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INTEGRATING LOCAL CULTURE INTO EOP COURSES: PERCEPTIONS OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION MAJORS IN A CHINESE VOCATIONAL COLLEGE

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Abstract:

As higher education institutions increasingly prioritise English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) to enhance internationalisation and equip students for specific professional roles, ensuring curriculum alignment with students' career needs becomes paramount. For preschool education major students, this necessitates mastering English proficiency tailored to kindergarten bilingual teaching contexts. Despite growing emphasis on EOP in higher education, limited research has examined how local cultural integration within hybrid project-based learning (HPBL) frameworks can enhance communicative competence among preschool education majors. This study employs needs analysis to investigate how integrating local culture within a hybrid project-based learning (HPBL) framework can address identified learner needs and enhance communicative competence. The study begins with a needs analysis to identify the specific linguistic, social, and cultural challenges learners face in real-world communication. Based on these findings, the pedagogical approach is developed by embedding culturally relevant content into project tasks, thereby increasing learner engagement and contextual relevance. These tasks are delivered through a hybrid project-based learning model, which combines face-to-face interaction with digital collaboration to create a flexible and supportive learning environment. Through this process, learners are guided to complete projects that require meaningful communication and cultural reflection. A qualitative needs analysis was conducted using open-ended questionnaires administered to 20 second-year preschool education majors. Data was analysed using inductive thematic analysis. Findings reveal strong learner support for integrating local folklore, classroom discourse practices, and culturally grounded teaching materials.

However, existing curricula remain predominantly exam-oriented and linguistically focused, with minimal contextualisation to kindergarten teaching scenarios. The study contributes to EOP curriculum design by proposing a culturally responsive HPBL model that aligns vocational language training with localised pedagogical realities.

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Keyword:

Communicative Competence, English for Occupational Purposes, Hybrid Project-Based Learning



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Introduction

Globalisation has intensified demands for workplace English proficiency, particularly in Guangxi, a pivotal Belt and Road region connecting to Southeast Asia where communicative competence proves crucial. English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) addresses this need by teaching vocationally relevant language skills. However, traditional English teaching methods often fall short of meeting practical workplace communication requirements, notably in developing authentic communicative abilities (Xue et al., 2022). Consequently, Hybrid Project-Based Learning (HPBL) has garnered attention as an innovative pedagogical approach. Integrating face-to-face instruction with digital learning environments, HPBL combines the practicality of project-based learning with the flexibility of blended teaching, offering students immersive learning experiences closely aligned with professional objectives.

HPBL enhances student engagement and key competencies through collaborative projects simulating workplace scenarios (Chua & Islam, 2021). Integrating local cultural themes, such as traditional festivals or folklore, which could further boost learning motivation, participation, and linguistic confidence, bridging the gap between classroom learning and real-world communication (Alamri, 2025). Vygotsky's (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978) sociocultural theory emphasises that language acquisition should occur within meaningful, culturally relevant contexts. In culturally diverse Guangxi, developing EOP modules incorporating local cultural elements not only enhances curriculum relevance but also empowers students to articulate indigenous traditions in English. Guangxi possesses rich ethnic cultural resources, including 11 minority groups that have developed unique cultural traditions over the centuries. As a vehicle for culture, language teaching should be integrated with local cultural characteristics to construct a regionally distinctive vocational English teaching system.

Problem Statement

This study conducted a needs analysis of EOP course at higher vocational institutions in Guangxi. EOP instruction at higher vocational institutions in Guangxi is confronted with three critical problems that impact its overall effectiveness. Firstly, students limited English communication skills hinder effective expression and comprehension in authentic contexts, thereby impeding achievement of course objectives. Secondly, students lack awareness of English's practical application in local sociocultural contexts, hindering the effective integration of language proficiency with regional contexts. Finally, current teaching methods lack strategies to stimulate students' enthusiasm and confidence in using English within professional contexts, thereby undermining the effectiveness of EOP instruction.

Research Objectives and Research Questions

This study grounded in needs analysis theory, aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the authentic demands and learning challenges faced by early childhood education students in locally integrated EOP programmes. Specific research objectives are as follows:

RO1: To reveal learners' specific needs and expectations regarding the integration of local culture within EOP courses.

