

Factors Influencing Group Piano Teachers to Incorporate Comprehensive Musicianship for Young Beginners in Northern China

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ABSTRACT

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Comprehensive musicianship, which emphasises the balanced development of technical, aural, creative, and theoretical skills, has become increasingly recognised as essential for fostering well-rounded young musicians. Group piano teaching provides a collaborative environment that supports varied and interconnected musical learning experiences. This study investigates the factors that influence piano teachers to integrate comprehensive musicianship into group lessons for young beginners in China. A qualitative case study design was employed, involving four piano teachers selected through purposeful sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Two major themes emerged from the analysis: perception change and group-settings strategies. On one hand, teachers' willingness to move beyond their conservative learning backgrounds, along with a growing recognition of group instruction as a valid teaching format, as well as parental expectations, contributed to their openness to adopting comprehensive approaches. On the other hand, the group structure itself enabled the use of eclectic teaching methods such as Kodály, Orff, and Dalcroze, which supported the integration of multiple musical skills. At the same time, the structural demands of group teaching, particularly the need for clear, multi-layered lesson planning, further encouraged the inclusion of comprehensive musicianship elements. This study highlights how both perceptual and practical factors interact in shaping teachers' curriculum choices. By examining these themes, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of contemporary piano pedagogy and provide practical insights for curriculum development and teacher training in the Chinese context.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by

examining children's group piano teaching through comprehensive musicianship. This study is one of very few studies which have investigated teachers' perspectives in the Chinese context. The paper's primary contribution is finding that perceptual change and group-enabled strategies jointly shape curriculum decisions.

1. Introduction

Piano instruction for young beginners has traditionally followed the individual lesson model, which remains widely accepted as the most authentic and effective method of teaching. However, group instruction, originating as early as the 19th century, has steadily developed as a pedagogical alternative and supplement to private lessons (Chiu, 2017). During the 20th century, particularly in Western countries, group piano instruction gained prominence alongside the emergence of method books such as *The Oxford Piano Course*, and later, programs inspired by the educational philosophies of Dalcroze, Orff, and Kodály (Huang, 2007; Sundell, 2012). These approaches reflect a broader vision of music education that integrates performance, listening, movement, and creativity, key elements of what is known as comprehensive musicianship.

Comprehensive musicianship is defined as an interdisciplinary approach to music education that promotes the integration of performing, creating, listening, analysing, and discussing music (Willoughby, 2021). It is essential in music learning as it cultivates well-rounded, independent musicians capable of understanding, interpreting, and creating music beyond mere technical proficiency. This philosophy contrasts with traditional private piano lessons, which have often focused narrowly on technical and performance-based outcomes (Kim, 2000). However, group piano settings provide an ideal environment to incorporate comprehensive musicianship. Research has consistently highlighted that group instruction fosters a broad range of musical skills, such as aural discrimination, sight-reading, keyboard harmony, and improvisation (Fisher, 2010; Morrison, 2023; Pike, 2017).

In China, the development of group piano instruction has coincided with broader shifts in educational values. As the country has undergone rapid economic growth, there has been a growing emphasis on children's holistic development, including in the arts. The national push toward "quality education" reflects a desire to move beyond rote learning and cultivate creativity and well-rounded abilities (Tang, 2016). However, tensions remain between these progressive ideals and traditional practices. While increasing parents' hope that piano lessons will support creativity and lifelong musical appreciation, the competitive, exam-driven environment often pushes teachers and parents toward performance-focused goals (Zhang, 2015). Therefore, in the current Chinese context, piano instruction faces both opportunities and challenges. While group lessons are increasingly adopted for practical reasons such as accommodating more students, they also have the potential to support broader educational goals through the application of comprehensive musicianship principles (Zhang, 2015). However, the adoption of comprehensive musicianship in group lessons is shaped by multiple factors (Pike, 2013). Understanding what factors influence teaching practices is essential to improving the implementation of group piano instruction in China.

This study aims to explore the factors that influence piano teachers to incorporate comprehensive musicianship in group lessons for young beginners. It focuses on the perceptual, cultural, and instructional elements that inform teachers' decisions and

practices within the group setting. As such, the goal of this study is to contribute to the field of group piano teaching by providing insights that can inform more effective curriculum design and teacher training strategies for contemporary group piano education in the Chinese context. To address the objective, the research questions guiding this study are as follows: What factors influence piano teachers to integrate comprehensive musicianship in group instruction for young beginners?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Development of Group Piano Instruction

Group piano instruction, as an alternative to traditional one-to-one lessons, has a long and evolving history that aligns closely with the philosophy of comprehensive musicianship. According to Richards (1962), the roots of group piano can be traced back to Johann Bernhard Logier, who began teaching piano in group settings in Dublin in 1815. His method, which accommodated up to 30 students, emphasised musicianship and theory over technical skill, offering a more cost-effective and accessible mode of instruction (Richards, 1962). Despite early criticism on the lack of individual attention, Logier's approach spread rapidly, influencing music education across Europe and the U.S. (Morrison, 2023).

Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, American educators began to recognise the value of the class piano formally. Calvin Brainerd Cady, often regarded as the father of group piano instruction in the U.S., advocated for teaching musical thought, expression, and experience in group settings, with a strong emphasis on musicianship (Richards, 1962; Pozenatto, 2021). By the 1920s, public schools widely adopted group piano, leading to what Richards called "The Piano Class Explosion" (Morrison, 2023). However, after 1935, interest declined due to economic and wartime pressures.

The mid-to-late 20th century witnessed a resurgence, driven by pedagogical pioneers like Raymond Burrows and Robert Pace. Pace's multi-key approach and emphasis on essential skills and comprehensive musicianship were particularly influential (Morrison, 2023; Pike, 2017). Different pedagogues promoted various combinations of group and individual instruction to optimise learning outcomes (Fisher, 2010).

The 21st century brought a renewed interest in group piano, particularly with the rise of online instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Organisations like the National Group Piano and Piano Pedagogy Forum (GP3) and MTNA have since fostered professional development in this area (Fisher, 2006). Numerous method books such as Faber's *Piano Adventures*, Frances Clark's *The Music Tree*, and Alfred's *Basic Group Piano Course*, incorporate group-friendly strategies and comprehensive musicianship elements like ensemble playing, improvisation, and creative engagement (Chiu, 2017; Pike, 2017; Sundell, 2012).

2.2. Comprehensive Musicianship in Group Piano Instruction

Closely related to the development of group piano is the concept of Comprehensive Musicianship, which gained prominence in the 1960s. The philosophy of comprehensive musicianship emphasises that music education should not be limited to the performance aspect of strict repertoire learning, technique training, and sight reading, but rather integrate it with the aspects of analysis and creation (Sundell, 2012, p. 22).

Group piano instruction naturally supports comprehensive musicianship due to its collaborative and multifaceted format. Early proponents like Logier and Cady already emphasised fundamental skills beyond performance, such as harmony and rhythm. [Lowder \(1973\)](#) later reinforced the idea that group settings foster critical listening, ensemble skills, and functional competencies like harmonisation and transposition. [Kim \(2000\)](#) developed teaching strategies and materials as a model for developing comprehensive musicianship in college piano majors through group instruction. He argued that group environments enable discovery learning, peer interaction, and time-efficient instruction across multiple musicianship domains. Similarly, [Fisher \(2010\)](#) emphasised the benefit of teaching broad musical competence, including improvisation and keyboard harmony, within group formats.

In addition, recent literature highlights a growing emphasis on eclectic teaching approaches in elementary music education, where multiple pedagogical methods, such as those of Kodály, Dalcroze, and Orff, are combined to create more inclusive, engaging, and effective instruction. [Mwanza \(2017\)](#) and [Bridges \(1984\)](#) note that eclectic approaches are particularly beneficial for their holistic, learner-centred, and participatory nature, enhancing students' musical understanding and enthusiasm. Empirical studies support this framework: [Fillips \(2005\)](#) developed a comprehensive method by selecting effective elements from existing pedagogies based on practical teaching experience, while [Promsukkul and Trakarnrung \(2014\)](#) demonstrated how an improvisation-based eclectic module significantly improved preschoolers' musicianship across rhythm and melody skills. [Mabini \(2024\)](#) further emphasises that such integration addresses varied learning styles and promotes long-term musical engagement. Collectively, these studies affirm the value of eclectic approaches in fostering comprehensive musicianship development in young learners.

2.3. Piano Education in China

In China, piano education has grown rapidly over the past two decades, fueled by rising demand for extracurricular arts education and increasing parental interest in cultural enrichment ([Wang, 2015](#)). However, piano pedagogy remains largely rooted in a performance-oriented tradition. Textbooks such as Beyer, Hanon, and Czerny continue to dominate the curriculum, and one-on-one lessons remain the standard approach ([Sun, 2018](#)). These materials and practices often prioritise technical precision and repertoire over broader musicianship skills.

The rise of piano education is also closely linked to social and policy factors. [Zhang \(2016\)](#) discussed the impact of China's one-child policy, noting that education became a central concern for families with only one child. Even in low-income households, parents were often willing to invest in piano lessons, believing these would enhance their child's future opportunities. As a result, piano learning became closely tied to the exam system and certification pathways. [Zhang \(2016\)](#) argued that this exam-driven culture led many parents to see the piano not as a source of musical enjoyment, but as a tool to increase their child's social and academic value.

