

Article

Research on the Development Dilemmas and Optimization Paths of Community-Based Music Education for Older Adults from the Perspective of Active Aging

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Abstract: With the continuous advancement of active aging strategies and the systematic improvement of lifelong education systems, cultural elderly care has evolved into a core developmental direction of modern elderly service undertakings. As a vital grassroots carrier of community aesthetic education and cultural elderly care, community-based music education for older adults effectively improves the cognitive status of aging populations, facilitates their social participation, alleviates negative psychological emotions, and boosts the overall quality of later life. Adopting a mixed research methodology based on active aging and lifelong education theories, this study systematically explores the current developmental status and practical bottlenecks of community-based music education for older adults. The findings reveal that this grassroots educational model is plagued by rigid curriculum frameworks, insufficient professional teaching teams, low learning initiative among older participants, inadequate grassroots supporting facilities, and prevalent teaching homogenization. These multifaceted dilemmas stem from delayed policy implementation, unbalanced public resource allocation, inadequate teaching adaptability, and individual cognitive discrepancies. Combining grassroots practical experiences and latest academic achievements, this study develops localized and implementable optimization strategies for educational quality improvement. It effectively remedies the existing research imbalance that overemphasizes educational practices in universities for the elderly while ignoring grassroots community scenarios, providing solid theoretical references and practical implications for the high-quality development of grassroots elderly aesthetic education and the comprehensive implementation of active aging strategies.

Keywords: music education; aesthetic education; active aging; lifelong education; social participation; mental health

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1. Introduction

China's population aging trend continues to deepen, accompanied by a comprehensive upgrade in the multidimensional demands of older adults. Traditional material-focused elderly care models can no longer meet the contemporary needs of aging populations for spiritual enrichment, social communication, and self-realization. Accordingly, quality-oriented, educational, and spiritual elderly care has gradually become the mainstream developmental trend of modern elderly service systems. The concept of active aging focuses on health maintenance, social participation, and lifelong empowerment to fully tap the potential of older adults and alleviate their social marginalization, while the grassroots popularization of lifelong education serves as a core approach to realizing the societal goals of "learning, enjoying, and contributing in later life." As the primary living and activity space for older groups, communities undertake crucial responsibilities in popularizing grassroots elderly education, delivering public cultural services, and providing spiritual care for older residents. Among various grassroots educational forms, community-based music education for older adults features

low participation thresholds, high interactivity, extensive population coverage, and strong practical adaptability, making it one of the most inclusive and widely recognized forms of grassroots lifelong aesthetic education.

Different from professional skill-oriented music training, community-based music education for older adults integrates multiple functional values including aesthetic cultivation, psychological adjustment, and social empowerment. Long-term consistent participation in music learning and artistic experiences helps older adults sustain cognitive vitality, relieve aging-induced loneliness, emotional distress, and other negative psychological states, build stable grassroots social connections, and reshape positive self-identity, which is crucial for maintaining the mental health and life well-being of aging populations. In recent years, China has optimized the top-level design of national elderly education and vigorously promoted the inclusive development of grassroots aesthetic education. Communities across the country have launched diverse courses such as chorus training, instrumental experience, and music appreciation, continuously expanding the grassroots coverage of music education for older adults [1]. Nevertheless, the practical development quality of community-based music education remains uneven. Compared with well-developed universities for the elderly with concentrated high-quality resources, grassroots community music education still faces prominent structural challenges and practical limitations [2, 3].

