning within activity processes. Papandreou (2014) examines drawing's thinking and communication functions socioculturally, supporting attention to images, language, and action together. Richer expression and communication nevertheless do not establish sustained confidence gains. Ruscoe et al.'s (2025) scoping review of funds of knowledge and school transition likewise identifies conceptual and implementation gaps. There are educational reasons to connect family experiences and curricula, but particular psychological outcomes require separate investigation.

Adjacent evidence further limits inference. Schneider and Rohmann (2021) show complexities across art

activities and competency outcomes; Rumble et al. (2026) identify a need for stronger evidence on ordinary visual arts participation and young children's socioemotional wellbeing. Neither establishes culturally relevant art effects in Jilin or justifies transferring therapeutic outcomes to ordinary classrooms. Table 1 distinguishes participation processes, general arts outcomes, and policy aims. A defensible synthesis is that art provides investigable expressive contexts and cultural resources may change participation conditions; confidence changes and their persistence cannot be inferred directly from those conditions.

Table 1: Representative sources: evidential scope and interpretive boundaries

Source	Type and focus	Supports attention to	Does not establish
Ajodhia and Cohen Miller (2024)	Integrative review: preschool art, inclusion, belonging	Cultural differences and participation spaces	Causal confidence changes in Jilin
D'warte and Woodrow (2023)	Creative methods in two countries' early education projects	Multimodal representation of family and identity resources	An independent art effect on confidence
Papandreou (2014)	Theory and drawing activity analysis	Drawing as mediation of thinking and communication	Lasting psychological gains across contexts
Rumble et al. (2026)	Scoping review: visual art and young children's wellbeing	Contextual differences and evidence gaps	General transfer of therapy findings to classrooms
Harter and Pike (1984)	Measurement of perceived competence and social acceptance	Distinct self-evaluation constructs and domains	A single behavior as overall confidence
MOE (2012, 2022); UNESCO (2024)	Development, process quality, and arts policies	Normative curriculum and participation aims	Demonstrated intervention effectiveness

Source: Authors' synthesis of the cited literature. This table compares interpretive scope, not research quality scores.

B. An interpretive framework from recognition to situated confidence

The proposed framework connects recognition of experience, expression and choice, supported challenge and response, and situated confidence. It describes possible educational processes without assuming identical steps for every child or empirical validation of each connection. Recognizing family experiences may help children understand that they have something worth contributing. Recognition should concern experiences they actually use and interpret, rather than presumed cultural attributes. It requires retaining children's accounts, not simply displaying corresponding patterns on a wall.

Experiences must then become opportunities to choose and change expression. Choosing representations of family life, revising an adult's story, or explaining images in a familiar language may position children as authors rather than recipients. When everyone copies the same artwork, even familiar themes can become prescribed answers. Cultural relevance consequently involves children's interpretations influencing works and activities, as well as familiar content. Expressive authority is the proposed connection between cultural resources and psychological experience, not a validated statistical mediator.

Expression also needs manageable challenge. Confidence should not depend solely on reduced expectations or indiscriminate praise. Addressing material connections, rhythmic coordination, or role negotiation with support may provide experiences of being able to try and find solutions. This is an educational inference from efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977), requiring correspondence with actual action. Teachers can describe changed strategies rather than attribute success to supposedly inherent ethnic artistic ability, and avoid completing decisive steps merely to prevent frustration.

Responses determine whether expression enters shared life. Clarifying questions, peers' attempts at a child's rhythm, or explanations influencing displays may communicate that contributions matter. Applause without understanding may instead reinforce dependence on approval. Participation requires listening, understanding, and appropriate influence beyond permission to speak (Lundy, 2007). Teachers can support explanation while respecting what children prefer not to disclose publicly.

Positive expectations must ultimately be examined across activities and relationships. Explaining work within a familiar group does not establish equal confidence in public performance or unfamiliar tasks. Relationships may also operate in reverse: already confident children may share more and receive more

responses; skilled children may obtain higher ratings of both cultural participation and confidence. The framework therefore retains reciprocal and alternative explanations rather than deriving stable development from one successful display.

C. Conditions under which cultural relevance may fail

Cultural relevance is not inherent in cultural display. First, ethnic labeling may restrict expression. Requiring Korean children to depict particular clothing or Manchu children to recount traditional stories turns historical resources into individual obligations. Unfamiliarity may then be misread as deficient cultural identification. Anti-bias education emphasizes respectful identities and equitable participation (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020). The corresponding recommendation is to recognize resources without making a child responsible for representing an entire group.

