



# Analysis of Teachers' Cognition and Influence on Music Education and Aesthetic Learning under the Double Reduction Policy in Zaozhuang City

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## ABSTRACT

The influence of the Double Reduction Policy on music education quality and the integration of aesthetic learning necessitated an in-depth examination into music teachers' experiences, views, and adaptations within the shifting educational landscape. This qualitative study's aim was to explore the complex interactions between pedagogy, policy dynamics, cognition, and aesthetic learning in the context of music education. The study sought to investigate how music educators in Zaozhuang City's primary and secondary schools managed policy changes while fostering aesthetic learning experiences against the backdrop of the Double Reduction Policy. A qualitative technique was used in this study, including targeted sampling of 25 music teachers from various schools. To investigate instructors' attitudes, beliefs, and instructional practices, semi-structured interviews were undertaken. Thematic analysis was used to uncover patterns in the obtained data, allowing for a thorough comprehension of the complex interplay between policy, cognition, and education. The study showed the complex interactions between policy requirements, instructors' cognitive environments, and the quest of aesthetic learning experiences. The results demonstrated how teachers were able to adjust their teaching methods while fostering aesthetic dimensions through interactive discussions and project-based homework. The study adds theoretical insights by demonstrating sociocultural dynamics inside educational contexts, where governmental requirements collide with personal values, influencing instructional choices. Practical implications underscore the necessity of individualized professional development in providing techniques for effective music education despite policy constraints. The paper suggests directions for future research, including longitudinal studies tracking the long-term effects of policy changes on music education.

**Keywords:** Aesthetic Learning, Double Reduction Policy, Teachers' Cognition, Music Education, Teachers.

## INTRODUCTION

Global education systems have seen substantial changes in recent years as a result of policies aiming at accomplishing specific aims. Among these programs, the Double Reduction Policy has gotten a lot of attention because of its varied impact on different sectors of education. Music education, which plays a key role in encouraging creativity, critical thinking, and aesthetic appreciation among pupils, is one sector substantially impacted by such regulation. The introduction of the Double Reduction Policy, which aims to reduce both academic and extracurricular obligations on students, indicates a significant shift in educational goals (Ding & Hu, 2022). This policy aims to provide a balanced learning environment that supports holistic development by

limiting the quantity of homework and off-campus activities. Because this policy aims to improve students' learning experiences, its ramifications extend beyond academic topics to include artistic and aesthetic realms such as music instruction (Jin, Wang, & Huang, 2023).

A special position in the curriculum is reserved for music education, which gives children the chance to explore their creativity, develop cognitive skills, and gain knowledge of many cultures. Students can interact with feelings and experiences that are beyond the scope of language alone through music (Petrie, 2022). The incorporation of aesthetic learning, in which students interact passionately with beauty and artistic expression, also promotes students' personal development and fosters a love of the arts that lasts a lifetime. It is significant to see into how the Double Reduction Policy's alterations affect music education and the advancement of aesthetic learning experiences because it is presently being implemented (Dai, 2023). This study intends to shed light on the perspectives of music teachers in Zaozhuang City by investigating how their thought processes and instructional choices relate to the objectives of the policy and influence the students' learning paths (Yu & Leung, 2019). Institutes may better comprehend the difficulties and opportunities presented by the Double Reduction Policy and how it affects the rich fabric of music education and aesthetic learning by examining this complex relationship.

Policies have an important role in defining students' educational experiences and influencing educators' practices in today's dynamic educational landscape. The Double Reduction Policy, a significant advance in educational policy, has ushered in a paradigm shift in teaching and learning by attempting to establish a balance between academic rigor and students' overall well-being (Yang, Jiang, & Pan, 2020). As this strategy takes root, it is critical to understand its consequences for music education and how well it corresponds with the goals of generating aesthetic learning experiences. The fundamental goals of the Double Reduction Policy, which are to relieve students' academic burdens and promote a healthy lifestyle, surely influence the content, intensity, and distribution of instructional time across disciplines (Chou et al., 2022). However, the precise effects of this approach on music education, an artistic realm centered on creative expression and aesthetic knowledge, necessitate further investigation. How have the reduced workload and extracurricular changes impacted the breadth and depth of music education? What new problems and opportunities have emerged for music educators as they navigate this new environment? Answering these questions sheds light not only on the policy's impact on music education but also on the broader implications for arts education within the current educational paradigm.

It is crucial for teachers to translate educational policies into relevant classroom experiences in order to mitigate their negative consequences. Their cognitive processes, ideas, and perceptions influence how they perceive policy instructions and choose instructional strategies (Lu, Zhou, & Wei, 2022). In light of the Double Reduction Policy, it is critical to comprehend the cognitive elements that influence music teachers' choices. How do their views on the function of aesthetic education and music education compare to or differ from the goals of the policy? How can they modify their instructional strategies to meet the changing requirements of their pupils while ensuring that they have enriching artistic experiences? Examining these cognitive dynamics sheds light on the complex interaction between policy goals and educators' real-world experiences (Ewing, 2023). This study attempts to explore the subtleties of the Double Reduction Policy's impact on music instruction and aesthetic learning in light of these factors. This study aims to understand the complex relationships between policy, cognitive processes, and instructional choices among music teachers in Zaozhuang City by examining their thought processes and instructional choices. **Table 1** shows the research questions and objectives of the study.

