

Integration of Multicultural Elements in Music Appreciation Education and Enhancement of Students' Cultural Understanding

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Abstract: In the context of global cultural integration, music appreciation education, as the core vehicle of aesthetic education, is an important path to cultivate students' cultural understanding literacy. The current teaching of music appreciation in primary and secondary schools faces practical challenges such as limited cultural perspectives, fragmented content of world traditional ethnic music, and superficial interpretation of cultural connotations, which seriously restrict the implementation of cultural education goals. This article is guided by The 2022 Edition of Art Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education and related policies of the Aesthetic Education Infiltration Action, combined with literature research method and front-line teaching practices, relying on the 2024 art education survey data of the Chinese Academy of Educational Sciences, to systematically explore the practical paths of integrating multicultural music elements into music appreciation classrooms, analyze its mechanism for improving students cross-cultural cognition, aesthetic empathy, and cultural thinking ability, and propose targeted optimization strategies. Research has confirmed that the systematic integration of multicultural elements can effectively address teaching shortcomings, enhance the cultural immersion function of music education, and provide solid practical support and theoretical reference for the reform of music appreciation teaching in primary and secondary schools and the cultivation of students' cultural understanding literacy.

Keywords: Music appreciation; Multiculturalism; Cultural comprehension; Aesthetic Education; Core Competencies.

1. Introduction

Cultural diversity is an important direction for aesthetic education in the new era, and music, as a cultural carrier that carries national historical memory and aesthetic pursuit, plays an irreplaceable role in cultivating students' cross-cultural cognition. The 2022 Edition of Art Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education lists "cultural understanding" as one of the four core competencies of the art discipline, and explicitly proposes to guide students in music teaching to understand the diverse music cultures of the world, establish cultural inclusiveness, and make understanding the diversity of music culture the core goal of music appreciation teaching. According to the 2024 research on aesthetic education by the Chinese Academy of Educational Sciences, there are still prominent practical problems in music appreciation teaching in primary and secondary schools: the curriculum content structure is relatively single, world traditional ethnic music is mostly presented in fragmented forms, and cultural interpretation often stays at the surface level. Classroom teaching often revolves around the analysis of musical elements such as melody and rhythm, and rarely combines the cultural context and social function of works for in-depth interpretation. This teaching model that emphasizes skill explanation and ignores cultural connotations can easily lead students to form a one-sided understanding of music, making it difficult to establish an equal and inclusive cultural value system [1]. The Notice of the Ministry of Education on the Comprehensive Implementation of the School Aesthetic Education Infiltration Action (Order No. 5 [2023] of the Ministry of Education) proposes to enhance students' core literacy such as cultural understanding and aesthetic perception through aesthetic education, encourage the absorption of excellent human civilization achievements in

teaching, and respect cultural diversity. Systematically integrating multicultural elements into music appreciation teaching can not only enrich classroom content, but also guide students to perceive cultural differences and understand cultural connotations while listening, gradually enhancing cross-cultural cognition and critical thinking abilities. This article is based on the actual situation of music teaching in primary and secondary schools, and explores the integration of multiculturalism and the cultivation of students' cultural understanding. It avoids the superficial teaching ideas and focuses on the substantive improvement of cultural literacy, striving to provide a practical path for implementing cultural education goals in music appreciation teaching.

2. The Core and Policy Basis of Multicultural Music Appreciation Education

The core essence of multicultural music appreciation education lies in breaking the monotonous traditional teaching model and achieving equal presentation and in-depth interpretation of different ethnic groups and types of music cultures. In fact, the theoretical support of this educational model mainly comes from the core viewpoints of music anthropology and the concept of multicultural education. Among them, Merriam's three-dimensional analysis framework of "Concept—Behavior—Sound" clearly defines the inherent relationship between music and cultural context, and provides a scientific analytical perspective for teaching practice.