Second, staged displays may orient artworks toward adult judgment. Preparing visits, competitions, or festival performances can compress exploration, negotiation, and explanation to secure a polished result. Uniform performance cannot demonstrate greater confidence. Repeated corrections of clothing, movement, or accent may make participation about avoiding errors. Performance remains a possible activity, but participation arrangements, rehearsal feedback, and alternatives for children who withdraw require attention.

Third, uniform aesthetic and communication standards can obscure experience. Rewarding realism, neatness, and rapid answers may overlook abstract images, movement, or longer reflection. Multimodal expression does not remove learning expectations: it offers different access to observation, planning, material exploration, and explanation. Cultural responsiveness and developmental appropriateness should be considered together (Gay, 2018; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2020), avoiding interpretations of communication barriers as limited ability.

Fourth, cultural activities can amplify resource inequalities. Family time, digital access, and material costs shape contributions. Displaying mainly polished family-made products can marginalize oral accounts, memories, and everyday work. Relevance should increase the visibility of experience rather than the cost of presentation. Kindergartens can supply shared materials, accept children's accounts during activities, and normalize families' decisions not to submit items.

Finally, familiar resources may cause discomfort. Stories can involve separation, festivals are not celebrated by every family, and children may temporarily prefer silence. Teachers should adjust to responses and permit imagined stories or alternative themes. Recognition does not require public disclosure or adult decisions about what children ought to value. Children should be able to approach cultural resources and choose distance from them.

D. Principles for curriculum adaptation in Jilin

Regional variation makes a uniform list of ethnic art activities unlikely to serve every kindergarten. Classes in Yanbian and elsewhere may have different needs concerning family languages, community resources, and experiences; these should be established through inquiry rather than inferred from administrative location. Official ethnic distribution information can suggest backgrounds to explore, but cannot determine classroom tasks (Jilin Provincial People's Government, 2020). Implementation should begin with understanding the class before selecting resources.

The first principle is to begin with lived experience rather than representative cultural objects. Family sounds, environments, caregivers' stories, and everyday objects can connect with community arts and local culture. Traditional music, paper cutting, fabrics, and patterns are possibilities whose relevance requires children's explanations and family clarification. Unfamiliar resources should remain available, allowing new shared experiences through exploration of difference.

The second principle combines shared life with respect for difference. Children can address common themes using different materials and stories without fixed ethnic grouping. Shared themes enable comparison and questions, while multiple answers preserve variation. Children with limited ties to a tradition or multiple family identities also need ways to participate. Treating difference as a resource for dialogue can avoid separating the class into cultural presenters and spectators.

The third principle connects practice with Chinese preschool process-oriented guidance. The Guidelines for the Learning and Development of Children Aged 3–6 support artistic appreciation and expression, and kindergarten quality guidelines emphasize care and education processes (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China [MOE], 2012, 2022). UNESCO (2024) also includes cultural participation and diversity in its arts framework. These documents guide curricula rather than prove psychological effects. Jilin kindergartens can examine opportunities, adult-child responses, and appropriate resources instead of treating visible ethnic features as the sole quality criterion.

E. Adaptable art activities and family partnerships

The following illustrations are theory-informed proposals, not projects implemented or validated in Jilin. In “Sounds in Our Lives,” children might choose a caregiver’s humming, traffic, nature, or imagined sounds and represent them through images, movement, and simple rhythms. Children familiar with several languages can share words they choose; repetition, images, or family clarification can support peers’ understanding. Recording family conversations and contributing traditional songs are not required. Children’s choices and transformations provide specific ways for experience to enter creation.

Teachers can introduce artistic challenges: making quiet sounds audible, representing one rhythm through different materials, or connecting sounds into a story. Groups can negotiate sequences while retaining disagreement. Feedback concerns decisions, such as adjusting rhythm, trying another tool, or communicating an intention. Recognition, shared creation, and capability exploration can thus connect within an activity that retains the artistic value of investigating sounds and forms.

“Places I Know” offers another possibility. Children can draw homes, frequently visited places, or imagined spaces, or use collage and construction. Teachers may introduce voluntarily contributed object patterns or community images and ask whether children perceive connections with their work. Children can retain their own names when declining adult interpretations. Those with migration experiences can represent several places, avoiding a single location as their only possible belonging. Displays can include children’s chosen explanations and revisions rather than finished products alone.

Family partnerships should be reciprocal. Invitations can concern familiar games, sounds, and everyday making, with oral accounts, brief explanations, and conversations accepted as contributions. Families should choose content and disclosure boundaries and be able to decline a particular invitation. Teachers need to explain how contributions informed activities and invite correction of misunderstandings. Funds of knowledge research and recent synthesis support this direction (Moll et al., 1992; Ruscoe et al., 2025), while organization requires adjustment to kindergarten conditions.

