



CONSTRUCTING THE VOCAL TECHNIQUE OF 21TH CENTURY POP ROCK GUIDEBOOK FOR TEACHING FIRST YEAR'S POP VOCAL MAJOR STUDENT AT GUANGDONG VOCATIONAL ACADEMY OF ART

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Abstract

In the context of globalization and increasing cultural exchange, the evolution of pop rock music has transcended borders, influencing diverse music education systems worldwide. This research explores the vocal techniques of 21st-century pop rock within China, aiming to develop a culturally adapted, pedagogically sound guidebook for higher education. Grounded in a multifaceted teaching model that integrates technical mastery, artistic expression, and cultural understanding, the study constructs a comprehensive 16-lesson curriculum combining foundational vocal skills with genre-specific techniques and performance readiness. The research objectives are: (1) to study the vocal techniques in 21st-century pop rock music from key informants; (2) to construct a vocal technique guidebook tailored for teaching 21st-century pop rock; (3) to experiment with using this guidebook to teach first-year pop vocal major students at Guangdong Vocational Academy of Art; and (4) to evaluate the effectiveness of this teaching experiment. This study adopts a mixed-methods approach,

combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Data collection includes semi-structured interviews with key informants, classroom observations, and various assessments such as formative tests, summative evaluations, and performance-based assessments, providing a comprehensive understanding of pop rock vocal teaching and learning. **The results were as follows:** (1) Expert interviews established that effective pop rock vocal pedagogy must integrate foundational technique, genre-specific expression, cultural contextualization, and personalized feedback within a structured framework. (2) A comprehensive 16-lesson guidebook was constructed covering breath control, belting, falsetto, vocal health, improvisation, studio technique, and live performance preparation, verified by expert review. (3) The 16-week teaching experiment demonstrated progressive improvement across all assessed vocal dimensions. (4) Student overall satisfaction averaged 87.66 out of 100, with 97 percent of students scoring 85 or above, confirming the guidebook's effectiveness as a pedagogical resource for vocational pop rock vocal training.

Keywords: Vocal Technique; Pop Rock Guidebook; Pop Vocal Major Student; Guangdong Vocational Academy of Art

Introduction

In the 21st century, pop rock music has emerged as one of the most dynamic and globally influential contemporary genres, fusing the melodic accessibility of pop with the rhythmic intensity and expressive power of rock. Its global popularity has fundamentally reshaped vocal performance standards, introducing a range of specialized techniques, including belting, mixed voice, falsetto transitions, vocal distortion, and improvisation, that demand dedicated pedagogical attention distinct from both classical vocal training and conventional popular music instruction (Chen, 2017). As this genre continues to dominate international music markets and entertainment industries, educational institutions worldwide face increasing pressure to develop specialized curricula that can prepare students for the specific technical and expressive demands of professional pop rock performance.

In China, the development of pop rock vocal education has been shaped by the country's distinctive cultural trajectory. Pop rock arrived in mainland China through Hong Kong and Taiwan in the late 1970s and early 1980s, carried by artists such as Teresa Teng whose emotionally direct ballad style introduced new expressive conventions to mainland audiences (Chen, 2005; Li, 2009). By the 1990s, pioneering mainland artists including Cui Jian had established a distinctively Chinese pop rock voice that blended Western rhythmic energy with Chinese linguistic and emotional sensibilities (Zhao, 2016; Smith, 1998). The 2000s brought rapid professionalization of the music industry alongside growing institutional recognition of popular music as a legitimate academic field, creating conditions for the formalization of pop rock vocal training within higher education curricula (Wang, 2021; Liu, 2014). Despite this institutional growth, a systematic gap persists between the technical demands of professional pop rock performance and the pedagogical resources available to support specialized vocal training within Chinese vocational music education.

Guangdong Vocational Academy of Art, located in one of China's most musically dynamic and culturally open provinces, occupies a significant position within this landscape. The institution's commitment to practical music training and professional development reflects Guangdong's longstanding role as a gateway for international musical influences and innovation. As pop rock has become an increasingly central component of the contemporary music industry that Guangdong's graduates enter, the demand for structured, genre-specific vocal training resources has grown correspondingly. First-year pop vocal major students at the institution arrive with varying degrees of foundational vocal preparation but consistently lack exposure to the systematic technical framework that 21st-century pop rock performance requires. Techniques such as belting, which requires the extension of chest voice into higher registers with controlled intensity; mixed voice, which blends chest and head resonance for smooth register transitions; and vocal distortion effects that characterize the expressive edge of rock-influenced singing, are rarely addressed through conventional vocal pedagogy texts or standardized teaching materials available in Chinese higher music education contexts.

