



Current Situation and Improvement Measures of Music Teaching by Rural Music Teachers in Chinese Primary and Secondary Schools

Yinzhe Cui^{1,*}

¹ Music Performance, Music Academy, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, S10 2TN, United Kingdom

**Corresponding author. Email: 15543777793@163.com*

Abstract. This paper discusses the multiple challenges facing rural music education in China and its strategies for improvement. In recent years, despite increased government policy and economic support, rural education still faces common problems such as uneven educational resources and insufficient teachers. Especially in the field of music education, the teaching environment, facilities and quality of teaching in rural schools are obviously lagging behind those in urban areas. Traditional attitudes and the influence of exam-oriented education have led to the marginalisation of the music curriculum, and school teachers face serious limitations in terms of resources, equipment and teaching methods. The study found that there is a general lack of awareness and support for music education among rural music teachers, while the lack of music teaching equipment and classroom facilities is a constraint on the improvement of education quality. Through qualitative research methods, this paper provides an in-depth analysis of the current situation, perceptions and needs of rural music teachers, and puts forward specific recommendations to improve rural music education, aiming to provide a reference for rural education policy and practice.

Keywords: Music Education in Rural Primary and Secondary Schools, Status of Teaching and Learning , Teachers' Perspective, Balanced Educational Resources

1 Introduction

In June 2023, the Opinions on Building a Quality and Balanced Basic Public Education Service System was issued by the General Office of the State Council of China. This document emphasized the importance of rural education development. At the same time, it was also mentioned in the Report on the Development of Rural Education in China (hereinafter referred to as the Report), which was released in September 2022 . In order to achieve a balanced level of education between urban and rural areas and ensure educational equity, rural education needs more support and attention. Although the Chinese government has been supporting rural education at both the policy and economic levels in recent years, the Report points out that there is a general problem of uneven distribution of educational resources and insufficient teachers in rural areas. For music education, the problem of rural education is particularly prominent. Specifically, in rural areas where educational resources are scarce, the teaching environment and resources are far inferior to those in urban areas, and it is difficult for students to have access to live musical works, musical instruments, and musical teaching materials. At the same time, due to the lack of professional music teachers, it is difficult for students to have access to professional music learning opportunities. As a result, the music programme in rural primary schools has been likened to a "bamboo basket" (i.e. describing the fact that things that are not carefully packed will flow out through the cracks, which is a waste of effort and fruitless in the end) [1]. Less investment in education in rural areas has led to a generally lower teaching environment and quality of teaching in rural primary and secondary schools. The concept of teaching is lagging behind, and many primary and secondary schools, parents and teachers are influenced by traditional ideological concepts and do not have a good understanding of the importance of music education [2]. They tend to think that music lessons are not necessary and only need to do well in the main subjects [3]. In rural areas, due to the influence of traditional concepts, there is a lack of attention to music education, and society is not concerned about its development [4]. Based on such a status quo, this study aims to explore the current situation, perceptions and needs of music teaching in rural primary and secondary

schools from the perspective of rural primary and secondary school music teachers, so as to provide a reference for rural education policy and practice.

2 Literature Review

Generally speaking, rural music education is facing the problems of insufficient teaching concepts, teachers, teaching resources and teaching facilities. First of all, in terms of teaching concepts, rural schools have long regarded music and other aesthetic courses as secondary, and seldom organized related activities, resulting in students not being able to feel the atmosphere of music culture and enjoy the fun of music. With schools and families neglecting music education, it is difficult to create a good learning atmosphere. Most school teaching programmes are still dominated by the teaching of main subjects such as language, mathematics and English, and lack of attention to courses such as music, art and physical education [5]. The irrational subject structure of compulsory education teachers in Yunnan county is a common problem, rooted in the fact that schools do not realize the importance of courses such as music, art and physical education, which they consider to be only auxiliary subjects and not crucial for the promotion examination [5]. At the same time, teachers of music, physical education and art have not been given due attention, and many teachers are still confined to the traditional "duck" and "Standardized" concepts of exam-oriented education, which prioritize the academic performance of cultural subjects, and regard aesthetic education as secondary or even dispensable, which gradually weakened the importance of music, art and physical education. This has gradually weakened students' interest and enthusiasm in music learning and hindered their all-round development. School leaders have not evaluated the work of music teachers according to the aesthetic principle of music education, and some schools have not even set up a special teaching and research department for music, physical education and aesthetics, and the music programme is simply arranged as a "singing class", with a single teaching method [6]. In addition, some schools blindly adopt the management mode of exam-oriented education, using music education as a means to improve the promotion rate and expand the influence of the school, only for a few "special students" [4]. Under the influence of the school's educational philosophy, teachers' attention is mostly focused on the curriculum that affects the examination for higher education, therefore, it is more common for music courses to be occupied or cut [5]. Many rural secondary schools offer music courses in the first and second

