

Review Article

A Review and Prospect of Research on the Reform of Music Education and Teaching Models in Chinese Higher Normal Colleges under the New Employment Orientation

Yiyang Zhao^{1,2}, Raja Zulkarnain Raja Mohd Yusof^{1,*}

¹City University Malaysia, Petaling Jaya 46100, Malaysia

²LiuPanShui Preschool Education College, Liupanshui 553040, China

*Correspondence: Raja Zulkarnain Raja Mohd Yusof, raja.zulkarnain@city.edu.my

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of China's education reform and new employment landscape, music education in Chinese higher normal universities has a prominent gap between curriculum supply and societal talent demands amid increasingly fierce job market competition. The core solution to this structural employment contradiction lies in the systematic restructuring of teaching models. This paper conducts a systematic review of existing research on this topic, covering core dimensions including reform principles, technological empowerment, curriculum restructuring, practical teaching reinforcement, and cultural integration. The results show that current reform practices present four core characteristics: student-centered interactivity, digital technologization, diversified talent training, and practice-oriented application. Meanwhile, existing research and practices still face bottlenecks including unbalanced regional development, formalistic application of educational technology, and imperfect multi-dimensional assessment systems. On this basis, this paper proposes future development directions: to further enhance the accuracy of employment orientation, construct a four-in-one integrated development model of "technology-curriculum-practice-culture", improve faculty capacity building and multi-dimensional evaluation systems, and promote the formation of an application-oriented, interdisciplinary, and innovative talent cultivation system, so as to continuously deliver high-quality music professionals for basic education and cultural industry sectors in China.

Keywords

New employment orientation, Higher normal colleges, Music education, Teaching model reform, Review and prospect

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Against the backdrop of China's comprehensive education reform, Chinese higher education is accelerating the transition to a quality-focused development stage. For music education, this transition is guided by two core national policy documents: the Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Aesthetic Education in Schools in the New Era issued by the General Office of the State Council of China in 2020, and the “double reduction” policy issued in 2021. These policies have fundamentally changed the talent demand standard for music education: the demand for primary and secondary school music teachers has shifted from a single skill-based standard to a comprehensive quality-oriented standard, while the rapidly developing cultural and creative industry in China has also provided diversified employment opportunities for music graduates. In China, Higher Normal Colleges (HNCs) are professional higher education institutions focusing on teacher training, which are the main body of music teacher training, differing from comprehensive universities (with more interdisciplinary academic orientation) and conservatories of music (with more professional performance orientation). Before the round of reform starting in 2020, music education in Chinese HNCs had long maintained a conservative training model, with problems such as rigid curriculum system, over-emphasis on musical skill training while neglecting teaching ability cultivation, insufficient practical teaching links, and mismatch between talent training and market demand. These problems have led to the increasingly prominent contradiction between structural employment difficulty of graduates and the shortage of high-quality compound music talents in the market (Dai, 2020). The new employment-oriented reform focuses on the systematic reconstruction of the teaching model in accordance with market demand and professional core competence development, which provides clear action guidance for the future reform of music education in HNCs. The implementation of the “double reduction” policy and the comprehensive popularization of school aesthetic education have further put forward higher requirements for the professionalization, diversification and innovation of music professionals. Qualified music talents not only need solid professional music foundation and standardized teaching ability, but also need to master modern educational technology, have interdisciplinary integration ability, and certain innovation and entrepreneurship literacy (Chen & Zhao, 2025).

The “double reduction” policy and the spread of aesthetic education has led to increased demands on music professionals who have to be professionalized, diversified, and innovative: they need a strong music background as well as teaching capabilities, with contemporary

educational tools, interdisciplinary incorporation, and the ability to be an innovator and entrepreneur (Chen and Zhao, 2025).

1.2. Significance of the Research

Theoretical Importance: The current paper analyzes the studies on the change in teaching models within higher normal music education, defining the key elements, directions, and issues. It builds a theoretical background within the context of the new employment orientation that adds value to the reform system. Moreover, it offers a literature basis and theoretical reference of future research through the incorporation of such viewpoints as teacher-student interaction, technology empowerment, and cultural integration.

Practical Significance : Literature review suggests that the proposed changes are targeted, which will help higher normal colleges improve their curricula, innovate methods and increase practice, hence bringing up market-ready music talents. Moreover, the results provide a source of reference to educational departments to come up with policies and enhance evaluation, which facilitates accurate correspondence between higher normal music education and the labour market.

1.3. Research Questions

The main questions considered in this paper are: What are the essential aspects and the actual ways of changing the model of music education and teaching in higher normal colleges with the new employment focus? What are the agreements and disagreements in the current reform studies? What is going to be the trend and major direction of reform development?

