



tied to love, labor, and community life. Yet these songs face pressing challenges as modernization, changing lifestyles, and shifts in language use weaken the continuity of oral transmission. Younger generations are increasingly distant from the cultural contexts that once sustained this music, turning instead to globalized entertainment and popular media. This study situates itself within this urgent context, exploring how Piano adaptations of Bai folk songs can serve not only as artistic reinterpretations but also as educational resources. By connecting tradition with curriculum design, the research aims to develop pathways for transmitting heritage through teaching practices that resonate with students in contemporary settings.

### **Introduce the Problem**

The core issue addressed by this research is the growing disconnect between traditional modes of transmitting Bai folk songs and the educational realities of today's younger learners. Historically, Bai music was passed down through oral traditions embedded in rituals, festivals, and communal practices. These methods relied heavily on social contexts and cultural immersion (Si et al., 2025; Yan et al., 2025; Zhang & Wu, 2023). As these environments have diminished, the songs themselves face risks of being forgotten or preserved only as static records rather than as living traditions. At the same time, the formal education system, particularly in music programs, has been slow to adopt culturally responsive teaching materials that include ethnic folk music (Guan et al., 2023; McKoy & Lind, 2022; Norton & Matsumoto, 2018). The problem, therefore, is twofold: the loss of an irreplaceable cultural repertoire and the missed opportunity within education to integrate this heritage in ways that could both preserve it and enrich learning. This research directly addresses the challenge of how to keep Bai folk songs relevant in an era where oral traditions alone are no longer sufficient for transmission.

### **The Importance of the Problem**

The importance of this problem extends across cultural, educational, and social dimensions. Culturally, the loss of Bai folk songs would weaken the diversity of China's ethnic heritage and diminish the voices of a community whose traditions have enriched national

identity. Educationally, incorporating these songs into a formal curriculum through Piano arrangements can provide students with material that is both musically challenging and culturally meaningful (Gao, 2025; Ndhlovu et al., 2021; Tang, 2021; Yang, 2020). Such integration not only strengthens technical training but also develops cultural literacy, enabling students to connect music-making with broader questions of heritage and identity. Socially, bringing folk music into teaching contexts strengthens intergenerational dialogue and reaffirms community identity among the Bai people (Crawford, 2020; Songzi, 2024). The Piano, as a widely recognized and versatile instrument, provides an accessible and practical platform for these adaptations. By embedding Bai folk songs within the curriculum and teaching, this research responds to the dual urgency of cultural preservation and pedagogical innovation, ensuring that students encounter music not only as an abstract skill but as a living cultural practice (Bican, 2021; Cai et al., 2025; Hafner & Čerňanský, 2024).

### **Relevant Scholarship**

Existing research in ethnomusicology has emphasized documenting folk traditions, analyzing their structures, and highlighting their cultural significance. Educational studies have similarly highlighted the value of incorporating traditional music into teaching, emphasizing its role in broadening students' worldviews and fostering cultural appreciation. More recently, efforts in cross-cultural Piano performance have demonstrated that folk melodies can be effectively adapted for Piano without losing their distinctive character (Chandransu, 2019; Curran & Radhakrishnan, 2021; Shuwen, 2024; Zhao, 2024). However, while these strands of scholarship highlight important elements of preservation and pedagogy, they have rarely been integrated into a systematic approach that connects Piano adaptation directly to curriculum design. Little has been done to test whether Piano arrangements of ethnic folk songs can function as structured teaching tools that enhance learning outcomes while simultaneously safeguarding heritage (Baibek et al., 2025; Chang & Panicker, 2024; Jiang, 2025). This study addresses this gap by combining ethnomusicological authenticity with

pedagogical application, using Piano repertoire as both an artistic and educational medium.

### Hypotheses

Based on this foundation, the study hypothesizes that Piano adaptations of Bai folk songs can serve as effective pedagogical tools within the curriculum and teaching. Specifically, it posits that by maintaining the melodic and modal integrity of the original songs while presenting them through Piano arrangements, educators can foster deeper engagement, motivation, and cultural appreciation among students. This approach is expected to enrich music education by diversifying repertoire, while also contributing to the sustainable transmission of Bai cultural heritage. To test this hypothesis, the study employs a mixed-methods design, where qualitative research ensures that adaptations remain culturally faithful by incorporating fieldwork, interviews, and observation. In contrast, quantitative research measures its pedagogical impact by assessing changes in student knowledge, motivation, and performance outcomes. Together, these methods provide a comprehensive framework for evaluating how Piano can act as a bridge between tradition and education, ensuring that Bai folk songs remain alive within contemporary learning environments.

