

A Study on the Path to Cultivating Cultural Identity in Music Education under a Multicultural Background

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ABSTRACT The current state of school music education shows a fragmented “cultural patchwork” pattern, resulting in students’ insufficient understanding of local musical identity and making skill-centered instruction inadequate for cultural identity cultivation. To address this problem, this study constructs a “three-dimensional integrated” immersive pathway consisting of three interconnected strategies: origin-tracing instruction for native musical heritage through field investigation, dual music literacy training that internalizes native music before engaging with heterogeneous cultures through dramatization, and a growth portfolio tracking students’ development in cultural cognition, emotional attitude, and behavioral participation. Experimental results show that the experimental group scores significantly higher than the control group in post-tests of national cultural pride, multicultural inclusiveness, and cultural identity clarity, with scores of 4.18-4.21 versus 3.29-3.32 and gains exceeding 1.17 points. Students receiving dual music literacy training perform best. The findings indicate that the proposed pathway can generate positive changes in students’ self-reported cultural identity within a single-site context, providing a feasible direction for transforming music education from skill transmission toward cultural cultivation.

INDEX TERMS multicultural background, music education, cultural identity, immersive learning, portfolio assessment

I. INTRODUCTION

GLOBALIZATION has accelerated the integration of diverse musical cultures into school curricula, necessitating pedagogical approaches that can effectively address increasing cultural complexity [1]. However, the phenomenon of “cultural patchwork” is prevalent in current music teaching practice: the introduction of musical works from different ethnic groups often remains at the level of form imitation and superficial appreciation, lacking in-depth exploration of the cultural value system and sense of identity behind them [2]. This superficial teaching method makes it difficult for students to form a firm cultural confidence in their own ethnic traditional music, and also makes it impossible for them to truly understand the core of different musical cultures, ultimately resulting in a blurring of cultural identity and confusion of aesthetic values. Against this background, how to guide students to establish cultural foundation and cultivate rational and inclusive cultural identity in a multicultural context has become an urgent issue for the field of music education [3,4].

Academic circles at home and abroad have conducted many discussions on multicultural music education and the cultivation of cultural identity. Ruokonen et al. found that strengthening music education in early childhood education

and care is related to the daily activities of children aged one to three years old, which can promote more positive emotions, improve social adaptation and increase interaction with adults, thereby optimizing the teaching and learning environment [5]. Sungurtekin used a phenomenological approach to explore the views of primary school music teachers on the cultivation of imagination and creativity. Based on the analysis of creative curriculum, he proposed teaching adjustments that teachers should make in music classrooms to promote the development of students’ imagination and creative thinking [6]. Ògúnsànyà compared the rhythmic functions of Dudubon’s “talking drum” and oral poetry, pointing out its broad application prospects in diasporic music and contemporary popular music [7]. Gramm aimed to analyze the most commonly used written notation methods in primary and secondary school popular music and modern band teaching and the main ways for students to learn songs, and to discuss its teaching practice, professional impact and subsequent research directions [8]. Fitzpatrick used a culture-based educational theory framework and a collective descriptive case study to explore the practice and situational characteristics of four Hawaiian music teachers in using Hawaiian cultural education methods in the classroom [9]. To better meet the needs of diverse learners, Bond and

Russell proposed a conceptual model to promote culturally responsive music education, which was used to guide related theoretical discussions and teaching practices, and to provide research and application suggestions [10]. These studies provide important theoretical basis for multicultural music education. However, existing literature still has several shortcomings: First, most studies focus on expanding curriculum content, lacking a systematic integrated approach design and failing to establish a synergistic mechanism at the levels of curriculum structure, teaching methods, and evaluation systems. Second, the definition of cultural identity is relatively macroscopic, lacking operational measurement tools and empirical testing. Third, discussions on “bicultural competence” or intercultural music practice mostly remain at the skill level, without deeply revealing its intrinsic mechanism for students’ cultural identity construction. Therefore, it is necessary to construct a comprehensive approach that combines theoretical support and empirical testing to respond to the practical needs of cultivating cultural identity in music education under a multicultural background. Based on this, this paper, within the framework of constructivism and cultural identity theory, integrates three approaches—“tracing the origins of one’s native musical heritage,” “dual music literacy training,” and “portfolio assessment”—to construct a “three-dimensional” immersive cultural identity cultivation model, addressing the problems of fragmented approaches, ambiguous mechanisms, and insufficient empirical evidence in current research. Given that the cultural identity formation process is deeply embedded in specific institutional and regional contexts, this study adopts an exploratory, single-site design to examine the feasibility and initial effectiveness of the proposed pathway. The findings are intended to offer a theoretically grounded and empirically tested framework that can be further validated and adapted across diverse educational settings.

