

# Curriculum Design and Implementation of Integrating Popular Music Learning Path into College Music Education

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**Abstract.** Against the backdrop of the deep integration of popular music into youth cultural life, music education in universities urgently needs to solve the practical problem of the disconnect between traditional curriculum systems and the demand for talents in the new era. This article focuses on the integration path of music education and popular music in universities, exploring a professional curriculum system that balances theoretical depth and practical value from dimensions such as curriculum design principles, multi-level learning path construction, and implementation guarantee mechanisms. By integrating theoretical teaching, practical training, and interdisciplinary resources, and linking media and digital technology fields to optimize course structure and teaching methods, combined with research data from universities, the implementation of integrated courses has increased student classroom participation rate to 91%, and the music job competency attainment rate to 85%, effectively filling the gaps in traditional music education and injecting vitality into aesthetic education work. Research provides practical solutions for the reform of music education in universities, helping to cultivate versatile music talents that meet industry needs.

**Keywords:** College Music Education, Popular Music, Curriculum Design, Learning Paths, Teaching Implementation.

## 1. Introduction

As the core position of aesthetic education, music education in universities undertakes the important mission of cultivating students' aesthetic literacy and professional abilities. Against the backdrop of the comprehensive promotion of the Aesthetic Education Immersion Initiative, music education is not only the core carrier of professional talent cultivation, but also a key path for carrying out aesthetic enlightenment and cultivating cultural confidence for all college students. According to the "Basic Requirements for Special Types of Enrollment in Ordinary Higher Education Institutions in 2023", music has been clearly defined as one of the basic qualities of college students, and "Music Appreciation" has been included in the compulsory course category of ordinary colleges and universities, covering more than 120 universities in more than 20 provinces across the country. Research data shows that only 32% of undergraduate music education majors in China offer courses related to popular music, while up to 90% of college students love popular music. More than 80% of students hope to increase the teaching content of popular music, and the supply-demand contradiction is significant. Traditional music education has long focused on imparting classical music theory and skills, with teaching content often emphasizing the appreciation and replication of classic works, lacking explanation of contemporary music industry operation models. Course cases and teaching models are relatively rigid, making it difficult to cover the talent needs of emerging fields such as digital music production and music IP operation, and disconnected from the current development trend of the music industry. Most students have reported a significant gap between the knowledge they have learned and practical positions such as digital music production and live performance planning [1]. At the same time, popular music, with its distinct characteristics of the times and extensive interactivity, has become an important carrier connecting students' interests and professional growth. In this context, exploring the learning path and curriculum implementation strategy of integrating popular music into college music education can not only improve classroom teaching effectiveness, but also broaden students' employment channels, and meet the goal of cultivating high-quality composite music talents. It has profound theoretical value and important practical significance.

## 2. The Realistic Foundation for the Integration of College Music Education and Popular Music

The integration of music education and popular music in universities has solid practical conditions, but also faces structural challenges. From the demand side, college students have a high acceptance of popular music. According to user data from NetEase Cloud Music, popular music accounts for over 80% of the total views among the "post-90s" college student group. More than 85% of music major students express a willingness to systematically learn popular music creation and performance skills. Among non-music-major students, over 70% participate in popular music practice through campus music festivals, singer competitions, and other activities, forming a broad audience base and participation atmosphere. From the perspective of industry demand, the talent training program for the music industry is clear. More than 80% of music-related companies require practitioners to have practical abilities in popular music production, live performances, etc. Some companies even point out that the attainment rate of relevant skills for fresh graduates is less than 40% [2], and students trained in traditional music education lack competitiveness in this field.

There are three prominent problems in the current integration process: firstly, the curriculum setting is unreasonable, with only 32% of popular music courses in universities forming a systematic system, most of which are scattered elective courses, and there are problems with tedious content and single teaching modes. The courses mostly stay at the level of appreciation of works, lacking in-depth exploration of practical content such as creation and production; Secondly, the practical ability of the teaching staff is lacking. Half of the in-service teachers have not participated in professional training in the field of popular music and lack practical experience in the industry [3]. Although some teachers have accumulated experience in classical music research, they lack systematic understanding of the logic of popular music arrangement and market operation mode, resulting in a disconnect between the teaching content and the forefront of the industry; Thirdly, there is a shortage of teaching resources. Most universities have a shortage of professional audio equipment and music production software. At the same time, extracurricular practice space is limited. Even if some universities are equipped with basic equipment, the equipment utilization rate is less than 50% due to a lack of professional operation and maintenance personnel, making it difficult to support deep integrated teaching. These issues make it difficult to further promote integrated teaching and urgently need to be addressed through scientific curriculum design and implementation mechanisms.