2. Methods

This paper adopts a systematic literature review method to sort out and analyze the existing research on the reform of music education teaching models in Chinese higher normal colleges under the employment orientation. The literature retrieval was conducted in 4 core academic databases, including CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure, the core Chinese academic database), Web of Science, Scopus, and arXiv, covering the time range from January 2020 to December 2025. The retrieval keywords include: “new employment orientation”, “higher normal colleges”, “music education”, “teaching model reform”, “music teacher training”, “curriculum reform of music education”. Inclusion criteria for literature: (1) Peer-reviewed journal papers and academic theses focusing on the reform of music education in Chinese higher normal colleges; (2) Research with clear empirical data or systematic theoretical analysis on the core dimensions of teaching model reform; (3) International

comparative studies on music education reform in higher education, covering Greece, Malaysia and other countries, to provide an international reference framework. Exclusion criteria: (1) Non-peer-reviewed conference abstracts, popular articles and news reports; (2) Research with repetitive content and no independent academic viewpoints; (3) Research only focusing on music performance teaching without involving teacher training or teaching model reform.

3. Results

3.1. Core Principles of Reform

(1) Student-centered and two-way interaction principle

The current study mostly focuses on the fact that music education reform in higher normal schools should not be stuck to the conventional educational paradigm of music education, i.e., the teacher-centered and student-receiving paradigm but should make the student central. Dong (2023) suggested that teacher-student interaction-based teaching reform needs to be conducted according to the principle of two-way interaction, which will allow making accurate adjustments to the teaching methods as well as enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of teaching due to the spiritual exchange and information feedback between teachers and students.

(2) The principle of multi-dimensional evaluation and personalized training

The conventional single assessment model is not sufficient to address the demand on talent cultivation with the new employment orientation, and the concept of diversified evaluation has emerged as the consensual principle of reform. It has been established through research that a combination of student self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and teacher evaluation will help build an evaluation system that encompasses various aspects of evaluation, including professional skills, teaching ability, and innovative qualities (Dong, 2023).

(3) The principle of practice orientation and employment matching

The development of practical abilities is the link between education and employment and as a research emphasis is made on the importance of practical education as the most crucial component. Dai (2020) suggested a combined system of theory, practice, and employment, which expanded the practical hours, improved teaching skills through observation, simulation, and on-the-job training. At the same time, the curriculums must be adapted to the needs of the market by introducing classes on teaching skills, educational technology, and innovation-entrepreneurship (Jiang, 2021).

Critical analysis of existing research: The three core principles have formed a research consensus in the academic circle, but there are still research differences in the priority of the

principles. Most local studies in China take the practice orientation and employment matching principle as the primary principle, while international studies represented by Greece and Malaysia pay more attention to the student-centered two-way interaction principle as the core of reform. In addition, existing research mostly focuses on the theoretical connotation of the principles, but there is a lack of empirical research on how to implement these principles in specific teaching scenarios, which is an important research gap in this field.

3.2. Key Paths to Reform

(1) Curriculum system restructuring

Curriculum system plays a key role in the development of talent. The existing reforms are aimed at: Firstly, the optimization of structure through the balance between theory, practice, profession-related, and general courses as well as enhancing the relevance (Dai, 2020); secondly, enriching the content through ethnic folk music, interdisciplinary knowledge, and modern technology to broaden the horizon (Chen and Zhao, 2025); and thirdly, innovative formats through electives, micro-courses, and project-based learning to address individual requirements (Zhong, 2025).

(2) Innovation in teaching methods

New educational strategies will be crucial in enhancing the quality. The current studies suggest that: firstly, there is a need to ensure that the interaction is encouraged through discussions, collaborations, and cases, which can trigger the initiative (Dong, 2023); secondly, there is an opportunity to use technologies, such as new media or VR, and low-latency streams to make their application more efficient (Zhong, 2025; Zhou and Bidin, 2025) and third, the introduction of project-based learning in creation, practice, and heritage preservation should be used to develop holistic skills (Lyberatos et al., 2023). One example is how low-latency streaming of remote ensembles with JackTrip positively influences collaboration and performance (Zhou and Bidin, 2025).

(3) Strengthening practical teaching

The practical teaching reform addresses vocational adaptability as follows; firstly, it involves increasing the platforms through the stability of the off-campus bases with schools and cultural organizations (Dai, 2020); secondly, it involves enriching the forms of simulated teaching, competitions, performances, and social services (Zhao, 2021); and thirdly, it involves empowering innovation-entrepreneurship with courses, lectures, and competitions to promote awareness (Jiang, 2021). As an illustration, the Shenyang Conservatory is increasing these abilities by creating practice bases and nurturing projects (Jiang, 2021).

