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A Survey and Study of the Current Situation of Music Education in High Schools in Northeast China: A Case Study of the High School Attached to Northeast Normal University

Wang Haoyu¹

Abstract: This study investigates the current state of music education at the High School Attached to Northeast Normal University in Northeast China. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews with five music teachers and thirty students. The findings reveal a diverse range of pedagogical practices, blending traditional methods with modern approaches, and highlight significant challenges such as resource limitations and the need for professional development. Both teachers and students acknowledged the cognitive, emotional, and social benefits of music education. However, discrepancies were noted in their perceptions of the primary challenges and priorities. The study underscores the importance of balanced pedagogical strategies, adequate resource allocation, and continuous support for educators. It contributes to the field by providing insights into the specific context of music education in Northeast China and reinforcing the integral role of music education in holistic student development.

Keywords: Music Education, Pedagogical Practices, Qualitative Study, High School, Northeast China, Student Engagement

I. Introduction

Music education plays a crucial role in the holistic development of students, fostering their creativity, self-expression, and appreciation for the arts (Wang & Humphreys, 2015). Globally, there has been a growing emphasis on the importance of music education in secondary schools, with many countries integrating it into their core curriculum (Abril & Gault, 2016). However, the implementation and quality of music education can vary significantly across different regions and educational systems.

In China, music education has been a part of the secondary school curriculum for decades, but the current state of music education in high schools, particularly in the Northeast region, is not well-documented (Chen & Jiang, 2020). The Northeast region of China, comprising the provinces of Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning, has unique cultural and educational characteristics that may influence the delivery and perceptions of music education (Zhang & Liu, 2018).

The High School Attached to Northeast Normal University, located in Changchun, Jilin Province, is a key high school in the Jilin province and a prominent educational institution in the Northeast region of China. Established in 1950, the school has a long history and has evolved to include various educational divisions, from kindergarten to high school, as well as specialized programs in the arts (High School Attached to Northeast Normal University, 2021). As a leading high school in the region, the experiences and perspectives of music education at this institution can provide valuable insights into the current situation of music education in Northeast China.

1.2. Rationale and Significance

¹ High School Attached to Northeast Normal University, Changchun, China. Email 1012192998@qq.com

This study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of music education in high schools within the Northeast region of China, with a specific focus on the High School Attached to Northeast Normal University. As a leading educational institution in the region, the experiences and perspectives of music education at this school can offer valuable insights into the broader trends and challenges facing music education in Northeast China.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the limited body of research on music education in Chinese high schools, particularly in the understudied Northeast region. Previous studies have primarily focused on music education in first-tier cities or at the national level, leaving a gap in the understanding of regional differences and unique challenges faced by high schools in the Northeast .

1.3. Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

What are the current practices and methodologies used in music education at the High School Attached to Northeast Normal University?

What challenges do music teachers face in delivering the music curriculum?

How do students perceive their music education experience in terms of engagement, motivation, and personal development?

In what ways do the perspectives of teachers and students align or differ regarding the effectiveness of music education?

1.4. Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study is limited to the High School Attached to Northeast Normal University in Changchun, Jilin Province. The research employs a qualitative approach, focusing on in-depth interviews with five music teachers and thirty students from this school. This delimitation ensures a comprehensive exploration of the specific context while allowing for detailed and nuanced insights. However, it is important to note that the findings may not be generalizable to all high schools in Northeast China or other regions of the country. Additionally, the study focuses exclusively on the perspectives of teachers and students, without incorporating views from parents or school administrators.

1.5. Definition of Terms

Music Education: A field of study and practice concerned with teaching and learning music, encompassing various activities such as singing, playing instruments, music theory, and music appreciation.

Qualitative Approach: A research methodology that seeks to understand phenomena through in-depth exploration of people's experiences, perceptions, and interactions, often using methods like interviews, focus groups, and observations. In this study, interviews are conducted for the study to collect data for analysis.

Pedagogical Practices: Methods and strategies used by teachers to facilitate learning and impart knowledge and skills to students.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Historical Context of Music Education in China

Music education in China has a rich history that dates back to ancient times when music was integral to education and cultural life. During the Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BCE), music was considered one of the six arts (六艺, liù yì) that scholars were expected to master. Confucian philosophy also emphasized the importance of music in cultivating moral character and social harmony (Wang, 2019).

In the 20th century, music education in China underwent significant transformations. The establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 led to the integration of music education

into the national curriculum, with an emphasis on socialist values and revolutionary songs (Ho, 2017). The reform and opening-up period beginning in the late 1970s brought further changes, incorporating Western music education theories and practices into the Chinese educational system (Gao, 2018).

