

A Study of Aesthetic Education for Integrated Piano-and-Singing Instruction in Primary and Secondary Schools under University–Social Institution Collaboration

Yeping Du

Department of Piano, School of Arts, Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua 321004, Zhejiang, China

Abstract: *This study focuses on the practical difficulties involved in integrated piano-and-singing instruction within music-based aesthetic education in primary and secondary schools. Drawing on a collaborative educational model between universities and social institutions, it explores effective ways of enhancing students' overall artistic expressiveness. In response to the widespread problems of "voice–piano conflict" and "sonic imbalance" in students' piano-and-singing performance, this study selected representative works such as Farewell and Lonely Warrior for empirical teaching-based investigation. The analysis shows that the main causes of students' stiff and mechanical performance lie in their lack of polyphonic listening awareness and their inadequate control of key touch. To address this, the paper proposes two key intervention strategies. The first is to strengthen "part differentiation and sonic balance" by guiding students to adjust touch quality and key depth, intentionally softening the accompaniment so as to create more auditory space for the vocal melody. The second is to develop "aural coordination and aesthetic expression" by training students' active listening under dual-task conditions, so that the continuity of the vocal line can be organically integrated with the rhythmic vitality of the piano. The empirical findings show that this collaborative training model can significantly improve students' coordination in piano-and-singing performance, enabling their musical expression to move from mechanical beat alignment to multidimensional artistic expression. This study not only provides a practical solution to the technical difficulties commonly found in grassroots piano-and-singing instruction, but also offers empirical support for pedagogical transformation and the integration of education and practice in university music programs, thereby further advancing the educational goals of aesthetic education in the new era.*

Keywords: Piano-and-singing instruction; Collaborative cultivation; Part balance; Auditory space; Music aesthetic education.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the full implementation of the Arts Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition) [1], music aesthetic education in primary and secondary schools has placed higher demands on students' "overall artistic expressiveness." As a bridge between instrumental performance and vocal expression, integrated piano-and-singing practice is an important pathway for cultivating students' aesthetic perception. However, in today's social arts training institutions, instruction in playing and singing often falls into the mechanical misconception of "practicing the piano part first and then adding the singing." When primary and secondary school students are faced with the complexity of performing two tasks simultaneously, conflict between the accompaniment and the singing voice easily emerges. In the absence of vertically structured listening guidance, students often respond to their urge to express themselves by striking the keys with excessive force, causing the piano sound to overpower the vocal line and resulting in serious voice–piano conflict and sonic imbalance. The root of this phenomenon lies in the severe lack of training in "part differentiation" and "three-dimensional auditory perception" in grassroots teaching. Traditional instruction tends to focus on fingering accuracy and rhythmic alignment, reducing piano-and-singing performance to mere physical simultaneity. At the same time, university programs in music, media, and related fields possess mature theories of polyphonic construction and auditory space, yet often lack empirical evidence drawn from frontline primary and secondary school classrooms. This disjunction between theory and practice leaves many teachers in grassroots institutions without scientific, intuitive, and child-accessible intervention methods when confronted with students' uncontrolled piano-and-singing performance.

This study aims to explore a practical intervention pathway for piano-and-singing instruction through a collaborative educational platform linking universities and social institutions. It integrates the professional logic of part balance developed in universities with the realities of institutional classrooms, with particular attention to the

influence of touch quality on auditory space. By introducing highly operable teaching strategies such as “yielding sonic space between parts” and “dual-track listening,” the study seeks to help primary and secondary school students develop sound listening habits. Whether in impassioned contemporary rhythmic works or in gentle, classically inflected lyrical pieces, students can be guided to locate the appropriate relationship between piano sound and vocal sound, thereby achieving a layered sonic relationship of foreground and background, solidity and lightness. This study is concerned not only with resolving the technical difficulties of rigid alignment and confused layering in students’ piano-and-singing performance, but also with reshaping their auditory aesthetics so as to realize a transition in aesthetic education from “mere skill training” to “multidimensional artistic expression.” At the same time, the construction of this collaborative model provides authentic frontline samples for the teaching practice of university arts programs, opening a channel through which professional theory can feed back into grassroots aesthetic education.

