

Educational Approaches to Sustainable Folk Music Transmission: Insights from a Case Study on Henan Zhuizi

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Abstract

As safeguarding intangible cultural heritage becomes increasingly important, this study examines the sustainable transmission of Henan Zhuizi in higher education. Using qualitative research methods, including thematic analysis of interviews and classroom observations, the study investigates current teaching practices and identifies key challenges. The findings highlight limitations in students' cognitive levels and insufficient teaching resources within existing models. However, the integration of innovative pedagogical approaches, practical activities, and teacher professional development has the potential to significantly improve teaching effectiveness. This research contributes to the theoretical framework of folk music education and proposes strategies for the sustainable development of Henan Zhuizi, offering practical insights for the preservation and enhancement of other ethnic music traditions in higher education contexts.

Keywords: Educational Evaluation; Folk Music Education; Sustainable Development; Higher Education; Pedagogical Practices

1. Introduction

The position of Chinese folk music in university curricula is influenced by two main forces: (i) the widespread dissemination of Western music, which has led to

the gradual Westernization of traditional music(Hu & Wang, 2001); (ii) due to commercial and educational demands, the "authentic" performance style has been replaced by modernized music arrangements(Du, 2007; Long, 2009). Oral traditions are increasingly being replaced by formal Western music arrangements, posing a risk of marginalization for traditional music. Since the arts education reform in 1989, folk music education has been integrated into formal educational systems, but it still faces numerous teaching challenges(Yang & Welch, 2014).

Henan Zhuizi is a traditional folk music of Henan Province in China. It originated from an oral storytelling and performance form, passed down through generations, and plays a significant role in preserving local cultural traits and traditions. This makes it a valuable component of China's intangible cultural heritage(Chen et al., 2022).

In recent years, the transmission of Henan Zhuizi in Chinese higher education institutions has increasingly gained attention. However, the teaching and transmission methods for Henan Zhuizi are still underdeveloped, and integrating Henan Zhuizi into the curriculum faces numerous challenges. While some higher education institutions have made efforts to preserve this folk music, the sustainability of these initiatives largely depends on the teaching methods employed. Therefore, understanding the current status of Henan Zhuizi's transmission in higher education is crucial to ensuring its long-term vitality.

The 1990 Tbilisi Declaration initiated an international movement in higher education institutions to promote sustainable development, advocating for effective learning through curricula and practices. In 2002, the United Nations General Assembly declared the "Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014)," emphasizing that education is a key factor in achieving sustainable development, a message recognized by over 50 countries, including those in North America, Europe, and Central Asia. To cultivate talent capable of addressing sustainable development challenges, a shift in mindset is necessary, and it is crucial to reposition "education for sustainable development."

In this context, the International Association of Universities (IAU) has made sustainable development a priority theme to address and implement. Higher education plays a vital role in tackling challenges related to sustainability and sustainable development (Owens, 2017). For over two decades, universities have been regarded as key contributors to achieving regional sustainability goals (Karatzoglou, 2013). The sustainability of higher education is seen as an emerging educational paradigm. Higher Education for Sustainable Development (HESD) aims to generate knowledge while focusing on enabling students to reflect on issues related to sustainability, global responsibility, behavioral complexity, and future decision-making.

Given these characteristics, this study explores the understanding and suggestions of teachers and students regarding the sustainable development of Henan Zhuizi education. This study aims to address the following research question: How can pedagogical approaches support the sustainable development of Henan Zhuizi in higher education?

2. Literature review

Folk music, folk songs, and folk dance are relatively new expressions. They are extensions of the term *folklore*, coined in 1846 by British antiquarian William Thoms to describe "the traditions, customs, and superstitions of the uneducated classes"(Sumner, 2017). British folk music collector Cecil Sharp provided a far-reaching definition, stating that folk music is "a musical tradition that evolves through oral transmission" (Karpeles, 2012). Bruno Nettl also held a similar view, defining folk music as "music associated with a particular ethnic, regional, or religious group that is created and transmitted orally." He also emphasized the importance of social context in the creation and transmission of folk music, pointing out that it is inseparable from specific cultural and historical environments (Nettl, 2010). These perspectives indicate that oral tradition is not only the means of transmission of folk music but also its profound cultural characteristic. Folk music typically originates in rural areas and is closely connected to daily life and community activities, reflecting its functional characteristics. Furthermore, its uniqueness as a form of learning lies in the auditory experience rather than written study, highlighting its essence as a living cultural practice.

Chinese folk music, from the perspective of musical forms, can be divided into ensemble instrumental music, solo instrumental music, opera music, dance and song music, recitation music, vocal music, religious music, and more (Wang & Du, 1999). Henan Zhuizi belongs to recitation music and originates from Henan Province in China, being a form of folk music(Ma, 1989). The pronunciation of Henan Zhuizi closely follows the local dialect, and the dialect's characters and tones must also align with the regional speech (L. Zhang & Li, 2007).

Folk music is a key component of cultural sustainability(Wolcott, 2016). Titon (2015) points out that sustainability interventions should follow the four principles of conservation biology: diversity, growth limitation, interconnectedness, and management. He further proposes "resilience" and "adaptive management" as improved sustainable development strategies. Soini and Dessein (2016) introduced an eight-dimensional conceptual framework for analyzing cultural sustainability, including: the definition of culture, culture and development, the

value of culture, culture and society, culture and nature, policy sectors, governance models, and research methods. Schippers(2016) proposed a model of the five domains of the music ecosystem, which includes music learning systems, musicians and communities, environments and structures, regulations and infrastructure, and media and the music industry. Grant(2016) added documentation and archiving as two new elements in the model. Drummond (2001) emphasized issues facing the protection of contemporary music traditions, such as lack of funding, education (for performers and audiences), repertoire updating, and the use of new media (such as live streaming). In addition, researchers have proposed various ways to achieve or enhance music sustainability. These include promoting through festivals and related cultural heritage(Cheung, 2004; Maharjan & Barata, 2021), encouraging innovation, and fostering cooperation between cultural bearers and academic researchers(Chan, 2018). Other suggestions include establishing multicultural libraries (Civallero, 2017), integrating social and commercial production systems (Almond & DeJordy, 2012), and strengthening intellectual property protection . These methods aim to adapt and maintain the relevance of music to both indigenous cultures and contemporary needs.

The *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* defines "safeguarding" as a set of measures to ensure the vitality of intangible cultural heritage, including identification, documentation, research, preservation, promotion, transmission, and revitalization, particularly through formal and informal education. Transmission falls within the scope of safeguarding and is an important component of it. Therefore, education becomes a core task for the transmission and sustainable development of intangible cultural heritage(Merillas & Rodríguez, 2018) . In China, as a solution, it is suggested that culture be "incorporated into development sectors and educational programs" (UNESCO, 2013). Schippers and Grant metaphorically describe music cultures as ecosystems, emphasizing the interconnectedness and influence of various elements within them. They note that this ecological perspective helps to deepen the understanding of the complexity of music cultures and provides guidance for developing more effective sustainability strategies(Schippers & Grant, 2016).