## 3. Design Principles and Core Objectives of Integrated Curriculum

The design of integrated courses should follow three core principles to ensure the unity of professionalism and practicality. One is the principle of compatibility. On the basis of retaining core courses such as "Music Theory" and "Sight Singing and Ear Training", popular music elements are integrated. It is not simply a matter of adding content, but rather integrating the rhythm and harmony paradigms of popular music into traditional music theory teaching, achieving a deep coupling between traditional music theory and popular techniques, avoiding fragmented course content, and taking into account the acceptance of students with different professional foundations. Basic adaptation modules are reserved for non-music-major students, forming a "classic+era" content matrix, which not only guarantees the foundation of the subject, but also is close to students' cognition; The second principle is practicality, combined with industry talent training standards, setting the credit proportion of practical courses to no less than 25%, setting up practical modules such as music production and live performances, adopting group training and project-driven teaching forms, and establishing detailed rules for assessing practical training results to meet the industry's demand for skilled talents [4]; The third is the principle of progressiveness, constructing a three-level curriculum system of "foundation-improvement-innovation", gradually improving students' comprehensive abilities from popular music style appreciation to original music work composition, and then to cross-border integration practice.

The core objectives of the course focus on three dimensions: knowledge objectives, to enable students to master professional knowledge such as melody structure, harmony characteristics, and arrangement logic of popular music, be familiar with 3-5 mainstream popular music style characteristics, understand the inherent relationship between different styles and cultural backgrounds of the times, and be able to accurately distinguish the technical differences of works of different styles; In terms of ability goals, cultivate students' practical skills such as singing popular songs, operating music production software such as Logic Pro, and arranging small bands, ensuring that more than 85% of students meet the core competency requirements for music positions; In terms of literacy goals, through the integration of popular music and traditional culture in teaching, students' cultural confidence is enhanced, innovative thinking and teamwork abilities are cultivated, and students are guided to establish a dialectical understanding of the commercial and artistic aspects of popular music, while also considering the cultivation of professional ethics and meeting the comprehensive literacy needs of enterprises for talents [5].

## **4. Multi-Level Learning Path Construction Integrating Popular Music**

### **4.1 Theoretical Cognitive Pathway**

Refactoring theoretical teaching content with "basic theory+style analysis" as the core. Integrating popular music elements into traditional music theory courses, by analyzing works such as "Blue and White Porcelain" and "Chengdu" that are both artistic and communicative, we explain the rhythm and harmony patterns of popular music, taking into account the artistic expression and communication logic of the works [6]. We also interpret the cultural logic behind the works in conjunction with different social trends of different eras, compare the differences in popular music styles in different regions, guide students to go beyond surface appreciation, grasp the creative core of different styles, and replace simple classical music case analysis. Offering courses such as "History of Popular Music Development" and "Appreciation of Popular Music Styles", systematically sorting out the relationship between popular music and contemporary culture, covering diverse styles, and guiding students to establish a comprehensive theoretical understanding.

### **4.2 Practical Training Path**

Build a three-level practical system of "classroom training+club practice+off-campus practice". Set up practical training modules such as popular song singing skills and music production software in the classroom, equipped with professional equipment to improve training accuracy; Relying on music clubs on campus, we organize band rehearsals, campus singer competitions, and other activities. Over 85% of the participating contestants choose to sing popular songs, ensuring that students participate in at least 2 public performances per semester [7]. Each practical session is accompanied by a review and evaluation to identify skill gaps; Collaborate with relevant institutions outside of school to establish more than 20 school-enterprise practice bases, clarify job internship assessment standards, incorporate enterprise mentor evaluation into the credit recognition system, and provide real project internship opportunities.

### **4.3 Interdisciplinary Integration Path**

Break down disciplinary barriers and design interdisciplinary projects such as "music+technology" and "music+literature". Combining digital audio technology to carry out arrangement practice, guiding students to reconstruct traditional Chinese music works using software; In collaboration with the Chinese Language Department, a lyric creation workshop is established, which uses poetry and literature as a blueprint to create lyrics and achieve the integration of ancient and modern cultures. Link up with the Media Department to build channels for work dissemination, utilizing new media technologies to explore the application of popular music in short videos, live broadcasts, and other scenarios, helping original works achieve a closed loop from creation to dissemination, in line with the development trend of the entire industry chain.

## **5. Key Links and Guarantee Measures for Curriculum Implementation**

### **5.1 Construction of Teaching Staff**

Adopting a dual-track model of "on-campus training+off-campus introduction" to optimize the teacher structure. Establish a mechanism for teachers' practical competence improvement within the school, requiring each teacher to participate in at least one popular music-related training session per year, focusing on core modules such as popular music arrangement techniques and digital audio production, and engage in on-the-job practice at enterprises for no less than one month to accumulate industry experience; Hiring experienced musicians and pop music producers from outside the school as part-time teachers to supplement practical teaching resources [8]. Based on the construction experience of art colleges, we aim to build a teaching team with high academic qualifications and industry experience, ensuring that more than 60% of teachers have practical backgrounds in the industry, and providing talent support for curriculum implementation.

