



A Preliminary Discussion on the Status and Reflections of Music Education for the Elderly in a Multicultural Context— Taking a University for the Elderly in Hefei as an Example

Furui Li*

School of Music, Nanjing Normal University, Nanjing, China

*Corresponding author: 2366680776@qq.com

Abstract. With the advancement of the times, China has entered a moderately aging stage with an increasingly severe population aging issue. Although the material life of the elderly has been met, their spiritual quality of life still needs to be improved. In a multicultural context, the integration of traditional and popular music has brought cultural impacts and collisions, posing new challenges to the relatively less capable elderly. This paper takes a certain university for the elderly in Hefei as its research object, analyzes the current status of music learning among elderly students through investigations and analysis, proposes improvement suggestions based on existing issues, and explores new paths for music education in universities for the elderly, to help them find their voices amidst the exchanges of multicultural.

Keywords: Elderly music education, multiculturalism, university for the elderly.

1 Introduction

In the 21st century, the rise of globalization and the information age has given birth to the vigorous development of diverse cultures, where various cultures intersect and collide. Music, as a form of cultural expression, also shows a trend towards diversity. For the elderly, music is not only an artistic pleasure but also a crucial part of their spiritual life. As a new group in music learning, the elderly's current status in music education is what? How should we reflect on and improve the existing music education model to adapt to their learning needs and psychological characteristics? These are important issues that music educators need to consider.

2 The era Background of Elderly Music Development

2.1 The Era Background of Aging Population

In the context of aging, there is a large base of the elderly population. In 2020, China's total population aged 60 and above was 264 million, with an expected increase to over 300 million during the 14th Five-Year Plan period[1], indicating enormous market potential for the elderly. Data from the United Nations Economic and Social Council's 'World Social Report 2023' shows that if the number of this group in 1980 was merely 260 million; by 2021, it had doubled to 761 million; by 2050, it is expected to rise to 1.6 billion[2]. The vast base of the elderly population lays a solid foundation for the development of the market for elderly music education.

2.2 The Multicultural Context of Times

In today's era of rapid globalization, the wave of multiculturalism is surging, bringing forth a myriad of cultural forms and artistic expressions. Among them, music, as a universal form of cultural expression, is naturally exhibiting a trend towards diversification. New trends in musical works are emerging at an astonishing rate, which undoubtedly increases the difficulty for the elderly group, who have relatively weaker cognitive abilities, to understand and appreciate modern music. Therefore, in such a context, how to help older people adapt to this overwhelming new musical environment and find a harmonious balance between different musical forms becomes a topic worth exploring.

Under the wave of globalization, multiculturalism is flourishing, and music, as a bridge for cultural exchange, is particularly notable for its diverse trends. This presents unprecedented opportunities for elderly music enthusiasts, who can now access a broader musical world, benefit from abundant educational resources, and enjoy a more varied music learning and creative experience, driven by technological advancements. However, the emergence of new trendy music with its avant-garde nature and rapid succession also poses challenges for the older demographic in terms of appreciation and understanding. Confronted with this complex and ever-changing musical environment, how to guide seniors to adapt and find a harmonious balance between different musical forms has become an important issue that urgently needs to be considered and addressed.

3 The Importance of Music in the Education of the Elderly

Appropriate music learning can have a positive effect on the physiological and psychological states of the elderly. It is important to integrate the characteristics of music learning to help seniors better integrate into the rapidly changing society. When faced with the continuous emergence of new things, it is vital to support the holistic development of older adults—who may have relatively weaker cognitive abilities—across multiple dimensions such as intellectual, emotional, and social aspects.

3.1 Music Promotes Elderly Physiology

Listening to and learning music brings significant benefits to the physical health of older adults. Firstly, engaging in musical activities can activate the cerebral cortex in the elderly, promoting neural system activity and helping to slow down the aging process. Secondly, music can stimulate the release of pleasure hormones such as endorphins, which not only help regulate blood sugar levels but also improve immune function. Moreover, music has shown great potential in relieving stress and anxiety, aiding elderly patients with chronic diseases in reducing stress responses and lowering stress hormone levels, thereby effectively alleviating anxiety. Studies have indicated that music plays a significant role in treating chronic conditions in the elderly, and an increasing number of healthcare practitioners are integrating music into their daily work routines[3]. For instance, music can significantly improve symptoms in patients with Alzheimer's disease (AD). Musical stimulation not only helps patients better recall verbal material within musical and spoken contexts but also maintains long-term memory in the brain. Even when other cognitive abilities are impaired, Alzheimer's patients can remain sensually and emotionally engaged through music, enjoying the pleasure it brings[4].

