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Exploring the Role of Music Education in Cultivating Moral Awareness of Secondary School Students in Huainan City

Yuejie Wang ^{1,*}, Yichen Liu ¹ and Ruoshi Hai ¹

¹ Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

* Correspondence: Yuejie Wang, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Abstract: With the rapid development of society and the impact of pluralistic values, traditional moral education faces many challenges. With its emotion-driven and cultural connotations, music education is considered an effective way to cultivate students' moral literacy and sense of social responsibility. However, existing studies have insufficiently explored its specific realization mechanisms and practice paths. This study targeted secondary school music teachers in Huainan City using a qualitative approach. Data was collected from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis to explore how teachers develop students' moral awareness through strategies in the classroom and the challenges they face. The study found that teachers effectively stimulate students' thinking about moral issues and deepen their understanding of social responsibility through emotional experience through classroom discussions, role-playing, group tasks, and musical performances. However, there are problems in practice such as insufficient teacher training, limited policy support, and difficulties in assessing moral education, which limit the effectiveness of education. This study provides theoretical support and practical guidance for the in-depth integration of music education and moral education and suggests strengthening teacher training, enriching teaching resources, and refining policy design in order to give priority to the role of music education in students' overall moral development.

Keywords: music education; moral awareness; secondary school students; Huainan city; teacher strategies

1. Introduction

In recent years, the moral quality of teenagers has become a significant societal concern. Rapid social changes, the impact of pluralistic values, and new media technologies have challenged traditional moral education models [1]. Educators must find effective ways to cultivate young people's moral awareness and character, especially during secondary education—a critical period for forming life and value outlooks. Strengthening moral education at this stage is crucial.

Music Education, an integral part of the secondary school curriculum, uniquely cultivates students' moral sentiment and character. Music embodies values such as harmony, responsibility, love, and courage, which students can internalize through musical study. It also enhances aesthetic taste and emotional integrity, fostering moral development. Additionally, the collaborative nature of musical activities promotes collectivism and mutual respect among students.

However, existing research mainly focuses on the direct effects of Music Education on moral concepts and character, with limited discussion on specific mechanisms [2]. This gap hinders the effective integration of Music Education and moral education. There is an urgent need to identify strategies used by music teachers to foster ethical values and explore systematic integration into the secondary school music curriculum [3]. Understanding these mechanisms will provide theoretical and empirical support for this integration.

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This research aims to reveal the specific process and mechanism of Music Education in cultivating moral consciousness, providing empirical evidence and theoretical support for effective integration in secondary schools. It promotes deep integration in Huainan City and offers new ideas for Music Education reform. The study seeks to enrich understanding of Music Education's role in moral education and provide useful references for strengthening teenagers' moral quality.

1.1. Background of the Study

Music, as a global language, plays an indispensable role in emotional expression, character building, and cultural exchange amidst economic globalization and cultural diversity. Research shows music aids in emotional expression, cultural communication, and character development [4]. Despite being a compulsory subject in China's education system, the effectiveness of music education in cultivating moral awareness and character needs improvement.

Westerlund emphasizes integrating ethical issues in music education as a global focus, calling for a broader social epistemology to address modern society's complexity [1]. This aligns with local concerns in Huainan, where traditional moral education methods struggle against diversified media influences.

Music education is not just about artistic skills but also about inheriting national culture and promoting moral concepts. Government attention to music education has increased its potential in shaping the younger generation's character. Policies like the Opinions on Comprehensively Deepening the Reform of Teachers in the New Era and the Guiding Opinions on Comprehensively Implementing Quality Education in Primary and Secondary Schools promote students' all-round development, especially ideological and moral growth. These policies encourage integrating ethical education into various disciplines, including music, aiming for an inclusive and integrated education system.

This study aims to analyze how secondary school music education can effectively cultivate students' moral consciousness and personality, and the specific mechanisms involved. It provides theoretical and practical suggestions for improving the music education curriculum and teaching strategies, maximizing music education's unique value in promoting moral growth and addressing contemporary challenges.

1.2. Problem Statement

Cultivating young people's moral awareness and character is crucial for personal growth and social well-being in today's rapidly developing social environment. However, traditional moral education faces unprecedented challenges from rapid social development, value diversification, and new media influences [1]. Despite educators' efforts, students' overall moral quality improvement remains limited [4]. Thus, exploring innovative and effective moral education strategies is urgent.