The structure of this paper is as follows: The introduction elaborates on the research background and the origin of the problem, reviews relevant literature and clarifies the research positioning; the methodology section elaborates on the construction logic and specific implementation strategies of the cultural identity cultivation path, and unfolds from four aspects: curriculum content, teaching methods, environment creation, and evaluation orientation; the experimental section introduces the empirical research design, and uses two progressive experiments to test the effectiveness of the overall path and the unique contribution of the core teaching strategies; finally, the conclusion section summarizes the research contributions and limitations, and looks forward to future research directions.

II. IMPLEMENTING “NATIVE MUSICAL HERITAGE” ORIGIN-TRACING TEACHING

To address the fragmented nature of current music curricula, this study establishes a coherent conceptual framework centered on the “native musical heritage.” This framework organizes instructional content around a unified origin-tracing

model, ensuring structural integrity and continuity across all subsequent pedagogical developments. The theoretical assumption of this design is that people must be grounded in their own cultural traditions before they can accept and tolerate multiculturalism in the world, and this kind of multiculturalism cannot be achieved without a clear self-cultural identity.

The implementation of the design can be described in three levels. First, break away from the logic of arranging the content based on Western music system and rearrange the teaching content based on cultural regions. Starting from the students’ local cultural ecology, representative local traditional music genres are selected as teaching contents. That is, local opera, folk songs and ritual music, etc. Second, field research and oral history methods are introduced. Students are asked to step out of the classroom and trace the cultural origins and social functions of the musical forms through field trips, interviews with folk artists and collection of original audio-visual materials. When students are recording musical scores and organizing lyrics, they are also decoding the culture of their own ethnic group and local knowledge at the same time. Third, students are asked to finish the compilation of “Local Music Culture Chronicle” in groups and integrate the field discoveries scattered during compilation into thematic reports in a systematic way and finish the course in multimedia form. This makes the individual experience becomes the collective cognition. Students achieve a high degree of identification with their native musical culture through their subjective practice of knowledge construction.

III. CONDUCTING “DUAL MUSICAL LITERACY” TRAINING

In response to the adjustment of content in the curriculum, innovative teaching methods have become an important link in the process of linking cultural cognition and emotional identification. Referring to the “dual musical competence” defined by the ethnomusicologist Mantle Hood, this study further extends its connotation from the narrow range of abilities to the level of cultural understanding and identity empathy, and establishes a “dual musical literacy” training mode.

The specific operation is divided into two progressive stages. The first stage is the deep internalization of native music. Students start with the local music selected in the previous “native musical heritage” origin-tracing teaching, completing the singing or performance of a complete piece. Unlike traditional skills training, this stage requires students not only to master formal elements such as pitch and rhythm, but also to experience, through oral transmission from folk artists, the vocalizations, embellishments, and emotional expression logic of the music within its original context, transforming technical discipline into bodily memory and cultural awareness. This embodied knowledge was operationalized through three observable indicators: (a) consistency of performance style with folk transmission

models, recorded via video documentation; (b) students' verbal articulation of physical techniques in cultural journals; and (c) peer recognition of authentic performance expression in classroom observation.

The second stage is cultural dramatization of heterogeneous music. After finishing the native language music lessons, students get into the world folk music module. The teacher chooses non-Western music genres, which are distant from the musical culture of students' native countries, and asks students to study the sonic organization and social functions of, for example, Indian classical music, African drumming, or Indonesian gamelan. The next step is the "cultural dramatization" exercise: students study in groups the ritual scenes of the studied music in its original environment, try to reproduce weddings, sacrifices, and festivals through roleplaying, and thus realize through their own bodies how music participates in cultural construction, making multiculturalism reasonably respected through roleplaying and aesthetic empathy.

