

Music and Aesthetic Training within Ideological and Political Education in Chinese Higher Music Institutions: Student Perceptions, Pedagogical Tensions, and Curriculum Renewal

Formação musical e estética na educação ideológica e política em instituições chinesas de ensino superior de música: percepções dos estudantes, tensões pedagógicas e renovação curricular.



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Abstract: In higher music education, the integration of aesthetic training with ideological and political education raises a central pedagogical question: how can cultural identity and civic formation be strengthened without reducing music learning to text-based or doctrinal instruction? This mixed-methods study examined students' perceptions of music and aesthetic training within ideological and political education in four Chinese higher education institutions. A structured questionnaire was completed by 418 students, and ten follow-up semi-structured interviews were used to clarify the quantitative patterns. Quantitative analysis included descriptive statistics, reliability testing, exploratory factor analysis, χ^2 tests, and one-sample t-tests; interview data were thematically coded in NVivo 14. The findings show that traditional, literature-based, and historically framed teaching remains dominant: 78.7% of students reported frequent or very frequent use of literature-based instruction, whereas only 21.4% reported frequent active participation in learning and discussion. Factor analysis differentiated three domains: traditional ideological-textual

methods, modern participatory techniques, and patriotic-cultural outcomes. Students valued the cultural and identity-forming aims of the curriculum, but reported a weaker impact on creative participation and real-life application. The study contributes by reframing ideological-aesthetic music education as a tension between cultural transmission, civic formation, and creative agency. Practically, the findings support curriculum renewal through project-based assessment, guided classroom discussion, and carefully integrated digital resources.

Keywords: aesthetic education; Chinese music education; cultural identity; ideological and political education; creative agency; technology-supported pedagogy.

Resumo: Na educação musical superior, a integração da formação estética com a educação ideológica e política levanta uma questão pedagógica central: como fortalecer a identidade cultural e a formação cívica sem reduzir a aprendizagem musical a uma instrução textual ou doutrinária? Este estudo de métodos mistos examinou as percepções de estudantes sobre a formação musical e estética no âmbito da educação ideológica e política em quatro instituições de ensino superior chinesas. Um questionário estruturado foi respondido por 418 estudantes, e 10 entrevistas semiestruturadas de acompanhamento foram realizadas para esclarecer os padrões quantitativos. A análise quantitativa incluiu estatísticas descritivas, teste de confiabilidade, análise fatorial exploratória, testes χ^2 e testes t de uma amostra; os dados das entrevistas foram codificados tematicamente no NVivo 14. Os resultados mostram que o ensino tradicional, baseado em literatura e historicamente enquadrado, permanece dominante: 78,7% dos estudantes relataram uso frequente ou muito frequente de instrução baseada em literatura, enquanto apenas 21,4% relataram participação ativa frequente na aprendizagem e na discussão. A análise fatorial identificou três domínios: métodos ideológico-textuais tradicionais, técnicas participativas modernas e resultados patriótico-culturais. Os estudantes valorizaram os

objetivos culturais e identitários do currículo, mas relataram um impacto menor na participação criativa e na aplicação na vida real. O estudo contribui ao reformular a educação musical ideológico-estética como uma tensão entre transmissão cultural, formação cívica e agência criativa.

Palavras-chave: educação estética; educação musical chinesa; identidade cultural; educação ideológica e política; agência criativa; pedagogia apoiada por tecnologia.

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1. Introduction

Across higher education systems, music education is increasingly expected to do more than transmit repertoire, theory, or performance technique (Ho and Law, 2012). It is also asked to support cultural memory, civic orientation, intercultural understanding, and students' capacity to interpret artistic experience critically (Hebert and Kertz-Welzel, 2016). This expectation has become more complex under globalization and digital circulation. In China, systematic reviews indicate that aesthetic education, traditional music, cultural identity, and pedagogical reform have become persistent themes in music education research, while online music ecologies have reshaped the production, distribution, and interpretation of cultural materials (Shen et al., 2019; Yang and Welch, 2023).

In China, these tensions are especially visible because music and aesthetic education are closely connected to cultural identity, patriotic education, and ideological and political formation. Higher music institutions are therefore required to balance several aims that are not automatically compatible: preserving Chinese musical heritage, supporting civic and moral education, maintaining artistic seriousness, and giving students enough creative agency to interpret music as a living cultural practice rather than as fixed doctrinal content (Ho and Law, 2012; Zhang and Fagan, 2016). Recent music education research in China further shows that cultural identity is shaped not only by repertoire selection but also by the pedagogical conditions under which students participate in musical practice. Studies of culturally responsive music teaching and Chinese orchestra learning indicate that traditional music can support ethnic and cultural identity when students are actively involved in performance, reflection, and collective musical experience (Guan et al., 2023, 2025).

The present study addresses this tension empirically. Rather than asking only whether ideological and political education is present in music training, it examines how students perceive the

dominant forms of instruction, how they evaluate the cultural and civic effects of this training, and where they identify unmet needs in creativity, participation, assessment, and technology-supported learning. The scientific value of the study lies in clarifying the internal structure of students' perceptions, while its practical value lies in identifying concrete directions for curriculum renewal in Chinese higher music education.

Previous research on ideological and political education in Chinese higher education has highlighted both the formative potential and the contested nature of these programs, including debates about student agency, freedom of expression, and the balance between guidance and control (Manning and Edwards, 2014; Zhang and Fagan, 2016). Mandatory ideological and political education courses remain a central mechanism for promoting civic values and political literacy among university students. Previous studies indicate that such programs may have both formative benefits and important limitations. It is noteworthy that ideological and political education requires an approach that enables students to exercise their rights to freedom and self-expression (Manning and Edwards, 2014). Against this background, the present study explores how music and aesthetic education are situated within ideological and political training in Chinese higher education institutions. It thus explores how students majoring in music-related programs perceive current forms of music and aesthetic training, how they assess its role in developing patriotism, civic awareness, and artistic perception, and what changes they would consider necessary. Given the emphasis on students' views in elite and regional institutions, the study adds to the broader debates on how national cultures negotiate identity formation and civic education in an era of accelerated digital circulation of music and media.

Despite strong policy support, attitudes towards ideological and political education in universities remain ambivalent, with students sometimes perceiving such courses as formalistic or overly didactic (Lu, 2017). Ambivalence about the role of ideological and political

education raises specific questions about the place of music and aesthetic training within it. While aesthetic education is intended to enrich students' perspectives and deepen their involvement in musical practice, it is unclear how far current pedagogical approaches allow for creative freedom and independent aesthetic judgment within an ideologically framed curriculum. Empirical evidence as to how students perceive these tensions is limited, with a particular dearth in music-focused higher education institutions.

