

PRACTICAL EXPLORATION OF PRESERVING HENAN FOLK SONGS IN HIGHER NORMAL MUSIC PEDAGOGY COURSES

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Abstract

Henan folk songs represent a significant form of Chinese intangible cultural heritage and embody regional history, dialect, aesthetic expression, and cultural identity. In higher normal music education, their pedagogical integration is important not only for the preservation and transmission of local musical traditions but also for the preparation of future music teachers with strong cultural awareness and instructional competence. This paper examines the educational value of Henan folk songs and investigates practical pathways for incorporating them into higher normal music curricula. Drawing on existing scholarship in folk music education, heritage transmission, and music pedagogy, the study analyzes how localized teaching models may be developed through curriculum design, teaching-resource construction, performance practice, and teacher-training reform. It also evaluates the relevance of major international pedagogical approaches, including the Kodály Method, Orff Schulwerk, Dalcroze Eurhythmics, Suzuki Method, and comprehensive musicianship-based teaching, arguing that such approaches should be adapted critically within the Chinese educational and cultural context rather than adopted mechanically. On this basis, the paper proposes a pedagogical framework grounded in contextualization, creativity, teacher-student interaction, and multidimensional learning. The study argues that integrating Henan folk songs into higher normal music education can strengthen localized curriculum development, enhance cultural confidence, and support the contemporary revitalization of regional folk music traditions.

INTRODUCTION

Henan folk songs serve as vital carriers of Central Plains culture, embodying rich dialectal, historical, folk, and humanistic elements. As an art form that preserves traditional culture, they naturally shoulder the important responsibility of nurturing students' emotions and developing their character. A vital contemporary approach to preserving Henan folk songs is integrating them into the teaching curriculum of higher normal music education programs. This practice simultaneously perpetuates the Central Plains people's national spirit of diligence, simplicity, and resilience. It

serves as a crucial pathway to enhance students' musical literacy, promote their holistic development, and cultivate awareness of local culture. This effort strengthens cultural identity among Henan's youth, ignites their confidence in Henan's indigenous culture, and fosters pride in loving their homeland and hometown.

To preserve Henan folk songs, our first priority is innovating talent development models. We must integrate these songs into relevant curricula, establish clear localized talent cultivation objectives, and promote distinctive talent

development within higher normal music education programs. Secondly, we must create music teaching models grounded in Henan folk songs. Music education curricula in higher normal institutions must pursue a path of nationalization and localization, emphasizing teaching method reforms centered on Henan folk songs as a distinctive feature. This will become a vital pathway to achieving specialized talent development goals. Third, actively advance the distinctive development of music education talent cultivation models in higher normal institutions. Research the construction of specialized curriculum systems based on Henan folk songs, develop and utilize teaching resources related to these songs, and strengthen their integration and permeation throughout the reform of teaching content. Finally, emphasize innovation-driven artistic practice, clearly define the positioning of Henan folk songs within the artistic practice system, incorporate them into the implementation of artistic practice, and thereby construct a music education model with local characteristics.

Teacher training colleges primarily cultivate music educators for primary and secondary schools. Music education in these settings encompasses modules such as singing, rhythm, instrumental performance, appreciation, drama, and composition, alongside diverse extracurricular activities like cultural performances, concerts, and singing competitions. Through diverse classroom instruction and extracurricular artistic activities, students perceive the beauty of music, learn to express their emotions through musical means, and foster the development of well-rounded personalities. Focusing on students' perception, appreciation, expression, and creation of music, the five renowned international music education systems offer valuable insights for teaching Henan folk songs.

Literature Review

Henan folk songs should be understood not merely as regional musical materials but as forms of intangible cultural heritage whose preservation depends on intergenerational transmission, cultural meaning, and continued educational use (UNESCO, 2003; Kurin, 2004). The *Convention*

for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage defines safeguarding to include documentation, protection, promotion, and transmission through formal and non-formal education (UNESCO, 2003). Kurin (2004) similarly argues that heritage survives most effectively when it remains embedded in living communities rather than being reduced to static archives. In China, music education has also long carried cultural and ideological functions, shaping national values, historical memory, and social identity through curriculum design (Ho & Law, 2004; Law & Ho, 2011). This broader literature helps justify the inclusion of Henan folk songs in higher normal music pedagogy not only as artistic repertoire, but also as a vehicle for cultural continuity, local identity, and teacher formation (Ho & Law, 2006; Law & Ho, 2011).

