



Development and Research on the Music (Singing) Course for the Elderly: A Case Study of The Seniors University of Taizhou

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Abstract: With China's rapidly growing elderly population, music education for seniors has become essential in enhancing their spiritual well-being and overall quality of life. The Taizhou Municipal Government actively supports national policies aimed at building a high-quality elderly care system, and this study explores a singing course offered at The Seniors University of Taizhou. Through the theme of "singing for the motherland," this course encourages elderly participants to connect with their memories of the past, foster teamwork, and engage in meaningful social interaction. The course incorporates historical and theoretical elements of music, using diversified teaching methods to stimulate learning interest. This study contributes valuable insights into the impact of music education on elderly individuals' emotional, social, and mental health, aiming to guide further research on music courses in the elderly care sector.

Keywords: elderly music education, social engagement, emotional well-being, music therapy, cultural heritage

1. Introduction

The global rise in life expectancy has led to an increasing focus on elderly care and well-being worldwide. As societies continue to age, providing quality-of-life enhancements for the elderly has become a global priority. Studies indicate that music education and therapy offer substantial cognitive and emotional benefits for elderly individuals, including improved memory, decreased feelings of isolation, and greater social engagement [1], [2]. Music education specifically has been shown to enrich the lives of elderly individuals by providing not only an artistic outlet but also a therapeutic intervention that can help in delaying cognitive decline and fostering mental well-being [3].

In recent years, China has faced similar demographic shifts, with its elderly population now approaching 250 million, accounting for nearly 18% of the total population. Consequently, there is an increased demand for elderly-focused educational programs that support mental and emotional well-being. In response, Chinese institutions and local governments have recognized the potential of music education as part of broader elderly care services, creating specialized programs designed to improve the lives of elderly residents. These initiatives reflect a commitment to lifelong learning and the holistic development of elderly individuals [4]. Additionally, national policies now emphasize the significance of senior education in fostering cultural engagement and mental wellness, as music education becomes a pillar in promoting psychological health in later life.

In Taizhou, this approach has materialized in the establishment of senior universities across districts. The Taizhou Municipal Government has set an ambitious target to ensure that, by 2024, education coverage for the elderly will exceed 90%. This initiative aligns with China's policies to integrate arts and culture into elderly care, recognizing music's role in bridging generational and social gaps, which benefits psychological health and strengthens community ties [5]. This study builds on the expanding research concerning music's role in elderly education, examining the intersection of music education with social and cultural objectives to provide practical insights into the design and implementation of music programs for the elderly.

2. Literature Review

Music education and therapy for the elderly have been the subject of extensive research over recent decades, with numerous studies underscoring the role of music in enhancing the quality of life for aging populations. Gibbons conducted an influential literature review on music education and therapy for the elderly, which highlighted its positive impact on cognitive and emotional health [6]. This review concluded that music interventions can significantly enrich the lives of elderly individuals by promoting psychological well-being, reducing stress, and enhancing social engagement.

Subsequent studies have explored the specific effects of music interventions on various aspects of elderly health and well-being. For example, Wang et al. investigated the impact of music interventions on sleep quality among elderly individuals living independently, demonstrating that music can safely improve sleep without adverse side effects, thereby offering a non-invasive approach to enhancing rest and overall health [7]. Similar findings were reported by Moreno-Gómez et al., who found that music training and education could slow the deterioration of music perception caused by presbycusis—a common age-related hearing condition. This preservation of auditory skills not only supports cognitive functions but also contributes to an improved quality of life for the elderly [8].

The importance of culturally resonant and systematically structured music education models has also been highlighted. Kim emphasized the need for well-structured music education programs, citing Germany's approach to senior music education as a model for adapting music education to better suit the needs and capacities of aging populations [9].



Similarly, Park used a Delphi survey to examine the factors contributing to effective elderly music education, proposing a model tailored to the specific needs and preferences of this demographic [10].

Therapeutic applications of music-based interventions have also been studied, particularly for elderly individuals dealing with cognitive and emotional challenges. Yang and Park explored the integration of early childhood educational elements, such as play, into dementia prevention programs for the elderly. Their findings suggest that these playful, music-based exercises can positively affect cognitive abilities and emotional well-being, helping maintain mental acuity and resilience in elderly participants [11]. In another culturally specific study, Primanda et al. examined the use of traditional Javanese music to promote foot health and reduce stress levels in elderly individuals. This culturally tailored approach demonstrates how music can support both physical and emotional health goals in ways that resonate with participants' cultural backgrounds [12].