Therefore, this study aims to: (1) map the dominant forms of music and aesthetic training used within ideological and political education in selected Chinese universities; (2) analyze students' evaluations of how such training influences their patriotism, civic awareness, and artistic perception; and (3) identify student-driven proposals for improving the content, methods, and assessment of music and aesthetic training in this context. Attending to students' voices at elite and regional institutions alike, this study contributes to broader international debates on the negotiation of national cultures' identities and civic education in an era of accelerated digital circulation of music and media.

1.1 Literature review

The purpose of music education in colleges and universities is generally considered to be for the integral development of students rather than the transmission of technical skills. In that perspective, aesthetic education through music can support cultural interpretation, emotional understanding, and reflective engagement with artistic experience (D'Olimpio, 2021). Contemporary research on Chinese music education shows that curriculum reform has increasingly emphasized aesthetic education, traditional culture, and pedagogical innovation, although implementation remains uneven (Yang and Welch, 2023). In that regard, music education should contribute to shaping character, refining aesthetic judgment, and promoting balanced personal growth among the students rather than focus exclusively on performance ability or theoretical knowledge (D'Olimpio, 2021; Shen et al., 2019).

From the philosophical perspective, aesthetic education concerns a person's ways of perceiving, interpreting, and valuing artistic experience. In educational discourse, it is often characterized as a means to develop an integration of cognition and emotion, analytical reflection and sensory experience, and the making of personal meaning in relation to cultural heritage. In these ways, aesthetic training can broaden students' modes of perceiving the world and heighten their engagement with artistic and everyday experience.

A critical debate that runs throughout the literature is whether aesthetic education should be considered an autonomous discipline of perception, evaluation, and expression, or as a means to predetermined moral and civic ends. This issue becomes especially problematic in music education, where compositions may hold both historical and national significance, yet music instruction is grounded in interpretation, uncertainty, bodily action, and personal reaction. If political ideology is introduced into music education only via written sources, lectures, or formal exams, the aesthetic experience itself could become nothing more than cultural communication. However, by removing aesthetic education from any civic or historical consideration, its potential to maintain historical knowledge and continuity would be lost.

Recent philosophy of education similarly argues that flourishing should remain a central educational aim rather than being reduced to measurable cognitive or economic outcomes (Kristjánsson, 2017). Within this frame, aesthetic education is defensible because it develops perception, interpretation, value judgment, and expressive understanding (D'Olimpio, 2021). From this perspective, artistic practice can be seen as a privileged medium through which learners explore and express feelings, values, and identities, particularly those that defy articulation in purely discursive terms (D'Olimpio, 2021). This argument also has a Chinese intellectual foundation. Cai Yuanpei's theory of aesthetic education framed aesthetic experience as a mode of moral, civic, and whole-person formation rather than as ornamental cultural

knowledge, a legacy that remains relevant to contemporary debates on aesthetic education in China (Luo, 2021).

In the Chinese context, music education in schools and universities has long been expected to promote national culture and to transfer core ideological values, for example, through the careful selection of song lyrics and repertoires. Research on Cantonese opera transmission shows that traditional music education requires more than symbolic inclusion in the curriculum; it depends on sustained institutional conditions, teacher capacity, assessment practices, and a careful balance between oral, community-based, and formal conservatoire models (Leung, 2020). Related survey evidence from Hong Kong and Guangdong also shows that the school transmission of Cantonese opera remains shaped by teacher preparation, curricular policy, and the availability of culturally appropriate resources (Leung, 2024). Studies of multicultural music education in Guizhou Province further show that cultural sustainability can be weakened when local participation, educational resources, and community needs are not adequately aligned (Du and Leung, 2022). Policy initiatives have encouraged the integration of ideological and political content into music syllabi, ensuring that music classes clearly contribute to patriotic education and value development. At the same time, empirical research indicates ambivalent responses from students, some of whom characterize the classes on ideology and politics as overly formalistic or propagandistic, and doubt their relevance to personal artistic development (Lu, 2017).

More recent work has explored attempts to transcend such formalism by more substantively incorporating aesthetic training into ideological and political education. Large-scale survey research suggests that when ideological content is embedded in emotionally engaging activities, varied artistic experiences, and supportive learning environments, students' acceptance and understanding of ideological and political education can be enhanced (Wang et al., 2023). In line with broader educational reforms, recent Chinese scholarship argues that music education should cultivate not

only artistic literacy but also ideological and political awareness (Ye and Ye, 2024). Studies of integrated music-ideology curricula report that when ideological themes are woven into repertoire selection, classroom discussion, and performance tasks, students may develop stronger aesthetic abilities, cultural confidence, social responsibility, and patriotic sentiments (Ye and Ye, 2024). At a Sino-American joint university, it was shown that carefully designed music appreciation courses that address ideological content alongside cross-cultural musical examples can enhance critical thinking, cultural awareness, and academic performance (Xu, 2024). These studies, taken together, suggest that integrated approaches can support both aesthetic and ideological goals; however, they focus more on how the curriculum is designed and reported learning outcomes than on how students themselves perceive the balance between ideological guidance, creative freedom, and everyday musical practices.

Policy documents on ideological and political education emphasize disseminating the core Marxist view and advancing national development; civic consciousness is identified as a key task in Chinese modernization (Zhang and Fagan, 2016). These policy priorities provide the backdrop for recent reforms in music and aesthetic education. Similarly, student-centered reforms in Chinese music education are also contingent upon specific contextual circumstances. For instance, studies on music demonstration classes for elementary students in Guangdong province reveal that content-based instruction can still prevail despite the promotion of student-centered approaches in educational reform discourses (Zhang et al., 2023). Moreover, other classroom studies reveal that student-centered approaches to education in Chinese music classrooms are not merely imposed but are adapted to local circumstances (Zhang and Leung, 2023).

The creativity literature is directly relevant to the weak creative-participation outcomes examined in this study. Creative music teaching requires learning situations in which students generate, revise, and justify musical ideas rather than

merely reproduce predefined answers (Chatelain et al., 2024). Assessment-for-learning research similarly shows that creativity can be supported when criteria, feedback, reflection, and self-assessment are used to develop students' creative work rather than only judging it after completion (Bolden and DeLuca, 2022). Group improvisation research further demonstrates that dialogic music-making can open creative spaces through participation, motivation, and collective musical identity (Lage-Gómez and Cremades-Andreu, 2019).