2. ORGANIZING AND DISTILLING THE AESTHETIC DIMENSIONS OF PIANO-AND-SINGING ABILITY IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

2.1 The Foundational Expressive Dimension: The Aesthetic Logic of Accuracy and Stability

Rhythmic stability is not simply a matter of keeping accurate time; it is the inner support of musical motion. In self-accompanied singing, a steady pulse forms the basis of aesthetic perception. In addition, pitch and melodic accuracy test the performer’s ability to resist interference from the sound of the piano accompaniment when rendering intervals and melodic lines, thereby reflecting the precise coordination between auditory perception and the vocal apparatus.

2.2 The Dimension of Coordinated Perception: The Artistic Collaboration of Body and Hearing

This dimension focuses on students’ multisensory coordination in the process of playing and singing, with the aim of helping them move from “rigid layering” to “natural artistic expression” through professional guidance. The natural coordination of key touch and singing breath is crucial to resolving the “stiffness” often observed in the piano-and-singing performance of primary and secondary school students. The study therefore emphasizes guiding students to maintain even and flowing breath support while touching the keys with their fingertips. Through gradual guidance, students come to experience how the rhythmic movement of piano playing can be brought into balance with breathing rhythm, so that bodily action no longer becomes a burden on phonation, thereby eliminating common signs of tension in piano-and-singing performance, such as breath-holding or raised shoulders. The supportive role of the accompaniment in shaping melodic affect focuses on cultivating the integrated habit of “playing while listening.” In teaching, the emphasis is no longer placed on complex theoretical structures; instead, students are guided to perceive how piano accompaniment can enrich the singing voice. By establishing basic auditory awareness, students learn to regulate the volume balance between piano and voice through listening while performing, so that the piano is no longer a mere background layer but an artistic partner capable of supporting and enriching melodic expression.

2.3 Aesthetic Expressive Power

This dimension aims, once basic coordination has been achieved, to guide students toward shaping musical character. It seeks to activate children’s innate desire to express themselves, elevating piano-and-singing performance from a technical exercise to a form of confident self-expression. The sense of fusion in piano-and-singing sound differs from the basic balancing of part volume; here, fusion is more concerned with the matching of musical character. For primary and secondary school students, the focus is on guiding them to find an appropriate touch according to the stylistic features of the song, whether lively, lyrical, or march-like. For example, when singing a bouncy children’s song, the piano sound should likewise be crisp and detached; when singing a lullaby, the fingertips should remain close to the keys to produce a connected touch. Students should come to understand that the piano is not a rigid accompaniment, but a participant that must “perform” together with the voice in shaping the musical image. The flexibility of piano-and-singing interpretation differs from basic beat alignment. What matters here is students’ sense of proportion in “breathing freely” within the music. Students should be encouraged, once technically secure, to add their own intuitive understanding of the piece, for example, a natural slight slowing at the end of a phrase or a natural forward drive when emotion intensifies. Such flexibility does not require sophisticated re-creation; rather, it preserves and stimulates the students’ innate musical instinct, allowing them to display vitality in performance that is neither affected nor mechanical.

3. CONSTRUCTING A “UNIVERSITY–SOCIAL INSTITUTION” COLLABORATIVE TRAINING MODEL

3.1 Top-Level Design of the Collaborative Mechanism

In this model, the university serves as an academic center, responsible for the conceptual construction of aesthetic-education goals, the organization and refinement of the evaluation system, and the standardized design of instructional pathways. Social institutions, by contrast, make use of their flexible teaching settings and rich student samples to undertake the practical implementation of teaching plans and the real-time return of classroom data. This form of collaboration effectively compensates for the dual limitations of university research, which is often detached from practice, and institutional teaching, which often lacks theoretical depth.

