



OBSERVATION ON THE APPLICATION OF CARL ORFF MUSIC TEACHING ACTIVITIES IN PIANO CLASSES AT FUJIAN ECONOMICS SCHOOL, FUJIAN PROVINCE, THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: In recent years, vocational music education has continuously evolved to align with 21st-century learning paradigms. However, piano instruction in vocational settings remains largely rooted in traditional. **Objective:** This study aims to examine the application of Carl Orff-based music teaching activities in piano instruction at Fujian Economics School and to analyze their effects on students' motivation and participation. **Method:** A qualitative approach was employed, including interviews with three piano teachers and classroom observations of first-year students. **Results:** indicate that Orff-based activities enhanced students' musical understanding, increased learning enthusiasm, and promoted active participation. Students showed improvement in rhythm, performance skills, listening, memory, and concentration, leading to greater confidence and motivation. **Conclusion:** the Orff approach creates an interactive and engaging learning environment while supporting students' musical development and cultural awareness.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of 21st-century education, there has been a growing emphasis on student-centered learning, creativity, and the development of higher-order thinking skills. Music education, in particular, has increasingly adopted interactive and experiential approaches that engage learners holistically, integrating cognitive, emotional, and physical dimensions of learning (Hallam, 2006^[6]; McPherson & Welch, 2012)^[9] However, despite these developments, piano instruction in many vocational education settings continues to rely heavily on traditional, teacher-centered approaches, in which teachers demonstrate techniques and students imitate and practice. Such methods often prioritize technical proficiency over active engagement and may limit students' creativity, participation, and motivation (Xia, 2017^[12]; Ma, 2023)^[8]

These limitations are especially evident in secondary vocational education, where many students begin piano study with limited prior experience and insufficient foundational skills. As a result, they often face difficulties in coordination, musical understanding, and performance, which can reduce confidence and diminish interest in learning (Jørgensen, 2004)^[7] Furthermore, traditional instructional approaches may not adequately address individual differences among learners, leading to passive learning behaviors and reduced instructional effectiveness.

In response to these challenges, alternative pedagogical approaches that emphasize active participation and experiential learning have gained increasing attention. One such approach is the Orff approach, developed by Carl Orff, which is based on the concept of elemental music and integrates movement, speech, and instrumental performance into a unified learning experience (Orff, 1963)^[10] The Orff approach promotes creativity, improvisation, and collaborative learning, encouraging students to actively engage in the learning process. Previous studies have shown that Orff-based activities can enhance musical perception, increase learning motivation, and foster active participation among students (Ge & Jia, 2019^[4]; Shamrock, 1997)^[11]

Although the Orff approach has been introduced in China since the 1980s and has been widely applied in general music education, its application in piano instruction-particularly in vocational education-remains limited. Moreover, there is a lack of empirical research examining how Orff-based teaching activities influence students' learning behaviors and the development of essential piano-related skills, such as coordination, memory, attention, and listening ability. This gap highlights the need for further investigation into the effectiveness of integrating Orff-based pedagogy into piano teaching in vocational contexts.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the application of Carl Orff-based music teaching activities in piano classes at Fujian Economics School, Fujian Province, the People's Republic of China. Specifically, the study seeks to examine the effects of these activities on students' motivation, participation, and the development of fundamental piano-related skills. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the improvement of piano pedagogy in vocational education and provide practical insights for implementing student-centered teaching approaches in music instruction.

2. OBJECTIVES

To observe on the application of Carl Orff music teaching activities in piano classes at Fujian economics school, Fujian province, the people's republic of China.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundations of the Orff Approach

In order to address the limitations of traditional piano instruction identified in the previous section, it is essential to examine the theoretical foundations of the Orff approach. Developed by Carl Orff, this pedagogical framework is based on the concept of *elemental music*, which integrates movement, speech, and instrumental performance into a unified and holistic learning experience (Orff, 1963)^[10] Rather than emphasizing passive knowledge acquisition, the Orff approach promotes active participation, creativity, and experiential learning, allowing students to construct musical understanding through direct engagement.

Fraze (1987)^[3] explains that the Orff approach encourages improvisation, exploration, and collaborative music-making, which contribute to the development of both musical skills and creative expression. Similarly, Goodkin (2001)^[5] highlights that Orff-based instruction supports multiple dimensions of learning, including cognitive, emotional, and social development. Through the integration of rhythm, body movement, and speech, learners are able to internalize musical concepts more effectively, leading to a deeper and more meaningful understanding of music.