3.2 Music Boosts Elderly Mental Well-Being

Music, as an art form that is readily accepted, can enrich the retirement life of the elderly, helping them to connect with society and integrate into groups, greatly promoting their mental health. Firstly, music has a powerful emotional regulation capacity, effectively stimulating and modulating the emotional state of the elderly. When facing negative emotions such as loneliness, depression, or anxiety, music can serve as a therapeutic tool by significantly enhancing the emotional state of the elderly through the release of "pleasure" neurotransmitters like endorphins, thereby alleviating psychological stress. Secondly, musical activities provide a platform for the elderly to participate in cultural life, increasing their exposure to and appreciation of the arts, thus enriching their interests, hobbies, and life experiences. Such artistic engagement not only helps the elderly maintain a pursuit and love for a beautiful life but also enhances their cultural literacy and aesthetic abilities. At the same time, group musical activities like choir singing or band performances offer opportunities for social interaction among the elderly. These activities help them establish and maintain social connections, reduce feelings of isolation, and improve their social skills and self-confidence through interaction.

According to a recent survey on the music learning situation at a certain university for the elderly in Hefei, it was found that 40% of the senior students indicated that learning music made them more confident, while a high 87% of the participants stated that music learning helped them maintain physical and mental pleasure. These figures fully demonstrate the positive role of music in the psychological health of the elderly. Therefore, we should further value and develop music education for the elderly, providing them with more high-quality music education resources to help them enjoy the happiness brought by music and promote their physical and mental health.

4 The Current State of Music Course Offerings in Universities for the Elderly Under a Multicultural Background

In the spring of 2024, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the current state of music education in universities for the elderly, this study focused on the status quo of music teaching at a certain university for the elderly in Hefei. Field research, questionnaires, and interviews were conducted from three aspects: teaching methods, curriculum system, and course content. The specific details are as follows:

4.1 Innovating Teaching Methods

In elderly education, traditional "lecture-style" teaching methods often struggle to engage the learning enthusiasm of older adults with relatively weaker physiological functions. However, a survey of teaching methods employed by music teachers at a certain university for the elderly in Hefei revealed that the institution is gradually breaking away from the constraints of traditional lecturing, returning the classroom to the students, and showing a trend that combines lectures with performances. These performance opportunities include not only end-of-term concerts but also collaborative performances with community choirs, folk orchestras, and other social organizations. Such practices have greatly motivated the elderly's desire to learn and effectively expanded the social influence of music education for the elderly, attracting more indecisive seniors to participate. Mr. Wang, a 65-year-old student who has been studying erhu at the university for a year, mentioned in an interview that various performance activities not only enriched their life experiences but also enhanced communication with peers, allowing them to learn a great deal of musical knowledge beyond the classroom. Moreover, the nervousness and pressure brought by performances transformed into motivation for daily practice, encouraging students to study and practice more diligently to present higher-level musical performances on stage. In summary, by incorporating actual performance opportunities, music education at the university for the elderly has successfully promoted the learning enthusiasm of senior students, improved their quality of life, and broadened their musical horizons. This teaching model has had a positive impact not only on participants but also sets a good example for observers, contributing to the continuous development and popularization of music education for the elderly.

4.2 Improving Curriculum System

In the spring of 2024, a survey of a certain university for the elderly in Hefei revealed that the university offered a total of 52 music practice courses and 5 drama practice courses, yet it had not established dedicated music appreciation courses. The curriculum was designed with varying difficulty levels in mind, enabling students to choose the right course based on their foundation, with even beginners starting from the elementary level. However, there are still some issues to be addressed within this curriculum system. Firstly, there is insufficient focus on the teaching outcomes of musical

works in elderly education. Due to limited energy, older adults engage with a restricted number of musical pieces during practical activities, and some learners with weaker abilities may not be able to fully perform a piece within a semester. Secondly, there is a significant gap between supply and demand in music education for the elderly. Against a multicultural backdrop, an abundance of musical styles has emerged, such as traditional music, internet pop music, red revolutionary music, etc., offering the elderly a wealth of learning options. Despite this, opportunities for seniors to deeply understand and practice musical works are very limited due to constraints in class hours and physical conditions. This indicates that the current music curriculum system for the elderly urgently needs improvement and refinement.

