

Review Article

Talent Cultivation in Higher Music Teacher Education: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Normal universities are the core base for training music education teachers for primary and secondary schools in China. This paper uses a narrative literature review method to trace the research context and core achievements in this field. The study finds that existing research mainly revolves around two major themes: the core factors influencing music education graduates' employment and career development, and the adaptability and optimization of the talent cultivation system to employment needs. Based on this, this paper reflects on the contributions and limitations of existing research and proposes key directions for future research, aiming to provide theoretical reference and practical basis for the reform of music education talent cultivation in normal universities and for high-quality employment of graduates.

Keywords

Normal colleges, Music education, Talent cultivation, Employment needs, Career development

1. Introduction

Aesthetic education is an important component of quality education in the new era, and music education serves as its core carrier. Normal colleges bear the core function of supplying qualified music education teachers to primary and secondary schools in their regions, making them the main body of China's music education talent cultivation system (Gao, 2023). On the one hand, more than 30 provinces across the country face a shortage of primary and secondary school music teachers, resulting in a severe shortage of aesthetic education teachers at the grassroots level; on the other hand, a large number of music education graduates are

unable to enter the teaching labor market, or experience problems such as poor career adaptation or resignation within a short period after entering the workforce.

Against this backdrop, Chinese and international literature has conducted extensive empirical research and theoretical discussions on the theme of “music education talent cultivation adapted to employment needs.” Internationally, scholars have focused on issues such as music teachers’ professional self-efficacy (an individual’s belief in their ability to successfully perform music teaching tasks), professional identity (a teacher’s self-perception and sense of belonging to the music teaching profession), professional retention of newly employed teachers, and the matching degree between university music teacher education curricula and teaching labor market needs, resulting in a wealth of empirical findings (Du, 2023; Miller, 2025; Shaw, 2023a). Domestically, scholars have conducted numerous regional studies on the current status of music education in normal universities, employment difficulties, and reform paths, providing practical references for localized talent cultivation reform (Li, 2022; Li, 2024; Gao, 2023).

However, few studies have systematically reviewed and integrated relevant Chinese and international research findings, especially those specifically targeting normal universities and addressing their employment needs. Therefore, this paper reviews representative selected literature from both Chinese and international sources, aiming to provide theoretical support for reforming the talent cultivation model of music education in normal universities and addressing the employment difficulties faced by graduates.

2. Research Methods

This paper adopts a narrative literature review method, which is appropriate for synthesizing existing research on a specific topic and identifying key themes and gaps in the literature. This approach uses thematic classification and content analysis to organize and interpret research findings, which aligns with the objectives of this study. This paper processes the literature content as follows: first, it uses open coding to sort out the core viewpoints, research conclusions and key variables of each selected study, compares and analyzes the similarities and differences between Chinese and international research, systematically sorts out the research context, objectively presents the current research status in this field, and on this basis, conducts reflection and prospect.

3. Research Results

Through a systematic analysis of the literature, existing research findings mainly revolve around three core themes, as detailed below:

3.1. Factors Influencing Music Education Graduates' Employment and Career Development: Individual and Institutional Dimensions

Existing research has revealed key variables influencing the employment choices, career adaptation, and career retention of music education graduates from three levels: individual psychology, workplace environment, and training foundation, forming a multi-dimensional analytical framework.