**Table 1.** Research Questions and Research Objectives

Research Questions (RQ)	Research Objectives (RO)
1. What effect does the Double Reduction Policy have on music education and aesthetic learning in elementary and secondary schools, according to teachers?	1. To investigate and assess teachers' perspectives on the Double Reduction Policy's impact on music teaching and aesthetic learning in elementary and secondary schools in Zaozhuang City.
2. What underlying assumptions, attitudes, and conceptual frameworks do teachers have about aesthetic learning and how it fits into the music curriculum?	2. To comprehend the mental models, worldviews, and attitudes of teachers regarding aesthetic education and its function in the music curriculum.
3. Under the framework of the Double Reduction Policy, how do teachers impact students' participation and performance in music education?	3. To examine and document the various strategies, methods, and pedagogical approaches used by instructors to improve students' engagement and performance in music education in light of the Double Reduction Policy.

Research Questions (RQ)	Research Objectives (RO)
	4. To determine the external and internal influences on the practices, convictions, and choices made by music teachers in relation to music education and aesthetic learning.

This study is important for understanding how the Double Reduction Policy impacts the quality of music education. This study gives insight into the possible costs and advantages of educational policy changes by investigating how this policy influences music education and aesthetic learning. The results may help educators, administrators, and educational officials understand the complex impacts of policy changes on the standard of music education. The results of this research can help make policies that include robust arts education in schools. Understanding the cognitive processes that influence the instructional decisions of music instructors is indispensable to the field of education. This study examines the beliefs, attitudes, and cognitive frameworks of instructors to provide a unique perspective on the pedagogical decisions made in response to policy changes. These cognitive dynamics can serve as a foundation for teacher professional development initiatives based on the insights obtained from examining them. Understanding how their colleagues navigate the intersection of policy objectives, personal beliefs, and effective teaching practices can benefit educators. In expansion, the consideration contributes to a broader understanding of how teachers adjust and innovate in arrangement environments that are constrained. In essence, the significance of this study extends beyond its immediate context because it provides insights that have the potential to influence educational policies and practices locally and beyond. By elucidating the effects of the Double Reduction Policy on music education and aesthetic learning, and by revealing the cognitive foundations of teachers' instructional strategies, this research contributes to the ongoing improvement of educational experiences for students and teachers. The findings of this study have the potential to spark discussion, inform decision-making, and promote positive change in music education and beyond.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview of the Double Reduction Policy

The Double Reduction Policy was developed in response to growing concerns about students' educational options in China. The Chinese government made the choice to put this regulation into effect as it became more and more clear how taxing the academic load was as well as the pervasive effects that extracurricular tutoring had on students' lives (Jin et al., 2023). It was implemented in a series of phases, each of which was designed to solve these issues and build a more balanced and thorough educational environment. The impact of the Double Reduction Policy on Chinese education is driven by a series of detailed goals (Dai, 2023). One of its primary goals is to alleviate the immense academic strain that children have been subjected to. The policy aims to create a more favorable environment for student's mental and physical well-being by reducing the quantity of homework provided and putting less focus on rote learning (Miao, Zhu, Zhou, & Zhang, 2023). This modification aims to reduce the prevalence of stress-related issues that students frequently confront and, as a result, improve their overall quality of life. The policy's advancement of a more comprehensive approach to education could be a key objective. This calls for a conscious change away from the exaggerated emphasis on academic accomplishments. The policy thus gives students the opportunity to partake in extracurricular activities, hobbies, and pursuits that advance their personal development (Shiratori et al., 2022). This focus on providing students with a more well-rounded education aims to foster abilities like creativity, emotional intelligence, and social interaction that are essential for students' overall growth.

Another aspect of the Double Reduction Policy that tries to be addressed is educational equity. The regulation acknowledges the inequities that frequently occur as a result of private extracurricular tutoring, which is more readily available to students from privileged families. The goal of the policy is to level the playing field by reducing the need for such coaching and guaranteeing that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed academically and access educational resources without unfair advantage (Daumiller & Dresel, 2023). Furthermore, the policy serves as a catalyst for rethinking teaching methodologies. The use of conventional, teacher-centered approaches that emphasize memorizing and exam preparation is strongly discouraged. Instead, the policy encourages the adoption of more engaging, student-centered teaching strategies that foster critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and subject-matter understanding in students (Skulmowski, 2023). The Double Reduction Policy has repercussions in many areas of education in China. School curricula are being reevaluated to correspond with policy goals, which may result in a shift in focus from rote memorization to practical application and interdisciplinary links (Von Roten & De Roten, 2023). Pedagogical innovation is encouraged, encouraging

educators to experiment with more interactive instructional strategies that actively involve students and stimulate their creativity (Dos Santos, Loke, Yacef, & Martinez-Maldonado, 2022). Furthermore, assessment methodologies are on the verge of transitioning from traditional exam-centric evaluations to more comprehensive assessments that take into account students' holistic growth, practical abilities, and conceptual understanding.

### **Theoretical Perspectives on Teachers' Cognition and Influence**

Cognitive theories have long been used to explain how people acquire, analyze, and apply knowledge. When applied to the subject of education, these theories provide significant new understandings of the mental operations that affect instructors' attitudes, decisions, and teaching methods (Ong'ayi, Dede Yildirim, & Roopnarine, 2020). Cognitive theories offer a prism through which to view the learning process and make pedagogical judgments in the field of music education. According to Piaget's constructivist approach, for instance, people actively create knowledge through interactions with their surroundings. When applied to music education, this theory emphasizes the significance of hands-on, experiential learning, which allows students to connect with musical concepts and build their own knowledge (Fathi, Derakhshan, & Torabi, 2020). Understanding how constructivist principles are used in teaching methods by music teachers will help us better understand how to create meaningful, individualized learning experiences for our students.