Furthermore, this approach aligns with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through active experience and social interaction (Hallam, 2006)^[6] Previous studies have also demonstrated that Orff-based activities can enhance students' motivation, engagement, and musical perception by creating an interactive and enjoyable learning environment (Shamrock, 1997^[11]; Ge & Jia, 2019)^[4]

Piano Pedagogy in Vocational Education

Piano instruction in secondary vocational education is often characterized by teacher-centered approaches that focus primarily on technical skill development and repetitive practice (McPherson & Welch, 2012)^[9] While these approaches are effective in building foundational performance techniques, they may limit students' creativity, autonomy, and intrinsic motivation. And Dianrun (2017)^[2] As a result, few students practice the piano from childhood.

In many vocational contexts, students begin piano study with limited prior experience and insufficient foundational skills, which presents significant challenges for both learners and instructors. These students often struggle with coordination, musical understanding, and performance accuracy, leading to reduced confidence and engagement (Jørgensen, 2004)^[7] In addition, traditional teaching methods may not adequately address individual differences among learners, resulting in passive learning behaviors and reduced instructional effectiveness (Xia, 2017^[12]; Ma, 2023)^[8] Moreover, existing piano curricula in vocational education are often criticized for being outdated and insufficiently responsive to contemporary educational needs. As a result, students may perceive piano learning as difficult and unengaging, which negatively impacts their learning motivation and long-term musical development. These limitations highlight the need

for more flexible and student-centered teaching approaches that can better support diverse learners in vocational settings.

Integration of the Orff Approach in Piano Instruction

The integration of Orff-based teaching activities into piano instruction offers a promising alternative to traditional pedagogical models. By incorporating rhythm exercises, body movement, improvisation, and collaborative learning activities, the Orff approach can transform piano learning into a more interactive and engaging experience.

Research suggests that combining movement and rhythm with instrumental learning can enhance coordination, listening skills, and musical memory (Goodkin, 2001)^[5] These elements are particularly relevant to piano education, where the coordination of multiple cognitive and physical processes such as auditory perception, motor control, and emotional expression is essential for effective performance.

In addition, Orff-based pedagogy promotes collaborative learning and peer interaction, which can foster a supportive and dynamic classroom environment. Abril (2013)^[11] emphasizes that participatory and culturally responsive teaching approaches can enhance student engagement and create more meaningful learning experiences. This is especially important in vocational education, where students often require additional motivation and support to sustain their interest in learning.

Despite these advantages, existing research on the application of the Orff approach has primarily focused on general music education and early childhood contexts. There remains a lack of empirical studies examining its use in piano instruction, particularly within secondary vocational education. This limitation suggests that further research is needed to explore how Orff-based activities can be effectively adapted to piano pedagogy for older learners.

Research Gap

Although previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of the Orff approach in enhancing musical engagement, creativity, and holistic development, there is still a significant gap in the literature regarding its application in vocational piano education. Specifically, limited research has examined how Orff-based teaching activities influence students' participation, motivation, and the development of essential piano-related skills, such as coordination, attention, memory, and listening ability.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by investigating the implementation of Orff-based teaching activities in piano classes at Fujian Economics School. By providing empirical evidence from classroom observations and teacher interviews, this research seeks to contribute to the development of more effective, student-centered approaches in vocational piano education.

4. METHODOLOGY

The population of this study consisted of all piano students at Fujian University of Economics, totaling 120 students. From this population, a behavioral sample of 30 students was selected for observation of learning outcomes and classroom participation. Due to time and resource constraints, the sample was selected using purposive random sampling, targeting students who attended classes consistently and possessed comparable foundational piano skills.

1. Research Scope

Observation on the application of Carl Orff music teaching activities to the piano teaching in Fujian Economics School in Fujian Province, the People's Republic of China. And interviews with three piano teachers. The period is from September 2024 to January 2025.

2. Research Tools

In this study, data were collected through a combination of semi-structured interviews and systematic classroom observations. Interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis with students and instructors to obtain in-depth information regarding teaching activities, learning experiences, and classroom interactions. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent to ensure accuracy in data transcription and analysis. Classroom observations were structured using observation protocols developed from preliminary interviews and consultations with music education experts. The observation protocols were designed to capture key aspects of students' engagement, participation, coordination, attention, and overall learning behavior during piano lessons. Observers recorded both quantitative and qualitative indicators, including frequency of participation, responsiveness to instruction, and demonstrations of musical skills. The combined use of interviews and structured observations allowed for data triangulation, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the implementation and impact of Orff-based teaching activities on students' learning outcomes. Observation data were subsequently organized, coded, and analyzed to identify patterns and evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional approach.

3. Data Collection Procedure

Data collection in this study was conducted through a structured, multi-step process to ensure accuracy, reliability, and validity. Three music education experts were involved to provide professional guidance throughout the study. Their roles included reviewing and refining the interview guides and classroom observation protocols to ensure that the research instruments were scientifically sound, reasonable, and effective. The data collection process consisted of the following steps: Instrument Development: Detailed interview guides and classroom observation protocols were designed based on the research objectives and a preliminary literature review.

