

Training and Practice of Style Recognition in Popular Music Teaching

Guo Xuan

Abstract –In the context of the global dissemination of contemporary pop music and the continuous expansion of its stylistic spectrum, stylistic distinctiveness has become a key component of the core competitiveness for undergraduate students majoring in pop singing, as well as a critical element that urgently requires refinement in university pop singing education systems. Grounded in teaching practice and based on the vocal pedagogy theory of Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM), this paper defines the academic connotation of stylistic distinctiveness, analyzes current challenges in teaching—including insufficient adaptation to musical styles, homogenization of individual vocal timbres, and weak practical expression—and establishes a systematic training pathway comprising "basic timbre exploration—style-specific training—personal style development." The effectiveness of this approach is validated through teaching experiments, aiming to optimize pop singing instruction paradigms, enhance students' stylistic control and artistic expression, and provide empirical insights for music education research.

Keywords – Popular singing instruction; Style recognizability; CCM vocal music teaching; Singing training; Undergraduate education

I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary pop music has developed into a diversified musical system including lyrical pop, R&B, rock, traditional Chinese-style pop, and electronic pop. Each genre has its own acoustic characteristics, vocal technique patterns, and emotional expression styles (Xu Chunyu, 2025). In this context, undergraduate students majoring in pop singing are required not only to master the technical skills needed for accurate musical performance, but also to cultivate distinctive artistic identities, which has become an important part of their professional competitiveness.

However, at present, pop singing education in many Chinese universities mainly focuses on basic training such as vocal mechanics, pitch accuracy, and rhythm control (Cheng Xi, 2024), while relatively limited attention is paid to the systematic cultivation of stylistic recognition. In addition, many curricula still lack specialized teaching modules related to stylistic awareness, technical adaptation, and individual artistic expression (Lan Tianming, 2023).

As a result, three common problems can often be observed among students. First, some students have unclear genre identification and insufficient understanding of the technical features and aesthetic boundaries of different styles. Second, vocal performances tend to become homogenized because excessive imitation weakens the development of personal vocal identity. Third, stage performance ability remains inadequate, making it difficult for students to transfer classroom knowledge into effective live performance.

These problems may hinder students' ability to adapt to the increasingly diversified and specialized demands of the contemporary music industry. Therefore, based on teaching

practice, this paper attempts to establish a systematic and practical training framework for stylistic recognition, so as to provide useful references for the reform of pop singing education and the improvement of teaching quality.

II. THE CORE MEANING OF IDENTIFIABILITY IN POPULAR SINGING STYLES

The recognizability of popular singing styles can be regarded as a comprehensive artistic characteristic that combines vocal technique, stylistic appropriateness, individual timbre, and emotional expression. From an academic perspective, its essential meaning may be divided into two levels.

First, style recognizability refers to a singer's accurate understanding of the acoustic characteristics, technical standards, and stylistic background of different popular music genres. On this basis, singers are able to employ corresponding techniques in performance, allowing listeners to clearly perceive the intended musical style. For example, breath continuity and soft tone control in lyrical pop, note transitions and rhythmic flexibility in R&B, as well as vocal cord tension and resonance control in rock, can all be considered important technical indicators of style recognizability (Cao Le, 2022; Li Zezheng, 2024).

Second, personal recognizability refers to the development of a distinctive and difficult-to-replace artistic identity. By mastering techniques from different musical styles and combining them with natural vocal characteristics, artistic personality, and aesthetic preference, performers gradually form their own vocal style, thus moving from simple style imitation to genuine style creation (Zhang, 2025). Personal recognizability can therefore be viewed as a higher stage of stylistic recognizability and an important reflection of a singer's artistic value.

The two dimensions are hierarchical as well as complementary. Style recognizability provides the technical basis for personal recognizability, while personal recognizability represents the artistic extension and further development of style recognizability. Together, they form a relatively complete system of stylistic recognizability in popular singing.