Teachers' beliefs and practices are not developed in a vacuum; rather, they are profoundly rooted in sociocultural contexts. The sociocultural theory of Vygotsky emphasizes the importance of social interactions and cultural factors in determining cognitive development (Fondo & Gómez-Rey, 2021). This theory, when applied to music education, emphasizes how instructors' activities are influenced by the cultural values they defend and the communities in which they work. Sociocultural variables take center stage in the framework of the Double Reduction policy, as teachers attempt to strike a compromise between governmental requirements and their own educational beliefs (Jia, Bi, Zhu, & Fang, 2023). Teachers' personal values, cultural standards, and professional groups all have an impact on how they interpret and react to policy changes. Examining these sociocultural influences reveals the intricate interaction between external policy frameworks and the cognitive processes of teachers.

### **Music Education and Aesthetic Learning Theories**

Aesthetic experiences play an important role in music education, building a stronger bond between students and the art form. According to aesthetic theory, engaging in beauty and artistic expression promotes human growth, emotional development, and cognitive enhancement (Horng & Hsu, 2020). Aesthetics in music education focus more than technical skill acquisition; they urge students to explore music's emotional and expressive qualities (Shih, 2020). Aesthetic experiences transcend the basic acquisition of musical procedures for music students. Students are encouraged to interpret, connect with, and gain meaning from musical works through these encounters. Music's emotional resonance engages pupils on a deep level, cultivating not only their musical abilities but also their whole sense of creativity and empathy (Olaussen, 2022). Understanding how music educators promote aesthetic experiences while adhering to educational rules is therefore critical to guaranteeing a well-rounded and enriching music education.

Teachers are essential in fostering students' aesthetic growth and helping them recognize that music is a transcendent art form. Music educators are curators of artistic experiences rather than just imparters of musical knowledge. Teachers broaden students' perspectives and help them understand the nuanced intricacies of music by exposing them to a variety of musical genres, styles, and historical settings (Özenç-Ira, 2023). Teachers serve as interpreters, assisting pupils in understanding the emotional themes weaved within musical pieces. By asking students to consider musical structures, instrumentation, and thematic components, they promote critical thinking. Teachers provide forums for pupils to communicate their interpretations and develop their aesthetic engagement through group projects and conversations (Byma & Lycette, 2023). The Double Reduction Policy makes the jobs of music teachers even more crucial. Teachers must expertly blend the technical components of music education with the development of aesthetic experiences due to possible time constraints (Jin et al., 2023). Due to time constraints, this calls for creative teaching strategies that encourage student involvement and emotional connection.

### **Previous Research on Teachers' Cognition in Music Education**

Previous studies have looked into teachers' cognition in the context of policy changes, providing insights into how educators perceive and respond to changes in educational frameworks. Several studies have been conducted to study how teachers interpret policy efforts and how well they connect with their professional values and classroom practices (Mannarelli & Serrano, 2022). These studies have looked at teachers' reactions to policies aimed at curriculum reform, assessment modifications, and pedagogical shifts in the context of music education. For example, studies have looked into how music teachers deal with governmental changes that prioritize



standardized testing or shift curriculum emphases. Such research has emphasized the difficulties that might exist between regulatory mandates and educators' aspirations of encouraging artistic expression and innovation (Hutton et al., 2017). These studies help to understand how policy changes are accepted and transformed into practical tactics in music classrooms by unearthing instructors' perceptions.

A recurrent subject in educational research is understanding the many elements that influence instructors' instructional decisions. Studies have looked into how teachers' own beliefs, past experiences, professional development, and outside governmental mandates interact to shape the lessons they plan and teach (Al-Husban, 2020). Research has looked at how music educators reconcile the development of musicality and creative expression with the pursuit of technical competence. These studies provide insight into how music educators modify their pedagogical strategies to meet the demands of a varied student body, shifting academic standards, and developing pedagogical paradigms (Després & Dubé, 2020). They also explore how collaborative networks and professional development opportunities affect teachers' ongoing professional development and instructional decisions. Previous research offers insights into the dynamic nature of music education and the cognitive processes influencing teachers' judgments by examining these elements.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development as a Lens for Understanding Teachers' Cognition**

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) provides a useful theoretical lens for understanding the complex flow of teachers' cognition inside the framework of educational practices. The ZPD, a cornerstone of sociocultural theory, holds that learners are most receptive to new concepts and abilities when they are given scaffolding - instruction and support from a more educated individual, typically a teacher or mentor (Bozorgian & Fakhri Alamdari, 2018). The ZPD is extended in this study to investigate not only students' learning processes but also the cognitive journey of music teachers as they navigate legislative changes and strive to build aesthetic learning experiences. Teachers, like mentors, are essential in assisting students through their own cognitive ZPDs (Cooper & Lavie, 2021). They tailor their instructional tactics to students' present levels of comprehension while also challenging them to reach higher levels of cognitive development. This study analyzes how music educators interpret and respond to the aims of the Double Reduction Policy while ensuring that aesthetic learning remains an intrinsic aspect of music education by applying the ZPD to instructors' cognition (Makini, Oguntola, & Roy, 2020). The theory illuminates how teachers, like scaffolds, strike a fine balance between policy mandates and their own instructional goals. The study attempts to reveal the cognitive processes by which music teachers scaffold their students' aesthetic and musical progress using this theoretical framework, even within the limits of policy-driven changes.

