

Exploring Self-Efficacy, Expressive Capabilities, And Social Leadership in Traditional Chinese Music Performance: A Study of Music Students in Henan Universities

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of self-efficacy in enhancing expressive performance capabilities among music students specializing in traditional Chinese instruments at universities in Henan Province, China. It investigates how self-efficacy influences musical expression, emotional regulation, and performance confidence, particularly in a context where traditional technical training often outweighs emotional and psychological support. The research also examines the impact of teaching strategies, guided by a social leadership framework, in promoting students' self-efficacy and expressive abilities. This study provides insights into how self-efficacy theory can be applied to improve expressive performance, reduce performance anxiety, and cultivate a more holistic approach to music education in under-resourced regions. The findings suggest that fostering emotional resilience and psychological readiness, through targeted instructional practices and supportive teacher-student relationships, is key to enhancing performance outcomes. By bridging the gap between technical proficiency and emotional expression, this research contributes to the development of more comprehensive music education models in traditional Chinese instrumental pedagogy.

Keywords: Self-efficacy; Expressive performance; Traditional Chinese instruments; Music education; Social leadership

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary music education, psychological factors like self-efficacy have become increasingly recognized for their significant role in shaping students' performance outcomes. Self-efficacy, a concept introduced by Albert Bandura, refers to an individual's belief in their ability to execute the actions required to achieve specific performance outcomes. This belief is critical for motivating students, regulating emotions, maintaining persistence, and overcoming challenges, all of which are essential for musical expressiveness in performance contexts. However, despite its importance, there is a lack of empirical research on how self-efficacy operates in traditional Chinese instrumental education, particularly in under-resourced regions like Henan Province. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the role of self-efficacy in enhancing students' expressive capabilities during traditional Chinese instrumental performances and examining how instructional practices can strengthen students' psychological readiness for performance.

Self-efficacy is a core psychological construct that explains motivation, persistence, and emotional regulation. In music education, it significantly influences performance, particularly under stress. Musicians with higher self-efficacy typically experience less anxiety, demonstrate stronger emotional control, and perform more expressively.

However, most research on self-efficacy has been conducted in Western contexts or with Western instruments, such as the piano and violin. Research on self-efficacy in traditional Chinese instrumental education remains limited, particularly in regions like Henan, where educational resources are scarce and traditional music education tends to emphasize technical skills over emotional and psychological support. As a result, students may struggle with emotional regulation, performance anxiety, and a lack of expressiveness during stage performances, despite possessing technical competence. Therefore, this study aims to explore how self-efficacy influences expressive performance in traditional Chinese instrumental education and how it can be enhanced through specific teaching strategies.

This study is significant because it seeks to expand the application of self-efficacy theory in music education, specifically within the context of traditional Chinese instruments, an area that has not been thoroughly explored. The findings will provide valuable insights into the psychological factors influencing expressive performance in traditional music education, contributing to both the academic understanding of self-efficacy and the practical development of teaching methods that address students' emotional challenges. By examining the role of self-efficacy in performance, this research will help identify strategies that educators can use to boost students' emotional resilience and self-confidence, ultimately enhancing their ability to perform expressively on stage.

The research questions guiding this study are: What are the levels of self-efficacy and expressive capabilities among university students studying traditional Chinese instruments in Henan? How do self-efficacy and expressive capabilities relate to each other in the context of traditional Chinese music performance? Are there differences in self-efficacy and expressive capabilities at different academic stages? And how can a social leadership model be developed to help teachers enhance students' self-efficacy and expressive capabilities? The study hypothesizes that self-efficacy is positively correlated with expressive capabilities in performance, and that students' levels of self-efficacy and expressive abilities vary across academic stages.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Bandura's social cognitive theory, which emphasizes the role of self-efficacy in shaping behavior, motivation, and emotional responses. In the context of traditional Chinese instrumental education, self-efficacy affects not only the technical execution of music but also the emotional and expressive aspects of performance. Students with high self-efficacy are more likely to manage anxiety, regulate their emotions effectively, and engage deeply with the music, leading to more expressive performances. Additionally, this study integrates the concept of social leadership, specifically Julian Stodd's framework, which emphasizes non-hierarchical leadership rooted in trust, collaboration, and co-creation. In music education, this means teachers act as relational leaders, fostering an environment where students feel supported and encouraged, thereby enhancing their self-efficacy and expressive capabilities.

The study is particularly relevant to Henan Province, where traditional Chinese music education faces challenges such as limited performance opportunities, scarce psychological support, and an emphasis on technical skills at the expense of emotional expression. By focusing on self-efficacy in this region, the study aims to provide insights into how psychological support can be integrated into music education to improve students' emotional regulation and expressive performance. The findings will offer practical strategies for educators, showing how to enhance students' self-efficacy through teaching practices that emphasize feedback, emotional regulation, and goal setting. Furthermore, the study will explore the role of teachers in fostering self-efficacy through social leadership approaches that promote trust and collaboration, thus supporting students' growth in both technical and expressive domains.

In conclusion, this study fills a critical gap in the literature by investigating how self-efficacy influences expressive performance in traditional Chinese instrumental education, particularly in Henan. By examining the relationship between self-efficacy and expressive capabilities, the study will provide a theoretical foundation for integrating psychological support into music pedagogy. The research will offer practical recommendations for educators in Henan and other similar regions, focusing on how to enhance students' self-efficacy and emotional resilience through specific teaching strategies. Ultimately, this study will contribute to the development of more holistic, student-centered pedagogical approaches in traditional Chinese music education, with implications for improving performance outcomes and emotional stability for music students in culturally diverse and resource-constrained settings.

The Role of Self-Efficacy Development in Music Performance

Self-efficacy, as a core concept in psychology, was first introduced by Albert Bandura in 1977 within the framework of Social Learning Theory and was later incorporated into the expanded Social Cognitive Theory in 1986, becoming a central component of the theoretical system. Bandura's social cognitive model emphasizes the dynamic interaction among cognition, behavior, and environment, suggesting that individuals form judgments about their capabilities by processing information from these three domains, which in turn regulates their behavioral performance (Bandura, 1986).

