

Research on Pathways for Cultivating Musical Literacy Among Preschool Education Majors in Higher Education Institutions in the New Era of Aesthetic Education

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Abstract

Aesthetic education, as a vital vehicle for fostering virtue and nurturing talent, has seen its value elevated to unprecedented heights in the new era. Music education, as a core component of aesthetic education, plays a foundational role in building the professional competencies of preschool education majors. However, three major challenges currently plague music courses in university preschool education programs: fragmentation of curriculum, lack of practical platforms, and ambiguous evaluation standards. These issues hinder students' musical literacy from meeting the demands of aesthetic education practices in kindergartens. This study, grounded in the policy framework of the "Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education in the New Era," addresses the practical issue of weak musical literacy among university early childhood education majors by exploring a systematic cultivation pathway. Through literature analysis, questionnaire surveys, and action research, it proposes an integrated cultivation model comprising four dimensions: "curriculum restructuring, methodological innovation, practice reinforcement, and evaluation reform."

Keywords

Aesthetic Education in the New Era, Early Childhood Education, Music Literacy.

1. Introduction

Musical literacy is an indispensable quality for educators engaged in aesthetic education, centered on a deep understanding and mastery of musical knowledge, skills, and attitudes. It is primarily reflected in educators' aesthetic literacy and professional expertise. Preschool education marks the starting point of the national education system, with kindergarten teachers serving as the direct initiators of children's aesthetic education. Their own level of musical literacy directly impacts the richness of aesthetic experiences, the stimulation of artistic interests, and the early cultivation of creativity during the preschool years. As a potential force in early childhood aesthetic education, the cultivation of musical literacy among preschool education majors is particularly crucial. Therefore, the quality of musical literacy cultivation for university preschool education majors has become a key factor in determining whether the aesthetic education policies of the new era can be effectively implemented at the foundational level of education. However, examining the current state of music education in university early childhood education programs reveals numerous challenges: curriculum systems often lack alignment with the distinctive characteristics of the field; teaching content and methods emphasize skill transmission while neglecting aesthetic and cultural cultivation; practical teaching components are weak; and evaluation methods are overly simplistic. These issues result in students graduating with structural deficiencies in musical literacy, making them ill-equipped to meet the demands of positions focused on educating through aesthetics.

Therefore, exploring effective pathways for cultivating musical literacy among preschool education majors in higher education has become an urgent practical issue. Grounded in the explicit requirements of aesthetic education in the new era and focusing on the practical challenges of developing musical literacy in preschool education programs, this study aims to propose a four-pronged cultivation model centered on “curriculum restructuring, methodological innovation, practice reinforcement, and assessment reform” through systematic theoretical construction and practical exploration. A teaching experiment will be conducted to validate its effectiveness. This research not only seeks to provide concrete solutions for optimizing music curricula and instruction in early childhood education programs but also aims to offer theoretical references and practical paradigms for enhancing the comprehensive aesthetic literacy of future early childhood educators and promoting the implementation of new-era aesthetic education policies at the foundational education level. In the context of aesthetic education in the new era, exploring pathways for cultivating musical literacy among preschool education majors in higher education holds significant theoretical value and practical significance.

2. The Essence of Musical Literacy and Aesthetic Education Requirements

2.1. Core Dimensions of Musical Literacy The Core Dimensions of Musical Literacy

Music literacy, as a multidimensional integrated competency system, encompasses four core dimensions in the training of early childhood education majors: the cognitive dimension, the skill dimension, the aesthetic dimension, and the educational dimension.