IV. CREATING AN IMMERSIVE CULTURAL EXPERIENCE SPACE

Innovation in curriculum content and teaching methods requires a corresponding teaching environment. This study breaks through the physical limitations of traditional music classrooms, constructing an immersive cultural experience space from both physical and virtual dimensions, allowing students to continuously immerse themselves in a diverse cultural atmosphere in their daily learning and life.

At the physical space level, we remodeled the original music classroom. In one side, there is a "National Musical Instrument Culture Exhibition Area". Students can see typical musical instruments of different ethnic groups classified by cultural areas, and graphic panels introduce form, original birthplace and ritual functions of musical instruments. In the other side, there is a "Traditional Instruction Workshop" area. We invite folk artists or inheritors of intangible cultural heritage to come to the music classroom once a week, and let them teach students in a traditional teacher-apprentice way on the spot. In this kind of teaching atmosphere, students can not only learn skills, but also get a sensory perception of musical culture by observing the postures of artists and listening to their oral descriptions.

At the virtual space level, we constructed a "Diverse Musical Culture Community" on the basis of the campus network platform. Teachers ask students to upload their own performance videos regularly, and at the same time, submit a kind of "cultural journal". While learning different style of works, students need to record and describe their learned knowledge, feelings about cultural differences they have experienced, and their psychological states in the process of identity transition. Teachers and other students can comment and communicate with students on this community. In this virtual space, the time and space of classroom are broken. The cultural experience is not limited to the process of in-class teaching, but also appeared in the daily reflection

of students outside of class. Students constantly reinforced their understanding of their own cultural identity and position by writing and communication.

V. ESTABLISHING A "THREE-DIMENSIONAL" GROWTH PORTFOLIO

Transforming the assessment system serves as a pivotal lever for the overall pedagogical shift. In alignment with the curriculum and instructional innovations described above, this study replaces traditional summative skills assessments with a growth portfolio system organized along three evaluation dimensions—cultural cognition, emotional attitude, and behavioral participation—thereby capturing the full trajectory of students' cultural identity development. The structure of this portfolio system is illustrated in Figure 1.

These three evaluation dimensions are defined as follows. Cultural cognition assesses students' understanding of the cultural logic behind musical phenomena, using materials such as field research reports and cultural origin analyses. Emotional attitude captures students' cultural respect and affective engagement, drawing from course reflection logs and cultural notes. Behavioral participation encompasses classroom discussion, group collaboration, and expressive performance, evaluated through teacher observation and peer assessment. "integration" means to produce a digital personal growth portfolio for each student and to dynamically integrate materials of three dimensions into the portfolio. At the beginning of the semester, students did self-assessment of their cultural identity and recorded an initial performance video as their portfolio. In the beginning of each week during the semester, students uploaded field notes and reflection log and at the end of each month, they uploaded a performance recording. At the end of the semester, students did another assessment of their cultural identity and recorded a final performance. Teachers did a "heat map" of students' cultural identity development by comparing materials of cultural identity assessment at the beginning and the end of the semester. Teachers visually presented the changes of students' development in three levels: deepening understanding of culture in cognition, transforming emotion about culture, and growing in performance skills. Therefore, compared to "what was learned", the focus of assessment is "whom were become". The assessment process itself was an learning process and was transforming into a positive push for students' construction of cultural identity. The weighting and scoring method of each dimension is shown in Table 1.

