

# Contemporary Lusheng as an Educational Resource in Teaching Chinese Folk Music

Hui Liu<sup>1</sup> & Narongruch Woramitmaitree<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>College of Music, Mahasarakham University, Thailand

\*Correspondence: College of Music, Mahasarakham University, Thailand. E-mail: narongruch.w@msu.ac.th

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## Abstract

The contemporary Lusheng, a reed instrument from the Miao ethnic group in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China, has significantly transformed since the 1970s to expand its musical capabilities and adaptability in modern educational settings. This study explores the role of the contemporary Lusheng as an educational resource in teaching Chinese folk music. Conducted in Nanning City and Rongshui Miao Autonomous County, the research involves ethnographic fieldwork, interviews with three key informants, performers, educators, and instrument makers, and observations of educational practices. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, focusing on how contemporary Lusheng is integrated into music education and its impact on cultural preservation and student engagement. The findings reveal that the contemporary Lusheng, with its expanded pitch range and improved design, is an effective tool for teaching Chinese folk music's technical and cultural aspects. It enhances student engagement and fosters a deeper appreciation for traditional music. However, challenges remain in integrating the instrument into urban education settings and addressing gaps in teacher training. The study suggests further developing specialized teacher training programs and exploring digital media to promote Lusheng in diverse educational contexts.

**Keywords:** contemporary Lusheng, Chinese folk music, cultural preservation, music education, student engagement

## 1. Introduction

The Lusheng, a reed instrument deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of the Miao ethnic group in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China, has evolved to meet the demands of modern performances. The Lusheng's simplistic structure and limited range have historically limited its use to rituals, festivals, and folk celebrations. However, since the 1970s, significant efforts have been made to reform and enhance the instrument, giving rise to the contemporary Lusheng (Provine et al., 2017; Wang, 2022).

### 1.1 Introduce the Problem

These improvements addressed several limitations of the traditional Lusheng, including its narrow pitch range, poor tuning capabilities, and limited adaptability to various musical settings. The development of the contemporary Lusheng increased its musical versatility and allowed its integration into more diverse and sophisticated musical contexts, including orchestral performances. Despite these advancements, the role of the contemporary Lusheng in education, particularly in teaching Chinese folk music, remains underexplored. Given its rich cultural significance and the innovations in its design, the contemporary Lusheng presents a valuable resource for fostering an understanding of Chinese folk music in educational settings (Du & Leung, 2022; Li, 2024; Qin, 2021; Wang et al., 2024).

### 1.2 The Importance of the Problem

The integration of folk instruments like the Lusheng into educational curricula is crucial for preserving cultural heritage and ensuring the transmission of traditional music to future generations. As China continues to modernize, there is an increasing risk that younger generations will lose connection with traditional folk music, particularly in regions where modernization has accelerated. This is particularly true in urbanized areas, where exposure to traditional musical forms is limited (Ping et al., 2024; Tang & Phaengsoi, 2024; Xu & Karin, 2024). The contemporary Lusheng, with its enhanced features and flexibility, offers an opportunity to bridge this gap by

providing a relevant and accessible entry point for students into the world of Chinese folk music. By incorporating the Lusheng into music education programs, educators can engage students with Chinese folk music's historical and contemporary aspects, thereby fostering a deeper appreciation for the country's musical traditions. Moreover, the adaptability of the contemporary Lusheng allows it to be used in traditional settings and modern music ensembles, making it a versatile educational tool that can appeal to a wide range of students (Fu & Choatchamrat, 2024; Qiang, 2021; Li, 2022; Yang & Welch, 2016).

### *1.3 Relevant Scholarship*

Several studies have highlighted the cultural and musical significance of the Lusheng in the Miao ethnic community and its role in regional festivals and ceremonies. Researchers like Xu and Karin (2024) and Chen and Seekhunlio (2024) have explored the development of Lusheng music in Guizhou, emphasizing the instrument's importance in expressing cultural identity. Also, researchers like Meng and Champadaeng (2024) talked about the technical changes made to Lusheng. These changes include adding more reeds and using Western musical temperaments, which have made the instrument more flexible and able to play a wider range of pitches. However, the limited focus has been on the educational applications of the contemporary Lusheng (Shun & Boonsrianun, 2023; Tang-jin, 2019). Most scholarship has concentrated on the performance and cultural aspects of the instrument, with little attention given to how it can be utilized as a teaching resource. This research aims to fill this gap by examining the potential of the contemporary Lusheng as a tool for teaching Chinese folk music in schools and universities, thereby contributing to the preservation and transmission of this musical tradition in a more structured and formalized educational setting (Campbell, 2017; Ho, 2016; Howard, 2016; Zhou, 2019).