In this theoretical framework, self-efficacy is defined as “people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of actions required to attain designated types of performances” (Bandura, 1986). This definition highlights self-efficacy as a form of self-referent thought that functions to mediate the relationship between cognition and behavior. Self-efficacy is not a stable personality trait but a psychological variable closely tied to specific tasks and contexts. Furthermore, Bandura emphasized the plasticity and dynamic nature of self-efficacy, noting that it can fluctuate depending on individual development, task requirements, social situations, and environmental stimuli (Calicchio, 2023). Due to these characteristics, the concept of self-efficacy quickly attracted widespread attention in the field of educational psychology and has since been empirically validated and expanded in subsequent studies (Wong & Liem, 2022; Yi et al., 2024).

Regarding the mechanism by which self-efficacy is formed, (Bandura, 1977, 1986) proposed four principal sources: First, enactive mastery experience, which refers to the individual's own past successes or failures in a specific task, is considered the most influential source. Second, vicarious experience, which involves observing similar others successfully performing a task and using that observation to infer one's own potential. Third, verbal/social persuasion, which refers to the impact of evaluative feedback and encouragement from others on one's behavior choices. Fourth, physiological and emotional states, which concern the bodily tension and emotional fluctuations experienced when facing a task; such states may strengthen or weaken efficacy beliefs.

Subsequent studies have demonstrated that learning motivation and academic performance in educational psychology are significantly associated with self-efficacy, establishing it as a core variable influencing educational outcomes and a strong predictor of academic success (Meng & Zhang, 2023; Zysberg & Schwabsky, 2021). Scholars such as Frank Pajares and Schunk further developed Bandura's core ideas and conducted a series of empirical studies focusing on the relationship between self-efficacy and academic performance in adolescent learning contexts. In educational psychology, self-efficacy is widely regarded as a key determinant of learning motivation and academic achievement. Empirical evidence shows that students with high self-efficacy are more likely to set challenging goals and demonstrate greater persistence in the face of difficulties. They tend to adopt deeper learning strategies, such as critical thinking and self-monitoring, rather than relying solely on surface-level approaches like rote memorization (Hands & Limniou, 2023). Specifically, a study found a strong positive correlation between self-efficacy and learning motivation, with a coefficient as high as 0.68 ($p < 0.01$), indicating that the stronger the self-efficacy, the greater the students' enthusiasm and initiative in learning (Alemayehu & Chen, 2023).

In modern research, the concept of self-efficacy has progressively extended beyond the domains of learning motivation and academic achievement to more in-depth explorations of music learning, performance psychology, and instructional behavior. Notably, McPherson, working within the framework of Social Cognitive Theory, developed the self-regulated music learning model. His research demonstrated that self-efficacy is not only a predictive factor for musical skill acquisition but also a critical mechanism influencing students' practice strategies, emotional regulation, and stage stress coping abilities (Jiang, 2024). This study critically compares three relevant models: Bandura and Wessels (1997); McPherson and McCormick (2006) model of musical performance confidence, and Zelenak (2010) validated self-efficacy scale. These frameworks collectively offer conceptual clarity and guide the empirical direction of this study.

Building on the foundations of self-efficacy theory, Zimmerman systematically constructed the Self-Regulated Learning Theory, which provides a theoretical basis for understanding the psychological mechanisms involved in students' long-term practice and preparation for high-pressure performances in music education contexts. Studies found that learners with higher self-efficacy are more inclined to set clear and measurable technical goals during the planning phase, employ refined time management and task decomposition strategies to enhance practice efficiency, maintain stronger attention control and emotional regulation during the execution phase, and utilize metacognitive strategies during the reflection phase to evaluate practice outcomes and optimize future learning paths (Drigas & Mitsea, 2021). These behavioral traits significantly enhance skill acquisition and stage adaptability, reflecting the core regulatory role of self-efficacy beliefs throughout the entire self-regulation process.

Complementing this, Zelenak further expanded the assessment of self-efficacy in musical performance by developing the Music Performance Self-Efficacy Scale (MPSES), enriching the operational measurement of this variable within music education settings. The MPSES is widely applied to evaluate students' confidence and task preparedness prior to formal performances, providing an effective tool for quantifying the mechanisms behind performance-related confidence. The scale, based on Bandura's four sources of efficacy, assesses students' perceived levels of preparation, emotional regulation capabilities, sensitivity to external feedback, and interpretation of prior success experiences (Zelenak, 2024). Sample items include: “I believe I am well prepared for the upcoming music performance,” and “Even if I feel nervous on stage, I can still complete the performance successfully,” using a five-point Likert scale to measure students' confidence levels and psychological regulation before performance. Meta-analytic findings reveal a moderate positive correlation between self-efficacy and musical achievement ($r \approx 0.4$), and a moderate negative correlation with performance anxiety, underscoring self-

efficacy's predictive power in music performance and suggesting that individuals with high self-efficacy often exhibit superior emotional regulation and anxiety mitigation mechanisms (Zelenak, 2024). Bandura's self-efficacy theory serves as a foundational framework for this study. His four sources of efficacy, mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states, directly relate to the domains assessed in the Zelenak (2010) scale and guide the interpretation of students' musical confidence.

With the deepening application of self-efficacy theory in music education, research has gradually shifted from learning motivation and practice behaviors toward instructional intervention strategies. As theoretical models mature, scholars have increasingly focused on how teachers can effectively enhance students' self-efficacy through instructional design (Chen, 2024; Gill et al., 2024; Zelenak, 2020). Studies show that when teachers deliberately apply self-efficacy-enhancing strategies in the classroom, such as setting attainable sub-goals, providing positive feedback, organizing simulated performances, and promoting peer collaboration, students experience significant increases in motivation and performance confidence (Zelenak, 2020). By guiding students to recall successful experiences, observe high-level performance demonstrations, and offering positive verbal encouragement during emotionally tense moments, teachers can effectively stimulate students' positive self-judgment of musical abilities. This logic of pedagogical intervention aligns closely with Bandura's four sources of efficacy, especially demonstrating strong effects in "verbal persuasion," "vicarious experience," and "emotional arousal regulation" (Kabir & Rabby, 2023). Instructional designs that emphasize goal-setting and progressive feedback have been shown to enhance students' sense of control and psychological stability when facing stage performance tasks. These interventions not only improve the execution of learning strategies but also help students maintain higher levels of efficacy belief under pressure (Chew & Cerbin, 2021).

