

Chinese Qiqiao Songs as an Educational Tool for Literacy: Case Study of Ying Qiao Ge Song

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ABSTRACT

Qiqiao songs, originating from the Qiqiao Festival, celebrate the annual meeting of the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl and serve as vessels of cultural storytelling, rich in linguistic structures and moral teachings. The objective of this research is to explore the educational potential of Chinese Qiqiao songs as tools for literacy, with a specific focus on the “Ying Qiao Ge” song. The study took place in Jiangyao Village, Xihe County, Gansu Province, and used qualitative methods. It included semi-structured interviews with seven informants, including scholars, cultural inheritors, teachers, and community members, and field observations of Qiqiao festivals. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, revealing that the song’s musical characteristics and lyrical content significantly contribute to vocabulary acquisition and comprehension while fostering cultural appreciation. The results indicate that integrating Qiqiao songs into educational practices creates an engaging learning environment that respects students’ cultural identities. This research advocates for incorporating traditional songs in curricula to enrich literacy education and preserve cultural heritage. Suggestions for future research include exploring the long-term impacts of Qiqiao songs on literacy development across diverse educational contexts and enhancing educator training for effective integration.

Key words: Qiqiao Songs, Ying Qiao Ge, Literacy Education, Cultural Heritage, Qualitative Research

INTRODUCTION

With their rich cultural heritage and deep-rooted traditions, Chinese folk songs play a crucial role in the educational landscape, particularly in literacy development (Shi & Nicolas, 2023; Wu & Chuangprakhon, 2024). Qiqiao songs are unique among these folk songs, especially the well-known “Ying Qiao Ge.” Originating from the Qiqiao Festival, which celebrates the annual meeting of the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl, “Ying Qiao Ge” is not only a musical piece but also a vessel of cultural storytelling that encapsulates the values, traditions, and historical narratives of the Chinese people. As the world increasingly emphasizes the importance of culturally relevant educational tools, Qiqiao songs like “Ying Qiao Ge” emerge as potential resources for enhancing literacy and promoting cultural understanding among learners (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011).

Despite their potential, integrating traditional songs into educational practices still needs further exploration. Many educational systems overlook local cultural elements in favor of standardized curricula, resulting in a disconnect between students’ cultural backgrounds and learning experiences (Wang & Webb, 2024; Zhang et al., 2016). In the context of literacy, this presents a significant challenge. Traditional songs often contain rich linguistic structures, narrative forms, and moral teachings that can enhance language skills,

comprehension, and cultural literacy. However, the effectiveness of these songs as literacy education tools has not been systematically examined (Barton, 2018; Kumar et al., 2022; Nomlomo & Sosibo, 2016). This study seeks to bridge this gap by investigating how Qiqiao songs, mainly “Ying Qiao Ge,” can be utilized in educational settings to enhance literacy skills among learners.

The objective of this research is to explore the educational potential of Chinese Qiqiao songs as tools for literacy, with a specific focus on the “Ying Qiao Ge” song. By analyzing this song’s structure, themes, and educational implications, the study aims to uncover its effectiveness in fostering literacy skills, such as reading, writing, and comprehension. This exploration will involve qualitative methods, including interviews with educators, practitioners, and community members and analyses of the song’s lyrics and performances. The insights gained from this research could contribute to the broader understanding of how integrating traditional cultural elements into literacy education can promote a more inclusive and engaging learning environment (Barry & Durham, 2017; Jang, 2020; Minor, 2023; Tezera & Bekele, 2021; Zhu & Sornyai, 2024).

The significance of this research extends beyond the confines of academic inquiry; it addresses the urgent need for educational practices that resonate with students’ cultural

identities. By demonstrating how “Ying Qiao Ge” can effectively enhance literacy, this study advocates for including traditional songs in educational curricula, thus enriching the learning experience. Additionally, as China continues to navigate the complexities of globalization and cultural exchange, preserving and promoting local traditions through education becomes increasingly vital. Ultimately, this research seeks to highlight the relevance of Qiqiao songs as cultural artifacts and valuable educational resources that can empower learners and foster a deeper appreciation of their heritage.

