

Conceptual Framework of Training Curriculum Development of Stylistic Vocal Performance of Popular Music

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ABSTRACT

Popular music comes in a multitude of styles. This creates problems in offering decent popular music education, which concerns the stylistic vocal performance of popular music. Therefore, there is a need to examine the training curriculum provided currently. The research problems studied have adhered to the research questions for the study. At the same time, a conceptual framework for examining the functionality of the training curriculum encompasses the theoretical supports of four-dimensional matrixes and five principles of curriculum development. The case study can be carried out based on the conceptual framework to examine the training curriculum development of stylistic vocal performance education to ensure that the talents trained suit the market and music industry. The conceptual framework provides a structured approach for analysing and understanding the problem, and the case study method allows for an in-depth examination of a specific real-life situation or instance. By combining these two methods, the study can provide valuable insights and recommendations for improving the curriculum and training process.

Keywords: *Curriculum development, stylistic vocal performance, popular music*

INTRODUCTION

Popular music can be treated as an overall music category by comparing it with other music categories such as classical music, art music and traditional "folk" music. According to an online music platform, Gracenote (2022), more than 2000 styles or sub-styles existed globally in 2022 under the popular music category. Most of these styles were created by record labels to target new audiences. Still, among all these styles, several are known as the mainstream styles of popular music in almost all countries, such as Blues, Jazz, R&B/Soul, Rock, Pop, Hip-hop/Rap, Country, Alternative, EDM, etc. These styles also can be found on the official web page of the award list of the most authoritative popular music award – Grammy Award in recent years. (Grammy Award, 2022).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Three research problems lead to the research objectives. These research objectives form the backbone of the conceptual framework of this study.

These three research objectives, followed by their statements and related research objectives of the study, are as below:

Research Objective 1 of This Study

To examine the curriculum and the relatedness of the courses contained in the curriculum of the selected case on stylistic vocal performance education.

Research problem statement 1:

There is the emerging phenomenon of the Stylistic Vertical Subdivision (SVS) in the popular music industry in China (Chen, 2016). Still, the Chinese National Public Conservatory of Music (CNPCM) curriculum is uncertainly suitable for the SVS phenomenon. Thus, there is a need to find a suitable case whose curriculum is ideal for the SVS phenomenon to study.

The Research Objective of This Study

To identify the case study's strengths in systematic SPV education in CNPCMs.

Research problem statement 2:

Such an urgent request for Stylistic Vocal Performance (SVP) from the demand end accentuates the importance of the SVP in the popular music vocal performance education system today (Wang, 2019); nevertheless, based on the uncertainty of the strengths of curriculums that contain the courses structure and content of SVP existed in CNPCMs, it's necessary to investigate a role model to be followed by all Conservatories.

Research Objective 3 of This Study

To look into the areas of improvement of the selected institution in SVP.

Research problem statement 3:

As pointed out by Li (2018), there are distinct differences between stylistic popular singing education as compared to general popular music singing education. Therefore, the lack of an existing curriculum containing the conception and contents of SVP needs to be inspected.

The problem addressed by the proposed study is the lack of a comprehensive and structured training curriculum for the development of stylistic vocal performance in popular music. This issue has significant consequences for vocalists who aspire to pursue careers in popular music and the industry. Without a clear and standardised approach to training, vocalists may struggle to develop the skills and techniques to perform stylistically in various popular music genres. This can lead to limited career opportunities, a lack of diversity in popular music, and a decline in the quality of vocal performances. Furthermore, the absence of a comprehensive training curriculum may contribute to a knowledge gap among vocal coaches and music educators, limiting their ability to train aspiring vocalists effectively.

SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of the proposed study lies in the fact that it seeks to address a critical gap in the current training and education of vocalists in popular music. The study aims to equip aspiring vocalists with the necessary skills and techniques to perform in various popular music genres by developing a comprehensive and structured conceptual framework of training curriculum for developing stylistic vocal performance education. The study also seeks to enhance the knowledge and understanding of vocal coaches and music educators, providing them with a standardised approach to training vocalists for stylistic performance. Ultimately, developing a training curriculum for stylistic vocal performance has the potential to improve the quality and practicability of vocal performance education in popular music and diversify the genre and expand career opportunities for aspiring vocalists.