#### **Analyzing Teachers' Cognition within the Sociocultural Context**

As a cultural artifact, the Double Reduction Policy molds the ideals and requirements that direct instructors' judgment. Policy influences how teachers understand the aims, restrictions, and possibilities within their professional area as a cultural component. Teachers' cognition is crucial in determining their instructional judgments in the Sociocultural setting (Wolf & McCoy, 2019). This approach addresses the complex relationship between teachers' cognitive processes - their beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions - and the classroom practices they use. The policy aims and limits that teachers perceive influence the instructional methods they choose, the curriculum they develop, and the interactions they cultivate with their students. The framework investigates how music teachers strike a difficult balance between policy aims and the preservation of aesthetic learning experiences through this viewpoint (Catala, Gijlers, & Visser, 2022). It studies how teachers' opinions about the value of music education and aesthetic involvement influence their instructional decisions. This concept illuminates the nuanced ways educators adapt and innovate within the sociocultural setting by connecting the connections between teachers' cognitive processes and their instructional techniques.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The research design for this study used a qualitative approach in recognition of the necessity for a thorough investigation of instructors' cognition, instructional practices, and the impact of the Double Reduction Policy on music education and aesthetic learning. A qualitative technique proved ideal for capturing teachers' complex, context-bound experiences and identifying the underlying motives, beliefs, and decision-making processes that drove their practices. The study was able to go beyond surface-level descriptions thanks to qualitative research, allowing for a better understanding of the intricate interplay between governmental mandates, instructors'

cognitive processes, and instructional practices. The study intended to understand the complexities of how music teachers navigated the educational landscape under the influence of the Double Reduction Policy through open-ended dialogues. The qualitative approach recognized that instructors' cognitive processes and instructional decisions were influenced by a variety of factors and accepted the complexity of human experiences. The study attempted to unearth the delicate threads that knitted together policy, culture, cognition, and instruction by taking this method, contributing to a more holistic understanding of the role of music educators within the changing educational landscape.

### Selection of Participants

The study stressed the need to reflect a variety of educational situations within the scope of the investigation. To achieve this, a purposeful sample technique was used, ensuring that music teachers from a variety of elementary and secondary schools in Zaozhuang City were included. This strategy ensured that the study included a diverse range of educational settings, each with its unique set of issues, resources, and student populations. The variables that could have impacted teachers' comprehension, instructional strategies, and responses to the Double Reduction Policy such as age, gender, teaching experience, and music specialty were carefully taken into account within the purposive sample framework. Participants were recruited to represent a range of teaching experience levels. The responses of both seasoned educators and more recent teachers to the policy changes were revealed, as well as how their backgrounds affected their responses. Music teachers' specialties, such as vocal, instrumental, or music theory, were examined (**Table 2**). Different specialties may lead to various viewpoints on how aesthetic learning and the Double Reduction Policy are integrated. The survey included teachers from a variety of schools, including public and private institutions. The resources available, the dynamics in the classroom, and the overall teaching strategies may all be impacted by the educational context of different school types.

### Data Collection Methods

This study used semi-structured interviews to acquire data from music educators about how the Double Reduction Policy affects music instruction and aesthetic learning. Instructors shared their thoughts on policy-driven changes, attitudes, and decision-making in these interviews. The semi-structured interviews provided for flexibility and focus. Interview questions addressed key research objectives by asking teachers about the regulation's effects on music instruction, their aesthetic learning ideas, and how they solved the law's challenges. However, the open-ended style encouraged participants to expound and share unexpected insights. Researchers empathized with teachers, listened to their stories, delved deeper, and encouraged them to reflect. This method allowed for a thorough examination of the intricacies that underpin teachers' cognitive processes and instructional decisions. Semi-structured interviews provided a window into the human aspect of policy implementation by illuminating the contextual, professional, and personal elements that influenced teachers' responses.

**Table 2.** Demographic Profile of Respondents

Participant	Age	Gender	Teaching Experience	Music Specialty
P1	32	Female	8 years	Vocal
P2	28	Male	5 years	Instrumental
P3	45	Female	15 years	Choral
P4	37	Male	10 years	Instrumental
P5	29	Female	6 years	Vocal
P6	41	Male	18 years	Choral
P7	35	Female	12 years	Instrumental
P8	31	Male	7 years	Vocal
P9	26	Female	4 years	Instrumental
P10	38	Male	9 years	Choral
P11	30	Female	7 years	Instrumental
P12	43	Male	16 years	Vocal
P13	27	Female	5 years	Instrumental
P14	33	Male	8 years	Choral
P15	36	Female	11 years	Vocal
P16	31	Male	6 years	Instrumental
P17	39	Female	13 years	Choral
P18	28	Male	4 years	Instrumental
P19	42	Female	14 years	Vocal
P20	29	Male	7 years	Choral
P21	34	Female	9 years	Instrumental
P22	44	Male	17 years	Choral

Participant	Age	Gender	Teaching Experience	Music Specialty
P23	30	Female	6 years	Instrumental
P24	40	Male	12 years	Vocal
P25	32	Female	8 years	Choral

### Data Analysis Techniques

The primary data analysis technique for this study was thematic analysis, which enabled a systematic exploration of patterns, themes, and meanings within the data collected from semi-structured interviews. The thematic analysis offered a methodical yet adaptable way to find and decipher the profound truths concealed within the participants' narratives. The following steps were part of the thematic analysis process:

Step 1: Familiarization with the Data: Researchers immersed themselves in the data, studying interview transcripts and observation notes to get a thorough knowledge of the material.