### *1.4 Hypotheses*

With its improved design and expanded musical capabilities, this study hypothesizes that the contemporary Lusheng can be an effective educational resource for teaching Chinese folk music. It posits that the instrument's versatility in traditional and modern musical contexts makes it an ideal tool for engaging students in studying Chinese folk music. Additionally, the study suggests incorporating contemporary Lusheng into music education programs can enhance students' understanding of Chinese folk music's cultural and historical significance while developing their technical and performance skills. The research design involves a combination of ethnographic fieldwork, interviews with Lusheng performers and educators, and observations of its use in educational settings (Hang et al., 2023; Wong, 2020; Wu, 2016; Yu & Choatchamrat, 2024; Zhang, 2015).

### *1.5 Research Objective*

To explore the role of contemporary Lusheng as an educational resource in teaching Chinese folk music.

## **2. Method**

This research adopts a qualitative approach to explore the role of the contemporary Lusheng as an educational resource in teaching Chinese folk music. The research examines the development, use, and educational potential of the contemporary Lusheng through ethnographic fieldwork, interviews with key informants, and observation of educational practices involving the instrument (Bresler, 1996; Hang et al., 2023). This qualitative approach provides in-depth insights into integrating the Lusheng in educational settings, particularly regarding its perceived utility by educators and performers and its cultural role in transmitting Chinese folk music to younger generations.

### *2.1 Research Site*

The research was conducted in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, focusing on key locations where the contemporary Lusheng has been developed and used, such as Nanning City and Rongshui Miao Autonomous County. The study began with a thorough literature review to establish a theoretical framework, grounding the research in the historical and cultural evolution of the Lusheng within Chinese folk music education. Fieldwork was conducted in educational institutions and communities in the region where the contemporary Lusheng is actively played, and its use in teaching was documented.

### *2.2 Key Informants*

A total of three key informants were selected based on specific criteria. These informants were carefully chosen because they are prominent figures in the Lusheng community, either as performers, educators, or instrument makers. The selection was based on their long-term involvement in developing and promoting the contemporary Lusheng, contributions to regional music education, and deep cultural and technical knowledge of the instrument. These key informants provided rich, nuanced perspectives on creating, teaching, and promoting the Lusheng within the regional

education system. Interviews were semi-structured to allow the informants to share their experiences freely while addressing critical areas of interest related to the research objective.

### 2.3 Research Steps

2.3.1 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework: The study began with a review of relevant literature on the history and development of the Lusheng, its cultural significance among the Miao ethnic group, and its evolution into the contemporary Lusheng. This provided a theoretical framework to guide the fieldwork and data collection.

2.3.2 Fieldwork and Data Collection: The researcher visited Nanning City and Rongshui Miao Autonomous County to observe the teaching and use of contemporary Lusheng in educational settings. The researcher documented classes and performances where the Lusheng was used to teach folk music, highlighting teaching methods, student engagement, and learning outcomes related to the instrument. The observations were further supported by semi-structured interviews with three key informants who offered insights into the Lusheng's role in education.

2.3.3 Interviews with Key Informants: Interviews with key informants followed a semi-structured format, facilitating discussion flexibility while addressing primary topics such as the history, educational role, and broader applications of the contemporary Lusheng. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed for detailed analysis.

2.3.4 Data Analysis: The data collected from the field observations, interviews, and literature review were analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher identified core themes, such as the Lusheng's educational applications, its role in preserving Chinese folk music, and perceptions of its effectiveness among educators and students. The analysis also considered the cultural implications of integrating the Lusheng into formal and informal education.