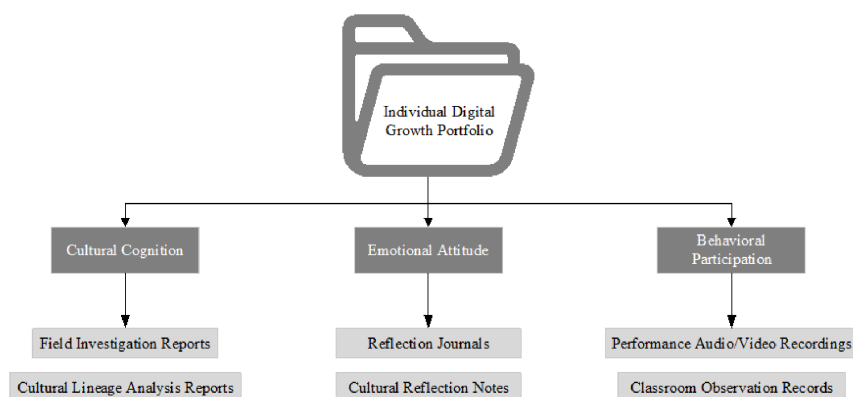


FIGURE 1. Structure Diagram of the “Three-Dimensional” Growth Portfolio Evaluation System

TABLE 1. Weighting of the “Three-Dimensional” Growth Portfolio Assessment

Assessment Dimension	Observation Indicators and Assessment Materials	Weight (Pre-test/Post-test)	Assessment Method
Cultural Cognition	Field investigation report, Cultural origin analysis report	30%/30%	Teacher assessment
Emotional Attitude	Course reflection journals, Cultural notes	30%/40%	Teacher assessment + Self-assessment
Behavioral Participation	Classroom observation records, Performance recordings	40%/30%	Teacher assessment + Peer assessment

VI. VALIDATION OF THE CULTIVATION PATHWAY

A. EXPERIMENTAL SETUP

To examine the effectiveness of the “three-dimensional integrated” pathway and the unique role of dual music literacy training, two successive quasi-experiments were conducted over one semester (16 weeks) with 160 students from four parallel classes at a single university. The self-developed Music and Cultural Identity Scale (18 items, five-point Likert) measured three dimensions: national cultural pride, multicultural tolerance, and cultural identity clarity. A two-group design (experimental vs. control) first tested the overall pathway effect; a subsequent three-group design (experimental groups A and B vs. control) isolated the contribution of dual music literacy training. To mitigate testing effects, the scale included reverse-coded items and neutral wording, and anonymity was assured. Likert items on identity clarity and national pride were directly aligned with the three observable indicators of bodily memory (video recordings, cultural journals, classroom observations), grounding quantitative results in embodied experiences. All quantitative data were triangulated with qualitative portfolio materials. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Taiyuan Normal University, and was performed in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. All eligible participants signed an informed consent form.

B. COMPARATIVE EXPERIMENT ON THE OVERALL PATHWAY INTERVENTION EFFECT

When assessing the overall effect of a pathway intervention, we randomly chose 80 students from a parallel class in a university as experimental group and control group, with 40 students in each group. The experimental group practiced

the whole “three-dimensional” cultural identity cultivation path, and the control group practiced in the traditional skills teaching model. The whole three teaching experiments were carried out in one semester (16 weeks), and the measurement adopted the Music and Cultural Identity Scale. The evaluation results are shown in Figure 2.

Figures 2(a) and (b) respectively show the pre-test and post-test scores of the experimental and control groups on the three dimensions of national cultural pride, multicultural tolerance, and cultural identity clarity. The experimental results showed that the experimental group’s post-test scores (4.21 ± 0.51 , 4.18 ± 0.49 , 4.20 ± 0.50) on the three dimensions of national cultural pride, multicultural tolerance, and cultural identity clarity were significantly higher than those of the control group (3.31 ± 0.48 , 3.29 ± 0.51 , 3.32 ± 0.49). Independent samples t-tests showed statistically significant differences between groups ($p < 0.001$). From pre-test to post-test, the experimental group improved by more than 1.17 points in each dimension, while the control group improved by less than 0.30 points. These results indicate that the pathway significantly improved students’ self-reported cultural identity attitudes (e.g., pride, inclusiveness, perceived clarity) over the 16-week period, outperforming the traditional model. However, as cultural identity formation is a gradual, long-term process, these short-term gains should be interpreted as preliminary attitudinal shifts rather than evidence of deep-seated identity reconstruction.