At the individual psychological level, professional self-efficacy, professional identity, and professional commitment are core factors determining graduates' employment behavior and career development. Du (2023), through a questionnaire survey and structural equation model analysis of 340 Chinese music teachers, found that music teachers' professional commitment and optimism significantly and positively predict their self-efficacy, with professional commitment having a predictive effect of 64% and optimism a predictive effect of 77%. This result confirms that positive psychological qualities and professional emotional connections are the core psychological foundation for music teachers' career development. DeAngelis (2026) further supplemented this view with a case study of newly hired music teachers in Australia. Her study found that 35% of newly hired music teachers were unsure whether they would continue teaching within 5 years. Positive feedback from parents and colleagues, a high degree of identification with professional value, and psychological resilience in the face of workplace pressure were key factors in determining teacher retention. Conversely, teachers with unclear professional identity and insufficient self-efficacy were more likely to experience burnout and turnover. Shaw's (2023a) research reveals the significant impact of career perception. Among students at British music conservatories, there is a prevalent hegemonic cultural perception that "becoming a teacher means becoming a failed performer." This negative career perception severely hinders students' career identity development and directly reduces their willingness to pursue a career in music education.

Miller (2025), using longitudinal tracking data from Maryland, USA, from 2008 to 2020, further quantified the impact of the employment environment. His research found that only 59% of music education graduates ultimately entered public K-12 schools, with graduates preferring suburban schools, while the teacher shortage in rural and urban schools remained difficult to fill. Simultaneously, there was a serious mismatch between the teaching content of new teachers and their training specializations—60% of new teachers worked in primary schools, primarily undertaking general music teaching, while university training focused more on specialized skills such as orchestral and choral singing. This mismatch directly led to poor career adaptation for new teachers, increasing their turnover risk. Shaw (2023b)'s survey of

66 music education institutions in the UK also confirmed that graduates generally lacked core workplace competencies such as large-class management, differentiated teaching, and adaptation to special education needs, failing to meet employers' job requirements and leading to difficulties in adapting after joining the workforce, further exacerbating the industry's talent drain.

British music students typically have informal teaching experience before undergraduate studies, but universities have failed to systematically transform this experience. Furthermore, fragmented pedagogy courses and a lack of quality control over practical internships have resulted in students' teaching abilities failing to meet the core demands of the job market.

Existing research generally confirms that the structural mismatch between the talent training system and the demands of the job market is the core root cause of the employment difficulties faced by music education graduates.

Domestic research focuses on the current training status of local higher normal colleges and the supply-demand imbalance in the regional employment market. Li (2024)'s survey of 136 music graduates from a local university in Shanxi Province showed that their employment intentions were concentrated in primary and secondary schools (30%), training institutions (10%), and opera and dance theaters (10%), but the proportion of graduates who ultimately entered their respective fields was extremely low. The study also pointed out three major problems in the training of local higher normal colleges: first, students have weak career planning awareness and lack understanding of the employment market; second, employment courses emphasize theory over practical skills, often involving large classes and lacking precise one-on-one guidance; and third, professional teaching emphasizes campus practice over off-campus real-world training, resulting in a disconnect between students' practical abilities and job requirements. Gao(2023) further points out that music education majors in domestic higher normal schools suffer from problems such as overly narrow career paths and highly homogenized training models. The curriculum system still focuses on performance skills courses such as vocal music and piano, which is seriously out of touch with the actual needs of music teaching in primary and secondary schools. At the same time, the continuous expansion of enrollment has led to a mismatch between teachers and teaching facilities, and the one-to-many teaching model has caused students' professional skills and comprehensive qualities to decline continuously, further exacerbating the difficulty of finding employment. Li's (2022) research also confirms that there is a significant gap between the training goals of applied talents in music majors in local higher normal schools and the actual teaching implementation. There are generally problems such as emphasizing theoretical teaching over practical ability training, rigid teaching models, and non-standardized assessment of teaching

results, which cannot meet the core needs of the job market for compound and applied music talents.

