

Music Educators as Self-Carers and Self-Care Agents: Exploring Selected Chinese International Graduate Students' Self-Care Practices and Their Contexts

Brian Bantugan, PhD¹, Lei Chai², Yan Dang², Tian Wang²,
Ge Zhang², and Yunxia Zhang²

¹Faculty Member, St. Paul University Manila

²Graduate Student, St. Paul University Manila

Abstract: The primary goal of this study was to examine the self-care practices, contexts, and benefits associated with graduate studies among music educators currently enrolled in the Doctor of Musical Arts Program with a specialization in Music Education, focusing specifically on a convenient sample of Chinese students from St. Paul University Manila. Participants were asked to respond to a three-item open-ended survey focusing on self-care practices, contexts of practice, and perceived benefits within the context of graduate studies. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the responses. The findings revealed that the respondents demonstrate proactive, comprehensive, and well-rounded self-care behaviors, prioritizing their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. The environment of music educators, as evidenced by the respondents' self-care practices, entails high levels of mental engagement, significant emotional demands, continuous learning, elevated stress levels, complex interpersonal dynamics, and the necessity of maintaining physical health. Self-care was perceived as enhancing academic performance, fostering emotional resilience, maintaining physical health, and developing essential life skills. Additionally, it was noted to improve social relationships, prevent burnout, and promote long-term well-being. The integration of self-care into educational curricula can provide students with the necessary tools to excel academically and lead fulfilling, healthy lives.

Keywords: Self-Care Practices, Self-Care Contexts, Self-Care Benefits, Graduate Students, Music Educators

I. Introduction

The number of Chinese international students pursuing graduate education abroad has seen a significant rise over the past decade. According to the Institute of International Education (IIE), China is the largest source of international students worldwide, contributing to a substantial proportion of the international student population in many Western countries, particularly the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. These students often face a unique set of challenges, including cultural adjustment, language barriers, academic pressures, and social isolation.

Self-care, defined as a multi-dimensional, multifaceted process of purposeful engagement in strategies that promote healthy functioning and enhance well-being, is crucial for managing these stressors. Effective self-care practices can improve mental health outcomes, academic performance, and overall quality of life. Despite the importance of self-care, there is limited research on the self-care behaviors and practices of Chinese

international graduate students. This population is particularly vulnerable due to the intersection of academic demands and the challenges associated with living in a foreign country.

Previous studies on international students have generally focused on psychological distress, academic challenges, and social adaptation, but there is a gap in understanding how these students engage in self-care and how it affects their well-being and academic success. Understanding the self-care practices of Chinese international graduate students is vital for developing targeted interventions and support services to help them navigate their academic and personal lives effectively.

The rationale for this study stems from the need to address the well-being of a growing but understudied population. Chinese international graduate students are often under considerable pressure to succeed academically while adapting to a new cultural environment. The stress associated with these demands can have adverse effects on their mental and physical health. By investigating their self-care practices, this study aims to identify the specific strategies that these students use to cope with their unique challenges.

Furthermore, this study seeks to fill a gap in the existing literature by providing a detailed exploration of the self-care behaviors among Chinese international graduate students. This information is crucial for higher education institutions that aim to support the health and well-being of their international student population. Insights from this study can inform the development of culturally sensitive resources and programs that promote effective self-care practices.

By focusing on self-care, this research acknowledges the agency of Chinese international graduate students in managing their health and well-being. It shifts the narrative from viewing them solely as passive recipients of institutional support to recognizing their proactive efforts in self-maintenance and resilience. This perspective is essential for creating empowering and supportive educational environments that respect and build on the students' strengths.

This study on the self-care practices of Chinese international graduate students is not only timely but also essential for enhancing the academic and personal success of this significant and growing student population. It aims to provide a deeper understanding of how these students maintain their well-being and to offer practical recommendations for higher education institutions to better support them.

Self-Care

Self-care involves a wide range of practices aimed at maintaining and improving one's physical, mental, and emotional health. It is essential in various contexts, from personal health management to sustaining professional well-being (Güler&Engin, 2023). Self-care can take various forms, including activities like exercise, meditation, social interactions, and ensuring adequate sleep (Prasad & Mehendale, 2023). Additionally, it extends to managing illnesses through self-management strategies, where patients actively participate in their treatment and make lifestyle adjustments, often prioritizing physical activity (Parishwad, 2022). Furthermore, self-care is emphasized as crucial in addressing self-neglect, which can have serious consequences for personal and public health. In essence, self-care is a multifaceted concept that plays a pivotal role in promoting overall well-being and improving the quality of life.

Self-Care among Graduate Students

Self-care is essential for the overall health and academic achievement of graduate students. Studies highlight the importance of professional self-care techniques in improving psychological well-being, academic performance, and emotional state among graduate students studying school psychology (Miller et al., 2023). Promoting communal care practices like community building is suggested to bolster well-being in graduate education, emphasizing the need to foster cultures that normalize and support self-care for everyone in academic settings (Woloshyn et al., 2022). These findings underscore the necessity for proactive mental health policies and a genuine commitment to self-care culture within academia to enhance the well-being of graduate students and faculty members (Obradović-Ratković et al., 2022).

