

A Study on Innovative Strategies for Vocal Music Teaching in Higher Education and the Development of Students' Singing Skills

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Abstract—Against the backdrop of the quality-driven development of higher education in the new era, vocal music teaching in universities faces an urgent need to transition from the transmission of technical skills to the development of competencies. Building upon the structural issues prevalent in current university vocal music teaching, such as an overemphasis on technique at the expense of artistry, monotonous teaching models, and a flawed assessment system, this paper systematically expounds on the theoretical foundations and practical necessity of innovative vocal music teaching strategies. The core section of the article constructs an innovative strategy framework underpinned by four pillars: interdisciplinary integration, digital technology empowerment, stage-based practical training, and personalised assessment and feedback. It further explores how these strategies specifically facilitate the coordinated development of students' vocal abilities across dimensions such as vocal technique, musical perception, interpretation of works, stage performance and psychological regulation. The study ultimately proposes that the profound transformation of vocal music teaching in higher education lies in establishing an educational ecosystem where performance facilitates learning, creativity drives practice, and assessment guides learning, thereby enabling students to undergo a qualitative shift from merely being able to sing to excelling at singing.

Keywords— Vocal teaching; pedagogical innovation; vocal performance skills; stage practice.

I. INTRODUCTION

As one of humanity's oldest and most direct forms of musical expression, vocal art embodies rich cultural significance and emotional power; in higher education, it is not only a core component of training musical talent but also a key benchmark for assessing the standard of music education. However, with the progression of the times, shifts in the cultural landscape and the evolution of higher education philosophies, traditional vocal teaching models are facing unprecedented challenges. For a long time, vocal music classes in Chinese universities have largely followed a master-apprentice system or a one-to-one skills training model. Whilst this approach has the advantage of allowing for the meticulous refinement of vocal technique, its drawbacks are equally significant: the curriculum is relatively insular, teaching methods tend to be rigid, and assessment places excessive emphasis on the mastery of technical criteria, whilst largely neglecting the comprehensive qualities and innovative abilities required of students as well-rounded musicians (Cox & Forbes, 2022).

As we enter the third decade of the 21st century, discussions within the global education community regarding

'21st-century core competencies' are becoming increasingly in-depth, with innovative thinking, interdisciplinary integration skills and the ability to apply information technology being prioritised to an unprecedented degree. In the context of vocal music education, the objective of talent development can no longer be limited to producing 'singers' with beautiful voices and proficient techniques; rather, the focus should be on shaping 'musicians' who possess profound artistic cultivation, a broad cultural perspective and a sustained capacity for innovation (López-Iñiguez et al., 2022). This shift in objectives inevitably demands a fundamental transformation of teaching strategies. At present, research on vocal teaching reform in China largely focuses on piecemeal improvements, whilst holistic strategic studies treating teaching innovation and the cultivation of vocal performance skills as an organic system remain insufficient. In light of this, this paper aims to transcend the limitations of a single dimension and, from a perspective that combines macro-level ecology with micro-level strategies, systematically explore the multidimensional pathways for innovation in university vocal teaching and the mechanisms through which these pathways enhance students' vocal performance abilities, with a view to providing theoretical references and practical insights for the high-quality development of university vocal education in the new era.

II. AN ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT STATE OF VOCAL MUSIC TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE CAUSES OF EXISTING PROBLEMS

An in-depth analysis of the current challenges facing vocal music teaching in higher education institutions serves as the logical starting point for proposing effective innovative strategies. Overall, the issues are concentrated in core areas such as teaching philosophy, content, methods, assessment and resources.

A. Path Dependence in Teaching Philosophy

Although the concept of quality education has been advocated for many years, the technique-centred approach remains deeply ingrained in actual vocal teaching practice. Many classes still devote the vast majority of their attention to physical and acoustic aspects such as breathing depth, resonance placement, vocal range expansion and tonal consistency, whilst treating the cultural significance, historical

context, stylistic interpretation and emotional expression of a piece as mere add-ons. This path dependence traps teaching in a cycle of technical training; despite years of training, students often possess technique without emotion, finding it difficult to connect with the soul of a piece, let alone offer a personalised artistic interpretation. This imbalance fundamentally narrows the educational function of vocal training (Juntunen et al., 2023).