Within the structure of self-efficacy and music education, instrumental instruction, due to its heavy reliance on individual skill accumulation and stage experience, has become a representative context for the application of self-efficacy theory (Bhati & Sethy, 2022). Studies have found that self-efficacy in instrumental learning not only influences the frequency of practice strategy usage, but also directly affects students' expressive capabilities and emotional regulation during public performances (Dong & Gedvilienė, 2025). Specifically, students with higher self-efficacy are more inclined to adopt structured, goal-oriented segmented practice strategies rather than repetitive mechanical exercises, and are more likely to maintain higher levels of motivation and persistence when facing technical challenges (Xavier & Meneses, 2022). Moreover, by setting phased achievement goals, organizing small-scale showcase performances, and reinforcing peer feedback mechanisms, teachers can effectively activate students' multidimensional self-efficacy construction pathways, thereby enhancing their expressive capabilities and psychological preparedness for complex musical tasks (Su et al., 2024). This theoretical and practical coupling mechanism has laid a solid foundation for further in-depth exploration of the psychological basis of expressive capabilities in instrumental learners.

Current Challenges in Developing Expressive Capabilities in Traditional Instrumental Music Education in Henan Province

Western instrumental performance gradually entered a systematized educational trajectory beginning in the Renaissance period, eventually developing into a highly professionalized system of instruction and performance. Western European music, initially dominated by church and court functions, emphasized ritualistic and functional roles. However, with the rise of the Enlightenment, music was gradually liberated from its religious functions, entering public concert halls and evolving into a "score-centered" and "performer-as-executor" mechanism. This model shaped a performance philosophy centered on "faithful reproduction," in which the performer's primary task was to precisely realize the composer's intentions and structural logic, with strict control over pitch, rhythm, and uniformity (Colin et al., 2022). In practice, Western stage performance emphasizes the tight integration of "control" and "reproduction." Modern Western conservatories often adopt a tripartite pedagogical structure of "technique-expression-stage psychology," offering multiple rounds of mock performance training before students even reach the formal stage. Performers are trained not only to achieve technical accuracy, but also to express musical emotional tension in front of an audience. Psychological preparation before performances, construction of stage presence, and training to respond to audience reactions form the core elements of expressive capabilities education (Lee & Liu, 2022).

Expressive capabilities are not merely an extension of technical skill but reflect internal psychological regulation and emotional construction (Gerli et al., 2022). In music pedagogy, expressive capabilities are often refined into the coordinated application of dynamic control, rhythmic shaping, timbral variation, and bodily expression. Research suggests that performers need to strengthen their grasp of musical phrasing, breathing rhythm, and a sense of musical flow to construct an "emotional contour," thereby enhancing the communicative power and depth of expression in musical works. Students are not only expected to faithfully present the composer's

intentions but also to establish their own performance styles, achieving personalized expression and emotional resonance through the stage (Mielke & Andrews, 2023).

In contrast, traditional Chinese instrumental performance does not typically rely on a systematic notation system or standardized evaluation criteria. Its construction of expressive capabilities is deeply rooted in the traditional philosophical emphasis on “spiritual comprehension” and “transmission of artistic conception.” Unlike the Western system, which highlights precision in score realization and technical uniformity, Chinese traditional music performance focuses more on the conveyance of inner *qi* and individualized expression. It emphasizes an integrated performance effect of “emotion guiding technique, spirit and form in harmony” (He, 2022). This philosophy leads to a mode of performance that does not rely solely on musical notation but values the free transformation of internal imagery and personalized interpretation. For example, in *guqin* performance, the notation adopts a “*jianzipu*” (reduced-character notation) system, which only records fingerings and pitches without specifying rhythm or dynamics. Performers rely on intuitive interpretation, “understanding the meaning through the rules,” to complete individualized musical renderings (Hang, 2014).

Traditional Chinese musical instruments often adopt pentatonic scales as their modal foundation and are primarily guided by a “fixed-do” (tonic-based) conceptual framework. The open-ended nature of their sonic structure provides ample space for improvisation and free expression. This system has shaped the aesthetic principle of “spirit over form” in traditional Chinese instrumental performance, where performers are required to pursue emotional flow within a limited technical framework. For example, compositions such as *Spring River in the Flower Moon Night* and *Three Variations on Plum Blossom* typically do not rely on fixed tempos or formal structures but instead seek a stage presentation characterized by fluid lines, contextual transitions, and progressive layering (Xing, 2025). This performance logic imparts qualities of “fluidity,” “flexibility,” and “spirituality” to traditional Chinese instrumental expression, placing demands on the development of expressive capabilities that differ from those of Western systems.

Within traditional modes of transmission, instrumental techniques are often passed down through oral and intuitive instruction. The teaching process emphasizes perceptual cognition and non-verbal interaction between master and apprentice, with instructional goals focusing on technical reproduction and stylistic imitation. However, systematic stage psychology training and expressive intervention mechanisms are largely absent (Tian et al., 2024). As a result, performers' understanding of works often remains at the level of technical reproduction, while the development of structural expressivity and emotional regulation remains uneven. Expressive capabilities are thus prone to imbalance in actual stage behavior. Moreover, influenced by traditional cultural values of “restraint and implicitness,” some performers lack training in stage presence during public performances, devoting little attention to body language, stage gaze, and audience interaction. These are factors that weaken the completeness and emotional impact of the performance. Studies have shown that students of traditional Chinese instruments often exhibit common traits during formal performances, such as “weak emotional tension, low technical stability, and singular expressive paths.” These issues are frequently rooted in the neglect of expressive structures and lack of stage experience during the training phase (Jiang et al., 2024). Therefore, under the current reform agenda in modern music education, exploring stage expressivity development pathways suited to traditional Chinese instrumental contexts has become a key issue in enhancing the expressive efficacy of national instrumental art.