LITERATURE REVIEW

AN OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE REVIEW

A theoretical framework is a structure or set of beliefs supporting the theories and concepts studied in a literature review. It provides a conceptual map of the field of study and outlines the fundamental concepts, theories, and models relevant to the research question. The theoretical framework guides the selection of literature and helps to organise and analyse the findings from the literature. It is a critical component of a literature review as it helps to provide context, background, and understanding for the research being conducted.

Four-Dimensional Matrixes of Teaching Mode for Stylistic Vocal Performance of Popular Music

As shown in Figure 1 below, the four-dimensional matrixes of teaching modes for Stylized Vocal Performance teaching proposed by Cao (2022a, b, c) can be used in theorising the Stylized Vocal Performance teaching framework. Four dimensions should be taken into consideration.

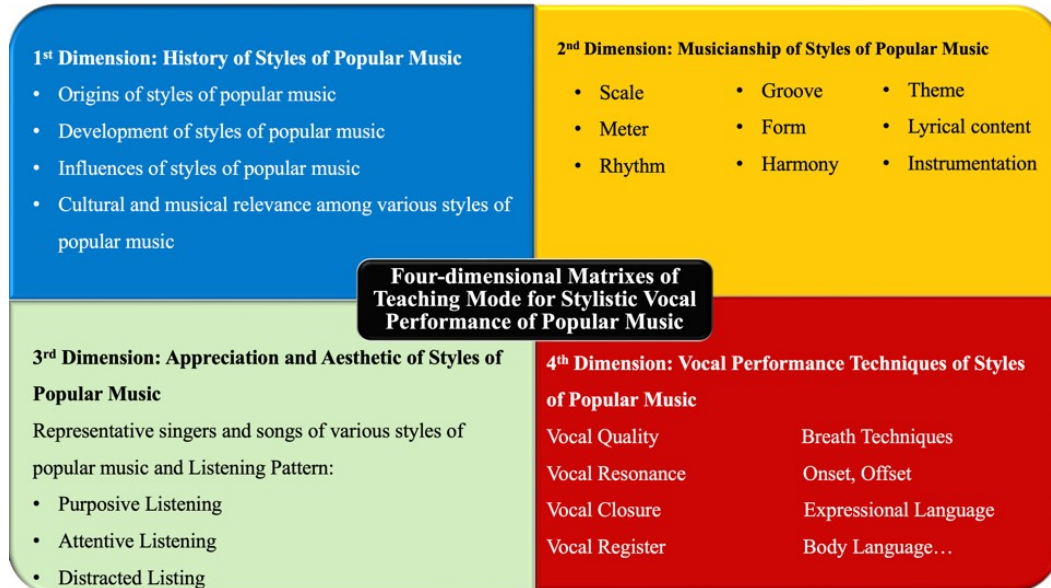


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework of 4-Dimension Stylistic Vocal Performance of Popular Music Education

For dimension 1, the focus is the historical dimension, as proposed by Burkholder (2015). Historical contents should be included in the Stylized Vocal Performance curriculum. Students should be exposed to the historical context of origins, development, and influence of Stylistic Vocal Performance to rationally and perceptually understand the cultural background of diverse popular music styles.

Dimension 2 will deal with the characteristics of different styles of popular music. As for every popular music style, there is a unique feature related to scale, rhythm, groove, harmony, form, instrumentation, and lyrical content. As a singer who represents the main melody and lyrics of a certain style of popular music, they must know how to sing with all corresponding elements of the style to interpret the song stylistically. Therefore, the musical characteristics of different popular music styles should be clarified.

Dimension 3 is related to stylistic appreciation and aesthetics. As Green (2017) pointed out, the appreciation of Stylized Vocal Performance music itself is the third dimension that must be focused on. In the process of appreciation, related listening concepts such as Purposive listening, Attentive listening, Distracted listening, etc., can be included for aurally analysing various features of representative singers and songs of different popular music styles.