RO2: To investigate the learning difficulties and challenges learners encounter when expressing local culture in English within the HPBL teaching model.

To guide the investigation and fulfill the research aims, the following questions are posed:

RQ1: What specific needs and expectations do learners have regarding the integration of local culture in EOP courses?

RQ2: What learning difficulties and challenges do learners encounter in expressing local culture within the HPBL teaching model?

Research Gap

Existing EOP needs analyses predominantly focus on general professional domains, such as business and tourism, and lack specific analyses of local cultural needs for Guangxi's higher vocational preschool education major English Course. Even fewer studies address the communicative difficulties students encounter in the workplace. This research fills this gap through qualitative needs analysis, providing theoretical support and practical pathways for locally distinctive vocational English teaching.

Literature Review

EOP Needs Analysis Theory

English for occupational purposes (EOP) refers to the specific ways English is used in different work and professional situations. It refers both to how English is used in workplace settings and to the teaching of courses that aim to prepare learners to communicate in English in occupational settings (Koester, 2012).

Needs analysis forms the foundation of EOP course design, aiming to identify learner challenges and propose intervention strategies (Hosshan et al., 2024). Anglin (1995) noted that needs assessment constitutes a critical starting point for instructional design. By systematically

collecting learner needs data, educators can diagnose root causes and formulate targeted solutions (Rifiyanti & Dewi, 2022). Zhang et al. (2024) further emphasized that needs analysis serves both as a guiding tool for instructional design and as a vital basis for evaluating teaching effectiveness.

Language Requirements in Preschool Education Majors

Within China's Preschool education sector, the rise of bilingual education has elevated demands on teachers' English proficiency. Educators must be able to narrate Chinese cultural stories in English to foster cross-cultural understanding (Wang, 2016). However, vocational students generally possess weak foundational English skills and lack oral practice in authentic contexts (Gong et al., 2020). Compounded by factors such as large class sizes and limited resources, these constraints hinder the development of language proficiency. Consequently, English courses tailored to the occupational needs of preschool education students must be designed.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing open-ended questionnaires to collect data. The aim is to gain an in-depth understanding of students' perceptions and experiences of integrating local culture into EOP courses. Qualitative research emphasizes the understanding and interpretation of phenomena, making it suitable for exploring learners' authentic feelings and needs within specific cultural contexts (Le, 2024).

Research Participants and Sampling

The population for the open-ended needs analysis questionnaire comprises all second-year students majoring in preschool education at a preschool education college in Guangxi, which is called Guangxi College for Preschool Education, totaling approximately 650 students. The total number of students majoring in preschool education at this college is 2,000, but this study focuses on the second-year cohort. This cohort has completed at least one university-level English course and undertaken systematic foundational studies in preschool education, enabling them to articulate their requirements for integrating local culture into English teaching modules with clarity, grounded in professional knowledge and English learning experience. First-year students lack sufficient professional understanding, while third-year students have commenced their internship phase, both of which show low alignment with the research objectives of this stage (Zana et al., 2024).

During the qualitative data collection of the research, this study employed purposive sampling. This method selects participants who can provide the most valuable information for the research, based on the researcher's professional judgement, thereby significantly enhancing the credibility and effectiveness of qualitative research (Campbell, 2020). The sample size is determined by data saturation (Wutich et al., 2024).

The sample for the open-ended questionnaire comprises 20 second-year students majoring in preschool education, selected from the aforementioned cohort of 650 second-year students via purposive sampling, representing a sampling ratio of approximately 3.08 per cent. This sample size aligns with the recommended range of 15-25 participants for qualitative needs research in education proposed by Wutich et al. (2024), which can not only comprehensively capture the diverse needs of students from different backgrounds but also ensure the depth and efficiency

of subsequent thematic coding analysis. The sample includes 8 Zhuang ethnic group students and 12 students from other ethnic groups, as well as all students with kindergarten internship experience.