Self-Care among Educators

Self-care is essential for educators, particularly amidst heightened stress and burnout, exacerbated by factors like the COVID-19 pandemic (Dunn, 2023). Often, educators encounter a lack of systemic support, leading to feelings of frustration and disillusionment when faced with self-care messages without broader changes in the educational system (Nguyen, 2023). Introducing self-care practices within higher education, including trauma-informed approaches, can address stress, trauma, and mental health challenges among both students and faculty, fostering a culture of well-being within academia (Butler et al., 2022). Moreover, integrating self-care strategies at both personal and institutional levels is crucial for preventing burnout, enhancing job satisfaction, and cultivating a healthy learning environment for students (Fox, 2022). Prioritizing self-care not only benefits educators' well-being but also enriches the overall educational experience for all involved.

Music in Self-Care

Music plays a crucial role in self-care across various demographics, as evident in the literature. Both music therapy students and professionals emphasize the significance of self-care practices, focusing on engaging in activities unrelated to work, desired outcomes, and the act of self-care itself (Wilhelm & Moore, 2023). For older adults residing in aged-care facilities, listening to music provides entertainment, relaxation, and mood regulation, contributing to their overall well-being (Trondalen, 2016). Furthermore, mindfulness meditation and music improvisation have emerged as effective tools for managing stressors and fostering positive experiences among music therapists, aiding them in their self-care endeavors (Moran, 2017). In adolescence, music serves as a versatile resource for emotional self-regulation and identity formation, with professionals guiding individuals towards healthy engagement with music (Suvi&McFerran, 2022). In summary, music's therapeutic properties significantly enhance self-care practices across diverse populations, promoting well-being and emotional balance.

Self-Care among Music Educators

Self-care is essential for music educators, enhancing their well-being and professional effectiveness. Common self-care practices include engaging in leisure activities, exercising, and seeking social support (Jones, 2018; Kinney, 2014). Music plays a crucial role in these routines, offering solace and rejuvenation through activities like listening, playing instruments, or improvisation (Shoemaker, 2016). Despite efforts to integrate self-care into music education pedagogy, time constraints and lack of institutional support pose significant challenges (Smith, 2017). Promoting a culture of self-care within educational institutions and providing necessary resources are critical for fostering resilience and job satisfaction among music educators, benefiting both educators and their students' overall

Self-Care Deficit Theory

Dorothea Orem's Self-Care Deficit Theory (Regis College, 2021) highlights the importance of individuals actively participating in their own care to maintain health and well-being, a concept highly relevant to self-care practices among music educators and international graduate students. The theory's emphasis on self-care agency—the ability to engage in self-care based on knowledge, skills, and motivation—parallels the need for these professionals to balance the demands of their roles with personal well-being. By understanding their self-care requisites, such as managing stress through music or mindfulness, and identifying self-care deficits due to time constraints or lack of support, music educators and graduate students can develop strategies to enhance their self-care practices. This approach promotes resilience, prevents burnout, and improves overall performance, underscoring the value of integrating self-care education and support within academic and professional environments.

Statement of the Problem

This study sought to describe the self-care practices of, contexts, and benefits to graduate studies of music educators currently enrolled as graduate students in the Doctor of Musical Arts Program major in Music Education in St. Paul University Manila.

II. Methodology

Five conveniently-sampled Chinese international graduate students of the College of Music and Performing Arts in St. Paul University Manila were asked to answer a three-item open-ended survey focusing on self-care practices, contexts of practice, and perceived benefits in the context of graduate studies. The responses were processed by employing thematic analysis.

III. Results

Chinese Music Educators' Self-care Activities

Physical Health and Exercise. Physical health and exercise are emphasized by multiple respondents as crucial aspects of their self-care routines. Respondent 1 highlighted the importance of regular physical activity, stating, "Regular physical activity, such as walking, running, yoga, or working out, helps keep your body healthy and energetic." This sentiment is echoed by Respondent 3 who included "regular exercise" as a key component of their self-care activities. Respondent 4 mentioned their practice of yoga and walking, saying, "I like to take long walks, meditate, and practice yoga." Similarly, Respondent 5 suggested a daily exercise routine, recommending, "Maintain a moderate amount of exercise every day, such as walking, dancing or playing ball, to enhance strength and flexibility." These activities are highlighted as essential for maintaining physical health and overall well-being.

Healthy Eating. Healthy eating is another vital theme in the respondents' self-care practices. Respondent 1 advised, "Make sure to eat a balanced diet that includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and protein," underscoring the importance of nutrition for maintaining energy and health. Respondent 3 also prioritized a "healthy diet" in their self-care regimen. Expanding on this, Respondent 5 suggested a specific dietary approach: "Choose whole grains, dark green vegetables, fresh fruits, and low-fat or fat-free dairy products. Cut back on meat and keep your diet light." These responses collectively emphasize the role of a balanced diet in promoting physical health and well-being.