Overall, the literature indicates that sustainable education for heritage preservation has become an important component of global educational systems, with potential benefits including the maintenance of cultural diversity and the promotion of sustainable development. However, further research is needed to explore effective strategies for implementing and promoting sustainable heritage education in different cultural contexts.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, selecting the case study method. The rationale behind this decision is that case studies can provide an in-depth, comprehensive, and targeted exploration of the teaching and sustainable development of Henan Zhuizi in higher education. By adopting this methodological framework, the study aims to achieve its research objectives and offer both theoretical and practical guidance for the teaching and transmission of Henan Zhuizi. The research focuses on how a university integrates the teaching practices of folk art practitioners and higher education instructors to teach Henan Zhuizi, demonstrating the application value of an embedded case study design in deeply understanding the interaction of different educational models and their impact on Henan Zhuizi teaching. In this study, folk art practitioners and educators form the two core units of the case analysis, reflecting two distinctly different teaching models: the practitioner education model and the educator education model. The practitioner model focuses on the practical teaching of performing artists in higher education, while the educator model examines the more traditional classroom teaching methods used by university instructors.

3.1 Sampling and Participants

This study includes five teachers from higher education institutions who are involved in teaching Henan Zhuizi. These participants consist of one curriculum designer, two practitioners, and two educators. They were selected because of their significant insights into the teaching methods and challenges of Henan Zhuizi in the context of higher education. Additionally, 15 students who are learning Henan Zhuizi were included, divided into three academic levels, with five students in each group. This stratified sampling ensures that the study captures a diverse range of learning experiences and reactions to teaching methods at different educational stages.

The focus of this study is on the teaching methods of Henan Zhuizi, with particular attention to the differences in teaching approaches between folk artists (practitioners) and university teachers (educators), as well as student feedback on learning Henan Zhuizi. Through this purposive sampling strategy, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of teaching and learning and their impact on the sustainable transmission of Henan Zhuizi in higher education. To ensure ethical standards, all classroom observations and video recordings were conducted with both verbal and written consent. The study also ensured the anonymity of participants by assigning pseudonyms according to privacy protection principles. For instance, the curriculum designer is denoted as "DR," practitioners as "PR," educators as "ED," and students as "ST" (Table 1).

Table 1 Sampling and Participants

POSITIONS	NAME	AGE FOR TEACHING TIME
Director of Instruction	DR1	15
Tutor	PR1	30
Tutor	PR2	16
Tutor	ED1	33
Associate Professor	ED2	30
POSITIONS	NAME	GRADE
Student	ST1	Freshman
Student	ST2	Freshman
Student	ST3	Freshman
Student	ST4	Freshman
Student	ST5	Freshman
Student	ST6	Sophomore
Student	ST7	Sophomore
Student	ST8	Sophomore
Student	ST9	Sophomore
Student	ST10	Sophomore
Student	ST11	Third-year
Student	ST12	Third-year
Student	ST13	Third-year
Student	ST14	Third-year
Student	ST15	Third-year

The informants are all from the same university, which serves as a research base for Henan Province's intangible cultural heritage (traditional drama, traditional music) and as a base for the inheritance of Henan Zhuizi, a distinguished element of China's traditional culture. The university offers full-time programs, with a 3-year curriculum for all disciplines and majors.

3.2 Timeline

Data collection spans one year, beginning in July 2023 and ending in June 2024. A total of eight classroom observations will be conducted, including three in practitioner-led classes, three in educator-led classes, and two in integrated classes. The extended timeframe allows for comprehensive observation of the teaching process, ensuring a full understanding of the dynamics of teaching and its impact on the sustainable development of Henan Zhuizi in higher education.

Starting in July 2023, the research was guided through clear communication with the informants to outline specific research steps. The selection and communication with the informants aim to deepen the researcher's understanding of the teaching environment for Henan Zhuizi and help refine the research focus. Classroom observations, the core of data collection, will run from September 2023 to June 2024. During this period, the researcher will engage in participatory observation, thoroughly documenting teaching methods, student learning reactions, and classroom interactions. The goal is to capture teaching details, providing rich raw data for subsequent analysis.

3.3 Data Collection

Data Analysis: This study follows the data management and analysis standards of qualitative research to ensure the integrity and reliability of the data. The main steps include:

1. **Data Transcription:** Ensuring the completeness of interview records.
2. **Member Checking:** Confirming the accuracy of the data.
3. **Data Organization and Coding:** Using Atlas.ti software to organize and code the data. This involves open coding, inductive categorization driven by research questions, and labeling key themes, ensuring the transparency and traceability of the analysis process.

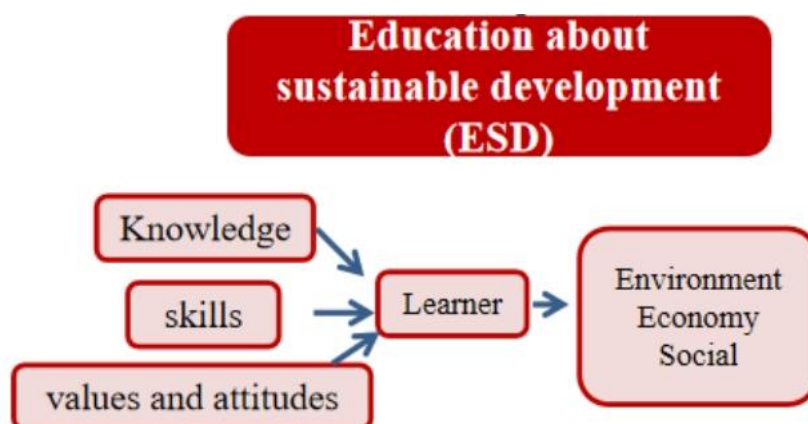
This study employed thematic analysis for data analysis, guided by an interpretivist research paradigm. The researcher applied a combination of problem-driven and theory-driven thematic analysis methods. By focusing on the research questions and emerging data, the study identified Emerging themes worth exploring. The advantage of this approach is its ability to closely link data, theory, and the research questions. It leverages existing theoretical frameworks to explain and understand events that have already occurred, providing a more direct response to the research questions.

3.4 Theoretical Guidance

UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Framework (Figure 1): This framework emphasizes the necessity of reforming educational systems to

promote sustainable development. It aims to equip learners with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes required to create a more sustainable future. Sustainable Schools Framework: Developed by the UK Department for Education and Skills, this framework is designed to help schools integrate sustainability into their operations and curricula. It consists of four key components: leadership and management, teaching and learning, partnerships and community involvement, and resource use and environmental impact.

These frameworks and approaches provide educators with a range of options for incorporating sustainability into their teaching activities.