This mindset has also shaped parents' preferences for lesson formats. [Cui \(2023\)](#) reported that many Chinese parents continue to prefer individual piano lessons, believing they lead to faster and more visible results. Consequently, teachers often feel pressured to focus on technical skills and exam preparation in private lessons. Broader

aspects of musicianship, such as creativity, music theory, or listening, are frequently sidelined due to limited time and the narrow focus of one-on-one instruction.

In recent years, however, there has also been a noticeable shift among some Chinese parents. While traditional expectations around performance and exams still exist, more parents are beginning to value enjoyable and well-rounded music education, especially for young beginners (Cui & Xie, 2024; Cui, 2023). A recent study by Huixuan et al. (2024) further found that increasingly Chinese parents now see group music classes as a way to support their children's creativity, confidence, and social development. These parents are less focused on measurable outcomes like exam scores and more interested in giving their children a positive musical experience. Group piano lessons, with their emphasis on collaboration, exploration, and play-based learning, meet this need well. As Cui (2023) suggested, this growing preference reflects broader changes in Chinese education, where more families are starting to prioritise emotional well-being and balanced development over academic pressure alone.

Group piano instruction was first introduced to Chinese music institutions in the 1990s, mainly in conservatories and teacher-training programs. Its use in beginner-level children's classes, however, has only gained more attention in recent years (Dong, 2018). Group teaching is often promoted as a cost-effective alternative to private lessons and a way to make learning more interactive and social. Despite these advantages, its development has been slow. Existing studies have identified several barriers, including teacher preparedness, curriculum development, and classroom management. For example, Tang (2016) and Zhang (2015) found that many group lessons in China either replicate the one-on-one format, resulting in limited interaction among students, or focus too heavily on fun activities, neglecting core musical learning.

2.4. Research Gap

There remains a gap in how comprehensive musicianship is integrated into group settings. While the group format has the potential to support a wider range of musical experiences, few studies have examined how teachers actually implement these elements in practice, especially with young beginners. In addition, little is known about the factors that motivate or hinder teachers from adopting more holistic approaches in their group teaching.

Moreover, most research on group piano instruction has been conducted within Western contexts. The adoption and practical implementation of group piano instruction in China, particularly for young beginners, remains underexplored. As group piano instruction becomes more visible in early childhood music education in China, it is important to understand how pedagogical beliefs, institutional expectations, and cultural factors shape its implementation. This study seeks to address that gap by exploring the factors that influence teachers' decisions to integrate comprehensive musicianship into group lessons for young beginners.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study aims to address teachers' perspectives and issues in group piano instruction, focusing on perceptions and interpretations. A case study was chosen to gather data

from four teachers (collective case study), using interviews, observations, and document analysis. The qualitative approach is suitable for this research as it provides an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. The study aims to provide rich descriptions and details, making it a valuable resource for understanding group teaching in a specific context.

3.2. Sample Selection

Geographically, this study is restricted to Northern China. Participants selected were from Beijing and Hebei province. This study targeted piano teachers as the primary study population. The four participants were group piano teachers who served as key stakeholders in instructional decision-making and curriculum implementation. Although students were observed during classroom sessions and parents were discussed in relation to teachers' perceptions, neither students nor parents were direct participants in the study. All data were collected from teachers through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations.

The purposive sampling procedure was adopted for the study and the selection criteria for participants were: (1) To provide a comparison insight, the participant teachers must have been teaching both group and individual piano lessons; (2) The participants should have at least four years of teaching experience in both children's group and individual piano instruction; (3) The teachers should implement comprehensive musicianship in group piano teaching; (4) The selected teachers should come from different institutions and offer different teaching methods to avoid one-sidedness. Following the criteria, four piano teachers have been purposefully selected for this study. The following is the basic information of the four participants, presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Basic Information of Participants

Code Name	Age	Group Teaching Experience	Institution	Method Used in Group Teaching
T1	36	5 years	Independent studio in Beijing	<i>My First Piano Adventures</i> <i>And Piano Adventures</i>
T2	38	12 years	Independent studio in Shijiazhuang	<i>Piano Adventures</i>
T3	29	4 years	Independent studio in Xingtai	<i>Bandzo School children's piano course</i>
T4	31	4 years	Yamaha Music School in Shijiazhuang	<i>Yamaha Junior music course</i>

3.3. Semi-structured Interview

To gain an in-depth understanding of the four teachers' perspectives on group piano instruction and related issues, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Each teacher participated in a one-on-one interview lasting approximately 60–90 minutes. The interview guide has focused on two aspects: (1) understanding the teachers' fundamental perceptions regarding the relationship between comprehensive musicianship and group instruction, and (2) understanding the piano teachers' practical strategies when implementing comprehensive musicianship into their group instruction.

3.4. Class Observation

In this study, although the interview data may provide a clear understanding of the teaching philosophy for each group piano teacher, it is challenging to objectively assess how they integrate their instructional philosophy into practice, as well as how their students respond to these strategies. Consequently, it is necessary to observe at least five one-hour classes of each teacher during their instructional time.