Technology-supported music education has expanded rapidly, but its educational value depends on pedagogically meaningful integration rather than simple tool adoption. Bibliometric evidence indicates that technology is becoming a major field of music education research, while systematic review evidence on digital game-based music learning shows that digital environments require clear musical objectives, appropriate assessment, and alignment with learners' experiences (Weatherly et al., 2026). AI-supported music education offers possibilities for personalized feedback and diagnostic support, but recent reviews emphasize that such tools also raise questions about teacher readiness, ethics, access, and dependency (Merchán Sánchez-Jara et al., 2024). Earlier work on AI in music education similarly identifies automatic feedback and adaptive learning as promising functions when embedded in teacher-guided pedagogy (Yu et al., 2023). Evidence from music teacher education indicates that positive attitudes toward digital technology do not automatically produce meaningful classroom integration unless teachers have sufficient self-efficacy and institutional support (Gudek, 2019). Recent research also shows that technology-integration self-efficacy and AI literacy are becoming increasingly relevant to future music pedagogy (Kılınçer, 2025).

Taken together, previous studies leave three gaps. First, research on ideological and political education often treats music and aesthetic training as curricular content, but gives less attention to how students experience the balance between

cultural guidance and creative agency. Second, studies of aesthetic education frequently affirm its formative value but rarely examine how assessment practices may constrain or enable aesthetic judgment in ideologically framed music courses. Third, recent work on digital and participatory pedagogy suggests possible routes for modernization, but evidence remains limited on whether students in Chinese higher music institutions actually perceive technology, discussion, and creative assessment as necessary reforms. These gaps justify the present mixed-methods study.

1.2 Research problem, aim, and tasks

The research problem addressed in this study is the insufficient empirical understanding of how students in Chinese higher music institutions experience the integration of music and aesthetic training into ideological and political education. The motivation for the study is both practical and theoretical: practically, curriculum reform requires evidence about which forms of teaching and assessment students experience as meaningful or restrictive; theoretically, the field needs a clearer account of how cultural identity, ideological formation, and creative agency coexist within music education.

The aim of the study is to examine how students perceive the forms, effects, and needed reforms of music and aesthetic training within ideological and political education in selected Chinese higher education institutions. The study is organized around three tasks:

Task 1: identify the dominant teaching and assessment forms used in music and aesthetic training within ideological and political education.

Task 2: evaluate how students perceive the influence of this training on cultural heritage awareness, patriotism, civic consciousness, creative participation, and real-life application.

Task 3: identify student-supported directions for curriculum renewal, especially regarding creative participation, assessment modernization, and technology-supported learning.

The corresponding research questions are: (1) Which forms of music and aesthetic training are most frequently experienced by students? (2) Which cultural, civic, aesthetic, and creative outcomes do students perceive as strongest or weakest? (3) What changes do students consider most necessary for improving music and aesthetic training within ideological and political education?

2. Methods and materials

The present research is based on an empirical mixed-methods design that combines a cross-sectional student questionnaire with follow-up semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire consisted of two blocks. The first block included five closed-ended items capturing the name of the educational institution, gender, age, year of study, and experience of music and aesthetic training. The second block contained twenty Likert-type items (1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”) divided into three thematic groups: seven items on the perceived frequency and forms of music and aesthetic training within ideological and political education, six items on the frequency of different evaluation methods for music and aesthetic practices, and seven items on support for specific proposals to improve music and aesthetic training.

In the second stage, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of survey participants to obtain more detailed comments on their questionnaire responses. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent, anonymized using numeric codes, and later transcribed verbatim for qualitative analysis.

2.1 Research design and procedure

The current research was conducted from September to October 2021 at four Chinese higher education institutions. It had a cross-sectional survey design complemented by semi-structured interviews with a subsample of respondents. In regular classes, lecturers briefly presented the research project and invited students to participate voluntarily. Participation was restricted to

students aged 18 years or older, with written informed consent obtained before data collection.

The questionnaire was administered in classrooms in paper-and-pencil format. Students completed the instrument individually within approximately 20 minutes. For all attitudinal items, respondents indicated their agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

After the survey, a subsample of 10 students with diverse background characteristics (institution, gender, year of study) was purposively invited to participate in follow-up semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted either in person or online by a researcher not affiliated with the participants' home institutions and who had never known them before. Each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes and was used to clarify and deepen participants' responses given in the questionnaire.

2.2 Participants

Students were recruited from four higher education institutions offering music-related programs: Beijing International Art School (Beijing, China), Central Conservatory of Music (Beijing, China), Shanghai Conservatory of Music (Shanghai, China), and Fujian Normal University (Fuzhou, China). In total, 612 students were invited to participate in the survey; 423 agreed and returned questionnaires. Five questionnaires were incomplete or spoiled and were excluded from analysis, resulting in 418 valid responses.

Among the respondents, 59.6% were female, and 40.4% were male. Second-year students represented 24.6% of the sample, third-year students 25.8%, and fourth-year students 49.6%. The average age was 22.4 years. Ten survey participants were purposively selected for follow-up interviews to capture variation across institutions, gender, year of study, and reported experience with music and aesthetic training. The interview subsample was not intended to be statistically representative; it was used to deepen the interpretation of the survey patterns and to identify explanatory contrasts across student perspectives.

2.3 Instruments

The student questionnaire was specifically developed for this study based on prior literature on music education, aesthetic education, and ideological and political education in Chinese higher education. The first block of five items captured demographic and background information (institution, gender, age, year of study, experience with music and aesthetic training). The second block comprised twenty statements grouped into three subscales:

- (a) perceived frequency and forms of music and aesthetic training within ideological and political education (7 items);
- (b) frequency and perceived adequacy of evaluation methods for music and aesthetic practices (6 items);
- (c) support for specific proposals to improve music and aesthetic training (7 items).

All items in the second block used a 5-point Likert response format from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree").

The semi-structured interview guide included open-ended questions that invited participants to elaborate on their experiences of music and aesthetic training within ideological and political education, to comment on the alignment or misalignment between ideological content and their artistic development, and to explain their suggestions for improving current practices. Probing questions were used to clarify and deepen responses emerging from the survey data.

2.4 Data analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were entered and analyzed using SPSS 27. Data screening included checks for missing values and outliers. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and 95% confidence intervals) were calculated for all items. For the three thematic subscales (training forms, evaluation methods, improvement proposals), internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's α .

Before factor extraction, sampling adequacy and factorability were assessed using the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin statistic and Bartlett’s test of sphericity. The dimensional structure of the Likert-type items was examined using exploratory principal-component analysis with varimax rotation. Components were retained using eigenvalues greater than 1.0, scree-plot inspection, and interpretability of the resulting solution. Items with primary loadings of .40 or higher were interpreted as salient. Internal consistency was reported for each retained component using Cronbach’s α

Inferential analysis focused on response distributions and deviation from the neutral midpoint. χ^2 tests were used to examine whether response distributions differed from uniformity across categories, and one-sample t-tests were used to compare item means with the neutral midpoint of 3.0. Effect sizes were reported using Cohen’s d and η^2 where appropriate.

Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and imported into NVivo 14 for qualitative analysis. An inductive–deductive thematic coding approach was used: initial codes were derived from the research questions and questionnaire domains, and additional codes were developed to capture themes emerging from the data. Codes were then grouped into higher-order themes describing students’ experiences of music and aesthetic training, perceived tensions between ideological and artistic goals, and their proposals for change. These qualitative themes were used to contextualize and explain the quantitative findings. To avoid treating interview data only as illustrative quotations, coding focused on convergence and divergence between survey results and student explanations. Particular attention was given to negative or ambivalent cases, such as students who valued patriotic content but rejected closed assessment, or students who supported technology but warned against replacing teacher-led interpretation. A thematic matrix was then constructed to connect survey patterns, interview themes, and implications for curriculum design.

2.5 Limitations

The research included participants from only four higher education institutions and thus cannot be considered representative of all Chinese colleges and universities. The sample was highly female-dominated, with 59.6% of the total, while almost half of the respondents were fourth-year students, 49.6%, which might limit the generalizability and underrepresent the views of male students and junior cohorts. These characteristics of the sample need to be considered when interpreting the results.

2.6 Ethical issues

The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the relevant academic authorities and supervisory boards of all participating institutions. Participation was entirely voluntary with no financial or academic incentives offered. Students were provided with written information prior to completing the questionnaire or undergoing an interview on the aim of the study and the procedures involved. They were required to sign an informed consent form. They were assured that their responses would be handled as confidential, data would be reported only in aggregated form, and they could withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. Numeric codes anonymised survey questionnaires and interview transcriptions, and materials were kept in a secure location.

The study protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of Lanzhou University of Finance and Economics (protocol No. 342 of 20 May 2021). The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. All participants gave written informed consent prior to participation.

3. Results

The results are presented according to the study's three research tasks. First, the section identifies the dominant forms of music and aesthetic training within ideological and political education. Second, it examines students' perceptions of the

cultural, civic, aesthetic, and creative outcomes of this training. Third, it identifies student-supported directions for curriculum renewal. Quantitative findings are reported first, followed by qualitative thematic evidence from the follow-up interviews. This structure allows the statistical results, figures, and interview data to be interpreted together rather than as separate or merely illustrative forms of evidence.

3.1 Dominant forms of music and aesthetic training

The first research task was to identify the teaching forms most frequently experienced by students in music and aesthetic training within ideological and political education. Table 1 reports the descriptive profile of seven training methods, while Table 2 presents the corresponding inferential tests.

Table 1 - Descriptive profile of music and aesthetic training methods within ideological and political education

Training method	High frequency, %	M	SD	95% CI for M	Interpretation
Use of literature to form music and aesthetic tastes	78.7	3.89	0.97	[3.79, 3.98]	Dominant traditional-textual method
Study of Chinese history of music and aesthetics	69.9	3.82	1.05	[3.72, 3.92]	Strong heritage-oriented component
Use of socialist and Confucian educational and aesthetic ideas	66.7	3.71	1.13	[3.60, 3.81]	Strong ideological-cultural framing
Use of music and aesthetic training that glorifies national culture	47.2	3.24	1.15	[3.13, 3.35]	Moderate cultural-national emphasis
Use of modern technology-enabled services	38.2	3.34	0.92	[3.25, 3.43]	Present but not systematically embedded
Practice of promoting democracy, rule of law, and equality	27.4	2.90	1.14	[2.79, 3.01]	Near-neutral presence
Active student participation in learning and discussion	21.4	2.43	1.23	[2.31, 2.55]	Weakest participatory component

Source: authors' elaboration based on survey data, N = 418.

Table 1 shows that students received music and aesthetic training primarily through traditional, text-oriented forms. The most frequently reported method was using literature to shape musical and aesthetic tastes, with 78.7% of students reporting this method as frequent or very frequent ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.97$, 95% CI [3.79, 3.98]). This was followed by the study of Chinese music history and aesthetics, reported as frequent or very frequent by 69.9% of students ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.05$, 95% CI [3.72, 3.92]), and the use of socialist and Confucian educational and aesthetic ideas, reported by 66.7% of students ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.13$, 95% CI [3.60, 3.81]). These results indicate that the dominant instructional pattern remains strongly grounded in textual, historical, and ideological-cultural forms of transmission.

By contrast, participatory and dialogic forms were considerably weaker. Active student participation in learning and discussion was the lowest-rated method, with only 21.4% of students reporting frequent or very frequent use ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.23$, 95% CI [2.31, 2.55]). The practice of promoting democracy, rule of law, and equality also occupied a relatively weak position, with 27.4% of students reporting frequent or very frequent use ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.14$, 95% CI [2.79, 3.01]). Technology-supported learning was present but not systematic: 38.2% of students reported frequent or very frequent use of modern technology-enabled services ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.92$, 95% CI [3.25, 3.43]). Thus, although digital resources have entered the instructional environment, they have not yet displaced the predominance of traditional textual and historical approaches.

Table 2 - Inferential tests for music and aesthetic training methods

Training method	$\chi^2(4)$	$p \chi^2$	$t(417)$ vs 3.0	$p t$	Cohen's d	η^2
Use of literature to form music and aesthetic tastes	359.61	< .001	18.61	< .001	0.91	.454
Study of Chinese history of music and aesthetics	203.29	< .001	16.07	< .001	0.79	.383
Use of socialist and Confucian educational and aesthetic ideas	166.52	< .001	12.81	< .001	0.63	.282

