

# Analysis of the Current Situation of Music Education in Rural Middle Schools in China from the Perspective of Educational Equity: An Example from Chishang Middle School in Laiyang

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## Abstract

China has prioritised art education for middle school students in promoting quality-oriented education and implementing pedagogical reforms. Promoted by the Chinese Government, music education in urban schools has developed rapidly in certain districts. In contrast, educational resources are uneven, resulting in slow—or even stagnant—development of music education in rural schools. This has led to a widening gap between urban and rural areas regarding the level of music teaching and its effectiveness. Based on this issue, the study is conducted from the perspective of educational equity, taking the researcher's participation and observation during the teaching practice in Chishan Middle School in Laiyang City, Shandong Province, China, as an example. Combined with the relevant data obtained from the questionnaire survey, the study analyses the current situation and problems of music education for disadvantaged groups in rural China, identifies the gaps in music education between urban and rural areas in China, and proposes corresponding solutions on how to achieve equality in education between urban and rural areas.

**Keywords:** Educational Fairness, Educational Gap, Rural Music Education in China, Countermeasures

## Introduction

### *The definition of cities and rural areas in China*

Since implementing China's "Urban Planning Law" (1990), the guiding ideology of urban development has been announced in the form of law. Where people live, the main economic activities are agricultural production and related industries in rural China\* and cities†.

The development gap between urban and rural China is widening. Since the reform and opening up, the per-capital disposable income of Chinese urban households and the per-

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\* Rural China is where people live in rural areas of China, and the main economic activities are agricultural production and related industries in rural China.

† Chinese cities are where people in urban areas live, and the main economic activities are city-related industries such as industry, service industry and commerce.

capital net income of Chinese rural households have increased yearly. However, the growth of urban households' per-capita disposable income is significantly faster than that of rural households in China, and the gap between the two tends to widen. Income is the basis of consumption, and the income gap between urban and rural residents will inevitably lead to a gap in consumption between urban and rural residents.

Due to China's industrialisation and urbanisation's vigorous development of cities, preferential policies are more biased towards cities, resulting in gaps in the supply of public goods between urban and rural areas. For example, the education gap is the most significant inequality between urban and rural areas. The state finance should bear China's rural obligations to education, but due to the urban-rural division system, the funds mainly come from the township finance and China's rural education surcharges, and the township finance income is primarily the agricultural tax paid by farmers, and ultimately the compulsory education in China's rural areas is mainly borne by farmers, but mandatory education in cities is undertaken by the state (Lin et al., 2010)

The economic development of China's rural areas is lower than that of cities. In some Chinese rural areas, access to such information is blocked. Most farmers are mainly engaged in farming and do not pay enough attention to their children's education. After the reform and opening up, most people in rural China will go to the cities. Those unwilling to leave the village will find jobs in a nearby factory to earn living expenses. The income is low, and there is no good positioning and help for children's education. The medical facilities in the rural areas of China are not as complete and advanced as those in the cities, and the medical assistance is also not perfect. Urban transportation is usually more developed, including subways, buses, taxis, shared bicycles, etc., while in rural China, there are relatively few, usually walking, bikes and buses, and many rural roads in China are winding. There are winding mountain roads and narrow dirt roads, and some roads cannot drive vehicles. Therefore, education in rural China has not been well developed under these conditions.

With the advancement of quality education and the implementation of the reform of new curriculum standards, the country has paid more and more attention to the art education of middle school students to promote the comprehensive development of middle school students' morality, intelligence, body and beauty, and improve the essential quality of middle school students. The development of music education in urban schools is relatively fast.