An observation matrix has been designed before the observation to investigate from three different perspectives or lenses: (1) instructional approaches for comprehensive musicianship; (2) group activities and games; (3) students' reactions. The class teaching materials are presented in Table 2 according to five observational sessions from O1 to O5.

Due to the observations being conducted during the COVID-19 period and limited by the Chinese government's strict policies, some were carried out via online video calls. The observation took place from October 2021 to May 2022, with each participant teacher teaching at least five one-hour lessons.

Table 2: Class Observing Contents

	O1	O2	O3	O4	O5
T1	Book A, Unit 1	Book A, Unit 3	Book A, Unit 5	Book B, Unit 1	Book C, Unit 4
T2	Grade 1, Unit 3	Grade 1, Unit 5	Grade 2, Unit 4	Grade 3, Unit 1	Grade 3, Unit 4
T3	Book 2, Lesson 1	Book 2, Lesson 2	Book 2, Lesson 5	Book 4, Lesson 14	Book 6, Lesson 8
T4	Book 1, Lesson 1	Book 1, Lesson 5	Book 3, Lesson 3	Book 3, Lesson 4	Book 4, Lesson 2

3.5. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the collected data. Transcripts and notes were coded inductively, allowing themes to emerge from the data. Initial coding focused on identifying recurrent patterns related to teaching approaches, curriculum structure, group dynamics, and the application of comprehensive musicianship. These codes were then grouped into broader themes aligned with the research questions: conceptual change regarding comprehensive musicianship and group-enabled instructional strategies for integrating comprehensive musicianship.

In writing the research findings, the data from the four teachers' interviews were coded with T1, T2, T3, and T4. The observation data were coded with the teacher's code, followed by a capital O and the observation number because there were five observations for each participant (e.g., T1, O3).

4. Results and Discussion

The overall findings of the study are consolidated in Table 3.

Table 3: Themes and sub-themes of factors that influence piano teachers to involve comprehensive musicianship in young beginners' group lessons

Themes	Sub-themes	Codes
Perception Change	Conservative learning backgrounds	Performance-focused learning experiences; Tendency to revert to traditional methods in individual lessons; Start point to change from past experiences
	Shifting Teaching Beliefs	Realisation of the importance of comprehensive musicianship; Changing views of group instruction as a rich and valid teaching format
	Parental Influences	Parents in individual lessons often prioritise performance; Parents in group lessons show openness to all-rounded music learning
Group-Settings Strategies	Eclectic Approaches	Integration of Kodály, Orff, and Dalcroze; Group settings naturally support the use of these approaches; Eclectic strategies promote comprehensive musicianship. Individual settings lack the flexibility to apply such approaches effectively.
	Structured Lesson Planning	Task- and process-based group teaching requires clear lesson structures. Structured planning enables multi-skill learning.

4.1. Perception Change

The concept of comprehensive musicianship challenged many teachers to rethink the foundations of their pedagogical approach, especially in light of their own experiences as students and early-career educators. Interviews and observations revealed that this perception shift was not abrupt but gradual, emerging as teachers encountered the possibilities offered by group instruction. The following subsections explore this transformation: beginning with the influence of teachers' own conservative learning backgrounds, followed by the gradual shift in teaching beliefs, and finally, the role of parental influences.

4.1.1. Conservative Learning Backgrounds

The findings showed that many teachers had a conservative background in piano learning, which strongly influenced their early teaching practices. Their learning experiences focused mostly on technical skills, reading notation, and playing set pieces, with little attention given to musicianship activities such as improvisation, composition, or aural development. These early experiences shaped how they first approached teaching, often repeating the methods they had learned.

T3 reflected, *"I am used to employing a more traditional teaching method that pays more attention to students' playing technique in private lessons, like how I accepted it in my childhood, and I just drifted into it"* (T3, Interview). Her statement shows that traditional methods were passed down without much reflection, simply because they were familiar. Most participants began teaching the same way they had been taught, often without questioning whether it was the best approach.

This background created a strong belief that correct technique and accurate reading were the main goals of piano instruction. Other aspects of musicianship, such as creativity, listening, or movement, were often ignored. T1 admitted, *"At first, I did not really think about trying anything new. I just used the same materials and methods that worked for me when I was learning"* (T1, Interview). This shows how personal learning history shaped their teaching habits.

However, these conservative foundations also gave teachers something to compare against. When they encountered new models, especially in group settings, they began to reflect more critically on their past and consider more holistic approaches. T4 said,

Because these methods aligned with the traditional exam-focused system, we saw them as the standard. Early lessons often followed a fixed structure: explaining the score, correcting mistakes, and preparing for exams. While this helped students build basic skills, it often left out important parts of musical development, such as expression and creativity. (T4, Interview)

In sum, the conservative background of the participants shaped their initial teaching identity. These early experiences fostered a reliance on teacher-centred approaches focused heavily on technique and notation, with little exposure to comprehensive musicianship. This background created both a challenge and a starting point as teachers gradually shifted toward more flexible and student-centred methods.

