

Healthy Aging Among Older Thai Adults with Passive & Active Music Participation: *A Qualitative Study*

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Abstract

Music participation is a beneficial activity for seniors. This qualitative study examined the experiences of sixteen healthy older adults in Thailand who engaged in some way with music. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The findings revealed four themes. The first theme, “Music as Leisure vs. Identity,” highlights music's dual role in offering enjoyment and shaping one identity. The second theme, “Music's Role in Social Connections,” explores how engagement with music fosters relationships and builds a sense of community. The third theme, “Music for Well-being,” highlights music's contributions to health and well-being. The last theme “Music as Lifelong Self-Improvement vs. Contemplation” demonstrates music's role in personal growth, self-reflection and skill development. This study supports prior research and deepens our understanding of music's positive impact on the well-being of healthy older adults. Insights into their participation can inform initiatives to enhance the well-being of elders in Thailand.

Keywords: *Older Adults, Seniors, Music Participation, Well-Being, Qualitative Study*

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Introduction

Participation in music whether through performing, listening, or composing among older adults has attracted considerable interest from scholars in Thailand and internationally (e.g., Davidson et al., 2014: 99-104; Hallam and Creech 2016: 21-25; Kirapon and Deelers 2017: 363-373; Lehmberg and Fung, 2010: 19-30). Previous studies indicate that music engagement in everyday life fosters a sense of purpose, autonomy, and social connection, while enhancing happiness, emotional well-being, and cognitive and physical development. Music also shapes perceptions of identity, beauty, and aesthetics, providing relaxation, stress relief, and motivation (Ponprasit et al., 2020: 91-103). Over the past decade, music educators have researched issues related to aging, particularly organizing music activities and developing instruments tailored for older adults to promote musical skills and well-being (Boonrod, 2021: 132-152; Phoasavadi, 2022: 258-271; Suttachitt et al., 2023: 94-111; Tissadikun, 2019: 95-108).

This raises important questions: “How does participation in music-related activities affect older adults?” “How do their experiences differ across these activities?” Although few empirical psychological studies have addressed these questions in the Thai context, the literature classifies musical participation as either passive or active. Consumers who listen to live performances or recorded music are passively engaged. Groarke and Hogan (2015: 95-115) show that listening to music each day enhances older adults’ social relationships and personal development, and encourages both social interaction and introspection. In contrast, active participation consist of playing instruments or singing, which foster creativity and connection through shared experiences (Creech et al., 2013: 87-102). Creech et al. (2014: 32-49) found that active engagement significantly improves self-esteem and strengthens identity, giving older adults a sense of purpose and autonomy in musical expression, while reinforcing social connections and contributing to a supportive community.

International empirical studies have examined the impact of older adults’ participation in musical activities. Sole, Mercadal-Brotons, Gallego, and Riera (2010: 264-281) identified choral groups, aesthetic groups, and music therapy groups, finding that participants in these groups reported improved quality of life, particularly in social terms, the formation of new friendships and personal growth. Older adults engaged in these activities to acquire knowledge and build connections. A qualitative study on singing among Chinese-Australian seniors found that participants enjoyed themselves, experienced relaxation, and had meaningful exchanges, all of which reduced their feelings of isolation and loneliness (Li and Southcott, 2012: 59-78). Research has also shown that music improves intergenerational relationships; for example, by joining a choir, older adults and children could spend time together, cultivating mutual understanding and cooperation (Varvarigou et al., 2011: 207-220). Hays and Minichiello (2005: 437-451) investigated the significance of music in the lives of Australian seniors, finding that it infused their lives with meaning, purpose, and satisfaction, thereby enhancing their quality of life. Their study also highlighted music's spiritual role among older adults as a means of focus, expression, and reflection. Even among participants who identified as non-religious, music provided a profound sense of existence, allowing for introspection and self-reflection similar to that offered by religious practices. Li and Southcott (2015: 316-333) examined the significance of piano lessons in the lives of older Chinese men and women. The findings indicated that learning music promotes emotional and physical well-being, while offering a valuable lifelong learning experience

and that performing music gave them a sense of accomplishment. While prior research has established that both active and passive participation in music can enhance well-being, active participation has been linked to additional benefits, including shifts in thinking, emotional responses, a sense of life having meaning, self-acceptance, and identity (Packer and Ballantyne, 2010: 164-181). However, more recent studies have not explored whether older adults who engage actively with music have different experiences from passive music consumers. This gap in the literature highlights the need for further investigation. This study fills this gap by examining the experiences of Older Thai adults who are both active and passive participants in music. By gaining insights into the distinct ways older adults engage with music, the research contributes to promoting well-being and preventing mental health issues within Thailand's aging population. Understanding these experiences could inform future music-related initiatives and programs that support healthy aging and enrich the lives of older adults.