In the reform efforts and research surrounding expressive capabilities in traditional Chinese instrumental performance, developed regions such as Beijing and Shanghai, owing to their concentrated educational resources, strong academic traditions, and frequent international exchange, have taken the lead in shifting from single-focus technical training to a more comprehensive cultivation of performance literacy (Mei & Symaco, 2021). These regions have established relatively systematic development models in curriculum design, teaching philosophy, and practice platform construction, achieving significant outcomes in both theoretical research and empirical exploration, thus providing models and references for nationwide educational reform in traditional instrumental performance.

In terms of curriculum structure and pedagogical philosophy, top conservatories such as the Central Conservatory of Music and Shanghai Conservatory of Music were among the first to incorporate expressive capabilities into the core training of music performance majors. Courses such as performance psychology, stage anxiety management, and artistic communication techniques have been systematically introduced into both undergraduate and postgraduate programs (Huang & Song, 2021). The construction of this curriculum breaks away from the conventional tendency in traditional instrumental instruction to “emphasize technique over expression,” establishing an educational philosophy that values both performance skill and expressive literacy. Students are expected not only to master instrumental techniques but also to possess the ability to convey emotions effectively and build emotional resonance with the audience in performance contexts.

However, despite the progress made in expressive capabilities training in developed regions of China, certain limitations remain. On one hand, there are still discrepancies in teaching models and course structures among institutions, and a standardized or nationally unified training system has yet to be formed. On the other hand, given

the increasing diversity of national instruments and the growing demand for individualized expression, current expressive training models still appear relatively standardized, and personalized or differentiated instruction needs to be further deepened (Cui & Wang, 2022). This disparity not only reflects the structural imbalance of the traditional music education system but also directly impacts the contemporary expressive capacity and sustainable transmission pathways of national music culture in central and western regions of China.

Firstly, the uneven distribution of educational resources remains the primary constraint hindering the development of instrumental stage performance education in central and western China. Compared with coastal cities in the east, although the number of universities in central and western regions has increased annually, the number of institutions offering high-level music performance programs remains relatively low and widely dispersed. This limits the overall quality of teaching. Many institutions still operate as music departments within comprehensive universities, where professional faculty, performance platforms, and teaching facilities are often insufficient to support a systematic cultivation of stage expressive capabilities. In addition, limited regional economic support places significant financial and policy pressures on these schools, making it difficult to develop curricula, organize performances, or innovate teaching practices (Xue & Li, 2021).

Secondly, music education in these regions is often marked by outdated teaching philosophies (Yang & Welch, 2023). Influenced by traditional technique-oriented instruction models, many universities continue to equate instrumental training with technical proficiency, overlooking the importance of cultivating students' emotional regulation, stage presence, and audience engagement strategies. As a result, even technically capable students often exhibit insufficient expressiveness, stage anxiety, or emotional rigidity during formal performances, which diminishes the overall quality and artistic impact of their presentations (Hongkun, 2024).

In terms of curriculum design, courses related to stage expressivity in central and western universities are generally characterized as “supplementary,” lacking both systematization and continuity. For instance, although some universities offer classes such as Stage Practice or Concert Design, these are typically limited to graduating students, without providing stepwise training from foundational to advanced levels. Furthermore, theoretical courses on topics like performance anxiety management, self-efficacy enhancement, or non-verbal expression strategies are extremely scarce. Consequently, students' understanding of stage expressivity remains superficial, lacking integrated training in psychological literacy and artistic awareness (Zheng, 2020).

It is worth noting that despite the relatively late start in the central and western regions, some provinces have begun exploring performance-based teaching strategies that incorporate local cultural resources. For example, provinces like Sichuan and Yunnan have experimented with embedding regional cultural elements into ethnic instrumental education, encouraging students to construct expressive strategies grounded in their ethnic cultural contexts. Some universities have also begun piloting stage training through campus performance seasons, collaborations with local ensembles, and simulated performance exercises (Liu, 2021). However, these efforts remain isolated practices with limited impact and lack theoretical synthesis and mechanisms for broader dissemination.

As a culturally significant province in China, Henan remains relatively underdeveloped in both teaching and research in this field (Wu et al., 2022). In terms of educational resources and institutional distribution, Henan lacks dedicated, high-level music institutions. Most music education programs are housed within comprehensive universities or vocational colleges. This institutional model results in a low level of specialization, with instrumental teaching primarily focused on technical training, and lacking a systematic, progressive framework for cultivating expressive stage performance. Studies show that although universities such as Henan University and Henan Normal University offer majors in musicology and instrumental performance, their curricula still lack sufficient attention to performance psychology, emotional expression, and stage presence training. As a result, most students experience fragmented stage exposure and insufficient psychological preparation throughout their studies (Li, 2023).

The outdated teaching philosophy is another critical factor constraining the development of instrumental stage expressivity in Henan Province. Traditional instructional perspectives still emphasize technical training and repertoire completion, reducing expressive performance to a mere byproduct of technical accuracy, while neglecting the significance of emotional regulation, nonverbal communication, and audience interaction during stage performances (Li, 2019). This one-sided emphasis on technique leads students to frequently experience stage anxiety, emotional tension, and rigid expression during formal performances, severely undermining the integrity and artistic appeal of musical presentations.

In practice, Although universities in Henan have provided some stage practice opportunities through events such as folk music festivals and campus concerts, for example, the Chuilatanchang folk music series by the College of Music at Henan Normal University (Guocheng & Sensai, 2022) these performances are primarily product-oriented, focusing on showcasing outcomes. They often lack pre-performance psychological preparation, in-performance adaptive guidance, and post-performance reflection or evaluation mechanisms. This “performance-centered but process-deficient” approach fails to substantially enhance students' actual stage expressive capabilities.