However, the development of music education in rural schools is slow or stagnant, resulting in a widening gap in music teaching level and teaching effect between urban and rural areas. Many factors affect the development of music education in rural schools in China, such as backward educational concepts, insufficient educational facilities, lack of academic teachers, etc., which requires researchers to formulate corresponding countermeasures to solve the problems that arise. Based on the promotion of educational equity<sup>‡</sup>, the researcher carried out on-the-spot investigation and research and put forward the problems existing in music education in rural middle schools in China through the analysis of the teaching environment, teaching quality and teaching arrangements in China's rural areas, as well as the situation observed during the researcher's supporting teaching period, and combined some Successful

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<sup>‡</sup> Educational fairness means everyone can obtain equal educational opportunities and enjoy fair educational resources.

cases and the experience of research scholars during the internship to formulate corresponding solutions and make suggestions for improvement of the current situation of music teaching in rural middle schools in China.

### *The Meaning of Music Education*

Most authors agree on the objective outcomes of musical skills and knowledge (music history, music theory, etc.) and the assessment methods. Much less certainty exists regarding affective outcomes in music education, such as meaning. Can music education effectively increase students' aesthetic, affective or personal abilities, and do other outcomes exist that are not currently measured?

Additionally, little empirical research exists on students' perspectives on their musical education. Understanding the meaningfulness of music education can help educators develop better educational opportunities for their students by bringing their perspectives to light. By understanding the value students find in their musical experiences, educators can better meet individual students' needs, develop more meaningful curricula for students in non-performance classrooms, and perhaps use this information to justify continued support for public school music programs (Winter, 2009).

### *The Significance of Orff's Teaching Method*

Carl Orff's philosophy<sup>§</sup> Music education focuses on providing the opportunity for all students to be successful. The Orff Approach contains steps that may be completed in any order. According to many music education teachers and researchers, lessons using Orff techniques and methods provide early creative experiences and activities involving active music-making. Incorporating these experiences into the elementary music classroom is essential for developing creative skills in the student as an individual. Musical independence and improvisation are an essential part of a young child's musical experience and learning process, and the use of Orff's Approach can be a successful way of allowing students to develop these techniques (Amanda, 2012).

## **Methodology**

This paper adopts the quantitative research method. Quantitative research refers to the quantitative description and explanation of social phenomena, emphasising the quantification and analysis of the research object, usually using questionnaires, experimental design, statistical analysis and other methods to present various characteristics and variables of the research object in digital form, focusing on quantifying and analysing the regularity and general conclusions of the research objects. Quantitative research is usually suitable for relatively simple and quantifiable issues, such as social economy statistics, public policy effect evaluation and other research. This article adopts the research method of the questionnaire, a standard survey tool used to collect the respondents' opinions on a specific problem or problem set. It usually includes questions, options, and fundamental questions about the respondent's personal information. The questionnaire aims to obtain many respondents' opinions for statistical analysis and result presentation.

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<sup>§</sup> Orff Schulwerk is a music education method founded by German composer Carl Orff. The Orff teaching method emphasises students' autonomy, participation and creativity in music education and focuses on cultivating students' musical perception, performance and creativity.

Questionnaires can take different forms, such as paper, online, telephone, etc. Designing an effective questionnaire needs to consider factors such as the scope of the questions, the language expression of the questionnaire, the order of the questions, the options of the questions, and the types of answers to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the obtained data. When using the questionnaire, attention should be paid to protecting the respondents' privacy and data security and ensuring the questionnaire design's legality and morality. This article uses a paper questionnaire, which is more intuitive to the data and makes it easier to find problems and establish solutions.

### **Results on the Status Quo of Music Teaching in Laiyang Chishan Middle School**

In order to make the data of the paper accurate and informative, the researchers conducted a questionnaire survey among some parents, teachers and students of Chishan Middle School in Laiyang.

Laiyang Chishan Middle School is located in Chishan Town, Laiyang City. Hills dominate the surrounding terrain. The school is built on the hills, surrounded by villages and fields. The transportation is inconvenient, and the living infrastructure is not perfect. The school has three parts: kindergarten, primary school and junior high school, with about 700 teachers and students.

#### *Parent Questionnaire Survey*

Survey object: Parents of 300 students from Laiyang Chishan Middle School.

Questionnaire distribution and recovery: 300 anonymous questionnaires were distributed, 296 questionnaires were recovered, and 296 valid questionnaires were obtained. The recovery rate was 98.67%, and the effective rate was 100%.