(Figure 1 Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Framework)

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Emerging theme 1-Pedagogical challenges

Due to the separate coding of educators and practitioners, the main codes identified were:

- ET 1-Pedagogical challenges: Folk Art Ed Lags
- ET 1-Pedagogical challenges: Lack of teaching reference
- ET 1-Pedagogical challenges: Low Initial Cognitive Level
- ET 1-Pedagogical challenges: E/Course Setting Difficulties

The most frequently occurring code was ET 1-Pedagogical challenges: Low Initial Cognitive Level, which appeared the most in both practitioner and educator interviews, with a total of 7 occurrences. Teachers generally reported that students, when first learning Henan Zhuizi, have a low level of skills and foundational knowledge, which significantly impacts the quality and effectiveness of teaching (Table 2).

(Table 2:ET 1-Pedagogical challenges: Folk Art Ed Lags)

Content of the interviews	Document
The students have little to no understanding of Henan Zhuizi, often confusing it with Henan Bangzi or Chinese opera, and their level of awareness is virtually zero.	DR 1 Interview
In their first year, I would start by explaining their movements, teaching them the posture first. My goodness, they didn't even know which steps to take!	PR 1 Interview
Especially considering the significant differences in students' foundational knowledge and skill levels. Some students may struggle with basic elements of singing, such as rhythm and pitch accuracy, which requires me to provide additional individual guidance.	PR 2 Interview
The students' overall quality is also not ideal.	ED 2 Interview

The research report shows that students have almost no understanding of Henan Zhuizi when they enter university, and they often confuse it with other regional operas. This lack of awareness directly affects the teaching process, leading to difficulties in mastering basic movements and posture. Teachers are forced to spend a significant amount of time on foundational instruction, which significantly reduces teaching efficiency. Additionally, to help students with weaker foundations, teachers need to provide extra individual guidance, which not only increases the teaching burden but also affects the overall pace of the class. The overall lack of student quality makes the process of nurturing high-level talent even more challenging. In student interviews (Table 3), they admitted that before university, they had never been exposed to Henan Zhuizi. Most of them were vocal music students and had never even heard of Henan Zhuizi.

(Table 3: Cultural Connection and Identity)

Content of the interviews	Document	Codes
Heard of it, don't know much about it.	ST 4 Interview	Cultural Connection and Identity: Initially unfamiliar with Henan Zhuizi
I've never heard of it.	ST 5 Interview	Cultural Connection and Identity: Initially unfamiliar with Henan Zhuizi
Didn't know that before.	ST14 Interview	Cultural Connection and Identity: Initially unfamiliar with Henan Zhuizi
I've also been around since my freshman year of college.	ST15 Interview	Cultural Connection and Identity: Initially unfamiliar with Henan Zhuizi

This situation reflects the lack of Henan Zhuizi education prior to higher education, highlighting the insufficient emphasis placed on traditional folk art forms by society and the education system. The absence of systematic curriculum design and teaching resources at the primary and secondary school levels, coupled with a shortage of qualified teachers, further exacerbates the issue. Data and analysis indicate that students' low initial cognitive levels represent a significant challenge to the transmission of Henan Zhuizi in universities. This not only affects teaching effectiveness but also undermines students' learning experiences. To address this issue, efforts should be made to enhance the promotion and popularization of Henan Zhuizi at the foundational education level, while higher education institutions should offer more introductory courses and personalized guidance.

The emerging themes, ET 1-Pedagogical challenges: Folk Art Ed Lags and ET 1-Pedagogical challenges: Lack of teaching reference, reflect the inadequacies in Henan Zhuizi education. These challenges are primarily manifested in the education system's lack of systematic and standardized guidance and curriculum design for folk arts, particularly Henan Zhuizi. As DR 1 mentioned in the interview:

"Because we currently have no reference. In fact, nationwide, there is no reference for Quyi education."

This highlights the urgent need for the development of comprehensive teaching frameworks and educational resources to ensure the sustainable transmission of Henan Zhuizi in higher education.

As PR 1 noted in the interview:

"In folk contexts, they don't focus on standardization. It's more about earning a living."

Similarly, PR 2 remarked:

"In folk art education, it's relatively rare."

These observations underscore the practical and livelihood-focused nature of folk art transmission, which often lacks a systematic theoretical foundation and structured teaching framework. This gap intensifies the challenges of integrating and teaching Henan Zhuizi within higher education, where such frameworks are crucial for standardizing and sustaining the art form.

The traditional transmission model of Henan Zhuizi, which relied on the master-apprentice system, had numerous advantages. First, it not only imparted musical skills but also conveyed cultural values, aesthetic principles, and ethical ideologies, providing deep emotional and spiritual immersion. Through hands-on mentorship, masters passed on their understanding of music and spirit to their apprentices, fostering profound resonance and technical refinement. Second, the oral tradition nurtured apprentices' independent creativity and flexibility. Apprentices were often required to compose their own lyrics and melodies, stimulating innovation. Additionally, the masters' rigorous standards and conservative mindset ensured the authenticity and continuity of the art form. Lastly, the personalized teaching approach tailored to individual needs allowed apprentices to better understand and master the techniques, particularly benefiting students with weaker foundations through extra one-on-one guidance. However, in the context of higher education, the master-apprentice environment has been entirely dismantled. The newly emerging theme ET 1-Pedagogical challenges: P/Changes in the teaching environment highlights the challenges posed by the shift in the educational and transmission landscape. These changes not only disrupt the intimacy and depth of the master-apprentice dynamic but also pose difficulties in adapting traditional methods to institutionalized learning frameworks.