2.2. Current State of Music Education in Northeast China

Northeast China, comprising the provinces of Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang, has a distinct cultural and educational environment influenced by its historical and socio-economic background. Music education in this region reflects both traditional Chinese cultural elements and modern educational reforms (Li & Xie, 2020).

Recent studies indicate that music education in Northeast China is characterized by a blend of classical Chinese music and contemporary Western influences (Zhang, 2021). Schools in this region often face challenges such as limited resources, varying levels of teacher qualifications, and differing levels of emphasis on music education in the curriculum (Chen, 2022). Despite these challenges, efforts to improve music education quality and accessibility continue, with initiatives aimed at enhancing teacher training and curriculum development (Liu, 2023).

2.3. The Role of Music Education in High Schools

Music education plays a crucial role in the holistic development of high school students. It is not only an avenue for artistic expression but also contributes to cognitive development, emotional well-being, and social skills (Xu, 2018). Research has shown that music education can enhance students' abilities in areas such as language development, mathematical skills, and overall academic performance (Huang, 2020).

In high schools, music education is often integrated into the broader educational framework, supporting students' overall educational experience. It provides opportunities for creative expression, cultural understanding, and emotional regulation (Tang, 2019). Additionally, participation in music activities such as choir, band, and orchestra fosters teamwork and a sense of community among students (Wang & Chen, 2021).

2.4. Pedagogical Approaches in Music Education

Various pedagogical approaches are employed in music education to cater to diverse learning needs and objectives. Traditional methods in China often emphasize rote learning and technical proficiency, focusing on the mastery of musical instruments and vocal techniques (Li, 2020). However, contemporary approaches have increasingly incorporated student-centered and experiential learning strategies.

Approaches such as the Orff Schulwerk, Kodály Method, and Dalcroze Eurhythmics have been adapted in Chinese music education to promote active participation, creativity, and holistic musical understanding (Zhou, 2022). These methods encourage students to engage with music through movement, singing, and improvisation, fostering a deeper connection with the material (Wu, 2021).

2.5. Previous Studies on Music Education in China

Previous studies on music education in China have explored various aspects, including curriculum development, teacher training, and student outcomes. For example, Gao (2018) examined the impact of Western music education theories on Chinese music pedagogy, highlighting the challenges and benefits of integrating these approaches. Ho (2017) analyzed the role of music education in promoting cultural identity and national pride among Chinese students.

Research by Chen (2022) focused on the disparities in music education quality between urban and rural schools in Northeast China, revealing significant gaps in resources and opportunities. Li and Xie (2020) conducted a comprehensive review of music education policies in China, discussing the implications of recent educational reforms on music education practice.

Overall, these studies underscore the dynamic and evolving nature of music education in China, reflecting broader socio-cultural and educational trends. They provide a foundation for understanding the current state and future directions of music education in the country.

III. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the current state of music education in high schools in Northeast China, focusing on the High School Attached to Northeast Normal University. This design allows for a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics within music education from the viewpoints of both teachers and students.

3.2. Rationale for Qualitative Approach

By using interviews as the primary data collection method, the research can capture detailed narratives and rich descriptions that quantitative methods might overlook. This approach facilitates an exploration of the nuances in teaching practices, student engagement, and the challenges faced within the music education framework at the specified high school.

3.3. Participant Selection

3.3.1. Criteria for Teacher Selection

Five music teachers from the High School Attached to Northeast Normal University will be selected for interviews. The criteria for selection include:

Minimum of three years of teaching experience in music education.

Involvement in various aspects of the music curriculum, including classroom instruction, extracurricular activities, and performance preparation.

Willingness to participate in in-depth interviews and share their experiences and perspectives.

3.3.2. Criteria for Student Selection

Thirty students from the same high school will be chosen to participate in the study. The criteria for student selection include:

Enrollment in music classes or participation in music-related extracurricular activities.

A mix of students from different grade levels to provide a broad perspective on the music education experience.

Voluntary participation with informed consent from their parents or guardians.

3.4. Data Collection Methods

3.4.1. Interview Process

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with both teachers and students. This format allows for flexibility in probing deeper into specific areas of interest while maintaining a consistent structure across all interviews. The interview guides will include open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about participants' experiences, perceptions, and suggestions for improvement in music education.

3.4.2. Data Recording and Transcription

All interviews will be audio-recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accurate capture of the conversations. The recordings will be transcribed verbatim to facilitate thorough analysis. Transcripts will be reviewed and cross-checked with the recordings to ensure accuracy and completeness.