The 20 participants were second-year preschool education majors at a Guangxi college specialising in preschool education, selected based on three criteria: firstly, all participants were second-year students majoring in preschool education, having completed one semester of professional English courses and foundational preschool education modules. They possessed a clear understanding of core teaching scenarios in preschool education and the professional foundation required to complete the questionnaire. Secondly, each participant had engaged in Guangxi local cultural practice activities organised by the college, enabling them to provide targeted feedback on the local cultural integration component of the module. Lastly, their English proficiency reached Band B level, which aligned with the average English level of second-year preschool students, ensuring they could accurately comprehend and complete the questionnaire.

Research Instrument

As defined by the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Lea et al., 2010), a questionnaire is a written collection of inquiries designed to gather perspectives from multiple respondents, a tool widely adopted in qualitative survey research for eliciting subjective reflections. In this study, the qualitative open-ended questionnaire served as the data collection instrument, developed based on a review of local cultural integration and EOP communicative competence for preschool education majors. The questionnaire covered the following five dimensions: (1) Student satisfaction with the current EOP course. (2) Views on local cultural integration. (3) Acceptance of the HPBL model. (4) Self-assessment of communicative competence. (5) Expectations and suggestions regarding future professional English usage. The questionnaire was drafted bilingually in Chinese and English to ensure full comprehension. Each student completed written responses within approximately 30 minutes. Following the collection, all replies were coded and analyzed thematically.

To ensure that the replies from respondents align with the researcher's aims, while remaining unbiased towards the study, leading questions that reveal the researcher's bias were avoided (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). This study formulates open-ended questions according to the types suggested by Patton (2014). This study uses two types of open-ended questions to formulate the eight interview questions: (1) experience and behaviour questions; (2) opinion and value questions.

Experience And Behaviour Questions

1. What difficulties did you encounter when introducing Guangxi local culture in English during simulated teaching practice?
2. What methods did you actually employ to express Guangxi local culture in English during class practice?
3. What is your perception of the applicability of hybrid project-based learning during class, and why?

Opinion And Value Questions

1. Do you believe teachers must integrate Guangxi local culture into preschool English courses? Why or why not?
2. Can the current preschool English syllabus and textbooks meet your learning needs for expressing Guangxi local culture in English? If yes, please elaborate on the aspects; if no, what supplementary support do you need?
3. Is it necessary to establish a specialised English teaching module centred on Guangxi local culture for preschool education majors? If yes, what local cultural elements would you hope to access within the teaching module? If no, please provide your reasons.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a crucial phase in qualitative research, as it lays the foundation for a thorough understanding of the findings and the information gathered (Eissa & Elsayed, 2022). The data collected from open-ended questionnaires were analyzed using thematic analysis. A systematic analysis was conducted on the open-ended questionnaire data from 20 preschool education students. Braun and Clarke (2006) six steps of reflexive thematic analysis were guided the process of identifying patterns and themes within the qualitative data. The steps begin with familiarisation, generating initial codes, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and lastly, writing up (Byrne, 2022).

Through repeated reading and coding of questionnaire responses, four core themes were identified. Three or four sub-themes were further discerned under each theme, comprehensively presenting students' perceptions, needs, and challenges regarding the integration of local culture into their professional English learning.

Findings and Discussions

The responses from 20 student questionnaires were carefully reviewed and categorized into distinct themes. Four key themes were identified from the collected data (see table1): (a) Learning difficulties; (b) Teaching requirements; (c) Cultural values; (d) Module content. As shown in the following thematic analysis:

Basic Information of Respondents

20 students participated in the survey, all of which are second-year students majoring in preschool education, majoring students at Guangxi College for Preschool Education. The cohort comprised 18 females and 2 males, aged 19-22. All students hailed from Guangxi, with local cultural backgrounds; the ethnic distribution was 8 Zhuang, and 12 other ethnic groups. The students' English proficiency levels ranged from beginner to intermediate. While some possessed foundational knowledge of local ethnic minority cultures, systematic understanding was generally lacking.