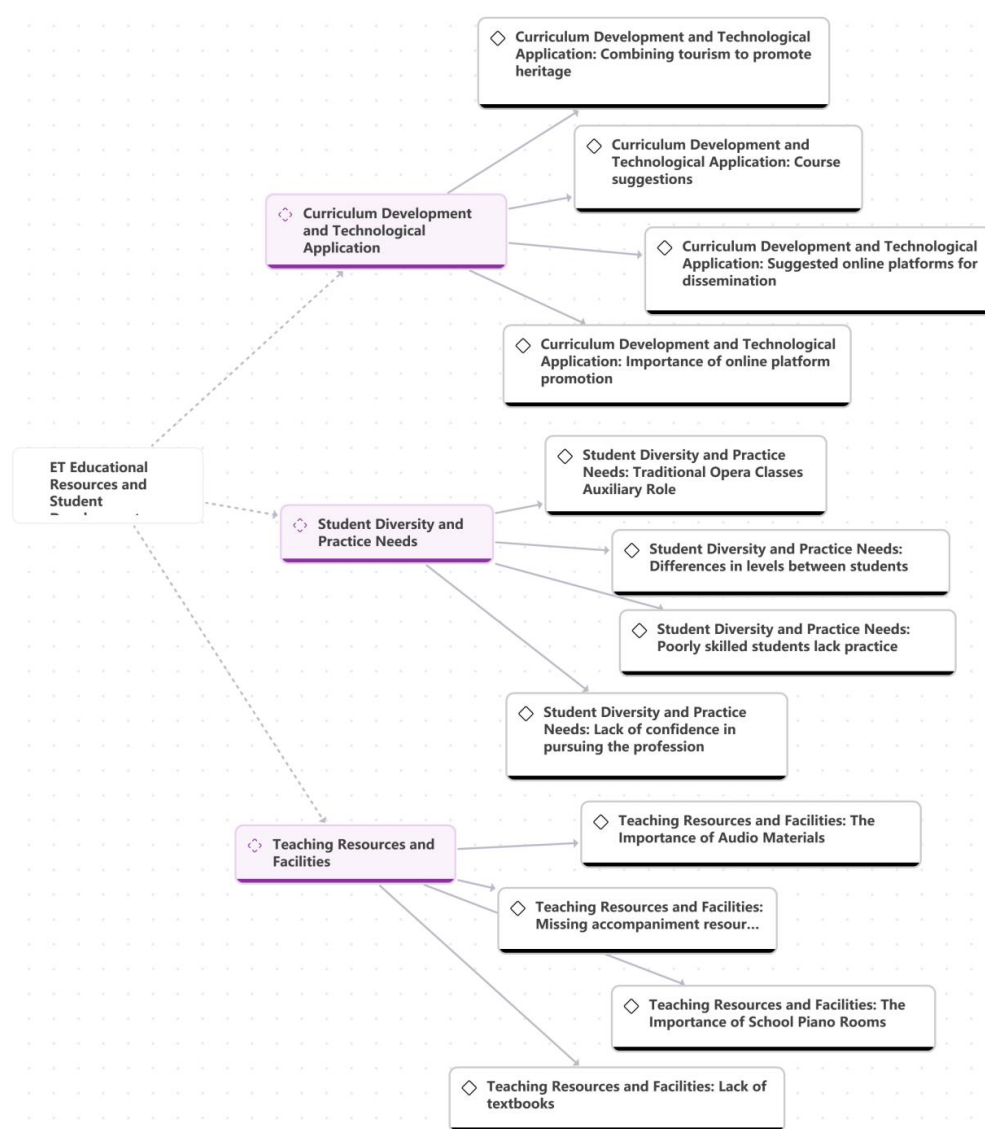
However, times have changed, and today's social background and teaching environment have undergone radical changes. In an educational environment such as a university, there is more equality and mutual respect between teachers and students. Students are no longer afraid of their masters as they were in our time, and they have more choices and the right to speak. [From PR 2 Interview](#)

This shift has brought both challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, the democratization and equalization of higher education foster students' autonomy and innovation. They are encouraged to express their opinions freely, explore new learning methods, and develop independent and critical thinking skills. These aspects stimulate creativity and drive the modernization and innovation of traditional music.

On the other hand, the profound emotional connections and personalized guidance inherent in the traditional master-apprentice system are difficult to fully replicate in modern higher education. The spiritual resonance between master and apprentice, along with tailored instruction, plays a crucial role in helping students deeply understand and master traditional art forms like Henan Zhuizi. The absence of these elements in institutionalized education poses a significant challenge to the sustainable transmission of such intangible cultural heritage.

4.2 Emerging theme 2-Educational Resources and Student Development

During the analysis of student interviews, a new theme emerged: Educational Resources and Student Development. This theme highlights the critical role of educational resources and the diverse needs of students in effectively integrating Henan Zhuizi into higher education curricula. The analysis identified three primary categories: Category 1: Teaching Resources and Facilities-Codes;Category 2: Curriculum Development and Technological Application-Codes;Category3:Student Diversity and Practice Needs-Codes(Figure 2).



(Figure 2 Emerging theme 2-Educational Resources and Student Development)

Category 1: Teaching Resources and Facilities

Students emphasized that audio materials are essential for learning Henan Zhuizi, as they help in mastering its unique rhythms and melodies. However, there is a notable scarcity of accompaniment resources for Henan Zhuizi, which poses challenges to effective learning and practice.

The audio material and the accompaniment material is necessary. Because sometimes after we learn it there are no strings underneath, and then we can't follow this so many chants that are unaccompanied, you don't know, and then it's just this or it's not right, there's not an accompaniment. [*From ST 1 Interview*](#)

Audio information and information on the accompaniment are necessary. [*From ST 4 Interview*](#)

Students noted that audio materials help them understand the pieces they are learning to perform. However, the improvisational accompaniment of the zhuihu—a defining characteristic of Henan Zhuizi—poses a challenge due to the lack of skilled zhuihu players in the school. This shortage creates difficulties for students during after-class practice. One student remarked:

The live accompaniment and the recorded accompaniment from my phone are not the same version. Live accompaniment means the teacher can adjust to your singing, but with recorded accompaniment, the rhythm and melody lack the flexibility of live accompaniment. [*From ST 10 Interview*](#)

Actually, what we're we're lacking right now is an accompanist, which is the Zhuihu teacher. What we are lacking is to sing along with Zhuihu. [*From ST 11 Interview*](#)

Additionally, the lack of dedicated textbooks for Henan Zhuizi presents a significant obstacle, as students heavily rely on structured written materials to guide their learning. One student expressed:

I think if we want Henan Zhuizi to sustain and develop, having textbooks is absolutely essential. Right now, in our study of Henan Zhuizi, we've only used two textbooks. [*From ST 7 Interview*](#)

Category 2: Curriculum Development and Technological Application

Students suggested incorporating more interactive and multimedia elements into the curriculum and emphasized the value of promoting Henan Zhuizi through online platforms. They believe digital media can expand the audience and make learning resources more accessible. One student remarked:

I think it's the online platforms. Now everyone knows about it, and people watch it every day. So, I feel like online platforms can really increase our influence. [*From ST 7 Interview*](#)

Another student added:

Short videos—nowadays, most people are scrolling through short videos. If Henan Zhuizi could be presented in a new and innovative way, it could be a great opportunity for people to rediscover it. [*From ST 9 Interview*](#)

Students recommended combining Henan Zhuizi with cultural tourism to increase its visibility and appeal. They suggested that promoting Henan Zhuizi in scenic areas or heritage sites could help raise awareness, and that online promotion could further amplify this effort. This approach could also create employment opportunities for students. One student explained:

It should be promoted in scenic spots or heritage sites, to let people know about it. Then, once people are aware, we can use the internet for further promotion. It's about how to combine both. [*From ST 10 Interview*](#)

Students recommended introducing traditional opera courses at the beginning of university education. One student shared their view:

I think it's a good idea. Actually, there should be a course on traditional opera in the first year. This way, students can start developing basic skills like eye contact and stage presence earlier. [*From ST 1 Interview*](#)

This suggestion highlights that early exposure to traditional opera could help students develop fundamental skills like stage presence and expressiveness. ST 3 agreed with this perspective, saying:

I feel it's good overall. Participating in more courses that help me practice things like eye contact and acting would definitely help my improvement. [*From ST 3 Interview*](#)

In the context of Henan Zhuizi teaching, traditional opera courses have played a supportive role, providing students with a broader background on this folk art. However, many students have expressed a lack of confidence in pursuing a career in Henan Zhuizi, indicating the need for more career support and development measures.