Existing domestic academic literature predominantly focuses on music education practices in universities for the elderly, adopting research paradigms of status quo sorting, experience summary, and macroscopic strategy discussion. Empirical research targeting localized community-based music education practices remains insufficient. Most previous studies fail to deeply explore the inherent learning characteristics of older adults, the practical adaptability of grassroots teaching modes, and the core difficulties in scenario-based implementation [4]. Meanwhile, the optimization strategies proposed in prior research are mostly overly generalized and lack operable solutions tailored to grassroots community scenarios, which cannot fully adapt to the high-quality developmental demands of active aging and lifelong education. Against this research background, this study focuses on grassroots community scenarios and adopts mixed research methods to systematically analyze the current status, core dilemmas, and underlying causes of community-based music education for older adults. By integrating innovative educational concepts including digital teaching, intergenerational aesthetic education, and university-community collaboration, this study constructs a localized optimization system to fill existing research gaps and support the quality improvement of grassroots elderly aesthetic education.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Foreign Research Progress

Developed countries in Europe, America, Japan and other regions entered the aging society at an earlier stage [5]. Through long-term practical exploration and academic research, these countries have formed standardized, systematic and mature operational paradigms for music education for older adults. At the policy level, most developed economies have incorporated elderly music education into national lifelong education systems, issued special supporting policies and detailed implementation rules, and built a diversified school-running mechanism coordinated by governments, supported by universities, implemented by communities, and participated by social forces, which guarantees the normalized and inclusive development of grassroots elderly aesthetic education. In terms of teaching practice, foreign elderly music education abandons traditional exam-oriented and skill-centered teaching concepts, and implements experience-based and personalized teaching modes adapted to the physical and mental characteristics of older adults. The curriculum system covers diversified modules such as music appreciation, chorus performance, instrumental experience, and popular music creation, balancing educational enjoyment, aesthetic value, and social practicality.

International academic circles have long focused on the physical and mental empowering effects of music education on older adults. A large number of empirical studies have verified that regular and long-term music learning can effectively delay cognitive function decline, alleviate negative emotions, expand social circles, and significantly enhance the sense of belonging and life satisfaction of aging populations [6]. In addition, digital teaching modes have been widely applied in foreign elderly music education practices. Online teaching platforms break temporal and spatial limitations to adapt to the learning needs of older adults with different age groups, health conditions and mobility levels, forming a complete service system covering teaching implementation, process evaluation and effect feedback. These mature practical experiences provide valuable references for the innovative development of global grassroots elderly aesthetic education.

2.2. Domestic Research Progress

With the accelerated population aging process and the in-depth implementation of the national aesthetic education strategy, music education for older adults has gradually become a key research hotspot in the fields of elderly education and artistic rehabilitation, with increasingly enriched domestic research achievements forming a multi-dimensional research system. Existing domestic research scenarios are highly concentrated on universities for the elderly [7, 8]. Chinese scholars have conducted field investigations in multiple regions to analyze the developmental status and supply-demand contradictions of music education in local universities for the elderly, and proposed a series of optimization countermeasures in terms of curriculum design, faculty construction, teaching management and quality improvement. Current domestic research can be divided into four core categories: sorting out regional developmental status and analyzing practical deficiencies; innovating digital teaching modes and exploring the practical value of online-offline blended teaching; studying university-community resource collaboration to explore effective ways of sinking high-quality university music resources to grassroots communities and alleviating grassroots aesthetic education resource shortages; conducting theoretical and empirical research based on geriatric psychomusicology and self-determination theory to clarify the empowering mechanism of music education on the physical and mental development of older adults and quantitatively analyze the core factors affecting their learning motivation and satisfaction.

Several cutting-edge domestic studies have introduced intergenerational education concepts, promoting intergenerational emotional communication and cultural inheritance through interactive music activities, helping older adults break social barriers and realize effective social integration, which further expands the research boundary and practical dimension of elderly music education. On the whole, existing domestic research has initially constructed a basic theoretical framework and practical system for music education for older adults, providing solid literature support for the scenario selection, problem analysis and path construction of this study [9].