### **5.2 Integration of Teaching Resources**

Special funds will be invested in campus facilities to update teaching equipment, build standardized recording studios and audio editing laboratories, equip mainstream music production software, and meet teaching needs such as music production and live performances; Online, relying on platforms such as NetEase Cloud Classroom and Tencent Classroom, high-quality popular music teaching resources are introduced, and an "online+offline" hybrid teaching model is constructed. An online learning check-in and Q&A mechanism is established, and data shows that over 60% of college students obtain popular music learning resources through online platforms, which can effectively support fragmented learning. Establish a modular teaching resource library that covers popular music scores, audio materials, production tutorials, and other content, making it convenient for teachers and students to access and use them at any time.

### **5.3 Innovation in Teaching Methods**

Promote the dual-driving teaching method of "project-based+situational", and organize teaching with specific music projects as the core. Using campus original popular music competitions and real music projects from enterprises as carriers, guide students to complete the entire process of work planning, creation, arrangement, and performance in groups, and cultivate teamwork and problem-solving abilities. Utilizing virtual reality technology to recreate large-scale performance scenes, conducting immersive stage performance teaching, and enhancing students' stage performance and adaptability [9]. Practical data shows that this teaching model can increase classroom participation from 64% in traditional teaching to 91%, significantly enhancing teaching effectiveness.

## **6. Evaluation and Optimization Strategies for Course Implementation Effectiveness**

Build a three-dimensional evaluation system of "process+diversity" to comprehensively evaluate the effectiveness of course implementation. Process evaluation accounts for 60%, covering core indicators such as classroom participation, completion quality of practical training tasks, and project progress performance. Refined observation points include classroom interaction frequency, technical analysis depth of practical training reports, completeness and logic of project stage reports, avoiding the drawbacks of a single result-oriented evaluation [10]; Achievement evaluation accounts for 40%, including skill assessment, original work quality, social practice feedback, etc. It adopts a combination of student self-evaluation, peer evaluation, and industry expert evaluation, and formulates quantitative scoring rules based on the music industry job competency standards to ensure objective and fair evaluation results. Based on the effectiveness data of talent cultivation in the industry, after the implementation of integrated courses, the attainment rate of students' music production skills can be increased from 61% to 85%, and the number of original music works has

increased by 38% year-on-year. Among them, 15% of original works have been selected for the campus music incubation plan and have been promoted. The graduate employment rate in relevant fields has increased by no less than 15 percentage points, and the employment positions cover multiple fields such as music production, performance planning, and art education.

To address the issues exposed during the implementation process, establish a dynamic optimization mechanism: firstly, keep up with the development trend of popular music, form a course content research group composed of teachers, industry experts, and student representatives, track in real-time the creative techniques and market trends of emerging styles such as electronic music, rap music, and Chinese pop music, update course content every two years, and incorporate cutting-edge content into the teaching system; Secondly, in response to the weak practical abilities of some teachers, we will expand the scope of industry cooperation, jointly establish teacher training bases with top music production companies, increase the frequency and coverage of teacher practical training, and regularly conduct themed workshops and on-the-job practice; The third is to improve the student feedback mechanism, conduct course satisfaction surveys every semester, set up feedback channels combining open-ended questionnaires and centralized discussions, classify and sort out the collected problems [11], clarify the rectification time limits and responsible parties for different types of problems such as teaching methods and resource allocation, and ensure that course satisfaction remains stable at over 87%. Through continuous optimization, promote the continuous improvement of the curriculum system.

## 7. Conclusion

The integration of popular music into the curriculum design and implementation of music education in universities is an inevitable choice to meet the needs of the times and improve the quality of music education. It also anchors the core orientation of aesthetic education and injects fresh energy into traditional music education. By constructing an inclusive curriculum system, multi-level learning paths, and a sound implementation guarantee mechanism, the practical problem of the disconnect between traditional music education and student interests and industry needs has been effectively solved. From the perspective of practical effects, integrated courses not only significantly enhance students' classroom participation and professional practical abilities, but also cultivate their innovative thinking and cultural heritage awareness, significantly enhancing their core competitiveness in fields such as music production, art education, and stage performance, and meeting the job requirements of enterprises for talents.

At present, the integration of music education and popular music in universities is still in the exploratory stage. It is necessary to closely follow the requirements of the Aesthetic Education Immersion Initiative, further optimize the curriculum structure, balance the commercial and artistic aspects of popular music, and avoid excessive entertainment tendencies; Continuously strengthen the practical capacity building of the teaching staff, deepen the depth and breadth of school-enterprise collaboration in education, implement a long-term mechanism for enterprise participation in curriculum design and practical training guidance, and broaden the coverage of on-campus and off-campus practical platforms. At the same time, we will conduct in-depth research on the development laws of popular music, promote its in-depth integration with traditional music culture and regional cultures, and explore the aesthetic value of popular music. With the continuous improvement of the curriculum system, music education in universities will better play the role of aesthetic education and provide solid support for cultivating composite music talents with both cultural heritage and practical abilities, thereby promoting the coordinated high-quality development of China's music education and popular music industry.

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