Methodology

This qualitative study adopted a scientific phenomenological method grounded in Husserl's concepts to explore and clarify the experiences of older Thai adults who were actively or passively engaged with music. This approach focuses on understanding their lived experiences and revealing the underlying structures and meanings behind their interactions with music (Giorgi, 2017: 83-144).

The participants in this study consisted of two groups of healthy older adults without neurocognitive disorders. The first group consisted of eight older adults (1 male and 7 females) aged between 60 and 82 years, who passively engaged in music, primarily by enjoying and appreciating music. The second group consisted of eight older adults (6 males and 2 females) aged 61 to 74 years, who engaged actively in music by playing instruments, singing, or performing. All participants were recruited through recommendations from gatekeepers, including leaders of music communities, directors of senior citizens clubs, alumni from colleges and universities with music programs, and staff at local senior residences and nursing homes. This strategic recruitment ensured that the selected individuals had relevant experiences and insights, enriching the understanding of the impact of music on older adults. Figure 1's table presents the personal and demographic information for each participant in addition to musical involvement. This information is essential for contextualizing the findings and understanding the diverse experiences of the participants.

Based on Giorgi (2017: 83-144), the researcher conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with open-ended questions to create a welcoming environment for informants. This approach encourages rich narratives, candid answers, and deeper insights into participants' lives. Questions like "How has music played a role in your life?" and "How has participating in musical activities affected your quality of life?" prompted thoughtful reflections on respondents' personal connections with music. To ensure a smooth interview, the researcher developed flexible guiding questions that allowed conversations to flow naturally. This adaptability enabled informants to discuss the topics they found most significant. By fostering an open and comfortable atmosphere, the researcher aimed to encourage the participants to share their stories and experiences. The content validity of the interview questions was rigorously verified by experts in qualitative research, ensuring

that they captured participants’ experiences and aligned with the study’s objectives. This careful attention to question design enhanced the reliability of the data, accurately capturing participants’ voices.

Code	Pseudonyms	Age	Gender	Occupation	Everyday Music Engagement
Group 1: Passive Participants in Music					
PA01	Orn	69	Female	University professor	Listening to music while working, exercising, or driving
PA02	Kai	62	Female	Writer / freelance translator	Listening to music, watching concerts
PA03	Toy	82	Male	Retired	Listening to music, collecting gramophone records, ballroom dancing
PA04	Suay	70	Female	Business owner	Listening to music while working or driving, watching the musical/singing TV programs
PA05	Jib	61	Female	Retired	Listening to music, watching the music performance
PA06	Paew	65	Female	Retired	Watching the musical/singing TV programs, listening to music
PA07	Cook	69	Female	Retired	Listening to music, watching music performances
PA08	Ya	72	Female	Retired	Casually listening to music
Group 2: Active Participants in Music					
AC01	Noon	65	Female	Retired	Performing singing or karaoke
AC02	Add	74	Male	Musician	Playing guitar, arranging music, and teaching music
AC03	Ake	69	Male	Retired	Playing guitar, singing, karaoke
AC04	Tee	62	Male	Musician	Playing guitar and keyboard
AC05	Pong	70	Male	Music teacher/ Instructor	Playing saxophone, teaching music in a high school, and being a music educator
AC06	Tiew	63	Female	Music teacher/ Instructor	Teaching music to young children
AC07	Karn	63	Male	Music teacher/ Instructor	Teaching music in a high school
AC08	Tar	61	Male	University professor of music	Teaching music at university, playing guitar, being a professional musician

Figure 1. Table of personal background information for each participant.