2.3. Research Review and Research Gaps

A comparative analysis of Chinese and foreign research and practical practices shows that foreign music education for older adults boasts sound institutional systems, diversified teaching modes, balanced resource allocation, and mature evaluation mechanisms, with research and practices highly focusing on the personalized needs and physical and mental empowerment of older adults. In contrast, domestic community-based music education for older adults is still in the initial exploratory stage, with prominent deficiencies in academic research and grassroots practice, and a mature developmental system adapted to China's national conditions has not yet been formed. A comprehensive review of existing literature identifies four key research gaps in current academic fields. First, imbalanced research scenarios: existing studies excessively focus on resource-intensive universities for the elderly, while paying insufficient attention to grassroots community scenarios with wider coverage and stronger inclusiveness, resulting in scarce targeted empirical research on community-based music education for

older adults. Second, insufficient research depth: most existing studies focus on superficial status description and experience summary, lacking in-depth mechanism analysis of core problems such as low participation willingness and insufficient learning sustainability of older adults. Third, poor practical operability: current research on teaching innovation and management optimization mostly focuses on macroscopic framework construction, lacking targeted and implementable solutions adapted to grassroots resource shortages and practical community operating conditions. Fourth, inadequate localized adaptation: few studies explore the localized transformation and innovation of foreign mature teaching modes and institutional experiences, making it difficult to form characteristic aesthetic education modes compatible with China's community governance system and the developmental characteristics of local older adults. Based on the above research deficiencies, this study carries out empirical research focusing on grassroots communities and constructs localized and operable optimization paths, which possesses important academic innovation value and practical application significance.

3. Research Methods

This study employs a mixed research method commonly utilized in humanities, social sciences, and elderly education research. It integrates questionnaire surveys, in-depth semi-structured interviews, case analysis, and qualitative coding analysis. By combining the objectivity of quantitative research with the depth of qualitative research, the study adheres strictly to international social science research norms to ensure scientific, reliable, and verifiable conclusions.

The research respondents include grassroots communities in various cities across China, encompassing older adult music learners, older residents not engaged in aesthetic education activities, community aesthetic education administrators, and grassroots music teaching volunteers. The sample scope spans old communities, newly built communities, urban areas, and suburban regions, ensuring diversity and representativeness. Primary data are collected through a combination of questionnaire surveys and in-depth semi-structured interviews, focusing on core developmental challenges in grassroots community-based music education for older adults. This provides robust empirical support for subsequent qualitative analysis and problem refinement.

The research dimensions align with core evaluation indicators in related academic fields, covering five primary modules: demographic characteristics of older adults, behavioral traits of elderly music learners, evaluation of learning motivation and satisfaction, the current state of community teaching resource allocation, and the adaptability of teaching methods to the learning characteristics of older adults. These dimensions comprehensively address the core aspects of grassroots community-based music education for older adults.

During the data processing phase, this study systematically organizes and analyzes questionnaire data to explore the internal correlations and influence patterns among various research variables. Concurrently, it refines coding and summarizes interview texts and typical community teaching cases to identify common practical issues and developmental features in grassroots elderly music education. By integrating existing academic theories and cutting-edge research findings, the study derives standardized, rigorous, and practically grounded conclusions, ensuring adherence to standardized research procedures and the credibility and reproducibility of results [10].

4. Research Results and Discussion

4.1. Current Status and Core Dilemmas of Community-Based Music Education for Older Adults

Field research results show that community-based music education for older adults in urban China has achieved preliminary normalized popularization and can meet the basic spiritual and cultural needs of aging populations. However, its overall development remains in the primary stage, with five prominent developmental dilemmas. First, the curriculum system is rigid and highly homogenized. Most community music courses

mainly focus on group singing and classic old song singing, with single and solidified curriculum modules, lacking diversified teaching contents such as instrumental experience, basic music theory popularization, music appreciation, and popular music creation. In addition, there is no hierarchical and personalized curriculum design tailored to the age differences, learning foundations, and interest preferences of older learners, resulting in poor adaptability to the differentiated learning needs of older adults. Second, professional teaching resources are in severe shortage. Grassroots community music teaching work is mostly undertaken by community volunteers, retired amateur literary and art enthusiasts, and non-professional practitioners, while full-time professional teachers specialized in elderly aesthetic education are notably scarce. Most grassroots teaching staff have not received systematic training in geriatric education and geriatric psychology, lack sufficient grasp of the cognitive rules and learning characteristics of older adults, and thus fail to guarantee the professionalism and targeted adaptability of teaching work.