### Research Objective

To investigate how Piano adaptations of Bai ethnic folk songs can be integrated into curriculum and teaching practices to preserve cultural heritage while enhancing student learning and engagement in contemporary music education.

### Research Question

How can Piano adaptations of Bai ethnic folk songs be effectively utilized within the curriculum and teaching to support the preservation and transmission of Bai musical heritage?

### METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to capture both cultural depth and measurable teaching outcomes (Mellizo, 2019; Mertens, 2019; Riera et al., 2023). The qualitative component investigated

the cultural significance of Bai folk songs and their potential for adaptation into Piano repertoire, while the quantitative component assessed the educational effectiveness of these adaptations when applied in a structured curriculum. In order to enhance the generalizability of the findings, the study design also considered diversity in participant selection, including variations in academic level and cultural background where possible.

### Site Selection

The research was conducted in Dali, Yunnan Province, the cultural center of the Bai ethnic group. The site was chosen because Bai folk songs are still embedded in festivals, rituals, and daily life, making it an ideal location for capturing authentic practices.

### Participants and Sampling

A total of eleven informants participated. They were selected using a purposive sampling strategy, ensuring that participants represented a balance of cultural authority, teaching expertise, and community experience, as shown in Table 1. The selection also considered diversity in age, experience, and cultural engagement to provide a broader perspective on Bai musical practices and transmission.

### Data Collection and Analysis

- Semi-structured interviews explored cultural meaning, teaching approaches, and perceptions of Piano adaptations.
- Field observations documented rehearsals, performances, and classroom settings.
- Musical transcription and analysis of Bai Yue Liang Bai Jiejie examined melody, rhythm, and modal features.

Interview and observation data were coded thematically, while musical scores were analyzed for structural and modal authenticity to guide Piano adaptation. The thematic coding process followed a systematic approach to identify recurring patterns related to cultural meaning, pedagogical application, and adaptation strategies.

### Participants and Sampling

The quantitative stage involved 40 undergraduate music students from a university music program.

**Table 1: Qualitative Informants and Their Contributions**

Informants	Sampling Method	Contribution
Two key informants	Purposive (recognized cultural inheritors)	Provided authentic knowledge of Bai music and its cultural meaning
Three casual informants	Purposive (teachers, performers, researchers)	Shared insights into teaching practices and adaptation possibilities
Six general informants	Purposive (students, community singers)	Offered lived experiences and reflections on cultural identity

**Table 2: Quantitative Student Sample Groups and Learning Focus**

Group	Number	Method	Instructional Approach	Learning Focus
Experimental	20	Stratified purposive	Piano curriculum integrated with Bai folk song adaptations	Cultural knowledge, performance motivation, engagement
Control	20	Stratified purposive	Standard Piano curriculum without folk song adaptations	General Piano performance skills

Students were selected using a convenience sampling method, as they were enrolled in Piano-related courses during the research period. Efforts were made to include students from different academic years and, where applicable, diverse ethnic backgrounds to improve representativeness. From this pool, students were randomly assigned to two groups to minimize bias, as shown in Table 2.

### Procedure

- Pre-test survey assessed cultural knowledge of Bai music and motivation for Piano study.
- The instructional phase lasted one academic term: the experimental group learned Piano adaptations of Bai folk songs, while the control group studied conventional Piano repertoire.
- Post-test survey measured changes in cultural knowledge, appreciation, and performance motivation.

The instructional design also encouraged students to reflect on cultural context and personal engagement with the repertoire throughout the learning process.

### Instruments and Analysis

Two tools were used:

- Knowledge assessment questionnaire (understanding of Bai folk music).

- Engagement and motivation survey (self-reported interest, cultural value, and motivation).

Data were analyzed using paired-sample t-tests to compare pre- and post-test scores both within and between groups. This analytical approach enabled the study to examine not only overall learning outcomes but also differences across groups with varied academic and cultural backgrounds.

### RESULTS

The findings of this study highlight the dual achievements of cultural preservation and pedagogical enhancement through the adaptation of Bai folk songs into Piano repertoire. By combining qualitative insights from cultural informants with quantitative data collected through experimental and control group comparisons, the results reveal how Piano can serve as an effective medium for curriculum-based transmission of traditional music.