B. The Dilemma of Homogenisation in Teaching Content

Regarding the selection of teaching content, many university textbooks and repertoires are updated only slowly, exhibiting a pattern of classical repetition. Whilst outstanding art songs and opera arias from both China and abroad are undoubtedly a valuable asset, over-reliance on them can lead to homogenisation of content. This neglects the introduction of outstanding modern and contemporary works, as well as a broad exploration of works from different ethnic groups, regions and styles, thereby limiting the expansion of students' musical horizons and the comprehensive development of their ability to master diverse styles (Nielsen et al., 2023). Furthermore, teaching content is often confined to singing itself, lacking sufficient integration with related courses such as sight-singing and aural training, harmony, form analysis, music history and dramatic performance, thereby failing to create a synergistic effect in the transmission of knowledge.

C. Unidirectional Transmission of Teaching Methods

Oral transmission and heartfelt instruction, as a traditional method of vocal teaching, has its unique value; however, if employed as the sole or predominant method, it is prone to devolving into a unidirectional demonstration – imitation model. The teacher becomes the absolute authority, whilst students passively receive instruction, their task being to imitate the teacher's or a particular singer's voice as accurately as possible. This model overlooks the students' agency, individual differences and creativity as active learners, undermining their capacity for independent inquiry, critical thinking and personalised expression. Consequently, singing tends to result in a one-size-fits-all phenomenon, lacking distinctive artistic individuality (Sandberg-Jurström, 2022).

D. The Tendency towards One-Sided Assessment

A prominent issue with the current vocal teaching assessment system is its over-reliance on summative assessment, particularly end-of-term examinations or live performances at concerts. This one-off approach has clear limitations: firstly, it overlooks the effort, progress and growth demonstrated during the learning process, failing to provide effective formative feedback; secondly, the criteria focus on technical specifications of the voice, whilst the assessment of deeper competencies, such as artistic expressiveness, stylistic interpretation and stage interaction, remains vague and subjective; thirdly, the evaluation is conducted by a single party, primarily led by the teacher, with a lack of student self-assessment and peer assessment, which hinders the

development of reflective abilities and critical thinking (Zhang et al., 2026).

E. The Relatively Closed Teaching Environment

The ultimate goal of vocal art is stage performance; however, teaching in many higher education institutions has long taken place in relatively closed practice rooms or classrooms. Although students may be technically proficient, once they take to the stage in front of an audience, they are prone to exhibiting symptoms of stage fright, such as nervousness, forgetting lyrics and loss of vocal control. This indicates that conventional teaching severely lacks practical training and psychological adjustment exercises commensurate with the stage performance environment. The disconnect between the teaching environment and the performance environment leaves vocal ability confined to a laboratory stage, making it difficult to translate into genuine stage presence (Mazzarolo et al., 2023).

In summary, the aforementioned issues are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, collectively constituting a systemic dilemma that requires resolution. The underlying cause lies in the fact that the understanding of the essence of vocal education has not yet fully evolved from a focus on skills training to the level of holistic education. Consequently, the solution must also be approached from a systems theory perspective, involving multi-dimensional innovation in teaching strategies.

III. THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND PRACTICAL BASIS FOR INNOVATION IN VOCAL TEACHING

Effective pedagogical innovation should be built upon a solid theoretical foundation and respond to the practical needs arising from contemporary changes.

A. Insights from Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivism holds that knowledge is not passively received, but is actively constructed by learners through interaction with the external world, building upon their existing experiences (Tan & Ng, 2021). This theory suggests that vocal teaching should not be a one-way process of imparting vocal techniques, but rather a process in which, under the guidance of the teacher, students actively explore, experience and reflect upon specific works or artistic tasks, thereby forming personalised understandings and expressions. Singing ability—particularly the capacity for artistic interpretation and stylistic mastery—cannot be acquired through direct instruction; it must be actively constructed through one's own musical experience, cultural background and emotional experiences. Therefore, innovative strategies should focus on creating learning contexts that facilitate students' active construction of knowledge.

B. Expanding the Perspective of Multiple Intelligences Theory

Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences posits that human intelligence is multifaceted, encompassing musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences, among others, thereby significantly broadening our understanding of 'ability' (Attwood, 2022). In vocal music teaching, singing ability relies not only on musical intelligence

but also on the combined contribution of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence (stage performance), linguistic intelligence (lyrical rhythm), interpersonal intelligence (interaction with accompanists and audiences) and intrapersonal intelligence (monitoring one's singing performance) (Xiong, 2025). This theory provides strong support for interdisciplinary integrated teaching and inspires us to focus on the comprehensive development of students' multiple intelligences when assessing them.