Table 1

#### *Parents' intentions for students to participate in art training*

	<b>Have intention</b>	<b>Do not have intention</b>
Number of people	83	213
Percentage	28.04%	71.96%

It can be seen from the data, as shown in Table 1 that more parents have no intention of enrolling their children in art training classes than those who intend to, so most parents have no intention of enrolling their children in art training classes.

Table 2

*Parents' expectations for their children's future (multiple choices are allowed).*

	Comprehensive development	Have a skill	Continue study to	Have basic cultural knowledge
Number of people	55	98	132	11
Percentage	18.60%	33.11%	44.59%	3.72%

It can be seen from the data as shown in Table 2 that most parents still hope that their children can continue to study and continuously improve their cultural level. Some parents hope their children can learn technology and get a job sooner.

Table 3

*Parents' opinions on the necessity of offering music lessons.*

	Necessary	Does not matter	No necessary
Number of people	105	88	103
Percentage	35.47%	29.73%	34.80%

The data as shown in Table 3 that most parents do not pay enough attention to the necessity of offering music lessons and feel that it does not matter or is unnecessary.

#### *Questionnaire for Teachers*

Teacher factors are also an essential part of music teaching in rural middle schools in China, so researchers also conducted a questionnaire survey on music teachers in Chishan Middle School.

Survey object: Three middle school music teachers in Laiyang Chishan Middle School.

Distribution and recovery of questionnaires: Three anonymous questionnaires were distributed to Chishan Middle School music teachers, and three questionnaires were recovered. There were three valid questionnaires, and the recovery rate was 100%.

Table 4

*The situation that affects the teaching of music teachers (multiple choices are allowed).*

Questionnaire content	Survey results
School music teaching facilities are perfect	No
Familiar with music materials	No
Flexible teaching methods	No
Rich teaching and research activities	No
There are music club activities	No
Received professional training after entering the job	No
Full-time music teachers	No
Music lessons are scheduled for two or more sessions per week	No
Participate in music activities and music competitions twice or more per semester	No
Music Lessons Not Taken	No
Enough teaching materials	No
Enough music teachers	No

It can be seen from the data as shown in

**Table 4** that the configuration of music teaching facilities in Chishan Middle School is not perfect. Since then, they have not received professional training and are not all full-time music teachers. There are very few music class schedules, and there are not many music activities for students to participate in each semester. Music classes are sometimes occupied, and the teaching methods of music teachers are relatively simple, the music class is seriously occupied, and the number of teaching materials cannot meet the needs of students.

*Questionnaire for Students*

Survey object: 300 students from Chishan Middle School.

Questionnaire distribution and recovery: A00 anonymous questionnaires were distributed, 297 questionnaires were recovered, and 297 valid questionnaires were received, with a recovery rate of 99% and an effective rate of 100%.

Table 5

*Types of music students like (multiple choices are allowed).*

	Classical music	Popularity music	Religion music	Electronic music	Rock and roll music	Heavy metal music	Blues	Jazz
Number of People	88	244	21	189	134	88	56	37
Percentage	29.63%	82.15%	7.07%	63.64%	45.12%	29.63%	18.86%	12.46%

It can be seen from the data as shown in Table 5 that most of the students in Chishan Middle School like pop music, followed by electronic music, and a few students like jazz and religious music, which shows that students are selective about the types of music.

Table 6

*Types of musical instruments students like (multiple choices are allowed).*

	Piano	Guzheng	Drum kit	Electronic organ	Other musical instruments
Number of People	132	78	114	112	33
Percentage	44.44%	26.26%	38.38%	37.71%	11.11%

In the data in Table 7, researchers found that most students in Chishan Middle School prefer the piano, followed by drums, and a small number of students choose other instruments.

Table 7

*Students' evaluation of music teachers (multiple choices are allowed).*

	Like the classroom atmosphere	Like the teaching method and content	Lectures are easy to understand
Number of People	56	108	118
Percentage	18.92%	36.36%	39.73%

From the data as shown in Table 7, it can be seen that most of the students in Chishan Middle School do not like the teaching method of the music teacher.