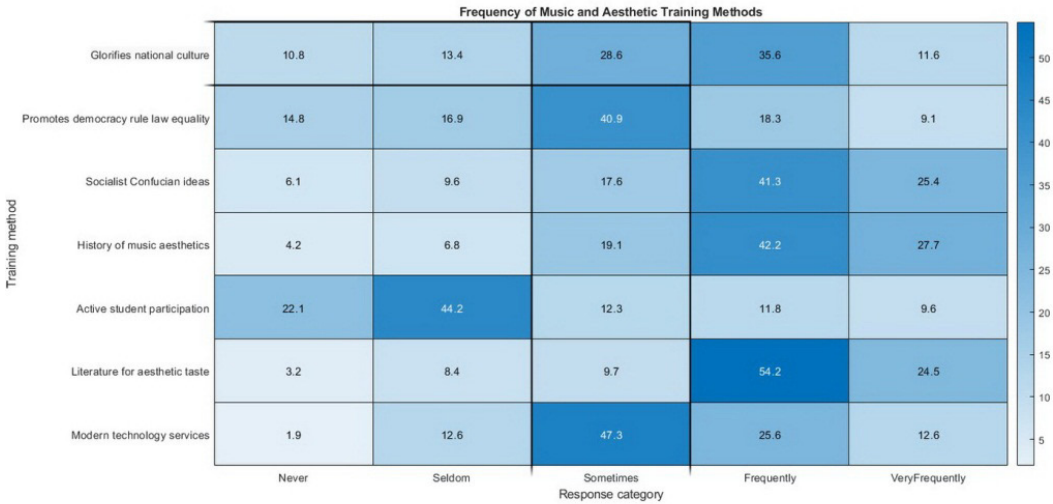
Use of music and aesthetic training that glorifies national culture	109.11	< .001	4.20	< .001	0.21	.041
Use of modern technology-enabled services	254.61	< .001	7.56	< .001	0.37	.121
Practice of promoting democracy, rule of law, and equality	124.42	< .001	-1.84	.066	-0.09	.008
Active student participation in learning and discussion	172.57	< .001	-9.47	< .001	-0.46	.177

Source: authors' elaboration based on survey data, N = 418

The inferential tests in Table 2 confirm that these patterns were statistically robust. All seven training methods showed non-uniform response distributions, $\chi^2(4) = 109.11\text{--}359.61$, $p < .001$, indicating that student responses were not randomly distributed across the five response categories. One-sample t-tests against the neutral midpoint further showed that literature-based instruction, music-history study, socialist and Confucian aesthetic ideas, national-cultural glorification, and modern technology-enabled services were rated significantly above the midpoint. The strongest effect was observed for the use of literature to form music and aesthetic tastes, $t(417) = 18.61$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.91$, $\eta^2 = .454$, followed by the study of Chinese music history and aesthetics, $t(417) = 16.07$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.79$, $\eta^2 = .383$.

The opposite pattern was found for active student participation. Its mean was significantly below the neutral midpoint, $t(417) = -9.47$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.46$, $\eta^2 = .177$, confirming that participatory learning was not simply less dominant but structurally weak within the reported curriculum experience. The practice of promoting democracy, rule of law, and equality did not differ significantly from the midpoint, $t(417) = -1.84$, $p = .066$, suggesting a near-neutral rather than clearly established presence. Overall, the evidence supports the conclusion that music and aesthetic training within ideological and political education remains more strongly associated with cultural transmission and textual study than with discussion, creative participation, or systematic technology-supported pedagogy.

Figure 1 - Heatmap of student responses to seven music and aesthetic training methods within ideological and political education. Darker shading indicates a higher percentage of responses within each frequency category



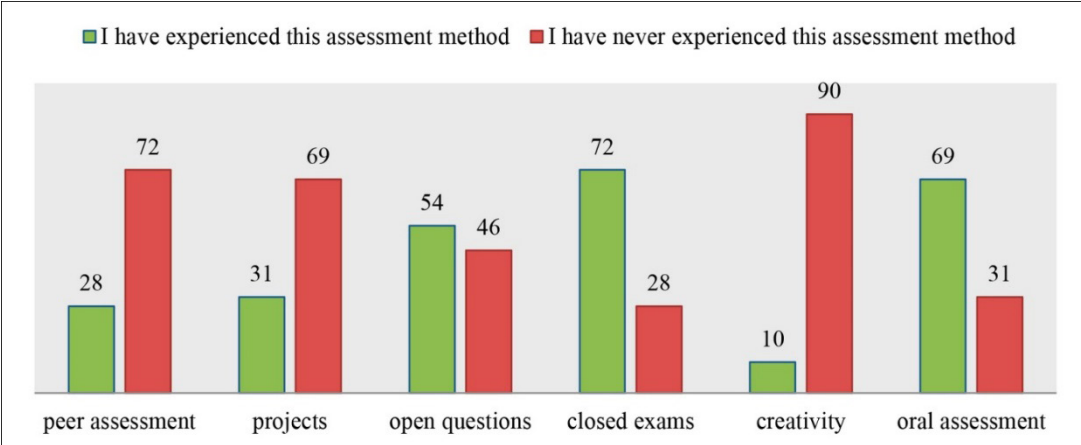
Source: authors' elaboration based on survey data, N = 418

Figure 1 visualizes the distributional pattern reported in Tables 1 and 2. Literature-based instruction, music-history study, and socialist-Confucian aesthetic ideas cluster in the frequent and very frequent categories, whereas active student participation remains concentrated in the newer and seldom categories. The figure, therefore, confirms that the curriculum is not only traditional in content but also traditional in delivery, with participatory and dialogic forms occupying a weaker position than textual and heritage-oriented instruction.

Assessment practices showed a similar pattern of conventional dominance. As shown in Figure 2, closed examinations and oral assessment were the most frequently experienced assessment methods, reported by 72% and 69% of students, respectively. Open questions occupied an intermediate position at 54%, whereas peer assessment and project-based assessment were less common, at 28% and 31%. Creative assessment was the least experienced method, reported by only 10% of students. This distribution explains why students later expressed strong support for assessment modernization: the existing assessment structure

evaluates recall and oral response more consistently than creative interpretation, collaborative inquiry, or project-based aesthetic production.

Figure 2 - Student experience of assessment methods used in music and aesthetic training within ideological and political education



Source: authors' elaboration based on survey data, N = 418

3.2 Factor structure of students' perceptions

To examine whether students perceived these practices as isolated items or as broader pedagogical dimensions, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted. The factor solution is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 - Exploratory factor analysis, reliability, and explained variance

Variable	Factor 1: Traditional ideological-textual methods	Factor 2: Modern participatory techniques	Factor 3: Patriotic-cultural outcomes	Communality h²
Use of literature	0.78	0.31	0.22	0.75
Study of music history	0.74	0.29	0.24	0.69
Socialist and Confucian ideas	0.71	0.26	0.34	0.69
Multimedia resources	0.25	0.81	0.19	0.76
Active student involvement	0.33	0.76	0.21	0.73
Democratic principles	0.22	0.69	0.28	0.6
Promotion of national culture	0.27	0.32	0.83	0.86

Importance of cultural heritage	0.29	0.25	0.79	0.77
Formation of socialist values	0.3	0.22	0.68	0.6
Diagnostic and reliability indicators				
Diagnostic / reliability indicator			value	
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure			0.82	
Bartlett’s test of sphericity			$\chi^2(36) = 1486.40, p < .001$	
Extraction method			Principal-component analysis	
Rotation method			Varimax with Kaiser normalization	
Eigenvalue, Factor 1			3.08	
Variance explained, Factor 1			34.20%	
Cronbach’s α , Factor 1			0.78	
Eigenvalue, Factor 2			1.78	
Variance explained, Factor 2			19.80%	
Cronbach’s α , Factor 2			0.76	
Eigenvalue, Factor 3			1.31	
Variance explained, Factor 3			14.50%	
Cronbach’s α , Factor 3			0.8	
Total explained variance			68.50%	

Source: authors’ elaboration based on survey data, $N = 418$

The factorability of the item matrix was acceptable, with a Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value of .82 and a significant Bartlett’s test of sphericity, $\chi^2(36) = 1486.40, p < .001$. Principal component analysis with varimax rotation retained three interpretable factors that explained 68.5% of the total variance. The first factor, labelled Traditional ideological-textual methods, explained 34.2% of the variance and included the use of literature (.78), the study of music history (.74), and socialist and Confucian ideas (.71). Its internal consistency was acceptable, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .78$.