Research Question

- How can Chinese Qiqiao songs, particularly the ‘Ying Qiao Ge’ song, serve as educational tools for enhancing literacy among learners?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Integrating traditional music and folk songs into educational settings has been a topic of interest among researchers and educators seeking to enhance literacy among learners. Chinese Qiqiao songs, mainly the “Ying Qiao Ge,” offer a rich avenue for exploration due to their cultural significance and unique lyrical structures. This literature review discusses the theories surrounding the role of music in literacy education, the specific characteristics of Qiqiao songs that contribute to learning, and the pedagogical implications of utilizing these songs as educational tools.

The Role of Music in Literacy Education

Music is a powerful learning medium to enhance cognitive development, language acquisition, and emotional connections to learning materials. Like Qiqiao songs, folk songs encapsulate cultural narratives and linguistic richness, providing contextually relevant content that resonates with learners. The repetitive nature of song lyrics aids memorization and recall, while the melodic structure encourages phonetic awareness. The ceremonial and narrative elements of Qiqiao songs, like “Ying Qiao Ge,” engage learners emotionally, prompting them to explore underlying meanings and linguistic features. The rhythmic and melodic patterns in the song can help develop phonological awareness, a foundational skill for reading and writing. By using Qiqiao songs as part of a literacy curriculum, educators can create a multi-sensory learning environment that nurtures language skills while celebrating cultural identity (Alam & Mohanty, 2023; Cuadrado, 2019; Hallam, 2015).

Characteristics of Qiqiao Songs

Qiqiao songs are a popular form of literacy education due to their narrative structures, vivid imagery, and traditional values. For example, the “Ying Qiao Ge” song provides a rich narrative context for learners, enhancing comprehension skills and promoting critical thinking. The interactive nature of Qiqiao songs encourages collaboration and peer learning, fostering social skills and understanding of the song’s

meaning through collective interpretation. This aligns with constructivist learning theories, emphasizing active engagement and social interaction. The musicality of Qiqiao songs, with simple melodies and repetitive structures, also facilitates language learning. The predictable patterns in the lyrics make it easier for learners to grasp phonetic and grammatical structures, while the singable nature promotes enjoyment and motivation. As students become familiar with the song’s melody and lyrics, they gain confidence in their language skills, allowing them to engage more deeply with literacy activities (Ho, 2023; Zhang et al., 2023).

Pedagogical Implications

Incorporating Qiqiao songs into literacy education has significant pedagogical implications. Educators can use these songs to bridge cultural heritage and language learning, fostering an inclusive environment that respects and values students’ backgrounds. By integrating “Ying Qiao Ge” into the curriculum, teachers can develop lesson plans incorporating music, storytelling, and interactive activities, creating a dynamic learning experience that appeals to diverse learning styles. Furthermore, effectively training teachers to use Qiqiao songs is essential for maximizing their educational potential. Professional development programs can equip educators with the necessary skills to integrate music into literacy practices, promoting innovative teaching methods that inspire creativity and engagement. Collaboration between educators, community members, and cultural experts can also facilitate the development of resources highlighting the cultural significance of Qiqiao songs, ensuring that these traditional practices are preserved and celebrated within educational contexts (Babinski et al., 2018; Crawford, 2017; Fan & Chuangprakhon, 2024).

METHOD

The qualitative methodology used in this research involved a multi-faceted approach to gather comprehensive data regarding the role of Qiqiao songs in literacy education (Kuang & He, 2022; Liu & Choatchamrat, 2024; Liu & Chuangprakhon, 2024). The study sought to engage various stakeholders, including scholars, cultural inheritors, educators, and participants in Qiqiao festivals. The research aimed to gain insights into the transmission and educational value of the “Ying Qiao Ge” song through interviews and field observations. This qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of the cultural context, practices, and perceptions surrounding Qiqiao songs as tools for literacy.