Table 8

*Students' suggestions and expectations for music lessons (multiple choices are allowed).*

	Teaching diversity	Make better use of teaching facilities	Teachers can drive the classroom atmosphere	Increase music lessons
Number of People	256	277	259	272
Percentage	86.20%	93.27%	87.82	91.58%

According to the data as shown in Table 8, researchers can see that Chishan Middle School students have high expectations for music classes. Most students hope that music classes can be carried out better and better and give pertinent suggestions.

### Results and Discussions

Based on the survey data, the researchers found the following problems in music education at Chishan Middle School.

#### *Educational Concepts are Backward*

The idea of most parents in rural China is that it is enough to learn cultural lessons well. There is no need to cultivate children's various interests, and they even feel that cultivating children's multiple interests will affect their children's learning. Go to college or learn a technology and find a job earlier.

#### *Inadequate Educational Facilities*

Many rural schools in China do not even have a musical instrument, let alone an independent music and dance classroom. The researcher interned at Laiyang Chishan Middle School for four months. Most of the students in the school are children from the surrounding villages. Because it is a newly built school, there are art classrooms and a musical instrument room. The musical instrument room has electronic pianos, zithers, saxophones and other instruments, but the utilisation rate of the musical instrument room is not very high. Although multimedia is in the classroom, it is not easy to use.

Inadequate teaching materials. 2–4 people read music textbooks, and the number cannot meet the needs of each student. This school has the best facilities in the surrounding Chinese rural schools, but compared with schools in cities, it still has a lot of problems. Big gap. Research scholars have visited a school in Longwangzhuang near this school. The classrooms are dilapidated bungalows, and the teaching facilities are relatively backward and imperfect.

In addition, there are few music training institutions in rural China. If someone want to participate in the training of music institutions, they need to go to the city. Most rural families in China will not consider sending their children to the city to participate in the training of music institutions. Students have even less access to professional music education.

#### *Insufficient Teacher Resources*

Most rural schools in China have difficulty attracting high-quality teachers due to problems such as environment, transportation, and salary. The number of music teachers is insufficient, and some schools have teachers from other subjects concurrently serving as music teachers.

Chishan Middle School has only three music teachers from elementary school to junior high school, of which there is only one full-time music teacher, and the remaining two are music teachers who are part-time teachers from other subjects.

This full-time music teacher has to give music lessons to the elementary school and the junior high school. Through communicating with her, I learned that it takes more than an hour for her to drive back and forth from home to work every day. The salary includes subsidies for going to the countryside, about 5,000 yuan per month, the number of music teachers is small, there are many courses, the teacher's task is relatively tight, the income is not high, and the environment is poor, so it is difficult to attract high-quality teacher resources to teach here.

Chishan Middle School has staff dormitories without heating. Generally speaking, teachers living in cities find it difficult to accept this environment and rarely choose to teach in this environment. The full-time music teacher at Chishan Middle School, majored in saxophone in college.

During the communication with her, I learned she doesn't know how to use the electronic organ and guzheng in the school's musical instrument room, nor do the other two part-time music teachers. Can use it, so the problem is configuring the music teaching facilities. However, the teachers do not know how to use them, and students still cannot enjoy these teaching facilities, which wastes this part of music education resources.

#### *Educational Methods are Backward*

Many students in rural middle schools in China are still yearning for music learning and are also very interested in many types of music and musical instruments. However, due to the backward teaching methods and single teaching content of music teachers in rural middle schools in China, they cannot meet the needs of students. The demand for music learning has caused many students to be less interested in music learning, which affects the development of music classes, and the effect of music teaching is not very optimistic.

#### *Single Music Activity*

The lagging behind music teaching concepts in rural middle schools in China, the lack of music teaching facilities, and the lack of teachers have led to the inability of Chinese rural middle schools to arrange and participate in suitable music activities.