Music Education, with its rich humanistic tradition and unique educational potential, is increasingly recognized as a promising way to improve young people's moral consciousness. Research shows Music Education fosters empathy, improves interpersonal skills, and reduces violence tendencies—qualities essential for moral development [1]. For example, Wang highlights traditional Chinese music's role in moral education through school and community activities, providing valuable moral concept dissemination resources [5].

However, most existing research focuses on direct effects, with limited exploration of mechanisms and pathways [4]. This gap hinders a comprehensive understanding of Music Education's contribution to moral development. Additionally, the current music curriculum often oversimplifies content, uses outdated teaching methods, and lacks humanistic care, limiting its potential in cultivating moral values and holistic development [6]. For example, Coppola finds the virtue of humility, important in musical participation, is often underrepresented in educational practice [7].

Systematic studies are needed to reveal specific ways Music Education influences secondary school students' moral development and underlying mechanisms. Zhu and Ai propose integrating music resources into ideological and political education to enhance relevance and appeal, suggesting Music Education goes beyond artistic skills to transmit moral concepts and values [8].

1.3. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

To explore strategies for music teachers to cultivate moral awareness in music teaching.

To identify challenges faced by teachers in Huainan secondary schools when integrating moral awareness into Music Education.

1.4. Research Questions

This study addresses the following questions:

What strategies do teachers use in music teaching to cultivate moral awareness?

What challenges do teachers in Huainan secondary schools face when integrating moral awareness into Music Education?

1.5. Significance of the Study

This qualitative research explores the relationship between Music Education and secondary school students' moral consciousness improvement. Firstly, Music Education plays a crucial role in cultivating teenagers' moral consciousness through appreciation, performance, and creation of music works, enhancing moral perception and judgment.

Secondly, Music Education conveys values and shapes character by exposing students to various moral concepts through music works, influencing them imperceptibly. It internalizes moral concepts into students' personalities, helping them form positive outlooks on life, values, and ethics.

Practically, this study guides secondary school music curriculum setting and teaching strategies. Educators can choose suitable music works and teaching methods based on students' age and cognitive levels, integrating moral education goals into course content, strategies, and activities. It also provides valuable resources for in-service music teacher training, helping them update teaching ideas and methods to better integrate moral education into music teaching.

In summary, this study reaffirms Music Education's important role in enhancing secondary school students' moral consciousness. Through in-depth analysis, we recognize its unique value and potential in moral development. It provides specific guidance for educational practice, promoting students' all-round development through Music Education.

1.6. Conceptual Framework

As shown in Figure 1, with the theme of "exploring the role of Music Education in the cultivation of students' moral awareness in secondary schools in Huainan City," this conceptual framework focuses on the research question and gradually refines it to elaborate on the integration of music education and moral education. The research theme of "exploring the role of Music Education in the cultivation of students' moral education awareness" was identified at the top level as the core objective. It emphasizes the unique potential of Music Education to develop moral awareness through its inherent emotional and cultural attributes. The next level narrows the focus to "Promoting the Development of Students' Moral Awareness," emphasizing how music instruction can support the growth of students' moral awareness and sense of social responsibility. At the implementation level, the framework examines the strategies teachers use in teaching music through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. These strategies include classroom discussions, role-plays, group work, and musical performances to gain insight

into how music education mobilizes students' emotions and promotes moral reflection. The framework also explores the challenges teachers face in integrating moral education into music teaching. It explores practical difficulties that affect the effectiveness of integration, such as resource constraints, policy support and teacher preparation. This section sets the stage for future exploration and refinement.