Thematic Analysis

Through meticulous reading and coding of all 20 questionnaires, the following four core themes and their sub-themes were identified:

Table 1: Learners' Open-ended Questionnaire Themes and Sub-themes

No.	Main Themes	Sub-themes
Theme 1	Learning Difficulties	Vocabulary expression difficulties, grammatical organisation difficulties, and a lack of cultural knowledge
Theme 2	Teaching Requirements	Output-oriented activity requirements, teaching resource requirements, and classroom atmosphere requirements
Theme 3	Cultural Values	Motivation Enhancement, Cultural Confidence Building, Professional Identity Development
Theme 4	Module Content	Folk Culture, Culinary Traditions, Interactive Activities, Intangible Cultural Heritage Elements

Theme One: Learning Difficulties

Students encounter multiple difficulties when expressing Guangxi's local culture in English, primarily manifesting across three dimensions: vocabulary, grammar, and cultural knowledge.

Vocabulary Expression Difficulties

Fifteen students (75%) noted the absence of direct English equivalents for cultural proper nouns, necessitating explanatory language for translation and increasing expressive difficulty. Students reported that many local cultural concepts lack direct English equivalents, resulting in verbose, imprecise expressions. These examples demonstrate that lexical gaps constitute the primary obstacle to students' cultural expression. They require learning translation strategies for culturally loaded terms, such as transliteration with explanation or analogy.

Table 2 Vocabulary Expression Difficulties

Sub-theme One: Vocabulary Expression Difficulties	
Participants	Responses
P3	<i>Terms like 老友粉“laoyou noodles” or 壮锦“Zhuang brocade” have no direct English equivalents. Every time I introduce them, I have to explain at length that “it is a type of rice noodle made with fermented bamboo shoots and fermented black beans” or “it is a traditional Zhuang textile”. It is bothersome, and I worry people will not understand.</i>
P8	<i>For the 三月三 Sanyuesan Festival, I looked up dictionary and found “March 3rd Festival or Sanyuesan Festival”, but foreigners still did not grasp what the festival was about. I had to add that it is a day for Zhuang folk song singing.</i>
P14	<i>When introducing 刘三姐 Liu Sanjie, I did not know how to translate '歌仙' (song fairy). Saying 'Fairy Singer' directly risked misunderstanding, so I ended up describing her as 'a famous singer in Zhuang legend</i>

Grammatical Organisation Difficulties

Twelve students (60%) reported significant weaknesses in sentence construction and grammatical application, struggling to form accurate, complete English expressions. Though possessing some vocabulary, their output often featured disordered word order and tense errors. Grammatical difficulties reveal students' lack of systematic sentence pattern training and output practice; mere knowledge transfer fails to translate into fluent expression.

Table 3 Grammatical Organization Difficulties

Sub-theme Two: Grammatical Organisation Difficulties	
Participants	Responses
P7	<i>I have memorised many words, but when it comes to forming complete sentences, I get stuck. I always get the grammar wrong with mixing tenses, confusing singular and plural forms.</i>
P11	<i>When writing essays, I intended to express “the Zhuang people engage in singing contests on March 3”, but it came out as “Zhuang people in March 3 singing”. Even I knew it was incorrect.</i>
P18	<i>My spoken expression is even worse. I often spout individual words without forming coherent sentences, which foreigners might not understand.</i>

Cultural Knowledge Deficiencies

10 students (50%) admitted to insufficient depth in understanding local culture, particularly the intangible cultural heritage of ethnic minorities, and to a lack of foundational cultural knowledge. This results in hollow content when expressing themselves in English, failing to convey cultural depth. This cultural knowledge gap not only limits the depth of linguistic expression but also undermines students' capacity as cultural communicators. This underscores that language teaching must be integrated with cultural education, which students must first “understand the culture” before they can “transmit the culture”.

Table 4 Cultural Knowledge Deficiencies

Sub-theme Three: Cultural knowledge Deficiencies	
Participants	Responses
P5	<i>I know little about Zhuang culture beyond superficial aspects like their clothing and cuisine. When it comes to deeper meanings, such as the symbolism of bronze drums, I am rather unclear.</i>
P12	<i>Our understanding of local culture is not deep enough either. Take intangible cultural heritage projects of some ethnic minorities . I am not very clear on them myself, let alone explaining them in English.</i>
P19	<i>The teacher asked us to introduce a local traditional festival. I wanted to talk about the Muolao Festival, but I did not know its origins or customs myself, so I had to choose a simpler one.</i>

Theme Two: Teaching Requirements

Students expressed clear expectations regarding teaching methods, seeking to enhance learning outcomes through output-oriented activities, supplementary resources, and a supportive classroom environment.

