

# **Harmony in Diversity: Enriching Pre-service Music Education with Culturally Responsive Approaches to Senior Immigrant Communities**

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The National Center for Education Statistics (2015) found that 21.5% of 70-year-olds participated in lifelong learning and adult education. About 300,000 U.S. adults aged 55 and older were enrolled in college or university programs in 2014 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2016). Programs like music production-based band activities effectively address the social needs of older adults, contributing to improved well-being and quality of life (Coffman & Adamek, 1999). Music provides intellectual stimulation, skill learning and reinforcement, creative expression, and social interaction for all ages. As a result, many institutions and schools have started integrating older adults into their music programs. Thus, a considerable number of pre-service teachers may interact with or educate seniors during their academic careers or future careers.

As globalization intensifies, there is an increasing demand for education in multicultural environments. Senior immigrants, who occupy critical societal positions, experience difficulties such as language barriers and assimilation, especially in artistic

and cultural expression (Salma & Salami, 2020; Steptoe et al.). Music, a universally understood form of communication, offers emotional solace and fosters social bonds among elderly immigrants, transcending cultural and generational barriers (Coffman, 2002; Sixsmith & Gibson, 2007). Therefore, there is a need for an in-depth study on how to prepare future music teachers with the skills to utilize culturally responsive and pedagogical approaches, especially to meet the unique cultural needs of senior immigrants.

This study examines the development, implementation, and impact of a culturally responsive music program designed to foster intercultural understanding between pre-service music teachers and senior Chinese immigrants. By situating the program at the intersection of music education, community engagement, and cultural responsiveness, the research highlights the transformative role of music as a medium for cultural connection and mutual learning. The program directly involves pre-service teachers in its design, implementation, and evaluation, improving their cultural sensitivity, multicultural communication, and adaptability to diverse learning contexts. The program is expected to help pre-service teachers grow professionally and help senior immigrants feel more connected to the community. This research is not only socially essential but is also crucial to addressing the practical challenges of teaching in today's multicultural societies. The guiding research questions for this study include:

1. What are the expectations and needs of the Chinese elderly immigrant community regarding music programs?
2. Can culturally responsive music programs influence the social engagement, emotional expression, and psychological well-being of Chinese

senior immigrants in the U.S., thereby contributing to their overall well-being? 3. How does participation in a culturally responsive music education program influence pre-service teachers' understanding and application of multicultural education? 4. In what ways has the program shaped pre-service teachers' educational philosophies and instructional practices? 5. What intercultural communication and educational challenges may be encountered in designing and implementing a culturally responsive music education program for older immigrants, and how can strategies be effectively employed to overcome these challenges?

The study is structured around two key facets. The first facet involves assessing the cultural needs, social expectations, and lived experiences of senior Chinese immigrants through a combination of semi-structured interviews and consultations with subject-matter experts. This phase informs the program's design, ensuring that its content resonates with the participants' cultural backgrounds while addressing their social and emotional needs. The second facet focuses on the program's implementation, providing pre-service music teachers with an immersive experience to develop their cross-cultural pedagogical competencies. Through collaborative music-making activities, such as traditional song-sharing, improvisational sessions, and culturally themed ensemble performances, participants engage in meaningful cultural exchange and mutual learning.

Employing an action research framework, the study utilizes qualitative methods, including direct observations, participant interviews, focus group discussions, and

reflective journals from both pre-service teachers and senior immigrant participants. Analysis of these data sources reveals significant outcomes for both groups. Senior Chinese immigrants report enhanced feelings of cultural validation, social belonging, and emotional well-being. Music activities serve as a platform for these participants to reconnect with their cultural roots while also navigating the challenges of acculturation. For pre-service music teachers, the program proves to be a transformative experience. Reflective journals and post-program interviews indicate substantial growth in their understanding of culturally responsive teaching practices, heightened cultural awareness, and improved adaptability in addressing diverse classroom needs. These findings emphasize the critical role of experiential learning in equipping future educators with the skills and mindset necessary for teaching in multicultural environments.

The study contributes to the broader discourse on equity and inclusion in music education by presenting a model of practice that aligns with culturally responsive teaching frameworks. It underscores the potential of music to act as a bridge, not only between different generations but also across cultural divides, fostering a deeper appreciation of diversity in educational and community settings. Implications for curriculum development, teacher training, and community-based music education are discussed, offering actionable strategies for integrating cultural responsiveness into music teaching and learning.

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