The mental health benefits of music for elderly populations were further supported by Yang, who studied the effects of music therapy on middle-aged and elderly individuals with depression. Yang's research indicated that music therapy could significantly alleviate depressive symptoms, suggesting its potential as a mental health intervention for aging individuals [13]. Expanding on this, González-Ojea et al. examined the effects of music therapy on the cognitive and physical functioning of elderly people in rural institutional settings, noting improvements in both mental acuity and physical mobility among participants [14].

3. Methodology

This study is grounded in the author's firsthand experience in designing and teaching a specialized singing course at The Seniors University of Taizhou, crafted to enrich the cultural and emotional lives of elderly participants. The focal point of the course was the "Red Star Song," a piece of patriotic music deeply embedded in Chinese cultural memory due to its historical significance. Its powerful melody and revolutionary themes made it an ideal choice for engaging older adults who may have lived through or been influenced by that era. The course was designed to evoke positive memories and a sense of pride, particularly valuable for elderly individuals seeking meaningful social connections and personal fulfillment. The selection of such a culturally resonant song as the "Red Star Song" served as a bridge between past and present, allowing participants to celebrate their shared heritage while forming new social bonds. This approach was rooted in the understanding that music is not only a tool for cognitive and emotional well-being but also a means to create community connections through shared experiences. By fostering emotional engagement with music rich in personal and national associations, the course aimed to enhance social cohesion, reduce feelings of isolation, and encourage dialogue across generations, benefiting both the participants and their communities.

The course design followed several pedagogical principles that were tailored to the unique needs of elderly learners. To maximize accessibility and engagement, the program incorporated various teaching methods, such as personalized vocal training, multimedia elements, and a structured yet flexible format. Classes were organized into smaller groups according to vocal range and voice color, allowing participants to sing within their comfort zone and reduce the risk of vocal strain. Each group received targeted vocal training, focusing on fundamentals like breathing techniques, posture, and vocal warm-ups, which are crucial for elderly learners whose physical limitations may impact their singing abilities. This grouping method allowed individuals to develop their vocal skills while contributing effectively to the overall group performance.

To further enhance emotional engagement, the course integrated multimedia resources and historical film clips, providing both visual and auditory stimulation that complemented the music. Participants watched historical clips depicting key events and images from the era of the "Red Star Song," enriching their understanding of the song's significance and connecting them more deeply to its message. In addition, brief, accessible introductions to music theory and historical discussions were included, covering the song's structure, melody, and rhythm. These discussions provided a platform for participants to share personal memories related to the song's themes, fostering a collaborative learning environment where they could express themselves and connect with others on an emotional level. Consistent positive feedback and emotional support from instructors further reinforced this inclusive environment, helping participants feel confident and motivated to engage fully, thus fostering a sense of pride and accomplishment.

4. Course Structure and Pedagogical Techniques

The course was designed with specific objectives to enhance both the musical abilities and the overall well-being of elderly participants. Firstly, the course aimed to improve music literacy and vocal skills, introducing participants to foundational vocal techniques and choral practices. Additionally, the course fostered a sense of community and teamwork by encouraging participants to sing together in harmony, reinforcing the value of collaboration and mutual support. Another central objective was to encourage reflection on China's historical and revolutionary legacy through patriotic music, helping participants reconnect with meaningful cultural elements from their past. Finally, the course sought to enhance social skills and emotional well-being, utilizing collective singing as a way to engage participants emotionally, foster a supportive atmosphere, and create a sense of belonging.

The teaching content was structured around three core components: vocal technique, historical context, and emotional expression. Each component was carefully selected to address specific needs of the elderly participants and to create a holistic learning experience. To build vocal technique, the song "Red Star Song" was broken down into segments, with each section rehearsed individually before integrating into a complete performance. This segmented practice method allowed participants to focus on mastering specific parts of the song, making it easier to retain each element of the piece

and facilitating smoother collective rehearsals. This structured approach also allowed instructors to provide individualized support within each segment, making adjustments as needed to suit the diverse vocal abilities of participants.

In addition to technical training, the course emphasized emotional guidance as a key pedagogical technique. Recognizing the importance of emotional connection in music, participants were encouraged to share personal stories or memories related to the themes of the song. This created a meaningful dialogue, allowing them to connect with each other on a deeper level. To further heighten emotional resonance, multimedia resources, including historical film clips and visuals, were incorporated into the sessions. These resources helped participants visualize the historical context of "Red Star Song" and enhanced their understanding and emotional connection to the music, which in turn strengthened their engagement with the course.