### 2.4 Observation of Educational Practices

Throughout the fieldwork, the researcher observed several educational programs where the contemporary Lusheng was used to teach Chinese folk music. These observations focused on varied teaching methods, lesson structure, and student engagement levels when learning about the Lusheng. Findings from these observations provided a valuable context for the insights shared by key informants, offering a more comprehensive view of how the Lusheng is utilized as an educational resource across formal and community-based music programs.

## 3. Results



**Figure 1.** Copper-colored Oral Pipe of 24-reed Contemporary Lusheng

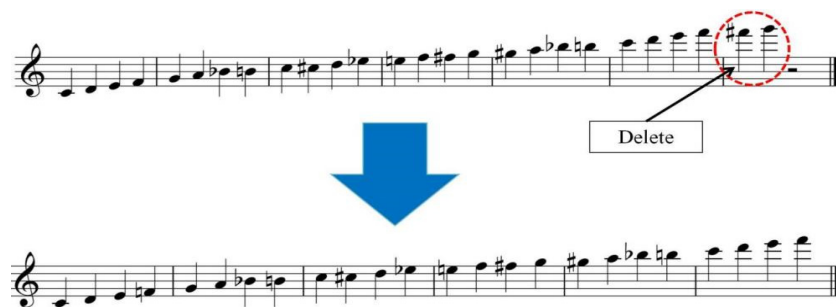
Source: Hui Liu, from fieldwork in May 2024

The contemporary Lusheng, a reed instrument of the Miao ethnic group, has undergone significant transformation since the 1970s in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China. Initially designed to address the limitations of the traditional Lusheng, the contemporary Lusheng has evolved into a versatile instrument capable of adapting to modern performance needs and educational contexts. Its adaptability and enhanced capabilities have made it a valuable resource in teaching Chinese folk music, particularly within educational institutions seeking to preserve and transmit traditional musical heritage (Figure 1).

### 3.1 Historical Development and Innovation of the Contemporary Lusheng in Music Education

Contemporary Lusheng has evolved significantly since its early use as a traditional musical instrument for the Miao ethnic group in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Historically, the traditional Lusheng was primarily utilized in rituals and celebrations, characterized by its simple structure, limited range of pitches, and traditional tonal quality. However, with the rise of cultural preservation initiatives and the increasing need for adaptable instruments in performance and education, the Lusheng underwent crucial reforms, particularly after the 1970s. These changes were pivotal in making the instrument suitable for modern pedagogical use, especially in teaching Chinese folk music.

One of the most significant innovations in the contemporary Lusheng is the expansion of its pitch range, which allows it to produce a broader variety of tones. Previously, the traditional Lusheng consisted of six to seven pipes, each producing a specific pitch. The improved contemporary version, such as the 24-reeds Lusheng, incorporates more reeds, allowing the instrument to extend its range across multiple octaves, thus enabling musicians to perform more complex pieces (Figure 2). This extension not only makes the instrument more versatile in performance but also allows students to explore a wider range of musical compositions, both traditional and contemporary.



**Figure 2.** The Scale of the 24-reeds Contemporary Lusheng

Source: Hui Liu, from fieldwork in May 2024

Another key innovation involves the structural modifications that have improved the instrument's functionality and ease of use. The contemporary Lusheng has undergone design enhancements, such as introducing auxiliary finger holes and modifying the oral pipe and blowhole. These changes have helped address air leakage and sound control issues, making it easier for performers and students to produce consistent sound quality. For example, the flat-shaped blowhole, introduced in the 24-reed Lusheng, allows for better airflow control, resulting in more accurate pitch and dynamics during performance (Figure 3). These structural innovations have also made the instrument more accessible to beginner students, enabling them to master the basics of Chinese folk music more efficiently.

Moreover, the contemporary Lusheng's material composition has been refined to enhance durability and sound quality. The use of golden bamboo for the tubes and copper for the reed chamber has contributed to the instrument's vibrant tonal qualities. Using these materials ensures that the contemporary Lusheng can withstand the demands of frequent performance and classroom use. Additionally, the improved material selection allows the instrument to blend more effectively with other Western and Chinese instruments, thus facilitating its use in ensemble settings in educational contexts.

