

The Role of Piano Improvisation Accompaniment in Enhancing the Musical Expressiveness of Vocal Music Learners-An Analysis from the Perspective of Pedagogy

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of vocal music teaching shifting from a "skill-oriented approach" to the cultivation of "core literacy and comprehensive performance", musical expressiveness has become a crucial indicator for evaluating vocal music learners' artistic comprehension, emotional communication, and stage practical abilities. As a teaching medium in vocal music classrooms that integrates musical support, situational generation, and interactive feedback, piano improvisation accompaniment not only provides references for pitch, rhythm, and harmony but also guides learners to perceive musical emotions and understand musical structures through real-time adjustments in texture, dynamics, tempo, and timbre layers. Based on literature analysis and pedagogical theoretical interpretation, this paper discusses the educational functions, mechanisms of action, and teaching implementation strategies of improvisation accompaniment. The study concludes that the promotion of musical expressiveness by improvisation accompaniment is mainly reflected in: stabilizing vocal techniques through auditory scaffolding, activating emotional expression through musical situations, facilitating musical perception and self-regulation through interactive feedback, and enhancing cooperative awareness and on-the-spot performance through stage simulation. This paper proposes an analytical model of "Accompaniment Support-Learning Transformation-Performance Improvement" and puts forward teaching suggestions from the aspects of layered teaching, circular feedback, teacher-student collaboration, and diversified evaluation.

1. Introduction

In the context of contemporary music education reform, the objectives of vocal music teaching are no longer limited to the training of technical elements such as breathing, resonance, articulation, and intonation. Instead, more attention is paid to the development of learners' comprehensive musical literacy, artistic comprehension ability, and aesthetic expression ability [1]. If vocal music learning overemphasizes the standardization of vocal techniques while neglecting work comprehension, semantic meaning of lyrics, emotional experience, and stage presentation, learners are prone to the problem of "complete sound but weak expression".

Piano accompaniment is the most common supportive musical activity in vocal music teaching. Compared with fixed-score accompaniment, piano improvisation accompaniment emphasizes real-time adjustment according to the singer's vocal range, tempo condition, breath capacity, emotional engagement, and classroom context, thus possessing stronger teaching adaptability and interactivity [2]. Existing studies have shown that piano improvisation accompaniment can enrich students' musical experience, enhance their perception of melody, rhythm, and harmony, and improve learning engagement through teacher-student interaction. However, accompaniment is sometimes simplified as a tool for "coordinating singing" in the classroom, and its educational value in cultivating expressiveness has not been fully explained. Therefore, it is necessary to re-examine the mechanism of piano improvisation accompaniment in vocal music learning from a pedagogical perspective [3].

This paper focuses on three questions: First, what educational functions does piano improvisation accompaniment have in vocal music teaching that are different from fixed accompaniment? Second, through what paths does it influence vocal music learners' musical perception, emotional expression, and stage performance? Third, how can teachers effectively use improvisation accompaniment in teaching design to promote learners' transition from technical mastery to artistic expression?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research on Classroom Application of Piano Improvisation Accompaniment

Taking junior high school music classrooms as the research object, Zhou Jingpei and Guo Chunrong emphasize that piano improvisation accompaniment is a comprehensive musical activity flexibly handled according to song style, students' singing status, and classroom interaction needs in the teaching scene, and its value is reflected in enhancing classroom participation, optimizing musical experience, and improving students' overall perception of works. Chen Dan points out that piano accompaniment can help students establish stable pitch and rhythm references, and expand students' perception of musical emotions through harmonic colors and texture changes. However, existing studies mostly focus on general music classrooms, and the explanation of its mechanism in individual vocal lessons and stage training is still insufficient [4].

2.2 Psychological Basis and Aesthetic Mechanism of Musical Expressiveness

Fang Bin et al. state that inner hearing is the ability of performers to form psychological anticipation of timbre, rhythm, melody, and emotional trend, which can help learners better grasp the work style and improve the delicacy of expression. Ge Chongyang emphasizes from the perspective of musical perception that expressiveness is not merely generated by technical proficiency, but based on a keen understanding of musical elements, structural relationships, and emotional connotations. Yan Qunli argues that modern music aesthetics pays more attention to the interactive relationship between musical works, performers, and recipients, emphasizing aesthetic creation and practical experience in performance activities. These studies provide a theoretical basis for analyzing the mechanism of improvisation accompaniment [5].