III. THE ISSUE OF INSUFFICIENT STUDENT STYLE RECOGNITION IN POPULAR SINGING INSTRUCTION

(1) The teaching system places excessive emphasis on fundamental skills and lacks a structured instructional module.

At present, popular singing courses in many universities mainly focus on vocal training and repertoire performance, while the teaching objectives are largely centred on the cultivation of fundamental skills (Cheng Xi, 2024).

However, systematic teaching modules related to style recognition are still relatively insufficient. In the process of classroom teaching, teachers seldom provide detailed explanations of the technical paradigms, aesthetic characteristics, and cultural contexts of different popular music styles. As a result, students' understanding of musical styles often remains superficial, and they may lack the awareness to consciously construct stylistic expression. Their performances are therefore frequently limited to singing the notes accurately, which makes it difficult to develop distinctive and convincing stylistic presentation (Lan Tianming, 2023).

(2) Students easily fall into mechanical imitation, which weakens their individual vocal characteristics.

During the early stages of learning, many undergraduate students commonly rely on imitation as a natural learning strategy. However, this imitation often remains limited to copying external elements such as tone color, pronunciation habits, and vocal mannerisms, without sufficient understanding of the stylistic logic and acoustic principles behind the model singers. If such learning patterns continue for a long period, students' natural vocal strengths may gradually become hidden, and their performances may become increasingly homogenized, showing a noticeable "one-size-fits-all" tendency. This not only restricts the formation of personal vocal identity, but also reduces the possibility of stylistic creativity and artistic innovation (Zhang, 2025).

(3) The practical teaching component is relatively weak, and students' stylistic expression lacks sufficient hands-on refinement.

Stage practice is widely recognized as an important way to refine vocal style and strengthen stylistic recognizability. Through authentic performance situations, students are able to test techniques, adjust expressive strategies, and gradually build confidence. However, in many universities, the teaching hours allocated to practical pop singing performance remain limited, and opportunities for public performance are not always sufficient. This often creates a clear gap between classroom instruction and stage application. Consequently, students may find it difficult to apply stylistic techniques flexibly in real performance settings, their expressive ability remains underdeveloped, and the transition from classroom technique to stage style becomes difficult to achieve (Cheng Xi, 2024).

IV. TRAINING APPROACHES FOR STYLE RECOGNITION IN POPULAR SINGING INSTRUCTION V.

(1) Strengthen the foundation for vocal expression and explore your unique vocal timbre

Fundamental timbre serves as the acoustic basis of stylistic recognition. In teaching practice, instructors should first guide students to move beyond simple imitation and instead employ systematic exercises, including breath control, resonance adjustment, and vocal cord function training. Through such training, students can gradually achieve comfortable and natural vocal placement, identify their own timbre characteristics, and improve vocal stability as well as expressive ability.

At the same time, style-oriented teaching requires the establishment of a modular training system that combines basic skills such as breathing and resonance with specific stylistic expression. In this way, fundamental training can be effectively connected with later stylistic application (Cao Le, 2022). In addition, teachers may help students analyze the compatibility between timbre characteristics and musical styles, so that students can form preliminary directions for future artistic development.

(2) Conduct specialized training on musical style to enhance the ability to control musical style

Based on the classification of Contemporary Commercial Music (CCM) styles (Magid, 2023), a modular teaching system may be constructed to explain the core techniques, rhythmic characteristics, and emotional expression patterns of mainstream genres.

For example, lyrical pop may focus on breath continuity, tone connection, and delicate emotional storytelling. R&B may emphasize ornamental runs, note transitions, syncopated rhythm, and expressive flexibility. Rock may require stronger energy release, firmer tone production, and more powerful emotional intensity. Chinese-style popular music may combine traditional articulation features with modern melodic design.

In practical teaching, differentiated technical and expressive modules should be arranged for different genres. Through stylistic comparison exercises, repertoire analysis, and guided imitation, students can gradually improve their adaptability to various musical styles and strengthen their technical control (Li Zezheng, 2024).