Sleep. Adequate sleep is highlighted as a crucial element of self-care by several respondents. Respondent 1 stressed the need for quality sleep, stating, "Get enough quality sleep each night to help rejuvenate your body and brain." This is reinforced by Respondent 3 who includes "good sleep habits" as part of their self-care routine. Respondent 5 provided specific advice for ensuring restful sleep, recommending, "Make sure to get 7-8 hours of quality sleep each night, keep your bedroom quiet and clean, and use comfortable bedding." These practices are aimed at ensuring that sleep contributes to overall health and effective daily functioning.

Mental Health and Relaxation. Mental health maintenance and relaxation techniques are integral to the self-care routines of several respondents. Respondent 1 uses "meditation and relaxation" to "reduce stress and anxiety through meditation, deep breathing, or other relaxation techniques." Respondent 3 also mentioned "mental health maintenance" as a key part of self-care. Respondent 4 engages in activities like meditation and listening to music, stating, "I like to take long walks, meditate, and practice yoga. I also enjoy reading books and listening to music." Respondent 2 described using music for relaxation: "In the flow of music, those beautiful notes seem to brush away the fatigue and tension in my thinking, so that I can feel calm and peace of mind." They also use nature sounds to calm their thoughts and reduce stress. Respondent 5 includes "hot water feet and

proper massage" to promote relaxation and relieve fatigue. These activities highlight the importance of mental relaxation and stress reduction in self-care.

Hobbies and Personal Interests. Engaging in hobbies and personal interests was highlighted by respondents as a way to enhance quality of life and personal satisfaction. Respondent 1 listed several hobbies, including "painting, music, writing, or gardening," which they find beneficial for improving life quality and personal satisfaction. Respondent 4 similarly enjoys personal interests, mentioning, "I also enjoy reading books and listening to music." These activities provide a sense of fulfillment and joy, contributing to overall well-being.

Social Interaction. Maintaining positive social connections is seen as a vital component of self-care by Respondent 1 who underscored the importance of "social interaction" to "maintain positive social connections with family, friends, and community to enhance emotional support." This highlights the role of social relationships in providing emotional support and contributing to mental health and well-being.

Personal Hygiene and Routine. Personal hygiene and maintaining a regular routine are emphasized as important self-care activities. Respondent 1 advised maintaining "good personal hygiene habits, such as taking regular showers, brushing teeth and organizing personal space." Respondent 5 stressed the importance of a regular routine, advising to "avoid staying up too late and keep regular routine." These practices are seen as foundational to overall health and well-being.

Learning and Self-Reflection. Continuous learning and self-reflection are mentioned as crucial for personal growth. Respondent 1 emphasized "self-reflection" through activities like "journaling, counseling, or self-reflection exercises" and underscores the importance of "learning and development" by "constantly acquiring new skills or knowledge to promote personal growth and self-actualization." These activities are aimed at fostering self-awareness and ongoing personal development.

Time Management. Effective time management is highlighted as a key to balancing various aspects of life. Respondent 1 discussed the importance of "time management," advising to "manage your time wisely and ensure a balance between work, rest and play." This theme emphasizes the need to allocate time effectively to maintain a balanced and healthy lifestyle.

Thematic Synthesis. The themes derived from the respondents' self-care activities reveal several insights into their approaches and attitudes towards self-care. These activities suggest that the respondents are proactive, holistic, and well-rounded self-carers who prioritize their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. The respondents' self-care activities indicate that they are comprehensive and dedicated self-carers. They take a proactive, well-rounded approach to maintaining their well-being, encompassing physical health, mental health, personal fulfillment, social support, and continuous learning. Their activities reflect a balanced and thoughtful approach to self-care, indicating that they prioritize their overall health and well-being through intentional and varied practices.

Proactivity and Intentionality. The respondents demonstrate a proactive approach to self-care. They engage in regular activities that require deliberate effort and planning, such as exercise, healthy eating, and time management. Respondent 1 emphasized "regular physical activity" and "time management," indicating a structured approach to maintaining health and balance. Respondent 5 also highlighted the importance of a "regular routine" and maintaining "a moderate amount of exercise every day," showing a consistent commitment to self-care.

Holistic Approach to Health. The respondents adopt a holistic approach to self-care, encompassing physical, mental, and emotional dimensions. They recognize the interconnectedness of these aspects and engage in activities that nurture each area. For example, Respondent 1 includes exercise, healthy eating, sleep, meditation, hobbies, and social interaction in their routine, covering a broad spectrum of self-care needs.

Respondent 4 also balances physical activities like walking and yoga with mental relaxation techniques such as reading and listening to music.

Emphasis on Mental Health and Stress Reduction. Mental health and stress reduction are prominently featured in the respondents' self-care activities. They use various methods to manage stress and maintain emotional balance. Respondent 2 uses music, including classical and nature sounds, to achieve "calm and peace of mind" and reduce stress. Respondent 1 practices "meditation and relaxation techniques" to manage stress and anxiety. These activities indicate a strong awareness of the importance of mental health and a commitment to maintaining it.

Personal Fulfillment and Satisfaction. Engaging in hobbies and personal interests is a significant aspect of the respondents' self-care routines, reflecting their desire for personal fulfillment and satisfaction. Respondent 1 enjoys "painting, music, writing, or gardening" to improve quality of life and personal satisfaction. Respondent 4 finds joy in "reading books and listening to music." These activities show that the respondents value personal enjoyment and creative expression as essential components of their self-care.