International research has revealed a deep-seated contradiction between the “performance-led” cultural tradition in music education and the demands of teaching positions, providing reference and inspiration for domestic research. DeAngelis (2026)’s comparative study of British universities and music conservatories found that in undergraduate music education in the UK, performance is always at the core, while pedagogy courses are mostly elective and fragmented, with some institutions only offering related courses in the final year, preventing students from developing a systematic teaching ability framework. In contrast, institutions that include compulsory pedagogy modules in the first year and integrate real-world teaching practice throughout the entire academic year show significantly higher student willingness to teach, teaching ability, and job suitability. Shaw (2023b) further points out that British music conservatories generally suffer from a disconnect from the job market. Curriculum design is dominated by performance teachers, lacking communication and cooperation with music education employers, resulting in a serious mismatch between graduates’ skill sets and job requirements—the large-class teaching, classroom management, and curriculum design abilities most valued by employers are precisely the weakest links in university education. Miller’s (2025) longitudinal study also found that there is a significant mismatch between the training content of music education majors in American universities and the actual teaching positions in primary and secondary schools. Graduates have outstanding specialized performance skills, but lack core work abilities such as primary school general music teaching and interdisciplinary aesthetic education integration, which directly affects their employment choices and career adaptation.

3.2. Research on Optimization Path of Music Education Talent Cultivation to Meet Employment Needs

To address the misalignment between training and employment, scholars both domestically and internationally have proposed specific optimization paths for talent cultivation from four dimensions: curriculum system, practical teaching, career development, and employment guidance, thus forming a systematic reform plan.

First, the curriculum system should be restructured based on market demand. Gao (2023) proposed that local higher normal music education needs to break away from the traditional curriculum structure centered on performance skills and increase courses that are relevant to teaching practice, such as children’s vocal training, improvisation, children’s dance choreography, and analysis of primary and secondary school music textbooks. He also

suggested extending the hours of practical courses and adopting a one-on-one teaching model to improve students' practical skills. Li(2022) further suggested improving the applied curriculum system, increasing interdisciplinary courses such as music management and music sociology, increasing the proportion of practical courses, and constructing a diversified curriculum group that matches the job market. International research emphasizes the systematic and coherent nature of the curriculum. Shaw (2023b) pointed out that effective teaching ability cultivation requires integrating pedagogy courses throughout the entire undergraduate program, introducing basic teaching theories and microteaching practices from the first year, and gradually increasing the difficulty of teaching, rather than only setting up related courses in the graduating year.

Second, deepen the integration of industry and education and strengthen the practical teaching system . Li (2024) emphasized that local higher normal colleges need to break through the limitations of campus practice and adopt a “going out and bringing in” strategy to establish stable school-enterprise cooperation with local primary and secondary schools and music education institutions, build off-campus internship and training bases, and provide students with real teaching practice scenarios. Long-term internships with professional supervision and embedded in real teaching scenarios are the core link to improve students' teaching ability, while short-term internships lacking quality control cannot achieve the training effect. Miller's (2025) research also found that the schools where students intern are highly correlated with the schools they will work for in the future. Establishing stable internship cooperation between universities and local primary and secondary schools can significantly improve the local employment rate and career adaptation speed of graduates.

Third, strengthen professional psychological development and build a positive professional identity . Du (2023)'s research confirms that professional commitment and optimism are core predictors of music teachers' self-efficacy. Therefore, universities need to integrate professional psychological development into the training stage, enhancing students' professional commitment and positive psychological qualities through the guidance of excellent teacher role models and the cultivation of a sense of accomplishment in teaching practice. The stress coping ability and professional resilience of newly employed teachers directly affect career retention. Universities need to incorporate relevant content on workplace stress coping and professional psychological adjustment into their training to help students build a psychological foundation for coping with professional challenges. Shaw (2023a)'s research emphasizes the need to break down the negative perception of “teaching is equivalent to failing at performing” throughout the entire training process, helping students

build a positive professional identity as music teachers through systematic career enlightenment, community support, and practical experience.

Fourth, improve the employment guidance system to achieve precise employment assistance . Li (2024) proposed that local normal universities need to implement employment assistance policies, utilize big data technology to accurately grasp graduates' employment intentions and regional market demands, and provide students with one-on-one personalized employment guidance to replace the traditional large-class theoretical teaching model. Gao(2023) emphasized that universities need to guide graduates to establish a scientific view of career choices, reasonably adjust their employment expectations, broaden their employment horizons, break the traditional employment perception of “only public schools,” and improve graduates' employment competitiveness and job suitability through employment guidance.