years, but in the third year, music and art courses often no longer appear on students' schedules resulting in a low status of music education [5]. At the same time, teachers also showed limitations in the use of music resources. For example, in the teaching of singing in the music classroom, teachers must focus on practice and impart theoretical and background knowledge along the way in order to achieve the purpose of learning and doing. However, according to the survey, many teachers pay too much attention to the explanation of music theory and fail to pay sufficient attention to the demonstration of singing, resulting in music teaching deviating from the purpose of aesthetic teaching [8]. In addition, it is also common for students to be afraid to sing out loud in the classroom, which may be due to students' shyness in the learning process, or they may feel that they are not capable and lack confidence [9].

Secondly, in terms of the balanced allocation of educational resources, there is the problem of unbalanced provision of backbone teachers between schools. Urban schools have a high concentration of backbone teachers, while rural schools have almost no backbone teachers. This difference leads to an imbalance in the quality of education [9]. There is a lack of teachers of aesthetic education, and the quality is uneven. With the acceleration of urbanization, the source of students in rural schools has been decreasing, which has led to the introduction of talents for aesthetic education teachers becoming very difficult, and even the situation of one teacher taking on multiple courses [6]. Especially in some rural schools, the shortage of teachers is large, which is still the main shortcoming in the teaching of aesthetic education in rural schools. Difficulty in introducing talents is the primary challenge facing rural education, and the introduced talents are difficult to stay in the local area for a long time, which has become a headache for the leaders of local party committees and governments. Music teaching in rural primary and secondary schools requires highly qualified teachers. In addition, the teaching content of ethnic music courses is relatively small, involving only aspects such as ethnic songs and dances, with less knowledge of ethnic musical instruments and operas, and more confusing teaching arrangements, which makes students' understanding of ethnic music relatively narrow [10]. Some music teachers with professional backgrounds have switched to teaching "main courses" after working for a period of time, or have tried to transfer out of the difficult rural areas, or have even taken up civil service or transferred to other institutions. This situation has long plagued the development of rural basic education, but also constrained the quality of education in rural schools [4].

Finally, the economic development of rural areas is relatively backward compared to urban areas, resulting in a lack of teaching venues, facilities and teaching aids for aesthetic education in rural schools [9]. Most rural schools do not have special classrooms for art classes, and although some rural schools have music classrooms, they are temporarily converted from cultural classrooms and are very limited in size. Music teaching equipment such as pianos, electronic pianos, stereos and other music teaching equipment are almost not equipped, and the implementation of music education is hindered by the lack of hardware construction and the lack of curriculum arrangement in some schools. Most of the schools do not have special music classrooms and music teaching equipment is not available, which leads to the limitation of the improvement of the students' music appreciation level and the technical level of music instruments, and the neglect of the improvement of music skills and theories. Many, some primary schools in rural areas are still using traditional old music equipment, and there is even no suitable site for music practice teaching, which makes music teaching in rural primary schools face more and more difficulties, and it is even difficult to achieve the expected educational effect of the school [11].

In summary, rural music education is faced with the problem of insufficient teachers, facilities, resources, concepts and student interest. However, existing studies have not used empirical research to explore the current situation of rural music teaching from teachers' perspectives, teachers' perceptions and attitudes, and what support is needed in rural music classrooms. Therefore, I posed the research question of what is the current state of music teaching among rural music teachers and what are the measures to improve it. In order to better answer the research question, I further divided the research question into three sub-research questions, namely research question 1 (RQ 1): What is the current situation of music teaching for rural music teachers? research question 2 (RQ 2): What are rural music teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards music teaching? ; research question 3 (RQ 3): What support do rural music teachers need in teaching music? This paper seeks to explore the above research questions in order to discover the current situation and needs, which will inform further support for rural music teachers in their teaching.