Several students have put forward suggestions for improving the curriculum to enhance the effectiveness of Henan Zhuizi teaching. For example, ST 4 recommended introducing creative courses to encourage students to compose their own works, fostering innovation and deepening their understanding of the art form. Other students, such as ST 5 and ST 7, felt that the three-year course duration is insufficient and suggested extending it to five or six years, while also increasing specialized course hours and incorporating smaller, more personalized classes to promote better interaction with teachers. Additionally, ST 6 and ST 11 proposed enriching the curriculum by integrating varied folk music styles and more engaging performance pieces to boost students' interest and motivation. Lastly, ST 9 suggested implementing a peer teaching model, where outstanding students guide others, helping to bridge skill gaps and promoting collaborative learning. This would foster overall progress and create a more supportive learning environment.

Category 3: Student Diversity and Practice Needs

This category highlights the importance of recognizing the diverse learning needs and practice preferences of students to ensure the effective integration of Henan Zhuizi into higher education curricula. Insights from the interviews underscore how variations in student backgrounds, levels of skill, and learning approaches impact their educational experiences.

Students from varying educational backgrounds bring different levels of knowledge and experience to the classroom. For example, one student highlighted the connection between opera and Henan Zhuizi, noting that the skills from traditional Chinese opera, such as body movements and eye expressions, could enhance the performance of Henan Zhuizi: “Why do people say that Teacher Niu’s posture is so good? Because he has the foundation of opera, which includes elements like eye expressions” *.From ST2 Interview*

This suggests that students with prior exposure to traditional performance arts may find it easier to grasp the physical and expressive aspects of Henan Zhuizi. However, other students without such a background may struggle with these elements, indicating the need for a more foundational approach in the curriculum.

The interviews also revealed that students have different learning preferences, particularly regarding practical vs. theoretical instruction. One student expressed a desire to move beyond singing skills, feeling that they were not yet proficient enough to bring Henan Zhuizi to a broader audience: “I feel that I’m not good enough to bring Henan Zhuizi to a bigger stage”. *[From ST6 Interview](#)*

This reflects a gap in students’ confidence and skill levels, with some feeling unprepared to perform at a professional level despite their academic training.

The need for more practice-oriented learning experiences was also emphasized in the interviews. For instance, a student mentioned that future courses might integrate more elements of opera, focusing on physical movement and eye expressions: “Next semester, there will be a new course. I heard it will include opera, where the actions and eye movements will be more emphasized”. *[From ST8 Interview](#)*

This comment indicates that students are keen to refine their physical expression and performance techniques, which are essential for mastering Henan Zhuizi. Additionally, a classroom observation revealed that students, despite varying skill levels, attempted to lead their peers in exercises that focused on classical body movements in opera: “Although the students in the class had different skill levels, the student guided the whole class in exercises emphasizing the classical body movements in opera”. *[From OB record 4](#)*

*[*This shows the importance of creating an inclusive learning environment where students can practice and develop at their own pace while being exposed to more complex techniques.

The diversity in skill levels also manifests in advanced learners who seek more challenging content. One observation noted that some students struggled with basic elements, such as synchronized handclaps and facial expressions, which hindered the overall portrayal of characters: “The handclaps weren’t in sync; the facial expressions were unclear, and the overall character portrayal was weak”. *[From OB record 6](#)*

However, more advanced students may find such drills insufficient, feeling that the curriculum does not offer enough depth for their level. There is a clear need for differentiated instruction that supports beginners in mastering the basics while providing advanced learners with opportunities to refine their techniques and deepen their understanding of Henan Zhuizi.

4.3 Suggestions for the Sustainable Development of Teaching and Learning of Henan Zhuizi

Through the analysis of the interview content in the case, the course director made several important recommendations regarding the sustainable development of Henan Zhuizi education, focusing on the necessity of departmental support, enrollment, and academic pathways (Table 4).

(Table 4: Transcripts of interviews with program directors)

Content of the interviews	Document	Codes
It requires support from the education department. Although the education undergraduate program has been approved, our school and even our province still do not offer a bachelor's degree program for it.	DR 1 Interview	ET 2-Sustainable development recommendations
The source of students is also an issue. As we discussed earlier, our students are transferred from vocal music programs, so fundamentally, they are not originally from this field and do not have a deep understanding of this specialty.	DR 1 Interview	ET 2-Sustainable development recommendations
The issue of students' career prospects is another challenge. If there were an undergraduate program, our students would at least be able to graduate with a bachelor's degree, which would provide them with more career opportunities.	DR 1 Interview	ET 2-Sustainable development recommendations

The department head emphasized that formal support from educational authorities is crucial for establishing and developing a Henan Zhuizi program at the undergraduate level. Currently, the school offers a three-year diploma course, but societal bias against vocational education significantly affects students' confidence. In many cultures, vocational education is often viewed as inferior to traditional academic pathways(Oecd, 2019), leading to decreased self-esteem and

self-confidence among students (Kraus & Park, 2014). Furthermore, vocational qualifications are often valued less in the labor market compared to university degrees (Rzepka, 2018), making students worry that their qualifications may not offer them competitiveness or social mobility. Improving the academic level or enhancing educational recognition could help strengthen students' confidence in their chosen field and motivate them to persist.

A weak recruitment base is a significant issue. As DR 1 mentioned, this weakness makes it difficult for students to fully engage in courses, increasing pressure on teaching resources and negatively affecting learning outcomes. Offering an undergraduate program in Henan Zhuizi would significantly enhance students' understanding of this art form and provide them with a clear academic development path. DR 1 pointed out that a bachelor's degree not only boosts the recognition of the qualification but also addresses the shortcomings of the three-year diploma course, enhancing students' performance skills and improving employment prospects. Furthermore, an undergraduate program could attract more students to engage in the preservation and promotion of Henan Zhuizi, as they would gain a higher educational return.

From the perspective of the tenured teachers, the interviews also gave them different insights (Table 5).

Content of the interviews	Document	Codes
Theoretically first understand Henan Zhuizi, understand the various genres, the first thing you can know the characteristics of each genre.	PR 1 Interview	ET 2-Sustainable development recommendations
Dialect training helps a lot in Henan Zhuizi singing.	PR 1 Interview	ET 2-Sustainable development recommendations
They're all college students now. To teach a little bit, a little bit of culture.	PR 1 Interview	ET 2-Sustainable development recommendations
Theoretical experts and educators should join hands to develop and write a set of systematic and comprehensive teaching materials for Henan Zhuizi.	PR 2 Interview	ET 2-Sustainable development recommendations
Although the application of modern educational technology and teaching methods is crucial to enhancing the efficiency and quality of teaching, traditional oral teaching is also important for art forms such as Henan Zhuizii, which is deeply rooted in folk tradition and culture.	PR 2 Interview	ET 2-Sustainable development recommendations
Increasing hands-on activities for students is an effective means of improving the effectiveness of instruction and students' interest in learning.	PR 2 Interview	ET 2-Sustainable development recommendations
It is important to pass it on to colleges and universities. Social transmission it is sometimes not standardized.	ED 2 Interview	ET 2-Sustainable development recommendations
If such funding is appropriately stripped to the colleges, it gives them a bit of autonomy.	ED 2 Interview	ET 2-Sustainable development recommendations