Demand for Output-Oriented Activities

Eighteen students (90%) strongly advocated increased cultural presentations, role-play simulations, and group performances to practise oral expression in authentic contexts. They deemed practical activities more effective than passive lectures. Students particularly emphasised that activities should relate to future careers, such as simulating English teaching sessions in kindergartens, which directly prepare them for employment.

Table 5 Demand for Output-Oriented Activities

Sub-theme One: Demand for Output-Oriented Activities	
Participants	Responses
P8	<i>We would like more simulated scenarios in class, like playing tour guides showing foreign visitors around Guangxi, or acting as nursery teachers telling Guangxi stories to children in English. That makes learning more engaging and helps us remember.</i>
P11	<i>We could perform short plays in English, like reenacting the Legend of Liu Sanjie. This would help us learn the language, understand the culture, and be great fun.</i>
P16	<i>Cultural presentations are excellent. Each person selects a Guangxi cultural topic, prepares a PowerPoint, and delivers it to the class. This hones oral skills while facilitating mutual learning.</i>

Teaching Resource Requirements

15 students (75%) noted that current textbooks lack local cultural relevance and requested supplementary bilingual reading materials, vocabulary lists, and exercises. Students require not only content but also varied exercises to consolidate their learning.

Table 6 Teaching Resource Requirements

Sub-theme Two: Teaching Resource Requirements	
Participants	Responses
P6	<i>Most textbook passages focus on Western culture with scant mention of Guangxi. A dedicated 'Guangxi Culture English Reader' showcasing our cuisine, festivals, and landmarks would be invaluable.</i>
P11	<i>The textbook content is too generic. It would be beneficial to supplement it with bilingual reading materials about Guangxi culture, such as short articles introducing "Zhuang brocade" or "embroidered balls", followed by key vocabulary and exercises.</i>
P13	<i>We need specific cultural vocabulary exercises, such as fill-in-the-blanks and matching drills, to help us memorise those difficult-to-translate terms."</i>

Classroom Atmosphere Requirements

Nine students (45%) called for more interactive and engaging lessons, hoping teachers would create a livelier, more relaxed learning atmosphere. A positive classroom atmosphere helps reduce emotional filtering and promotes language acquisition.

Table 7 Classroom Atmosphere Requirements

Sub-theme Three: Classroom Atmosphere Requirements	
Participants	Responses
P1	<i>I wish lessons were not so rigid. Teachers should encourage more discussions and games to get everyone involved – learning would be more enjoyable that way.</i>
P7	<i>If the classroom atmosphere were livelier, I would not feel so nervous and would be more willing to speak English.</i>
P15	<i>Teachers could show English-language videos about Guangxi culture, like those introducing Guilin's landscapes. After watching, we could discuss them. It would be both enjoyable and educational.</i>

Theme 3: Cultural Value

Students broadly recognise the value of disseminating local culture through English, primarily reflected in three dimensions: learning motivation, cultural confidence, and professional identity.

Stimulating Learning Motivation

Seventeen students (85%) believe integrating local culture into English learning creates emotional connections and practical relevance, thereby boosting interest. Cultural content transforms language learning from abstract symbols into meaningful communication tools, enhancing students' intrinsic motivation.

Table 8 Stimulating Learning Motivation

Sub-theme One: Stimulating Learning Motivation	
Participants	Responses
P2	<i>Introducing my own culture in English made me realise that learning the language is not just for exams; it also allows others to understand our Guangxi. This gives me greater motivation.</i>
P4	<i>I used to feel English was worlds away from me, but now that I have learnt how to describe 'laoyoufen', it feels much closer at hand and far more enjoyable to study.</i>
P16	<i>Sharing local culture makes learning English feel more relatable—it is no longer just rote memorisation.</i>

Enhanced Cultural Confidence

Sixteen students (80%) reported that learning to express local culture in English fostered pride in their heritage and bolstered cultural confidence. Cultural confidence stems not only from understanding one's culture but also from the ability to express it in a universal language.