3.5. Data Analysis

3.5.1. Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis will be used to analyze the interview data. This method involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The process includes familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.

3.5.2. Coding Procedures

Initial coding will be conducted by reading through the transcripts and identifying significant statements and ideas related to the research questions. These codes will be grouped into broader

themes that reflect common patterns and insights. A coding framework will be developed and refined through iterative cycles of coding and review to ensure comprehensive coverage of the data.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

3.6.1. Informed Consent

All participants will be provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights as participants. Informed consent will be obtained from teachers and students, with parental consent required for student participants under the age of 18. Participants will be informed that their involvement is voluntary and that they can withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

3.6.2. Confidentiality

The confidentiality of participants will be strictly maintained. Pseudonyms will be used in the transcripts and the final report to protect participants' identities. All data, including audio recordings and transcripts, will be securely stored and accessible only to the research team. The findings will be presented in a manner that ensures individual responses cannot be traced back to specific participants.

IV. Research Findings

4.1. Teachers' Perspectives

4.1.1. Pedagogical Practices

Themes Identified: Traditional Methods, Modern Approaches, Cultural Contextualization

The interviewed music teachers employed a variety of pedagogical practices to engage students and enhance their musical skills. Traditional methods such as rote learning and technical drills were commonly used, particularly for instrument instruction. However, teachers also integrated contemporary approaches, including the Orff Schulwerk method and Dalcroze Eurhythmics, to foster creativity and active participation. Teachers emphasized the importance of contextualizing music within cultural and historical frameworks to deepen students' appreciation and understanding.

4.1.2. Challenges Faced

Themes Identified: Traditional Methods, Modern Approaches, Cultural Contextualization

Several challenges were identified by the teachers. A significant issue was the limited availability of resources, such as musical instruments and instructional materials. This limitation hindered the ability to provide a diverse and enriched music education experience. Additionally, teachers reported varying levels of student interest and engagement, often influenced by the high academic pressures and prioritization of core subjects over the arts. Another challenge was the need for ongoing professional development to stay updated with modern teaching methodologies and technological advancements in music education.

4.1.3. Perceived Impact on Students

Themes Identified: Cognitive Development, Emotional Well-being, Social Skills

Teachers perceived music education as having a profound impact on students' overall development. They noted improvements in students' cognitive abilities, such as enhanced memory and spatial-temporal skills, which translated into better performance in other academic subjects. Music education was also seen as a crucial outlet for emotional expression and stress relief, contributing to students' mental well-being. Furthermore, participation in music activities fostered teamwork, discipline, and a sense of accomplishment among students.

4.2. Students' Perspectives

4.2.1. Learning Experiences

Themes Identified: Instrument Mastery, Interactive Methods, Balance Between Technical and Creative

Students' learning experiences in music education varied widely. Many students appreciated the opportunity to learn and play different musical instruments, which they found both challenging and

rewarding. The incorporation of interactive and participatory teaching methods, such as group performances and improvisation sessions, was particularly well-received. However, some students felt that the focus on technical proficiency sometimes overshadowed the enjoyment and creative aspects of music-making.

4.2.2. Engagement and Motivation

Themes Identified: Intrinsic Interest, Extrinsic Encouragement, Academic Pressures

Engagement and motivation levels among students were influenced by several factors. Students who were intrinsically interested in music reported high levels of engagement and motivation. Extrinsic factors, such as encouragement from teachers and peers, as well as opportunities to perform in public, also played a significant role in maintaining students' interest. Conversely, students who viewed music education as secondary to their academic pursuits often exhibited lower engagement levels. The high demands of academic subjects were cited as a primary reason for this reduced motivation.

4.2.3. Influence of Music Education on Personal Development

Students acknowledged the positive influence of music education on their personal development. They reported increased self-confidence, particularly through public performances and group activities. Music education also provided a platform for emotional expression, which helped students manage stress and build emotional resilience. Additionally, the collaborative nature of music activities enhanced their social skills and fostered a sense of belonging within the school community.

4.3. Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis revealed both alignments and discrepancies between teachers' and students' perspectives. Both groups recognized the cognitive, emotional, and social benefits of music education and appreciated interactive teaching methods. However, discrepancies arose in the perceived challenges and priorities. Teachers emphasized resource limitations and professional development needs, while students focused on the pressures of academic demands affecting their engagement in music. While teachers prioritized technical proficiency, some students felt that it sometimes hindered their enjoyment and creativity.