C. The Driving Force of Digital Transformation

The rapid development of information technology has profoundly transformed the ways in which knowledge is disseminated and acquired, whilst also providing unprecedented tools for innovation in vocal pedagogy. New technologies such as digital audio workstations, intelligent accompaniment software, online education platforms, VR and AI-assisted teaching systems offer potential solutions to many of the challenges faced in traditional teaching (Yu et al., 2023). For example, audio spectrum analysis software can visualise abstract concepts such as overtones and formants, helping students to intuitively understand the physical properties of sound; high-definition online masterclasses can break down the barriers of time and space, giving students access to top-tier teaching resources. Making effective use of these technologies not only enhances teaching efficiency but also stimulates students' interest in learning and their desire to explore.

D. The Intrinsic Requirements of a New-Era Approach to Talent Development

The state is currently vigorously promoting the development of the 'New Liberal Arts', emphasising interdisciplinary integration and the cultivation of talent with innovative capabilities and well-rounded qualities. The Ministry of Education has also issued multiple circulars requiring higher education institutions to strengthen aesthetic education and enhance students' aesthetic and humanistic literacy. These policy directions chart a course for the reform of vocal music education: future vocalists should not merely be technical craftsmen, but rather well-rounded talents possessing a profound cultural foundation, a broad international perspective, a strong spirit of innovation and outstanding artistic expressiveness (Wang, 2023). This shift in the concept of talent necessitates that vocal music teaching move beyond the confines of a technology-centric approach and advance towards a new phase characterised by greater openness, integration and innovation.

IV. DEVELOPING A SYSTEM OF INNOVATIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR VOCAL MUSIC

Based on the aforementioned analysis of the issues and theoretical underpinnings, this paper constructs a four-pronged system of innovative vocal teaching strategies, encompassing four core dimensions: interdisciplinary integration, digital empowerment, stage-based practical training, and personalised assessment and feedback.

A. Interdisciplinary Integration

The art of vocal performance is, in itself, a comprehensive art form with intrinsic and deep-rooted connections to disciplines such as literature, drama, dance, history and psychology. The strategy of interdisciplinary integration aims to break down disciplinary barriers, organically incorporating relevant knowledge into vocal music teaching to enrich students' artistic grounding and deepen their understanding and interpretation of works (Jiang et al., 2024).

The integration of vocal music with literature and linguistics is essential, as lyrics form the literary foundation of vocal works. A thorough understanding of the literary atmosphere, rhetorical devices, rhythm and metre, and phonetic characteristics of the lyrics is a prerequisite for the accurate interpretation of a piece (Juntunen et al., 2023). Students can be guided to interpret works from the perspectives of poetic analysis and literary criticism, whilst also being taught the pronunciation characteristics and phonetic aesthetics of different languages, ensuring that their enunciation is not only precise but also imbued with linguistic musicality.

The integration of vocal music with performance studies and dance: a stiff posture or unconscious movements can diminish the emotional impact of a performance. Through integration with performance studies and physical expression courses, training in basic stage movement, facial expression management and spatial awareness can help students develop an awareness that singing is performance, enabling body language to become a powerful tool for expressing musical emotion (Jiang et al., 2024).

The integration of vocal music with psychology and music therapy: understanding the basic principles of performance psychology—such as managing stage anxiety and accessing emotional memories—is crucial for students to develop a healthy performing mindset (Clements-Cortés et al., 2024). Concepts from music therapy regarding the relationship between voice and emotion can also inspire students to explore the richer expressive potential of the voice.

The integration of vocal studies with music history and cultural anthropology recognises that every classical work is a product of a specific era and culture. Incorporating knowledge of music history and socio-cultural history into teaching helps students understand the compositional context, stylistic characteristics and aesthetic tastes, thereby avoiding the pitfall of interpreting historical works through a modern emotional lens.

B. Digital Empowerment

The judicious use of digital technology is a key driver of transformation in vocal teaching models; its purpose is not to replace teachers, but to serve as a capable assistant and effective tool.

Teaching supported by intelligent software and applications—such as audio analysis programmes like Melodyne and Spectrogram—can visualise abstract parameters such as sound waveforms, pitch, timbre and formants, helping students establish correct vocal concepts and accurately identify and resolve technical issues. The use of intelligent accompaniment apps, such as Appcompanion,

provides high-quality accompaniment that can be adjusted for tempo and key anytime, anywhere, greatly enhancing the efficiency and enjoyment of practice.

Expanded learning through online resources and platforms: platforms such as MOOCs and Chuxing Learning Pass can be utilised to build an online repository of vocal theory resources, including analyses of works from different periods, video masterclasses by renowned artists, and animations on the physiology of singing, enabling students to pursue self-directed learning. Online platforms can also be used for the submission and peer assessment of homework, thereby breaking down the spatial and temporal constraints of the classroom.