Educators emphasize the importance of developing a systematic curriculum for Henan Zhuizi that covers both theoretical knowledge and practical guidance. As PR 1 mentioned, students first need to understand the different styles and characteristics of Henan Zhuizi. PR 2 also pointed out that theoretical experts and educators should collaborate to write detailed textbooks that cover the history and culture of Henan Zhuizi, providing students with a rich learning background. The lack of textbooks is a significant barrier because students rely on structured written materials for learning. ST 7 expressed the same view in an interview:

"I believe that if we want Henan Zhuizi to continue developing, textbooks are essential. Currently, we have only studied two textbooks related to Henan Zhuizi:

one on singing and recitation, and another from Liaoning University of Science and Technology." [From ST7 Interview](#)

Educators emphasize that the curriculum should include content with cultural depth. PR 1 mentioned, "They're all college students now. To teach a little bit, a little bit of culture." This approach helps students not only master performance techniques but also understand the cultural essence of Henan Zhuizi. Student feedback supports this viewpoint, with ST 6 and ST 11 suggesting the incorporation of various folk music styles into the curriculum, blending engaging and educational works to maintain student interest and motivation. For example, ST 6 emphasized that introducing different styles helps keep the learning process appealing.

Although modern educational technology is crucial for enhancing teaching efficiency, for an art form like Henan Zhuizi, deeply rooted in traditional culture, the traditional method of oral transmission remains irreplaceable. PR 2 stressed, "Traditional oral teaching is also important for art forms such as Henan Zhuizi, which is deeply rooted in folk tradition and culture." Student feedback also indicated that face-to-face individual guidance greatly helps their learning.

First, I listen to the original recording again, and then I discuss it with the teacher. In one-on-one sessions, the teacher sings a line, and I follow by singing the same line. [From ST15 Interview](#)

The professional course teacher also provides one-on-one teaching, and I think this class is quite important. [From ST12 Interview](#)

Increasing practical activities is an effective way to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. PR 2 suggests organizing more performances, competitions, and collaborations with folk art groups: "Increasing practical activities can effectively improve teaching outcomes and student interest, helping students develop skills in a supportive environment." Student feedback also supports this view, emphasizing that stage experience is crucial for their growth.

During the New Year holiday, we practiced almost every day for a month. After rehearsing at school, we would go to the theater and rehearse with the actors. Throughout the repeated rehearsals, the actors provided us with many valuable suggestions. [From ST3 Interview](#)

When preparing for the performance, I was very nervous, always afraid I might forget the lyrics or sing wrong. [From ST6 Interview](#)

Adequate funding and autonomy are key to the sustainable development of Henan Zhuizi. ED 2 emphasizes the need for dedicated funding and granting autonomy to these projects. Incorporating contemporary cultural elements and social issues into Henan Zhuizi can make it more relatable to students. PR 2 suggests updating the lyrics to include themes such as friendship, dreams, and environmental protection: "On the basis of preserving the classic framework, introducing modern social issues will stimulate students' interest and emotional resonance." This approach helps bridge the gap between traditional art and modern society. Organizing creative activities, such as writing Henan Zhuizi works or participating in musical theater performances, can greatly enhance students' enthusiasm and confidence. PR 2 emphasizes the importance of these activities: "Through creative activities, students can connect with the art form on a deeper level."

From the students' perspective, they have proposed several suggestions to support the sustainable development of Henan Zhuizi, including innovation in content and performance styles, strengthening publicity, and integrating modern platforms and trends. Students unanimously believe that while maintaining traditional elements of Henan Zhuizi, it is crucial to introduce innovative elements to keep it relevant and appealing. ST 1 highlights the necessity of innovation in lyrics and performance: "Innovation can be reflected in the lyrics and performance style, but the characteristics of singing should preserve the traditions of Zhuizi." ST 4 agrees, suggesting that lyrics should be updated to reflect current events and social trends to attract a younger audience: "The lyrics should be closely connected to current events, like the popularity of crosstalk at Deyun Club, which is driven by the interesting lyrics that people enjoy listening to." Additionally, students suggest increasing publicity to raise public awareness of Henan Zhuizi. ST 1 points out that if people have the opportunity to hear Henan Zhuizi, many would like it: "Publicity needs to be strengthened; many people don't dislike Henan Zhuizi, they just haven't heard it." ST 2 also supports this, proposing to introduce Henan Zhuizi to young people through school publicity programs: "We need supportive projects that go to rural areas and schools, especially to campuses." Students indicate that before entering school, most people were unaware of Henan Zhuizi, which led to some resistance. They emphasize that if Henan Zhuizi were popularized starting from the basic education level, their acceptance of the art form would be much higher.

Sustainable development requires more teachers. There should be more teachers, and I believe the main focus should be on high schools for publicity and popularization. [From ST8 Interview](#)

Strengthen publicity so that current middle and high school students can learn about Henan Zhuizi. Also, there should be more opportunities for stage performances. [From ST10 Interview](#)

Students also mentioned the potential of modern digital platforms in promoting Henan Zhuizi. ST 4 emphasized the importance of online platforms: "We should utilize online platforms and share content to reach more people." ST 6 further suggested using TikTok and other short video platforms to create engaging Henan Zhuizi content: "We all use Douyin (TikTok) to watch short videos, so we could create more videos about Henan Zhuizi to help more people understand it." However, some students disagreed, believing that live streaming might not appeal to young people.

I feel like young people might not like live streaming... I think it would be better to have some performances, like street performances. I think people might like that. [From ST112Interview](#)

These students believe that while they wouldn't watch a live stream of Henan Zhuizi, they would be more willing to watch a live performance.

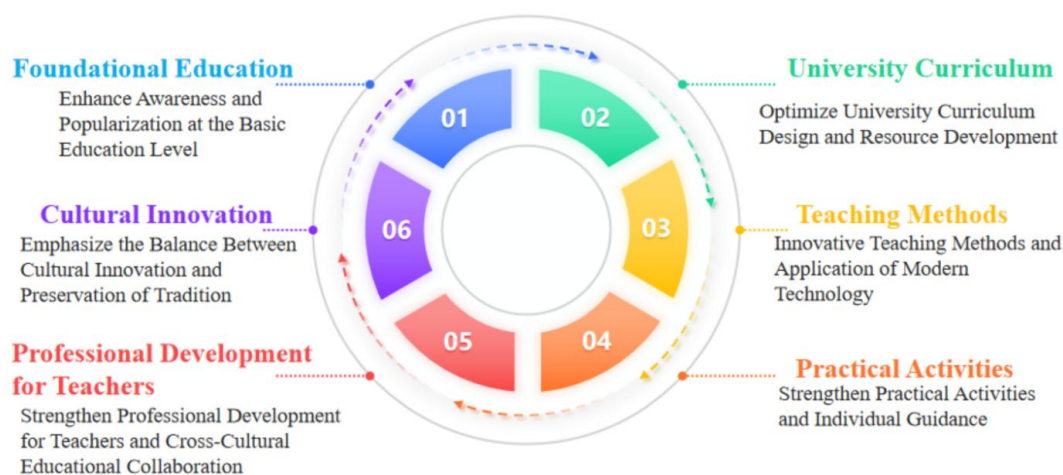
I actually think online streaming doesn't really contribute to the heritage. It would be better to promote it at scenic spots or historical sites, so that people get to know it, and then use the internet for further promotion. It's about combining both approaches. [From ST10 Interview](#)