4.1.2. Shifting Teaching Beliefs

Despite their conservative foundations, many participants gradually recognised the limitations of traditional piano instruction. As they gained more experience and considered their students' needs, they began to revise their beliefs. T3 remarked,

I realised that comprehensive musicianship is crucial and the piano instruction should fit in with the new age, so I must go out of my comfort zone and find a new way to do what I want to do, that's why I started to teach beginners in groups. (T3, Interview)

Teachers began to view group instruction not only as a practical solution but also as a valuable way to deliver holistic music education. The group setting allowed for ensemble

playing, musical games, and peer interaction, which are the elements often missing in their own early training. T2 described a key moment when she saw her students improvising together: *"When I saw my students building ideas together in a duet improvisation, I realised this kind of interaction simply doesn't happen in one-on-one lessons. It made me think differently about what piano teaching could be."* (T2, Interview)

Still, several participants admitted that their private lessons continued to follow more traditional models, especially when trying to meet parental expectations. This suggests that the shift was still in progress. While comprehensive musicianship had become central in group lessons, one-on-one instruction remained more conventional.

In summary, teachers' beliefs were evolving. Influenced by their own experiences and by what they observed in students, they were moving from a narrow, technical focus to a broader, more student-centred approach. Group instruction played a key role in this change.

4.1.3. Parental Influences

The study also showed that participants' willingness or hesitation to adopt new approaches was shaped by how they interpreted parents' expectations.

In individual lessons, many parents focused on technical progress and performance. Teachers shared that these parents often judged success by how many pieces their child could play or how quickly they advanced through exams. T1 said, *"Parents... tend to expect technical skill training more than comprehensive musical knowledge."* Similarly, T2 and T3 noted that some parents did not support time spent on ear training, improvisation, or movement, believing such activities were unrelated to performance and not worth the time (T2 & T3, Interview).

In contrast, group lessons gave teachers more space for creative and holistic teaching. Teachers noticed that parents who chose group instruction were generally more open to a broader view of music learning. These parents were less focused on performance outcomes and more accepting of lessons that included singing, games, and collaboration. T4 said, *"Parents of group students are more relaxed. I feel less pressure to only focus on pieces and can do more listening and creative things."* Some teachers (T2 and T4) also observed a rise in the number of parents choosing group lessons. T2 noted, *"I think more parents are beginning to see that piano learning doesn't have to be so intense, they're becoming more open to different ways of learning."* (T2, Interview)

This difference in parental attitude allowed teachers to try new methods and reflect on the limits of traditional instruction. It also supported their growing interest in comprehensive musicianship, especially in group contexts.

In summary, parental influences played a key role in shaping teachers' perceptions. While parents of private students often expected measurable progress and technical achievement, those in group settings were more supportive of creative, student-centred learning. This gave teachers greater flexibility in group lessons and encouraged a more comprehensive approach to music teaching.

4.1.4. Discussion on Perception Change

This theme highlights the tension teachers experience when trying to shift from conventional, technique-focused instruction to a more holistic approach. The transition to comprehensive musicianship, especially in group settings, was often influenced by teachers' own conservative learning backgrounds.

The data revealed that teachers' early experiences as piano students strongly influenced their initial teaching practices. Most participants had learned piano in a traditional way, with a strong focus on reading notation, building technical skills, and preparing exam pieces. Creative aspects of music, such as improvisation, composition, or aural training, were rarely emphasised in their own lessons as children. As a result, they entered teaching with a narrow view of what piano instruction should include. This finding aligns with previous research, which has shown that teachers often replicate the teaching methods they experienced as students (Conway, 2008).

This reflects broader historical trends. While U.S. music education moved toward general musicianship by the mid-20th century (Brubaker, 1996, as cited in Sundell, 2012), Chinese piano instruction remained conservative until the 1980s (Zhao, 2013). Although American ideas on comprehensive musicianship have since influenced Chinese teaching, technical focus still dominates (Xu, 2001). Many teachers in this study continued using performance-based methods in private lessons, shaped by their own learning and lacking training in alternatives. Chirkov (2009) noted that in some Asian cultures, structured, performance-focused learning is favoured, making it harder for teachers to adopt more creative approaches. Moreover, private lessons offer flexibility, but also make it harder to break old habits.

However, the findings suggest that group instruction played a key role in supporting change. While most participants began with traditional views, many gradually saw the value of holistic, student-centred teaching, especially in group settings. Creative and interactive activities were more naturally integrated in group lessons, and teachers could try new activities, observe results, and reflect on students' responses. Importantly, the findings also suggest that teachers' beliefs are not fixed, but can evolve through reflection and practice. This supports earlier research showing that teaching beliefs are shaped not only by past experiences but also by classroom practice (Burnard & Haddon, 2015). Over time, teachers began to view group teaching not just as practical, but as a way to offer richer musical experiences.