3 Methodology

This study is a qualitative research which explored the research questions in a case study manner. The participants in this study were town-level rural primary schools and county-level rural primary schools in a city in China. There were two participants, a total of one male and one female. Data were collected using telephone, one-on-one, and semi-structured interviews. The interview questions are listed below. Data collection was mainly done using thematic analysis. The study mainly used member checking to ensure the validity of the data and audio recording of the interviews to ensure the reliability of the data. The study strictly adhered to the requirements related to ethical considerations, ensured the privacy of the participants, and obtained the consent of the participants.

1. whether or not teaching materials are used/what kind of teaching materials are used
2. Are the instruments used in teaching?
Frequency of lessons/number of people taking lessons/how many music teachers are there in the school
3. Rural music teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards music teaching?
 - How do you understand music education? -Definition
 - How well do you know the knowledge and skills related to music education? -Is there a professional background and to what extent -Does it affect your practice of music education
 - What is your attitude towards music education? -Does the attitude affect your music education practice.
4. What support do rural music teachers need in their music teaching?
 - What difficulties do you encounter in your music teaching?
 - What kind of support do you want? -Teaching aids/equipment/exhibition opportunities/ professional training/

4 Findings

For RQ1, the study explored the teaching materials and apparatus, frequency of lessons and number of teachers. For the use of music teaching materials in the schools, the study found that both schools used the nationally standardized

Humanities Teaching Edition of primary school music textbooks for teaching. The frequency of music lessons in both schools was two regular lessons per week with class sizes ranging from 37 to 42 students. Music lessons in the relatively advanced classes are replaced by some of the main subjects. The teaching materials are focused on theory, with some instrumental or modal practice in addition to the material. With regard to the use of music teaching instruments in schools, the study found that the musical instruments used in music teaching were relatively consistent, with the electronic organ and accordion as the main instruments, including a small number of hulusi and harmonica. In terms of quantity, it is difficult to ensure that each person has a musical instrument such as the electronic organ when teaching, so in the teaching process, teachers mainly take turns to use and learn to play the instrument in the way of teaching. For cheaper and more portable instruments like the harmonica and Hulusi (Chinese instrument), the school provided a small number of instruments, while students in the school substituted these instruments into the music classroom by purchasing them themselves and bringing them to school for use. For the accordion, teachers indicated that the school did not provide an accordion. Participants interviewed for this study indicated that the accordions were purchased by the teachers themselves and brought to school for use as teaching instruments. In township primary schools there are three music teachers, two specializing in instrumental music and one in basic music theory. In county primary schools there is one music theory teacher.

For RQ2, the study focused on teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards music, and the teachers' responses showed positive attitudes towards music perceptions. When it comes to music education, the music teacher: "I understand it to be the process of helping students develop their musical skills, sense of aesthetics, and emotional expression through the study and practice of music". The functionality of music education is not only about teaching basic music theory, but also the importance of developing students' own abilities, teamwork and creativity. In terms of the music teacher's background of knowledge and skills: "I have a professional background in music education and I continue to learn and improve in my teaching practice. My professional background (instrumental music performance) has enabled me to develop a deeper understanding of the theory and practice of music education, which has had a positive impact on my teaching. Through continuous learning and participation in professional training, I am committed to incorporating the latest music education concepts and methods into my teaching to enhance students' learning

experiences and outcomes." In expressing attitudes towards music education, the teacher responded, "I have a positive and responsible attitude towards music education. In addition to imparting knowledge the aim is to develop abilities and qualities that will benefit students throughout their lives. Therefore, I endeavour to create a passionate and encouraging learning environment where students are encouraged to develop their creativity and expression". For example, during the input stage of organizing music activities in school, the teacher personally covers the cost of the prizes, "I sometimes have my students share their extended music knowledge they have collected with each other within the class, my aim is to stimulate the students' interest and potential in music as well as to develop their artistic literacy and ability to express themselves emotionally".