Exploring cutting-edge virtual reality and artificial intelligence: universities with the necessary resources may consider introducing VR technology to simulate different acoustic environments, such as concert halls and opera houses, allowing students to practise on realistic virtual stages and effectively alleviating stage fright. AI technology can analyse students' singing in real time for pitch accuracy, rhythm and breath control, providing preliminary feedback to assist teachers in delivering more targeted guidance.

C. Stage-centred, practice-driven approach

The vitality of vocal art lies on the stage. Establishing a stage-centred teaching philosophy and integrating practice throughout the entire teaching process is key to transforming students' singing abilities from a technical to an artistic level (Westerlund & Gaunt, 2021).

Regular weekly concerts and class presentations should be introduced to break with the convention of relying solely on end-of-term concerts as the final form of assessment. By establishing periodic, non-competitive weekly concerts or class presentations, a supportive, low-pressure environment can be fostered, providing students with frequent opportunities for public performance and enabling them to gradually adapt to and master the stage through practice.

Flipped classrooms and role-playing: in class, students take turns playing the roles of performer, audience member and critic. Following a performance, students conduct self-assessments, peers provide honest feedback from the audience's perspective, and the teacher concludes with a summary and critique. This multi-role experience not only enhances stage presence but also cultivates aesthetic judgement and critical thinking skills (Thompson-Bell, 2023).

Project-based concert planning and rehearsals: Students are encouraged to work in groups to plan and stage a complete concert centred on a specific theme. From selecting the theme and repertoire, through programme arrangement and programme booklet production, to stage design and rehearsals, the entire process is student-led, with the teacher acting solely as an advisor. This approach maximises initiative and creativity, comprehensively enhancing students' organisational, collaborative, planning and performance skills.

Expanding opportunities for off-campus performances and social practice, we actively seek to provide students with practical performance opportunities outside the school, such as community charity performances and various vocal

competitions. By putting the outcomes of our teaching to the service of society, we strengthen students' sense of social responsibility and a sense of achievement, whilst honing their performance psychology and adaptability in diverse performance settings and before varied audiences.

D. Personalised Assessment and Feedback

Assessment serves as the guiding principle of teaching. Establishing a scientific, comprehensive and personalised assessment system is a key safeguard for guiding pedagogical innovation and promoting students' skill development.

We combine formative and summative assessment, significantly increasing the weighting of formative assessment by incorporating classroom participation, the quality of homework, performance in group work and the effectiveness of stage-based presentations into the final mark. We establish vocal development portfolios to document technical progress, repertoire accumulation and artistic insights throughout the term, ensuring that assessments authentically reflect the process of effort and the trajectory of growth.

Diversifying the assessment process breaks the monopoly of teacher-led assessment by introducing mechanisms for student self-assessment and peer assessment. Clear assessment rubrics should be designed, setting scoring criteria across multiple dimensions—including intonation and rhythm, vocal technique, linguistic style, musical expression and stage etiquette—to ensure that assessments are evidence-based and more instructive.

Enrichment of evaluation dimensions: The content of evaluation should transcend mere technical indicators to encompass broader dimensions such as musical understanding, artistic expressiveness, stylistic mastery, innovative thinking, collaborative skills and learning attitude. Comprehensive competence is assessed through various formats, including written reports, oral examinations and the review of concert recordings.

The concept of value-added assessment should be introduced, focusing on students' individual progress over time rather than merely on horizontal comparisons. Baseline assessments should be conducted at the start of the term and summative assessments at the end; by comparing and analysing these, students' progress relative to their original level can be evaluated, which is particularly motivating for students with weaker foundations (Wu et al., 2022).

V. THE ROLE OF INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES IN FOSTERING STUDENTS' SINGING SKILLS

The four major innovation strategies outlined above are interwoven and work in synergy, collectively aimed at the comprehensive and systematic development of students' vocal abilities, as specifically reflected in the following five core dimensions.

A. Promoting the in-depth transformation from vocal technique to musical interpretation

The primary level of vocal ability is vocal technique, but technique ultimately serves musical expression. The interdisciplinary integration strategy enables students to move beyond mere vocal production and gain a deep understanding

of a work's cultural DNA and emotional core; Digital tools make abstract vocal concepts tangible, helping students to efficiently overcome technical obstacles and clear the path for artistic expression; stage-based practice, meanwhile, hones their ability to convey emotion through voice through repeated refinement in real-world contexts. Through this process, students gradually come to realise that masterful technique is merely the starting point, whilst an accurate grasp of musical style and personalised artistic interpretation constitute the very soul of vocal performance, thereby driving a shift in their self-perception from that of a craftsman to that of an artist.