The absence of a comprehensive, culturally adapted pedagogical resource specifically designed for first-year pop rock vocal instruction creates multiple practical challenges. Without systematic technical scaffolding, students may develop incorrect habits in high-demand techniques that risk vocal health, a significant concern in an industry characterized by sustained intensive performance (Zhang, 2020). Without cultural contextualization connecting Western pop rock traditions to Chinese musical heritage and contemporary industry practice, students may develop technical proficiency without the stylistic authenticity and expressive range that professional performance demands. Without a structured 16-lesson curriculum framework that progresses systematically from foundational skills through advanced performance preparation, instructors face the challenge of constructing coherent instructional sequences without adequate supporting materials. This research addresses all three challenges through the construction, implementation, and systematic evaluation of a purpose-built vocal technique guidebook for 21st-century pop rock instruction at Guangdong Vocational Academy of Art.

Three significant research gaps motivate this study. First, existing vocal pedagogy literature and teaching materials for Chinese higher music education remain predominantly oriented toward classical bel canto and traditional Chinese vocal styles, with limited systematic resources addressing the technical and expressive demands of contemporary pop rock performance (Li, 2009; Wang, 2006). Second, while individual instructors have developed personal approaches to pop rock vocal instruction, no empirically tested, expert-validated guidebook exists that provides a structured 16-lesson curriculum integrating technical training, genre-specific technique, cultural contextualization, and performance preparation appropriate for first-year vocational students in China. Third, the specific instructional strategies most effective for developing pop rock vocal technique in Chinese students, whose linguistic characteristics, cultural formation, and prior musical training differ substantially from the Western contexts in which most pop rock vocal pedagogy has been developed, have not been systematically investigated through experimental teaching research. This study addresses all three gaps through qualitative expert consultation, systematic guidebook construction, and a controlled teaching experiment providing empirical evidence of pedagogical effectiveness.

Research Objectives

1. To study the vocal techniques in 21st-century pop rock music from key informant
2. To construct a vocal technique of 21st-century pop rock guidebook for teaching.
3. To experiment by using the guidebook to teaching first years pop vocal major student at Guangdong vocational academy of art.
4. To evaluate the experiment from teaching first years pop vocal major student at Guangdong vocational academy of art

Literature Reviews

History of Pop Rock in China: 1970s–1980s: The Introduction Stage, during the 1970s, Chinese music was dominated by traditional and revolutionary styles aligned with political ideologies. However, China’s gradual opening to the world brought a cultural shift, allowing Western music—including pop rock—to enter the country (Li, 2009).

Hong Kong and Taiwan played key roles in this transformation, serving as gateways for Western music. Artists like Teresa Teng became cultural icons, introducing soft rock ballads that deeply resonated with mainland audiences. Her emotional and personal themes contrasted sharply with the collectivist tone of earlier Chinese music (Chen, 2005).

This marked the beginning of a broader cultural awakening. With greater access to foreign media and global trends, Chinese audiences began to explore more diverse musical expressions. Pop rock slowly gained popularity, laying the foundation for a unique blend of Western styles and Chinese traditions (Zhang, 2020).

In summary, the late 1970s and early 1980s saw the quiet but impactful arrival of pop rock in China. Hong Kong, Taiwan, and influential figures like Teresa Teng helped introduce this genre, sparking a shift in musical taste and identity that continues to shape Chinese pop music today.

1980s–1990s: Emergence and Growth on the Mainland

The First Wave of Mainland Pop Rockers: The 1980s saw the rise of mainland Chinese pop rock, with Cui Jian emerging as a pioneer. His 1986 song “Nothing to My Name” became a cultural milestone, expressing themes of

freedom and social change that resonated with China's youth during the reform era (Zhao, 2016).

Cui Jian's work marked the formal emergence of pop rock on the mainland, inspiring a wave of new musicians. These artists began blending Western rock with traditional Chinese music, creating a distinctive Chinese pop rock identity (Smith, 1998). This period also reflected a growing openness to global culture, aided by advancements in media and communication.

Cui Jian's influence extended far beyond music—his legacy set the tone for future generations to explore bold, expressive, and hybrid musical forms, shaping the evolution of the Chinese music industry (Wang, 2006).

The Diversification of Pop Rock Styles

In the 1990s, Chinese pop rock evolved through stylistic fusion. Musicians increasingly integrated traditional Chinese instruments like the *erhu* and *pipa* into rock compositions. This not only enriched the music but also connected it to cultural heritage.