(4) Cultural integration and distinctive development

The cultural inheritance is one of the crucial goals of music education in higher normal schools and universities, which is also a unique benefit of improving the employment competitiveness of graduates. The current studies focus on incorporating the ethnic folk music into the curriculum system, developing the cultural literacy and teaching peculiarities of students by providing them with ethnic music courses, conducting field surveys, and implementing programs of intangible cultural heritage transmission (Chen and Zhao, 2025). As one example, Qiannan National Normal University introduces local ethnic music including Dong folk songs and Miao flying songs to its teaching, building an ethnic music education model (Chen and Zhao, 2025); Wenhua College of Yunnan Arts University provides unique courses like the manufacture of the hulusi (type of gourd flute) and the performance of ethnic musical instruments to improve the competitiveness of its students in the region (Zhao, 2021).

3.3. The effectiveness and influencing factors of the reform

(1) Reform results

According to empirical research findings based on provincial and institutional case studies, the ongoing music education reform in Chinese higher normal colleges has achieved preliminary results in local practice: First, there was an improvement in student learning initiative and comprehensive ability, with 40% of respondents in the survey claiming to have developed further learning interest in music education, and 24% noting a significant improvement in creative practice ability (Zhang, 2024); Second, the employment quality of graduates has been improved in pilot institutions, as the practical ability and entrepreneurial literacy cultivated by the reform have effectively enhanced the employment competitiveness of graduates in the job market (Jiang, 2021); Third, the teaching quality and social reputation of relevant institutions have been improved through closer school-enterprise and school-institution cooperation, and the matching degree between talent training and market demand has been significantly optimized (Dai, 2020). It should be noted that the above results are mostly from the case studies of key institutions in eastern China, and the universality of the reform effects in central and western regions still needs to be verified by more large-sample empirical research.

(2) Influencing factors

The reform process is limited in a number of aspects: firstly, the lack of hardware facilities, whereby some institutions do not have specialized teaching devices, practical facilities, and out-of-school training centres that would facilitate in-depth promotion of the reform (Chen and Zhao, 2025); secondly, the underdeveloped teaching staff, whose new media literacy, practical skills and the ability to teach innovation and entrepreneurship need to

be developed (Zhong, 2025); thirdly, unequal regional development, where schools in the central and western regions are slowly developing their reforms because of various economic and geographic conditions and so forth (Zhou and Bidin, 2025); and fourthly, a flawed evaluation system, which currently evaluates only theoretical knowledge and professional skills, but does not assess the dimensions of practical ability and innovative literacy.

4. Discussion

4.1. The core logic of the reform: the unity of employment orientation and education goals

The main idea behind the reform of the teaching model of music education in higher normal colleges with the new employment orientation is to ensure that there is a dialectical unity between the two concepts of employment requirements and educational goals. It is not just a matter of meeting the demands of the market but an attempt to use employment as the basis of the creation of a three-in-one system of talent development that includes knowledge, skills, and quality, to meet the employment needs of students and at the same time promote their overall development and lifelong learning (Zhao, 2021).

Such unity can be seen in the novelty of teaching approaches, namely, the emphasis on both technical power and humane concern: on the one side, the current educational technologies are applied to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of teaching, and on the other side, the communication abilities and spirit of teamwork of students are developed through the teacher-student interaction, group cooperation, and other activities (Dong, 2023; Zhang, 2024). Meanwhile, practice-based teaching enhances not only the development of the vocational skills but also instills social responsibility and service consciousness, which results in the dual enhancement of the concepts of employment competitiveness and social responsibility (Jiang, 2021).

4.2. The key contradiction in reform: balancing tradition and innovation

The music education reform in higher normal colleges has numerous contradictions, the most important being the balance between the concepts of tradition and innovation: Firstly, there is a contradiction in teaching philosophies, as between the traditional approach of discipline centered and the modern approach of student centered, which forces institutions to create a student-centered teaching philosophy and still maintain their professional strength (Dai, 2020); secondly, there is a contradiction in the design of the curriculum, which requires balancing professional and general education courses, as well as theoretical and practical courses, considering both the depth of profession and the width of employment (Zhao, 2021);

furthermore, it has been established that there should be an integration of teaching approaches, integrating conventional face-to-face instruction with contemporary online and technological instruction, where it is important to ensure that formalism does not dominate the innovation, but rather that the effectiveness of instruction is achieved (Zhong, 2025); lastly, there must be a balance between the heritage of culture and innovation, which involves merging the contemporary aspects and cross-cultural views as well as inheriting the folk music to bring about the improvement of cultural innovation abilities of the students (Chen & Zhao, 2025).

The resolution of such contradictions involves universities developing differentiated reform strategies depending on their position and resources: key universities may concentrate on the development of innovative talents through the addition of interdisciplinary courses and innovation and entrepreneurship projects; local universities must enhance the growth of application-oriented talents with a special emphasis on practical skills and regional cultural peculiarities (Zhao, 2021; Zhou and Bidin, 2025). At the same time, it is necessary to introduce a dynamic adjustment mechanism that would help optimize the teaching system in due time in response to the changing job market and student needs.