Research on Chinese folk music in higher education shows, however, that the transfer of orally transmitted traditions into formal classrooms is not straightforward. Yang and Welch (2014, 2016), in their studies of Hua'er music, demonstrate that conservatory-style instruction, notation-based assessment, and classroom standardization can conflict with the informal, participatory, and community-based nature of folk music learning. More recent Henan-centered studies echo this problem while also suggesting possible routes forward. Guocheng et al. (2023) show that the transmission of Xinyang folk songs is increasingly shaped by social change, digital dissemination, and institutional training. Pu et al. (2024) identify oral teaching, imitation, mentorship, and embodied performance as core pedagogical processes in the teaching of Henan Zhuizi. Likewise, Ke and Haris (2024) emphasize the relationship between Henan Zheng music, cultural identity, and educational preservation. Together, these studies indicate that effective preservation in higher normal institutions requires more than adding folk songs to the syllabus; it requires a pedagogy that retains dialect, style, performance context, and local cultural logic (Yang & Welch, 2014, 2016; Pu et al., 2024).

The major international music education approaches discussed in this paper remain useful, but the literature suggests that they should be

adapted rather than imported unchanged. Kodály (1974) and Szónyi (1974) emphasize singing, sequential musical development, folk-song-based literacy, and inner hearing in the Kodály approach. Orff and Keetman (1976) foreground rhythm, speech, movement, improvisation, and collective music-making in Orff-Schulwerk. Jaques-Dalcroze (1921) places embodied response and eurhythmics at the center of rhythmic understanding, while Suzuki (1983) stresses imitation, repetition, environmental cultivation, and gradual mastery. For Henan folk-song pedagogy, these systems are valuable not because they provide a ready-made model, but because each contributes a useful principle: Kodály for vocal and modal literacy, Orff for participatory rhythm and creativity, Dalcroze for bodily phrasing and pulse, and Suzuki for oral transmission and scaffolded repetition (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1921; Kodály, 1974; Orff & Keetman, 1976; Suzuki, 1983; Szónyi, 1974).

Broader scholarship in music education further supports a localized and plural framework. Reimer (2003) stresses the formative value of meaningful musical experience through his aesthetic philosophy of music education, whereas Elliott (1995) shifts attention toward music as situated human action in his praxial philosophy. Volk (1997), Campbell (2004), and Schippers (2010) extend this discussion by arguing that multicultural and global music education should respect not only diverse repertoires but also the

knowledge systems, performance practices, and social functions attached to them. This point is especially relevant in Chinese music education, where globalization and localization continuously shape curricular selection and pedagogical priorities (Ho & Law, 2006; Law & Ho, 2011). From this perspective, a strong model for teaching Henan folk songs in higher normal colleges should combine musical skills training with contextual learning, movement, improvisation, listening, dialect awareness, and reflection on regional culture (Campbell, 2004; Schippers, 2010; Volk, 1997).

Taken together, the literature reveals a clear research gap: although many scholars support the inclusion of folk music in formal education, fewer studies explain how a specific regional tradition such as Henan folk songs can be transformed into a sustainable pedagogical model for higher normal music programs (Yang & Welch, 2016; Schippers, 2010). The strongest scholarly position, therefore, is not simply that Henan folk songs deserve preservation, but that they can serve as a culturally grounded basis for training future music teachers through localized curriculum design, school-community linkage, and embodied modes of transmission (Kurin, 2004; Pu et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2003). Framing the paper this way makes the argument more theoretically grounded, regionally specific, and pedagogically persuasive.