According to Zhang (2012), this hybridization helped bridge generational divides—combining youthful energy with familiar traditional elements. It reflected a broader movement to redefine Chinese cultural identity in a rapidly modernizing society.

This trend was also part of a global phenomenon, where musicians worldwide drew on diverse traditions to innovate. With improved access to international music through technology, Chinese pop rock became a powerful example of cultural blending in a globalized world.

The Maturity and Global Influence (2000s–Present)

The Rise of Professionalism: Beginning in the 2000s, China's pop rock industry entered a period of rapid maturation, marked by a surge in professionalism. Increased investment in music production infrastructure—including modern recording studios, skilled producers, and professional songwriters—greatly enhanced the quality and diversity of pop rock music (Wang, 2021).

The emergence of professional music production companies played a central role in this transformation. These organizations provided the structural support for high-caliber music creation and contributed to nurturing a new generation of musical talent. This generation brought innovative ideas, enriched the genre's artistic expression, and broadened its thematic range.

This era witnessed a notable shift in production quality, with refined sound engineering, sophisticated musical arrangements, and complex harmonies becoming standard. Artists were no longer limited to basic rock forms; instead, they began incorporating diverse musical elements and exploring deeper emotional and social themes, reflecting the evolving cultural landscape of contemporary China.

Moreover, increased global connectivity allowed Chinese musicians to collaborate with international artists and adopt global production standards. These cross-cultural interactions not only improved technical capabilities but also fostered creative exchange, further elevating the profile of Chinese pop rock on the global stage (Li, 2009).

Global Reach and Influence

In the last decade, Chinese pop rock has made significant inroads into international music markets. Chinese artists have performed at global music festivals and released music on international streaming platforms, gaining exposure to audiences beyond Asia. This expansion has helped reshape the global image of Chinese music, moving it beyond traditional stereotypes (Liu, 2014).

The global rise of Chinese pop rock reflects the genre's growing maturity and adaptability. It showcases China's ability to produce music that resonates with global audiences while maintaining distinct cultural elements. Furthermore, this international presence has opened avenues for reciprocal influence—where Chinese pop rock contributes to, and simultaneously draws from, global music trends.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Data collection instruments include semi-structured interviews with key informants, classroom observations of student learning, and various forms of assessment, including formative tests, summative

evaluations, and performance-based assessments. This integrated approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the teaching and learning of pop vocal music.

Key Informants

Key informants were selected based on the following criteria:

More than 15 years of experience in teaching pop vocal

Academic rank of professor or associate professor

Age over 40 years

Experience in presiding over and participating in at least two scientific research projects at the provincial level or above

Recipient of first prize in recognized music competitions

The selected key informants are as follows:

Professor Dr. Zhang Nan

Affiliation: Xinjiang Arts University

Professor Zhang Nan has more than 15 years of experience in pop vocal teaching. He has participated in multiple provincial-level research projects and has received top awards in competitions. His academic and teaching achievements make him a prominent figure in the field.

Professor Dr. Zhang Chen

Affiliation: Sichuan Conservatory of Music

Professor Zhang Chen has accumulated extensive experience over a teaching career spanning more than 15 years. She meets all the criteria, including leadership in research and recognition in competitions. Her comprehensive background makes her a key informant for this study.

Professor Dr. Li Yuhuan

Affiliation: Tianjin Normal University

Professor Li Yuhuan has led and participated in numerous provincial-level projects. His students have earned high rankings in national pop music contests and major televised talent shows, reflecting his successful teaching approach.

Population: The population for this study consists of 132 first-year students majoring in pop music at Guangdong Vocational College of Art, distributed across four classes.

Sample: A systematic sampling method was employed to select 30 students from the four classes. The process involved:

Compiling a complete list of all students and assigning each a unique number.

In the first round, students whose numbers ended in 3 (e.g., 3, 13, 23) were selected from each class.

In the second round, students with numbers ending in 6 (e.g., 6, 16, 26) were chosen.

Additional rounds included numbers ending in 9 and 0.

This process ensured equal representation from each class, resulting in a total of 30 students.

This method ensured a random and proportionally distributed sample suitable for further analysis in the research.

Results

To Study the Vocal Techniques in 21st-Century Pop Rock Music from Key Informant

Effective teaching of pop rock vocal techniques in higher education requires a multifaceted approach that blends technical skill-building, artistic interpretation, individualized instruction, and cultural understanding. Foundational elements such as breath control, posture, and vocal health must be established before progressing to more complex genre-specific techniques like belting or vibrato. Teachers are encouraged to contextualize these methods within the historical and cultural roots of pop rock, helping students achieve expressive authenticity. The use of modern technology, including apps for pitch feedback and VR performance simulations, enhances student engagement and allows for more personalized, interactive learning. Instruction must also address common challenges—such as emotional expression and vocal endurance—through structured exercises, journaling, and collaborative activities like band rehearsals.