2.3 Vocal Skills, Emotional Expression and Stage Performance

Wang Yanjiao points out that vocal music learning requires not only scientific vocal methods but also learners to shape vivid auditory images through lyric comprehension and emotional experience; if teaching only emphasizes vocal training while neglecting emotional integration, students are

prone to the problem of complete sound but lack of expressive appeal. Zhang Dongfeng believes that singing skills and emotional expression should support each other, with skills providing vocal conditions for emotional transmission and emotions endowing skills with artistic purpose. Wei Huihong points out that teachers should guide students to coordinate vocal training and emotional expression on the basis of understanding the content of works [6]. Studies by Wang Kunyu and Sun Xingyou show that vocal performance includes not only sound presentation but also factors such as body posture, expression control, spatial awareness, and communication with the audience. These studies reveal the multi-dimensional paths through which improvisation accompaniment influences expressiveness [7].

Existing studies have three shortcomings: First, most studies on piano improvisation accompaniment stay at the level of general music classroom application, with few targeted analyses on the improvement of individual expressiveness of vocal music learners [8]; second, studies on vocal emotional expression emphasize the combination of skills and emotions, but rarely explain how accompaniment participates in this process as a teaching scaffold; third, studies on stage expressiveness focus more on performance results, with insufficient discussion on the transitional function of improvisation accompaniment between classroom training and stage practice. From a pedagogical perspective, this paper interprets piano improvisation accompaniment as a teaching medium characterized by musical support, emotional guidance, and interactive generation, and further analyzes its paths to enhance the musical expressiveness of vocal music learners [9].

3. Theoretical Framework and Analytical Model

This paper establishes an analytical model of "Accompaniment Support-Learning Transformation-Performance Improvement" (as shown in Figure 1). The first link is accompaniment support, that is, piano improvisation accompaniment exerts external influences on vocal music learners through pitch scaffolding, rhythm scaffolding, harmonic colors, and situational construction [10]. The second link is learning transformation, that is, learners transform external accompaniment cues into inner hearing, musical perception, and emotional comprehension through repeated listening, imitation, adjustment, and feedback. The third link is performance improvement, that is, learners present more stable technical control, clearer work expression, more active emotional engagement, and more complete stage presentation in singing. This model emphasizes that the effect of piano improvisation accompaniment on musical expressiveness is not linear instillation, but gradually generated through teaching interaction [11].

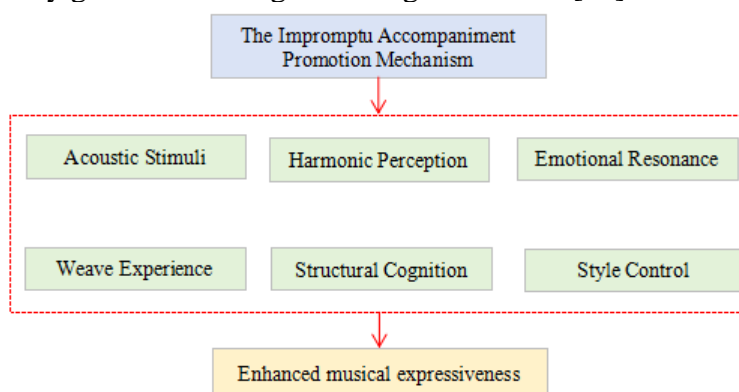


Figure 1: The Mechanism by Which Piano Improvisational Accompaniment Enhances Vocal Expressiveness

As shown in Figure 1, improvisation accompaniment acts on the development of vocal music

learners' musical expressiveness through six paths: auditory stimulation, harmonic perception, emotional resonance, texture experience, structural cognition, and style mastery [12]. This multi-dimensional mechanism reveals that improvisation accompaniment is not a single-functional technical means, but a comprehensive teaching medium that can exert educational effects simultaneously in multiple aspects such as technical stability, emotional deepening, work comprehension, and stage adaptation [13].

3.1 Definition of Core Concepts

Piano improvisation accompaniment: A piano accompaniment activity in which the accompanist provides on-site generative support for vocal singing by means of harmony configuration, texture organization, rhythm pattern variation, prelude, interlude and coda design, as well as tempo and dynamic adjustment, on the basis of understanding the melody, lyrics, mode and tonality, style vocabulary of vocal works and the real-time status of the singer. The improvisation accompaniment discussed in this paper is not free improvisation in the sense of stage virtuosity, but educational improvisation serving the process of vocal music learning [14].

Musical expressiveness of vocal music learners: The ability of learners to comprehensively apply vocal techniques, musical comprehension, emotional experience, language expression, and stage presentation in singing to transform the connotation of works into perceptible artistic images. Musical expressiveness is not subjective emotional catharsis divorced from technical foundation, but a comprehensive expressive ability based on vocal control, musical perception, and aesthetic judgment [15].