Selection of Key Informants

Seven key informants were selected for this study, divided into four groups to provide diverse perspectives on the use and significance of Qiqiao songs in literacy education. The selection criteria ensured the informants were well-acquainted with Qiqiao songs and their cultural implications, contributing to a rich data set. The groups included as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of key informants selection

| Group | Criteria | Number |
|--------------------|--|--------|
| Scholar Informants | These experts had extensive knowledge of Qiqiao culture, history, and music. They were chosen based on their academic background and contributions to Qiqiao research. | 1 |
| Key Informants | Recognized inheritors of Qiqiao culture, they provided practical insights into the transmission and performance of Qiqiao songs, particularly the "Ying Qiao Ge" song. | 1 |
| General Informants | Individuals who had participated in Qiqiao festivals and ceremonies offered firsthand accounts of their experiences and the cultural significance of Qiqiao songs. | 3 |
| Casual Informants | Young girls who participated in Qiqiao activities provided perspectives on their understanding and engagement with the songs as educational tools. | 2 |

Data Collection Techniques

The data collection process involved several qualitative techniques to ensure comprehensive coverage of the topic.

Semi-structured interviews

Informants participated in semi-structured interviews, which allowed for open-ended questions and in-depth discussions. This format enabled the researcher to explore specific themes related to the educational aspects of Qiqiao songs while allowing informants to share personal insights and experiences. The interviews were conducted conversationally to foster a comfortable environment for participants.

Field observations

During Qiqiao festivals and ceremonies, observations were conducted to witness the performance and transmission of the "Ying Qiao Ge" song in its cultural context. These observations provided valuable insights into how the song was integrated into the festival activities and its impact on literacy education among participants.

Focus group discussions

Group discussions were held with young girls participating in Qiqiao activities to facilitate dialogue around their experiences with the "Ying Qiao Ge" song. This method allowed for collective insights and encouraged participants to reflect on the song's educational value in their learning processes.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis process involved several steps to ensure a thorough examination of the collected information.

Transcription of interviews and discussions

All interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy in capturing the informants' perspectives. This step facilitated a detailed review of the data for thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis

The transcribed data were analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying key themes related to the research objectives

and questions. This method allowed for the categorization of responses, highlighting common patterns and unique insights regarding the educational role of Qiqiao songs.

Triangulation

To enhance the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was employed by cross-referencing information gathered from interviews, field observations, and focus group discussions. This approach ensured that multiple perspectives were considered in concluding the role of Qiqiao songs in literacy education.

RESULTS

Examining the song's melody, rhythm, and structure reveals how these elements engage students and support their literacy development. Furthermore, a detailed analysis of the song's lyrics reveals how the themes and language promote vocabulary acquisition and comprehension skills. Finally, the research explores innovative strategies for integrating "Ying Qiao Ge" into literacy education practices, demonstrating its potential as a multifaceted tool for fostering a deeper understanding of literacy concepts in the classroom.

Musical Characteristics and Their Contribution to Literacy Development


The "Ying Qiao Ge" song, a ceremonial piece rich in cultural significance, serves as a means of ritual expression and an effective tool for enhancing literacy among learners. This section delves into the musical characteristics of "Ying Qiao Ge," including its melody, rhythm, and structural components, and how these elements facilitate literacy development through increased engagement and retention in educational settings.

The formal structure of "Ying Qiao Ge" is crucial in understanding its role as a literacy tool. The song is organized into three distinct phrases, each containing subphrases contributing to its overall narrative and musicality. According to Figure 1, the song follows a one-part form comprising three words, with each phrase further divided into two subphrases. This structured approach not only aids learners in memorizing the music but also fosters their understanding of musical composition and lyrical storytelling. Repeating musical patterns helps reinforce memory retention, which is essential for literacy development.


迎 巧 歌
Ying Qiao Ge

Transcription by: Xiao Qian

Phrase 1



Phrase 2



Phrase 3




Figure 1. The song is “Ying Qiao G.”