Therefore, online promotion needs to align with the aesthetics of young people. Promoting Henan Zhuizi through digital platforms can significantly increase its influence. The suggestion is to combine modern cultural elements with traditional performances. ST 9 mentioned integrating Henan Zhuizi with rock music to create a fresh and captivating performance: "Combining Henan Zhuizi with modern pop music, like rock Zhuizi, sounds really novel." ST 11 also supports this approach, believing that blending Henan Zhuizi with modern singing styles would enhance its appeal: "By combining live streaming with modern singing techniques, it becomes more attractive."

The students' suggestions emphasize innovative content, strengthening publicity, and strategically utilizing modern platforms and trends. By preserving the essence of Henan Zhuizi while integrating it with contemporary culture, its appeal can be heightened, ensuring its continued relevance and vitality.

4.4 Strategies to Promote the Sustainable Development of Teaching and Learning of Henan Zhuizi

Henan Zhuizi, as one of China's important intangible cultural heritages, carries rich historical, cultural, and artistic connotations. However, with the rapid process of social modernization, the inheritance and preservation of Henan Zhuizi are facing severe challenges. Especially at the higher education level, how to effectively teach this ancient art form to ensure its transmission and development among the new generation has become a pressing issue that needs to be addressed (UNESCO, 2013). Higher education not only bears the responsibility of imparting knowledge and skills but also plays a crucial role in the transmission of intangible cultural heritage. Therefore, exploring strategies to promote the sustainable development of Henan Zhuizi teaching in higher education is not only of practical significance for the preservation of this cultural form, but also provides a replicable model for the transmission of other intangible cultural heritages. The inheritance and development of Henan Zhuizi as an intangible cultural heritage requires systematic improvements and innovations in teaching from multiple dimensions (Figure 3).



(*Henan Zhuizi Sustainable Teaching Improvement and Innovation Framework*)

4.4.1 Enhance awareness and popularization at the basic education level

Before entering higher education, students generally lack knowledge of Henan Zhuizi, which directly affects the effectiveness of teaching at the university level. Most students stated that they had never been exposed to Henan Zhuizi

before university and even confused it with other forms of traditional Chinese opera (ST 4, ST 5, ST 14). This gap in awareness impacts students' learning attitudes and increases the burden on teachers in foundational knowledge instruction, leading to a low starting point in higher education and hindering the deeper development of Henan Zhuizi teaching.

To address this issue, educational policies should introduce Henan Zhuizi into primary and secondary education, particularly through traditional opera courses. By incorporating cultural curricula, lectures, and extracurricular activities, students can be introduced to the background, history, and performance techniques of Henan Zhuizi. This early exposure will help bridge the knowledge gap and foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of this traditional art form before students enter higher education (Q. Han, 2019). By introducing Henan Zhuizi to students before they enter university, early exposure can spark interest and foster a deeper understanding. ST 10 emphasizes that early publicity and promotion can attract more students, thus enhancing learning outcomes in higher education. Additionally, local governments and educational departments can collaborate with cultural organizations to develop curricula and ensure the integration of Henan Zhuizi into early education. This can be achieved not only through formal courses but also by organizing regional traditional opera activities to showcase the cultural richness of Henan Zhuizi. Research has shown that initiatives like the "Opera in Schools" project significantly increase students' interest in local culture, demonstrating the potential for such programs to enhance both cultural preservation and student engagement (Y. Zhang, 2016). In addition, the promotion of folk music culture can be integrated with other regional cultural projects to build a rich cultural education system.

Some students in the interviews expressed support for early promotion of Henan Zhuizi, believing that exposure to this art form in primary and secondary school would spark their interest and aid in understanding (ST 8, ST 10). Early cultural education helps foster students' cultural identity and artistic interest, providing a solid foundation when entering higher education and promoting the sustainable development of Henan Zhuizi. Early exposure to intangible cultural heritage cultivates students' cultural awareness and aesthetic appreciation (Zhao, 2021), and this strategy aligns with the progressive and sustainable principles of intangible cultural heritage education. By offering related courses at the primary and secondary education stages, the teaching of Henan Zhuizi can achieve sustainable transmission.

4.4.2 Optimizing university curriculum and resource development

In the university-level teaching of Henan Zhuizi, there is a significant lack of curriculum design and teaching resources, especially in terms of textbooks, teaching outlines, and supplementary materials. This absence makes it difficult for students to obtain a systematic knowledge framework and sufficient practice opportunities, which negatively impacts the effectiveness of teaching. Student feedback indicates that they rely on limited textbooks and inadequate accompaniment materials, which hinders their ability to practice and master skills outside of class (ST 7, ST 11), thus affecting their learning progress.

To address these issues, educational departments and universities should develop a systematic textbook for Henan Zhuizi, combining traditional theory with modern practice, covering historical background, different performance styles, and singing techniques. The textbook should also provide practical exercises to help students master the art of Henan Zhuizi. Teachers believe that existing materials do not fully support students in understanding and mastering the essential elements of Henan Zhuizi, and emphasize the importance of integrating theory and practice in curriculum design.

Additionally, to improve the quality of teaching, a variety of audio, video resources, and accompaniment tools should be developed. Students need to practice repeatedly with audio materials to master the rhythm and melody of Henan Zhuizi. However, the lack of accompaniment resources has become a major obstacle (ST 1, ST 2, ST 11). Providing high-quality audio and video materials will help students understand performances more accurately and ensure that after-class practice is adequately supported. The development of digital resources, combined with modern teaching technologies, will enhance the student learning experience, particularly through online platforms that allow students to conveniently access learning materials and engage in self-directed learning.

4.4.3 Innovative teaching methods and application of modern technology

Integrating modern technology with other art forms such as Chinese opera and kuaiban (traditional Chinese rhythmic storytelling) can enhance students' overall artistic literacy and provide an innovative learning experience. This interdisciplinary teaching approach not only helps Henan Zhuizi integrate into modern education but also increases its cultural appeal and diversity. In teaching, techniques from other performing arts, such as the rhythmic sense and language skills of kuaiban, can be incorporated to help students better grasp the essence of Henan Zhuizi. This innovative teaching method sparks students' interest and provides a diversified learning experience through the fusion of different art forms.

Existing research has shown that interdisciplinary education can effectively enhance students' creativity and cultural understanding (Tzima et al., 2020).