Social and Emotional Support. The importance of social interaction and emotional support is highlighted by the respondents. Respondent 1 underscores maintaining "positive social connections with family, friends, and community" to enhance emotional support, indicating an understanding of the role social relationships play in emotional well-being. This aspect of self-care suggests that the respondents are not only focused on individual activities but also recognize the value of supportive social networks.

Continuous Learning and Growth. The respondents engage in activities that promote continuous learning and personal growth. Respondent 1 emphasizes "learning and development" by "constantly acquiring new skills or knowledge," showing a dedication to self-improvement and lifelong learning. This reflects a growth mindset and a desire to continually evolve and improve oneself.

Contexts of Self-Care Practice

Respondents see self-care as essential in various situations, including managing stress, emotional distress, physical health issues, major life changes, mental fatigue, relationship problems, and preventive health measures. These responses highlight a comprehensive understanding of self-care's importance in maintaining overall well-being and resilience in the face of life's challenges.

Stress and Feeling Overwhelmed. Several respondents identify stress and feeling overwhelmed as primary situations where self-care becomes essential. Respondent 1 noted the need for self-care when experiencing "too much stress" from work, school, or personal life. Respondent 4 echoed this, mentioning that self-care activities are crucial "especially during times of stress or when I am feeling overwhelmed." Respondent 3 also emphasized the need for self-care to "relieve stress and improve your emotional and physical state" when feeling stressed or anxious. These responses indicate that managing stress and avoiding burnout are key triggers for engaging in self-care.

Emotional Distress and Mood Swings. Emotional distress and mood fluctuations are another common theme. Respondent 1 pointed out that self-care is needed "when you feel anxious, or depressed," highlighting the role of self-care in managing emotional well-being. Respondent 4 similarly emphasized the importance of self-care for "maintaining my mental and emotional well-being." These insights suggest that emotional challenges prompt individuals to seek activities that can help stabilize their mood and mental health.

Physical Health Issues. The need to address physical health problems through self-care is a recurrent theme. Respondent 1 mentioned the necessity of self-care "when facing physical discomfort or illness." Respondent 5 elaborated on this by stating that self-care activities are essential to "reduce illness, cooperate with treatment, and promote recovery" and maintain "basic vital activities" disrupted by work or responsibilities. This reflects a proactive approach to managing physical health through self-care.

Major Life Changes. Respondents also identified major life changes as situations requiring self-care. Respondent 1 mentioned that experiencing a major life event, such as "moving, changing jobs, or losing a loved one," can necessitate self-care. These events can be highly stressful and emotionally taxing, making self-care crucial for coping and adjustment.

Mental Fatigue and Lack of Motivation. Mental fatigue and lack of motivation are highlighted as situations where self-care is needed. Respondent 1 referred to the need for self-care "when you feel exhausted after working or studying for a long time" and "when you feel low on motivation." Respondent 2 added that feeling "mentally tired" from providing extensive information and analysis in music education could necessitate self-care. These responses underscore the importance of self-care in rejuvenating mental energy and motivation.

Relationship Problems. Interpersonal conflicts and difficulties are noted as triggers for self-care. Respondent 1 mentioned the need for self-care "when there are conflicts or difficulties in interpersonal relationships." This highlights how relational stress can impact emotional well-being and the importance of self-care in managing such stress.

Preventive and Proactive Self-Care. Proactive self-care measures to prevent health problems are also emphasized. Respondent 5 discussed "preventive self-care" to avoid future health issues and improve "self-diagnosis skills" for timely action. This theme illustrates a forward-thinking approach to self-care, focusing on maintaining long-term health and well-being through preventive practices.

Thematic Synthesis. The environment of music educators, as reflected in the respondents' practice of self-care, involves high mental engagement, significant emotional demands, continuous learning, high stress, complex interpersonal dynamics, and the need for physical health maintenance. To navigate this challenging environment effectively, music educators must adopt comprehensive self-care practices that address their mental, emotional, and physical well-being. This balanced approach enables them to manage stress, maintain energy and creativity, and foster positive relationships, ultimately enhancing their professional performance and personal fulfillment.

High Mental Engagement and Fatigue. Music educators often operate in environments that require significant mental engagement. Respondent 2 alludes to this by discussing the mental fatigue that can arise from "constantly providing a lot of information and analysis for music education." This high level of cognitive demand can lead to mental exhaustion, highlighting the importance of self-care activities that promote relaxation and mental recovery. Music educators might need to engage in activities such as listening to soothing music or visualizing peaceful music scenes to "relax" and "adjust" their mental state.

Emotional Demands. The emotional demands of being a music educator are also significant. Respondent 1 suggested the importance of self-care in situations involving "mood swings" or when feeling "anxious, depressed, or depressed." Music educators are often involved in emotionally charged environments, whether through personal interaction with students, performance pressure, or the emotional content of the music itself. This necessitates self-care practices that help in managing emotional well-being, such as mindfulness, meditation, or engaging in personal hobbies that bring joy and relaxation.