Step 2: Creating Initial Codes: By spotting and naming recurrent themes, topics, and patterns in the text, researchers methodically coded the data. In order to capture the spirit of each unit, codes were assigned once the data were divided up into meaningful units.

Step 3: Finding Themes: The codes were divided into potential themes that represented significant trends in the data. Themes emerged spontaneously as researchers searched for connections between codes that represented similar concepts.

Step 4: Reviewing and Defining Themes: The selected themes were assessed and modified by researchers to ensure that they accurately reflected the data's substance and context. This level focused on comparing and contrasting ideas and their connections.

Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes: The fundamental ideas that each theme represented were captured in its creation and naming. Each theme supplied an intensive draw close of the underlying patterns in the information and a set of applications to go together with it.

Step 6: Interpretation and Analysis: Researchers investigated how the themes relate to the research aims, questions, and theoretical framework in order to generate useful findings. This approach involves interpreting the themes in light of the research's key objectives.

Step 7: Reporting Findings: The results were presented as a logical story that highlighted the themes and their effects. It was standard procedure to use quotes from participant interviews to clarify and reinforce the principles.

## RESULTS

### Teachers' Interpretations of the Double Reduction Policy's Impact on Music Education

The findings of this research provide a compelling window into how track educators perceive and react to the effects of the Double Reduction Policy on the field of music education. Comprehensive viewpoints developed through the lens of in-depth interviews and careful observations, each illuminating the intricate threads of teachers' cognitive processes and professional experiences. A recurring issue in these accounts concerned the policy's desire to create a harmonious balance between hard academics and students' general well-being. While many teachers expressed satisfaction with the reduced burden brought about by the legislation, others expressed concern about the potential trade-offs for music education. A reoccurring theme exposed the conflict between legislative goals and educational aspirations: how to fit comprehensive music instruction into the confines of condensed class time. Shifts in instructional priorities were noticeable as teachers wrestled with the new paradigm. Some highlighted a curriculum reorganization to focus on fundamental musical concepts, a required adaptation within the changed terrain. However, this restructuring occasionally came at the expense of certain aspects of aesthetic learning. Nonetheless, despite these obstacles, instructors demonstrated remarkable creativity by devising strategies to incorporate aesthetic experiences into their instruction. This inventiveness spanned from utilizing technology to coordinating extracurricular events, all of which were in line with the policy's objective.

Teachers showed a variety of responses while navigating these limitations, which required a fine balance. While some cleverly employed technology to allow additional learning outside of regular classroom settings, others struggled to maintain the depth of musical inquiry and creative expression that they saw as essential for complete student development. Teachers developed specialized strategies in the midst of these complicated

dynamics, each one carefully calibrated to the particular requirements of their students and governed by their own pedagogical ideals (**Table 3**). Project-based assignments that encouraged aesthetic engagement outside of the classroom became a frequent technique. Others supported interactive debates that aimed to foster meaningful musical experiences under the constraints of limited instructional time. Importantly, many teachers expressed a wish to advocate for the importance of aesthetic learning in the larger dialogue on educational policy. In order to maintain the core principles of comprehensive music education in the face of policy-driven changes, their stories resoundingly repeated a demand for open dialogue with politicians.

**Table 3.** Themes Related to Teachers' Interpretations of the Double Reduction Policy's Impact on Music Education

Theme	Description
Striking a Balance	The policy's goal of striking a balance between academic demands and student well-being is acknowledged by teachers.
Restructuring of Priorities	Teachers reorganize instructional priorities, concentrating on essential skills while addressing time constraints.
Navigating Constraints	To maintain a broad education, teachers navigate constraints using technology and creative solutions.
Individualized Approaches	Teachers adapt individualized strategies in accordance with student requirements and the Double Reduction Policy's objectives.
Need for Advocacy	Teachers realize their advocacy role and urge for open communication in order to preserve comprehensive education.

### Identified Cognitive Factors Influencing Teachers' Approaches to Aesthetic Learning

A complex array of cognitive elements that provided insight into the complex ways these educators handle the interplay between aesthetic learning and the environment outlined by the Double Reduction Policy appeared among the diverse narratives given by music teachers. Teachers' unshakable ideas about the fundamental relevance of aesthetics in education are at the center of their cognitive landscapes. This repeating thread revealed a shared belief that aesthetic experiences are essential to students' overall development. The concept that aesthetics fosters not just creativity and emotional expression, but also a deeper connection with the subject matter, is embedded in this cognitive basis. The teachers discovered themselves juggling the demands of policy mandates with their passionate desire to foster artistic learning experiences. The struggle to sustain profoundly held values while harmonizing them with the practical limitations imposed by educational rules was made clear by this internal debate. A broader view arose among these cognitive currents, seeing aesthetics as a gateway to the cultural and emotional components of music. This viewpoint informed teachers' strategic decisions about including aesthetic learning experiences in their instructional fabric. It was a cognitive alignment based on the idea that aesthetics can help students have a better understanding of music's historical, cultural, and emotional aspects, thereby enriching their learning journey (**Table 4**).