(3) Emphasize individualized guidance and cultivate personal singing style.

After students have developed relatively solid technical ability, teachers should provide one-to-one personalized guidance. By considering students' vocal timbre, personality traits, and aesthetic preferences, teachers may encourage them to move beyond the original framework of songs through rhythmic restructuring, articulation adjustment, phrasing redesign, and vocal style innovation.

Students should also be encouraged to incorporate genuine emotional expression into performance and remain aware of current global popular music trends. In this way, they can gradually realize an organic combination of personal characteristics and contemporary aesthetics, and eventually develop a vocal style that reflects both professional competence and individual uniqueness (Johansson, Klöfver, & Sæther, 2024).

VI. TEACHING PRACTICE VERIFICATION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY BASED ON A QUASI- EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

To validate the effectiveness of the constructed training pathway, this study employed a single-group pre-post test design and integrated qualitative and quantitative assessment methods to empirically evaluate the specialized teaching approach.

Research Design

Study subjects: A purposive sampling method was employed to select 12 undergraduate students from a regular

teaching class of the second year in the Popular Singing major at a university as the experimental subjects. All students passed the unified professional entrance examination upon enrollment, demonstrating comparable vocal proficiency levels, thereby effectively minimizing the interference of pre-experimental skill disparities on the experimental outcomes.

Research period: One semester (totaling 16 weeks).

Data Collection Method (Triangular Cross-verification)

To comprehensively assess changes in style recognizability, the study collected data from multiple dimensions:

Pre-test and post-test:

Acoustic Feature Analysis: Using professional audio analysis software (e.g., Praat), audio samples were collected and analyzed from all students performing the same standardized scale and a specified repertoire (including segments in various styles) before and after instruction. Parameters such as fundamental frequency perturbations, amplitude perturbations, resonance peak frequencies, and harmonic-to-noise ratio were quantitatively analyzed to objectively assess changes in vocal timbre stability and stylistic vocalization patterns.

Blind evaluation of vocal performance: Three professional pop vocal instructors, who do not participate in teaching, were invited to conduct blind listening and evaluation of video recordings of students performing works in different styles before and after the experiment. The scoring employed a five-point Likert scale, assessing the following dimensions: accuracy of musical style and technique, distinctiveness of personal vocal timbre, emotional expressiveness, and overall artistic individuality.

Process data:

Classroom Observation Record: The researcher conducted structured documentation of each specialized training session, focusing on students' mastery of various technical styles, their individual exploratory behaviours, and classroom performance.

Student Reflection Journal: Students are required to submit a weekly learning reflection journal, documenting their understanding of various musical styles, changes in their personal vocal timbre, as well as the challenges and breakthroughs encountered during practice.

Performance Video and Peer Review Records: Full video recordings were made of the two small-scale performances organized during the semester and the final course finale, along with collected written peer review feedback from students.

Implementation of Teaching Intervention (Independent Variable)

In addition to the regular curriculum, systematic specialized training in style recognition was implemented as the teaching intervention variable in this study. The specific arrangements are as follows:

Modular teaching:

Basic Timbre Module (2 class hours per week): Conduct systematic training on breath control, resonance, and vocal cord function, combined with acoustic analysis feedback to

guide students in identifying and stabilizing their fundamental timbre.

The Style Specialization Module (3 class hours per week) employs a four-step approach—"Classic Work Appreciation – Core Technique Breakdown – Imitation Practice – Style Comparison"—to provide rotational training across four genres: lyrical pop, R&B, rock, and traditional Chinese-style pop.

Personalized Construction Module (1 class hour per week, one-on-one or group): Students are guided to create personalized adaptations of musical works—focusing on rhythm, melody, and vocal delivery—based on their acquired musical styles, followed by integrated performance exercises.

Strengthen the practical component: Organize thematic performances every four weeks (e.g., "Lyric Pop Special," "Cross-Style Fusion Special"), and implement peer review alongside immediate teacher feedback.