Continuous Learning and Creativity. The need for continuous learning and fostering creativity is another aspect of the music educator's environment. Respondent 5 mentions "improving self-diagnosis skills" and engaging in "preventive self-care" as part of their routine. Music educators must stay current with pedagogical strategies, musical repertoire, and performance techniques, which requires ongoing learning and professional development. Self-care activities that promote mental clarity, such as regular exercise, healthy eating, and sufficient sleep, are essential to maintain the stamina and cognitive function necessary for continuous learning and creative teaching.

High Stress and Overwhelming Feelings. The environment of music educators can be highly stressful, often involving tight schedules, performance deadlines, and the pressure to meet educational standards.

Respondent 4 highlighted the importance of self-care during times of "stress or when I am feeling overwhelmed." This stress can stem from various sources, including preparing students for performances, managing classroom dynamics, and balancing administrative duties. Effective self-care practices, such as time management, prioritizing tasks, and taking breaks to engage in relaxing activities, are crucial for mitigating stress and preventing burnout.

Relationship and Interpersonal Dynamics. Managing interpersonal relationships and dynamics is also a significant part of the music educator's environment. Respondent 1 pointed out the need for self-care "when there are conflicts or difficulties in interpersonal relationships." Music educators often work closely with students, colleagues, and parents, which can sometimes lead to relational stress. Engaging in self-care activities that foster emotional resilience and effective communication can help educators navigate these challenges more effectively.

Physical Health Maintenance. Maintaining physical health is essential for music educators, given the physical demands of teaching and performing music. Respondent 1 mentioned the need for self-care "when facing physical discomfort or illness," and Respondent 5 discussed "maintenance of basic vital activities." Educators must ensure they have the physical stamina to teach, demonstrate techniques, and possibly perform. Self-care activities such as regular exercise, healthy eating, and proper sleep are vital to maintaining physical health and energy levels.

Music Educators' Self-Care and their Graduate School Performance

Self-care activities were perceived to positively impact graduate school performance in various ways by the participants. Improved concentration and focus, enhanced memory and learning abilities, stress reduction and emotional stability, good physical health and energy levels, better social skills and networking, and maintaining a healthy work-life balance are all key benefits of self-care. These factors collectively enable graduate students to perform better academically, manage the demands of their studies, and maintain overall well-being.

Improved Concentration and Focus. A recurring theme is that self-care activities significantly improve concentration and focus. Respondent 1 mentioned that self-care can "improve concentration" by allowing students to relax and rest, which enhances their ability to focus on research and study. Respondent 3 supported this, noting that being in good physical and mental condition can "improve my concentration and study efficiency." Respondent 4 also emphasized that taking breaks to engage in self-care helps to "recharge and refocus," allowing for renewed energy and focus on studies. This theme underscores the importance of self-care in maintaining mental clarity and the ability to concentrate on academic tasks.

Enhanced Memory and Learning Abilities. Self-care activities are linked to improved memory and learning abilities. Respondent 1 highlighted that a healthy lifestyle can "help improve memory and learning ability." This suggests that activities promoting physical health, such as exercise and proper nutrition, can enhance cognitive functions critical for academic success. While other respondents do not explicitly mention memory improvement, the overall benefits of self-care on mental functions imply a positive impact on learning abilities as well.

Stress Reduction and Emotional Stability. Reducing stress and achieving emotional stability are crucial benefits of self-care activities. Respondent 1 stated that self-care helps "reduce stress," which in turn minimizes mental and physical problems caused by stress. Respondent 4 added that self-care reduces "stress and anxiety," improving the ability to concentrate and retain information. Respondent 2 related this to the music education field, where self-care helps maintain a better state and patience, thus improving teaching effectiveness. This theme indicates that self-care is essential for managing stress and maintaining emotional balance, which are critical for academic performance and overall well-being.

Physical Health and Energy Levels. Maintaining good physical health through self-care is emphasized as essential for academic performance. Respondent 1 pointed out that good physical health ensures students can "participate fully in their studies and research activities." Respondent 5 mentioned that self-care helps in "reducing illness" and promoting recovery, ensuring that physical health does not impede academic responsibilities. Respondent 3 also noted that being in good physical condition can improve study efficiency. This theme highlights that physical well-being is a foundational aspect of self-care that supports academic engagement and productivity.

Social Skills and Networking. Self-care activities that include social interaction and hobbies contribute to improved social skills and networking, which are beneficial for academic and professional development. Respondent 1 mentioned that through social activities, students can build a stronger social network, which is advantageous for academic and professional growth. Although this theme is not heavily emphasized by all respondents, it suggests that social aspects of self-care can enhance collaborative opportunities and support systems in a graduate school environment.

Maintaining Work-Life Balance. Maintaining a healthy work-life balance through self-care activities is highlighted as crucial for preventing burnout and sustaining overall well-being. Respondent 4 emphasized that self-care helps maintain a "healthy work-life balance," which is important for preventing burnout. Respondent 5 discussed engaging in self-care to restore balance when daily activities are disrupted. This theme indicates that achieving a balance between academic responsibilities and personal life through self-care is essential for long-term success and well-being in graduate school.