The pitch progression in “Ying Qiao Ge” is another significant aspect that contributes to its educational efficacy. For instance, Phrase 1, depicted in Figure 2, spans a range from C to B \flat (minor 7th) and is characterized by a smooth, flowing melody resembling storytelling’s contours. This melodic contour, featuring ascending and descending intervals, creates a pleasing auditory experience that captures learners’ attention. As discussed in the interviews, many participants noted that the melody’s simplicity allows them to engage more deeply with the lyrics, enhancing their comprehension and vocabulary. The tempo of *Larghetto* ($\text{♩}=52-60$) sets a calm and reflective mood, encouraging learners to focus on the song’s message rather than merely memorizing the notes.

The second phrase of “Ying Qiao Ge,” as shown in Figure 3, introduces a range from D to B \flat (minor 6th) and employs wavy melodic lines that further engage listeners. This upward and downward movement mimics natural speech patterns, making it easier for learners to relate the music to spoken language. The interview insights revealed that this characteristic not only aids in vocalization but also encourages learners to connect the melody with the meaning of the lyrics. The fluidity of the melody allows for a seamless integration of musical and literacy skills, reinforcing vocabulary acquisition and comprehension.

In Phase 3, shown in Figure 4, the melody descends from F to G, which emphasizes the ceremonial aspect of the song. The consistent melodic structure throughout the phrases fosters a sense of familiarity and predictability, essential elements in literacy education. As learners become more

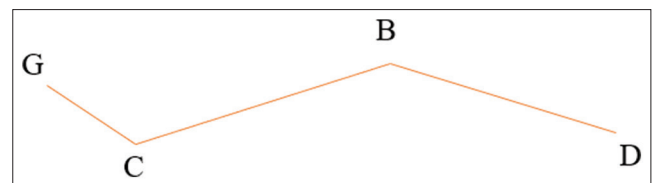


Figure 2. The melodic contour of Phrase 1

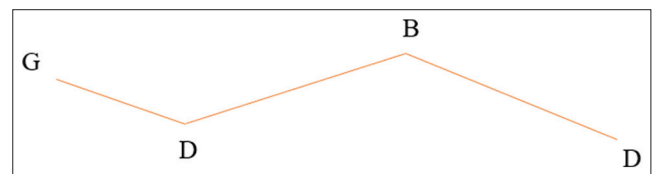


Figure 3. The melodic contour of Phrase 2

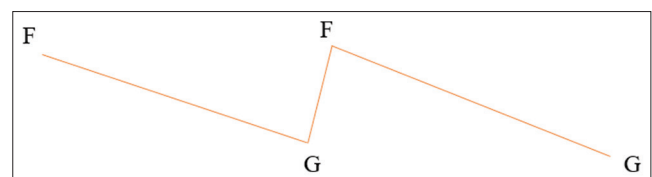


Figure 4. The melodic contour of Phrase 3

comfortable with the song’s progression, they are more likely to engage with the lyrics and understand their significance. The rhythmic patterns of “Ying Qiao Ge,” characterized by a slow and stable rhythm, contribute to this predictability, allowing learners to internalize the song’s structure and themes effectively.

Lyric Analysis: Enhancing Vocabulary and Comprehension

This section focuses on the lyrics of the “Ying Qiao Ge” song, exploring how its themes and language contribute to vocabulary acquisition, comprehension skills, and overall literacy enhancement among learners. The song’s lyrical content is rich in imagery and cultural references, making it a valuable resource for teaching literacy. By analyzing the lyrics, educators can identify specific vocabulary and themes that promote student engagement and understanding.

The lyrics of “Ying Qiao Ge” convey profound meanings related to cultural rituals and the reverence for the Weaver Girl, Queen Qiao. As shown in Table 2, the song’s structure consists of three phrases, each containing subphrases that encapsulate significant themes. For instance, the opening lines introduce the concept of welcoming Queen Qiao, symbolizing the transition from the divine to the earthly realm. This theme can be leveraged in the classroom to discuss cultural narratives, thus enhancing students’ comprehension of context while broadening their vocabulary. The words used in the lyrics, such as “Heavenly Gate” and “embroidered shoes,” are rich vocabulary entries that students can explore in greater depth.