The findings also highlight the role of parental influence. Many Chinese parents still value clear, measurable outcomes, like how many pieces a child can play, over broader musicianship. Compared to Western parents, who may see music as personal enrichment, Chinese parents often view piano lessons as part of academic preparation. Zhang (2016) linked this to China's one-child policy, where education became a top priority. Piano lessons were seen as a way to improve a child's future. This led to an exam-driven culture, where piano learning became about achievement, not enjoyment.

Teachers in this study often felt limited by these expectations in private lessons. Parents focused on the number of pieces finished rather than skills like listening, improvisation, or rhythm reading. These cultural values made it harder to introduce broader musicianship. Teachers feared that parents might see creative activities as a waste of time. Cui (2023) also found that many Chinese parents prefer individual lessons because

they believe they lead to faster progress. As a result, teachers felt pressured to focus on technical training within limited lesson time.

In contrast, group instruction gave teachers more room to use comprehensive musicianship strategies. Since group lessons were less focused on individual performance, teachers felt freer to include creative and collaborative activities. The results also show that parents who chose group lessons were generally more relaxed and less focused on strict progress. Teachers had more control over the curriculum and lesson content. Unlike private lessons, where parents' goals influenced teaching, group lessons allowed teachers to follow educational values more fully.

Recently, there has been a shift among some Chinese parents. While traditional views still exist, more parents are starting to value enjoyable and well-rounded music education, especially for young beginners. Studies such as [Huixuan et al. \(2024\)](#) and [Cui and Xie \(2024\)](#) have found that many urban parents now view piano learning as a means to support their children's creativity, confidence, and enjoyment of music. These parents are less focused on exam results and more interested in giving their children a positive musical experience. Group lessons, which include collaboration and exploration, fit this goal. Participants also observed this trend, saying that group parents were more supportive of creative activities and group music games. [Cui \(2023\)](#) linked this to broader changes in Chinese education, where more families are prioritising emotional well-being and balanced development.

In summary, the findings show that Chinese piano teachers who embrace comprehensive musicianship often do so through group instruction. In individual lessons, their efforts are sometimes limited by the influence of their own past experiences and the expectations of parents. These factors reinforce traditional teaching methods. However, in group settings, teachers were more able to apply new ideas, design well-structured lessons, and make learning more engaging and enjoyable for students. At the same time, a growing number of parents are now showing interest in holistic learning and are more willing to support a broader vision of music education, especially in group formats. This shift provides new opportunities for teachers to move away from convention and promote comprehensive musicianship more fully.

4.2. Group-Settings Strategies

In the group setting, teachers were able to explore new strategies that were not always possible in individual lessons. The shared learning environment allowed them to try different methods to support students' overall musical growth. The following sections explain two key strategies that teachers use in group instruction: applying eclectic approaches and using structured lesson planning.

4.2.1. Eclectic Approaches

The interview data suggested that all participants recognised a strong connection between group piano teaching, eclectic approaches, and comprehensive musicianship. They believed that the nature of group settings made it easier and more effective to apply teaching methods drawn from general music education, such as Dalcroze, Kodály, and Orff-Schulwerk. Both interview and observation data showed that participants often integrated activities like body percussion, solfège, and eurhythmics into their lessons, combining these methods in a flexible and purposeful way.

Participants noted that the group setting provided better conditions, such as larger spaces and more students, for using eclectic activities. T2 shared that she regularly used music games and eurhythmics to teach theory and musicality in group classes but avoided them in private lessons, saying they felt limited and awkward with only two people. In one observed lesson, she used a circle game where students passed a ball in time to the beat, then stopped and clapped the rhythm of a simple melodic phrase. This helped students connect rhythm and pitch through movement and play (T2, O2). She also included solfège hand signs when teaching scales, encouraging students to sing and sign the pitches in groups, which she believed helped reinforce tonal relationships more effectively.

T3 also used Curwen hand signs and Orff-based activities like improvisation games and rhythm ensembles. She guided students in creating short rhythmic patterns using percussion instruments and body percussion, then had them perform as a small ensemble. In one class, she invited students to improvise simple melodies using C-D-E on the keyboard, while others played a steady beat using rhythm sticks (T3, O5). She reflected that these methods were rarely part of her one-on-one teaching, partly due to space limitations and her performance-focused training. *"I hadn't even realised the importance of eclectic approaches until I began to teach group piano,"* she said. (T3, Interview)

T1 and T4 also noted that working with 4–8 students in group lessons made it easy to divide them into smaller teams for ensemble playing or rhythmic games. T1 often used call-and-response activities with clapping and singing, followed by group keyboard playing where students took turns adding a phrase to a melody. To introduce 3/4 time, she assigned students different beats to physically perform. For example, one student would step on beat one, another clap on beat two, and another snap on beat three. These kinds of practices helped the students internalise the meter through interaction and movement (T1, O3). T4 introduced scales through singing and movement by combining Kodály solfège and eurhythmics. For example, students sang a major scale while stepping up and down a floor keyboard marked with pitch names. She also used improvisation cards with pictures (e.g., rain, birds, or robots) to encourage expressive playing on the keyboard. After each student performed their interpretation, the group discussed which musical elements matched the images, building listening skills and creativity (T4, O5). In contrast, they found that in individual lessons, practice was simplified and material was often covered just once, often with little variation or exploration.