3.2 A “Resident Teaching–Research” Model under Expert Guidance

By regularly organizing joint teaching–research meetings between universities and institutions, university experts provide frontline teachers in institutions with training in the educational philosophy of integrated piano-and-singing aesthetic education. At the same time, by making use of practicum and internship mechanisms for teacher-education students, preservice teachers equipped with advanced pedagogical concepts are introduced into institutions, thereby forming a virtuous cycle of “expert guidance—resident practice—feedback and revision.”

4. EMPIRICAL PATHWAYS AND CASE ANALYSIS OF INTEGRATED PIANO-AND-SINGING INSTRUCTION

4.1 Case One: Constructing Part Independence and Three-Dimensional Auditory Perception—Using the Classic Work Farewell as an Example

4.1.1 Learner Background

Students in the middle grades of primary school. They already possess basic score-reading ability, but in piano-and-singing performance their listening often remains flat and linear, leaving them unable to handle the layered relationship between the singing voice and the accompaniment.

4.1.2 Analysis of the Teaching Difficulty (Part Conflict)

In the phrase “chang ting wai, gu dao bian” (Outside the long pavilion, beside the ancient road, the vocal melody is the leading part, broad and sustained in contour, while the right-hand broken chords function as a flowing background part.

A typical misalignment occurs when students sing the sustained tone on the word “bian” with unstable breath support, causing the right-hand accompaniment to increase force unconsciously in an attempt to “fill the gap.” As a result, the background part abruptly collides with the leading part, disrupting the vertical sonic balance and producing an auditory texture that lacks spatial depth.

4.1.3 Collaborative Intervention Strategies (Parts and Listening)

Layered control of parts: Students are guided to clarify the part logic that “the piano supports while the voice leads.” The right hand is required to maintain a low touch position, staying close to the keys and reducing the fingertips’ vertical impact, so as to leave auditory space for the singing voice.

Perception of vertical balance: Students are trained to use their ears actively to monitor the brightness of the accompaniment texture while sustaining long tones. By reducing the “grain” of the accompaniment, it can be transformed into a hazy underpinning, thereby creating a sense of foreground and background between voice and piano in auditory space.

4.1.4 Empirical Results (A Qualitative Change in Performance)

Students learned to develop a form of “three-dimensional listening” in piano-and-singing performance. In the

post-test, they were able not only to stabilize the continuity of the vocal line, but also to reposition the piano sound appropriately in the background, thereby creating a valedictory atmosphere marked by depth and spaciousness.

4.2 Case Two: Constructing Polyphonic Hierarchy and Resolving Voice–Piano Confrontation—Using Lonely Warrior as an Example

4.2.1 Learner Background

Students in the upper grades of primary school. They show a very strong desire to express themselves in this work, but when they enter the climactic section, emotional excitement often leads them to apply force indiscriminately and pound the piano mechanically.

4.2.2 Observation of the Current Teaching Situation (Specific Pain Points)

In the chorus section “zhan ma? Zhan a!” (Will you fight? Fight on!), the piano accompaniment features highly dense syncopated accents and octave leaps.

4.2.3 Characteristics of Part Collision

Because students are unable to control the force in their hands, the piano sound becomes excessively harsh and heavy, forming a “wall of sound.” Conflict arises between the accompaniment and the vocal line, with the result that the auditory texture has no layering at all and the singing voice is submerged beneath the pounding piano. In order to hear themselves, students can only shout instinctively. Instead of collaborating, the two parts end up undermining each other at the auditory level.