Modern technology has opened new avenues for the transmission and teaching of intangible cultural heritage. Short video platforms, such as TikTok, and other online media provide more channels for promoting Henan Zhuizi. Student feedback indicates that short video platforms effectively capture the interest of young people in Henan Zhuizi (ST 7, ST 9). Through digital platforms, students can easily access online learning resources, such as teaching videos or online courses on Henan Zhuizi, allowing them to engage in self-study outside of class. The digital learning model enhances learning convenience and offers new possibilities for the spread of Henan Zhuizi in contemporary society (H. Zhang, 2024).

4.4.4 Strengthen practical activities and individual guidance

To enhance students' performance skills and confidence, universities should organize more performance opportunities, providing practical stage experiences. By regularly hosting on-campus showcase performances, inter-school collaborative performances, and collaborations with local opera troupes, students can accumulate experience in real stage settings, improving their proficiency and expressiveness in performance. This stage experience helps students gain better control over their Henan Zhuizi performances, overcome stage fright, and boost their confidence. Additionally, through long-term collaboration with professional performers, students can receive more feedback and guidance, further refining their skills (Jin, 2022).

To address individual challenges students encounter during their learning process, a "one-on-one" teaching model should be implemented to provide personalized guidance. This approach can cater to each student's specific needs, helping them overcome difficulties in pronunciation, singing techniques, and stage performance. Personalized guidance is especially important for students with weaker foundations or slower progress (PR 2). As student ST 15 stated, "One-on-one teaching helped me better understand the teacher's feedback and allowed me to improve my performance skills in a short period of time." Research has shown that combining practical activities with personalized guidance can

significantly enhance students' learning outcomes and performance levels(Li, 2024).

4.4.5 Strengthen professional development for teachers and cross-cultural educational collaboration

To improve the quality of Henan Zhuizi teaching, education departments and universities should provide more professional development opportunities for teachers. Teacher training should combine traditional teaching methods with modern educational technologies to help educators address the challenges they face in the classroom. Additionally, the training should focus on collaboration with frontline performers, allowing teachers to enhance their performance skills through practical exercises, and incorporating more practical techniques into their lessons (PR 2). By engaging in exchanges and collaborations with practitioners, teachers can gain practical experience, enhancing the flexibility and relevance of their teaching(Barrett, 2006).

The promotion of Henan Zhuizi teaching should not be limited to domestic efforts; it should also expand its influence in global music education through cross-school collaborations and international exchange programs. Cross-cultural cooperation projects can introduce international educational resources and concepts, helping teachers and students better understand the global cultural significance of Henan Zhuizi and broadening its audience. For example, conducting teaching exchanges with international music conservatories would not only enhance the professional level of Henan Zhuizi instructors but also promote Henan Zhuizi culture through international platforms, thereby increasing its global impact(X. Han, 2024).

4.4.6 Emphasize the balance between cultural innovation and preservation of traditions

In the process of promoting the sustainable development of Henan Zhuizi teaching, balancing cultural innovation with the preservation of tradition is crucial. By combining the approaches of educators and practitioners, effectively integrating traditional teaching methods with modern educational needs, the best way to foster innovation while preserving culture is demonstrated. To ensure the relevance of Henan Zhuizi in modern society, teachers and curriculum designers should update lyrics and performance styles to incorporate contemporary cultural and social issues, thus attracting younger audiences and enhancing its cultural influence (PR 2). For example, by incorporating modern themes such as

environmental protection, friendship, and dreams, Henan Zhuizi performances can become more contemporary, bridging the gap with today's audiences. Student ST 4 also mentioned that integrating current topics aligns Henan Zhuizi with the values and interests of the younger generation. Additionally, with the rise of social media and short video platforms, Henan Zhuizi can spread through these channels, attracting a wider audience and enhancing its cultural impact (Z. Zhang & Thotham, 2024). This innovation not only aids in the dissemination of Henan Zhuizi but also allows more viewers to appreciate the unique charm of this traditional art form.

In order to promote the sustainable development of teaching Henan Luzi, a balance must be found between innovation and tradition. Teaching should maintain its unique singing style and performance techniques while incorporating modern social and cultural issues to attract young audiences. Teachers should instruct their students to innovate performance content while still strictly following traditional singing techniques, such as luohu accompaniment, rhyme and rhythm, and the use of dialect. This balance can maintain the uniqueness of Henan Luzi as an intangible cultural heritage and continue to attract audiences in modern society (Appendino, 2017).

Educators and practitioners each play a crucial and complementary role in Henan Zhuizi teaching. Educators focus on promoting students' diverse development through cross-school collaborations and resource sharing, while practitioners provide strict performance requirements and professional guidance to improve students' performance skills and professional competence. Through classroom discussions, educators encourage students to reflect on the cultural and artistic values of Henan Zhuizi, enhancing their cultural identity. Practitioners, on the other hand, focus on refining performance skills, helping students improve their execution in actual performances.

The inheritance and development of Henan Zhuizi require systematic teaching improvements. First, in the basic education phase, students' interest and awareness should be raised through courses and cultural activities. Second, higher education institutions should develop systematic textbooks and enrich teaching resources, optimizing the curriculum design. Incorporating modern technology and interdisciplinary teaching methods, such as short video platforms and online resources, can enhance course interactivity and appeal. Practical activities and personalized guidance provide students with more performance opportunities, significantly enhancing their skills and confidence. Additionally, strengthening teacher professional development and promoting cross-school and cross-cultural cooperation can bring more resources and international perspectives to Henan Zhuizi teaching.

Through a balance of innovation and tradition, Henan Zhuizi not only attracts modern audiences, but also retains its unique cultural essence. These strategies work together to promote the sustainable inheritance and development of Henan Luzi and to ensure that this traditional art form remains relevant and enduring in modern society.

5. Conclusions

To ensure the sustainable development of Henan Zhuizi in higher education, a multifaceted approach to teaching methods is required. The results of this study highlight several key strategies that can be implemented to promote the effective transmission of this traditional art form while meeting the demands of contemporary education. These strategies include: enhancing awareness and popularization at the primary and secondary education levels, optimizing curriculum design and resource development in higher education institutions, innovating teaching methods and applying modern technology, strengthening practical activities and personalized guidance, fostering professional development for teachers and encouraging cross-cultural educational collaboration, and maintaining a balance between cultural innovation and the preservation of tradition. Together, these components form a comprehensive framework to ensure that Henan Zhuizi can thrive within modern educational institutions while retaining its cultural authenticity.

However, this study also has certain limitations. As data collection was restricted to a specific higher education institution, its conclusions may not fully represent the situation across all higher education institutions. Based on this limitation, future research could explore the following areas: First, expanding the scope of research to include more higher education institutions to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Second, further investigation into the social and cultural dissemination of Henan Zhuizi and its impact, particularly regarding its reception in different cultural contexts and among diverse audiences, would provide more comprehensive theoretical support for the sustainable development of Henan Zhuizi.

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