

"ROOTS AND WINGS - CULTURAL AWARENESS AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN"

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Abstract: *In the current context, cultural education plays an essential role in the integral development of children, especially in rural communities where access to cultural resources may be limited. This article examines the "Roots and Wings" program, an innovative project designed to enrich the cultural education of rural children through direct and experiential activities. Through storytelling and folklore workshops, cultural preservation projects, local art and history sessions, children's festivals and partnerships with schools, the program aims to strengthen children's ties with the cultural heritage of their community. The study uses mixed methods, including participatory observations and questionnaires, to assess the impact of the program on children's knowledge, appreciation and application of cultural values in everyday life. Preliminary results suggest a significant improvement in understanding and appreciation of local culture, as well as an increase in confidence in one's own creative and social skills. The article argues that such programs can serve as valuable models for integrating culture into the educational curriculum, having the potential to transform children's perspective on cultural heritage and positively influence their behavior.*

Key words: *Cultural education; local heritage; personal development; rural communities; experiential methods; curricular integration.*

Introduction

Access to cultural education remains a fundamental pillar in the development of young people, serving as a binder between them and the collective heritage of society. In rural areas, this access is often hampered by geographical isolation and lack of resources, which can lead to a rift between youth and the cultural richness of their region. As technology continues to reshape the educational landscape, children in these communities face the risk of being left behind, not only technologically, but also culturally.

"Roots and Wings" program aims to address these challenges through an innovative approach that brings local cultural heritage back to the forefront. Replacing screens with real and tangible experiences, the program takes children on a journey of discovery of the traditions and values that have shaped their communities over time. Hands-on activities, from craft workshops to local celebrations, are designed not only to educate but also to inspire and encourage active participation in the preservation and perpetuation of cultural heritage.

This article explores in detail the "Roots and Wings" approach, investigating how direct interaction with cultural elements can positively influence the development of children in rural areas. Our analysis aims to show how such cultural experiences enrich formal curriculum and contribute to children's personal and social development. We will examine how these interactions help young people form a sense of identity, develop critical thinking skills and value their heritage in ways that are creative and relevant to contemporary challenges.

Therefore, this article not only highlights the success of the programmed in rural communities, but also aims to serve as a replicable and scalable model for other regions facing similar challenges. Addressing this topic, we hope to open a constructive dialogue between educators, politicians and community leaders, leading to effective strategies for integrating cultural heritage into children's daily lives, regardless of their geographical location.

Theoretical foundation

Cultural education in rural areas is not just an extension of the curriculum, but a necessity for the balanced development of children (Smith, 2018). Children who are exposed to cultural values and traditions have a greater tendency to develop a deep understanding of identity and belonging (O'Donnell, 2020). This is vital in rural communities, where cultural resources may be less accessible compared to urban areas (Green, 2019).

Studies show that engaging in cultural activities can improve children's cognitive and social skills while encouraging critical thinking and creativity (Baker & Jones, 2017). Moreover, direct cultural experiences have been linked to an increase in self-esteem and self-confidence in children, giving them a sense of accomplishment and contribution to their community (Fisher & Robinson, 2021).

The importance of integrating cultural education in rural areas is supported by studies highlighting the link between knowledge of cultural heritage and personal development (Lopez & Wilson, 2019). The "Roots and Wings" program embraces this perspective, aiming to

create a framework in which children explore and value the local culture in an active and practical way.

To better understand this impact, it is essential to refer to Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological systems, which emphasizes the importance of the environment in child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory suggests that every level of a child's ecological system, from the immediate family to the wider culture and society, contributes to his education and development. In this context, "Roots and Wings" operates in several levels of this system, offering rural children a tangible connection with their culture that may otherwise be neglected.

Moving forward, it is important to recognize the role that family and community play in preserving and transmitting cultural values. According to Harris (2022), the family serves as a child's first point of contact with cultural heritage and, as such, is a crucial agent in shaping early cultural perceptions. In the rural context, where schools may have limited resources, the role of the family becomes even more pronounced.

On the other hand, the extended community, through celebrations and cultural events, reinforces these values and strengthens them through repetition and participation (Martinez, 2019). This is consistent with Bandura's theory of social learning, which states that observing and modeling the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others plays a fundamental role in social learning (Bandura, 1977).

However, in today's globalized world, it is essential to ensure that children are exposed not only to local culture but also to a variety of cultural perspectives. Schwartz and Bardi (2001) point out that exposure to a wide range of cultural values can improve children's adaptability and tolerance. The "Roots and Wings" program incorporates this idea by integrating activities that present children with a panorama of cultural diversity.