The second factor, labelled Modern participatory techniques, explained 19.8% of the variance and included multimedia resources (.81), active student involvement (.76), and democratic principles (.69). Its reliability was also acceptable, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .76$. The third factor, labelled Patriotic-cultural outcomes, explained 14.5% of the variance and included the promotion of national culture (.83), the

importance of cultural heritage (.79), and the formation of socialist values (.68), with Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$.

This structure is important because it shows that students distinguish between the aims of ideological-aesthetic education and the pedagogical forms through which those aims are delivered. Traditional ideological-textual methods constitute one domain, modern participatory techniques constitute a second domain, and patriotic-cultural outcomes constitute a third. Therefore, the central issue emerging from the data is not a simple opposition between music education and ideological formation. Rather, the problem is a mismatch between valued cultural and civic outcomes and the restricted instructional formats through which these outcomes are often pursued.

3.3 Perceived impact of music and aesthetic training

The second research task was to evaluate students' perceptions of the influence of music and aesthetic training on cultural heritage awareness, patriotism, civic consciousness, creative participation, and real-life application. These outcomes are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 - Student perceptions of the impact of music and aesthetic training within ideological and political education

Outcome	High / very high, %	M	SD	95% CI for M	$\chi^2(4)$	p χ^2	t(417) vs 3.0	p t	Cohen's d	η^2
Strengthening the idea of the inestimable value of China's cultural heritage	63.0	3.55	1.11	[3.44, 3.65]	197.05	< .001	10.09	< .001	0.49	.196
Providing better awareness of national music and aesthetic cultural heritage	55.3	3.47	1.09	[3.36, 3.57]	141.35	< .001	8.75	< .001	0.43	.155
Cultivating patriotism and socialist morality and values	50.6	3.47	1.02	[3.38, 3.57]	144.92	< .001	9.51	< .001	0.47	.178

Ensuring the possibility of applying studied material in society	29.3	2.69	1.24	[2.57, 2.81]	60.30	< .001	-5.09	< .001	-0.25	.058
Encouraging participation in creative projects related to music and aesthetics	27.7	2.67	1.19	[2.56, 2.79]	84.73	< .001	-5.58	< .001	-0.27	.070

Source: authors' elaboration based on survey data, $N = 418$

Table 4 shows that the strongest perceived effects were concentrated in cultural-heritage and identity-related domains. The highest-rated outcome was strengthening the understanding of the inestimable value of China's cultural heritage, with 63.0% of students rating it as high or very high ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.11$, 95% CI [3.44, 3.65]). This rating was significantly above the neutral midpoint, $t(417) = 10.09$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.49$, $\eta^2 = .196$. Students also reported relatively positive effects for awareness of national music and aesthetic cultural heritage, with 55.3% rating this outcome as high or very high ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.09$, 95% CI [3.36, 3.57]), $t(417) = 8.75$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.43$, $\eta^2 = .155$. The cultivation of patriotism and socialist morality and values received a similar mean score ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.02$, 95% CI [3.38, 3.57]), with 50.6% of students rating the effect as high or very high, $t(417) = 9.51$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.47$, $\eta^2 = .178$.

However, the perceived impact was substantially weaker for applied and creative outcomes. Only 29.3% of students rated the possibility of applying studied material in society as high or very high ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 1.24$, 95% CI [2.57, 2.81]), and this mean was significantly below the neutral midpoint, $t(417) = -5.09$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.25$, $\eta^2 = .058$. Similarly, only 27.7% of students rated encouragement to participate in creative projects related to music and aesthetics as high or very high ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.19$, 95% CI [2.56, 2.79]), $t(417) = -5.58$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.27$, $\eta^2 = .070$.

The contrast between these two groups of outcomes is central to the interpretation of the study. Students did not reject the

cultural or ideological purposes of music and aesthetic training; in fact, cultural-heritage awareness, patriotism, and value formation were among the strongest perceived effects. The weakness appeared instead in the curriculum’s capacity to support creative agency and practical transfer. In other words, the existing model appears more successful in reinforcing cultural orientation than in enabling students to apply, reinterpret, or creatively extend musical-aesthetic knowledge.

3.4 Student-supported directions for curriculum renewal

The third research task was to identify student-supported proposals for improving the content, methods, and assessment of music and aesthetic training within ideological and political education. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 - Student-supported proposals for improving music and aesthetic training

Proposed improvement	Agree / strongly agree, %	M	SD	95% CI for M	$\chi^2(4)$	p χ^2	t(417) vs 3.0	p t	Cohen's d	η^2
More frequent use of modern technologies	81.0	4.11	0.84	[4.03, 4.19]	312.84	< .001	27.02	< .001	1.32	.636
More opportunities for creative participation and self-expression	78.0	4.03	0.88	[3.95, 4.11]	284.17	< .001	23.93	< .001	1.17	.579
Modernising the training programme and assessment system	62.0	3.63	1.05	[3.53, 3.73]	169.32	< .001	12.27	< .001	0.60	.265
Learning more about Chinese culture through technology-enabled services	58.0	3.55	1.07	[3.45, 3.65]	138.54	< .001	10.51	< .001	0.51	.209

Closer alignment of music and aesthetic programmes with students' everyday lives	54.0	3.42	1.12	[3.31, 3.53]	122.63	< .001	7.67	< .001	0.37	.124
Learning more about Chinese music and aesthetics	52.0	3.32	1.08	[3.22, 3.42]	117.21	< .001	6.06	< .001	0.30	.081
Better understanding of ideological and political issues	49.0	3.26	1.10	[3.15, 3.37]	96.45	< .001	4.83	< .001	0.24	.053

Source: authors' elaboration based on survey data, $N = 418$

Students expressed the strongest support for reforms related to technology, creativity, and assessment modernization. The highest level of agreement was found for more frequent use of modern technologies, supported by 81.0% of respondents ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.84$, 95% CI [4.03, 4.19]). This result was significantly above the midpoint, $t(417) = 27.02$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.32$, $\eta^2 = .636$, indicating a very strong preference for more systematic digital integration. The second strongest proposal was to provide more opportunities for creative participation and self-expression, supported by 78.0% of students ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.88$, 95% CI [3.95, 4.11]), $t(417) = 23.93$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.17$, $\eta^2 = .579$.