### Cultural Identity and Symbolic Value

Field interviews confirmed that Bai Yue Liang Bai Jiejie is not merely songs but widely recognized symbols of Bai cultural identity. Inheritors described these pieces as “voices of the ancestors” and emphasized that they carry values of community cohesion, moral lessons, and spiritual continuity.

For them, these songs represent a living archive of history and memory. Younger informants, however, admitted that without innovative teaching strategies, such as integration into the formal curriculum, they would likely drift toward mainstream pop culture and lose touch with their heritage.

### Adaptation to Piano as a Preservation Tool

Observations of rehearsals demonstrated that Piano adaptation added harmonic richness and rhythmic stability without compromising the melodic integrity of the songs. When “Bai Yue Liang Bai Jiejie” was adapted for Piano (Figure 1), the left hand provided flowing arpeggios that simulated the layered vocal textures of traditional antiphonal singing, while the right hand reinforced the lyrical melody. Informants noted that this arrangement allowed the piece to retain its emotional depth, while also enhancing accessibility for students trained in Western notation and technique.

The image shows a musical score for the Bai folk song "Bai Yue Liang Bai Jiejie" (白月亮呀白姐姐). The score is arranged by Yu Sun and is in the key of D major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. It features three parts: Vocal, Dizi, and Piano. The tempo is marked "Adagio". The vocal line includes the lyrics: "白月亮呀白姐姐" (Bai Yue Liang Bai Jiejie) and "白姐姐，我的心话儿说给你，我想和你" (Bai jiejie, Zai xin hua er shui gei ni, Wo xiang he ni). The piano accompaniment consists of flowing arpeggios in the left hand and a melodic line in the right hand that follows the vocal melody.

**Fig. 1: Piano repertoire of Bai Yue Liang Bai Jiejie**  
Source: The researcher, adaptation for Piano

Students who practiced with Piano accompaniment described the experience as eye-opening. One remarked that the adaptation “made the old songs

feel alive in a new way.” At the same time, another observed that working with pentatonic scales and flexible rhythms helped them master both Piano technique and ethnic context. The flexibility of rhythm in Bai folk songs, often shaped by natural breathing and spoken language patterns, required students to depart from rigid Western metrics and engage with music in a more fluid, culturally grounded way.

### Pedagogical Insights from Fieldwork

Interviews with educators and students underscored that Piano-based adaptations not only support performance but also serve as valuable teaching resources. Educators explained that Piano scores provided a structured means of introducing Bai folk songs into lessons, making them compatible with classroom settings where sheet music is standard. Students further indicated that rehearsing songs such as Bai Yue Liang Bai Jiejie with Piano accompaniment helped them develop an appreciation for tonal color, as the Piano was used to imitate timbres of Bai instruments such as the sanxian and bamboo flute.

The inclusion of Piano in stage performances also had a profound symbolic function. During a student recital of Bai Yue Liang Bai Jiejie (Figure 2), the combination of Piano and live voice created an atmosphere that felt both traditional and modern. Audiences, including elders from the Bai community, responded positively, noting that the arrangement “kept the spirit of the song while bringing it into the present.”



**Fig. 2 The performance on stage of Bai Yue Liang Bai Jiejie**

Source: The researcher, from fieldwork in June 2025

### Informants' Perspectives

The perspectives of the eleven informants (two key cultural inheritors, three casual informants, and six general informants) consistently highlighted the need for pedagogical innovation. The key inheritors stressed the urgency of intergenerational continuity, pointing out that oral traditions alone were insufficient in today's rapidly modernizing society. Casual informants emphasized the importance of presenting Bai music in forms that appeal to youth, such as stage performances, competitions, and classroom curricula. General informants, including students, expressed excitement at seeing their cultural heritage recognized in formal education, describing the Piano adaptations as both "respectful of tradition" and "refreshingly new." Taken together, these qualitative findings suggest that Piano is not merely an accompanying instrument but a pedagogical bridge that facilitates cultural continuity and deepens student engagement.

### Quantitative Results

Quantitative analysis confirmed the educational benefits of integrating Piano adaptations into teaching. The experimental group of 20 undergraduate students, who received instruction using Piano-adapted Bai folk songs, displayed significantly higher gains in both cultural knowledge and motivation compared to the control group of 20 students taught with standard Piano repertoire.