The 4th dimension is vocal performance techniques involved in Stylistic Vocal Performance. The stylistic vocal performance consists of using specific techniques to achieve a desired style or genre in singing. The techniques can vary depending on the type of music being performed, but some common elements include:

1. Vibrato: A slight wavering of pitch that adds expressiveness to the voice.
2. Belt: A powerful, full-bodied singing style often used in musical theatre.
3. Head Voice: A lighter, higher-pitched singing style used to produce a floating, ethereal sound.

4. Chest Voice: A deeper, more powerful singing style often used in heavier styles of music such as rock and metal.
5. Whistle Register: An extremely high register produced by a specific technique involving the muscles in the larynx.
6. Vocal Fry: A low, rough register produced by relaxing the vocal cords.
7. Riffing: A technique in which a singer adds melodic embellishments to a song to create a unique interpretation.
8. Scatting: A form of improvisational singing in which nonsense syllables are used instead of lyrics.

These are just a few examples of the many techniques used in stylistic vocal performance. The key is understanding the style and using the appropriate techniques to achieve the desired sound. This is because there are distinct singing techniques that are specific to the particular style of popular music, such as various types of vocal onsets, vocal offsets, vocal closure, vocal registers, vocal qualities, vocal resonance, dynamic control, vocal fold control, etc. (Soto-Morettini, 2014). For instance, while a singer sings the Rhythm and Blues (R&B) style, a prominent stylistic vocal performance technique frequently applied is called "Melisma". This singing technique requires the singer to rapidly change their singing pitch up and down with accuracy and dynamic.

Five Principles of Curriculum Development

Additionally, five principles of curriculum development in popular music education are added. These principles are discussed in the subsections below.

Principle 1: Personalisation

The principle of personalisation and choice is one of the key principles of curriculum design. This principle plays a significant role in helping teaching professionals and learning institutions in their practice and as a basis for reviewing, evaluating and improving the learning and teaching process once taken into account for all learners in which individual needs of the learners will be attended to (Singer, 2000; Mohanasundaram, 2018).

Related questions to be included in an interview for the case study that adheres to this principle include:

How does the training curriculum encompass the element of personalisation?

What does the training curriculum consist of components that consider the learners' personal needs?

Principle 2: Breath

Under this principle, all learners are provided with opportunities for a broad range of experiences in the learning process (Apple, 1990; Oliver et al., 2010). This is because their learning is planned and organised in a manner that they learn and develop through various contexts within both the classroom and other aspects of their life.

Related questions to be included in an interview for the case study that adheres to this principle include:

How can the learners receive adequate information for their future career development?

Is the training curriculum broad enough to cover a variety of music styles?

Principle 3: Relevance

Relevance in terms of content is another key principle of curriculum design that should not be left out. This is because it allows learners to recognise the purpose of their learning and related activities

(Wiggins, 2005; Abeles et al., 2021). It is implemented to ensure that learners see the value of what they are learning and its relevance to present and future lives.

Related questions to be included in an interview for the case study that adheres to this principle include:

Are the contents of the training curriculum relevant to future career needs?

How does the training curriculum allow learners to express their thoughts about future career needs?

Principle 4: Challenge and content enjoyment

The principle of challenge and content enjoyment is also one of the significant principles of curriculum design. Learners are meant to find their learning process challenging, attractive and motivating (Halpern, 1998; Anderson, 2022). This is achieved when the curriculum encourages high aspirations and ambitions for all learners despite their intelligence differences. In addition, learners are made to experience a suitable level of challenge that enables them to achieve their potential.

Related questions to be included in an interview for the case study that adheres to this principle include:

Are the contents of the training curriculum challenging enough to face real-world challenges?

Do the learners find the contents of the training curriculum challenging, attractive and motivating enough?

How does the training curriculum allow learners to exert their full potential?

Principle 5: Coherence

According to Schmidt (2005) and Mellizo (2020), this principle allows a combination of the learner's different aspects of learning activities to form a coherent experience that enhances the achievement of the learning outcomes.