Most music activities in rural middle schools in China only have music lessons, and there are relatively few opportunities to participate in competitions. Most rural middle schools in China do not have music clubs, and very few music activities are held in schools every semester. Although most students like to learn music, according to the survey, most students do not like the music teacher's teaching mode and are not motivated to learn music.

#### **Conclusion**

Through the study, it was found that with the development of the country's economy, the improvement of people's living standards, and the implementation of quality education, China's rural education, which is on the edge of education, has attracted more and more attention from the state and society.

The researcher participated in music education at Laiyang Chishan Middle School and discovered that due to insufficient educational facilities and a shortage of teachers, music teaching in rural secondary schools in China is still relatively backward compared with music teaching in urban secondary schools. Music is in life, reflects life, and shows a contemporary life atmosphere. Music influences students' ideological development, moral sentiment, and physical and mental development. We must pay attention to music teaching in rural middle schools in China so that students in rural middle schools in China can also enjoy high-quality music teaching resources and better cultivate talents for the country.

In order to solve the problems existing in music education in rural middle schools in China, the author puts forward the following feasible suggestions from the perspective of educational fairness.

#### *Change the Concept of Education*

To change the concept of education, we must first start with the school, teachers and parents. Music teachers should encourage and actively drive students to participate in various music competitions and accumulate some valuable experience from them.

Educational administrators at the upper level should urge schools to pay attention to cultivating students' interests in various aspects, regularly go to rural schools in China to inspect the music teaching situation, raise problems existing in the inspection and suggest corresponding solutions. Later inspections should be compared with previous ones. Inspect the situation and then improve it, such as whether the arrangement of class hours is more reasonable than before, whether it is enough for students to have a music textbook, whether the music teaching facilities are well utilised, etc., if the inspection situation finds that the previous problems have not been resolved or if the effect is not good after treatment, it is necessary to interview the school leaders to criticise their inaction and discuss and formulate other solutions.

#### *Improve Teaching Facilities*

Music teaching facilities are a basic premise and guarantee for implementing good music teaching. The Government should make various policy orientations for music education in rural schools in China. It should increase capital investment in rural middle schools in China and ensure they have basic facilities.

Music teaching facilities, such as accordion, zither, piano and other musical instruments, national and Western musical instruments should be equipped as much as possible. Furthermore, now is the era of rapid development of science and technology. Multimedia is a critical music teaching facility. Using the current developed network technology and network resources to play works to students or show them videos of dances, musicals, and youth competitions is more beneficial. Cultivate their interest in music and enhance their aesthetic ability so that vision and hearing can better cooperate to understand what music is like and what kind of feeling it brings to people.

Therefore, multimedia is essential for teachers and students to communicate music. At the same time, it is also necessary for the school to provide enough music teaching materials. Suppose there is no music teaching material or music teaching material at all. In that case, it will significantly reduce the efficiency and effect of students learning music and affect their

interest in learning music. Specific difficulties will also increase the music literacy gap between Chinese rural and urban middle school students.

### *Strengthen Teacher Resources*

The national teacher-student ratio standard for Chinese rural middle schools is 1:19. Although there is no standard teacher-student ratio for a single subject, the music teacher-student ratio in Chishan Middle School is about 1:233, an obvious imbalance. In the current situation, the survey found that the number of music teachers in most rural middle schools in China is insufficient, and teachers' enthusiasm for teaching is not very high. Educational departments at all levels should take strong measures to solve it. For now, it is not easy to attract high-quality music teachers to work in rural China in the short term.

The suggestion is that, first of all, the education department should use vacations or spare time to train Chinese rural music teachers together to improve the music literacy of Chinese rural music teachers. They must be able to use the most basic musical instruments and then train according to different school conditions to improve their teaching level. The second is to invite high-quality teachers to give music lectures in rural primary and middle schools in China and to answer questions raised by music teachers in rural middle schools in China to improve their music literacy and music teaching level. The Ministry of Education should implement inclusive policies for rural teachers in China to solve a series of fundamental problems for them, such as wages, housing subsidies, living security, career development, etc., to attract high-quality teacher resources and improve China's rural areas—the overall level of music teaching in middle schools.