Thematic Synthesis. Integrating self-care knowledge into education is vital for preparing students for higher educational degrees. It enhances academic performance, fosters emotional resilience, maintains physical health, and develops essential life skills. Moreover, it improves social relationships, prevents burnout, and promotes long-term well-being. By embedding self-care into the educational curriculum, institutions can equip students with the tools they need to succeed academically and lead fulfilling, healthy lives.

Enhanced Academic Performance. Integrating self-care knowledge into education helps students develop strategies to manage stress, maintain focus, and enhance cognitive functions, which are essential for academic success. As Respondent 1 pointed out, self-care activities can "improve concentration" and "memory," directly impacting students' ability to absorb and retain information. By learning these skills early, students are better prepared to handle the rigorous demands of higher education, leading to improved academic outcomes.

Stress Management and Emotional Resilience. Higher education often brings increased stress due to academic pressures, deadlines, and the transition to more independent learning. Teaching self-care strategies helps students build resilience against these stresses. Respondent 1 and Respondent 4 both highlighted the role of self-care in reducing stress and improving emotional stability. Integrating self-care knowledge equips students with tools to manage anxiety and maintain emotional balance, which is critical for sustaining mental health and avoiding burnout during their higher education journey.

Physical Health and Well-being. Good physical health is foundational for academic performance and overall well-being. Incorporating self-care education can teach students the importance of regular exercise, proper nutrition, and adequate sleep. Respondent 1 emphasized that maintaining good physical health allows students to "participate fully in their studies and research activities." Early education on self-care can promote lifelong healthy habits, reducing the risk of illness and absenteeism, which can disrupt academic progress.

Development of Life Skills. Self-care education fosters the development of essential life skills such as time management, self-awareness, and effective stress management. Respondent 5 discussed the importance of self-care in maintaining a "regular routine" and preventing future health problems. These skills are not only crucial for navigating higher education but also for professional and personal life. By integrating self-care into

the curriculum, students learn to balance multiple responsibilities, make informed health decisions, and sustain productivity over the long term.

Improved Social and Professional Relationships. Self-care knowledge can enhance social skills and networking, which are vital for academic and professional success. Respondent 1 mentioned that self-care activities can improve social skills and build a stronger social network. Understanding the importance of self-care helps students maintain positive relationships, collaborate effectively, and build supportive networks, all of which are critical in higher education and beyond.

Prevention of Burnout. The transition to higher education often involves increased workloads and higher expectations, leading to a risk of burnout. Integrating self-care education helps students recognize the signs of burnout and take proactive steps to prevent it. Respondent 4 noted that self-care helps maintain a "healthy work-life balance," essential for long-term well-being. Educating students about self-care equips them with strategies to balance academic demands with personal life, reducing the likelihood of burnout and promoting sustained engagement with their studies.

Promoting Long-term Well-being. The benefits of self-care extend beyond the academic environment into personal and professional realms. By integrating self-care education, institutions can help students develop habits that contribute to long-term well-being. This holistic approach to education ensures that students are not only academically prepared but also equipped with the skills necessary to lead healthy, balanced lives.

IV. Discussions

Importance of Music in the Music Educators' Practice of Self-Care

The importance of music in self-care, as revealed in the responses, is multifaceted, contributing significantly to mental health and relaxation, personal satisfaction, and emotional well-being. Music plays a critical role in self-care by providing a means for mental relaxation, personal enjoyment, and emotional support. Whether through classical compositions, nature-inspired sounds, or favorite tunes, music helps individuals manage stress, find peace, and enhance their overall well-being. The responses collectively underscore the therapeutic and satisfying effects of music in various self-care routines.

Mental Health and Relaxation. Several respondents highlight music as a crucial tool for reducing stress and anxiety. Respondent 1 included "music" as one of the hobbies they engage in to improve the quality of life and personal satisfaction. Respondent 2 provided a detailed explanation of how music, especially classical pieces like Bach's Goldberg Variations, helps them achieve calm and peace of mind: "In the flow of music, those beautiful notes seem to brush away the fatigue and tension in my thinking, so that I can feel calm and peace of mind." They also mentioned using nature sounds, such as waves, rain, and birds, to create a soothing atmosphere: "This sound can gradually calm my thoughts and stress seems to slowly dissipate." These examples illustrate how music serves as a form of mental relaxation and stress relief, akin to music therapy, which helps adjust emotional and psychological balance.

Personal Satisfaction and Hobbies. Music is also part of personal interests and hobbies that enhance personal satisfaction and overall well-being. Respondent 4 enjoys "listening to music" as a leisure activity, indicating that it brings them joy and relaxation. This aligns with Respondent 1, who listed music as one of their hobbies, contributing to improved quality of life and personal fulfillment. Engaging in music, whether through listening or playing, provides an outlet for creative expression and emotional release, which is an essential aspect of self-care.

Emotional Well-Being. Listening to music can have a profound impact on emotional well-being. Respondent 2 noted that immersing themselves in music allows them to escape into a "virtual world" where they can feel calm and peaceful. The use of music that mimics natural sounds to create a tranquil environment shows

how music can evoke a sense of serenity and reduce anxiety. This emotional connection to music helps individuals manage their stress levels and maintain emotional balance.