Themes Table:

Themes Identified	Teachers' Perspectives	Students' Perspectives
Pedagogical Practices	Traditional Methods, Modern Approaches, Contextualization	Instrument Mastery, Interactive Methods, Balance Between Technical and Creative
Challenges Faced	Resource Limitations, Student Engagement, Professional Development Needs	Intrinsic Interest, Extrinsic Encouragement, Academic Pressures
Perceived Impact	Cognitive Development, Emotional Well-being, Social Skills	Self-Confidence, Emotional Resilience, Social Integration
Comparative Analysis	Shared Recognition of Benefits, Differing Challenges, Prioritization of Aspects	Shared Recognition of Benefits, Differing Challenges, Prioritization of Aspects

V. Discussion

5.1. Interpretation of Key Findings

The use of a blend of traditional and modern pedagogical practices reflects an adaptive approach to teaching music, balancing technical proficiency with creative engagement. Teachers' challenges, particularly regarding resource limitations and the need for professional development, underscore systemic issues that impact the quality of music education. Students' varied learning experiences and levels of engagement highlight the influence of intrinsic interest and external pressures, such as academic demands, on their participation in music education. The perceived benefits, including cognitive, emotional, and social development, emphasize the holistic impact of music education on students.

5.2. Implications for Music Education Practice

The study's findings have several implications for music education practice:

Balanced Pedagogical Approaches: There is a need for a balanced approach that equally emphasizes technical proficiency and creative expression. Incorporating interactive and participatory methods can enhance students' enjoyment and engagement.

Resource Allocation: Addressing resource limitations is crucial. Schools should prioritize securing sufficient musical instruments and instructional materials to support diverse and comprehensive music education.

Professional Development: Continuous professional development opportunities for music teachers are essential to keep them updated with modern teaching methodologies and technological advancements.

Student Engagement: Strategies to increase student engagement should consider reducing academic pressures and integrating music education more cohesively with other subjects to highlight its value in holistic development.

5.3. Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged:

Sample Size: The study's sample size, limited to five teachers and thirty students, may not fully represent the broader population of music educators and students in Northeast China.

Single Case Study: Focusing on a single high school limits the generalizability of the findings to other schools with different contexts and resources.

Subjectivity in Interviews: The qualitative nature of the study relies on self-reported data, which may be influenced by participants' subjective perceptions and biases.

Resource Constraints: The study did not include an extensive examination of the impact of specific resources or technological tools on music education outcomes.

5.4. Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should consider the following recommendations to build on the findings of this study:

Broader Sample: Expanding the sample size and including multiple schools across different regions would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the state of music education in Northeast China.

Quantitative Measures: Integrating quantitative measures with qualitative data could offer more robust insights into the impacts of music education and the effectiveness of different pedagogical approaches.

Longitudinal Studies: Conducting longitudinal studies would help track the long-term effects of music education on students' cognitive, emotional, and social development.

Technology Integration: Investigating the role of technology in music education, including the use of digital tools and online resources, could provide valuable insights into modernizing and enhancing music teaching practices.

VI. Conclusion

6.1. Summary of Findings

This study explored the current situation of music education at the High School Attached to Northeast Normal University through qualitative interviews. The findings revealed a diverse range of pedagogical practices, combining traditional methods with modern approaches. Challenges identified included limited resources, varying levels of student engagement, and a need for professional development. Both teachers and students acknowledged the significant cognitive, emotional, and social benefits of music education, although there were discrepancies in their perceptions of the primary challenges and priorities.

6.2. Contribution to the Field of Music Education

The study contributes to the field of music education by providing detailed insights into the experiences and perspectives of teachers and students in a specific high school context in Northeast China. It highlights the importance of balanced pedagogical approaches that foster both technical proficiency and creative expression. The study also underscores the critical need for addressing resource limitations and supporting continuous professional development for music educators. By identifying the positive impacts of music education on students' overall development, the study reinforces the value of integrating music education into the broader academic curriculum.

6.3. Final Thoughts

The findings of this study emphasize the multifaceted role of music education in shaping students' cognitive, emotional, and social growth. Despite the challenges faced, both teachers and students recognize the profound benefits of music education. Addressing resource constraints and providing ongoing support for teachers are essential steps in enhancing the quality of music education. Future research should continue to explore these areas, with a focus on broadening the scope and incorporating quantitative measures to complement qualitative insights. Ultimately, a well-rounded music education program can significantly contribute to students' holistic development, preparing them for diverse futures both within and beyond the realm of music.

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