The participants agreed that to support comprehensive musical development, an organised combination of multiple teaching approaches is essential. The group setting made this possible by offering physical space, social interaction, and varied learning experiences. In contrast, individual lessons were constrained by space and format, limiting the range of teaching methods and leaning toward a more traditional, technique-focused approach. T4 highlighted the difficulty of teaching comprehensive musicianship in individual lessons without the support of group-based, eclectic methods. To address this, she created an additional group course to teach musicianship skills like aural training, theory, and sight-singing. However, she noted that the effect was not ideal because the students had mixed piano skill levels, which made it hard to balance the content. T3 also commented on the structural differences between group and individual lessons: *"The teaching method is more concise in individual lessons, and we usually teach by rote."* While she acknowledged that progress in group lessons could feel

slower, she believed the musical knowledge gained was broader and more comprehensive due to the use of multiple approaches and varied activities (T3, Interview).

4.2.2. Structured lesson planning

According to the participant interviews, group instruction is characterised as task-and process-oriented, differing significantly from traditional individual piano instruction, which tends to centre on individual performance and flexibility based on real-time student progress. In private lessons, the content can shift spontaneously depending on the student's immediate needs or challenges. However, *"in group settings, where students vary in ability and practice levels, teachers must carefully unify instruction through detailed and structured lesson planning"* (T1, Interview). As T1 explained, *"In individual lessons, I often just go with the flow depending on how the student performs that day. But in group classes, I must plan every part ahead, because I can't adjust as freely with multiple students."* All participants emphasised that group lesson planning requires considerably more time, typically ranging from 30 minutes to an hour per class, whereas preparation for private lessons was often minimal. This advanced preparation was necessary to maintain engagement and ensure all students could follow the group pace, which, in turn, enabled a multitasking curriculum supporting comprehensive musicianship.

Structured lesson planning was seen as key to supporting multi-skill learning. Participants described how task-based teaching required careful sequencing to develop rhythm, aural training, theory, and creativity within a single class. Unlike the flexible pacing of private lessons, group instruction needed a clear structure to maintain flow and focus, especially for young beginners. Teachers agreed that effective planning helped them manage time, support engagement, and include diverse learning goals in a balanced way, aligning with the principles of comprehensive musicianship.

Three key elements emerged from participants' reflections on planning group lessons. All of them emphasised the need for step-by-step instruction that keeps students engaged and gradually builds musical understanding.

First, teachers identified core concepts and matched them with short, focused activities. They broke lessons into manageable steps to suit young beginners' limited attention spans. T2 explained, *"Generally, the time of each knowledge point or activity is no more than 15 minutes"* (T2, Interview) T4 also prepared backup activities *"just in case one doesn't work well"* (T4, Interview), showing the need for flexibility.

Second, sequencing activities was essential. Unlike private lessons, which allow spontaneous instruction, group teaching requires planned progression. For example, T3 shared that instead of simply naming a concept like syncopation, she would first use clapping, rhyming, or ensemble work before applying it to repertoire, helping students grasp the idea more deeply.

Third, participants stressed the importance of clear, pre-planned teaching language. T4 noted that wordy explanations caused distraction, while T1 and T2 found that using fewer, simpler words led to better understanding.

These strategies were essential for maintaining engagement and scaffolding learning in group settings. This structured approach helped manage diverse ability levels, provided

consistency across lessons, and allowed for rich, multi-dimensional musical experiences aligned with the goals of comprehensive musicianship.

4.2.3. Discussion on Group-Settings Strategies

Previous studies have found that the holistic configuration in group settings would compel the teachers to go beyond purely virtuoso-producing instruction and provide students with a more comprehensive development in historical, theoretical, stylistic, and analytic aspects of music (Sundell, 2012). Based on this view, this section further discusses two practical enabling factors that support comprehensive musicianship in group piano instruction: The use of eclectic teaching approaches and the need for structured lesson planning. The findings show that these two instructional strategies are enabled by group settings and are essential in helping teachers deliver a more complete and engaging music education.