Integrating pop rock into formal vocal education involves not only technical and expressive training but also the creation of structured resources, such as guidebooks, to support diverse learners. These guidebooks must balance theoretical concepts like vocal anatomy with practical exercises, adapt to stylistic

variations within pop rock, and align with educational standards while preserving the genre's expressive freedom. Evaluating student performance requires a comprehensive and multidimensional strategy that includes both quantitative tools (pitch, breath, range) and qualitative assessments (stylistic interpretation, emotional delivery). Adding reflective journals, self-assessment, and peer critiques fosters deeper learning and critical thinking. Altogether, this pedagogical model aims to cultivate technically skilled, culturally aware vocalists capable of performing pop rock with authenticity and creativity.

To Construct a Vocal Technique of 21st-Century Pop Rock Guidebook for Teaching

The Vocal Technique of 21st Century Pop Rock guidebook presents a comprehensive 16-lesson curriculum aimed at training students in both technical and artistic aspects of pop rock vocal performance. Designed for learners with basic musical literacy, it progresses from foundational vocal skills—such as breath control, resonance, registration, and vocal health—to advanced techniques like belting, improvisation, and live/studio performance preparation. Each lesson features in-depth analysis of iconic pop rock songs by artists like Deng Ziqi, Zhou Jielun, and Wu Yue Tian, integrating theoretical instruction with practical exercises to foster emotional expressiveness, stylistic versatility, and technical accuracy. Teaching methods include sequential learning, multimodal instruction, song-based drills, and formative feedback mechanisms such as peer review and performance recording.

Beyond its instructional content, the guidebook emphasizes the importance of tailored exercises for technical mastery, vocal safety, and performance readiness. Exercises are designed not only to build stamina and expressive phrasing but also to prevent common vocal injuries, a known issue in the Chinese pop industry. The guidebook carries literary value by formalizing a structured curriculum for a genre still underrepresented in Chinese music institutions. It adapts Western vocal science to Mandarin linguistic nuances, promoting culturally authentic singing. Moreover, it bridges academic and industry needs through modules on studio techniques, vocal health, and performance critique, making it a valuable resource for educators, performers, and researchers interested in contemporary pop rock vocal pedagogy.

To Experiment by Using the Guidebook to Teaching First Years Pop Vocal Major Student at Guangdong Vocational Academy of Art

The 16-week Pop Rock Vocal Teaching curriculum is designed to guide students through a progressive and immersive learning experience. Beginning with foundational techniques, the first few lessons introduce students to the core characteristics of pop rock singing, including belting, falsetto, vocal texture, resonance, and safe vocal registration methods. Lessons focus on practical applications using well-known songs such as "Daodai" and "Haikuotiankong" to reinforce technical concepts like mask resonance and diaphragm-supported belting, while also emphasizing vocal health and longevity through exercises in vocal fry and warm-up routines.

The mid-section of the curriculum transitions to genre-specific applications and performance-focused training. Students analyze and rehearse iconic songs like Jay Chou's "Qingtian" and GEM's "Guangnianzhiwai" to develop dynamic control, vocal agility, and melodic phrasing. Lessons incorporate improvisation, ad-libbing, and anthem-style projection using songs such as "Paomo" and Mayday's "Jue Qiang." Students also gain studio experience through lessons on microphone technique, DAW software, and medley planning. Toward the end, the course emphasizes live performance preparation, vocal health for long-term careers, and reflective feedback through a final performance. Assessment is conducted via formative and summative tests, ensuring students leave with both technical mastery and expressive artistry tailored to the demands of contemporary pop rock performance.

To Evaluate the Experiment from Teaching First Years Pop Vocal Major Student at Guangdong Vocational Academy of Art

The evaluation data demonstrates the guidebook's effectiveness in enhancing pop rock vocal education. With a high overall satisfaction score averaging 87.66 out of 100 and 97% of students scoring 85 or above, the guidebook has gained widespread approval. All measured dimensions—including teaching connection, methods, learning status, and evaluation—scored above 21 out of 25, indicating a well-rounded and impactful educational tool. Strong correlations among teaching methods, student learning, and evaluation

approaches further confirm the guidebook's coherent and structured design. Additionally, positive qualitative feedback highlights increased student confidence and technical development. While minor improvements, such as adding more advanced content, could enhance the guidebook, the data strongly supports its value and popularity as an effective resource for pop rock vocal training.