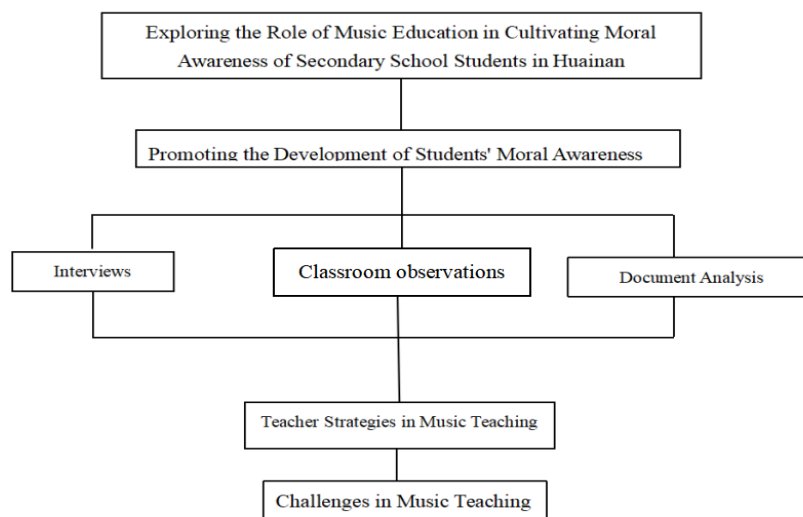


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. *The Relationship between Music Education and Moral Cultivation*

Music education significantly contributes to shaping moral consciousness and social values. Eryong and Li highlight its active role in fostering moral awareness, while Westlund argues for expanding music education to include moral cultivation, enhancing students' sensitivity to global changes [1,9]. Richerme emphasizes educators' need for critical thinking to examine the ethical implications of teaching content, ensuring music education effectively conveys positive values alongside knowledge [6]. Varkøy suggests that high-quality music education should cultivate moral consciousness alongside musical skills, equipping students with both abilities and enhanced ethics [10].

2.2. *The Role of Music Education in Global Moral Education*

Music education promotes moral development globally by fostering empathy and ethical behavior. Research has found that music participation enhances emotional intelligence, positively affecting ethical behavior and academic performance [11]. In Sweden, choir and band activities promote social and emotional learning [10]. In the U.S., music education combines with community service to teach civic responsibility [7]. Integrating traditional Chinese music into educational programs has been recognized as a means to preserve cultural heritage and foster moral development, underscoring music education's broader role in cultivating ethical and social values [12].

2.3. *Mechanisms of Moral Education through Music*

Music education promotes moral growth by stimulating emotional resonance and simulating moral situations. Coppola highlights music activities' role in teaching cooperation, respect, and responsibility [7]. Zhu and Ai stress integrating musical resources into ideological and political education to enhance relevance [8]. Ansani et al. propose that music engagement fosters empathy and fairness, aiding moral development [13]. Bradley advocates exploring music's social impact to motivate critical reflection on societal roles

and responsibilities, suggesting curricula that incorporate moral and ethical discussions [14].

2.4. Interaction between Music and Moral Cognition

Research reveals music's profound impact on moral cognition by enhancing emotional intelligence and promoting moral maturity. Vuoskoski and Eerola found that sad music enhances empathy, facilitating moral reasoning [10]. Ansani et al. provide empirical support for emotional communication in music, linking musical expertise with preferences for fairness in moral decision-making [13]. Coppola highlights the role of musical activities in developing humility, a key element of ethical behavior [7]. Beyond these specific mechanisms, music can also help students progress from basic rule-following toward understanding universal moral principles, supporting the development of more advanced moral reasoning.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Methodology

Using qualitative research methods, this study aims to explore how music teachers cultivate students' moral awareness through specific teaching strategies and the challenges they face in integrating moral awareness into music teaching. Considering the complexity of moral education and its integration with Music Education, the qualitative research method is particularly suitable. Through in-depth interviews and classroom observations, this study captures and analyzes how teachers naturally integrate moral education into their teaching practices. In addition, the study explores how these teaching strategies affect students' behavior and moral concepts, and through the collection of descriptive data, more fully understand the role of Music Education in students' moral development.

3.2. Research Design

The research design included both exploratory and descriptive designs. The exploratory design was designed to analyze the instructional strategies used by music teachers in their classrooms and the impact of these strategies on student learning, as well as to explore the challenges teachers encountered in their implementation. The descriptive design, on the other hand, describes in detail the actual implementation of these instructional strategies and the specific ways in which teachers dealt with the challenges. Combining these two designs, this study supports a comprehensive understanding of music teachers' instructional practices.

3.3. Participant Selection

A purposive sampling method was used to select three experienced music teachers from secondary schools in Huainan City as the study participants. This sampling strategy ensured that the selected participants were able to provide critical data and insights to the research questions.

3.3.1. Participant Selection Criteria

Participants were selected based on their understanding of the research questions and potential to contribute to ensuring the richness and depth of the research data. The selection criteria specifically included:

- 1) Experience: participating music teachers were required to have a minimum of six years' experience in teaching music at the secondary level to ensure that they had an adequate professional background in the field of Music Education.