Professional learning can address concrete interactions: When are children’s interpretations replaced? Who repeatedly has to display culture? Does feedback describe strategies or only judge products? Kindergarten-based discussions can compare plans, explanations, and revisions, identify participation barriers, and adjust materials and questions. Developmentally appropriate practice considers individuality and context (NAEYC, 2020). Cultural responsiveness therefore requires continuing understanding of children, beyond acquiring a repertoire of ethnic art knowledge.

F. Assessing participation conditions separately from confidence

Assessment should first examine opportunities: expressive choices, explanations, accessible materials, and responses to diverse languages and images. It can then document participation through proposals, changed strategies, help seeking, and renewed attempts. Capability expectations and situated confidence require a further, cautious interpretation. Separating these levels prevents assuming that a culturally labeled curriculum provides identical experiences to all children, or using engagement to define both curriculum quality and confidence outcomes.

Formative records can describe particular events: task demands, children’s actions, support, and subsequent attempts. Teachers should distinguish spontaneous from prompted behavior, and absent opportunities from demonstrated difficulties. Artworks, explanations, and records can complement one another, but bright colors cannot establish confidence, and reluctance to display work need not indicate negative self-evaluation. Assessment should improve support rather than rank children or construct ethnic ability comparisons.

Disagreement between children’s accounts and adult judgments also requires interpretation. Harter and Pike (1984) show that children’s and teachers’ judgments are not necessarily closely aligned. Claimed capability may express aspiration or positive expectation; lower teacher ratings may reflect language and classroom norms. Neither children’s reports nor adult ratings should be dismissed or treated as definitive. Images, short conversations, and behavioral clues must suit younger children’s understanding; naming an established scale does not demonstrate local measurement suitability.

Assessment should also retain contextual variation. A child active with familiar materials but hesitant with new tools may need demonstration rather than additional public praise. Independent creation alongside reluctance to share with a particular peer may concern relationships. Repeated records can help distinguish materials, tasks, and partners, but observed change cannot exclude maturation, family support, or other curricula. Everyday assessment and rigorous effectiveness research serve different purposes and cannot substitute for one another.

G. Contribution, limitations, and future research

The theoretical contribution locates the relevance–confidence relationship in how children’s

interpretations enter shared activity. Cultural content alone overlooks participation arrangements; praise alone overlooks expressive meaning; skill alone overlooks whether contributions are recognized. Integrating these concerns conceptualizes relevance as educational connections among experience, expression, and response, while confidence remains a separately investigated child experience. It also preserves artistic learning's value rather than reducing art to a tool for improving psychological indicators.

Theoretical transfer has limits. Some cultural pedagogy originates in United States school contexts; family knowledge and art projects come from other countries with different institutions, ages, and relationships. Similar problems do not establish equally effective practices. Jilin implications draw primarily on official context and theory, without kindergarten observations or child data. The article cannot describe provincial curriculum coverage, teacher cultural competence, or ethnic confidence differences. Public retrieval and narrative selection may also omit other languages and unpublished studies.

Research could first examine conceptual and item comprehension before investigating relationships. Surveys should distinguish culturally relevant practices, confidence, language experience, and prior artistic skill, avoiding "willingness to participate" as both cause and outcome. Teachers rating their own curricula and the same children may introduce common method bias; multiple information sources can help compare interpretations. Cross-sectional associations and statistical adjustment cannot establish temporal order or mediation. Analysis should also consider children's nesting within classes and kindergartens.

Process or longitudinal research could compare participation arrangements with similar materials, adult support, and activity time, examining responses to children's interpretations and expectations in new activities. Studies should specify confidence domains, implementation differences, and reciprocal explanations, and report non significant results and uncomfortable experiences. Cross-language or group comparisons require examination of measurement equivalence rather than treating ethnicity as a fixed cause of ability. Future collection of child information would require appropriate institutional authorization and respect for children's willingness to participate; these are recommendations, not procedures already undertaken for this article.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

Cultural relevance in multiethnic preschool art concerns how experiences enter activity, expression acquires interpretive space, and contributions receive responses. Cultural resources can provide entry points without independently guaranteeing confidence gains. The proposed connections among recognition, expression and choice, and supported challenge and response synthesize theory and literature. They emphasize situated confidence and retain reciprocal and alternative explanations rather than constitute a validated causal model.

Jilin kindergartens can begin with children's actual lives, connect families and shared learning through open-ended art, accommodate diverse expression, establish voluntary partnerships, and adjust support through process records. Teachers should avoid ethnic task assignments, uniform aesthetic judgments, and polished performances as evidence of development. Practice should first examine whether children can choose, explain, attempt, and be understood, while appropriate research tests sustained confidence changes. The value of culturally relevant art education needs to be established through particular educational relationships and conclusions proportionate to evidence.

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