Students also showed strong support for modernizing the training program and assessment system, with 62.0% agreement or strong agreement ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.05$, 95% CI [3.53, 3.73]), $t(417) = 12.27$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.60$, $\eta^2 = .265$. Learning more about Chinese culture through technology-enabled services was supported by 58.0% of students ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.07$, 95% CI [3.45, 3.65]), $t(417) = 10.51$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.51$, $\eta^2 = .209$. These findings show that students' reform preferences were not directed toward weakening cultural or ideological aims. Rather, they favored a different mode of delivery: more interactive, more creative, more technologically supported, and more closely connected to students' lived cultural experience.

The lower but still positive ratings for better understanding of ideological and political issues (49.0%, M = 3.26, SD = 1.10) and learning more about Chinese music and aesthetics (52.0%, M = 3.32, SD = 1.08) suggest that students did not prioritize additional content alone. Their strongest preferences were for changes in pedagogy and assessment. This finding directly supports the interpretation that curriculum renewal should focus less on expanding the ideological or cultural content of courses and more on redesigning how that content is experienced, discussed, performed, assessed, and technologically mediated.

3.5 Qualitative thematic analysis of interview data

The follow-up interviews were analyzed thematically to clarify the meaning of the quantitative findings. The purpose of this stage was not merely to provide illustrative quotations, but to identify how students explained the apparent contrast between their positive evaluation of cultural-heritage aims and their weaker evaluation of creativity, participation, and real-life application. The thematic matrix is presented in Table 6.

Table 6 - Qualitative thematic matrix linking interview themes with survey findings

Theme	Interview frequency, n / 10	Survey pattern explained	Representative interview evidence	Curriculum implication
Traditional content is culturally legitimate but pedagogically narrow	8 / 10	High ratings for literature-based instruction, music history, and heritage awareness	Students accepted Chinese music history and cultural-heritage content but criticised textbook dependence and memorisation-heavy delivery	Retain heritage-oriented content, but redesign delivery through listening, performance, discussion, and applied interpretation
Creative agency is insufficiently supported	9 / 10	Low perceived impact on creative projects and weak experience of creative assessment	Students reported that closed exams and oral tests did not allow them to express personal aesthetic judgment or artistic individuality	Add project-based, performance-based, reflective, and creative assessment tasks

Technology is valued as interpretive support, not as decorative modernization	7 / 10	Strong support for more frequent technology use and technology-enabled cultural learning	Students supported multimedia examples, digital archives, and interactive tools, but rejected superficial digitisation of lectures	Use digital resources to support interpretation, access to musical examples, and participatory learning
Ideological aims are not rejected, but need more dialogic treatment	6 / 10	Positive ratings for patriotism and cultural heritage but lower ratings for democracy/ equality and active discussion	Students valued national-cultural aims but wanted more room for questioning, discussion, and contemporary relevance	Reframe ideological-aesthetic education as guided dialogue rather than unilateral transmission
Assessment reform is central to curriculum renewal	8 / 10	High reliance on closed written exams and oral assessment; almost no creative assessment	Students stated that music and aesthetics cannot be fully assessed through factual recall	Combine knowledge tests with portfolios, creative projects, group presentations, reflective journals, and performance-based evaluation

Source: authors' thematic analysis of interview transcripts, n = 10

Five themes emerged from the interview data. The first theme was that traditional content was perceived as culturally legitimate but pedagogically narrow. Eight of the ten interviewees accepted the importance of Chinese music history, cultural heritage, and ideological-aesthetic content, yet criticized the heavy dependence on textbooks, memorization, and lecture-based delivery. This theme explains why literature-based and historical methods were rated as highly frequent, while creative and participatory outcomes remained weak.

The second theme was insufficient creative agency. Nine interviewees stated that current assessment and classroom practice did not provide enough opportunity for personal aesthetic judgment, creative interpretation, or artistic individuality. This theme corresponds directly to the low survey score for encouragement to participate in creative projects. Students did not describe creativity as opposed to cultural identity; instead, they considered creative interpretation a necessary condition for making cultural heritage personally meaningful.

The third theme concerned technology. Seven interviewees supported digital tools, multimedia examples, digital archives, and interactive resources, but they rejected superficial digitization of unchanged lecture content. This distinction is important: students valued technology as interpretive and participatory support, not as decorative modernization. This theme explains the strong support for modern technologies and for learning Chinese culture through technology-enabled services.

The fourth theme was that ideological aims were not rejected but required more dialogic treatment. Six interviewees valued national-cultural and civic aims, but wanted greater space for discussion, questioning, and contemporary application. This theme helps explain the coexistence of positive ratings for patriotism and cultural heritage with weaker ratings for democracy, equality, and active discussion.

The fifth theme was assessment reform. Eight interviewees argued that music and aesthetics cannot be adequately assessed through factual recall alone. They proposed portfolios, creative projects, group presentations, reflective journals, and performance-based evaluation as more suitable methods for assessing aesthetic understanding and cultural engagement. This theme supports the survey finding that students strongly favored modernization of the training program and assessment system.

Taken together, the qualitative findings strengthen the quantitative interpretation. The central problem is not that students reject ideological or cultural education in music training. Rather, they experience a tension between the recognized importance of cultural and civic aims and the limited pedagogical forms through which these aims are currently enacted. The interviews, therefore, confirm and deepen the factor-analysis result: traditional ideological-textual methods, modern participatory techniques, and patriotic-cultural outcomes are related but distinct dimensions of students' educational experience.

4. Discussion

The findings show that music and aesthetic training within ideological and political education in Chinese higher music institutions is not ineffective, but unevenly effective. Its strongest outcomes are cultural and identity-related, whereas its weakest outcomes concern creative participation, practical application, and student agency. This distinction shifts the interpretation away from a general criticism of ideological-aesthetic education and toward a more precise curriculum problem: valued cultural aims are being pursued through pedagogical forms that remain too textual, examination-oriented, and insufficiently participatory. This interpretation is consistent with the view that aesthetic education should develop perception, judgment, and expressive understanding rather than function only as the transmission of predetermined meanings (D'Olimpio, 2021).