4. Discussion

4.1. Core contributions of existing research

Existing research, focusing on the cultivation of music education talent to meet employment needs, has made three core contributions, laying a solid foundation for the theoretical development and practical reform of this field.

First, existing research reveals the core contradiction between music education talent cultivation and the teaching labor market, and constructs a systematic analytical framework. This is the most significant contribution of the field, as it clearly identifies that the structural mismatch between training and employment, rather than a simple oversupply of graduates, is the root cause of the current employment dilemma. International research focuses on the deep-seated contradiction between “performance-driven training culture” and “competency requirements for teaching positions,” while Chinese research focuses on the misalignment between “homogeneous training in normal universities” and “diversified demands of regional teaching labor markets.” These two perspectives complement each other, constructing a complete analytical framework for the employment and career development of music education talents from three levels: individual psychological factors, higher education training, and workplace environment.

Secondly, the key variables influencing the career development of music education professionals have been identified . Existing research, through empirical analysis, has clarified the relationships between variables such as professional self-efficacy, professional identity, curriculum system, practical teaching, and workplace environment, confirming that curriculum design, practical teaching, and career development during the higher education

stage are the core preconditions determining the employment quality, career adaptation, and long-term retention of graduates. In particular, Du's (2023) research, based on positive psychology and career development theory, reveals the crucial role of individual psychological factors in career development, providing theoretical support for integrating career psychological development into talent cultivation.

Finally, the study explored talent cultivation reform pathways adapted to employment needs, resulting in feasible practical solutions . Existing research has proposed specific reform strategies from multiple dimensions, including curriculum restructuring, practical enhancement, industry-education integration, career development, and employment guidance. (Ballantyne & Zhukov, 2024)

4.2. Limitations of existing research

Despite the rich results achieved in existing research, there are still four significant limitations.

First, domestic research lacks large-sample, long-term longitudinal follow-up studies . Most existing domestic studies are regional cross-sectional surveys and policy discussions, which can only reflect the current status of training and employment at a certain point in time. They lack longitudinal follow-up data covering more than ten years, like Miller (2025), and do not sufficiently explore the causal relationship between talent training models and the long-term career development of graduates. The empirical support for the research conclusions is limited.

Second, the research perspective suffers from a one-sidedness, lacking a holistic analysis that integrates supply and demand . Shaw (2023b) demonstrates through research from the employer's perspective that only by simultaneously grasping the core demands of both the supply and demand sides can the root causes of the mismatch between training and employment be accurately identified, which is also a significant shortcoming of domestic research.

Third, the research lacks specificity and in-depth localized research on local higher normal schools. International research mostly focuses on music conservatories and top comprehensive universities' music programs, whose training models, student demographics, and employment scenarios differ significantly from those of local higher normal schools in China. Domestic research, on the other hand, is mostly generalized research on music education in higher normal schools, lacking localized and distinctive research that addresses the educational positioning of local higher normal schools as "serving regional development and oriented towards grassroots aesthetic education." There is also insufficient discussion on

differentiated training strategies for local higher normal schools at different regions and levels.

Fourth, the evaluation dimensions of the research are too short-term, lacking attention to the long-term career development of graduates . Existing research on the evaluation of talent training effectiveness mostly focuses on short-term employment indicators such as employment rate and job placement rate, with very few follow-up studies on long-term indicators such as career growth, career retention, and career well-being. A study on music teachers with five years of experience in the early stages of their careers confirms that the impact of higher education continues to affect teachers throughout their entire career development cycle, but relevant long-term follow-up studies in China are still lacking.