Following approval from Chulalongkorn University's Office of the Research Ethics Review Committee for Human Subjects (COA. 255/2564), the researcher began data collection. After obtaining informed consent, the researcher provided detailed information about the study and outlined the participants' rights, in accordance with the committee's approved procedures. Participants were required to sign a consent form to confirm their willingness to take part. The researcher then conducted one online interview with each informant, lasting approximately 1-2 hours. This online format was chosen to protect the health of older adults, who were particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 during the data collection period (January – June 2022). The researcher employed Giorgi’s (1985) approach to data analysis, a method well-suited for capturing the richness of participants' lived experiences. This process involved several steps:

1. Creating a verbatim transcript of each interview and reviewing the data to gain a comprehensive understanding of each informant's experience.
2. Conducting multiple readings to extract detailed information and identify meaningful units from the informants' descriptions, without initially imposing predefined definitions.
3. Engaging deeply with each meaning to grasp the core aspects of the musical experiences of older musicians.
4. Analyzing the complete meaning units, categorizing them, and identifying patterns that reflect the structure of the informants' experiences.
5. To ensure the credibility of the findings, the first author repeatedly read, analyzed, and discussed the data. The second and third authors, serving as advisers, validated the analysis, ensuring it aligned closely with the informants' experiences and minimized biases, errors, or misinterpretations

Results

The findings reveal four main themes. The first, Music as Leisure vs. Identity, highlighted its dual role. The second, Music's Role in Social Connections, reflected its impact on interpersonal relationships. The third, Music for Well-being, illustrated its contribution to health and well-being. The fourth and last theme, Music as Lifelong Self-Improvement vs. Contemplation, emphasized its role in personal growth.

Main Theme 1: Music as Leisure vs. Identity

Both groups of older adults considered music an important part of their lives. Group 1 (passive consumers of music) viewed music as "an activity they choose to engage in during their spare time" for entertainment and self-development. In contrast, Group 2 (active participants in music) described music as "analogous to an organ or a part of the body," emphasizing its inseparability from their lives. Under this main theme, the older adults discussed three subthemes:

Subtheme 1.1: Early Music Exposure

The members of both groups reflected on similar beginnings to their musical experiences in childhood. Group 1 noted they "grew up in an environment where music was played." Group 2 shared that they "absorbed a love for music from those around them." Here are some examples:

In fact, I've been listening to it since I was a child. Like, my mother listened to it when I was young. She turned on the vinyl player, played the records of Sawali, Charin, Jintana and other Chinese songs, good old Chinese songs, something like this. I'd listen to it all day and night. While mom was sewing, she would play music, and I would hear something like this. - Kai (Group 1 code PA02)

It started with my grandmother, really from the very beginning. My mother is a person who loves music, likes to listen, likes to sing, and she wants her children to feel that they can play music, especially Thai instruments. She'd ask me to play a little for her. There was a Thai hammered dulcimer at home, and mom would want me to play it. It was taught to me by my sister. She went to study, and I learned from her and occasionally practiced playing. I studied the dulcimer in school as a music subject, but just like playing it freely. I didn't take music seriously in the past because it's just like another subject that I had to study. - Tiew (Group 2 code AC06)

Subtheme 1.2: Fascination with Music vs. Deep Passion for Music

Older adults in Group 1 noted that they have been listening to music since childhood, making it a regular and enjoyable part of their lives. They expressed strong preferences for a variety of types of music. The members of Group 2 expressed a passion for music that often overshadowed other aspects of their lives and led some to pursue careers in music. Here are examples:

Actually, I'm a music lover and I enjoy listening to all types of music, but most of them are foreign songs. I prefer international music and light classical music. Well, listening to music is like stepping up. I liked slow songs, fast songs, and preferred vocal songs when I was a teenager. - Kai (Group 1, code PA02)

I've been playing [music] since I was a young adult, but it's almost like playing by heart... Sometimes it's like, ah, I feel like singing today, something like this. Then, I listen to music while doing things like planting or gardening in the backyard. After taking a shower and allowing my body to rest for a while, if I feel the urge to sing, I'll pick up the guitar and sing some songs. But as soon as my hands start to hurt, I'll stop. - Aek (Group 2 code AC03)

