

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Research on the Development of Folk Music in Music Education of Higher Education

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the development of ethnic music education in Chinese higher education, focusing on its current status, challenges, and strategies for improvement. It underscores the importance of ethnic music education in preserving cultural heritage, enhancing musical literacy, and promoting multicultural understanding. Through an analysis of curricula, teaching methods, faculty development, technology integration, and campus cultural activities, the study suggests a comprehensive approach to strengthening ethnic music programs. Key findings include the need for curricula that balance theory and practice, innovative teaching methods (e.g., the master-apprentice model and immersive technologies), and a faculty skilled in both academia and traditional music. The study also highlights the role of modern technology in preserving and sharing ethnic music, as well as the value of diverse campus activities to boost student engagement and cultural awareness. Challenges include curriculum standardization, maintaining authenticity in modern education, and resource limitations. The study concludes that overcoming these challenges requires collaboration between educational institutions, policymakers, and cultural practitioners. Implementing the proposed strategies will help preserve and evolve China's ethnic musical traditions while preparing students for a globalized cultural landscape.

**Keywords:** ethnic music education; higher education; cultural preservation; curriculum development; innovative teaching methods; faculty development; technological integration; campus cultural activities; multicultural understanding; Chinese musical heritage

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## 1. Introduction

The study of ethnic music in regular higher education institutions has become increasingly significant in the context of China's rich cultural diversity and the challenges posed by globalization. As a crucial component of intangible cultural heritage, ethnic music plays a vital role in preserving and transmitting the cultural essence of China's numerous ethnic groups<sup>[1]</sup>. The integration of ethnic music into higher education curricula not only serves to safeguard traditional musical forms but also contributes to the broader goals of cultural preservation and identity affirmation in a rapidly changing society<sup>[2]</sup>. The development of ethnic music education in regular higher education institutions faces numerous challenges, including the need for

### ARTICLE INFO

Received: 27 September 2024 | Accepted: 6 December 2024 | Available online: 18 December 2024

### CITATION

Wen GY, Zhang M, Wang YD. Research on the Development of Folk Music in Music Education of Higher Education. *Environment and Social Psychology* 2024; 9(11): 3137. doi:10.59429/esp.v9i11.3137

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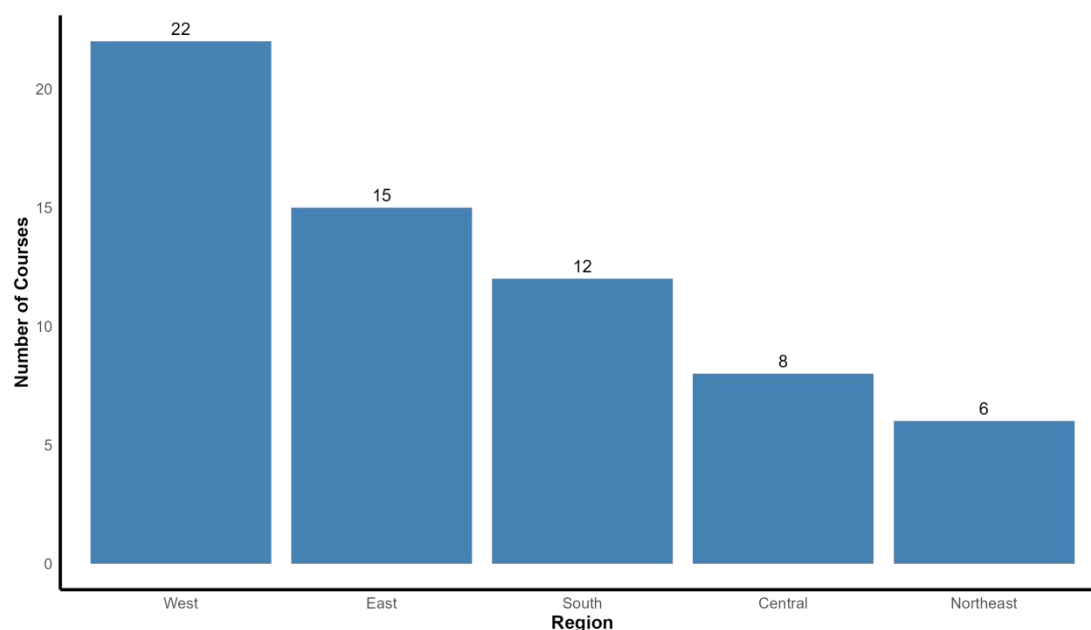
specialized curriculum design, appropriate teaching methodologies, and qualified instructors. Despite these obstacles, there is a growing recognition of the importance of ethnic music education in fostering cultural awareness and musical diversity among students. Recent years have witnessed increased efforts to incorporate ethnic music into higher education programs, driven by both cultural policies and academic initiatives<sup>[3]</sup>. This study explores the current state and development strategies of ethnic music education in Chinese higher education institutions. It examines the need for ethnic music education, its current status, and potential strategies for advancement, aiming to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the role of ethnic music in higher education and its potential to enrich the broader musical landscape<sup>[4]</sup>. The research draws upon various case studies and theoretical frameworks, including the analysis of specific ethnic music traditions such as the Mudong folk songs and the Hua'er folk songs<sup>[5]</sup>, as well as broader perspectives on the relationship between music, identity, and cultural preservation<sup>[6]</sup>.