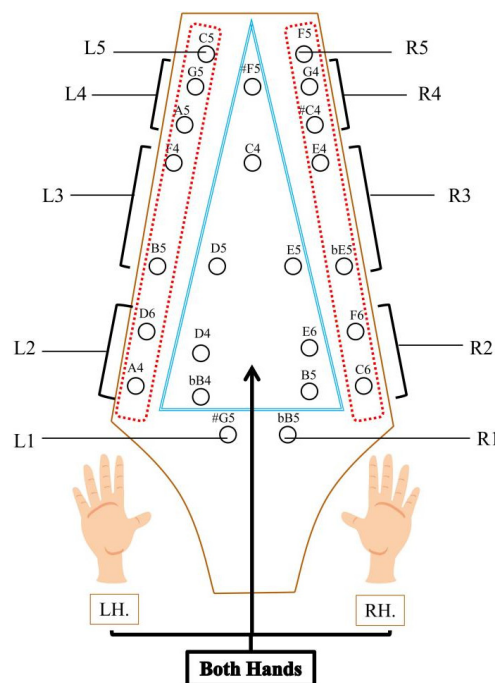
The innovations in the construction, pitch range, and materials of the contemporary Lusheng have made it an ideal tool for teaching Chinese folk music. By offering a modernized instrument that retains the essence of its traditional roots while incorporating technological advancements, the contemporary Lusheng bridges the preservation of folk music and the modern educational landscape. Its adaptability and enhanced features enable educators to use it to teach the technical aspects of music and convey Chinese folk traditions' cultural and historical significance, thus enriching the overall learning experience.



**Figure 3.** The Flat-shaped Blowhole for the 24-reed Contemporary Lusheng  
 Source: Hui Liu, from fieldwork in May 2024

*3.2 Educational Integration and Pedagogical Approaches Using the Contemporary Lusheng*

Integrating the contemporary Lusheng into the music education curriculum has opened new pathways for teaching Chinese folk music, blending practical performance skills and cultural education. Educators have employed a variety of pedagogical approaches to maximize the instrument’s potential as a learning tool, emphasizing its technical aspects and the cultural significance it holds within the broader context of Chinese folk traditions. Through these methods, students can develop a deeper appreciation and understanding of the folk music of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and China.



**Figure 4.** The fingering Charts for the 24-reed Contemporary Lusheng  
 Source: Hui Liu, from fieldwork in May 2024

A key focus is placed on ensemble performance in terms of practical instruction. The contemporary Lusheng's expanded pitch range allows it to integrate seamlessly into classroom ensembles, where students can perform in groups and develop a strong sense of rhythm, harmony, and coordination. Teachers often design lesson plans that combine the contemporary Lusheng with other traditional Chinese instruments like the pipa, erhu, and dizi, enabling students to appreciate the rich textures of Chinese folk music. This ensemble approach reinforces the communal aspect of folk traditions and encourages students to collaborate musically, simulating real-world performance environments. Additionally, instructors utilize finger charts for the 24-reed contemporary Lusheng (Figure 4) to guide students through the technical challenges of playing in different registers, ensuring they can navigate both individual practice and group play effectively.

One key pedagogical approach involves the introduction of the contemporary Lusheng in early music education, where students begin by learning its historical and cultural background. By incorporating multimedia resources, such as videos of traditional Lusheng performances at ethnic festivals and contemporary concerts, teachers provide students with a context-rich learning environment. This cultural immersion is crucial, as it allows students to understand the role of the Lusheng in Miao ethnic traditions and how it has evolved in modern contexts.

Pedagogical approaches also emphasize the theoretical aspects of the Lusheng, such as music theory and composition, to provide a comprehensive musical education. Through studying the modes, scales, and harmonic structures of traditional Chinese folk music, students gain insight into how contemporary Lusheng compositions can be crafted. For example, the unique twelve-tone equal temperament adaptation in the 24-reeds contemporary Lusheng allows educators to teach students how this instrument bridges the gap between Western and Chinese musical systems. By comparing the pentatonic scales used in traditional Lusheng music with the broader chromatic capabilities of the contemporary version, students learn to appreciate the evolution of folk music while acquiring skills in music composition and arrangement.