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4.3. Future Research Prospects

Given the limitations of existing research, future research in this field needs to focus on deepening in four key areas:

First, conduct localized and regionalized longitudinal tracking studies . For local higher normal colleges, establish a long-term tracking database of graduate employment and career development. Through large-sample longitudinal data, analyze the long-term impact of factors such as talent cultivation models, curriculum design, and practical teaching on graduate employment quality, career development, and career retention, clarify the causal relationships between variables, and provide more solid empirical support for talent cultivation reform.

Secondly, we should strengthen the integrated research on both the supply and demand sides . We should break away from the single perspective of training-side research and combine the needs of employers such as local primary and secondary schools, grassroots art education institutions, and regional cultural industries to conduct job competency requirements surveys from the employer's perspective. We should then construct competency

standards for music education talents that are adapted to the local job market, and on this basis, optimize the talent training and evaluation system to achieve a precise match between training and employment.

Third, deepen the research on the distinctive training of local higher normal teachers . Focusing on the core positioning of local higher normal teachers as “serving regional aesthetic education and oriented towards grassroots employment,” explore differentiated talent training models for local higher normal teachers in different regions and at different levels. In particular, address the needs of music teachers in the central and western regions and at the county-level grassroots, researching localized curriculum systems, practical models, and employment support mechanisms to fill the research gap in grassroots music teacher training.

Fourth, expand interdisciplinary research. By combining findings from positive psychology, career development theory, educational neuroscience, and other disciplines, we will deepen research on the cultivation pathways of career identity, self-efficacy, and career resilience among music education students. We will explore new changes in the job market brought about by new media, digital music, and other new business models in the digital age, study innovative paths for talent cultivation models, and broaden the employment channels and career development space for graduates.

5. Conclusion

Cultivating music education talent in normal universities that meets employment needs is not only a practical requirement for implementing the new era’s school aesthetic education policy and ensuring the supply of music teachers at the grassroots level, but also a core issue for solving the employment dilemma of music graduates and achieving high-quality employment. The findings of this literature review confirm that a precise match between the talent cultivation system and the teaching labor market is the core key to determining the quality of graduate employment, career adaptation, and long-term retention. The significance of this study lies in its systematic synthesis of existing research on music education talent cultivation and employment, which provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of the field and identifies critical gaps that need to be addressed. By integrating Chinese and international perspectives, this review highlights both universal challenges in music teacher education and context-specific issues faced by normal universities in China. To address these challenges, future reforms of music education in normal universities should focus on five core areas: restructuring the curriculum system to align with primary and secondary school teaching needs; strengthening practical teaching through deeper school-school cooperation; enhancing professional identity development to improve teacher retention; improving

employment guidance systems to provide personalized support; and conducting long-term follow-up research to evaluate the effectiveness of talent cultivation reforms. These reforms will help build a talent cultivation system that better adapts to the needs of grassroots aesthetic education, ultimately ensuring a stable supply of high-quality music teachers and promoting the high-quality employment of graduates.

Currently, the cultivation of music education talent in local higher normal schools still faces many practical difficulties: the curriculum system is disconnected from the actual teaching of music in primary and secondary schools; the traditional performance-oriented training model is mismatched with the needs of grassroots education positions; practical teaching is superficial, students lack training in teaching abilities in real-world scenarios, and their job adaptability is insufficient; professional identity building is weak, students have biased perceptions of the music teacher profession, and their professional psychological resilience is insufficient; the employment guidance system is imperfect, emphasizing theory over practice, and failing to provide students with precise employment assistance. These problems collectively lead to a structural contradiction between talent cultivation and the job market, and are also the core focus that future reforms of music education in local higher normal schools need to address.

In the future, local higher normal colleges need to take regional employment needs as the core orientation, restructure the curriculum system, strengthen practical teaching, deepen the integration of industry and education, improve employment guidance, strengthen professional psychology construction, and build a talent training system that adapts to the needs of grassroots aesthetic education and the development of regional cultural industries.

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