This study also examines China's multiethnic society and the challenges of balancing cultural diversity with national unity. By exploring the integration of ethnic music into higher education, we aim to highlight the interplay between tradition and modernity, local and national identities, and the role of education in shaping cultural perceptions and practices<sup>[7]</sup>. Ultimately, the research provides insights and recommendations for policymakers, educators, and cultural practitioners involved in developing and implementing ethnic music education programs in Chinese higher education institutions.

## **2. Analysis of the current situation of folk music in music education in ordinary colleges and universities**

### **2.1. Current status of folk music courses**

The current state of ethnic music curriculum in regular higher education institutions in China reveals a complex landscape of challenges and opportunities. While there has been a growing recognition of the importance of ethnic music education<sup>[12]</sup>, the implementation of comprehensive curricula remains uneven across institutions. Many universities have introduced courses focusing on specific ethnic musical traditions, such as Tibetan or Uyghur music<sup>[8]</sup>, but these often exist as isolated offerings rather than integrated components of a holistic music education program. The depth and breadth of these courses vary significantly, with some institutions providing in-depth studies of particular ethnic music forms, while others offer only cursory overviews<sup>[9]</sup>. **Figure 1** illustrates the distribution of ethnic music courses across different regions in China, highlighting the disparity in curriculum offerings. As shown in the figure, the Western region leads with the highest number of ethnic music courses, followed by the Eastern and Southern regions. This geographical variation reflects not only the diverse cultural landscapes of different regions but also the varying levels of resources and expertise available to institutions .

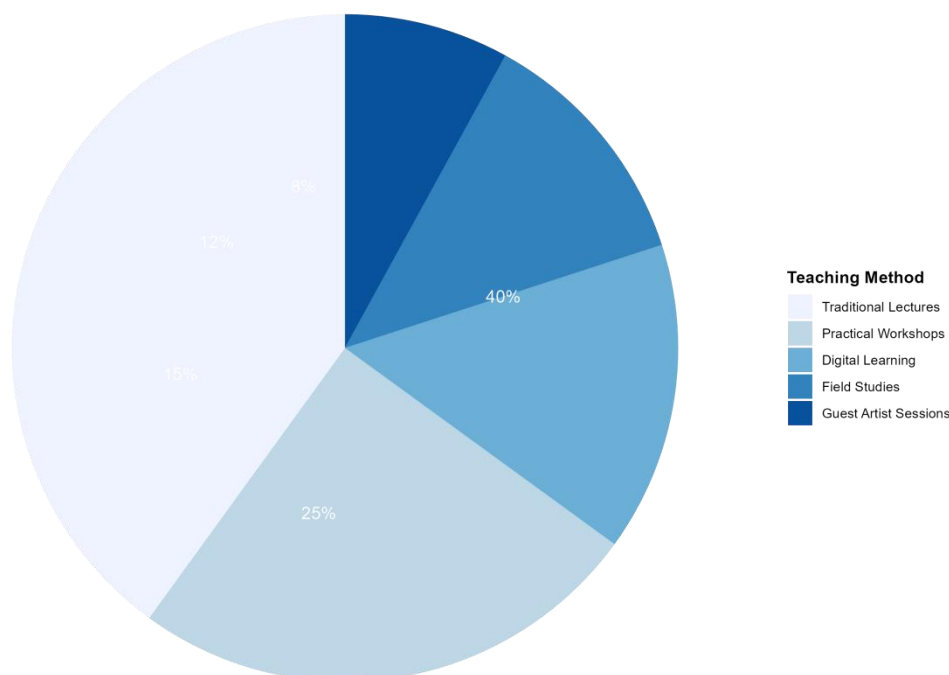


**Figure 1.** Distribution of Ethnic Music Courses Across Regions in China's Higher Education Institutions.

*Note:* Data represents the number of dedicated ethnic music courses offered in regular higher education institutions across five major regions of China. Source: Compiled by the author based on data from