Table 9 Enhanced Cultural Confidence

Sub-theme Two: Enhanced Cultural Confidence	
Participants	Responses
P10	<i>After learning how to tell Zhuang stories, I feel more proud of being an ethnic minority and am more willing to introduce our culture to others.</i>
P14	<i>When I successfully introduced 'March 3' to others in English, I felt our culture was truly remarkable and gained greater confidence.</i>
P18	<i>Being able to share my culture in English makes me feel I can contribute to promoting our culture globally.</i>

Enhanced Professional Identity

Twelve students (60%) believed that mastering the ability to disseminate local culture in English directly aids their future work in early childhood education and enhances their professional identity. Students view cultural communication skills as integral to professional competence, enhancing their identification with and anticipation of future careers.

Table 10 Enhanced Professional Identity

Sub-theme Two: Enhanced Professional Identity	
Participants	Responses
P1	<i>When I become a nursery teacher, being able to teach children Zhuang nursery rhymes and Guangxi stories in English will surely be popular and help cultivate their cultural identity from an early age.</i>
P9	<i>Many kindergartens now offer English classes. Integrating local culture through English would make the curriculum more distinctive and enhance my own competitiveness.</i>
P17	<i>Learning to introduce Guangxi culture in English will enable me to design themed activities at work, such as an 'English Theatre for March 3' event. The children would absolutely love it.</i>

Theme 4: Module Content

Students broadly support developing English teaching modules centred on Guangxi's local culture, offering specific content suggestions. Based on their responses, these proposals can be categorised into four main areas:

Folk Culture

Students suggested incorporating folk elements such as Zhuang nursery rhymes, the March 3 Folk Song Festival, and the Legend of Liu Sanjie. They believe these topics possess strong regional characteristics and are suitable for English teaching.

Table 11 Folk Culture

Sub-theme One: Folk Culture	
Participants	Responses
P1	<i>We could include Zhuang nursery rhymes and bamboo pole dancing – these would be useful if we become nursery teachers later.</i>
P6	<i>Events like the March 3 Song Festival and the Legend of Liu Sanjie could be adapted into short stories in English or used for role-play activities.</i>
P19	<i>The Liu Sanjie story is brilliant. It could be adapted into a short play for us to perform.</i>

Culinary Culture

Students proposed incorporating Guangxi specialities such as Guilin rice noodles, snail noodles, and Laoyou noodles into the module, noting that these topics are relatable and likely to spark interest.

Table 12 Culinary Culture

Sub-theme Two: Culinary Culture	
Participants	Responses
P3	<i>Guangxi has so many delicacies, like snail noodles and Laoyou noodles. We could create role-play scenarios, such as ordering dishes or explaining their preparation.</i>
P8	<i>We could design a 'Food Festival' project where each group introduces one Guangxi dish in English, culminating in an award for the best presentation.</i>
P13	<i>Guangxi's cuisines, like snail noodles and Lao You noodles, could be used in role-play dialogues. This way, we learn language while understanding food culture.</i>

Interactive Activities

Students suggested designing highly interactive activities like bamboo pole dancing, traditional games, and festival simulations to enhance engagement and enjoyment.

Table 13 Interactive Activities

Sub-theme Three: Interactive Activities	
Participants	Responses
P4	<i>We could learn the bamboo dance, then explain its rules and significance in English.</i>
P12	<i>During the 'March 3 Festival', we could simulate the 'throwing embroidered balls' activity with English explanations to deepen cultural immersion.</i>
P16	<i>Traditional games like 'clog racing' could be introduced in English and organised as competitions. It would be quite enjoyable.</i>

Intangible Cultural Heritage Elements

Students proposed incorporating intangible cultural heritage, such as Zhuang brocade, bronze drums, and embroidered balls, into the module, believing this would help preserve local culture and deepen English expression. Students believe that integrating intangible cultural heritage elements not only enhances language proficiency but also fosters a sense of responsibility towards cultural dissemination.