Well, I'm really into jazz, but I don't know why, it truly drives me to seek it out. Since I've been listening to that cassette... the music has a slight retro jazz feel, but within the mellowness and smoothness, there is complexity underneath. So, it makes me feel eh!! [wonder]. Its complexity makes me curious and drawn in, as if I'm curious about it... - Tar (Group 2 code AC08)

Subtheme 1.3: Music as Part of Everyday Life vs. an Integral Connection to Life

Older adults in Group 1 described music as a significant aspect of their daily routines. In contrast, Group 2 described music as an essential connection to life itself, reflecting a deeper integration of music into their existence. Here are examples:

My uncle listens to music while monitoring the stocks until noon. When the market opens in the afternoon, he turns it back on and enjoys music during his trading routine. – Jib (Group 1, code PA05).

Right now, it's like, how to put it, it's been a part of my life. Music meant two things to me: listening to it solely and playing along with it. If I have to separate, I separate between listening to other people's work and playing, umm the music that I like... Music adheres to me like my limbs, which are, after all, a part of my body. – Tee (Group 2 code AC04).

Main Theme 2: Music's Role in Social Connections

Members of both groups reported similar experiences with music's ability to facilitate social interactions. The participants in Group 1 stated that "music contributes to their social activities," emphasizing how engaging in music creates opportunities to connect and build relationships with others, including people of different ages. According to one participant, "Besides happiness, I also gain experience; it keeps me up to date when someone talks to me. It's sort of, I mean, I can still talk to younger people as if I'm a modern person." – Jib (Group 1 code PA05). Another participant mentioned how singing together in school helped maintain connections and intimacy, stating, "Bind our relationship together so that we can be more intimate and love each other. Today, we are still connected because we used to sing together in school." – Ya (Group 1 code PA08).

In Group 2, participants indicated that "music strengthens social relationships." This led to the identification of two subthemes: Strong Family Connections and Social Interaction across Ages and Genders.

For Subtheme 2.1, participants described how music activities enhance family bonds, even among people with different tastes in music. Tiew (Group 2, code AC06) explained how new musical instruments or records create opportunities for conversation and connection among family members.

In terms of music, it emphasized bringing new musical instruments or a new stereo system to play music together. My son likes to bring something new, buy a record player or vinyl record, and when we turn it on, we can make conversation, such as asking about the new disc or being excited to hear this song, a new release. It gave us something to talk about, and most of the time it's a chat between father and son. - Tiew (Group 2 code AC06).

For Subtheme 2.2, participants noted that music facilitates connections across age and gender. They recounted forming friendships regular karaoke sessions and similar activities. One informant compared playing music together to "telepathy" and emphasizing the shared joy and energy of these experiences.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, I had a group of friends who also liked to sing. We formed a group and set aside time to get together, such as every Friday to sing at a restaurant with karaoke and a piano. I'll have a meeting with these friends every Friday. – Add (Group 2 code AC01).

Another informant reflected:

Playing music together is like turning on the radio. A kind of telepathy... like communication without voice. This level is not easy for a new band to achieve; it's the level that results from constantly playing together for a long time. Relationships through sound are incredible... It's like when we were watching some bands play and had a lot of fun because of the energy that the bands immediately delivered to the audiences, it's like throwing happiness and energy toward the people who were listening. – Tar (Group 2 code AC08).

Main Theme 3: Music for Well-being

The members of both groups view participation in music activities as a way to improve their health and well-being. This main theme highlights music's role in restoring physical vitality and mental acuity, helping them cultivate energy while promoting cognitive health and quality of life.

The theme has two subthemes: Music's Role in Mood Balancing, and Music's Ability to Relieve Fatigue. Notably, Group 1 described music as effective for "mental relaxation, contentment, and pleasure," while Group 2 viewed it as "the nourishing water for healthy physical and mental well-being." Through their shared experiences, participants identify music as an essential tool for navigating complex emotions and fostering a more positive outlook on life.