At the theoretical level, systematic research on instrumental stage expressivity in Henan remains in its infancy. Existing master's theses, such as Zhang (2018) study on performance anxiety intervention strategies and Wang (2020) survey on the current state of ethnic instrumental teaching, have touched on topics such as stage anxiety and emotional expression. However, these studies are largely descriptive, lacking in variable construction, empirical validation, and comprehensive theoretical models. An integrated framework combining psychology, pedagogy, and art theory has yet to be established, limiting the capacity to support educational reform.

Furthermore, issues persist in integrating traditional cultural heritage with modern education. Although Henan is rich in local folk music resources, current university teaching still prioritizes the continuation of technical skills in traditional instrumental performance, while paying insufficient attention to the organic integration of cultural connotation, emotional imagery, and contemporary aesthetic demands (Ren & Thotham, 2023). As a result, students often lack a deep understanding of the emotional context of their repertoire, leading to inadequate emotional transmission in performances, which in turn hampers the modern dissemination and audience reception of ethnic instrumental art.

In sum, Henan Province faces structural, systemic, and ideological challenges in cultivating stage expressivity in traditional instrumental music education. These limitations not only hinder the development of comprehensive performance competencies among music majors, but also pose significant obstacles to the innovation and transmission of regional traditional music culture in the context of contemporary education. Therefore, investigating the influence mechanism of stage expressive capabilities among Henan's music students through the lens of self-efficacy theory not only enriches the theoretical framework of traditional instrumental education, but also holds practical significance by providing theoretical and instructional guidance for improving higher education quality and promoting cultural heritage innovation.

Theoretical Foundations of the Social Leadership Model

The Social Leadership Model, proposed by Julian Stodd, represents a contemporary approach to leadership that is distinct from traditional hierarchical models. Rather than being grounded in a single theoretical tradition, the model draws upon a blend of social learning theory, distributed leadership, networked leadership, constructivist perspectives, and trust-based leadership principles (Stodd, 2014). These theoretical underpinnings collectively explain how leadership is earned, demonstrated, and co-constructed through interaction, community, and influence, particularly in social and digital spaces.

A central foundation of the Social Leadership Model is Bandura and Walters (1977), which emphasizes that individuals acquire behaviors, skills, and values by observing and interacting with others in a social environment. In this model, leaders do not command through instruction, but influence through visible modeling, storytelling, and engagement. Stodd incorporates this into his framework by emphasizing that leadership is practiced and earned through consistent, observable contributions that build reputation and trust within a community.

The model is also deeply influenced by Distributed Leadership and Network Leadership theories. These perspectives view leadership as a shared and decentralized function, not tied to a specific position. In the context of social leadership, influence flows across digital platforms, communities of practice, and peer networks. Stodd highlights how online engagement, such as blog posts, collaborative content, and digital presence, forms a crucial basis for leadership in modern settings, reinforcing that authority stems from participation, not position.

From a constructivist viewpoint, leadership is not a fixed trait but is developed through ongoing interaction and co-construction of meaning. The Social Leadership Model reflects this by focusing on co-creation, dialogue, community building, and shared narratives. Leadership identity is thus created in social relationships, rather than imposed from above. Dialogic leadership further supports the idea that leadership emerges from listening, engaging in reflective discussion, and enabling collective sense-making.

Finally, trust and authenticity are essential to social leadership. Drawing from authentic leadership theory, the model values transparency, ethical conduct, and consistency of action. A social leader gains influence by being reliable and relatable, qualities that foster trust in both offline and online communities. Julian Stodd positions trust and personal narrative at the heart of influence, replacing command-and-control leadership with connection and credibility.

Table 1 Summary of Theoretical Influences on the Social Leadership Model

Theory	How it Supports Social Leadership
Social Learning Theory	Learning by observing, modeling, and reflecting in social settings
Distributed Leadership	Leadership is shared, not tied to formal roles
Networked Leadership Theory	Influence spreads through online and offline networks
Constructivist Leadership	Leadership identity is co-constructed through dialogue
Authentic/Trust-Based Leadership	Trust, transparency, and personal narrative foster legitimacy

5 Conceptual Framework

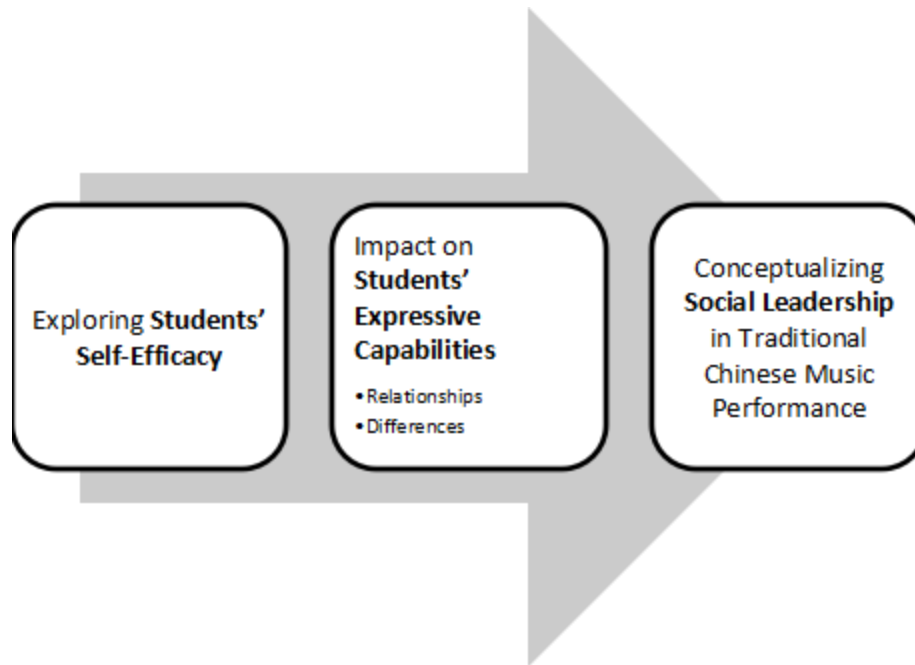


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is structured around three interrelated components: students' self-efficacy, their expressive capabilities in traditional Chinese musical performance, and the role of social leadership as a pedagogical and cultural enhancer. This structure visually and conceptually maps out how the psychological attributes of learners connect with their musical expressiveness, and how these can be further shaped by educational leadership. The framework reflects the developmental and performance-focused realities of university-level music education in Henan, China, particularly within the traditional Chinese music context where both technical mastery and expressive authenticity are highly valued.