4.2.4 Teaching Intervention Strategy: “Part Differentiation and Spatial Depth”

The idea of yielding sonic space between parts through touch is crucial. Students should be told clearly that the piano functions like percussion, while the voice carries the call. To address keyboard pounding, students are guided to change their touch: the fingertips should strike the keys lightly and quickly, rebounding like a bouncing ball rather than pressing down with brute force. By shortening the duration of the piano sound, sonic space is “given back” to the voice, allowing the vocal melody to emerge through the gaps in the piano texture. Students are also guided to develop vertical listening and a sense of spatial contrast between distance and proximity. They are asked to focus their auditory attention on the solidity and nearness of the singing voice, while treating the piano sound under their hands as diffuse and distant, like smoke in the background. Through such timbral contrast between brightness and dimness, the piano retreats to a supporting position, thereby constructing a clear three-dimensional sonic image with depth.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through its empirical analysis of integrated piano-and-singing instructional pathways, this study reaches the following conclusions. First, clarifying the hierarchy of parts is central to resolving voice–piano conflict. The empirical evidence shows that the phenomena of “keyboard pounding” and “shouting” in primary and secondary school students’ piano-and-singing performance are, in essence, manifestations of disordered polyphonic logic. By guiding students to establish a vertical hierarchy in which the voice leads and the piano supports, and by requiring the fingers to make room actively for the vocal line through touch, the problem of sonic accumulation can be effectively addressed, transforming performance from mechanical juxtaposition into artistic integration. Second, the improvement of auditory monitoring ability is a prerequisite for aesthetic transformation. Simple correction of bodily action alone cannot fundamentally eliminate the stiffness of piano-and-singing performance. The study confirms that cultivating students’ “dual-track listening”—that is, simultaneously monitoring the continuity of the vocal line and the grain of the piano sound—is key to enhancing expressive flexibility. When students learn to regulate the contrast between prominence and restraint among parts through listening, their artistic expressiveness undergoes a qualitative leap. Third, the collaborative model provides an empirical example of integrating education with practice. Theoretical support from universities and the teaching reality of social institutions complement one another. Through concrete empirical cases such as Farewell and Lonely Warrior, this model not only verifies the effectiveness of instructional intervention, but also offers a useful conceptual framework for addressing the widespread problem in primary and secondary arts education of emphasizing technique over artistry.

It is therefore recommended that social institutions establish evaluation systems oriented toward auditory aesthetics and optimize teaching feedback methods. Teachers are advised to introduce “part-deconstruction training” into the classroom and to use digital recording devices to help students conduct comparative analysis of sound. Students should be guided to identify and correct situations in which the accompaniment masks the melodic line, thereby shifting the focus of evaluation from pitch and rhythm to part balance. Teaching materials should also be diversified and integrated: syllabuses should maintain a balance between lyrical works and strongly rhythmic works. Differentiated teaching plans should be developed for problems such as rhythmic assimilation or loss of dynamic control in works of different styles, so as to preserve and stimulate the innate musical intuition of primary and secondary school students.

Universities should strengthen teacher-education students’ capacity for pedagogical translation and practical teaching, while improving the construction of case-based teaching resources. In piano pedagogy courses, dedicated discussion modules should be added on typical misconceptions in piano-and-singing instruction at the primary and secondary levels. Preservice teachers should be trained to translate complex theories of piano performance into intuitive and accessible teaching directives appropriate to students’ actual learning conditions, thereby shortening their adjustment period after entering the profession. The two-way collaborative educational mechanism should also be deepened: university experts should be encouraged to enter institutions for practice-based “clinical” guidance, and joint teaching-research activities should be conducted around common instructional problems such as training in part independence, so as to ensure that talent-cultivation programs remain closely aligned with the practical needs of aesthetic education in primary and secondary schools.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China. Arts Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition). Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press, 2022.
- [2] Cao, L. Music Education in General Schools. Shanghai: Shanghai Education Press, 1993.
- [3] Xie, J., & Yu, W. Music Education and Pedagogy. Beijing: Higher Education Press, 2007.
- [4] Qian, R. Research on Piano Playing-and-Singing Techniques and Teaching. *Art of Music*, 2015(02).
- [5] Tang, T., & Qian, L. *Lonely Warrior*. Shanghai: Tencent Music, 2021.
- [6] Arnheim, R. *Art and Visual Perception*. Translated by Teng, S. and Zhu, J. Chengdu: Sichuan People’s Publishing House, 1998.