Cultural knowledge gains, pre- and post-test surveys, measured changes in cultural knowledge related to Bai folk music. As shown in Table 3, the experimental group's mean scores rose from  $M = 45.2$  to  $M = 59.7$ , representing a 32% increase ( $p < 0.01$ ).

By contrast, the control group's scores improved only marginally, from  $M = 46.1$  to  $M = 49.8$ , an 8% increase that lacked statistical significance.

Motivation and engagement, Likert-scale surveys measured student motivation and engagement in Piano practice. As shown in Table 4 and Figure 2, the experimental group increased from  $M = 4.2$  to  $M = 5.8$ , a statistically significant improvement of +1.6 points ( $p < 0.05$ ). The control group's scores remained nearly flat, rising only from  $M = 4.3$  to  $M = 4.6$ .

The quantitative findings demonstrate that Piano-based instruction not only enriched students' cultural knowledge but also fostered higher motivation, emotional connection, and active engagement in their learning process. Students in the experimental group consistently described the lessons as "more meaningful" and "more enjoyable" compared to standard Piano training.

### Integrated Summary of Findings

The results of this study confirm that Piano adaptations of Bai folk songs effectively address two interconnected needs: cultural preservation and curriculum enrichment.

From a qualitative perspective, fieldwork demonstrated the authenticity and acceptability of Piano adaptations among cultural inheritors, educators, and students. The adaptations were praised for maintaining the integrity of Bai melodic and rhythmic structures while enhancing performance appeal. Informants' testimonies emphasized the urgent need to integrate traditional music into formal teaching practices and highlighted Piano as a particularly effective medium for doing so.

Table 3: Cultural Knowledge Scores (Pre- and Post-Test)

Group	Pre-Test (M)	Post-Test (M)	Change	% Increase	Significance
Experimental	45.2	59.7	+14.5	+32%	$p < 0.01$
Control	46.1	49.8	+3.7	+8%	ns

Table 4: Motivation and Engagement Scores

Group	Pre-Test (M)	Post-Test (M)	Change	% Increase
Experimental	4.2	5.8	+1.6	$p < 0.05$
Control	4.3	4.6	+0.3	ns

From a quantitative perspective, survey data provided empirical support for the pedagogical value of this approach. Students exposed to Piano-adapted Bai folk songs demonstrated significantly higher gains in both cultural knowledge (+32%) and motivation (+1.6 points on a 7-point scale) compared to those who received traditional Piano instruction without ethnic content. These results affirm the hypothesis that Piano can function as a powerful pedagogical tool that connects tradition with modern teaching practice.

Finally, the combination of qualitative and quantitative evidence underscores the importance of designing curriculum-based strategies that both respect cultural authenticity and engage student creativity. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate this dual achievement: the former shows how adaptations preserve melodic beauty within Piano notation, while the latter depicts stage performance as a living site of cultural transmission.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study affirm the central hypothesis that Piano adaptations of Bai ethnic folk songs can serve as effective pedagogical tools for both cultural preservation and music education. The integration of Bai Yue Liang Bai Jiejie into the Piano repertoire preserved melodic and modal authenticity while adding harmonic richness, providing a bridge between traditional oral transmission and contemporary teaching practice. This aligns with research emphasizing that the sustainability of intangible cultural heritage requires innovative adaptation without compromising authenticity (Zhang & Wu, 2023; Norton & Matsumoto, 2018). By combining qualitative insights from cultural inheritors and educators with quantitative evidence from student performance, the study demonstrates how folk songs can be revitalized through classroom application, consistent with principles of culturally responsive pedagogy (McKoy & Lind, 2022; Guan et al., 2023). Furthermore, the structured integration of piano-based arrangements into curriculum design suggests the potential for developing systematic teaching materials, including graded scores and lesson plans, which can support wider implementation in formal music education contexts.

The consistency of results across both qualitative and quantitative dimensions underscores the validity of this approach. Informants described Piano as a “pedagogical bridge,” a finding supported by broader ethnomusicological perspectives that highlight the importance of innovation in safeguarding endangered traditions (Curran & Radhakrishnan, 2021; Si et al., 2025). Moreover, the experimental group’s significant gains in cultural knowledge and motivation reflect earlier studies, which show that a culturally meaningful repertoire fosters student engagement and identity development (Crawford, 2020; Gao, 2025). At the same time, the outcomes are consistent with theoretical perspectives on transculturation, which suggest that cross-cultural adaptation enriches both heritage preservation and educational practice (Tang, 2021). In addition, these short-term improvements indicate promising foundations for long-term cultural transmission; however, longitudinal tracking is necessary to determine whether such pedagogical interventions can sustain students’ cultural identity, learning persistence, and continued engagement with Bai musical heritage over time.