2.1.1. Cognitive Dimension

The cognitive dimension forms the foundational layer of musical literacy, encompassing elements such as music theory knowledge, music history, and cultural context. Specifically, it includes fundamental music theory concepts like pitch, rhythm, and harmony; the developmental trajectories of Chinese and Western music; and the cultural connotations of diverse ethnic music traditions. Its significance lies in helping students comprehend the cultural logic underlying children's song composition, recognize the characteristics of different musical styles, and establish a solid theoretical foundation for music education.^[1]

2.1.2. Skill Dimension

The skill dimension represents the practical application of musical literacy, encompassing vocal performance, instrumental playing, and improvisational abilities. This requires not only mastery of proper vocal techniques and instrumental skills but also the capacity to accompany children's songs and create melodies and rhythms spontaneously based on teaching contexts. This dimension directly relates to the organization and implementation of kindergarten music activities, serving as the crucial bridge that translates musical literacy into educational practice.

2.1.3. Aesthetic Dimension

The aesthetic dimension represents the value-based aspect of musical literacy, manifested through musical appreciation, critical thinking, and the ability to express aesthetic sensibilities. This implies that students must be able to discern the quality of music, understand the emotional depth and artistic value of musical works, and develop their own aesthetic judgments^[2]. This dimension concerns future teachers' capacity to guide young children's aesthetic awakening and directly influences the cultivation of children's aesthetic sensibilities.

2.1.4. Educational Dimension

The educational dimension represents the application level of musical literacy, emphasizing instructional design capabilities and teaching resource development skills. This includes designing music activity plans tailored to children's age characteristics, creating age-

appropriate musical games, and effectively utilizing diverse teaching resources to conduct music instruction [3]. This dimension is pivotal for achieving effective implementation and innovation in music curricula, serving as the final link in transforming musical literacy into educational outcomes.

These four dimensions mutually reinforce each other and form an organic unity: the cognitive dimension serves as the foundation, the skill dimension as the means, the aesthetic dimension as the guiding principle, and the educational dimension as the ultimate goal. Together, they constitute the holistic framework for music literacy in preschool education majors, providing comprehensive support for their professional development [4]. During the training process, all four dimensions must develop synergistically without neglecting any, thereby cultivating outstanding preschool educators who possess both musical expertise and pedagogical knowledge.

2.2. Policy Orientation for Aesthetic Education in the New Era Policy Directions for Aesthetic Education in the New Era

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the Party Central Committee and the State Council have attached great importance to aesthetic education in schools and issued a series of important documents. In November 2013, the Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Several Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening Reforms emphasized the need to improve aesthetic education and enhance students' aesthetic and humanistic literacy. In September 2015, the Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Aesthetic Education in Schools proposed a comprehensive enhancement of aesthetic education starting in 2015. By 2018, the allocation of aesthetic education resources would be progressively optimized, with all schools at every level fully implementing the required aesthetic education curriculum. By 2020, a modern aesthetic education system with Chinese characteristics would be preliminarily established. [5] In April 2019, the Opinions on Effectively Strengthening Aesthetic Education in Higher Education Institutions in the New Era further clarified that aesthetic education in schools is fundamental to nurturing students' character and enhancing their aesthetic and humanistic literacy. Comprehensively strengthening and improving aesthetic education is a crucial task for higher education in the current and coming period. [6]The Opinions explicitly require: "Integrating curriculum instruction with practical activities, and giving equal emphasis to artistic abilities and humanistic literacy." This necessitates achieving the following cultivation pathways: Cultural immersion: Incorporating traditional ethnic music; Unity of knowledge and practice: Practical class hours accounting for $\geq 40\%$ of total instruction; Lifelong development: Establishing a sustainable literacy evaluation mechanism.

3. Major Issues in Cultivating Musical Literacy Among Preschool Education Students

Currently, higher education institutions offering early childhood education programs face several prominent challenges in cultivating musical literacy, which hinder improvements in talent development quality. These issues require in-depth analysis and resolution.