Third, older adults lack sustainable learning motivation. The participation degree and learning sustainability of elderly music education are restricted by physical and mental conditions, cognitive concepts, social needs, and personal energy. Some older adults have negative cognition and difficulty-avoidance psychology towards music learning. Meanwhile, existing community courses are less engaging with rigid teaching rhythms and imperfect learning feedback and incentive mechanisms, leading to declining learning enthusiasm and high student loss rates, which hinders the formation of a stable and normalized grassroots learning atmosphere. Fourth, grassroots supporting resource guarantee is weak. Most grassroots communities lack dedicated music teaching venues, with outdated and insufficient teaching equipment and audio devices, and no special operating funds for aesthetic education. The lack of stable financial support for equipment renewal, venue operation, and activity organization seriously restricts the quality improvement of grassroots music education. Fifth, teaching modes are traditional and rigid. Current community-based music education for older adults mostly adopts directive-style singing teaching dominated by skill explanation and group imitation, lacking diverse teaching scenarios such as interactive experience, achievement display, and online learning development. The neglect of older adults' emotional experience and personalized learning demands makes traditional teaching modes lag behind the innovative developmental trend of modern grassroots elderly aesthetic education.

4.2. In-Depth Attribution Analysis of Development Dilemmas

At the policy level, national supportive policies and resource allocation for elderly education mainly focus on professional educational institutions such as universities for the elderly, while special policies, financial support, and institutional guarantee mechanisms for grassroots community elderly aesthetic education are relatively insufficient. Grassroots communities have not established complete supporting systems for teacher training, venue construction, and activity operation, resulting in the lack of long-term institutional support for community-based music education, and its development presents scattered and random characteristics. At the resource level, public art education resources in China show obvious hierarchical and regional imbalance. High-quality teachers and teaching resources are highly concentrated in universities, professional art institutions, and universities for the elderly, while grassroots communities have weak talent attraction and retention capabilities. At the same time, the resource sinking mechanism of university-community collaboration and institutional linkage has not been fully popularized, leading to poor docking channels for high-quality social resources and resulting in insufficient total supply and structural imbalance of grassroots community aesthetic education resources.

At the teaching level, grassroots community music education fails to follow the core principles of elderly education. Curriculum design, teaching rhythm, and teaching modes mostly copy general education models, which cannot adapt to the physical and mental characteristics of older adults such as slowed cognitive speed, declined memory ability,

and emphasis on emotional experience. The insufficient implementation of innovative modes such as digital blended teaching and intergenerational integrated aesthetic education makes teaching concepts and forms lag behind the digital and diversified developmental trend of lifelong education, and cannot meet the personalized learning needs of older adults in the new era. At the individual level, influenced by traditional elderly care concepts, some older adults hold the solidified belief that "the elderly do not need to learn," with weak awareness of lifelong learning and self-improvement. Elderly, solitary, and physically vulnerable older groups have low willingness to actively participate in aesthetic education due to health limitations, social barriers, and cognitive challenges, which further restricts the popularization quality and coverage effect of community-based music education for older adults.

4.3. Optimization Paths for High-Quality Development of Community-Based Music Education for Older Adults

Based on the above developmental dilemmas and underlying causes, guided by the core theories of active aging and lifelong education, and combined with cutting-edge academic research and grassroots practical characteristics, this study constructs a systematic, operable and replicable high-quality development system from five dimensions: curriculum construction, teacher cultivation, teaching innovation, resource guarantee and incentive mechanism. First, build a hierarchical and diversified characteristic curriculum system [11, 12]. Breaking the solidified single chorus teaching mode, this study designs three-level hierarchical courses including basic popularization, skill improvement and interest-based learning according to the learning foundation, age characteristics and interest differences of older adults, covering diversified contents such as music appreciation, beginner chorus, zero-based instrumental experience, classic music interpretation and popular music creation. Meanwhile, local cultural and red cultural elements are integrated to develop characteristic courses that balance fun, aesthetic value and cultural connotation, so as to accurately meet the diversified learning needs of older adults.