Table 14 Intangible Cultural Heritage Elements

Sub-theme Four: Intangible Cultural Heritage Elements	
Participants	Responses
P6	<i>Zhuang brocade is exquisite. We could learn to describe its patterns and craftsmanship in English.</i>
P10	<i>Bronze drum culture is distinctive to Guangxi. Learning to narrate its stories in English would deepen foreigners' understanding of us.</i>
P19	<i>Learning to introduce intangible heritage like Zhuang brocade and bronze drums in English would greatly aid in disseminating our culture.</i>

Summary of Findings***Students' Perceptions of Local Cultural Integration***

The majority of students indicated that current EOP courses lack content relevant to local culture, making it difficult to connect classroom learning with future professional contexts. One student remarked: "We wish to learn English applicable in kindergarten settings, such as narrating Guangxi stories or singing local nursery rhymes in English." Others added: "I would be more engaged if lessons included more cultural content we are familiar with."

Feasibility of Integrating Local Culture into HPBL

Students generally welcomed the HPBL model, believing that project-based learning enhances both enjoyment and practicality. One student wrote: "Through projects, we can communicate in English more naturally, far more engaging than just memorising vocabulary." Others suggested: "Projects incorporating our local festivals, such as introducing 'March 3' in English, would be more meaningful."

Development of Communication Skills

Most students believe that HPBL, incorporating local culture, will help improve their English communication skills. One student remarked: "I will learn how to express my thoughts in English and gain the confidence to speak up." This highlights the need for course design to prioritise process support and resource provision.

Conclusion

Through qualitative needs analysis of 20 early childhood education students, this study reveals shortcomings in current EOP curricula regarding local cultural integration and students' strong demand for culturally relevant content. Students broadly recognise the HPBL model's potential for enhancing communicative competence and expect curricula to better align with local culture and professional realities.

Dual Barriers of Language And Culture Constrain Expression

Students exhibit deficiencies in vocabulary, grammar, and cultural knowledge, necessitating systematic instruction to address these gaps. Specifically, vocabulary gaps constitute the primary obstacle, grammatical errors compromise expressive accuracy, and deficits in cultural knowledge result in superficial content. Consequently, EOP courses should strengthen teaching of culturally loaded words, sentence pattern drills, and systematic imparting of local cultural knowledge.

Strong Demand For Practical Teaching

The vast majority of students anticipate more output-oriented, highly interactive classroom activities, such as role-play simulations, presentations, and performances, to enhance language application in authentic contexts. Concurrently, students seek supplementary bilingual cultural resources, specialised exercises, and a dynamic classroom atmosphere. This indicates that course design should be student-centred, incorporating more output-oriented activities and providing rich, appropriate teaching materials.

Cultural Integration Holds Multifaceted Value

Cultural content not only stimulates learning interest but also strengthens cultural confidence and professional identity. Students broadly recognise the significance of disseminating local culture through English, viewing this as a shift from exam-oriented to practical language learning that aids future career development. Thus, cultural integration serves not merely as a teaching strategy but as a vital pathway to achieving language education objectives.

Modular Course Development Presents A Viable Pathway

Students expressed strong endorsement for EOP teaching modules centred on local culture, proposing specific content suggestions across four categories: folk customs, cuisine, activities, and intangible cultural heritage. These recommendations provide clear direction for subsequent course design and demonstrate students' willingness and capacity to participate in curriculum development.

Through these measures, the EOP programme will better serve the career development needs of early childhood education students, enhancing their English communication skills in practical work settings. In summary, Guangxi's higher vocational early childhood education students demonstrate clear demand and positive attitudes towards integrating local culture into EOP courses. Course developers should acknowledge students' challenges and expectations by designing outcome-oriented teaching modules centred on local culture, complemented by rich resources and innovative teaching methods. This approach will effectively enhance students' English communication skills, their capacity for cultural dissemination, and their professional competence.

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Author Contribution Statement: This study is one of the very few studies that have studied the use of hybrid project-based learning (HPBL) with the integration of local culture to assist in improving learners' communicative ability.

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