4.3. Implementation Guarantee of Reform: Construction of a Multi-dimensional Collaborative Mechanism

The transformation of music education reform in higher normal colleges will need a multi-dimensional mechanism of institution-government-enterprise-society: Firstly, institutions should optimize their governance, reinforce their curriculum, teacher education, and investment in hardware and put in place a reform evaluation feedback (Dai, 2020); Secondly, government needs to enhance policy and financial assistance, particularly in central/western areas, as well as develop a connection between the education-employment market (Zhou and Bidin, 2025); Thirdly, the enterprises and the society (schools, cultural institutions, art groups) are required to take the concept of talent training seriously and provide platforms and co-design curricula as well as assess the quality of teaching to promote the integration of industry and education (Chen and Zhao, 2025); Fourth, teachers should change their ideas and approaches, whereas students should actively participate in practice and innovation, which positively contribute to the interaction of teaching and learning (Dong, 2023).

Moreover, the necessity to reform the assessment system plays an important role in the successful implementation of the reforms. The evaluation system must be diverse and include both procedural and results-oriented assessments as well as quantitative and qualitative ones. The evaluation indicators included in this system should include the employment quality,

employer satisfaction, and student career development so that the reform direction would not go away to the employment orientation (Zhang, 2024).

5. Conclusion

This paper conducts a systematic review of the existing literature, and comprehensively analyzes the research status of the reform of music education and teaching models in Chinese higher normal colleges under the new employment orientation. The research finds that the current reform has formed core consensus including student-centeredness, two-way interactive teaching, diversified assessment, and practice-oriented reinforcement, and has explored diversified reform paths including curriculum system reconstruction, teaching method innovation, practical teaching strengthening, cultural integration, and faculty capacity building. These reform practices have achieved preliminary results in improving students' comprehensive ability and graduate employment quality in pilot institutions. At the same time, existing research and reform practices are still facing realistic bottlenecks including insufficient hardware infrastructure, lagging faculty capacity building, unbalanced regional development, and imperfect multi-dimensional assessment system, and need to further explore the dynamic balance between tradition and innovation in the reform process (Ning & Raja Halid, 2024).

The future curriculum reforms need to focus more on being accurately aligned to employment demands. The settings of curricula are supposed to change dynamically through surveying the requirements of the employers, and here are some examples: To start with, there is a need to reinforce the core vocational skills subjects among them music teaching methodology, use of educational technology, and management of classrooms. Secondly, there is a need to expand the existing courses on diversified employment directions to include the courses like music therapy, management of cultural industries, and innovation and entrepreneurship to respond to the diverse employment desires of students. Thirdly, interdisciplinary integration courses need to be reinforced to incorporate music with other fields like psychology, education and information technology so as to improve the ability of students to comprehensively apply their skills (Zhao, 2021; Jiang, 2021).

The development of modern educational technologies will move toward a high level of integration: First, developing a more immersive VR/AR environment to simulate teaching and performance environments, increasing practical teaching efficacy (Zhong, 2025); second, creating online systems and databases of resources so as to exchange high-quality materials and reduce disparities among regions (Zhou & Bidin, 2025); third, using big data to study the learning process and job status, which can help optimize teaching and provide career

counseling (Lyberatos et al., 2023).

Real-life education will create a unified system of on-campus practice-off-campus internship-innovation: Firstly, it will enhance the on-campus facilities such as multi-functional classrooms, studios, and simulation laboratories to enhance the basic training; secondly, it will increase off-campus sites through long term partnerships with schools, sites and art groups to provide variety of opportunities; third, it will spur innovation-entrepreneurship through incubation sites, financial assistance and mentoring of entrepreneurship skills (Jiang, 2021; Dai, 2020).

The cultural integration will no longer be a simple inclusion but an innovative transformation. Firstly, it will explore the resources of local ethnic and folk music and produce special courses and teaching materials; secondly, it will motivate students to integrate the ethnic culture elements with the modern music styles and engage in creative practice; and lastly, it will expand the students international and develop the intercultural music education abilities by organizing intercultural exchange programs (Chen and Zhao, 2025; Zhang, 2024).

The assessment system will be enhanced in the following manner: Firstly, a multi-dimensional assessment framework of knowledge-skills-quality-employment will be developed to assess the total capabilities of the students; secondly, there will be an emphasis on the process-oriented assessment, and the dynamic monitoring of the learning and development of students will be done in various forms such as classroom performance, practical results, and project reports; thirdly, the concept of third-party evaluation will be introduced, and the participation of employers and industry experts in the evaluation will be sought to enhance the objectivity and relevance of the evaluation (Dong, 2023; Zhang, 2024).

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