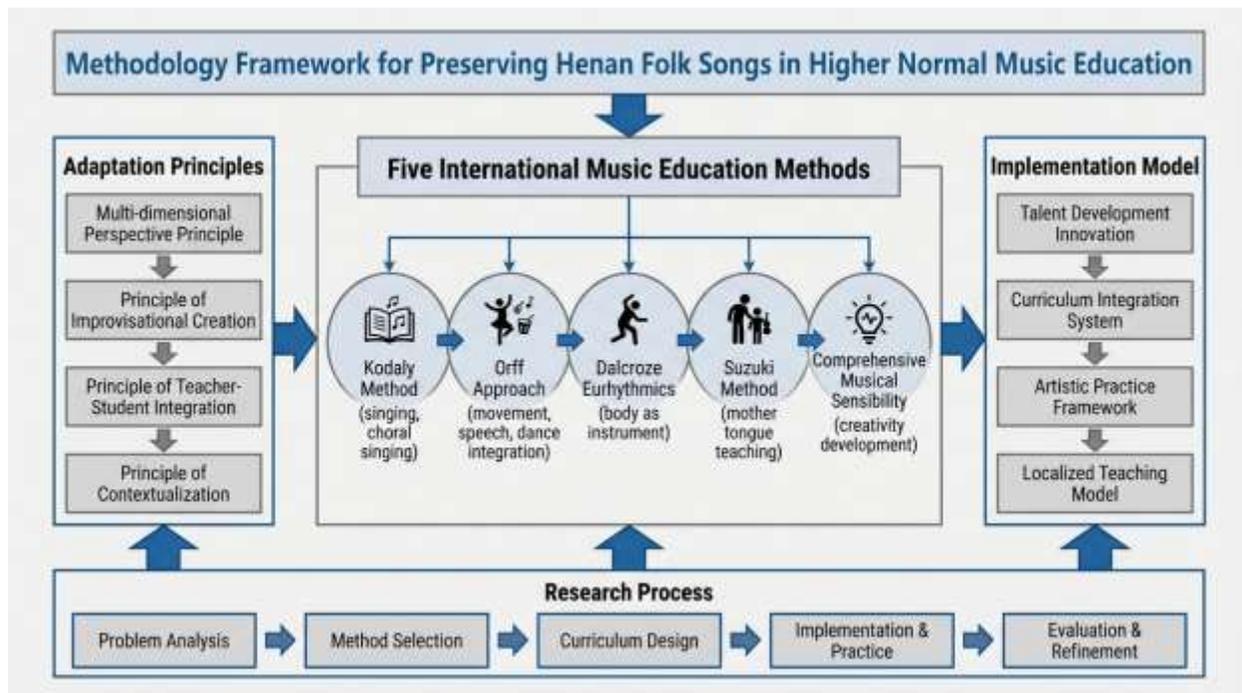


Figure 1 : Methodology Framework

I. The Kodaly Method of Music Education

Developed by Hungarian music educator Zoltan Kodaly, the Kodaly Method advocates “singing, choral singing, and sight-singing” as the primary forms of music instruction. It structures the sequence of music lessons according to the distinct physiological, psychological characteristics, and abilities of students at different developmental stages. Its foremost objective is to cultivate students' love for the folk songs of their own country, region, and ethnic group, alongside their artistic sensibilities and appreciation skills.

Singing games can serve as the primary form of music instruction, and folk music should form the foundation of school music education. Folk songs, in particular, provide an essential foundation for students to accumulate the language of national music and strengthen their national consciousness. Based on these principles, the Kodaly Method primarily employs collective singing as its teaching format. It uses the pentatonic scale as a consistent thread throughout instruction, begins rhythmic training with quarter and eighth notes, and relies on solfege syllables for rhythm reading and Kodaly gestures as

fundamental teaching tools, thereby establishing its own distinctive music education model.

II. Orff Approach to Music Education

Founded by German music educator Carl Orff, this methodology is also known as “authentic music education.” It posits that music serves as a means while talent development is the ultimate goal. The teaching process aims to spark students' interest in learning, engage them in musical practice, and guide them to perceive, experience, and create through hands-on activities. Teachers and students operate as collaborators and partners. The defining feature of the Orff approach is integrating movement, speech, and dance into music education. It emphasizes starting with rhythm, employing recitation, clapping, leg slapping, foot stomping, and finger snapping to cultivate students' rhythmic awareness. A set of melodic instruments and percussion instruments was designed to facilitate polyphonic rhythmic training. The Orff approach also emphasizes improvisation and creativity, guiding students to sing, clap, play instruments, and move simultaneously. Using hand instruments or their

hands and feet, students engage in creative performance. Thus, the Orff approach is a comprehensive methodology that interconnects music with dance, visual arts, drama, and other disciplines, enabling students to gain a holistic aesthetic experience.

III. Dalcroze Eurhythmics Method

This teaching method was founded by the Swiss music educator **Emile Jaques-Dalcroze**. It advocates that music education should begin from both the physical and psychological aspects, using the body as an instrument. Students express the music they hear through rhythmic body movements, experiencing elements such as rhythm, tempo, dynamics, and note duration through physical action, thereby cultivating their sense of rhythm and musical flow.

Another component of the Dalcroze method is solfege and ear training. It emphasizes developing children's auditory and memory abilities through the coordinated use of the ears, voice, and body, combined with language and singing. By incorporating eurhythmic movement, the method aims to cultivate absolute pitch and inner hearing.