## 2.2. Current situation of teaching content and methods

The current state of teaching content and methods for ethnic music in regular higher education institutions reflects a diverse yet often fragmented approach<sup>[10,11]</sup>. While traditional lecture-based methods remain prevalent, there is an increasing trend towards more interactive and experiential learning approaches<sup>[12]</sup>. Many institutions are incorporating practical performance elements, field recordings, and cultural context studies into their curricula<sup>[13]</sup>. However, the depth and authenticity of these teaching methods vary significantly across institutions. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of different teaching methods employed in ethnic music education across China's higher education institutions. As evident from the figure, while traditional lectures still dominate, there is a growing adoption of practical workshops and digital learning tools. This shift in teaching methods aims to provide students with a more immersive and comprehensive understanding of ethnic music traditions<sup>[14]</sup>. Nevertheless, challenges persist in terms of standardizing teaching content and ensuring the availability of qualified instructors who are well-versed in both academic pedagogy and authentic ethnic musical practices<sup>[15]</sup>.



**Figure 2.** Distribution of Teaching Methods in Ethnic Music Education at China's Higher Education Institutions.

## 2.3 Main existing problems

The integration of ethnic music education in regular higher education institutions faces several significant challenges. A primary issue is the lack of standardized curricula and teaching materials that adequately represent the diversity of China's ethnic musical traditions. Additionally, there is a shortage of qualified instructors who possess both academic expertise and practical knowledge of ethnic music<sup>[16]</sup>. The preservation of authenticity in teaching ethnic music within a modern educational context remains a constant struggle. Furthermore, limited resources and funding often hinder the development of comprehensive programs, particularly in regions with rich ethnic musical heritage but fewer economic resources<sup>[17]</sup>. There is also a noticeable disconnect between academic study and real-world application, with graduates often struggling to find relevant employment opportunities in the field of ethnic music. These issues collectively pose significant obstacles to the effective integration and development of ethnic music education in China's higher education system.

## 3. The necessity of folk music development in music education in ordinary colleges and universities

### 3.1. The need for inheriting and developing the Chinese national music culture

The necessity of inheriting and developing Chinese ethnic music culture through higher education is paramount in the face of rapid globalization and cultural homogenization. Ethnic music, as a vital component of China's intangible cultural heritage, embodies the collective wisdom, historical experiences, and aesthetic values of various ethnic groups<sup>[18]</sup>. Integrating this rich musical tradition into the curriculum of regular higher education institutions serves as a crucial mechanism for its preservation and evolution. Higher education institutions play a pivotal role in this process by providing a structured environment for the systematic study, documentation, and dissemination of ethnic music. Through academic research and practical training, these institutions can help codify oral traditions, analyze complex musical structures, and

explore the cultural contexts that give ethnic music its profound significance. This scholarly approach not only ensures the accurate transmission of musical knowledge but also contributes to the development of new interpretations and innovations within the tradition<sup>[19]</sup>.

Moreover, the inclusion of ethnic music in higher education curricula creates a bridge between traditional culture and contemporary society. It allows young musicians and scholars to engage with their cultural heritage in a meaningful way, fostering a sense of cultural identity and pride<sup>[20]</sup>. This engagement is crucial for the vitality of ethnic music, as it ensures that these traditions remain relevant and vibrant in the modern context, rather than becoming fossilized artifacts of the past<sup>[21]</sup>. The development of ethnic music education in higher institutions also contributes to the broader goal of cultural sustainability. By training a new generation of performers, educators, and researchers specializing in ethnic music, universities help to create a robust ecosystem for the continued practice and evolution of these musical traditions<sup>[22]</sup>. This academic focus can lead to increased public awareness, cultural tourism opportunities, and the integration of ethnic music into contemporary artistic expressions, all of which contribute to the long-term sustainability of these cultural practices.