Music Educators Becoming Better Self-Carers

In the context of the demanding environments in which the respondents participate, several key factors enable them to become better self-carers. These include a strong awareness of personal needs, access to supportive resources and networks, proactive time management, a commitment to continuous learning and self-improvement, engagement in enjoyable activities, and leveraging their professional environment to integrate self-care practices. These factors collectively help respondents maintain their physical, mental, and emotional well-being, allowing them to navigate their complex environments successfully.

Awareness of Personal Needs. A significant enabler for the respondents in becoming self-carers is their heightened awareness of personal needs. This awareness allows them to recognize when they are experiencing stress, mental fatigue, or emotional distress and to identify the appropriate self-care activities to address these issues. Respondent 1 highlighted the importance of self-care in situations of "too much stress," "mood swings," and "mental fatigue." This self-awareness is crucial for timely intervention and effective self-care practices.

Access to Resources and Support. Having access to resources and support systems is another critical enabler. This includes having the tools and knowledge to engage in self-care activities, as well as support from family, friends, and professional networks. Respondent 1 mentioned the importance of "social interaction" and "positive social connections" for emotional support. These social networks provide not only emotional backing but also practical support, making it easier to engage in self-care activities.

Proactive Time Management. Proactive time management enables respondents to allocate sufficient time for self-care activities amidst their busy schedules. Respondent 1 discussed the importance of "time management" in ensuring a balance between work, rest, and play. Similarly, Respondent 5 emphasized maintaining a "regular routine" to ensure that basic physical needs, such as proper eating, sleep, and exercise, are met. Effective time management skills allow respondents to carve out dedicated time for self-care, reducing the risk of burnout and maintaining overall well-being.

Commitment to Continuous Learning and Self-Improvement. A commitment to continuous learning and self-improvement also plays a vital role in enabling respondents to become self-carers. This involves staying informed about new self-care techniques, understanding personal health needs, and being open to adapting new practices. Respondent 5 mentioned "improving self-diagnosis skills" and taking "preventive self-care measures" as part of their routine. This ongoing commitment to learning helps respondents stay proactive in their self-care efforts, allowing them to adapt to new challenges and maintain their health and well-being.

Engagement in Enjoyable Activities. Engaging in activities that bring joy and personal satisfaction is another enabling factor. These activities not only provide a break from routine stressors but also enhance overall quality of life. Respondent 4 noted that self-care activities "bring me joy and relaxation," which is crucial for maintaining mental and emotional well-being. Finding and participating in hobbies or leisure activities that are enjoyable can significantly improve one's ability to manage stress and maintain a positive outlook.

Professional and Educational Environment. The professional and educational environment itself can support the practice of self-care. For example, Respondent 2 described using music education techniques, such as listening to soothing music or visualizing musical scenes, to manage mental fatigue and stress. These

practices, integrated into their professional activities, provide a built-in mechanism for self-care, making it easier to incorporate into their daily routine.

Agency of music educators towards the practice of self-care

Given the above responses, music educators hold significant agency in promoting self-care through the integration of music into daily routines. Music educators possess significant agency in promoting self-care through music. They can facilitate mental health and relaxation, encourage personal satisfaction through musical hobbies, support emotional well-being, and build a culture of self-care. By leveraging their expertise and fostering a deep connection with music, educators can profoundly impact their students' overall well-being and promote lifelong self-care practices.

Facilitating Mental Health and Relaxation. Music educators can play a pivotal role in teaching students how to use music as a tool for stress relief and mental relaxation. Respondent 2 highlighted the calming effect of classical music and nature sounds: "In the flow of music, those beautiful notes seem to brush away the fatigue and tension in my thinking, so that I can feel calm and peace of mind." Educators can introduce these genres to students, explaining their benefits and encouraging their use in self-care routines. By incorporating relaxation techniques such as deep listening and mindfulness through music, educators can help students develop lifelong habits that support mental health.

Encouraging Personal Satisfaction and Hobbies. Music as a hobby contributes significantly to personal satisfaction, as indicated by Respondent 1 and Respondent 4, who both enjoy engaging with music as part of their self-care routines. Music educators can inspire and guide students to explore music as a fulfilling hobby. By providing opportunities for students to engage in diverse musical activities—such as learning an instrument, singing, or composing—educators can help students discover the joy and satisfaction that comes from musical expression. Encouraging students to pursue music outside the classroom fosters a sense of personal achievement and enhances their overall well-being.

Supporting Emotional Well-Being. Music educators have the expertise to select and introduce music that can evoke specific emotional responses and support emotional well-being. Respondent 2 mentioned using music that simulates natural sounds to create a peaceful atmosphere: "This sound can gradually calm my thoughts and stress seems to slowly dissipate." Educators can curate playlists or recommend pieces that help students manage their emotions, whether they need to calm down, lift their spirits, or process complex feelings. Educators can also encourage students to use music journaling, where they reflect on their emotional responses to different pieces, thus fostering greater emotional awareness and regulation.