Subtheme 3.1: Music's Role in Mood Balancing

Participants in both groups described how music helped enhance positive emotions such as happiness, enjoyment, and relaxation. Jib (Group 1, code PA05) noted, "I'm not easily dis-

tracted and don't obsess over things. Listening to music helps relieve loneliness and sets the mood. I occasionally listen to monks' sermons; this year is the first time I've started doing so." Tiew (Group 2, code AC06) shared, "When I'm alone, I just want to listen to music. It instantly responds to my mood. Some days, I seek calming music, while other days, I play lively songs and dance by myself." Both groups mentioned using music to alleviate stress and anxiety. Kai (Group 1, code PA01) said, "It helps us feel relaxed and shifts our mood, preventing confusion and stress." Noon (Group 2, code AC01) echoed this sentiment, stating, "When I feel frustrated with those around me—my kids, friends, or family—I retreat to my room to listen to music. It helps change my mood and allows me to forget the source of my anger."

Subtheme 3.2: Music's Ability to Relieve Fatigue

This subtheme emphasizes the transformative impact of music, according to informants from both groups. They claimed that music both revitalizes their spirits and facilitates cognitive enhancement. Engaging with music stimulates the mind, contributing to improved memory and concentration. Ya (Group 1, code PA08) remarked, "It's probably a memory thing; it makes us listen and sing, helping us remember the lyrics and keeping our brains active. It prevents us from forgetting easily." Similarly, Pong (Group 2, code AC05) stated, "I believe music has beneficial effects, especially for the elderly. It plays a crucial role in our healing. We have the power to heal ourselves and don't need to rely on others. Sometimes I write songs when I'm free, which gives my life purpose and makes me feel valuable." This subtheme demonstrates the dual role of music in restoring physical vitality and mental acuity among older adults. This subtheme emphasizes the multifaceted role of music in mood balancing, revealing its potential to enhance emotional resilience and well-being among older adults.

Main Theme 4: Music as Lifelong Self-Improvement vs. Contemplation.

Older adults in both groups shared varied experiences within this theme. Group 1 viewed music as a means of "Lifelong Self-Improvement." Group 2 saw it as "Lifelong Contemplation." These differing perspectives, shaped by participants' diverse backgrounds, offered valuable insights for each group within the fourth theme. Members of Group 1 examined three subthemes of "Music as Lifelong Self-Improvement." This theme demonstrates music's central role in lifelong learning and personal development. Participation in musical activities fosters empathy, patience, and an appreciation for beauty, linking musical ability to sophistication and social grace. Ultimately, music acts as a catalyst for growth, encouraging older adults to embrace new challenges and enrich their lives.

Subtheme 4.1 (Group 1): Acquiring Knowledge for Self-Improvement

This subtheme emphasizes music as an essential tool for personal growth and knowledge across linguistic, social, and cultural dimensions. Participants noted that engaging with music deepened their appreciation for the Thai language and culture. Suay (Group 1, code PA04) shared that their mother learned English grammar by listening to Western music. "If we listened to that song frequently, we could learn many things – at least the grammar." This example illustrates music as an educational resource, allowing for natural absorption of language. Ya (Group 1, code PA08) remarked, "Music allowed me to experience the lives and emotions of others. Songs carry meanings like movies, resonating even after the artist is gone." This perspective emphasizes how music reflects social and cultural changes, fostering empathy and understanding. Overall, this subtheme underscores music's profound impact on lifelong learning and personal development.

Subtheme 4.2 (Group 1): Promoting Positive Character Traits

This subtheme emphasizes music's role in cultivating admirable qualities in Group 1. Participants remarked that engaging with music enhances personal skills while fostering refinement and social connections. Orn (Group 1, code PA01) expressed, *"I believe that those who can play music are refined individuals who know how to make friends and appreciate leisure and rest."* This perspective suggests that musical ability is linked to sophistication and social grace, encompassing traits like empathy, patience, and an appreciation for beauty.

Subtheme 4.3 (Group 1): Embracing Lifelong Learning

This subtheme highlights how older adults in Group 1 view music as a vital tool for personal development. Participants shared experiences of gaining new skills through various musical activities. Kai (Group 1, code PA02) illustrated this by describing how reconnecting with high school friends in the Suntaraporn band led him to learn singing techniques. He noted, *"They helped me with breathing and practicing the 'Buakaw' song, guiding my posture and encouraging improvement."* This experience emphasizes the supportive environment that fosters community and connection, further enriching their lives.