### **3.2. The need to improve students' musical literacy**

The integration of ethnic music into the curriculum of regular higher education institutions is essential for enhancing students' overall musical literacy and competence. Exposure to diverse musical traditions, particularly those from China's rich ethnic heritage, broadens students' musical horizons and develops their ability to appreciate and understand a wider range of musical styles and techniques<sup>[23]</sup>. Ethnic music often employs unique scales, rhythms, and instruments that differ significantly from Western classical or popular music traditions. By studying these elements, students develop a more comprehensive understanding of music as a global phenomenon, rather than being limited to a single cultural perspective<sup>[24]</sup>. This expanded musical vocabulary not only enriches their personal artistic expression but also prepares them for a globalized music industry where cross-cultural competence is increasingly valuable<sup>[25]</sup>. Furthermore, the study of ethnic music challenges students to develop new listening skills and analytical frameworks. Many ethnic music traditions rely on oral transmission and improvisation, requiring students to cultivate acute aural skills and an understanding of musical structures that may not be easily notated in Western staff notation<sup>[26]</sup>. This exposure enhances students' overall musicianship, improving their ability to perceive and respond to subtle nuances in pitch, rhythm, and timbre across all musical genres<sup>[27]</sup>. The incorporation of ethnic music also provides students with valuable insights into the relationship between music and culture. By examining how ethnic music reflects and shapes cultural identities, social structures, and historical narratives, students gain a deeper understanding of music's role in society<sup>[28]</sup>. This interdisciplinary approach fosters critical thinking skills and encourages students to consider the broader cultural and social implications of musical practices, both within their own traditions and in global contexts<sup>[29]</sup>.

Moreover, practical engagement with ethnic music, such as learning to play traditional instruments or participating in ensemble performances, can significantly enhance students' musical skills. These experiences often require the development of new physical techniques and mental approaches to music-making, which can transfer positively to other areas of musical study and performance<sup>[30]</sup>.

### **3.3. The need to promote a multicultural understanding**

The inclusion of ethnic music in the curriculum of regular higher education institutions plays a crucial role in promoting multicultural understanding, a skill of increasing importance in today's interconnected world. By engaging with diverse musical traditions, students are exposed to different cultural perspectives, fostering empathy and cross-cultural dialogue<sup>[12]</sup>. This exposure is particularly significant in the context of

China's multi-ethnic society, where understanding and appreciating cultural diversity is essential for social harmony and national unity<sup>[4]</sup>.

Studying ethnic music provides students with a unique window into the worldviews, values, and historical experiences of different ethnic groups. Through music, students can gain insights into the social structures, religious beliefs, and everyday life of cultures that may be very different from their own<sup>[27]</sup>. This immersive cultural experience helps to break down stereotypes and challenges ethnocentric viewpoints, preparing students to become more open-minded and culturally sensitive global citizens. Furthermore, the comparative study of ethnic music alongside other musical traditions enables students to recognize both the universal elements of human expression and the specific cultural contexts that shape musical practices<sup>[31]</sup>. This dual perspective fosters a nuanced understanding of cultural diversity, encouraging students to appreciate differences while also recognizing shared human experiences across cultures<sup>[32]</sup>.

The process of learning and performing ethnic music from various traditions also promotes intercultural communication skills. Students must navigate different musical languages, performance practices, and cultural etiquettes, developing the flexibility and adaptability necessary for effective cross-cultural interactions<sup>[33]</sup>. These skills are invaluable in an increasingly globalized world, where the ability to work effectively across cultural boundaries is a key competency in many fields<sup>[34]</sup>.

Moreover, exposure to ethnic music can inspire students to reflect on their own cultural identities and musical heritage. This self-reflection, coupled with an appreciation for other cultures, contributes to the development of a more inclusive and pluralistic worldview<sup>[35]</sup>. It encourages students to see diversity as a source of richness and creativity rather than a cause for division, fostering a more harmonious multicultural society<sup>[36]</sup>.

## 4. Development strategy of folk music in music education in ordinary colleges and universities

### 4.1. Optimize the curriculum setting

Optimizing the curriculum for ethnic music education in regular higher education institutions is a critical step towards ensuring its effective integration and development. This process involves a comprehensive review and restructuring of existing courses, as well as the introduction of new, specialized offerings that reflect the diversity and depth of China's ethnic musical traditions<sup>[12]</sup>.

A well-designed curriculum should strike a balance between theoretical knowledge and practical skills, incorporating courses that cover the historical, cultural, and musicological aspects of ethnic music alongside performance-based classes<sup>[27]</sup>. **Table 1** presents a proposed structure for an optimized ethnic music curriculum, highlighting the key components and their respective focuses.