- 2) **Involvement:** Teachers selected should be actively involved in the development of the school's curriculum and teaching practices, showing initiative and innovation especially in the integration of ethics education.
- 3) **Accessibility:** Teachers need to be able to be observed in the classroom and be willing to participate in interviews to openly share their teaching experiences and insights.

3.3.2. Role of the Researcher

The researchers played the dual roles of observer and interviewer in this study. As observers, researchers will objectively record the teaching dynamics and student interactions in music classes, without interfering with normal teaching activities. As interviewers, the researchers will guide music teachers to explore in depth their teaching methods, the way moral education is integrated, and their views on the impact on students. Researchers will maintain professional neutrality while being open and understanding to the complexities of educational practice, ensuring the authenticity of data and the objectivity of research [15].

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

The data collection program for this study was carefully planned to ensure research depth while minimizing disruption to daily school activities. Our main target respondents are music teachers who have extensive experience in integrating moral education into music teaching [16]. In order to provide them with a comfortable and distraction-free interview environment, we plan to choose a quiet and private area of the school for the interview. Each interview is expected to last approximately 40 minutes, and we will use an interview guide to delve into their educational philosophies, specific approaches to incorporating moral education into music lessons, and their views on the effectiveness of these practices in promoting the moral development of students.

In addition to interviews, we also plan to conduct classroom observations to more intuitively understand the implementation of moral education in music lessons. We will communicate with the teachers in advance, arrange the time of observation, and try to keep a low profile in class so as not to interfere with normal teaching activities. We will carefully observe student interactions with teachers, how ethical content is taught, and student responses, and record video of the class with consent for more detailed analysis later on.

3.5. Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis of the collected data uses a rigorous and systematic approach to identify, classify, and interpret underlying themes that emerge from interviews and observations.

1) Initial coding

After all the interviews have been recorded, followed by the collation of the observation data, the open coding is the first stage of the analysis where every record and note was carefully read through and an initial code generated for marking fragments of the text representing important points or concepts in music class moral education.

2) Focus coding and classification

The first codes are thus revisited and put into even larger topic categories to help in capturing large concepts or ideas expressed in more than one data source. Focused coding thus enables one to reduce data into manageable parts for further analysis.

3) Thematic analysis

This is a stage that involves critical analysis of the aggregated data aimed at developing key themes to describe how moral education is conveyed through music education. Thus, the synthesis of data from different participants and observing meeting notes is taken with the aim of revealing common patterns of significant change.

4) Narrative analysis

Coupling thematic analysis with narrative techniques in the construction of detailed stories from data. These narratives allow for context insight into how individual teachers approach ethical education, challenges associated with this effort, and consequences for student behavior and engagement.

5) Integration and reporting

The final step is to integrate the results of thematic and narrative analysis to form a coherent picture of the findings. The findings will be used for presentation and careful consideration will be given to how the findings are communicated to ensure clarity and impact. This includes an illustrative introduction for the selection of participants and a detailed description of observed classroom interactions

3.6. Ethics

This study will strictly adhere to the highest standards of ethical behaviour in order to respect and uphold the dignity and rights of all participants. During the course of the study, we will ensure the informed consent of the participants by clearly informing them of the purpose, procedures, possible risks and benefits of the study prior to data collection and reaffirming that participation is entirely voluntary and that they may withdraw at any time without consequence.

In addition, all personal data will be strictly protected to ensure their privacy and confidentiality during the study and the publication of the results. At the same time, the research team will be honest and transparent to ensure the scientific and ethical nature of the research activities and create a safe and credible research environment for the participants.

3.7. Trustworthiness

In order to ensure the strength and reliability of the research findings, strategies such as methodological triangulation and member checking were adopted. We integrated data from interviews and classroom observations that provided cross-validation, which further enabled a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. Checks with members ensure consistency of the conclusions with participants' actual experience. We also comment in detail on the research environment, context, interactions, and events to increase the validity and credibility of this research. These strategies are ethical and have a sound basis that cannot be easily questioned [17].

4. Reporting of Findings

4.1. Overview of the Collected Data

The data for this study came from music teacher interviews, classroom observations, and analyses of policy documents and literature. Interviews revealed teachers' educational philosophies and experiences, observations showed moral education strategy implementation, and documents provided theoretical support. Integrating these data enabled a comprehensive exploration of music education's role in promoting students' moral awareness.