Expert Review: The three experts evaluated the instruments and provided feedback, which was used to revise and finalize the tools. Interviews: Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted with three piano teachers to gather information on teaching practices and classroom activities. All interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate transcription and analysis. Classroom Observations: Student behavior and teacher-student interactions were observed using the finalized observation protocols. Both quantitative data (e.g., participation frequency) and qualitative data (e.g., responsiveness to instruction and demonstration of musical skills) were systematically recorded. Data Verification: All collected data were carefully reviewed for accuracy. Triangulation of interview and observation data was conducted to ensure objectivity, and the data were analyzed to identify patterns and evaluate the effectiveness of Orff-based piano teaching activities.

This structured approach ensured that the collected data were comprehensive, reliable, and suitable for addressing the research objectives.

5. RESULTS

The findings of this study are presented based on qualitative analysis of interviews with piano teachers and classroom observations of students. To enhance clarity and credibility, the results are organized into three main themes: Student Engagement and Participation

Observations indicated that students demonstrated increased active participation when Orff-based music activities were integrated into piano lessons. For example, several students spontaneously engaged in improvisation exercises and group rhythm activities, reflecting heightened interest and motivation. Interview excerpts from teachers also confirmed that students showed greater willingness to experiment with musical ideas during these sessions.

Development of Musical Skills

The classroom observations and teacher reports revealed improvement in essential piano-related skills. Students exhibited better coordination, attention, and memory in response to rhythmic and melodic exercises. One teacher noted, “Students who initially struggled with hand coordination showed significant improvement after participating in structured Orff activities.”

Impact on Learning Environment and Teacher Practices

The integration of Orff activities contributed to a more interactive and student-centered classroom. Teachers reported that the approach encouraged collaborative learning and fostered a supportive environment, allowing students to explore creativity while maintaining structured practice routines. Observational notes highlighted active teacher-student interactions and frequent feedback loops, enhancing the overall learning experience.

Supporting excerpts from interviews and observational records were used to triangulate data, ensuring that the results accurately reflect both student behaviors and teacher perceptions. Statements involving interpretation or broader implications were reserved for the discussion section to maintain objectivity in presenting findings.

6. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine the application of Carl Orff-based music teaching activities in piano instruction and their effects on student engagement, musical skill development, and classroom dynamics. The findings indicate that the integration of Orff-based activities can significantly enhance students’ participation, motivation, and overall learning experience in piano classes. These results provide important insights into how student-centered and experiential learning approaches can address the limitations of traditional, teacher-centered piano pedagogy identified in earlier sections.

First, the observed increase in student engagement and active participation suggests that Orff-based activities create a more dynamic and inclusive learning environment. Students were more willing to take part in classroom activities, including improvisation and group rhythm exercises, reflecting a higher level of interest and motivation. This finding is consistent with the theoretical principles of the Orff approach, which emphasize active involvement and experiential learning as essential components of musical development (Orff, 1963^[10]; Frazee, 1987)^[3] It also supports previous research indicating that Orff-based activities can

enhance students' intrinsic motivation and engagement by making learning more interactive and enjoyable (Shamrock, 1997^[11]; Ge & Jia, 2019)^[4]

Second, the findings demonstrate that Orff-based teaching activities contribute to the development of essential piano-related skills, including coordination, attention, memory, and listening ability. Students showed noticeable improvement in these areas, particularly in tasks involving rhythmic and melodic exercises. These results can be explained by the integration of movement, rhythm, and active participation in the learning process, which facilitates the coordination of cognitive and physical functions required for piano performance. This supports Goodkin's (2001)^[5] argument that Orff-based instruction promotes holistic musical development and enhances students' ability to internalize musical concepts. Importantly, this study extends existing knowledge by demonstrating that such benefits are not limited to general music education or early childhood contexts but are also applicable in secondary vocational piano instruction.

Third, the study reveals that the implementation of Orff-based activities positively influences the overall classroom environment and teaching practices. The classroom became more interactive and student-centered, with increased teacher-student interaction and opportunities for collaborative learning. Teachers reported greater flexibility in their instructional approaches and were able to provide more immediate and responsive feedback to students. These findings align with Abril (2013)^[11] who emphasizes the importance of participatory and responsive teaching methods in creating meaningful learning experiences. The shift from a rigid, technique-focused approach to a more flexible and engaging model appears to be particularly beneficial in vocational education contexts, where students often have diverse backgrounds and learning needs.

Importantly, this study addresses a gap in the existing literature regarding the application of the Orff approach in piano instruction within secondary vocational education. While previous research has primarily focused on general music education, the present study provides empirical evidence that Orff-based activities can be effectively adapted to piano teaching for vocational learners. This contributes to the expansion of Orff pedagogy and highlights its relevance in instrumental music education beyond its traditional applications.

However, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study employed a qualitative design with a relatively small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the duration of data collection was limited, and long-term effects of Orff-based teaching activities on piano learning were not examined. Future research could incorporate larger sample sizes, mixed-method approaches, or longitudinal designs to provide more comprehensive and generalizable findings.

In terms of pedagogical implications, the findings suggest that piano educators should consider integrating Orff-based activities such as rhythm exercises, improvisation, and collaborative music-making into their teaching practices. Such integration can help balance technical skill development with creativity and student engagement, leading to more effective and meaningful learning experiences.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that the application of Orff-based music teaching activities provides a viable solution to the limitations of traditional piano instruction. By enhancing student

participation, improving essential musical skills, and transforming classroom dynamics, the Orff approach offers a valuable framework for advancing piano pedagogy in secondary vocational education.

7. ORIGINALITY AND BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

This study contributes to the field of music education by providing empirical evidence on the application of Carl Orff-based music teaching activities in piano instruction within the context of secondary vocational education. While traditional piano pedagogy has predominantly emphasized technical proficiency through teacher-centered approaches, this research demonstrates the effectiveness of a student-centered, experiential framework in enhancing learners' engagement, participation, and overall musical development.

The originality of this study lies in its integration of Orff-based pedagogical principles into piano teaching, an area that has received limited scholarly attention. By incorporating rhythmic activities, improvisation, and collaborative learning into piano instruction, this study bridges the gap between technical skill development and creative musical expression. This integration not only supports students' cognitive and motor skill development but also fosters their confidence, motivation, and active participation in the learning process.

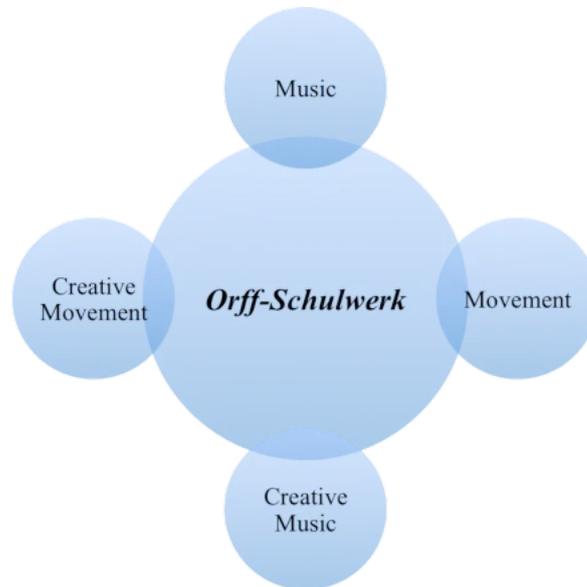
Furthermore, this study extends the application of the Orff approach beyond its traditional focus on general music education and early childhood contexts. By situating the approach within secondary vocational piano education, the research provides new insights into how Orff-based activities can be adapted to meet the needs of learners with diverse backgrounds and limited prior musical experience. The findings demonstrate that such an approach can effectively support the development of essential piano-related skills, including coordination, listening, memory, and attention.

In addition, this study contributes to pedagogical practice by illustrating how Orff-based teaching activities can transform classroom dynamics. The shift from a teacher-centered model to a more interactive and student-centered environment promotes collaborative learning, immediate feedback, and greater flexibility in instructional strategies. This transformation highlights the potential of Orff pedagogy to enhance both teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes in vocational music education.

In summary, this study advances the body of knowledge in music education by offering both conceptual and practical contributions. Conceptually, it expands the scope of Orff pedagogy to include piano instruction in vocational contexts. Practically, it provides a replicable framework for integrating experiential, student-centered approaches into piano teaching. These contributions offer valuable implications for educators, curriculum designers, and researchers seeking to improve the quality and effectiveness of music education in contemporary vocational settings.

Figure 1

Originality and Body of Knowledge



8. RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implication of the Study

1. to enhance piano teaching in secondary vocational education through the application of Carl Orff music activities: Incorporate Orff-Based Activities into Regular Piano Lessons Adopt Student-Centered Teaching Approaches

2. Teachers can systematically observe student responses to Orff-based activities and reflect on their instructional methods. This approach allows educators to adjust activities according to student needs and optimize learning outcomes, as supported by the observed improvements in coordination, attention, and musical responsiveness.

2. Recommendations for Future Research

1. Piano instructors should focus on creating a more interactive and participatory classroom environment. Encouraging students to explore musical ideas independently and collaboratively can foster autonomy, confidence, and holistic musical development.

2. Teachers are encouraged to integrate rhythmic exercises, improvisation, and collaborative music-making into the standard piano curriculum. The study shows that these activities increase student engagement, motivation, and creativity while reinforcing technical skills.

3. While promoting creative exploration, teachers should continue to monitor and support the development of fundamental piano skills. Structured guidance alongside Orff activities ensures that students achieve a balance between technical proficiency and creative expression.

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