From the perspective of policies and norms, China's current art education policies provide clear guidance for the promotion of multicultural music education. The 2022 Edition of Art Curriculum Standards for Compulsory

Education includes "cultural understanding" as a core competency, and explicitly requires that teaching should take into account the inheritance of excellent traditional Chinese culture and the introduction of diverse music cultures from around the world; The "National Music Curriculum Standards for Ordinary High Schools" also emphasize the need for systematic teaching to guide students to understand the cultural connotations behind music and establish the concept of respecting multiculturalism. At the same time, the relevant conventions implemented by the United Nations since 2003 also explicitly include intangible cultural heritage education in the formal education system [2], among which the inheritance and dissemination of music intangible cultural heritage has become an important carrier for promoting cross-cultural exchange.

In fact, multicultural music appreciation is not simply about expanding repertoires, but about building communication bridges between different cultures through music as a medium. Front-line teaching practices have shown that systematically carrying out multicultural music teaching not only allows students to feel the unique charm of different ethnic music, but also guides them to deeply understand the cultural background and value connotations behind the works [3]. Under this teaching model, the classroom is no longer simply about imparting music skills, but has become an important platform for cross-cultural cognition and communication, gradually cultivating students open and inclusive cultural mentality.

It should be noted that the implementation of multicultural music education cannot be separated from scientific teaching design and practical guidance. It is necessary to avoid the perfunctory repertoire accumulation and pay attention to the deep exploration of cultural connotations, so that every music work can become a carrier for conveying cultural values and promoting cultural understanding, truly achieving the educational goal of "convey cultural values and nurture students' character through music".

3. The Practical Shortcomings of Multicultural Integration in Music Appreciation Teaching in primary and secondary schools

The integration of diverse cultural elements in current music appreciation teaching in primary and secondary schools is still in the superficial stage of implementation, which not only falls short of the cultural education goals of the new curriculum standards, but fails to effectively support the substantial improvement of students' cultural literacy. The practical bottlenecks are mainly reflected in four dimensions.

Firstly, textbook content is structurally imbalanced. Multiple surveys have shown that music works of world ethnic groups and local ethnic minorities are often embedded in textbooks in a fragmented manner, lacking systematic cultural context sorting, and rarely related to folk situations, social life, and cultural backgrounds for interpretation. The proportion of diverse music content is low, making it difficult to support students in forming a complete multicultural cognitive system [4].

Secondly, there are structural weaknesses in teachers multicultural teaching abilities. According to relevant data, 65% of primary and secondary school music teachers have not received systematic training on world ethnic and local characteristic music, and have insufficient understanding of

the background knowledge of multicultural music. Classroom teaching is mostly limited to the analysis of rhythm, melody, and other musical elements, making it difficult to deeply explore the cultural connotations of works. Even though teachers generally recognize the value of multicultural teaching, only 29% are able to fully carry out related teaching, with insufficient cultural interpretation ability, lack of teaching resources, and class time constraints pose common limitations.

Thirdly, the classroom teaching mode is relatively rigid. Teaching still relies mainly on one-way transmission of "listening + explanation", lacking immersive experience and situational exploration [5]. Students can only obtain formal auditory perception, making it difficult for them to understand the cultural logic behind music. Their understanding of diverse music mostly stays at the symbolic level, making it difficult to form cultural empathy and cross-cultural comparison perspectives.

Fourthly, there is a misalignment between teaching evaluation and core competency requirements. Music appreciation assessments tend to focus more on piece recognition and element judgment, with less emphasis on cultural understanding, cultural comparison, and other evaluation content, resulting in teaching leaning towards knowledge memorization rather than cultural speculation. The existing evaluation system has failed to effectively meet the requirements of "cultural understanding" literacy, making it difficult to promote the transformation of teaching towards deep cultural exploration. The integration of diverse cultures tends to be formalized, making it difficult to truly promote the development of students cultural understanding, and also restricting the full realization of the schools aesthetic education and cultural education functions.