The first component, exploring students' self-efficacy, focuses on understanding how students perceive their own competence and confidence in performing music. This segment addresses Research Question 1, which investigates the levels of self-efficacy and expressive capabilities across academic stages. By considering how students' beliefs in their abilities vary from year to year, the framework allows for a developmental analysis of self-efficacy, recognizing that confidence may grow with increased performance experience, feedback, and peer comparison. Self-efficacy, drawn from Bandura's social cognitive theory, is fundamental to musical learning, influencing students' willingness to take risks, persist through difficulty, and engage in expressive interpretation.

The second component of the framework emphasizes the impact of self-efficacy on students' expressive capabilities. This part addresses Research Questions 2 and 3, which explore the relationship between self-efficacy and expressiveness, and the differences across academic levels. Expressive capability in this study refers to the student's ability to communicate emotion, dynamics, and stylistic nuances in musical performance. The framework assumes that stronger self-efficacy enhances a student's willingness to interpret music with more depth and creativity. At the same time, academic stage differences may reveal disparities in how expressiveness develops over time, or how it is supported differently depending on the curriculum or teaching approach in early versus advanced years.

Finally, the third component centers on conceptualizing social leadership in traditional Chinese music performance, aligning with Research Question 4, which seeks to explore how social leadership can be thematically understood and applied to enhance student outcomes. Social leadership, as defined by Stodd (2014), focuses on influence through trust, community, and collaboration rather than authority. In this context, teachers and mentors act as social leaders by creating environments that promote student confidence and expressive risk-taking. Through qualitative thematic analysis, this framework allows the study to identify how certain leadership behaviors, such as storytelling, co-creation, emotional support, and digital engagement, contribute to the shaping of musical identity and expressive growth. This layer of the framework bridges the psychological and performative aspects with pedagogical practice, offering practical implications for music education in both local and broader Chinese cultural contexts.

Exploration of Self-efficacy

This section provides a systematic overview of the theoretical foundations, core dimensions, and practical significance, particularly the research gaps, of self-efficacy within the context of traditional instrumental music education. It begins by defining self-efficacy as a highly contextualized, task-oriented psychological belief system, emphasizing its regulatory function in generating learning motivation, managing emotional responses, and sustaining behavioral persistence. Drawing on Bandura's four-source model, the section offers in-depth analyses of mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological/emotional states, exploring their construction mechanisms and intervention value in instrumental learning through both international and domestic empirical studies. By integrating recent research findings with the specific educational context of central Chinese universities, this section further examines the localized applicability and adaptation challenges of self-efficacy theory in traditional Chinese music instruction, thereby laying a psychological foundation for subsequent investigations into the development of students' expressive capabilities.

Concept of Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their own ability to organize and execute the actions required to achieve a specific goal. It is not a judgment about the task itself, but rather a subjective evaluation of one's capability to complete the task. This belief plays a regulatory role in behavioral decision-making and acts as a mediating mechanism in cognitive processing, emotional responses, and motivational generation (Bandura, 1986). Psychologically, self-efficacy is highly task-dependent and context-sensitive, manifesting as a dynamic psychological construct that evolves with experience and adjusts in response to feedback (Puntoni et al., 2021). When facing the same external task, individuals with varying levels of self-efficacy will exhibit significantly different behavioral tendencies, levels of effort, and persistence strategies (Zimmerman, 2000). Therefore, self-efficacy is neither a stable personality trait nor equivalent to general self-confidence; rather, it is a highly contextualized and task-specific internal regulatory mechanism (Schunk & Pajares, 2009).

The functional mechanism of self-efficacy demonstrates strong predictive capacity, serving as a motivational starting point and emotional regulation core in learning behaviors (J. Yu et al., 2022). An individual's perceived ability before task initiation determines whether they approach the task, how much effort they exert during execution, and whether they persist in the face of setbacks. This belief system influences behavior initiation through "expectation of control," reinforces behavioral continuity through "successful attribution," and maintains psychological stability through "emotional regulation" (Bandura & Wessels, 1997). Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to set challenging goals, adopt more complex strategies, and exhibit higher resilience after failure (Zaman et al., 2021); in contrast, those with low self-efficacy are more likely to avoid difficult situations and display cognitive exhaustion, emotional withdrawal, or behavioral abandonment (Bandura, 2023). The core of this mechanism lies in its self-regulatory nature: self-efficacy not only predicts behavior but also guides individuals in resource mobilization, attention allocation, and the internalization of emotional experiences, thus forming a self-sustaining motivational system (Karoly, 2024). To further explain the specific operational pathways of this mechanism, Bandura proposed four psychological sources of experience: enactive mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal/social persuasion, and physiological and affective states, which constitute the core four-source model of self-efficacy formation. This structure has demonstrated strong explanatory power and practical adaptability in numerous task-intensive fields (Zhang et al., 2025).