4.2. Respondent Information

As shown in Table 1, the three participating music teachers differed in gender, teaching experience, and school affiliation. Teacher A had 12 years of teaching experience at Huainan No.2 High School, Teacher B had 7 years at Huainan No.22 Middle School, and Teacher C had 22 years at Huainan Shouxian No.1 High School. This range of experience provides diverse perspectives on strategies for promoting students' moral awareness in music education.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Music Teacher Respondents.

Respondent No.	Gender	Teaching Years	School Name	Interview Time
Teacher A	Female	12	Huainan No.2 High School	August 2024
Teacher B	Male	7	Huainan No.22 middle School	September 2024
Teacher C	Female	22	Huainan Shouxian No.1 High School	September 2024

4.3. Reporting of Findings Based on Research Question 1

This study examined strategies teachers use to develop students' moral awareness in music teaching.

4.3.1. Classroom Discussion

Classroom discussion is a common and effective music teaching strategy. It helps students understand music's artistic and moral aspects through teacher-student and student-student interactions. The Guide to Moral Education in Primary and Secondary Schools states that classroom teaching is the main channel for moral education and should be integrated into the whole teaching process. In music class, discussions guide students to explore moral connotations. For example, Teacher A used discussions to help students understand the deeper meaning of songs. Observations show that teachers guide discussions to stimulate students' moral thinking, such as asking about the patriotic feelings in a song and how teenagers can embody them. Students' responses indicate that discussions can elevate their moral understanding and social responsibility. Classroom discussion is valuable for both art and moral education [18].

4.3.2. Role-Playing

Role-playing immerses students in musical characters' experiences and dilemmas, enabling them to explore moral issues tangibly. The Music Curriculum Standards for Full-time Compulsory Education (Experimental Draft) emphasizes students' participation and experience through role-playing. Teacher B believes role-playing helps students understand moral conflicts and empathize with characters. For instance, in studying "Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai," students reflected on the characters' values and their own courage and responsibility. Literature suggests role-playing improves moral education effectiveness, stimulates learning interest, and promotes cooperation and personalized development. Role-playing makes abstract moral concepts concrete and relevant, connecting musical narratives with real-life applications.

4.3.3. Group Work

Group work in music education emphasizes teamwork, mutual respect, and shared responsibility, providing opportunities for students to practice ethical behavior. The Manual for the Implementation of the Guidelines for Moral Education in Primary and Secondary Schools suggests developing cooperative skills and social responsibility through group work. In one observation, students rehearsed in groups and resolved conflicts with teacher guidance. After the performance, a student recognized the importance of teamwork. Teacher C concluded that group work helps students understand mutual respect and understanding. Group work translates abstract moral principles into practical action, connecting music education with ethical and social learning.

4.3.4. Music Performance

Music performance promotes students' understanding of moral values through emotional expression. The Compulsory Education Curriculum Program (2022 Edition) proposes that the arts curriculum should focus on aesthetic education and moral emotion cultivation. In the class of "Take Me Home on a Country Road," Teacher A guided students to explore themes of persistence, belonging, and responsibility. During the performance, students expressed their feelings deeply, indicating a move towards the social contract orientation stage in Kohlberg's theory. Teacher A believes music performance helps students understand their social responsibility. Musical performance bridges emotional expression and moral understanding, internalizing ethical principles through life experiences.

4.4. Reporting of Findings Based on Research Question 2

Teachers at Huainan secondary schools face multiple challenges in integrating moral education into music teaching, including inadequate teacher training, lack of administrative and parental support, difficulty in assessing moral education effectiveness, and lack of practical instruction.

4.4.1. Insufficient Teacher Training

Lack of special moral education training is a major challenge. Although teachers have music training, they often lack skills to incorporate ethical education. The Guidelines for Moral Education in Primary and Secondary Schools require strengthening teachers' moral education competence training, but actual training focuses more on music skills. Teachers reported a lack of specific guidance on integrating moral education into music teaching, highlighting the need for targeted professional development programs [19].