**Table 1.** Proposed Structure for an Optimized Ethnic Music Curriculum.

Course Category	Focus Areas	Examples
Foundational Courses	Historical and Cultural Context	- Introduction to Chinese Ethnic Music- Ethnomusicology and Cultural Studies
Theoretical Courses	Musicology and Analysis	- Ethnic Music Theory and Analysis- Comparative Studies in Ethnic Music Styles
Performance Courses	Practical Skills	- Ethnic Instrument Performance- Vocal Techniques in Ethnic Music Traditions
Fieldwork and Research	Hands-on Experience	- Fieldwork Methodologies- Ethnographic Research in Music
Contemporary Applications	Modern Context	- Fusion and Innovation in Ethnic Music- Music Production and Technology in Ethnic Music

As illustrated in **Table 1**, the optimized curriculum encompasses a wide range of courses designed to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of ethnic music. This structure ensures that students not only gain proficiency in performing ethnic music but also develop a deep appreciation for its cultural significance and the ability to analyze and interpret various musical tradition. Moreover, the curriculum should be flexible enough to accommodate the specific ethnic musical traditions of different regions while also providing a broad overview of China's diverse musical landscape. This approach allows institutions to leverage their local cultural resources while ensuring that students gain a national perspective on ethnic music<sup>[37]</sup>.

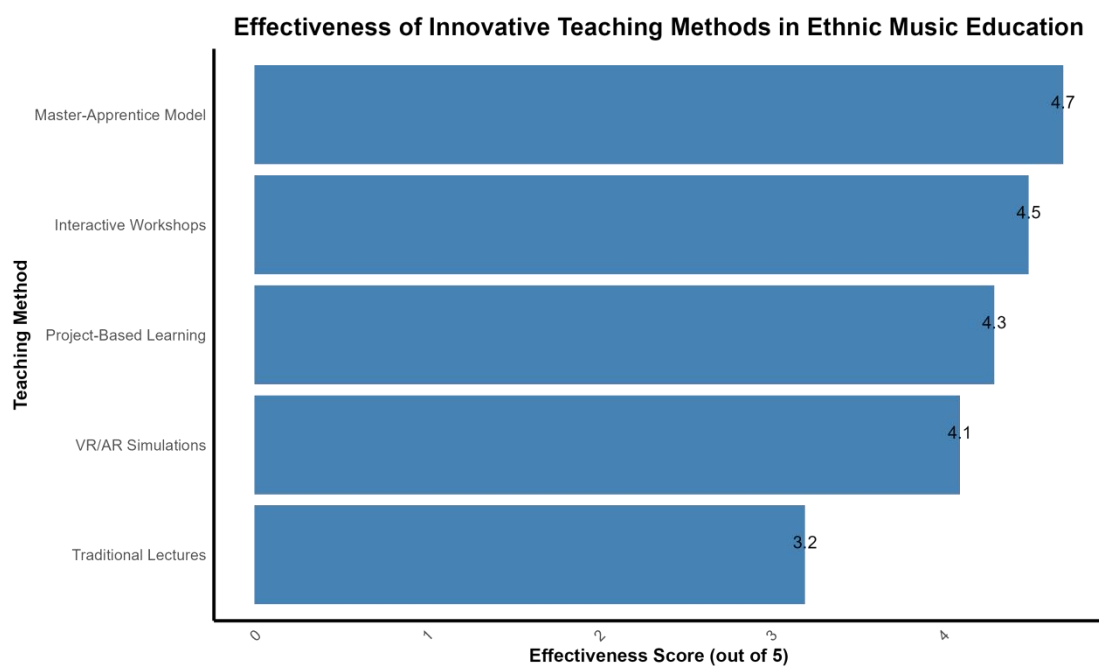
Interdisciplinary courses that connect ethnic music with other fields such as anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies should also be incorporated. These cross-disciplinary offerings can enhance students' critical thinking skills and provide a more holistic understanding of the role of music in society<sup>[38]</sup>.

Additionally, the curriculum should include courses that address contemporary issues in ethnic music, such as preservation techniques, digital archiving, and the impact of globalization on traditional music practices. These forward-looking elements prepare students to engage with ethnic music in modern contexts and contribute to its ongoing evolution<sup>[24]</sup>.