Older adults in Group 2 explored three subthemes of "Lifelong Contemplation," emphasizing music as a tool for introspection, personal growth, and deeper understanding. Participants expressed pride in their musical abilities and noted how music reconnects them with others and fosters development. Their experiences highlight music's transformative power, motivating engagement and enhancing connections with the world.

Subtheme 4.1 (Group 2): Integrating Core Identity with Music

This subtheme illustrates how the musical identities of people in Group 2 have become intertwined with their sense of self through regular engagement in music activities. Participants expressed that music is more than an interest; it is part of their identity, shaping their experiences and interactions. Their unique identities as musicians are often conveyed through their distinct singing voices or the sounds of their instruments. This integration of music into their identities allows them to express themselves in ways that words alone may not. Pong (Group 2, code AC05) said, *"I possess a whole musicianship. I met an old friend from high school who had never seen me play music, and when he heard me perform at a reunion in Ayutthaya last year, he exclaimed, 'Wow! What a divine level!'"* This moment not only reflects Pong's pride in his musical abilities but also emphasizes how music reconnects people with others and facilitates personal growth.

Subtheme 4.2 (Group 2): Creating Meaning and Living a Valuable Life

This subtheme illustrates how regular engagement with music gives the people in Group 2 a profound sense of value and purpose. Participants emphasized that music infuses their lives with meaning, making daily experiences more worthwhile. As Ta (Group 2, code AC08) stated, *"The only thing that keeps me alive is playing music. It gives my everyday life purpose and challenges me at this age. I don't want to grow old incompetently. I aspire to be a quality elderly person; for me, there is no retirement – I've been retired since I grew up."* This statement encapsulates the transformative power of music, by motivating individuals to remain engaged and proactive.

Subtheme 4.3 (Group 2): Personal Growth with Understanding of the World and Life

This subtheme reveals how music engagement significantly contributed to the personal growth and perspectives of people in Group 2. Participants noted that music shaped their musical identities while deepening their understanding of others and the world. As Aek (Group 2, code AC03) reflected, *"I used to be aggressive and hot-tempered, but music has transformed me into a kinder person who understands others' contexts."* Tiew (Group 2, code AC06) noted, *"I've become more understanding and less frustrated with others. After ten years of teaching, my perspective has shifted – I've learned to let go of high expectations and feel more at ease."* These reflections illustrate how engaging with music has broadened their understanding of life and enhanced their connections with others.

Discussion

This study explored the experiences of healthy older adults in Thailand as they actively and passively engaged with music. Passive engagement consists of consuming music, such as listening to live or recorded performances; active participation includes creating music by playing instruments or singing. Two key findings are discussed here.

The role of music in enhancing health and well-being emerged as a prominent theme. The findings of this study support previous research on the significant benefits of active and passive participation in music for older adults in Thailand. Engaging with music both provides enjoyment and serves as a crucial aspect of identity, bringing joy, fulfillment and self-expression to their daily lives. Music allows older adults to build intergenerational relationships and strengthen family bonds. This social engagement helps combat feelings of isolation and enhances emotional resilience, creating a supportive network that contributes to their physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Both active and passive participation in music strengthens social relationships, allowing older adults to engage in a variety of social activities. Participants reported improved connections with close family, acquaintances, and even strangers. This aligns with Southcott and Joseph (2013), who found that choir singing fosters a sense of community and belonging. Additionally, music activities enable older adults to express their identities and maintain their well-being. Many participants noted that playing and listening to music increased their joy and happiness while reducing boredom and irritability (Hays and Minichiello, 2005). Moreover, music promotes relaxation and alleviates fatigue, leaving older adults feeling invigorated, with some likening it to water for the mind. These findings resonate with studies by Greasley and Lamont (2011), which found that individuals who listen to music 21 to 40 hours per week are more likely to select music that helps manage their emotions or enhances specific activities. Laukka's (2007) research on older Swedish adults similarly showed that music is a popular leisure activity used to manage emotions, create enjoyment, and induce relaxation. Baker and Ballantyne (2013) also observed that older adults who engaged in music activities reported enjoyment and good health. While this study focuses on older Thai adults, the results are consistent with previous studies involving older adults in amateur music activities (Hays and Minichiello, 2005). This consistency underscores music's critical role in fostering emotional and physical well-being while providing valuable lifelong learning experiences and a sense of accomplishment (Southcott and Joseph, 2013; Li and Southcott, 2015).