An iterative feedback loop formed an integral part of the course structure, with regular assessments to evaluate participants' progress in both vocal skills and emotional engagement. Instructors provided feedback to participants throughout the course, assessing vocal quality, participation, and overall growth. This ongoing evaluation allowed instructors to tailor their teaching methods, addressing any specific challenges that arose and ensuring continuous improvement. This feedback mechanism not only enhanced participants' learning experience but also reinforced their confidence, encouraging them to fully engage with each aspect of the course.

5. Course Outcomes and Participant Feedback

The course had a significant impact on participants' music literacy and social engagement. Elderly participants demonstrated noticeable improvements in vocal control, rhythm, and overall music literacy, with many becoming more confident in their singing abilities. Feedback collected from the participants highlighted how the course had helped them feel more connected to their peers, as they worked together in a supportive environment. This connection extended beyond just music, as participants reported a strengthened sense of cultural identity, allowing them to feel more deeply rooted in their heritage through the shared experience of singing a patriotic song.

In terms of emotional and psychological benefits, the course's emphasis on emotional guidance proved to be highly effective. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their own experiences and memories related to the themes of the "Red Star Song," which fostered a deep sense of pride and personal connection to the music. Many elderly students reported feeling revitalized by the patriotic themes, expressing a renewed sense of collective pride. This emotional engagement was crucial in enhancing participants' involvement with the course, making each session meaningful and reinforcing their motivation to learn.

Additionally, the emotional nature of the music and the course environment created a positive atmosphere that contributed to the participants' mental health. Observations indicated that the supportive and inclusive space helped reduce feelings of isolation among participants, with many feeling more energized and uplifted after each session. The opportunity to engage with meaningful music in a group setting helped foster a sense of belonging and purpose, which positively impacted their overall mental well-being. This combination of musical, social, and emotional benefits made the course a fulfilling experience for the elderly participants, contributing to both their personal growth and social connection.

6. Discussion and Implications

This study demonstrates the transformative potential of music education for the elderly, particularly through culturally resonant and emotionally meaningful songs. The use of the "Red Star Song" not only improved participants' musical abilities but also fostered a deep emotional connection, helping them reconnect with personal and collective memories. This dual focus on technical skill-building and emotional engagement proves effective for elderly learners, who may benefit more from music that evokes familiarity and pride. As seen in the course outcomes, the tailored approach in song selection and pedagogical methods enhanced both music literacy and social cohesion, suggesting that culturally relevant content can be especially impactful in elderly education programs.

One of the key findings is the role of music education in supporting emotional and psychological well-being. The structured emotional guidance provided throughout the course created a space where participants felt safe expressing personal memories and patriotic pride, which reinvigorated their sense of identity and community. This support was integral in fostering a positive mental health environment, as participants reported reduced feelings of isolation and an improved sense of belonging. The emotional aspects of the course highlight an important implication for elderly education: integrating personal and culturally significant material into learning can enhance psychological resilience and social connectivity, two factors that contribute to the overall well-being of elderly individuals.

The study's implications extend beyond music education, as it emphasizes the importance of holistic, community-centered approaches in elderly care. By fostering social interaction and shared cultural experiences, programs like this can help address broader challenges such as social isolation and declining mental health among the elderly. Future programs may consider incorporating a broader range of culturally relevant materials and diverse music genres to appeal to varied backgrounds and personal experiences. Additionally, these findings suggest that policymakers and educational institutions should prioritize elderly education as a valuable component of community health, recognizing the unique role that music education can play in enhancing both cognitive and emotional well-being.

Conclusion

This study highlights the profound benefits of a culturally resonant music course for elderly individuals, demonstrating how patriotic music like "Red Star Song" can enhance both music literacy and emotional well-being. By bridging the past with the present, the course allowed participants to reconnect with their cultural heritage, thereby reinforcing personal

identity and community bonds. The structured yet supportive environment enabled elderly learners to engage deeply with the music, boosting confidence, reducing isolation, and fostering a renewed sense of collective pride. These outcomes support the broader implementation of music education in elderly care, particularly when courses are designed to reflect the cultural backgrounds of participants. Future programs may consider diversifying content to accommodate a range of cultural experiences and preferences, thus appealing to wider elderly populations. This study also emphasizes the value of music education as an integral part of holistic elderly care strategies, encouraging policymakers to invest in community-centered programs that enhance both cognitive and emotional health for aging individuals.

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