Related questions to be included in an interview for the case study that adheres to this principle include:

Are the contents of the training curriculum coherent in enhancing positive learning achievement and learning outcomes?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In relation to the theoretical framework above, these four dimensions are essential in developing a conceptual framework for the Stylized Vocal Performance curriculum. Therefore, these four-dimensional matrixes serve as the conceptual framework for this study.

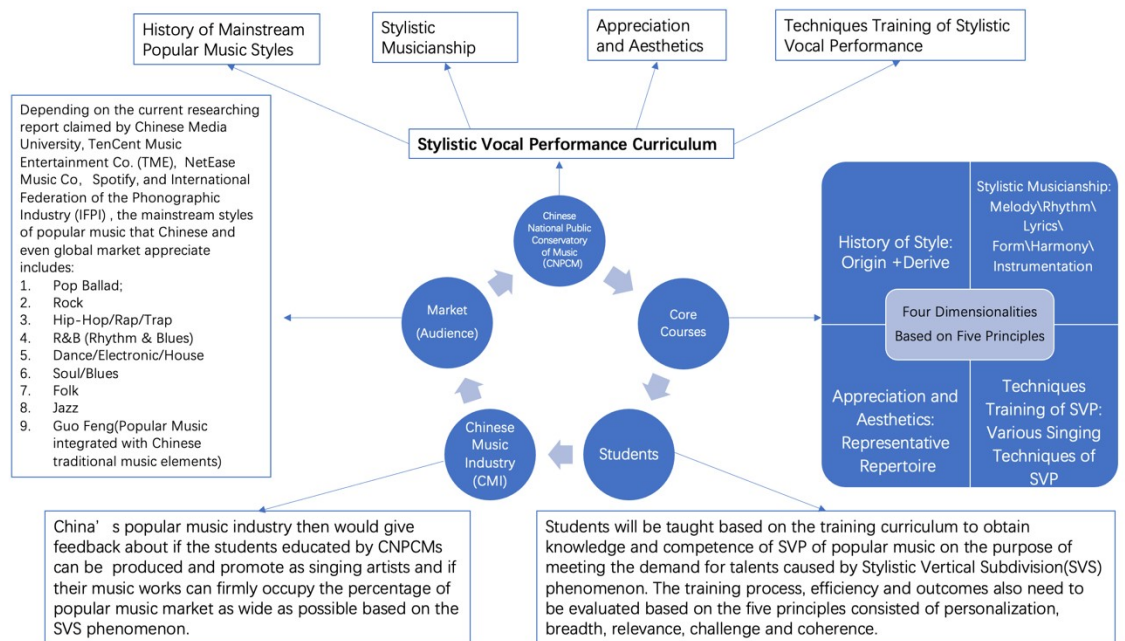


Figure2. Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

The proposed study will employ a qualitative research design using a case study approach. The study will involve conducting in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of participants, including current students, alums, vocal coaches, music educators, and curriculum developers of the Sichuan Conservatory of Music. The semi-structured interviews will allow participants to share their experiences, perspectives, and recommendations regarding developing a training curriculum for stylistic vocal performance. The study will employ various techniques to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, including member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation of data sources. Overall, the qualitative approach and case study design will enable a rich and detailed exploration of the research question and provide valuable insights into developing a training curriculum for stylistic vocal performance in popular music.

The conceptual framework of training curriculum development for stylistic vocal performance of popular music would involve the following steps:

1. Conducting a needs analysis to determine the current skills and knowledge of the students and what is required for them to meet their career goals.
2. Reviewing existing training programs, techniques, and resources to identify best practices in stylistic vocal performance of popular music.
3. Developing clear goals and objectives for the curriculum, considering the needs of the students and the industry's requirements.
4. Designing a curriculum that is both comprehensive and practical, including theoretical components, hands-on training, and performance opportunities.
5. Evaluating and revising the curriculum regularly ensures it is effective and relevant.

The case study is a prevalent research method in examining music curriculum (Gage et al, 2020). The research methodology for the case study at Sichuan Conservatory of Music, China, could use qualitative and quantitative approaches, such as:

1. Interviews with industry professionals, students, and faculty to gather their perspectives on the current curriculum and its effectiveness.