It is important to note that this study was limited to healthy older adults without neurocognitive disorders. Additionally, the findings indicate that members of both groups have engaged with music since childhood. Family and community are crucial in instilling an interest in movement, influencing older adults to develop a love for music and integrate it into their daily lives. This ongoing engagement contributes to strengthened social relationships, continuous self-improvement, and overall well-being.

In addition, the differing impacts of passive and active participation in music were noteworthy. This study addresses a gap in the research by exploring the unique benefits of active versus passive engagement in music among older Thai adults. While previous studies have shown that active and passive participation can enhance well-being, active participation offers additional advantages, including improvement in cognitive processes, enhanced emotional responses, a deeper sense of life meaning, increased self-acceptance, and a stronger sense of identity (Packer and Ballantyne, 2010). The study reveals notable differences in self-development between the two groups. For those engaging passively with music, the impact is significant; it facilitates lifelong learning and cultivates positive traits like attention to detail and the ability to relax. This passive engagement often leads to enjoyment and appreciation of music, providing a soothing backdrop to daily life. In contrast, older adults who are actively engaged with music see it as integral to their identity, helping them create meaning in their lives and enriching their understanding of the world.

Older adults who simply consume music consider it a pastime that they engage in for entertainment and self-development. They appreciate music as a source of relaxation and fulfillment, but it is not part of their core identity. They noted that music enhances their social activities, so that they can connect with others across generations and acting as a catalyst for personal growth. Conversely, older adults who actively participate in music liken it to a part of their body that they cannot do without. This metaphor emphasizes their deep emotional and spiritual connection to music, suggesting it shapes their experiences and interactions with the world. They recognized music as crucial for building and enhancing social relationships, articulating how it not only improves their mood but also serves as a source of connection, community, and personal expression. They expressed pride in their musical abilities and noted how music reconnects them with others and fosters development. Their experiences emphasize music's transformative power, motivating engagement and deepening connections with the world.

These findings align with Hay and Minichiello (2005), who noted that listening to and playing music, and singing all enable older adults to explore their identities and emotions. Active participation is a powerful means of communication, allowing individuals to express themselves more authentically. Members of the active group likely have a long-standing relationship with music, leading to deeper integration of music into their identities and a more pronounced development of their psychological identity than passive consumers of music. Ultimately, this study emphasizes that while both forms of participation offer valuable benefits, the emotional and psychological connections forged through active engagement significantly enhance self-development and identity formation in older adults. This distinction highlights the importance of fostering opportunities for active musical participation in community programs and interventions aimed at improving the well-being of older populations.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The study confirms the centrality of music in the lives of older adults, often mentioning its multifaceted role in enhancing health and well-being. Music fosters social connections across generations, helping to combat isolation and contributing to emotional health through supportive community interactions. The study also distinguishes passive from active participation in music. Although both offer substantial benefits, active engagement—such as performing or creating music—brings additional advantages, including improved cognitive processes, greater emotional expression, and a stronger sense of identity. In contrast, passive engagement, like listening to music, promotes lifelong learning and relaxation, enriching daily experiences. These findings have implications for policymakers and service providers as they consider the diverse needs of older adults. Local policies and community interventions may focus on the importance of incorporating both active and passive music participation into community programs for older adults in Thailand to enhance their health and well-being. Initiatives such as music classes, community choirs, and listening sessions can encourage participation and promote lifelong learning. Organizations can design programs that offer opportunities for both performances and music creation, catering to diverse preferences. To maximize benefits, there should be efforts to encourage older adults to engage in singing, playing instruments, and joining music groups, with accessible workshops and classes. Policymakers can advocate for funding to support these initiatives, ensuring their accessibility. In sum, a balanced approach to musical engagement is essential, recognizing the unique benefits of both active and passive participation to improve the quality of life for older adults.

Acknowledgments

The authors express their gratitude to the participants in this study and the 100th Anniversary Chulalongkorn University for the Doctoral Scholarship.

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