By implementing such an optimized curriculum, higher education institutions can ensure that their ethnic music programs are comprehensive, relevant, and capable of producing graduates who are well-equipped to contribute to the field, whether as performers, researchers, educators, or cultural advocates.

#### **4.2. Innovate teaching methods**

Innovating teaching methods is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of ethnic music education in regular higher education institutions. Traditional lecture-based approaches, while valuable for conveying theoretical knowledge, are often insufficient for fully engaging students with the rich, experiential nature of ethnic music. Therefore, a shift towards more interactive, immersive, and technology-enhanced teaching methods is essential<sup>[36]</sup>. One of the most effective innovations in teaching ethnic music is the implementation of the "master-apprentice" model within the academic setting. This approach, which mirrors traditional methods of transmitting ethnic music knowledge, involves bringing master musicians from various ethnic traditions to work closely with students over extended periods. This immersive learning experience allows students to absorb not just the technical aspects of the music but also the cultural nuances and performance practices that are often difficult to convey through conventional teaching methods<sup>[39]</sup>. Another innovative approach is the use of project-based learning, where students engage in long-term projects that involve researching, performing, and even creating new works based on ethnic music traditions. These projects can culminate in public performances or recordings, providing students with real-world experience and a sense of achievement<sup>[40]</sup>. The integration of technology in teaching ethnic music has also opened up new possibilities. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies can be used to create immersive experiences that transport students to the cultural contexts where ethnic music originates. These technologies can simulate traditional performances, allowing students to observe and interact with virtual representations of master musicians<sup>[41]</sup>.



**Figure 3.** Effectiveness of Innovative Teaching Methods in Ethnic Music Education.

As shown in **Figure 3**, innovative methods such as the master-apprentice model and interactive workshops score significantly higher in effectiveness compared to traditional lectures. This data underscores the importance of adopting these new approaches in ethnic music education<sup>[42]</sup>.

Furthermore, collaborative learning techniques, such as peer-to-peer teaching and cross-cultural ensemble work, can be highly effective in ethnic music education. These methods not only enhance musical skills but also develop students' intercultural communication abilities<sup>[43]</sup>.

By adopting these innovative teaching methods, institutions can create a more engaging, effective, and culturally authentic learning environment for ethnic music education. This approach not only improves student outcomes but also contributes to the preservation and evolution of ethnic music traditions in contemporary educational contexts.

### 4.3. Strengthen the construction of the teaching staff

Strengthening the faculty team is a critical component in the development of ethnic music education in regular higher education institutions. The quality and expertise of instructors directly impact the effectiveness of the curriculum and the overall learning experience of students. Therefore, a comprehensive approach to faculty development is essential to ensure the success of ethnic music programs<sup>[44]</sup>. One of the primary challenges in this area is the scarcity of qualified instructors who possess both academic credentials and deep, practical knowledge of ethnic music traditions. To address this, institutions need to implement multi-faceted strategies for faculty recruitment, development, and retention<sup>[45]</sup>. Recruitment efforts should focus on attracting a diverse pool of candidates, including both academically qualified musicologists and ethnomusicologists, as well as master musicians from various ethnic traditions. This blend of academic and practical expertise can create a rich learning environment for students<sup>[46]</sup>. Institutions should also consider establishing visiting professorships or artist-in-residence programs to bring renowned ethnic musicians into the academic setting, even if only for short-term engagements. Faculty development programs are crucial for enhancing the skills and knowledge of existing instructors. These programs should include opportunities for continued learning, such as workshops, seminars, and field research experiences. Encouraging faculty



members to engage in collaborative research projects with ethnic communities can also deepen their understanding and connection to the music they teach<sup>[47]</sup>.

Furthermore, institutions should support faculty members in pursuing advanced degrees or specialized training in ethnomusicology and related fields. This not only enhances their academic qualifications but also contributes to the overall research output and reputation of the institution's ethnic music program<sup>[48]</sup>.

Interdisciplinary collaboration should be encouraged, allowing ethnic music faculty to work with colleagues from other departments such as anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies. This cross-pollination of ideas can lead to innovative teaching approaches and research projects<sup>[49]</sup>.