4.3 Streaming Courses Content Structure

Currently, the curriculum content of most universities for the elderly is based on professional music textbooks available on the market, reflecting a pursuit of authority and professionalism that positively impacts senior music learning. However, there is an issue with rigidly following these materials while overlooking the interests of the elderly and the development of the times, leading to a failure to update course content promptly. Taking the vocal music course at a certain university for the elderly in Hefei as an example, the adopted textbook is "College Entrance Exam Music Intensive Training (Vocal Music Volume)," and the song selection is also quite fixed. Although these textbooks are authoritative and standardized, for non-utilitarian purposes of elderly music learning, the content is too rigid and lacks contemporary relevance, not fully considering the interests of older learners. Mrs. Zhou, a 72-year-old who has been participating in the choir at the university for two years, mentioned her expectations for the current vocal music course content. She hopes to learn some popular vocal works from the internet, such as popular tracks from social media platforms like Douyin that she enjoys. This feedback points to the need for updating music course content in elderly education and the vision of aligning with modern pop culture.

5 Implementation Pathways for Elderly Music Education in a Multicultural Context

Based on a survey of the current state of music course offerings at a certain university for the elderly in Hefei and questionnaires and interviews conducted with the elderly under a multicultural background, the following implementation pathways are proposed, starting from the teaching evaluation system, course ratio, teaching methods, and course content.

5.1 Establishing a Multi-dimensional Teaching Evaluation System

The current music course evaluation system at universities for the elderly is imperfect and insufficient, which to some extent affects the depth and breadth of musical learning among older students. To truly achieve teaching objectives and enhance the self-artistic

cultivation of elderly students, universities for the elderly must add a more comprehensive and detailed course evaluation system to existing courses. This evaluation system should encompass both school evaluations and self-evaluations by the elderly students. School evaluations include three aspects: first, assessing whether the elderly students have achieved the teaching objectives of the semester, that is, whether they can fully perform designated pieces; second, evaluating whether teachers have employed diverse teaching methods to fully engage the learning enthusiasm of the elderly students; third, focusing on whether students have experienced physical and mental pleasure during the learning process, and whether they have genuinely improved their artistic cultivation. Regarding self-evaluation by elderly students, teachers should keep up with the dynamic development of course construction in real-time, closely observing student feedback on the music course at every stage of implementation. Students need to reflect on whether they have achieved the course goals and plans, whether they have gained or improved musical skills, and whether they have been influenced by the edification of music and the pursuit of art. Such self-evaluation not only helps students better understand their learning status but also provides an important reference for the continuous improvement of course quality.

In the context of a multicultural background, the musical learning needs of elderly students are becoming increasingly diverse. To meet this trend, teachers need to construct a more multi-dimensional and comprehensive evaluation system within the music curriculum. Specifically, by employing quantitative analysis methods, such as detailed assessments of students' exam scores, performance presentations, and self-reported satisfaction levels, teachers can not only accurately evaluate students' actual mastery of different musical styles but also provide highly targeted guidance for course design. Through such an evaluation system, teachers can more precisely grasp the learning needs of the students, offering them a richer and more diverse musical learning experience, thereby truly enhancing their musical literacy and artistic cultivation.

5.2 Optimizing the Comprehensive Course Ratio Evaluation Framework

Compared to various types of performance-based music teaching, music appreciation courses have a lower barrier to entry and require less physical fitness from the elderly, making them suitable for those with mild needs or older adults who are on the fence about music education[5]. Therefore, it is recommended that a moderate amount of music appreciation courses be incorporated into the curriculum design of universities for the elderly, in order to provide diverse options that meet a wide range of learning interests and needs.

In the current era of multiculturalism, emerging musical works exhibit significant diversity, leading to considerable differences in acceptance and interest among elderly students toward these works. In response to this phenomenon, universities for the elderly should consider offering a broader range of course options, integrating practice and appreciation, and incorporating different styles such as modern music, classical music, and traditional music into the teaching system. Additionally, comparative courses are needed, such as contrasting modern and traditional music, comparing the development of Eastern and Western music, and comparing national and Western

musical instruments, to enrich the content and deepen the learning experience. In surveys, many elderly students expressed strong interest in courses comparing Chinese and Western musical instruments. One 72-year-old lady, who has participated in piano courses for half a year, believes that such courses do not require a profound musical foundation or extensive practice after class, yet they allow her to appreciate the charm of different musical cultures. This feedback reaffirms the desire of elderly students for diverse and comparative courses. Therefore, universities for the elderly should make greater efforts to offer appreciation courses, combining theory with practice, and providing the elderly with course content that genuinely interests them from multiple perspectives. Such a curriculum not only meets the diverse learning needs of elderly students but also enhances their musical literacy and aesthetic abilities.