B. Fostering a shift from individual practice to a collaborative, co-creative learning paradigm

Traditional vocal training is often viewed as a solitary, individual pursuit; however, innovative strategies, particularly project-based learning, group collaboration and peer assessment, have profoundly transformed this ecosystem. Students are required to communicate ideas with peers, coordinate tasks, accompany one another, listen attentively and collaborate on completing pieces. This not only hones their interpersonal and teamwork skills but, more importantly, fosters an atmosphere of openness, dialogue and mutual support. Students draw inspiration from singing together and providing feedback to one another; they learn to understand music from different perspectives, and their motivation and creativity are greatly stimulated through such interaction.

C. Strengthening the Deep Connection Between Cognitive Understanding and Emotional Experience

The essence of singing lies in moving people through emotion. If students lack a profound emotional resonance with a piece, their performance will inevitably fall flat. Interdisciplinary integration strategies build a bridge to the spiritual world of the work: literature helps to understand the beauty of the lyrics; history imbues the work with historical significance; and psychology guides the exploration of the sources of emotion. Digital tools can enhance synesthetic experiences, whilst stage-based practice propels inner cognition and emotion into the public sphere of expression. This cyclical training, involving cognition, emotion and expression, ensures that emotional expression is no longer mere pretence or imitation, but stems from a genuine inner stirring and sublimation (Caruso & Nijs, 2020).

D. Enhancing Comprehensive Skills in Stage Presentation and Psychological Regulation

Stage-based practice strategies provide the most direct pathway to enhancing stage presence. Frequent stage appearances in themselves constitute the most effective systematic desensitisation to stage anxiety; coupled with performance workshops, physical training and the experience of playing multiple roles, students can gradually develop a strong sense of the stage, an awareness of their audience and a sense of control (Huang & Yu, 2022). Positive guidance and constructive feedback within personalised assessment help students develop a healthy self-image, reduce excessive anxiety regarding external judgement, and enable them to face the real stage with greater composure and confidence, shifting

their focus from the fear of making mistakes to a concentration on their performance.

E. Transforming Short-Term Goals into the Development of Lifelong Learning Competences

The ultimate goal of education is to facilitate students' lifelong development (Cronholm, 2021). The innovative strategies focus not only on cultivating students' vocal proficiency during their time at school, but also on fostering the core competencies essential for their sustainable development. Interdisciplinary integration fosters a broad intellectual perspective and comprehensive thinking skills; digital empowerment equips students with new tools for independent learning; stage-based practice shapes personality traits characterised by a willingness to take on challenges and a knack for collaboration; whilst personalised assessment helps students internalise metacognitive abilities such as self-reflection and self-motivation. When students leave school, these core competencies, which transcend specific repertoire, will become an inexhaustible driving force for their continued exploration of vocal art, adaptation to industry changes, and the pursuit of lifelong learning and self-transcendence.

VI. CONCLUSION

In light of the higher demands placed on vocal artistry in this new era, the reform of vocal music education in higher education institutions is no longer a matter of making piecemeal adjustments, but rather a systematic transformation encompassing philosophy, content, methodology, technology and assessment. The four-dimensional innovative strategy framework developed in this study, characterised by interdisciplinary integration, digital empowerment, stage-based practical training and personalised assessment and feedback, aims to break the closed cycle of traditional teaching and rebuild an open, interactive and vibrant ecosystem for vocal music education.

At the heart of this framework lies the realisation of three key shifts: in teaching objectives, a shift from training vocal skills to nurturing well-rounded musicians; in the teaching dynamic, a shift from one-way instruction by the teacher to co-creation between teacher and student and peer-to-peer interaction; and in teaching assessment, a shift from summative technical examinations to multi-dimensional formative and developmental assessment. Through these transformations, we aim to effectively stimulate students' intrinsic motivation to learn, broaden their artistic horizons, deepen their understanding of music, and hone their stage presence, ultimately achieving a comprehensive elevation of their vocal abilities, from technique to artistry, from imitation to creation, and from the classroom to the stage.

Looking ahead, the path to innovation in vocal teaching remains long and arduous. How to further systematise and integrate these innovative strategies into the curriculum; how to more deeply integrate emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence; and how to construct a more scientific model for evaluating outcomes to verify the practical efficacy of these innovative strategies, these are all topics worthy of continued exploration. Only by adhering to both tradition and

innovation, and through constant reflection and practice, can higher education in vocal music, standing at this new historical juncture, cultivate more outstanding talents capable of singing from the heart and illuminating the era through art (Zhang et al., 2024).

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