### *Improving Teaching Methods*

Music teaching methods play an essential role in the teaching practice of cultivating students' artistic accomplishment, which is worthy of our reflection and research. It is undeniable that teaching methods have a considerable influence on guiding students' interest in learning music.

Music teachers in rural middle schools in China should reflect more on their classroom teaching design and improve their teaching design according to students' reactions in the classroom. Combined with the excellent music public class videos, it is found that the music teachers in the public class videos are in the teaching process.

Combined with the situation of teachers and students, they can learn from the excellent experience and improve their teaching quality. It is also essential to find out the deficiencies in the teaching process of the music teachers in the open classroom videos and reflect on whether such a situation has occurred in the teacher's classroom. If such a problem occurs, how to solve it, to avoid the same problem in music classroom teaching, take the essence and discard the dregs. In addition to their work, Chinese rural music teachers should improve their music teaching ability to achieve better results.

### *Enrich Students' Music Activities*

By designing more music activities to mobilise students' enthusiasm for learning music, realise the diversification of music classroom teaching methods, and attract Chinese rural middle school students' interest in music. For example, to learn music properly through music games

or body rhythms, the teacher's teaching cooperates with the student's imagination and creativity to carry out music courses, making the courses lively and exciting, cultivating students' interest in learning music, and allowing them to participate Learn music knowledge in classroom actively.

Meanwhile, the study concluded that the Orff teaching method is best for students to learn various musical skills and abilities. With improvisation, this original music education system allows students to learn and feel the music through their hands, feet and brains. Another example is holding small music competitions in the school to encourage students to express themselves, enhance their self-confidence, and stimulate their music learning. Most students in Chishan Middle School do not like the music teacher's teaching mode. They feel that the music class is unattractive, so they naturally cannot cooperate reasonably with the teacher. Music teachers can let everyone bring empty bottles, sand and other materials to make small musical instruments to participate in music classes. They can also take music classes in group competitions so that students can actively participate in the class and improve their enthusiasm for learning music. They also cultivated students' sense of honour and cohesiveness.

#### *Establishment of Music Clubs\*\* by Category*

Through the survey, each student has different preferences for music, and their preferences for musical instruments are also selective, so it is necessary to classify and establish music clubs. The organisation of the event content. Such as chorus clubs, percussion clubs, dance clubs, etc., let students choose their favourite clubs to participate in to stimulate their interest in learning music. Participating in clubs can not only cultivate students' teamwork ability but also cultivate their Collective sense of honour.

#### *Teaching is Based on Encouragement*

Teachers guide students' learning, promoters of students' development, and the builders and developers of courses. They should fully mobilise students' subjective initiative, cultivate students with active exploration spirit and active thinking, and guide and promote students' learning.

For students, teaching should be based on encouragement. Students who answer questions about music knowledge and do not understand should be praised for stimulating their enthusiasm for learning music and enhancing their self-confidence. Students who responded wrongly should first be commended for their courage to answer questions and then guide them tactfully. Give the correct answer and protect their self-esteem.

#### *Create a Good Music Learning Atmosphere*

Some students are not concentrating when studying and are easily affected by everything around them. Therefore, schools should create a good music learning atmosphere and subtly influence students to learn music.

First, music teachers should pay attention to their appearance, be friendly, treat students enthusiastically, bring students full of positive energy, and interact with them more to drive

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\*\* A society is an organisation formed voluntarily by a group of like-minded people with a specific purpose or interest as the main content of activities.

a positive atmosphere in music classes. In addition, create a good music learning atmosphere after class. The teacher can change the bells for class and class every week. During extracurricular activities, teachers can play some music works of different styles on campus and introduce the author and creative background. When students hear what they are interested in When writing music-style works, they will pay special attention to the information in this work and then achieve the effect of students learning extracurricular music knowledge.

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