IV. Suzuki Method

This violin teaching approach, founded by Japanese music educator Shinichi Suzuki, focuses on developing students' musical talents. He believed that environment influences human ability development more than genetics, and early education is the primary condition for nurturing children's special talents. Parents should strive to create a favorable learning environment to cultivate children into competent citizens and even outstanding individuals. In practical music instruction, he emphasized that all skill formation relies on thousands of repetitions. His "mother tongue teaching method" develops musical talent through external stimulation and intensive training. He advocated creating a "mother tongue music education environment," establishing a teaching sequence of "exposure, imitation, encouragement, repetition, expansion, and refinement," and promoted group instruction to provide children with the finest teaching materials and repertoire.

V. Comprehensive Musical Sensibility Teaching Method

Originating in 1960s America, this approach focuses on unlocking students' creative potential and comprehensively enhancing their overall musical literacy. It creates dynamic classroom formats where students actively explore and reflect to achieve predefined objectives. Characterized by "creativity development," this approach encourages students to thoroughly discuss and analyze fundamental musical characteristics before proposing individual performance interpretations. Teachers assist with technical challenges, then select representative interpretations for classroom rehearsals conducted by student conductors, culminating in peer evaluations. The "Integrated Musical Sensibility Teaching Method" employs auditory means to gradually establish a stable teaching sequence: "Free Exploration—Guided Exploration—Improvisation—Planned Improvisation—Concept Consolidation." Teachers emphasize arranging instructional activities across six domains: aural training, performance, composition, conducting, analysis, and critical evaluation.

Additionally, American music educator Satis Coleman pioneered the "Student Creative Music Education" experiment. This approach centers on instrument-making, improvisational performance, singing, dancing, and musical composition, with the primary goal of fostering student-driven creative activities. Reviewing these methodologies reveals a common thread: they all ground instruction in students' physical and psychological characteristics, emphasize experiential engagement with music, and cultivate learning motivation through interest development.

Traditional Chinese society, deeply influenced by Confucian thought, emphasized social hierarchy and individual conformity to the collective. Consequently, modern Chinese school music pedagogy has largely been teacher-centered, characterized by teacher-led instruction and passive student learning. The conventional music teaching model in China typically involves students following the teacher in singing (or playing), first mastering the pitch, rhythm, lyrics, etc., of a piece. The teacher then explains the

work's content, scales, modes, form, style, etc., sets requirements for singing (or playing) techniques, and urges students to complete the teaching objectives. This traditional teaching model has been criticized. Consequently, heuristic teaching methods emerged, enhancing teacher-student interaction. However, this limited student participation model still relies on the teacher's guidance to achieve predetermined learning outcomes, remaining a teacher-centered approach dominated by convergent thinking. It falls short of liberating students' thinking and achieving a true student-centered goal.

Since the 1970s and 1980s, the aforementioned five music teaching methods have successively been introduced to China. Many music educators have conducted effective practices through institutions such as teacher training colleges, early childhood education organizations, social training institutions, and preschool education departments, achieving favorable teaching outcomes. However, this transplantation also presents numerous challenges. Significant gaps exist between these approaches and the stylistic characteristics of Chinese folk music, as well as traditional teaching methods. This hinders the cultivation of students' Chinese folk music thinking and impedes the establishment of a comprehensive folk music education system.

A defining characteristic of traditional Chinese music lies in its structural hierarchy based on "melodic contours" and its compositional principle of "gradual progression." The articulation of a single note often involves subtle shifts in pitch, timbre, and dynamics. During performance, tempo possesses a degree of spontaneity, with rhythmic patterns exhibiting slight elasticity, yielding a distinctive aesthetic charm. Notation employs a hybrid approach combining quantitative pitch notation with qualitative duration notation. While fundamental pitches are recorded with relative precision, duration is often indicated vaguely, requiring performers to intuitively discern the rhythmic flow of the piece. Reviewing these teaching approaches, their core methodology centers on rigorously emphasizing "rhythm" as a fundamental element, supplemented by integrated training through

other methods. This Western-oriented musical thinking and pedagogical framework, when applied to traditional Chinese musical works, often suffers from incompatibility, resulting in diminished teaching effectiveness.