5.3 Developing a Diversified System of Teaching methods

Nowadays, traditional didactic teaching methods no longer meet the needs of current music education for the elderly. Teachers can appropriately integrate innovative teaching methods, such as the "spirit of play," to invigorate the classroom atmosphere and make learning enjoyable. Game activities can encourage the elderly to learn knowledge and skills voluntarily, consciously, and actively through the teaching form of games, allowing them to gain a sense of satisfaction and pleasure in the learning process. Therefore, the goals of game activities and those of elderly education can be mutually integrated and referenced[6].

Teachers can incorporate the spirit of play into the learning of pop music, which is relatively unfamiliar to the elderly, in order to enhance their interest and classroom participation. Compared to traditional didactic teaching methods, gamified teaching is not only an excellent tool for course introduction but also an effective way of learning. In a relaxed and enjoyable classroom atmosphere, teachers can design various games related to pop music, such as music knowledge quizzes, song title guessing games, or simulated performances. These games can help elderly students better grasp the rhythm, melody, and lyrics of music while having fun. At the same time, gamified teaching also helps break away from the rigid learning patterns of traditional classrooms, introducing more interactive and participatory elements, making the learning process more dynamic and productive.

5.4 Constructing a Multi-level Teaching Content Framework

Textbooks, as an important auxiliary tool in the teaching process, play an irreplaceable role in guiding teachers to establish the scope and structure of teaching content. To maximize the educational value of textbooks, teachers should delve into and fully utilize textbook resources while actively keeping up with new trends and developments in the field of music to ensure the timeliness and foresight of the teaching content. When developing and implementing music education courses for the elderly, teachers need to recognize that although textbooks provide basic knowledge and a standard framework, they should not be used as the sole teaching resource. Given the regional disparities, individual differences among learners, and the increasingly rich multicultural

background, teachers should continuously explore and integrate new teaching methods and content. This includes introducing musical elements with local characteristics, considering the learning needs and interests of elderly students, and incorporating current popular or representative new music works into the curriculum. Moreover, innovative classroom content should also encompass intercultural music exchanges, providing understanding and appreciation of different music styles from around the world, thereby constructing a comprehensive and in-depth music learning environment for elderly students. Through such course design, it is possible not only to enhance the musical aesthetics and cultural literacy of the elderly but also to increase their interest in and participation in music learning, thereby improving their quality of life.

6 Summary

In today's multicultural context, the elderly population faces numerous challenges in music education. The continuous development of society and the deep integration of cultures have led to increasingly diverse needs for music education among the elderly. To adapt to these changes, music courses at universities for the elderly must adopt more standardized, innovative, and entertaining teaching strategies. Although significant achievements have been made in music education at universities for the elderly, there are still many issues that educators need to further explore and perfect. To promote the progress and development of music education for the elderly, educators should commit to continuous learning and systematic planning to fully meet the learning needs of the elderly. This includes deepening the understanding of the characteristics of elderly learners, designing courses that suit their interests and physical conditions, and incorporating modern educational technology to enrich teaching content and improve teaching efficiency. In summary, with the rapid changes in society and culture, innovative educational strategies that adapt to the learning needs of the elderly become particularly crucial. Through continuous efforts and innovation, music education for the elderly is expected to continue to thrive, providing rich and meaningful learning opportunities for the elderly.

References

1. Ma Xiaoweil.Fully Promoting High-Quality Development of Work on Aging in the New Era[N].People's Daily,2021-12-24(010).DOI:10.28655/n.cnki.nrmrb.2021.013555.
2. Pan Yinru.Global Aging Acceleration Report Calls for Leaving No One Behind in an Aging World[N].Yicai Daily,2024-03-22(A10).
3. Wang Lujie.Physiological, Emotional, Cognitive, and Behavioral Aspects: Twenty Years of Research on the Role of Music Therapy in the Management of Chronic Diseases among the Elderly in China[J].Exploration in Music,2022,(02):100-111.DOI:10.15929/j.cnki.1004-2172.2022.02.012.
4. Huang Xueqing,Zhu Yanan,Wang Yansong.Is Music Therapy Helpful for Alzheimer's Patients?[J].Family Life Guide,2021,37(10):184-185.

5. Shang Fang. Research on the significance and Development Strategies of Music Education for the Elderly in the New Era[J]. Journal of Jilin Radio and Television University, 2022, (06): 37-39.
6. He Yinjie. "Research on Piano Teaching for the Elderly from the Perspective of 'Game Spirit'" [D]. Hunan Normal University, 2020. DOI: 10.27137/d.cnki.gghusu.2020.002011.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