Furthermore, the rhyme and rhythm in the lyrics enhance memorization and retention, which are crucial components of literacy development. The lyrical structure makes the song engaging and aids in phonetic awareness. As students practice singing “Ying Qiao Ge,” they are exposed to repetitive patterns and sounds that reinforce their language understanding. The interview with educators revealed that this repetition helps students internalize vocabulary more effectively. For example, many teachers noted that students often recalled specific phrases from the song, demonstrating

how combining musical and lyrical elements can enhance literacy.

The relationship between the lyrics and melody, as shown in Figure 5, further emphasizes the importance of lyrical analysis in literacy education. The melody serves as a mnemonic device, aiding in the retention of words and phrases. Educators can create activities encouraging students to connect specific lyrics with their meanings, promoting deeper comprehension. For example, discussions around the lines of Queen Qiao teaching needlework can lead to conversations about traditional crafts, thereby expanding students’ knowledge and vocabulary in cultural and practical contexts.

Integrating the Musical into Literacy Education Practices

This section discusses practical strategies for incorporating the musical characteristics of the “Ying Qiao Ge” song into literacy education, highlighting innovative approaches that utilize music to foster a deeper understanding of literacy concepts in the classroom. Integrating music into literacy education enhances engagement and supports the development of essential skills such as vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, and critical thinking.

One effective strategy for utilizing “Ying Qiao Ge” in the classroom involves creating interactive learning experiences that combine music with language activities. For instance, teachers can organize singing sessions where students practice the song’s lyrics while simultaneously discussing the cultural significance and themes presented in the lyrics. This approach encourages students to connect with the material personally, fostering a deeper appreciation for the content. Interviews with educators reveal that students often express

Table 2. The lyrics content of “Ying Qiao Ge”

| Phrase | Sub Phrase | Lyric | Meaning of the Lyric | Word Count |
|--------|--------------|--|--|------------|
| 1 | Sub phrase 1 | Qi yue chu yi tian men kai | On the first day of July, the Heavenly Gate opens, and I invite Queen Qiao to descend to earth | 15 |
| | Sub phrase 2 | Wo qing qiao niang niang xia fan lai | | |
| 2 | Sub phrase 3 | Qiang niang niang chuan de xiu hua xie | The embroidered shoes worn by Queen Qiao walked down the Tianhe River | 15 |
| | Sub phrase 4 | Tian he bian Shang Zou Xia Lai | | |
| 3 | Sub phrase 5 | Qiang niang niang xia fan lai | Queen Qiao came down to earth and taught me needlework | 13 |
| | Sub phrase 6 | Gei wo jiao zhen jiao xian lai. | | |

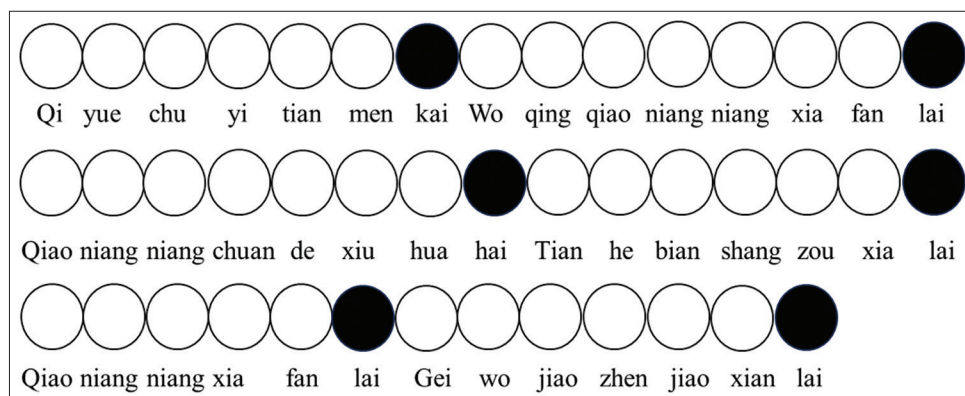


Figure 5. The relationship between lyric and melody



Figure 6. The transmitter is vividly explaining the culture of Qiqiao to the girls in Jiangyao Village, Xihe Jiangxi Town
Source: Qian Xiao, from fieldwork in March 2024

enthusiasm during these sessions, as combining music and cultural storytelling creates a lively and interactive learning environment (Figure 6).