Teachers' integration of aesthetic experiences into classes took shape within these cognitive landscapes, bridging the gap between theory and practice. These techniques showed how well cognitive frameworks were woven into the fabric of classroom implementation. The use of interactive talks, a cognitive technique aiming at creating emotional and intellectual connections with music, was a prominent strategy. These talks encouraged students to incorporate their individual views, developing a profound aesthetic affinity. The cognitive premise was to establish an environment in which students could engage on a personal and emotional level with music. Some educators showed cognitive flexibility in reaction to the restrictions of policy by creating assignments that went beyond the confines of the typical classroom. These tasks, which were frequently exploratory or project-based, gave students the freedom to interact with aesthetic experiences at their own speed. This innovative thinking demonstrated teachers' capacity for change and innovation while preserving the core of aesthetic learning.

**Table 4.** Cognitive Factors Influencing Teachers' Approaches to Aesthetic Learning

Cognitive Factor	Description
Teachers Beliefs about the Role of Aesthetics in Education	Deeply ingrained convictions about the intrinsic value of aesthetics in fostering holistic student development.
Tension Between Beliefs and Policy Mandates	The cognitive struggle to reconcile the desire to cultivate aesthetic experiences with the constraints of policy directives.
Aesthetic Learning as a Cultural and	Perception of aesthetics as a conduit to the cultural and emotional



Cognitive Factor	Description
Emotional Gateway	dimensions of music, shaping strategic integration.
Strategies for Emotional Engagement	Cognitive utilization of interactive discussions to foster emotional and intellectual connections with music.
Adaptability within Policy Constraints	Cognitive agility in crafting assignments that extend beyond traditional boundaries, preserving aesthetic learning.

### Teachers' Adaptations and Strategies

As the Double Reduction Policy went into effect in Zaozhuang City, music educators were forced to rethink their teaching methods and find techniques to maintain the quality of music education while complying with the policy's criteria. These adjustments occurred across multiple dimensions, eventually changing their pedagogical landscape (**Table 5**).

#### Innovative Pedagogical Approaches

Due to fewer class hours, music teachers showed a surprising propensity for innovative pedagogy. The traditional lecture-heavy and textbook-based teaching methods were augmented with innovative and engaging methods. To add dynamism to their classes, educators used digital technologies, multimedia resources, and virtual learning environments. Through the use of visual and audio assistance, this technological integration not only captivated the interest of the students but also helped them learn music theory in greater depth. Additionally, project-based learning has proven to be a powerful approach, permitting students to become absolutely immersed in song-related duties that are for collaboration, essential questioning, and problem-solving abilities. This shift away from memorization gave children a sense of independence and encouraged a sincere passion for music outside of the classroom.

#### Collaborative Efforts among Music Teachers

The Double Reduction Policy ushered in a paradigm shift in how music teachers interacted. Educators transcended disciplinary boundaries in order to optimize instructional time and resources. Collaborations between music professors and their counterparts in other courses have grown in popularity. This interdisciplinary approach not only enhanced students' learning experiences by illustrating the interconnectivity of numerous topics, but it also allowed music to be effortlessly integrated into students' holistic education. Aside from multidisciplinary cooperation, music professors collaborated on lesson planning and co-teaching, harnessing their total knowledge to manage the policy's complexities. Despite policy limits, this collaborative culture generated a sense of unity among educators and emphasized their commitment to providing a well-rounded education.

#### Professional Development and Learning Communities

Music educators realized the need for their professional development given the changes taking place in the educational world. Workshops, seminars, and online courses have become crucial venues for honing teaching techniques and adopting cutting-edge practices. These possibilities gave teachers exposure to cutting-edge techniques while also inspiring them to try out novel teaching methods. Additionally, teacher-learning communities have developed into thriving centers for information sharing. These groups provided a forum for open talks regarding the difficulties the policy presented, giving teachers a chance to exchange effective tactics, get suggestions, and together come up with solutions. This environment of constant learning and cooperation improved the quality of music instruction overall while also boosting the morale of the teaching staff.

**Table 5.** Teachers' Adaptations and Strategies

<b>Adaptation and Strategy</b>
<b>Innovative Pedagogical Approaches</b>
Music teachers utilized multimedia resources, technology, and virtual platforms to create dynamic and engaging lessons.
Integration of project-based learning encouraged critical thinking and collaborative skills among students.
Departure from traditional lecture-style teaching in favor of interactive and experiential methods.
<b>Collaborative Efforts among Music Teachers</b>
Music educators embraced interdisciplinary collaborations with teachers from other subjects to enhance cross-disciplinary learning.
Joint lesson planning and co-teaching allowed educators to collectively address challenges posed by the policy.
Strengthened professional relationships and unity among music teachers through collaborative initiatives.
<b>Professional Development and Learning Communities</b>
Participation in workshops, seminars, and online courses enabled music teachers to refine teaching techniques and explore innovative strategies.
Engagement in teacher-learning communities provided a platform for mutual support, idea exchange, and problem-solving.
Cultivation of a culture of continuous learning and collaboration among music educators contributed to professional growth.