C. ENHANCEMENT EXPERIMENT OF CORE TEACHING STRATEGIES

In order to explore the effect of dual music literacy training on the formation of cultural identity, this study randomly

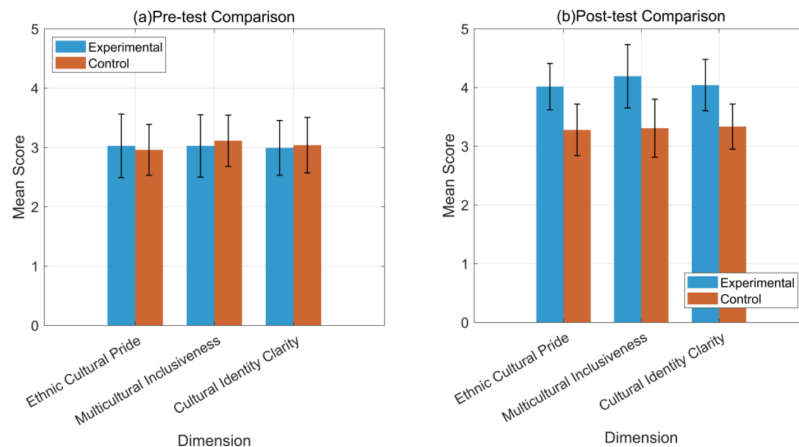


FIGURE 2. Comparison of Overall Pathway Intervention Effect

chose 90 students from three parallel classes and adopted a random allocation method to form experimental group A, experimental group B and control group with 30 students in each group. Experimental group A implemented the full “three-dimensional” cultivation path, including dual music literacy training. Experimental group B received the same curriculum content and total instructional time as Group A, but the dual music literacy training component was replaced by an equal amount of lecture-based instruction on the cultural background of the selected world musics (e.g., historical context, instrument construction, social functions). The control group received traditional skills-based instruction without any of the pathway components. The teaching time was one semester (16 weeks) in total. Music Cultural Identity Scale was used for pre- and post-tests.

TABLE 2. Comparison of the Enhancement of Core Teaching Strategies

Dimension	Group	Post-test Score (M±SD)	Gain
Ethnic Cultural Pride	Experimental Group A	4.21 ± 0.48	1.19
	Experimental Group B	3.82 ± 0.51	0.8
	Control Group	3.30 ± 0.49	0.28
Multicultural Inclusiveness	Experimental Group A	4.18 ± 0.50	1.18
	Experimental Group B	3.79 ± 0.48	0.79
	Control Group	3.31 ± 0.52	0.31
Cultural Identity Clarity	Experimental Group A	4.20 ± 0.49	1.2
	Experimental Group B	3.81 ± 0.50	0.81
	Control Group	3.29 ± 0.48	0.29

Table 2 shows that experimental group A’s post-test scores (4.18–4.21) and improvement (1.18–1.20) in all dimensions were significantly higher than those of experimental group B (3.79–3.82, improvement 0.79–0.81) and the control group (3.29–3.31, improvement 0.28–0.31). One-way ANOVA showed significant differences between groups ($p < 0.001$), and post-hoc tests confirmed that experimental group A was significantly better than the other two groups. This result suggests that dual music literacy training is a core enhancing element in the cultivation path, effectively strengthening

students’ self-reported emotional identification with different music cultures over the semester. Further longitudinal research is required to examine whether these effects persist and deepen over time.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study offers an initial attempt to shift music education from “skill transmission” toward “cultural cultivation” by empirically testing a “three-dimensional integrated” pathway within a single university over 16 weeks. Results indicate positive shifts in students’ self-reported cultural identity attitudes, with dual music literacy training as a key synergistic factor. However, the single-site design, short intervention period, and reliance on self-reported measures limit generalizability and causal claims about deep identity reconstruction. Specifically, the self-developed scale may be subject to testing effects (e.g., social desirability bias). Although reverse-coded items and anonymity were employed, future research should incorporate implicit or behavioral measures, extend the pathway across diverse settings, and conduct longitudinal follow-ups to assess long-term stability.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Jie Hao designed, collected and analyzed the data, and drafted the manuscript. Jie Hao conducted the study, critically revised the manuscript for important intellectual content, and gave final approval of the version to be published. Jie Hao participated fully in the work, take public responsibility for appropriate portions of the content, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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HUMAN RESEARCH SUBJECTS

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Taiyuan Normal University, and was performed in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. All eligible participants signed an informed consent form.

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