4. The Value of Integrating Multicultural Elements into Students' Cultural Understanding

A music classroom is an important carrier for cultivating students cultural understanding literacy. Integrating multicultural music materials into various aspects of daily teaching can effectively enhance students comprehensive cultural literacy from three levels: cultural cognitive construction, emotional empathy cultivation, and cultural speculation. This is also an inherent requirement for implementing the new version of the compulsory education art curriculum standards. In terms of cultural cognition construction, traditional music of various ethnic groups and regions carries distinct regional culture and ethnic characteristics. Incorporating world traditional ethnic music and folk music into appreciation teaching can enable students to intuitively perceive the lifestyle, spiritual connotation, and cultural identity of different ethnic groups while listening, gradually building a complete multicultural cognitive framework, eliminating cultural barriers, and broadening cultural horizons. In terms of cultivating emotional empathy, music has the characteristic of transmitting emotions beyond language and region. Music works of different styles and ethnic groups can enable students to resonate emotionally across cultural differences, understand the emotional expression logic behind various types of music [6], weaken cultural stereotypes through continuous appreciation, and form an inclusive and open cultural mentality. Front-line teaching practices have also shown that long-term and stable

implementation of multicultural music appreciation teaching can significantly enhance students' cultural empathy ability and cross-cultural understanding level. In the formation of cultural speculation, through the comparative appreciation and in-depth interpretation of classic music works from the East and the West, students can be guided to clarify the inherent connections between music and culture, society, and history. Through analysis, comparison, and judgment, independent aesthetic and cultural reasoning abilities can be formed, and rational and objective cultural cognition can be established. Integrating multicultural music materials into music appreciation teaching is not only a specific path to implement the core literacy cultivation of "cultural understanding" in art curriculum standards, but also an important means to help students establish cultural confidence and enhance cross-cultural communication skills [7]. Relying on normalized and systematic teaching implementation, continuously enriching teaching content and forms, can help students form an open and inclusive cultural perspective and sound cultural cognition, laying a solid foundation for the overall improvement and long-term development of students' artistic core literacy. In actual teaching promotion, teachers can also explore localized teaching by combining regional music and cultural resources, making multicultural teaching more contextualized, more in line with students' life experience and cognitive reality, and truly effective in cultivating cultural understanding.

5. The Implementation Path and Real Practice of Multicultural Music Appreciation Teaching

In music teaching in primary and secondary schools, the promotion of multicultural appreciation should be based on the main battlefield of the classroom, relying on regular and sustainable teaching practices, and avoiding formalism or superficial experiences. The implementation path can revolve around three main lines: cultural interpretation, experiential integration, and local cultural connection, which is also in line with the requirements of The 2022 Edition of Art Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education for "cultural understanding" literacy.

In terms of teaching content, teachers can reorganize appreciation materials, classify world music according to regional and folk characteristics, and carry out teaching in conjunction with cultural background materials. When appreciating samba music, combining the images of the Brazilian carnival with cultural introductions, can align music with its cultural context, and help students understand the historical and social significance of samba as a cultural symbol [8]. Teaching can rely on the "Latin American Music" unit in the eighth grade textbook of the Peoples Education Press, and draw on high-quality lesson examples such as "Song of Carnival" to ensure standardized content and complete system.

In classroom implementation, experiential learning can be used to enable students to perceive cultural connotations through rhythm imitation, simple instrument playing, situational simulation, and other methods of participation. For example, using hand drums to reproduce traditional African rhythms, understand the role of music in group activities and rituals. The practice of Nankai School in Tianjin Haihe Education Park shows that seventh grade students have significantly improved their cultural empathy ability after

listening to African drum performances and works, with a classroom participation rate of 92%.

From a cultural perspective, teaching should be based on local culture, comparing and appreciating local folk songs, operas, and intangible cultural heritage music with world music. By comparing Jiangnan silk and bamboo with Japanese classical music, analyzing the differences from the perspectives of instruments, melodies, aesthetics, etc., students can not only recognize their own cultural background, but also understand the diversity and commonalities of world cultures [9]. The Wuxi "Intangible Cultural Heritage in Schools" project demonstrates that the "local+global" appreciation model can enhance cultural confidence and cultivate cross-cultural perspectives.

On this basis, schools can expand classroom space and guide students to shift from passive listening to active exploration through activities such as music appreciation weeks, folk performances, and workshops. The primary school practice of Inner Mongolia University for Nationalities also shows that interactive teaching of morin khuur and cello can effectively broaden students' cultural horizons and aesthetic levels. The combination of in-class and out-of-class activities can provide students with a more authentic cultural experience and promote the steady development of cultural understanding literacy.