Data Analysis Process

Quantitative data analysis: Using SPSS statistical software, paired-sample t-tests were performed on the blind evaluation scores to compare the significant differences in scores across various dimensions before and after teaching; descriptive statistics and comparative analyses were conducted for the acoustic parameters.

Qualitative Data Analysis: Conduct thematic analysis on classroom observation records, student reflection journals, and Peer Review texts. Through coding and induction, identify key transformation patterns in students' style cognition, technique application, and personality development.

Research Findings and Discoveries

At the end of the semester, analysis of integrated multi-source data revealed the following results:

Quantitative results: Post-blind evaluation scores were significantly higher than pre-evaluation scores across all dimensions ($p < 0.01$), with the "Personal Timbre recognizability" and "Artistic Personality" dimensions showing the greatest improvements. Acoustic analysis revealed more pronounced differences in vocal production parameters when students performed works of varying styles, accompanied by enhanced timbre stability.

Qualitative findings: Thematic analysis identified three critical stages in students' cognitive development: "awakening of style awareness," "separation and mastery of techniques," and "personalized integration and expression." The reflection journal indicates that students gradually transitioned from initial imitation-dependent learning to conscious style selection and individual expression (Zhang, 2025).

Comprehensive conclusion: All 12 students accurately identified and applied characteristic techniques from at least three mainstream popular styles to deliver their performances; among them, 10 students were unanimously recognized by three evaluators in the post-test as having developed distinctive personal vocal styles. The teaching intervention effectively enhanced students' ability to master

musical styles and their individual artistic distinctiveness (Johansson, Klovfer, & Sæther, 2024).

dimension	content	explain
research design	Single-group pre-test and post-test accuracy experiment	Lasts for one semester (16 weeks)
subject investigated	Second-year students majoring in Popular Singing at a university (N=12)	Natural class, with similar foundational levels
Teaching Intervention	Third-order system training 1. Basic Timbre Module (2 class hours/week) 2. Melodic Style Technique Module (3 class hours/week) 3. Personalized Construction Module (1 class period/week)	Adopt the four-step approach of "appreciation – analysis – practice – comparison" to provide rotational training in four musical styles: lyrical pop, R&B, rock, and traditional Chinese-style pop.
data collection	Teaching Practice Exploration Acoustic Characteristic Analysis (Praat Software) Teacher Blind Evaluation (Li Likert Five-Point Scale) Student Reflection Journal and Classroom Observation	Combining quantitative and qualitative data to assess changes in style recognizability
DA	Quantification: Paired-sample t-test (SPSS) Qualitative: Thematic Analysis	Assess the intervention effect and reveal the students' cognitive development process
Core Discovery	1. Post-blind evaluation showed significant improvement in scores across all dimensions ($p<0.01$). 2. Student development follows a three-stage model: "awareness awakening → technique mastery → personality integration" 3. All 12 students were able to employ more than three stylistic techniques, with 10 of them developing a distinct personal style.	The effectiveness of the systematic training pathway—"Basic Timbre – Genre Specialization – Personal Style"—has been validated.

VII. CONCLUSION

Cultivating distinctive vocal style is a core component of popular singing instruction, directly impacting undergraduates' professional competence and career development. University programs in popular singing education must transform their teaching philosophies by establishing a systematic framework that encompasses "basic timbre exploration—specialized stylistic training—individual style development." This approach balances fundamental skills with style cultivation, strengthens practical teaching components, and enables students to develop their unique vocal identities.

In future teaching practices, educators should ground their work in the cutting-edge theories of contemporary commercial music (CCM) vocal instruction (Magid, 2023), integrate international pedagogical concepts with local teaching realities, continuously refine instructional content and methods, and prioritize students' individualized development (Johansson, Klovfer, & Sæther, 2024). This approach aims to cultivate pop singing talents with both solid

professional expertise and distinctive artistic styles, thereby advancing the high-quality development of pop singing education.

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