For RQ3, this study explored the difficulties and support needed (teaching equipment and training) mainly from the teachers. This was combined with the lack of teaching resources and equipment available in this school. The teacher stated, "I would like the school to be equipped with more modern music teaching equipment, such as the number of electronic piano applications and sound system. This will enrich my classroom teaching and enhance students' practical playing and performance abilities. Secondly performance opportunities. I hope the school can provide more school concerts or festival performances for students. Again professional training and continuing education. I would like to attend various professional training and seminars on music education to learn about the latest educational concepts and teaching methods. Through these training, I will be able to continuously improve my teaching skills and provide better educational services to my students. Lastly, it is the improvement of teaching space and resources. I hope that the school can improve the conditions of the music classrooms and provide a quiet, clean and musical learning environment. There is also a need for more music teaching resources, such as quality teaching materials, musical works and reference materials, to support my teaching practice."

5 Discussion

This study found that the musical instruments used during the teaching of music in the school were more consistent, with the electronic organ and accordion predominating, including a small number of hulusi and harmonica, and the overall provision of musical instruments in the school was inadequate in number. The frequency of music

lessons was two regular lessons per week, and the music programme covered less teaching overall. Teaching materials include a significant component of theory, with very little incorporation of instrumental or modal practice outside of the textbook.

Despite the government's support for rural education at both the policy and economic levels, there is still a wide disparity in the distribution of resources, particularly in the lack of resources for music education. The lack of adequate music equipment and specialized teachers in rural schools affects the quality of teaching. With the acceleration of urbanization, the student population in rural schools has decreased, and it is difficult to introduce talents for aesthetic education teachers; many teachers need to teach multiple courses at the same time, and the lack of teachers is still the main shortcoming of aesthetic education teaching in rural schools [6].

Secondly, rural schools and parents generally do not have a good understanding of the importance of music education, leading to the neglect of music courses and low social attention. Many schools fail to fully recognize the important role of music education for the overall development of students, and the teaching content and methods are single, failing to effectively stimulate students' interest and creativity in music. Again, the teaching environment and facilities of rural schools are backward, and the lack of specialized music classrooms and modern equipment affects the teaching effect [5]. It has been found that full-time music teacher positions in some rural schools are vacant for a long period of time, and there is a lack of teachers who graduated from professional music colleges, and even if they offer music classes, they lack professionalism [9]. Past studies have found that although some schools have set up specialized classrooms with complete teaching facilities, the teaching staff lacks professionalism, and the music teacher posts are often taken up by language, mathematics and English teachers, resulting in unprofessional music courses. In addition, uneven allocation of educational resources is also a major problem [9]. As confirmed by past studies, there are large differences in the allocation of backbone teachers between schools, with a high concentration of backbone teachers in urban schools and virtually none in rural schools, which further exacerbates the imbalance in the quality of education [5]. However, all of these studies lacked the support of empirical data and, therefore, lacked credibility. The present study, on the other hand, provides data as support in this regard.

6 Conclusions

Overall, this study found that there is a general lack of awareness and support for music education among rural music teachers, and the lack of music teaching equipment and classroom facilities is a constraint to improving the quality of education. At the same time, this study puts forward specific recommendations for improving rural music education, which can provide a reference for promoting the development and quality of rural music education. However, the samples for this study came from two specific schools located in Northeast China. Given the vast geographic and sociolect-economic differences across the country, the results from this sample may not be generalisable to other regions. China is at different stages of economic and educational development, and the experiences and perspectives of students in the Northeast may be very different from those in other regions. Whilst conducting a case study provides insights, the limited number of cases analyzed means that individual differences can have a significant impact on the findings. Consequently, the conclusions drawn from this study may not be representative of the wider population. Each individual's unique background and experiences can affect their views and experiences of country music, limiting the generalisability of the results. Data in this study were collected through interviews only. While interviews can provide rich qualitative data, relying on a single data collection method may raise concerns about the credibility and reliability of the findings. However, during the interviews, questions were asked from multiple perspectives and responses were cross-validated to ensure consistency and accuracy. In the future the study could cover more teachers and districts, resulting in a broad understanding of the current state of affairs and data integrity. It could also incorporate classroom observations in different districts, through questionnaires, etc., to gain a deeper understanding from different perspectives and participating members.

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