6. Optimization Direction and Long-term Development of Multicultural Music Education

The key to achieving long-term development of multicultural music education lies in improving the implementation system from three aspects: teaching resources, teacher training, and teaching evaluation. The ultimate goal is to enhance students' cultural understanding ability, which is also in line with the requirements of the Ministry of Education's aesthetic education infiltration action to build a modern and high-quality aesthetic education system.

From the perspective of teaching resources, the education department can establish a national multicultural music digital resource platform, integrating standardized world traditional ethnic music materials and supporting cultural interpretation materials [10]. During the construction process, reference can be made to the resource construction standards of the national higher education smart education platform "World Music Tour", while introducing high-quality course resources from Chinese university MOOCs "Foreign Ethnic Music" to compensate for the shortage of music teaching resources in rural and remote areas and expand the coverage of multicultural music teaching.

At the level of teacher training, the teaching content of world traditional ethnic music and cross-cultural music can be included in the scope of continuing education for primary and secondary school music teachers [11]. Jointly conduct specialized training with professional music schools and intangible cultural heritage inheritance institutions, focusing on enhancing teachers' cultural analysis ability and curriculum design level. The special training conducted by Yunnan Arts University for primary and secondary school music teachers in border areas has covered 156 frontline teachers, effectively enhancing the practical ability of local teachers to carry out multicultural music teaching.

The assessment system of music appreciation courses can be appropriately optimized, reducing the proportion of single

knowledge-based assessments and increasing qualitative evaluation content such as cultural understanding, cultural comparison, and cultural perception. Specifically, students' cultural thinking ability can be comprehensively evaluated through forms such as music essays and group cultural discussions, which is also in line with the current development direction of aesthetic education evaluation reform.

In the long run, multicultural music appreciation teaching should not blindly pursue the quantity and breadth of repertoire, but should focus on the deep cultivation of students' cultural understanding ability, avoiding fragmented and formalized teaching content. In the context of the reform of aesthetic education in the new era, following the cognitive laws of students, balancing the aesthetic and cultural aspects of teaching, can effectively promote the deep integration of aesthetic education and cultural education, implement the core requirements of aesthetic education of "fostering virtue through aesthetics and cultivating people with beauty", and provide stable support for the sustainable development of students' cultural understanding literacy.

7. Conclusion

In music appreciation teaching, integrating diverse cultural content into the system can not only enrich the path of cultural transmission, but also help cultivate students' comprehensive cultural literacy. It can effectively solve practical problems such as limited cultural perspectives in traditional classrooms and insufficient cultivation of students' cultural understanding abilities. From the perspective of teaching practice, the integration of multiculturalism does not need to be limited to the formal level of shallow listening. It is entirely possible to combine music works with their cultural background, folk connotations, and regional aesthetic characteristics. Through content reconstruction, experiential teaching, and mutual comparison between local culture and foreign music, students can naturally complete their understanding, empathy, and speculation of culture in the process of appreciation.

From the perspective of practical effects, multicultural music appreciation that conforms to students' cognitive characteristics can indeed enhance their cross-cultural understanding, aesthetic empathy, and cultural thinking abilities, and also help students form equal and inclusive cultural values. However, there are also obvious limitations in practice, as many teaching methods still remain at the superficial level of mere playback and piece listing. The uneven supply of digital resources between urban and rural areas, uneven cross-cultural interpretation and curriculum design abilities of teachers, and excessive reliance on knowledge-based assessments in evaluation methods have all

to some extent affected the overall effectiveness of teaching.

Going forward, teaching can continue to improve the supply of multicultural music resources within the existing framework of aesthetic education policies, with a focus on bridging resource gaps in rural and remote areas; incorporate cross-cultural music teaching into the regular training of music teachers to enhance their ability to interpret multicultural works and design classrooms; optimize evaluation methods and appropriately increase qualitative evaluations in cultural understanding, cultural experience, and other aspects. Based on local culture, we will steadily deepen the teaching of multicultural music appreciation, allowing students to gradually enhance their cultural understanding through music experience, and truly implement the fundamental task of aesthetic education, fostering virtue and cultivating talents.

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