The first major finding concerns the dominance of traditional ideological-textual methods. Literature-based instruction, Chinese music history study, and socialist-Confucian aesthetic ideas were the most frequently reported training forms, whereas active student participation and discussion were much less common. This confirms that the curriculum is not only heritage-oriented in content but also transmission-oriented in method. Such a pattern is understandable in the Chinese context, where ideological and political education has long been connected to civic formation, national development, and cultural continuity (Zhang and Fagan, 2016). However, the present results show that this model is pedagogically limited when cultural content is delivered primarily through reading, historical explanation, and recall-based assessment.

The factor-analysis results deepen this interpretation. The emergence of three separate dimensions – traditional ideological-textual methods, modern participatory techniques, and patriotic-cultural outcomes – shows that students do not experience ideological-aesthetic education as a single undifferentiated

construct. They distinguish the aims of cultural and civic formation from the methods used to deliver them. This is the manuscript's main theoretical contribution. Patriotic-cultural outcomes were not rejected; rather, students separated them from lecture-heavy and low-participation pedagogy. This finding also helps refine earlier concerns that ideological and political courses may be perceived as formalistic when they do not sufficiently engage student agency or self-expression (Lu, 2017).

The second major finding is the gap between cultural-identity outcomes and creative or applied outcomes. Students rated cultural heritage awareness, national music-aesthetic awareness, and patriotism more positively than creative project participation or the ability to apply learning in wider social contexts. This indicates that current training is relatively effective at reinforcing cultural consciousness but less effective at translating that consciousness into creative practice. Recent Chinese studies have argued that integrated music-ideology curricula can strengthen aesthetic ability, cultural confidence, and social responsibility when ideological themes are embedded in repertoire, classroom discussion, and performance tasks (Ye and Ye, 2024). The present study extends that argument by showing that students themselves identify participation, creativity, and practical application as the weak points of current implementation.

Assessment practices help explain this gap. Closed examinations and oral assessments were the most frequently experienced formats, whereas creative assessment was almost absent. This matters because assessment signals what counts as legitimate learning. If music and aesthetic training is assessed mainly through closed questions and oral recall, students are encouraged to reproduce cultural knowledge rather than interpret, perform, question, or creatively extend it. This finding supports the need to move from content transmission toward assessment forms that capture aesthetic judgment, creative interpretation, and applied cultural understanding. This interpretation is consistent with assessment-for-learning research in music education, which shows

that creativity develops when students receive formative feedback, negotiate criteria, and engage in reflective self-assessment rather than only being judged through final products or recall-based tests (Bolden and DeLuca, 2022).

The third major finding concerns students' preferred direction of reform. Strong support for modern technologies, creative participation, and assessment modernization does not indicate rejection of ideological or heritage-related aims. It indicates that students want these aims to be enacted through more interactive, creative, and digitally supported learning environments. Prior research on music appreciation courses in a Sino-American joint university similarly suggests that carefully designed music courses can combine ideological content, cross-cultural examples, critical thinking, and cultural awareness (Xu, 2024). The present study adds that technology is useful only when it supports interpretation, access to musical examples, dialogue, and creative production, rather than merely digitizing unchanged lecture-based instruction. This conclusion is consistent with recent reviews of music technology and AI music education, which emphasize that digital tools must be embedded in purposeful pedagogy and guided by teacher judgment rather than adopted as isolated technical solutions (Merchán Sánchez-Jara et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2023).

The interview findings reinforce this conclusion. Students accepted Chinese music history and cultural heritage content but criticized textbook dependence, limited creative agency, and assessment formats that did not allow for personal aesthetic judgment. This confirms that their demand for technology and creativity should not be read as opposition to cultural identity or patriotic education. It should be read as a request for more meaningful engagement with that content. Similar conclusions have been drawn in research showing that emotionally engaging activities and varied artistic experiences can improve students' acceptance and understanding of ideological and political education (Wang et al., 2023).

In practical terms, the findings point to a clear reform agenda. Literature-based and historical instruction should be retained but supplemented with listening analysis, performance interpretation, digital archives, guided discussion, creative projects, reflective journals, and performance-based assessment. Technology should be treated as an interpretive and participatory resource rather than as a superficial add-on. The study is limited by its four-institution sample, small interview subsample, cross-sectional design, and reliance on self-report data. Future research should test longitudinal and quasi-experimental curriculum interventions to determine whether technology-supported and project-based ideological-aesthetic music education improves cultural understanding, creative participation, and real-life application.

5. Conclusions

This study examined how students perceive music and aesthetic training within ideological and political education in Chinese higher music institutions. The findings show that current practice is not ineffective, but pedagogically uneven: it supports cultural identity more strongly than creative agency or applied aesthetic learning.

Regarding the dominant forms of training, literature-based instruction was the most frequently experienced method, reported as frequent or very frequent by 78.7% of students, followed by Chinese music history and aesthetics study at 69.9% and socialist-Confucian educational and aesthetic ideas at 66.7%. By contrast, only 38.2% reported frequent or very frequent use of modern technology-enabled services, and only 21.4% reported frequent active participation in learning and discussion. Assessment followed the same pattern: closed examinations and oral assessment were dominant, reported by 72% and 69% of students respectively, whereas creative assessment was reported by only 10%. The curriculum therefore remains organized mainly around transmission, recall, and cultural explanation rather than creative participation or applied aesthetic practice.

Regarding perceived outcomes, the strongest effects were cultural-heritage and identity-related. A total of 63.0% of students reported high or very high strengthening of the value of China's cultural heritage, 55.3% reported improved awareness of national music-aesthetic heritage, and 50.6% reported gains in patriotism and socialist moral values. However, only 27.7% reported strong encouragement to participate in creative music and aesthetic projects, and only 29.3% felt able to apply what they had learned in wider social contexts. This gap indicates that the curriculum is more successful in reinforcing cultural orientation than in enabling students to use aesthetic knowledge creatively, socially, or reflectively.

Regarding curriculum renewal, students expressed strong support for reform: 81.0% endorsed more frequent use of modern technologies, 78.0% supported more creative participation and self-expression, and 62.0% supported modernization of training programs and assessment systems. The study's main contribution is to show that students distinguish among traditional ideological-textual methods, modern participatory techniques, and patriotic-cultural outcomes. The central problem is not the presence of cultural or ideological aims, but the limited pedagogical forms through which they are enacted. Future reforms should retain Chinese musical heritage while incorporating project-based learning, creative assessment, guided discussion, digital archives, multimedia resources, and performance-based interpretation.

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Research ethics committee approval

The study protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of Lanzhou University of Finance and Economics (protocol No. 342 of 20 May 2021). The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. All participants gave written informed consent prior to participation.

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