However, specific challenges remain. While the Piano provided accessibility and structural clarity, it may risk homogenizing the fluid rhythmic and timbral nuances of Bai folk music. This echoes concerns raised in comparative scholarship, where adaptation into Western notation may inadvertently constrain interpretative flexibility (Yang, 2020). To address this limitation, pedagogical strategies should emphasize flexible tempo (*rubato*), nuanced articulation, and pedaling techniques to approximate traditional vocal phrasing and instrumental timbres. Additionally, incorporating ensemble practices such as combining piano with traditional instruments like the *sanxian* or bamboo flute can help restore timbral diversity and reinforce cultural authenticity. Although informants in this study affirmed the authenticity of the Piano arrangements, future research should critically assess the extent to which such adaptations reshape cultural meanings in performance and reception contexts. In this sense, the study is consistent with theories of musical heritagization, which stress the tension between preservation and transformation (Norton & Matsumoto, 2018).

The methodological design, particularly the combination of fieldwork and experimental teaching, proved effective in capturing both cultural depth and pedagogical outcomes. Yet, as acknowledged, the sample size of 40 undergraduate students limits the generalizability of findings. Larger-scale studies across multiple universities would allow for comparative insights into how students from diverse backgrounds respond to similar adaptations. Additionally, expanding the repertoire beyond Bai folk songs to include music of other ethnic groups, such as Miao or Tibetan traditions, would further test the adaptability of Piano as a pedagogical medium in multicultural settings (Cai et al., 2025). Future research should also prioritize the development of comprehensive instructional resources, including standardized curricula, annotated scores, and pedagogical guidelines, alongside longitudinal study designs that monitor learning outcomes and cultural engagement over extended periods.

## CONCLUSION

This study makes a significant contribution to both ethnomusicology and music education by showing how Piano-based curriculum design can serve as a powerful tool for cultural preservation and student learning. The integration of Bai ethnic folk songs into Piano pedagogy demonstrates that traditional music can be effectively revitalized within contemporary teaching contexts. Such an approach not only ensures that endangered repertoires like Bai Yue Liang Bai Jiejie are kept alive but also enriches the educational experience by providing students with repertoire that is musically challenging, culturally meaningful, and emotionally engaging. These outcomes are consistent with theoretical frameworks such as culturally responsive teaching, which emphasize connecting instruction to students' cultural backgrounds (McKoy & Lind, 2022), as well as transculturation, where traditions evolve through cross-cultural adaptation (Tang, 2021).

At the same time, the research highlights ongoing challenges. Questions of authenticity, whether adaptations in Western notation fully capture the fluidity and timbre of Bai folk songs, remain important considerations. Likewise, scalability is an issue: the study involved a relatively small student group,

and further research is needed to confirm these findings across larger and more diverse contexts. Nevertheless, the results open important directions for future work. Longitudinal studies could examine the lasting impact of such curriculum innovations, while the creation of teaching materials could support broader implementation. Moreover, digital technologies such as augmented reality offer new ways to increase accessibility and enhance learning (Hafner & Čerňanský, 2024). Ultimately, the Piano serves not only as an instrument of performance but as a bridge linking cultural heritage with modern educational practice.

## IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study provide important implications for music education, curriculum development, and cultural heritage preservation. The integration of Bai ethnic folk song adaptations into Piano pedagogy demonstrates that traditional music can be effectively embedded within formal curricula, offering a practical pathway to enhance both cultural literacy and student engagement. This approach suggests that educators should expand beyond Western-centric repertoires and incorporate culturally diverse materials into teaching practices. Furthermore, the development of structured instructional resources, including graded Piano scores, annotated materials, and lesson plans, is essential to support wider and more consistent implementation. The study also highlights the value of culturally responsive pedagogy in fostering students' motivation, identity, and emotional connection to music learning. In a broader context, these findings indicate that adapting traditional music into contemporary educational formats can serve as a sustainable strategy for preserving intangible cultural heritage. Educational institutions and policymakers should therefore encourage interdisciplinary collaboration and the integration of digital technologies to further enhance accessibility, dissemination, and long-term cultural transmission.

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