3.1. Students have weak musical foundations and lack motivation to learn.

Most students in early childhood education programs have not received systematic music training prior to enrollment, resulting in generally low levels of music theory foundation and skill proficiency. Some students, due to their weak foundations, tend to feel daunted when confronted with highly specialized music courses. This leads to low motivation and a widespread tendency to passively absorb knowledge, hindering the effective enhancement of

musical literacy. This situation falls significantly short of the requirements outlined in the “Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Aesthetic Education in Schools in the New Era,” which calls for “comprehensively enhancing students' abilities to perceive, express, appreciate, and create beauty.”^[7]

3.2. The curriculum structure is overly rigid, with insufficient interdisciplinary integration.

The current music curriculum exhibits a pronounced tendency toward uniformity, failing to adequately reflect the interdisciplinary nature of early childhood education programs. Course content often remains confined to traditional music skill instruction, lacking effective integration and complementarity with related disciplines such as pedagogy, psychology, and children's literature. This isolated curriculum model weakens knowledge connectivity, hindering students' ability to translate musical proficiency into comprehensive educational literacy and limiting their capacity for innovation and activity design in future professional settings. As scholars have noted, “In implementing music aesthetic education courses, universities inadequately highlight disciplinary thinking and artistic uniqueness, hindering students from developing profound subject literacy and sustained learning interest”^[8].

3.3. Weaknesses in practical teaching components, resulting in a disconnect between theory and practice

The cultivation of musical literacy cannot be separated from ample practical training, yet the current training programs exhibit significant weaknesses in their practical components. Survey data reveals that 50% of students reported participating in music teaching practice fewer than twice during their studies, while 60% had never independently organized music activities in real kindergarten settings. This blockage in the “learning-to-apply” pathway makes it difficult for students to translate their acquired knowledge and skills into actual teaching competencies. A deeper issue lies in the current training model's “neglect of accumulating contextual, practical knowledge for preschool education majors, coupled with a lack of course structures that integrate theory and practice”^[9]. This disconnect between theory and practice means students may possess certain musical skills but struggle to translate them into effective teaching behaviors for young children.

3.4. The evaluation mechanism is outdated and fails to adequately reflect comprehensive competencies.

The current assessment and evaluation system exhibits significant lag. Research indicates that approximately 90% of assessment content excessively focuses on isolated skill demonstrations—such as performing designated pieces or executing specific techniques—while neglecting core professional competencies like music teaching design, activity organization, aesthetic guidance, and innovative application. This evaluation approach, which prioritizes skills over competencies and emphasizes outcomes over processes, fails to comprehensively and objectively measure students' true capabilities. Instead, it misdirects teaching and learning toward a narrow pursuit of technical proficiency. The current evaluation system is severely disconnected from the talent development objectives of early childhood education programs, undermining the holistic development of students' comprehensive musical literacy and professional competencies.

4. Pathway Development: A Four-Pronged Systemic Cultivation Model

To systematically enhance the musical literacy of preschool education majors, this study has established an integrated training model centered on “curriculum restructuring as the foundation, methodological innovation as the driving force, practical expansion as the key, and

assessment reform as the safeguard.” This model aims to form an organic whole, with each component interlinked and synergistically contributing to the comprehensive development of students' musical literacy.

4.1. Curriculum System Restructuring

In restructuring our curriculum, we have moved beyond the traditional single-skill training framework by adopting a three-dimensional structure: “Foundation + Modules + Extension.” The Foundation Module emphasizes music literacy education, covering music theory and the history of Chinese and Western music to solidify students' theoretical grounding and artistic perspective. The Professional Module aligns with early childhood education career demands, offering courses such as children's song composition and folk music culture to strengthen practical application skills. The Extension Module introduces cutting-edge content like the Orff approach and fundamentals of music therapy, broadening students' knowledge horizons and future career development opportunities.

4.2. Innovation in Teaching Methods

In terms of teaching methodology innovation, we are advancing student-centered, practice-oriented educational reforms. On one hand, we extensively employ contextualized teaching approaches, such as conducting the “Rhythm Factory” game within a simulated “Kindergarten Music Corner.” This guides students to explore rhythms using everyday objects like buckets and basins, enabling them to master teaching techniques in authentic settings. On the other hand, we deeply implement Project-Based Learning (PBL). A signature task involves “creating and staging a themed musical for a community kindergarten,” immersing students in the entire process—from design and rehearsal to stage presentation—to comprehensively develop their innovation, collaboration, planning, and execution skills.