Building a Culture of Self-Care. By integrating discussions about self-care into music education, educators can build a culture that values and prioritizes well-being. This can include incorporating moments of reflection and relaxation into lessons, teaching students about the psychological benefits of music, and encouraging them to share their own experiences with music and self-care. Such practices not only enhance students' understanding of music's therapeutic potential but also promote a broader appreciation of self-care.

Promoting Life-Long Self-Care Practices. Music educators are in a unique position to instill the value of music as a life-long self-care practice. They can provide students with the skills and knowledge to use music as a therapeutic tool throughout their lives. By teaching students how to create their own musical self-care routines, such as crafting personalized playlists for different moods or learning simple compositions to play when stressed, educators empower students to take control of their mental and emotional health.

References

- [1.] Barrett, M. S. (2017). Burnout in music education: An exploratory study. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 213, 7-21

- [2.] Butler, L. D. et al.(2022). Self-care as an Essential Part of Trauma-informed Educational Practice and Policy in Graduate Education. In S. Obradović-Ratković, M. Bajovic, A. P. Sen, V. Woloshyn, & M. Savage (Eds.), *Supporting student and faculty wellbeing in graduate education: Teaching, learning, policy, and praxis* (pp. 155–175). Routledge.DOI: 10.4324/9781003268185-12
- [3.] Dunn, A. H. (2023). Teacher Self-Care Mandates as Institutional Gaslighting in a Neoliberal System. *Educational Research, Educational Researcher*, 52(8), 491-499.DOI: 10.3102/0013189x231174804
- [4.] Fox, M. (2022). A community of practice-educators as self-care. Reflections on Valuing Wellbeing in Higher Education: Reforming our Acts of Self-care. Routledge..DOI: 10.4324/9781003213161-8
- [5.] Güler, C. Y. &Engin, E. (2023). A Self-Care Deficiency Syndrome: Self-Neglect. *PsikiyatriyeGuncelYaklasimlar - Current Approaches in Psychiatry*, 15(4), 622-630. DOI: 10.18863/pgy.1224990
- [6.] Jones, B. D. (2018). The well-being of music educators. In C. Benedict, P. Schmidt, G. Spruce, & P. Woodford (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Social Justice in Music Education* (pp. 589-607). Oxford University Press
- [7.] Kinney, D. W. (2014). Self-care of music educators: Exploring the relationship between the use of leisure time and teacher stress, and its effect on teacher effectiveness. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 199, 45-62
- [8.] Miller, C. K. et al. (2023). Self-Care of Canadian School Psychology Graduate Students. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*,38(4), 349-372. DOI: 10.1177/08295735231183463
- [9.] Moran, D. (2017). Mindfulness and the Music Therapist: An Approach to Self-Care. (Master's Thesis, Concordia University)
- [10.] Nguyen, M. (2023). *Managing Our Mental Health Needs in Turbulent Times Through Self-Care. Importance of Practicing Self-Care in Education*. IGI Global.DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-7556-0.ch013
- [11.] Obradović-Ratković et al., (Eds.). (2022). *Supporting Student and Faculty Wellbeing in Graduate Education Teaching, Learning, Policy, and Praxis* (1st ed.). Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9781003268185-5
- [12.] Parishwad, O. (2022). *Self-care*. DOI: 10.4337/9781839105906.00017
- [13.] Prasad, A. &Mehendale, S. (2023). Self-care: a thematic study of self-care posts amidst COVID-19 on Instagram. *AIP Conf. Proc.* 2523:020097. DOI: 10.1063/5.0110011
- [14.] Regis College. (2021, October 29). The Pivotal Role of Orem's Self-Care Deficit Theory. <https://online.regiscollege.edu/blog/the-pivotal-role-of-orems-self-care-deficit-theory/>
- [15.] Shoemaker, J. (2016). Stress and burnout in the music education profession: A survey of school music teachers and college music education students. *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education*, 35(2), 47-54
- [16.] Smith, J. A. (2017). A mindfulness-based stress reduction workshop for music educators. *Contributions to Music Education*, 43(1), 83-97
- [17.] Suvi, S. &McFerran, K. S. (2022). Musical care in adolescence: Supporting healthy musical identities and uses of music. on N. Spiro &K. R. M. Sanfilippo. (Eds). *Collaborative Insights: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Musical Care Throughout the Life Course*. Oxford Academic. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197535011.003.0004>
- [18.] Trondalen, G. (2016). Self-care for music therapists. *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy*, 25(sup1), 77. DOI: 10.1080/08098131.2016.1180057
- [19.] Wilhlem, L. A. & Moore, C. M. (2023). "Taking Time": Exploring Music Therapy Student Self-Care Definitions and Practices. *Journal of Music Therapy*, 60(3), 343–369. DOI: 10.1093/jmt/thad005
- [20.] Woloshyn, V. et al., (2022). Promoting Communal Care for Wellbeing in Graduate Education. In S. Obradović-Ratković et al., (Eds.). *Supporting Student and Faculty Wellbeing in Graduate Education Teaching, Learning, Policy, and Praxis* (1st ed.). Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9781003268185-5