Finally, it is essential to recognize that cultural education is not static, but must evolve with changes in society. Dewey (1938) argued that education should be relevant to students' experiences and reflect their changing interests and needs. Therefore, "Roots and Wings" aspires to be a dynamic program, adapting and responding to current cultural and social transformations.

Research

This research aims to analyze the impact of the "Roots and Wings" program on cultural awareness and appreciation among young schoolchildren in rural areas. Focusing on personal and social development, the study assesses how cultural heritage-based activities influence children's cultural identity, creativity and collaborative skills.

The study was designed as blended research, using both quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a deep understanding of the effects of the program.

- Quantitative research involved pre-testing and post-testing through standardized questionnaires to measure changes in cultural appreciation and self-efficacy. The independent sample t-test was used to compare pre-test and post-test scores, assessing the significant impact of the programme on the selected indicators.
- Qualitative research: Semi-structured interviews with participants, parents, and educators, as well as participatory observations during the conduct of program activities. Data from interviews and observations were analyzed through thematic coding, identifying major themes related to children's cultural experience and integrating values into their daily behavior.

The study included a sample of 100 children, ages 7 to 12, from five different rural communities. Participants were selected using a stratified sampling method to ensure representativeness of socio-cultural diversity in rural areas.

Table 1. Changes in cultural perception and self-efficacy

Indicators	Pre-test (Media ± SD)	Post-test (Media ± SD)	Average difference	P-value
Cultural appreciation	3.2 ± 0.8	4.5 ± 0.6	+1.3	<0.001
Creativity	2.9 ± 0.9	4.3 ± 0.7	+1.4	<0.001
Collaboration	3.0 ± 0.7	4.4 ± 0.5	+1.4	<0.001

Note: SD = standard deviation; P-value < 0.05 indicates statistical significance

Analysis of data collected under the "Roots and Wings" program revealed a significant improvement in the cultural appreciation, creativity and collaboration skills of the participating children, as illustrated in Table 1.

Cultural appreciation

Participants showed a notable increase in appreciation and understanding of local cultural heritage after participating in the program. This was reflected not only in the answers to questionnaires,

but also in the interactions and discussions during the workshops, where children shared deep perceptions and questions about the culture and traditions discussed.

Creativity

Comparative analysis of children's responses and creative work done before and after the program showed a significant increase in creative expression. Children became more inclined to experiment with new shapes and materials in craft workshops and to use their imagination in designing their own works.

Collaboration skills

Participatory observations and feedback from educators indicated an improvement in collaboration skills among children. Group activities were punctuated by more active participation and fairer distribution of tasks, reflecting an increase in self-confidence and respect.

Parents and educators reported positive observations of changes in children's behavior and attitudes toward the local culture. Many pointed to a new appreciation for community traditions and an increased interest in participating in cultural events.

These results suggest that the "Roots and Wings" program has had a positive impact on the personal and cultural development of rural children. The increase in cultural appreciation, creative expression and collaboration indicates a successful integration of cultural values into the daily life of participants.

Conclusions

The study presented in this article investigated the impact of the "Roots and Wings" program on the cultural and personal development of children in rural areas. Through activities that promote cultural heritage and creativity, the program has demonstrated a significant capacity to enrich the education and life experience of these children.

The results obtained underline the importance of integrating cultural education into the school curriculum, especially in rural areas. Increasing cultural appreciation, enhancing creativity and strengthening collaboration skills highlights how valuable experiential activities can be for children's development. Therefore, it is essential for politicians and educators to recognize and support such programs as "Roots and Wings", which can serve as models of good practice for cultural education.

The Roots and Wings program also contributes to strengthening the bond between children and their community, giving them a better understanding and appreciation of cultural origins and values. This can have a profound impact on social cohesion and preservation of cultural

heritage in rural communities, encouraging active and sustained participation in cultural activities.

There is significant potential for future research in the long-term evaluation of the effects of cultural education programs. Further studies could explore specific ways in which these programs influence children's educational and career trajectories, as well as how they can be adapted and implemented in diverse cultural and geographical contexts.

The "Roots and Wings" program is an important step towards a more comprehensive and integrated approach to cultural education in rural areas. The results of our study confirm the inestimable value of cultural heritage as an educational resource and as a means of improving community life. By promoting such initiatives, we can ensure that all children have access to an education that celebrates and develops their cultural identity, creativity and ability to collaborate.

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