Discussions

The findings of this research underscore the importance of a multifaceted approach to teaching 21st-century pop rock vocal techniques in higher education. The integration of technical skill development, artistic interpretation, cultural context, and individualized learning strategies provides a comprehensive pedagogical model that addresses the genre's unique demands. The guidebook's structured curriculum, which progresses logically from foundational vocal skills to advanced expressive techniques, aligns well with student needs and industry expectations (Li, 2010). Its incorporation of iconic pop rock songs enables practical application, enhancing students' stylistic understanding and emotional expressiveness. The use of modern technology, including digital feedback tools and performance simulations, further supports personalized learning and increases student engagement (Chen, 2015). These elements collectively contribute to improved vocal performance and greater student confidence, as evidenced by the positive evaluation data.

Moreover, the guidebook's cultural adaptation—merging Western vocal science with Mandarin phonetics and Chinese stylistic aesthetics—addresses a notable gap in current music education in China. This cultural sensitivity ensures authenticity and relevance, enhancing students' connection to the genre. The evaluation results confirm the guidebook's pedagogical coherence, practical utility, and popularity among learners (Guo, 2019). However, the need for occasional refinement, particularly the inclusion of more advanced techniques, suggests that ongoing curriculum development will be important to accommodate diverse learner profiles and evolving industry standards. Overall, the research highlights the value of a balanced educational resource that combines academic rigor, cultural relevance, and practical application in pop rock vocal training.

New Knowledges

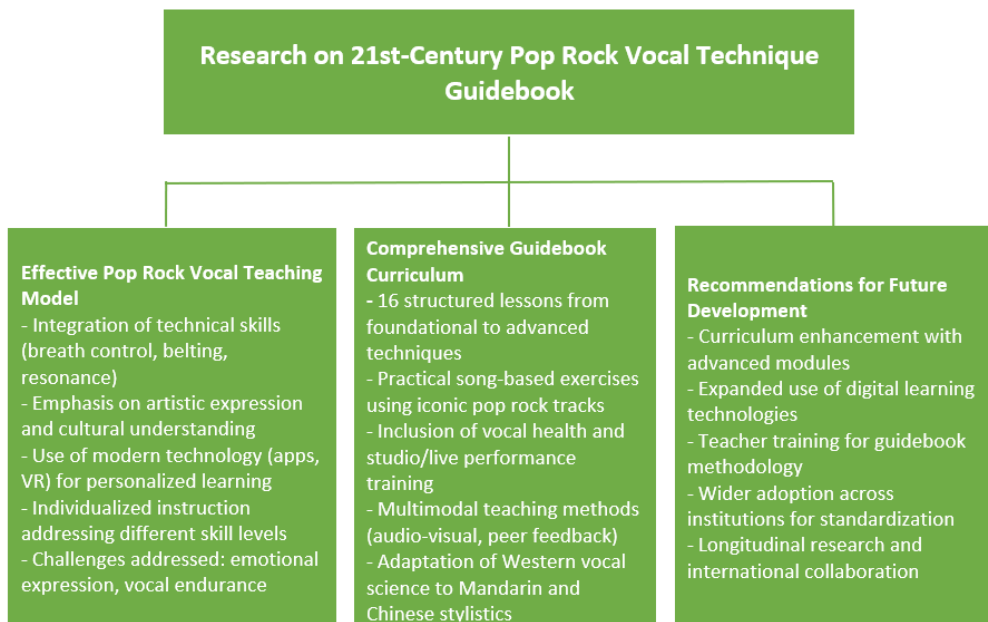


Figure 1: New Knowledges Diagram of Constructing the Vocal Technique of 21th Century Pop Rock Guidebook for Teaching First Year's Pop Vocal Major Student at Guangdong Vocational Academy of Art.

Conclusions

This research successfully developed and validated a comprehensive guidebook for teaching 21st-century pop rock vocal techniques tailored to first-year pop vocal students. The guidebook's 16-lesson curriculum effectively integrates foundational vocal training, genre-specific applications, and performance preparation, bridging theoretical knowledge and practical skills. The experimental teaching using this guidebook at Guangdong Vocational Academy of Art demonstrated significant improvements in student vocal technique, artistic expression, and confidence. Evaluation data show strong student satisfaction and learning outcomes, confirming the guidebook as a valuable educational tool in Chinese pop rock vocal pedagogy. The study contributes a much-needed standardized curriculum that respects both the artistic freedom and technical

precision required in this evolving genre, while addressing cultural and linguistic particularities relevant to Chinese learners.

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