When introducing Henan folk songs into higher normal music education, pedagogical innovation must skillfully leverage internationally established teaching methods while actively exploring localized approaches tailored to the characteristics of traditional Chinese music and the realities of teacher training. The author believes that the reform and innovation of music teaching models based on Henan folk songs should be multifaceted, multidimensional, and diverse to accommodate the vast differences in music education practices across China's teacher training institutions. In this exploration, the following principles should be observed:

I. Multi-dimensional Perspective Principle

This principle involves examining higher normal music classroom instruction through multiple dimensions, particularly organizing teaching from the student's perspective. It entails enriching the content of higher normal music education by integrating research methodologies and findings from disciplines such as cultural studies, sociology, psychology, kinesiology, dance studies, and folklore studies. This approach aims to diversify classroom teaching methods and explore multidimensional, multi-level, and multi-faceted instructional strategies, ensuring that classroom formats and content better align with the physical and psychological characteristics of Chinese students. Concurrently, organizational management must be strengthened to institutionally guarantee the sustained advancement of teaching reform. A real-time tracking and feedback mechanism should be established to promptly collect, preserve, and analyze experimental data, providing reliable foundations for subsequent experimental reforms. This approach abandons the single-perspective teaching methods or rigid thinking prevalent in past music education, facilitating the organization of multi-angle, comprehensive teaching. This

enables Henan folk songs to more accurately and vividly reflect the complex, diverse local social life.

II. Principle of Improvisational Creation

Music education in teacher training colleges aims not merely to impart musical knowledge and skills, but to cultivate students' aesthetic appreciation of music. It seeks to stimulate their aesthetic perception of musical elements—pitch, rhythm, meter, dynamics, tempo, timbre, scales, modes, etc.—by engaging them in effective musical activities that evoke aesthetic experiences. This fosters their ability to grasp the traditional music of their own ethnic group and region, thereby building cultural confidence. Therefore, while teaching objectives in higher normal music classrooms are clearly defined, classroom organization should not be rigid. It should center on stimulating students' improvisational and creative abilities to help children fully unleash their creative potential. To achieve this, teachers should serve as guides, assisting children in addressing various challenges encountered during the perception of nursery rhymes. While listening to and understanding Henan folk songs, children should be encouraged to express their ideas through singing, dancing, or playing instruments. Teachers should permit them to improvise songs or performances based on Henan folk songs, while establishing an incentive-based evaluation system to foster student's abilities in reproduction, expression, and creation.

III. The Principle of Teacher-Student Integration

The most significant evolution in contemporary music pedagogy is the shift from teacher-centered to student-centered approaches. This emphasizes cultivating students' classroom experiences and creative abilities, transforming teachers into partners, guides, and facilitators. Consequently, student engagement increases, sustaining their interest in musical works and laying a solid foundation for future musical learning. However, this student-centered model effectively transforms teachers into directors and scriptwriters, overlooking their essential role as the core facilitators in guiding students' musical

perception, emotional expression, and creative processes. Music education is a long-term classroom endeavor. Misaligned positioning makes it difficult to ensure every lesson is thoroughly prepared and effective. Without strong organizational skills, teachers risk turning classroom instruction into chaotic playtime, unable to follow planned objectives. This reduces efficiency, leaving students with little learning and failing to meet intended goals.

The author believes a new relationship should be established where both teacher and student are equally central and mutually engaged. This approach emphasizes the student's perspective throughout while also highlighting the teacher's comprehensive involvement. While teaching music to students, it also allows them to gain initial sensory aesthetic experiences and develop rational cultural thinking abilities. In teaching Henan folk songs, particular attention should be paid to providing children with opportunities for free expression and strengthening teacher-student interaction. Efforts should be made to help them experience the joy of freely expressing music, allowing them to appreciate music through authentic folk song singing activities and articulate their musical feelings.

IV. Principle of Contextualization

Purely academic music instruction fails to sustain student's interest or maintain their attention over extended periods. Therefore, teachers should create contextual scenarios in classroom settings to make lessons more engaging and lively, thereby enhancing students' receptiveness to the material. Generally, game-based teaching proves most effective. When teachers and students assume roles within a narrative, children become fully immersed, their desire to perform ignited. At this point, students' minds are most active, and their perception of musical elements most sensitive. Teachers can then skillfully guide instruction accordingly. Alternatively, teachers may step back from the game, organizing students to create their own musical activities. Through play and sensory engagement, their artistic imagination blossoms as the story unfolds. Henan folk songs boast rich themes and melodies. Instruction can create

familiar life scenarios for children, triggering immersive experiences through the convergence of auditory, visual, and kinesthetic senses, thereby evoking associated emotions and imagination.

In summary, integrating Henan folk songs into higher normal school music pedagogy not only introduces new artistic elements but also inevitably drives innovation in teaching models. Given the distinct characteristics of existing music pedagogy, implementing this approach in China requires adapting teaching models to local contexts. We can fully integrate Henan folk songs as a core component of teacher training music education, drawing on established teaching methodologies to actively pursue pedagogical reform. This exploration of localized, culturally rooted teacher training models will forge new pathways for the practical application of Henan folk songs in the contemporary era, thereby advancing their preservation and transmission.

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