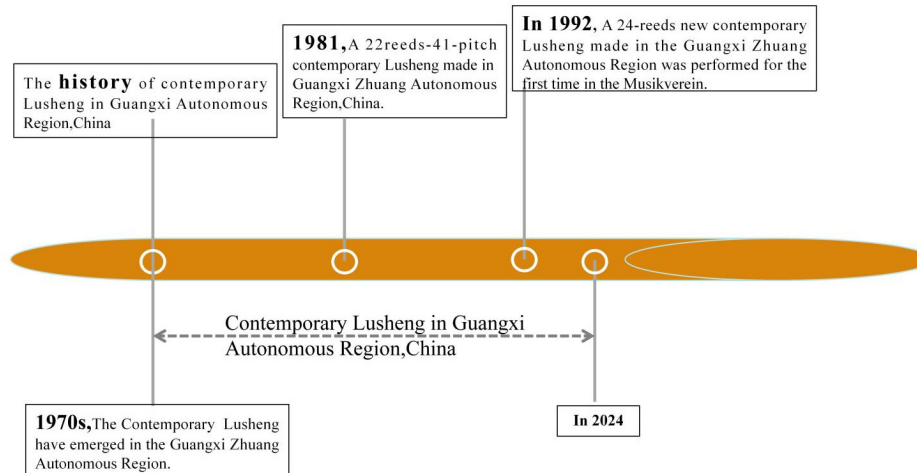
Performance-based learning remains a central component of Lusheng pedagogy. Instructors encourage students to participate in recitals and public performances, where they can showcase their skills and understanding of Chinese folk music. The performance context helps students build confidence while allowing them to engage with the local community and experience the cultural significance of the Lusheng firsthand. The role of performance in education is further enhanced by inviting key informants, such as professional Lusheng performers, to give masterclasses and provide students with insights into the instrument's practical applications. These experiences deepen students' connection to the cultural heritage of the Lusheng and promote a holistic approach to music education.

### *3.3 Impact of the Contemporary Lusheng on Cultural Preservation and Student Engagement*

The incorporation of contemporary Lusheng in music education has significantly impacted cultural preservation and student engagement, particularly in Chinese folk music. By utilizing this instrument, educators are not only preserving an important part of the Miao ethnic cultural heritage but also promoting greater cultural literacy and musical awareness among students. The teaching of the Lusheng helps bridge the gap between traditional practices and modern education, ensuring that younger generations remain connected to their cultural roots while also enhancing their musical competencies.

One of the most notable impacts of using the contemporary Lusheng as an educational resource is its ability to foster a deeper understanding of and respect for Chinese folk traditions among students. The instrument's unique sound, historical significance, and association with the Miao ethnic group allow students to engage with a living tradition, experiencing firsthand the cultural expressions of their ancestors. Educators often use historical timelines, such as the timeline of contemporary Lusheng in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (Figure 4), to illustrate the instrument's evolution and role in various cultural contexts. This helps students appreciate folk music traditions' continuity, adaptation, and relevance in modern society. Additionally, using traditional folk songs and melodies in the curriculum enables students to connect with the cultural narratives and values embedded in the music.

Regarding student engagement, the contemporary Lusheng has proven to be a highly effective tool for promoting active participation and enthusiasm in music education. Students are often drawn to the instrument's distinctive sound and appearance, which differ from more commonly taught Western instruments. The hands-on experience of learning to play the Lusheng encourages students to take an active role in their musical education, fostering a sense of ownership and pride in their learning process. Educators have reported that students show increased motivation and commitment when learning an instrument tied closely to their cultural heritage, as it allows them to feel part of a broader cultural story. The fingering charts for the 24-reed contemporary Lusheng (Figure 3) are frequently used in lessons to guide students through the technical aspects of playing while also sparking interest in the instrument's complexity and versatility.



**Figure 4.** Timeline of Contemporary Lusheng in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, China

Source: Hui Liu, from fieldwork in May 2024

Beyond the classroom, using the contemporary Lusheng in educational settings has broader implications for cultural preservation. By teaching students how to play this instrument, schools are actively participating in the transmission of folk traditions, ensuring that these cultural expressions are not lost with time. Learning and performing folk music allows students to become bearers of their cultural heritage, contributing to the sustainability of these traditions. Public performances, such as those involving Lusheng ensembles, showcase students' musical skills and bring folk traditions to the forefront of community life, fostering a collective appreciation for cultural diversity. As students perform traditional pieces on the Lusheng, they also help raise awareness about the importance of cultural preservation in a rapidly changing world.