Second, construct a multi-collaborative compound teacher team. Deepen the university-community collaborative education mechanism, cooperate with music majors in local universities and vocational colleges, and establish a normalized mechanism for college student volunteer services and professional teachers' grassroots assistance to continuously deliver professional teaching forces for community education [13–15]. Carry out targeted competency training for community part-time teachers and literary volunteers, focusing on geriatric psychology, age-adapted teaching methods and aesthetic education service concepts, so as to build a multi-level compound teaching team composed of professional teachers, university student volunteers and experienced literary and art enthusiasts. Third, innovate digital integrated teaching modes. Construct a blended education system integrating online fragmented autonomous learning and offline immersive practical teaching. Lightweight digital platforms are used to push music theory knowledge and short teaching videos to adapt to the fragmented learning scenarios of older adults; offline small-class teaching, music salons, art performances and other interactive activities are carried out to strengthen learning experience and achievement transformation. In addition, integrate intergenerational aesthetic education concepts to carry out cross-age music interactive activities, promote the social integration of older adults through intergenerational emotional communication, and enrich the educational connotation of grassroots aesthetic education.

Fourth, improve the normalized grassroots resource guarantee system. Promote communities to set up special funds for elderly aesthetic education, which are specially used for teaching equipment renewal, venue upgrading, teacher subsidies and cultural activity operation. Integrate public spaces such as community cultural centers and new era civilization practice stations to renovate standardized music teaching venues and make up for grassroots hardware deficiencies. Establish a three-level linkage management mechanism covering communities, streets and civil affairs departments, clarify the job

responsibilities of each level, standardize daily teaching operation, and ensure the sustainable and stable development of music education activities. Fifth, build a long-term participation incentive mechanism [16–18]. Based on the learning motivation and psychological characteristics of older adults, build a grassroots display platform for elderly music learning achievements, and regularly carry out art performances, achievement exhibitions and themed music activities to meet the spiritual needs of older adults for self-display and self-realization. Implement hierarchical incentive systems such as point rewards and honor recognition to fully mobilize the participation enthusiasm of older adults and create a good community atmosphere of lifelong learning and active aging.

5. Conclusion

Against the backdrop of the deepening implementation of active aging strategies and the continued extension of lifelong education systems to the community level, community-based music education for older adults, as a core vehicle of grassroots aesthetic education and cultural elderly care, has significant empowering value in stimulating social participation, delaying cognitive decline, improving mental health, enhancing quality of later life, and promoting community harmony. Empirical analysis indicates that community-based music education for older adults in China remains at an early exploratory stage and is generally constrained by rigid curriculum structures, a shortage of qualified teachers, insufficient learner motivation, inadequate supporting resources, and homogenized teaching approaches. These prominent problems arise from the combined effects of delayed grassroots policy implementation, uneven allocation of public resources, limited instructional adaptability, and cognitive biases at the individual level.

Based on local grassroots development realities and relevant academic advances, this study proposes a five-dimensional optimization path encompassing tiered curriculum design, multi-dimensional teacher development, digital teaching innovation, institutional resource support, and long-term incentive mechanisms. These strategies can help address key bottlenecks in the development of grassroots music education for older adults and provide both theoretical support and practical reference for improving grassroots aesthetic education for older populations, strengthening lifelong education systems, and advancing active aging initiatives. This study also has certain limitations, including restricted regional sample coverage and limited generalizability. Future research may expand the sampling scope to conduct cross-regional comparative studies and further examine digital precision aesthetic education, the integration of intergenerational aesthetic education, and long-term operational mechanisms, so as to refine localized music education systems for older adults and promote the high-quality and sustainable development of grassroots aesthetic education in later life.

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