In this study, self-efficacy is regarded as the core independent variable and is conceptualized as a key psychological mechanism influencing stage performance capabilities among students majoring in traditional Chinese musical instruments. Its core function is not to directly explain the outcomes of students' stage performances, but to reveal their level of psychological readiness prior to entering performance conditions, including processes such as cognitive mobilization, emotional regulation, and motivational activation (Bandura & Wessels, 1997; Ritchie & Williamon, 2007). Specifically, the level of self-efficacy determines whether students are willing to undertake complex and repetitive practice tasks, whether they can flexibly adjust strategies in the face of technical challenges, and whether they possess the capacity to maintain psychological stability under the highly uncertain environment of stage performance (McPherson & McCormick, 2006). In a longitudinal study of 157 Australian secondary school music students, McPherson and McCormick (2006) found that students with higher levels of self-efficacy were more likely to set challenging practice goals, persist in high-intensity daily practice, and demonstrate stronger strategic adaptability and problem-solving orientation when encountering skill bottlenecks. Zelenak (2024) found that students who scored higher on self-efficacy questionnaires typically adhered more effectively to long-term planning and self-feedback mechanisms during preparation, and exhibited more stable psychological states and expressive capabilities before public performances. This mechanism is particularly relevant in the context of central

Chinese universities. Due to structural constraints in teaching resources, faculty density, and performance opportunities, students in this region often face substantial performance pressure and weak psychological support. In this context, self-efficacy serves as a psychological “valve” that determines whether students can confidently step onto the stage, perform steadily, and effectively express artistic content (Wang et al., 2023). Wang et al. (2023), through a comparative quantitative questionnaire survey of students in eastern and central regions of China, pointed out that students in central regions scored significantly lower on scales such as “stage confidence” and “performance anxiety control,” indicating that structural inequalities in resources have a profound impact on students' psychological preparedness. Once their sense of efficacy is frustrated, students are more likely to become imbalanced due to physiological tension, past failure experiences, or negative external feedback, thereby affecting their depth of practice engagement and the quality of their stage performance (McPherson & McCormick, 2006; Zelenak, 2024).

Based on the above theoretical framework and contextual requirements, this study adopts “enactive mastery experience,” “vicarious experience,” “verbal persuasion,” and “physiological/emotional states” as the four core dimensions of self-efficacy to construct a theoretically consistent and operationally measurable structural model. This model not only informs the dimensional design of subsequent quantitative tools but also offers strong value for interview validation, enabling researchers to deeply understand the psychological mechanism of traditional instrument learners through a combination of structured measurement and qualitative analysis. Particularly in the teaching domain of traditional Chinese instruments, which involves high task intensity and long feedback cycles, the four-source model can effectively reveal the diversity in students' practice strategies, confidence-building approaches, and willingness to participate in performance, all of which are shaped by differences in psychological regulation ability under otherwise homogeneous resource conditions (Zhou et al., 2022).

Research Gap in Self-Efficacy

Although self-efficacy, as a core construct in social cognitive theory, has been widely validated for its regulatory value and application potential across various fields (Bandura & Wessels, 1997), several critical gaps persist in current research. These include the absence of systematically constructed theoretical models, the scarcity of intervention pathways and outcome evaluations, and the neglect of cultural adaptation and regional diversity. Such omissions limit the transferability of self-efficacy theory in specific educational contexts and hinder its localized application in multicultural educational systems, particularly within non-Western arts education environments (Zelenak, 2024).

Most empirical studies on self-efficacy to date remain focused on static inter-variable correlations, relying primarily on descriptive or basic regression analyses, while lacking the construction of mechanism-based models or systemic theoretical extensions (Gacicio, 2022). Although prevailing predictive models of efficacy demonstrate some explanatory power in areas such as individual motivation, strategic behavior, and persistence (Ferreira-Neto et al., 2023), they fall short in addressing multi-variable interactions, feedback regulation, and dynamic developmental trajectories—especially in high-complexity fields such as music education. Within performance anxiety scenarios, for example, the interplay between self-efficacy and other psychological variables like learning strategies or emotional regulation remains under-explored. Individuals' perceived efficacy in performance settings is frequently influenced by both external evaluations and subjective experiences, making its trajectory notably unstable. Although research has confirmed a significant inverse relationship between performance anxiety and musical self-efficacy, this relationship often fails to be effectively modulated in the absence of contextual support or targeted instructional strategies (Zelenak, 2024). This lack of fine-grained modeling severely constrains the practical application of theory in educational settings.

On the other hand, as a modifiable construct, self-efficacy theoretically lends itself to intervention and measurement. However, many existing intervention studies tend to be short-term in nature and lack sustained tracking or staged evaluation mechanisms (Sun, 2022). For instance, in a study on metacognitive interventions among university students, participants showed significant gains in self-efficacy scores at the end of the course, but scores regressed to baseline levels in follow-up assessments three months later, revealing a lack of sustained support mechanisms (Zhang et al., 2024). This phenomenon is particularly acute in artistic performance domains. Due to the high uncertainty and public evaluation pressure inherent in musical tasks, students often experience a sharp drop in confidence when performing on stage without structured training and feedback systems (Lin et al., 2023). While some music education studies have focused on general pedagogical improvements, targeted interventions, such as simulated performance, segmented feedback, and peer observation, have yet to be coherently theorized or systematically implemented. Although some institutions have attempted pre-performance counseling or periodic stage training, these interventions are rarely grounded in Bandura's four identified sources of self-efficacy (mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, physiological and emotional states), resulting in theoretically fragmented designs and weak outcome evaluation (Hipes, 2025).

A more critical issue lies in the fact that current self-efficacy research is almost entirely grounded in Western cultural and educational contexts, lacking effective integration of cultural variables, cognitive structures, and social norms in non-Western educational environments (Wang & Wu, 2023). Although Bandura emphasized that self-efficacy is applicable across diverse cultural settings, significant mismatches in cultural applicability have been observed in practice. For instance, studies in Argentina and Guatemala revealed that young students' self-efficacy beliefs are strongly influenced by family structures, gender norms, and social mobility, factors that substantially differ from the Western model, which emphasizes individual will and autonomous control (GIBBONS, 2022).