#### 4. Discussion

The findings of this research demonstrate that the contemporary Lusheng is a valuable educational tool in teaching Chinese folk music, particularly in the context of cultural preservation and student engagement. This conclusion is consistent with previous research highlighting the importance of integrating folk instruments into educational settings to foster cultural literacy (Du & Leung, 2022; Li, 2024). By enhancing the traditional Lusheng's musical capabilities through modern innovations, such as expanding its pitch range and improving its structural design, the instrument has been made more accessible to students while retaining its cultural essence. This supports the theoretical principles of folk music education, where cultural heritage is transmitted through practical engagement with traditional instruments (Campbell, 2017; Howard, 2016).

One of the significant findings in this study is the dual role of the contemporary Lusheng in preserving cultural heritage and enhancing musical competencies. This aligns with the theoretical framework of multicultural music education, which emphasizes using folk instruments to connect students with their cultural roots while developing broader musical skills (Ho, 2016). As observed in this study, the adaptability of the contemporary Lusheng to both traditional and modern settings supports its use in various educational environments, from classroom ensembles to individual instruction. This echoes previous studies' findings suggesting the potential for modernized traditional instruments to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes (Xu & Karin, 2024; Tang & Phaengsoi, 2024).

However, this research also highlights areas where further exploration is needed. While the performance and educational potential of the contemporary Lusheng is well-established, its integration into the broader music curriculum, particularly in urbanized areas where Western music dominates, remains limited. This finding is somewhat inconsistent with the theoretical principles of music education reform, which advocate for a more balanced inclusion of traditional and modern instruments in curricula (Provine et al., 2017). Although this study demonstrated the effectiveness of the Lusheng in fostering cultural appreciation among students in rural areas, more research is needed to determine how this instrument can be integrated into urban educational settings where exposure to traditional Chinese folk music may be lacking (Fu & Choatchamrat, 2024; Li, 2022).

Additionally, the findings suggest that while students show increased engagement when learning the Lusheng, mainly through performance-based learning, the pedagogical approaches vary significantly depending on the educators' familiarity with the instrument. This inconsistency highlights a gap in teacher training, as many music educators may lack the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively teach traditional instruments like the Lusheng. This is consistent with prior research, which has shown that inadequate teacher training can hinder the successful implementation of folk music education (Yang & Welch, 2016). Addressing this gap through specialized teacher training programs could enhance the integration of the Lusheng into music education.

In conclusion, this study has shown that the contemporary Lusheng is a valuable educational resource for teaching Chinese folk music. The instrument's expanded musical capabilities and cultural significance make it a versatile tool for engaging students with Chinese folk traditions' technical and cultural aspects. The study supports the integration of the contemporary Lusheng into music education programs, particularly in regions where the preservation of traditional music is a priority. This research also highlights the potential for contemporary Lusheng's integration beyond its current geographical and cultural setting. It suggests its utility as a model for music education programs in other regions that aim to preserve and promote traditional music forms.

The findings are consistent with existing research on the role of folk instruments in education (Campbell, 2017; Howard, 2016), though challenges remain in broadening the instrument's use in more urbanized areas and improving teacher training. Expanding the application of contemporary Lusheng to different educational contexts can offer insights into adapting traditional instruments for global music curricula, which could foster a broader appreciation of cultural diversity in music education.

Additionally, leveraging digital media offers promising pathways for further promoting the Lusheng in educational contexts. Digital platforms can facilitate remote learning, allowing students and educators in diverse regions to access online Lusheng performances, tutorials, and cultural history. By incorporating digital resources, educators can introduce interactive tools, virtual lessons, and media-based cultural materials that extend beyond the classroom, broadening students' engagement and understanding of Chinese folk music.

Future research could explore the integration of the contemporary Lusheng into urban music education, specialized teacher training programs, comparative studies between modernized traditional instruments, and the role of digital media in enhancing accessibility to traditional music resources, particularly for geographically distant or urban students. The potential of digital media to serve as a bridge between traditional instruments and modern educational needs is essential for both student engagement and cultural preservation.

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**Data sharing statement**

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