This study found that, compared to individual lessons, which are often limited by small rooms and one-on-one interaction, group piano instruction benefits from larger spaces and more students. These conditions naturally support a wider range of activities and encourage the use of eclectic methods. Participants used rhythmic games, ensemble playing, body percussion, solfège, eurhythmics, and movement to enrich learning and support comprehensive musicianship. These findings align with previous research showing that group instruction allows for discussion, critical listening, historical context, and shared decision-making (Pike, 2017; Shin, 2021). Fisher (2010) also highlighted the value of group settings in teaching skills like harmony, improvisation, and aural training. In contrast, private lessons tend to rely more on teacher demonstration and repetition, often missing broader musicianship elements (Pace, 1978).

The study also supports recent literature on eclectic teaching. Mwanza (2017) described eclecticism as a structured, flexible, and learner-centred approach. Mabini (2024) emphasised that combining methods from Kodály, Orff, and Dalcroze deepens understanding and increases engagement. Participants in this study confirmed that eclectic strategies were easier to apply in group settings, helping create a more dynamic and complete musical experience.

Group instruction not only supported eclectic teaching but also required more detailed and structured lesson planning. Unlike private lessons, which often adapt to a student's needs in the moment, group classes need every part of the lesson prepared in advance. This structure was essential for managing a multitasking curriculum. Since group lessons aimed to integrate rhythm, aural skills, theory, creativity, and ensemble playing, teachers had to think carefully about how to combine these elements within a single class. Participants reported spending 30 minutes to an hour preparing for each group session. This time investment helped them design lessons that engaged students in multiple ways and covered various aspects of musicianship. As Willoughby (2021) and Sindberg (2016) noted, comprehensive musicianship involves connecting different musical skills into a unified learning experience, rather than focusing only on performance.

Structured planning also helped teachers manage students with varying skill levels. In group settings, learners often had different practice habits and musical backgrounds.

Unlike in private lessons, where teachers could simply adjust the pace in real time, group instruction required teachers to design content that would support progress for all students. Careful planning allowed them to unify the group around shared tasks while also including flexibility through activities like partner work or layered musical roles. This ensured that students could move forward together, even if their skill levels were not exactly the same. These findings support Tomlinson's (2017) view that structured planning is essential for differentiating instruction in mixed-ability classrooms while preserving group cohesion. Moreover, this study found that intentional planning further encouraged teachers to make broader teaching choices. Instead of relying on rote teaching or reacting to student mistakes as in private instruction, group teachers had to plan with a wider educational goal in mind. This shift allowed them to include more activities that supported musical understanding, such as theory-based games, aural discrimination tasks, or rhythm ensemble work. These intentional choices aligned closely with the goals of comprehensive musicianship, which focuses on connecting skills across different areas of music learning.

In summary, this section identified two practical strategies that support the integration of comprehensive musicianship in group piano instruction: the use of eclectic teaching approaches and the need for structured lesson planning. Compared to private lessons, group instruction offers a more interactive environment, allowing teachers to use a wider range of activities such as ensemble playing, solfège, movement, and rhythmic games. These methods, drawn from Dalcroze, Kodály, Orff, and other approaches, helped teachers create a more dynamic and complete musical experience. The group setting also required detailed and intentional lesson planning. Teachers had to carefully design lessons that supported a multitasking curriculum, combining aural skills, theory, rhythm, creativity, and performance. Structured planning helped manage varied student levels, maintain engagement, and guide students through well-sequenced, skill-integrated lessons. Together, these strategies enabled teachers to move beyond rote learning and deliver a more well-rounded and meaningful piano education aligned with the goals of comprehensive musicianship.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the factors that influence and enable Chinese piano teachers to integrate comprehensive musicianship into group instruction for young beginners. The findings highlight the interplay between perceptual change and practical strategies, showing that teachers' willingness to move beyond traditional, technique-focused approaches is a key driver in adopting more holistic pedagogies. Group instruction, in particular, served as both a catalyst for this shift, supporting the use of eclectic methods and requiring structured, goal-oriented lesson planning. Teachers found that group settings enabled them to engage students in a wider range of musical experiences, including music games, ensemble playing, and group activities. In contrast, individual lessons often remained limited by space constraints and conservative expectations, especially those influenced by performance-focused parental demands. The study also suggests that changes in parental attitudes, especially among those opting for group lessons, are opening new pathways for more comprehensive and creative approaches to piano teaching. As more parents begin to prioritise well-rounded musical development over exam-based achievement, the potential for broader comprehensive musicianship grows.

Future research could expand on these findings by including a larger and more diverse sample of teachers across regions and institutional settings. Longitudinal studies could examine how teachers' beliefs and practices evolve over time, especially with professional development interventions. Additionally, comparative studies between private and group instruction across cultural contexts would further illuminate how social and educational environments shape the adoption of comprehensive musicianship. Such research could provide stronger empirical support for policy and curriculum innovation in music education.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers used the research ethics provided by the University of Malaya Research Ethics Committee (UMREC). All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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Conflict of Interest

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