## DISCUSSION

A powerful lens for understanding the complex relationships between cognitive development, social interactions, the effects of policy, and aesthetic learning in music education is provided by the exploration of findings within the framework of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Kantar, Ezzeddine, & Rizk, 2020). The premise that learners can complete tasks beyond their autonomous capacities when guided and assisted by more competent individuals or peers is central to Vygotsky's ZPD. This fundamental idea is echoed in the tactics used by music teachers to include aesthetic experiences in their instruction. The study's engaging conversations, project-based assignments, and creative adaptations are examples of teachers acting as "more knowledgeable others," scaffolded support that enables students' engagement with aesthetics (Ferguson, van den Broek, & van Oostendorp, 2022). This method is consistent with Vygotsky's idea of leading learners through their ZPD, assisting them in reaching levels of knowledge and engagement that they would not have achieved on their own.

Additionally, the cognitive conflict brought on by teachers' perceptions of aesthetic importance and the restrictions imposed by policy directives mirrors Vygotsky's idea of the "potential development level." The cognitive landscapes of teachers demonstrate their awareness of the possible advantages of aesthetic learning opportunities for students' overall development (Velychko & Li, 2022). However, the realities dictated by policy make it difficult for them to completely adopt and put these principles into practice. This cognitive dissonance is similar to Vygotsky's theory that learners have a "zone of potential development," a space where guided interactions can help them achieve goals that are just outside of their current scope of competence. Similar to students, teachers are negotiating the expanse of educational possibility while attempting to balance their appreciation of the significance of aesthetic encounters with the restrictions imposed by legal requirements (Han, 2010). Vygotsky's emphasis on the dynamic interaction between cognition and the sociocultural milieu and the complicated interplay between instructors' cognitive processes, policy influences, and the promotion of aesthetic learning are perfectly in line with one another (Gauvain, 2020). The results show that teachers play a key role in putting the ZPD's tenets into practice as active participants in the educational system. Teachers exemplify the core of guided development that Vygotsky's theory promotes by purposefully integrating aesthetic experiences and responding to policy-driven obstacles.

### Research Objectives Discussion

The study's four research objectives (ROs) come together to offer a thorough examination of the complex interactions between pedagogy, cognition, policy, and aesthetic learning within the field of music education. Each objective offers a distinctive viewpoint that helps to illuminate the intricate environment in which music teachers function and make decisions about how to teach.

1. Investigating Teachers' Perspectives on the Impact of Double Reduction Policy: RO 1 investigates the perspectives of music instructors regarding the impact of the Double Reduction Policy on aesthetic learning and music instruction. The findings demonstrate educators' multifaceted responses to policy mandates, encompassing both positive and problematic aspects. Teachers' perspectives develop as a tapestry of nuanced reactions as a result of in-depth interviews and observations. Some teachers support the policy's goal of striking a balance between academic rigor and student well-being, while others are concerned about the potential trade-offs for music instruction. This goal reveals teachers' intricate cognitive landscape as they navigate the policy-driven world, providing insights into how educators respond to and make sense of policy changes in their teaching environments. A reoccurring theme exposed the conflict between legislative goals and educational aspirations: how to fit comprehensive music instruction into the confines of condensed class time.

2. Comprehending Teachers' Mental Models and Attitudes towards Aesthetic Education: The second RO delves into the world of music teachers' cognition in an effort to understand their worldviews, mental models, and attitudes toward aesthetic education. The research sheds light on the mental models that guide instructors' instructional decisions. The importance of aesthetics as a vehicle for creativity, emotional expression, and cultural awareness is highlighted by teachers' beliefs in its significance. Their choices and methods for including aesthetic experiences in the curriculum are influenced by these cognitive underpinnings. The consistency between teachers' cognitive assumptions and their instructional strategies emphasizes the importance of individual attitudes and worldviews in determining how pupils learn to appreciate art.

3. Documenting Pedagogical Approaches in Light of the Double Reduction Policy: The third RO focuses on the practical, detailing the numerous techniques, methods, and pedagogical approaches used by music teachers to improve student engagement and performance while adhering to the Double Reduction Policy. The findings highlight educators' resourcefulness in adapting to policy limitations while still giving opportunities for aesthetic experiences. As techniques for bridging the gap between governmental mandates and aesthetic learning objectives, project-based assignments, interactive dialogues, and creative adaptations emerge. This goal provides a real peek into the instructional choices instructors make and the unique approaches they use to expand music education despite policy direction obstacles.

4. Determining Influences on Teachers' Practices and Choices: In the fourth RO, the focus is widened to examine both internal and external factors that affect teachers' practices, convictions, and decisions related to music instruction and aesthetic learning. The findings provide light on a complicated web of elements such as innovative pedagogical approaches, collaborative efforts among music teachers and professional development and learning communities, ranging from institutional frameworks and policy mandates to individual values and professional experiences. The study reveals how these variables interact dynamically, illuminating the fine line that teachers walk in their effort to deliver a comprehensive music education. This goal presents a comprehensive view of the environment in which music teachers function, emphasizing the sociocultural setting that influences their decision-making.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the complex dynamics of music education in the context of the Double Reduction Policy in Zaozhuang. The study aims to discover the intricate interplay between policy, cognition, and the fostering of aesthetic learning experiences through a qualitative analysis of teachers' views, attitudes, and instructional practices. The results shed light on the various perspectives music teachers held regarding the Double Reduction Policy's effects on music education. While some teachers dealt with the difficulties by focusing on quality over quantity, others expressed anxiety about fulfilling policy objectives without sacrificing aesthetic learning. The difficulties in striking a balance between instructional principles and policy requirements were made clear by this nuanced assessment. Further investigation demonstrated the cognitive elements influencing teachers' methods of integrating aesthetic learning. Teachers' approaches to incorporating creativity, emotional engagement, and personal expression into their courses were influenced by their views on the role of aesthetics in education. These tactics included collaborative projects, cross-cultural comparisons, and experiential exercises that demonstrated educators' flexibility in producing significant aesthetic experiences. The results of the study were analyzed using Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development as a framework, emphasizing how teachers' scaffolding and mentoring responsibilities are complementary. The dynamic interplay between policy, cognition, and instructional choices paralleled Vygotsky's theory's emphasis on sociocultural variables. In the end, this study emphasizes the necessity of music instructors' efforts in navigating policy-driven changes while fostering the artistic and aesthetic development of students. The interaction between policy and teachers' cognition highlights the difficulties of