In the Chinese context, collectivist orientations and a high reliance on authority figures often lead students' self-judgments to be shaped by external evaluations rather than constructed through task experience. Under the traditional master-apprentice model, students are more accustomed to imitation than to constructing personal learning goals, resulting in a misalignment between behavioral experiences and efficacy judgments (Markus et al., 2024).

It is also noteworthy that there exists a clear bias in the educational stages covered by self-efficacy research (Livingi et al., 2021). Most studies concentrate on basic education, particularly analyzing the relationship between motivation and academic achievement among primary and secondary school students, with limited extension to higher education and specialized learning contexts. Research has shown that even though self-efficacy in secondary education may predict future academic performance, such predictive validity often breaks down at the university level, especially in highly specialized and practice-oriented domains like the arts, due to environmental changes and task complexity (Neroni et al., 2022). Structured instructional interventions such as goal-setting training and positive feedback mechanisms remain largely unimplemented in music-focused higher education institutions, constraining the operational applicability of theory in educational practice.

From a regional perspective, Central and Western China, particularly Henan Province, suffers from chronic disadvantages in educational resource allocation and psychological support systems. The development of psychological constructs is limited by resource scarcity, weak teacher support, and underdeveloped cultural climates. In an interview-based study targeting music students in Central China, most participants reported limited performance opportunities, insufficient feedback mechanisms, and a lack of teacher attention to psychological states. These issues led to significant fluctuations in performance expressiveness and frequent episodes of self-doubt (Jiang, 2025). Statistical data further indicate that students in Central and Western universities score significantly higher in anxiety, depression, and social pressure compared to their counterparts in Eastern China (Y. Yu et al., 2022).

Against this backdrop, traditional models of self-efficacy fail to adequately explain students' emotional regulation and cognitive control within complex cultural structures. This structural gap not only undermines the theoretical generalizability of self-efficacy but also directly impacts the efficacy and universality of psychological interventions. Therefore, in educational practices within underrepresented regions, there is an urgent need to refine mechanisms, reconstruct theoretical pathways, and embed them into the cultural context under the existing framework of social cognitive theory, in order to localize and effectively implement self-efficacy theory within traditional Chinese instrumental music education.

Research Gaps in Expressive Capabilities within Traditional Chinese Instrument Education

Although “expressive capability” has always been regarded as one of the key competencies in musical performance (Meissner, 2021), within the educational system of traditional Chinese instrumental music, its theoretical construction as an independent cognitive-to-affective construct remains significantly underdeveloped. Current teaching practices are generally focused on technical imitation and repertoire reproduction, neglecting the structural role of expressiveness in emotional communication, stylistic representation, and cultural transmission (Zhou, 2023). Studies have shown that traditional Chinese instrumental education has long relied on a master-apprentice model and a “technique-first” teaching paradigm, resulting in students' performance abilities remaining at the level of “accurate playing” rather than “deep expression” (Xing & Chen, 2024). In higher music education, expressiveness has not yet been systematically incorporated into curriculum design and competence evaluation frameworks. While students may meet technical requirements in performance, they lack training in expressive dimensions such as musical imagery construction, emotional regulation, and bodily expression. Their performances often exhibit insufficient emotional tension, unclear personal style, and weak stage adaptability (Song et al., 2024). Moreover, traditional instrumental works structurally emphasize free rhythm and the fluidity of imagery, which places higher demands on performers' emotional mobilization and stage presentation. However, existing teaching strategies have not yet established effective intervention mechanisms to support this performance logic (Zheng, 2024). Although some institutions have begun offering courses or modules related to expressiveness and performance training, such content is mostly short-term and fragmented in design, lacking a systematic path from emotional recognition to expressive transformation. The absence of structured teaching, reflective mechanisms,

and performance feedback cycles makes it difficult for students' expressive capabilities to develop steadily in stage scenarios (Hongkun, 2024). The construction of expressive capability still relies on personal experience and intuitive teacher guidance, and has not yet formed a standardized teaching path supported by theory.

Current dominant pedagogical concepts largely continue the tradition of "technique-centeredness," emphasizing technical accuracy and stylistic replication while viewing expressiveness as an auxiliary output rather than a cultivable psychological ability. This concept directly leads to a lack of systematic training in emotional expression, nonverbal communication, and stage situational adaptation in instructional design. Consequently, students often exhibit insufficient emotional tension and weak stage control in real performance contexts, revealing a structural disconnection between "technical completion" and "artistic presentation" (Zhou, 2023). In addition, the relationship between expressive development and cultural identity or regional aesthetic preferences has long been overlooked. Although traditional Chinese instrumental performance heavily relies on cultural imagery and aesthetic context, existing research rarely situates expressiveness within a cultural-psychological dimension. As a result, teaching often lacks theoretical integration between expressive ability, cultural understanding, and imagery construction. Assessment criteria for expressiveness are also largely based on Western logic, and a locally appropriate evaluation system has yet to be developed.

(Lau et al., 2015) noted that local music plays a critical role in shaping cultural identity, for instance, in regional music practices such as Jiangnan Sizhu and Chaozhou string-poetry, expressive capability is endowed with distinct cultural symbolic meaning. However, such regional aesthetics are often marginalized in national mainstream music education (Lau et al., 2015). In central provinces such as Henan, the situation is particularly lagging due to insufficient professional resources and outdated teaching concepts. Although most universities offer traditional instrument courses, they generally lack systematic mechanisms for stage simulation, psychological adjustment, and emotional expression training. Existing studies mostly remain at the descriptive level of teaching status, lacking explorations of underlying mechanisms or intervention experiments, and have yet to construct a theoretical research framework with "expressive capability" as a core variable (Li, 2023). Overall, in central regions, especially Henan Province, the educational mechanisms, cultural support, and practical pathways for developing expressive capabilities in traditional instrumental performance have not yet formed a comprehensive model integrating theory, pedagogy, and culture. This structural gap not only results in unbalanced development of students' stage expressive abilities but also seriously restricts the contemporary expression and effective dissemination of traditional musical culture within the modern educational system.

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