4.4.2. Insufficient Administrative and Parental Support

Music Education's potential in cultivating moral awareness is limited by insufficient support from schools and parents. Schools often neglect Music Education in resource allocation, prioritizing core subjects for exams. Parents also often see Music Education as secondary, ignoring its moral value. This reflects a lack of understanding of the combination of Music Education and moral education [20].

4.4.3. The Effect of Moral Education is Difficult to Evaluate

Evaluating the effect of moral education in Music Education is challenging. Although Music Education has potential value, effective evaluation mechanisms are not yet mature. Teachers can grade musical performance but find it difficult to measure students' moral growth. Current assessment tools mainly focus on skills and performance, lacking assessment of emotional experience and values internalization.

4.4.4. Lack of Teaching Practice Guidance

Lack of practical guidance is an obstacle to realizing moral education goals. Teachers reported a lack of specific teaching strategies and resources. The curriculum mentions the importance of moral education but provides general guidance. Teachers need more practical examples and actionable strategies, as well as sufficient resources to implement teaching effectively.

4.5. Summary

This chapter details the strategies secondary school music teachers in Huainan City use to promote students' moral awareness and the challenges they face. Classroom discussions, role-plays, group tasks, and musical performances are effective teaching strategies that integrate students' emotional experiences with moral education goals through

artistic practices. However, challenges such as inadequate teacher training, insufficient support, difficulty in evaluation, and lack of guidance limit the effectiveness of moral education. These issues reflect inadequacies in institutional support and resource allocation and highlight bottlenecks in teaching practice. The findings provide empirical evidence and theoretical guidance for implementing moral education in Music Education, suggesting directions for curriculum design, policy improvement, resource allocation, and teacher training. Future work needs to explore solutions to overcome these obstacles and support the deeper integration of music teaching and moral education.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1. Discussion of Major Findings

This study reveals that music education serves as a significant vehicle for moral development among secondary school students in Huainan. Through qualitative analysis of teacher interviews and classroom observations, several effective pedagogical strategies were identified, including classroom discussions, role-playing, group work, and musical performances. These methods facilitate emotional engagement and contextualize moral reasoning, allowing students to reflect on values such as cooperation, responsibility, and empathy within aesthetic experiences.

However, these efforts are hampered by systemic challenges. Teachers reported insufficient professional training in moral education, limiting their ability to consistently and effectively integrate ethical themes into music instruction. Furthermore, a lack of institutional and parental support—coupled with the abstract and often unquantifiable nature of moral growth—makes it difficult to sustain and assess moral education outcomes within the music curriculum.

5.2. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings carry both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, this study reinforces the link between aesthetic experience and moral development, supporting the idea that music education can serve as a medium for value-laden learning. It also underscores the importance of emotional and social dimensions in moral education, aligning with established theories such as Kohlberg's stages of moral development.

Practically, this research highlights the need for better-prepared teachers and more supportive educational environments. Schools should provide targeted training programs that equip music teachers with the pedagogical tools and ethical understanding necessary for integrating moral education. Curriculum developers and policymakers are encouraged to design clearer guidelines, teaching resources, and evaluation frameworks that recognize and reinforce the moral potential of music education.

5.3. Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, the sample was limited to three teachers in Huainan, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Second, the qualitative approach, while rich in contextual insight, does not allow for statistical generalization. Future research could benefit from mixed-methods designs, larger samples, and longitudinal approaches to trace the long-term impact of music education on moral development.

5.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, music education holds meaningful potential for fostering moral awareness among secondary school students. When effectively implemented through discussion, performance, and collaborative activities, it can transcend mere technical training and contribute meaningfully to character formation. Nevertheless, without adequate teacher preparation, resource support, and policy reinforcement, this potential remains underutilized. It is imperative that educational stakeholders recognize and invest in the

moral dimensions of music education to fully realize its role in the holistic development of young people.

5.5. Recommendations for Future Practice and Research

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

Teacher Development: Introduce specialized training and workshops focusing on moral education through music, including lesson planning, ethical discussion facilitation, and evaluation strategies.

Curriculum Enhancement: Develop practical teaching kits that include repertoire with strong moral themes, accompanied by guided activity plans.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Encourage cooperation between music teachers and those in humanities and social sciences to create integrated learning experiences.

Policy Support: Education authorities should issue detailed implementation guidelines and allocate resources supporting moral education within art subjects.

Future Research: Expand studies to include student voices, quantitative measures of ethical growth, and comparative analyses across regions and school types.

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