modern education, in which educators serve as bridges between legislative mandates and meaningful learning experiences. This study gives useful insights into the adaptable and creative attitude of music teachers at a time when policy environments are still changing. Their passion for the complete development of their students is shown in their determination to retain the integrity of aesthetic learning experiences within the restrictions of legislative changes. The study advances knowledge of the dynamic forces influencing music education in the contemporary day and adds to the conversation on educational policy, cognition, and instructional practice.

## IMPLICATIONS

### Theoretical Implications

The findings of the research have significant theoretical implications, shedding light on the complex sociocultural dynamics at work in educational settings. This study's convergence of politics, aesthetics, cognition, and pedagogy provides a profound knowledge of how these aspects interact to define the landscape of music education. The study emphasizes music instructors' critical role as interpreters and mediators of policy changes within their particular teaching environments by diving deeply into their cognitive landscapes. This examination of education's dynamic nature as a sociocultural phenomenon emphasizes the complicated interplay between governmental mandates and individual opinions. It graphically shows how these components influence instructional tactics and pave the way for the development of artistic learning experiences that transcend policy constraints.

The investigation of instructors' cognitive frameworks in the study also provides valuable depth to the theoretical implications. The zone of proximal development proposed by Vygotsky is powerfully embodied by the way in which educators internalize directives from policy. This theoretical perspective enlarges the ways in which teachers scaffold their students' learning, actively encouraging their engagement with aesthetic elements even when faced with policy limitations. Therefore, this study goes beyond the obvious and adds to a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of how cognitive processes, policy dynamics, and pedagogical strategies collide and interact within the complex web of educational contexts, ultimately affecting students' experiences and overall development.

### Practical Implications

The practical ramifications of this study are similarly deep, providing valuable insights into encouraging effective music education and aesthetic development within the framework of the Double Reduction Policy. Drawing inspiration from the study's teachers' tactics, numerous practical recommendations arise that might be used to improve the music education experience: To begin, educators might intentionally integrate aesthetic experiences into their teaching methods. Teachers can overcome legislative constraints and provide meaningful learning opportunities by adopting interactive dialogues, technology-driven engagements, and exploration-based projects. Second, the significance of advocacy and cooperation is highlighted. By having open discussions with decision-makers, teachers have the ability to become spokespersons for the preservation of comprehensive music education. Educators can influence legislative conversations and the educational landscape by clearly stating the importance of aesthetic learning in students' overall development. Finally, a flexible approach to curriculum design is required. Curriculum designers can prioritize flexibility, giving teachers the freedom to incorporate aesthetic learning experiences without jeopardizing the time allotted for fundamental courses. The importance of individualized professional development must also be understood. The study emphasizes the dynamic cognitive processes instructors go through as they incorporate aesthetic learning experiences and adjust to policy changes. Customized professional development opportunities can give teachers the tools and techniques they need to creatively work around policy restrictions, assuring the ongoing support of students' aesthetic growth. By supporting teachers' professional development, educational institutions can enable them to successfully bridge the gap between legislative requirements and the bigger-picture objectives of comprehensive music instruction, thereby enhancing students' educational experiences.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

### Limitations

It is important to identify some restrictions that might have affected the study's objectives and conclusions. First off, the 25-participant sample size can be a drawback, perhaps limiting the breadth and variety of viewpoints represented. Although efforts were made to choose participants from a variety of backgrounds, the small number of participants could restrict the depth of the learned insights. Additionally, the replies could have been exposed to some degree of subjectivity due to intrinsic biases in the sample, such as unique teaching philosophies or affiliations. The study's emphasis on a single geographic area, Zaozhuang City, may further limit the study's capacity to generalize its findings to larger educational environments with diverse political dynamics and cultural quirks.

### Future Research

Proposing potential study avenues opens the door to additional exploration and better understanding. Conducting longitudinal research to examine the long-term consequences of policy changes on music education could be one viable avenue. This would require tracking how instructors' techniques and attitudes change over time, as well as how students' experiences and outcomes change in the years after policy implementation. A longitudinal method may want to shed light on the lengthy-term viability and effectiveness of instructors' adaptations, as well as the lengthy-term impact of legislative changes on aesthetic learning. Additionally, expanding the geographic scope of the study can make the results more broadly applicable. Researchers could determine whether the trends seen in Zaozhuang City are consistent or impacted by certain contextual circumstances by analyzing music education and aesthetic learning under similar policy dynamics across other places. It may also be possible to gain a deeper knowledge of how policy directives are implemented in classroom settings and how students view the effects of these changes on their own learning processes by looking at the experiences of students themselves.



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