4.3. Practice Platform Expansion

In expanding practical platforms, we are focused on building a three-tiered, deeply integrated practical teaching network linking schools, kindergartens, and communities. On campus, we foster a vibrant artistic practice environment through initiatives like establishing music workshops and hosting regular arts festivals. At kindergartens, we implement a stable job shadowing system requiring students to spend at least one day per month observing and participating in authentic music education activities. In the community, we actively collaborate with social resources such as intangible cultural heritage inheritors' studios (e.g., the Mianyang Qiang Flute Artistry Training Center), enabling students to experience cultural transmission in the broader societal classroom and deepen their cultural understanding and identity.

4.4. Reform of the Evaluation System

Finally, in reforming the evaluation system, we have moved away from the traditional approach centered on summative skill assessments and fully adopted a process-based portfolio evaluation. This evaluation system encompasses multiple dimensions: analyzing skill development through “microteaching video recordings” (30%), assessing cultural understanding depth via “traditional music research reports” (25%), evaluating educational innovation capabilities through “original music activity plan design” (35%), and comprehensively examining professional competence through kindergarten mentor evaluations (10%). This initiative aims to achieve a dynamic, multifaceted, and comprehensive evaluation of the learning process and overall competence, effectively leveraging assessment as a guiding tool to steer students' learning direction and holistic development.

5. Practical Verification and Conclusions

To validate the effectiveness of the aforementioned training pathway, this study conducted a teaching experiment at Sichuan Urban Vocational College during the spring semester of 2025. By implementing the four-in-one training model on the experimental group (N=42) and comparing it with the control group (N=45) using traditional teaching methods, the results showed that students in the experimental group achieved significant improvements in multiple key competencies.

Table 1. Two sets of comparisons

Key Competency Indicators	Improvement Rate in Experimental Group	Improvement Rate in Control Group	Difference in Improvement
Ability to Improvise and Create Nursery Rhymes	+53%	+22%	+31%
Ability to Design Music Activities	+48%	+18%	+30%
Ability to Interpret Traditional Music	+60%	+15%	+45%

Specifically, the experimental group demonstrated a 53% improvement in children's song improvisation skills, far surpassing the control group's 22% gain. In music activity design capabilities, the experimental group advanced by 48% compared to the control group's 18%. Notably, the experimental group achieved a remarkable 60% progress in traditional music interpretation skills, while the control group only improved by 15%. These quantitative data conclusively validate the effectiveness of the new training model. Equally noteworthy are qualitative student reflections. For instance, student from the experimental group wrote in a reflective journal: "Through composing songs about the 24 solar terms for kindergartens, I truly grasped that aesthetic education isn't merely skill training but cultural transmission." This insight profoundly reflects the encouraging shift from purely technical learning toward cultural understanding and pedagogical awareness.

Based on the results of practical validation, this study draws the core conclusion that aesthetic education in the new era requires preschool education professionals to possess a comprehensive musical literacy that integrates cultural inheritance capacity, artistic creativity, and educational practice ability. The cultivation pathway developed and validated through practice in this study effectively enhances students' comprehensive literacy by: integrating intangible cultural heritage elements like Sichuan opera percussion into required courses; promoting methodological innovation through the "position-course-competition-certification" integrated project approach; and implementing evaluation reform via competency growth portfolios. Looking ahead, future research is encouraged to explore AI-supported diagnostic tools for musical literacy to enable personalized cultivation. As this study reveals, the essence of aesthetic education lies not in mere skill transmission but in awakening life's perceptual capacities through art. The ultimate value of cultivating musical literacy in early childhood education lies in empowering future teachers to become "lightbearers" who ignite children's aesthetic awareness—a vision that embodies both our educational ideal and the fundamental direction of aesthetic education reform in the new era.

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