2. Surveys of students to assess their perceptions of the training they received and their satisfaction with the curriculum.
3. Observations of training sessions to gather data on the content, delivery methods, and assessment processes used.
4. Analysis of performance data to determine the impact of the curriculum on students' vocal performance skills.

The case study's findings could inform future curriculum development and recommend improvements to the Sichuan Conservatory of Music training program.

PROPOSED ANALYSIS

The proposed case study analysis would involve a qualitative data analysis using thematic analysis and the software Atlas.ti. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying patterns, themes, and relationships in qualitative data, and Atlas.ti is a software tool for organising and analysing qualitative data.

Thematic analysis of a music curriculum case study is a qualitative research method used to identify patterns or themes in the data collected from studying a particular music curriculum. This method is used to analyse interview transcripts, surveys, observations, and other qualitative data sources to identify themes related to the music curriculum under investigation. Thematic analysis is often used in educational research to understand better how a particular curriculum is implemented and experienced by students, teachers, and other stakeholders. The thematic analysis aims to provide insights into the experiences, perspectives, and attitudes of those involved in the music curriculum, which can then be used to inform future curriculum development and implementation. (Çeliktas, et al, 2022). The process of thematic analysis using Atlas.ti would involve the following steps:

1. Transcribing and coding the data collected from the interviews, surveys, and observations, using Atlas.ti to categorise the data into meaningful themes.
2. Identifying and defining the themes that emerge from the data, such as student perceptions of the curriculum, teaching methods used, and the impact of the curriculum on vocal performance.
3. Analysing the themes to identify patterns and relationships in the data and to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of the students, faculty, and industry professionals.
4. Reporting the findings clearly and concisely, highlighting the key findings and making recommendations for future improvements to the training program.

The use of thematic analysis and Atlas.ti in the case study analysis would provide a systematic and rigorous approach to identifying and understanding the experiences and perceptions of the stakeholders involved in the training program. The analysis results could be used to inform future curriculum development and make recommendations for improvements to the stylistic vocal performance training program.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Since this study is interested in investigating the curriculum of Stylized Vocal Performance, studies on curriculum design should be given a sample of attention. Understanding curriculum design is essential as it affects the perceptions and practices in the actualisation of popular music education (Anderson, 2022).

Popular music curriculum design decides the musical pedagogies. As part of teacher training, some music specialists receive limited opportunities to develop their thinking in curriculum design or articulate rationales for topic order and relationships between them to facilitate progress (Anderson, 2019). Understanding the thoughts of music specialists and educators is thoughtful in examining the impact of the Stylized Vocal Performance curriculum, which helps build future music talents.

Various methods should be used to examine the current music curriculum (Fautley, Kinsella & Whittaker, 2018). The purpose is to improve teaching and ensure usability in developing talents for the music industry. An assessment of the music curriculum has to be carried out (Finney, 2017; Mellizo, 2020). These can be done as a Survey, case study (Yin, 2009), etc.

Notwithstanding these demands, such a decent Stylized Vocal Performance curriculum is anticipated. It is, therefore, significant to examine how effectively the music curriculum was developed and implemented and to look for further improvement and advancement of the stylised vocal performance program that enriches the curriculum design. This is vital for Stylized Vocal Performance curriculum planning (Ona, 2020), development (Rudland, 2020), assessment and improvement.

Good singing is about efficient vocal function, regardless of whether one sings classical, music theatre, or contemporary commercial music (CCM) styles. (Hoch, 2018; 2020), As recently as the 1970s and 1980s, hardly anyone was available to teach singing lessons that were not classical. This is perhaps due to the training that singing teachers received—all university degrees were classical as well. What is astonishing about this reality is that popular singing styles dominated virtually the entire twentieth century—on Broadway, on jazz records, and radio and television (Hoch, 2017, 2019).

It is hoped that applying the proposed conceptual framework helps evaluate the training curriculum by having a case study. The findings obtained through the case study (Yin, 2014) will help develop comprehensive guiding principles as reflected in the research questions.

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