Another strategy involves using the melody and rhythm of “Ying Qiao Ge” to enhance phonemic awareness and vocabulary skills. Teachers can design activities where students clap or tap the song’s rhythm while identifying different vocabulary words within the lyrics. This kinesthetic approach not only aids retention but also reinforces the connection between sound and meaning. Figures such as 6, which depict students engaging in musical activities, illustrate the dynamic learning atmosphere that can be achieved through these methods. Students are more likely to engage with the text and its vocabulary in these settings, improving their literacy skills.

Additionally, integrating the “Ying Qiao Ge” song into cross-disciplinary projects can enrich the educational experience further. For example, students could be encouraged to create lyrics inspired by the song’s themes, drawing on personal experiences or local culture. This creative expression allows students to practice writing skills while fostering critical thinking and comprehension. By sharing their creations with peers, they practice their literacy skills and develop public speaking and presentation abilities.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research findings highlight the significant role of Qiqiao songs, mainly “Ying Qiao Ge,” in enhancing literacy among learners, aligning with existing literature that emphasizes integrating cultural elements in educational practices. The potential of traditional songs as tools for literacy development is consistent with theories surrounding culturally relevant pedagogy, which advocate for including students’ cultural backgrounds in learning processes (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). By utilizing Qiqiao songs, educators can create a bridge between cultural heritage and literacy education, fostering a more inclusive and engaging learning environment.

The analysis of the musical characteristics of “Ying Qiao Ge” revealed that its structured phrases and predictable

melodic patterns enhance learners’ engagement and retention, supporting findings from other studies that demonstrate the positive impact of music on cognitive development and language acquisition (Alam & Mohanty, 2023; Hallam, 2015). The results indicate that the song’s repetitive lyrics facilitate phonetic awareness and vocabulary acquisition, echoing previous research highlighting the benefits of rhythmic and rhyming elements in improving language skills (Kumar et al., 2022; Nomlomo & Sosibo, 2016).

Furthermore, the study’s qualitative approach, which involved interviews and field observations, provided a rich context for understanding the educational value of “Ying Qiao Ge.” Engaging with various stakeholders, including scholars, cultural inheritors, and community participants, allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the song’s role in literacy education. This multi-faceted methodology aligns with best practices in qualitative research, as emphasized by Kuang and He (2022) and Liu and Choatchamrat (2024), who advocate for diverse data sources to enhance the credibility and depth of findings.

The thematic analysis revealed that integrating Qiqiao songs into literacy curricula promotes vocabulary and comprehension skills and fosters cultural appreciation among students. This aligns with constructivist learning theories, which underscore the importance of active engagement and social interaction in learning (Ho, 2023). By discussing the cultural significance of the song and its themes, educators can create a dynamic learning experience that resonates with students’ identities and experiences.

The study demonstrates that Chinese Qiqiao songs, mainly “Ying Qiao Ge,” are practical educational tools for enhancing literacy among learners. Integrating traditional music into literacy education aligns with theoretical principles of culturally relevant pedagogy and constructivist learning theories, emphasizing the importance of cultural context in fostering language skills. By leveraging the musical and lyrical characteristics of Qiqiao songs, educators can create engaging learning environments that promote vocabulary acquisition, comprehension, and critical thinking.

Given the positive outcomes observed in this research, educational systems must consider incorporating traditional songs into their curricula. This approach enhances literacy skills and helps preserve and promote cultural heritage, particularly in a rapidly globalizing world. The findings highlight that the emotional engagement and cultural storytelling inherent in Qiqiao songs can significantly enrich students’ educational experiences.

While this study contributes valuable insights into the educational potential of Qiqiao songs, further research is necessary to explore their long-term impacts on literacy development across diverse educational contexts. Future studies could investigate the effectiveness of Qiqiao songs in different age groups and academic settings, including urban and rural schools. Additionally, comparative studies between Qiqiao songs and other forms of traditional music in literacy education could provide a broader understanding of how cultural elements can enhance learning outcomes.

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