**Table 2** outlines a comprehensive faculty development plan for ethnic music education:

**Table 2.** Comprehensive Faculty Development Plan for Ethnic Music Education.

Area	Strategies	Expected Outcomes
Recruitment	- Targeted hiring of academics and practitioners- Visiting professorships- Artist-in-residence programs	Diverse and well-rounded faculty team
Continuous Learning	- Workshops and seminars- Field research opportunities- Collaborative projects with ethnic communities	Enhanced expertise and cultural understanding
Academic Development	- Support for advanced degrees- Research grants- Conference participation	Improved academic qualifications and research output
Interdisciplinary Collaboration	- Joint courses with other departments- Cross-disciplinary research projects	Innovative teaching and research approaches
Performance and Practice	- Regular performance opportunities- Collaborations with ethnic music ensembles	Maintained practical skills and authenticity
Technology Integration	- Training in digital tools and platforms- Development of online teaching skills	Enhanced ability to use modern teaching methods

As illustrated in **Table 2**, a comprehensive approach to faculty development encompasses various aspects of professional growth, from academic qualifications to practical skills and technological competence. By implementing such a plan, institutions can ensure that their faculty team remains at the forefront of ethnic music education, capable of delivering high-quality instruction and contributing to the field's advancement. Additionally, institutions should create a supportive environment that values and recognizes the unique contributions of ethnic music faculty. This can include establishing specific criteria for tenure and promotion that acknowledge the importance of practical skills and community engagement in ethnic music education, alongside traditional academic metrics<sup>[50]</sup>.

By prioritizing the strengthening of the faculty team, higher education institutions can significantly enhance the quality and impact of their ethnic music programs, ultimately contributing to the preservation and development of China's rich musical heritage.

#### 4.4. Case study

The Central Conservatory of Music, as one of the most influential music colleges in China, has been actively exploring and innovating in the field of folk music education. The institute focuses on interdisciplinary integration and the application of modern technology in the teaching of ethnic music majors. For example, in terms of curriculum design, the Central Conservatory of Music combines traditional theories of folk music with modern theories of musicology, and offers courses including Research on Ethnic Music Culture and Traditional Chinese Music and Modern Composition. These courses not only cover the history and development of folk music, but also focus on its application in modern composition, cultivating students' ability to balance between tradition and innovation.

Yunnan Arts Institute focuses on localized and diversified teaching modes in ethnic music education. As an institution located in a multi-ethnic region, Yunnan Arts Academy makes full use of the rich local ethnic cultural resources to create an ethnic music education program with local characteristics. The school not only offers traditional ethnic musical instrument courses, but also develops local specialties including “Dai and Yi Ethnic Music” and “Ethnic Instrumental Performance Techniques” for the characteristics of ethnic music in Yunnan, in which students learn not only music theory and techniques, but also understand the cultural background and performance traditions of ethnic music.

Southwest University has also achieved remarkable results in building its faculty in ethnomusicology education. In order to improve the quality of teaching, the university has introduced a number of experts in ethnic music with international perspectives and academic backgrounds through international cooperation and exchanges, and at the same time strengthened the academic training of its own teachers. For example, the school has organized a number of teacher trainings and seminars, inviting famous scholars from home and abroad to lecture on the latest research results and teaching methods of folk music. In this way, the school's ethnomusicology education has gradually shifted from the traditional teaching of skills to a more academic and innovative teaching mode.

## **5. Conclusion**

The development of ethnic music education in higher education institutions is crucial for preserving, evolving, and promoting China's rich musical heritage. This study explores the current state, challenges, and strategies for advancing ethnic music education, revealing a complex landscape that requires multifaceted solutions. Integrating ethnic music into curricula is essential for cultural inheritance, enhancing students' musical literacy, and fostering multicultural understanding. By optimizing curricula, innovating teaching methods, strengthening faculty teams, leveraging technology, and organizing diverse campus activities, institutions can establish a robust educational framework that preserves the traditional essence and enhances the contemporary relevance of ethnic music.

The challenges faced, including standardization of curricula, preservation of authenticity, and resource limitations, highlight the need for continued research, policy support, and cross-institutional collaboration. However, the potential benefits of a well-implemented ethnic music education program extend far beyond the immediate academic context, contributing to cultural sustainability, social harmony, and the enrichment of China's artistic landscape.

Moving forward, it is essential for higher education institutions, policymakers, and cultural practitioners to collaborate in realizing the full potential of ethnic music education. This will not only honor the cultural legacies of China's diverse ethnic groups but also equip future generations with the knowledge, skills, and cultural sensitivity necessary to navigate an interconnected world. The development of ethnic music education is, at its core, a journey of cultural dialogue, artistic innovation, and mutual understanding.

## **Conflict of interest**

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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