3.2 Pedagogical Analysis Perspective

First, the perspective of learning scaffolding. According to Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development" theory, learners' development needs to move from the existing level to the potential development level with appropriate support. Piano improvisation accompaniment plays a similar scaffolding role in vocal music classrooms: it prompts emotions through preludes, stabilizes tonality through bass, strengthens rhythm through rhythm patterns, and guides emotions through harmonic colors, helping learners reduce singing difficulty and gradually internalize external musical cues into their own musical judgment ability. Second, the perspective of aesthetic experience. Modern music aesthetics emphasizes that musical meaning arises from the interaction between sound structure, performing subject, and receptive experience. Improvisation accompaniment creates situations through timbre, texture, dynamics, and voice layers, which can help learners more intuitively feel the emotional atmosphere of works, thus promoting the transformation of aesthetic experience into singing expression. Third, the perspective of subject development. Music education not only pursues skill training but also undertakes the tasks of stimulating interest, improving participation, and promoting the development of comprehensive literacy. Improvisation accompaniment is not only a sound background "accompanying singing", but also a process medium to promote learners' listening, reflection, and self-regulation [16].

4. Mechanism of Piano Improvisation Accompaniment Promoting the Improvement of Musical Expressiveness

The promoting effect of piano improvisation accompaniment on the musical expressiveness of vocal music learners can be analyzed from five dimensions: activation of emotional expression, construction of rhythm scaffolding, deepening of work comprehension, enhancement of musical perception, and stage simulation training. These dimensions do not operate in isolation, but interact

and promote synergistically in teaching interaction. Compared with fixed accompaniment, improvisation accompaniment has significant advantages in educational functions. There are functional differences between fixed accompaniment and improvisation accompaniment in the dimensions of pitch and rhythm support, emotional and style shaping, classroom interaction mode, aesthetic experience generation, stage performance training, and individual difference adaptation. Fixed accompaniment focuses on providing stable pitch and beat references, which is conducive to students' familiarity with performance versions and ensuring the integrity of works; improvisation accompaniment emphasizes real-time adjustment according to learners' status, and has unique advantages in emotional guidance, classroom interaction, and stage adaptation. The two accompaniment methods are not absolutely opposed, but should be used complementarily according to teaching objectives.

4.1 Activating Emotional Expression through Musical Situations

The role of piano improvisation accompaniment in the musical expressiveness of vocal music learners is first reflected in the activation and concretization of emotional expression. In actual teaching, some learners, although able to complete melody and rhythm accurately, tend to have problems such as "flat" sound and insufficient emotional layers, which are often due to the lack of musical situations that can arouse emotional responses. Through real-time changes in harmonic colors, texture density, dynamic layers, and tempo elasticity, piano improvisation accompaniment provides external emotional cues for singers, making it easier for them to grasp the emotional direction of works in the auditory environment. For example, in lyrical works, accompanists can use broken chords, weak-start preludes, and softer bass progressions to guide learners to form coherent breath and delicate tone; in march-style works, they can help learners establish a firmer and more open vocal state through block chords and clear bass support. Emotional expression is not the result of direct instillation by teachers through verbal commands, but a learning achievement gradually generated in situational experience.

4.2 Promoting Sense of Rhythm and Breath Organization through Rhythm Scaffolding

Sense of rhythm is not only the ability to sing in time, but also includes the comprehensive grasp of accents, off-beats, syntactic breathing, tempo elasticity, and style rhythm. The value of improvisation accompaniment lies in that accompanists can set different levels of beat references according to learners' rhythm stability. For learners with weak rhythm foundation, accompaniment can strengthen beats with clear bass progressions and regular rhythm patterns; for learners with basic rhythm ability, beats can be appropriately weakened to increase syncopation, suspension, or rhythm elasticity. Stable and flexible accompaniment can help learners arrange inhalation, maintenance, and release in the ups and downs of phrases, avoiding short breath or broken sentences caused by rhythm tension.

4.3 Deepening Work Comprehension through Structural Cues and Interactive Listening

The comprehension of vocal works depends not only on lyric interpretation but also on multiple factors such as mode and tonality, musical form structure, melody trend, harmonic function, and style vocabulary. Piano improvisation accompaniment transforms work structure into specific auditory clues: preludes can prompt the tempo, tonality, and basic emotions of works; interludes can help learners understand phrase transitions; codas can strengthen the concluding direction of work emotions. At the same time, improvisation accompaniment requires learners to continuously listen to the harmonic changes, rhythm promotion, and dynamic cues of the piano while singing, and

adjust their timbre, tempo, and emotional intensity according to accompaniment feedback. This interactive listening can prompt learners to shift from one-way vocalization to comprehensive perception, and gradually form the ability to judge the overall musical sound. Cooperative learning theory holds that the development of learners' abilities does not occur in isolation, but in interaction with teachers, peers, and learning environments. Piano improvisation accompaniment is a special cooperative environment in vocal music learning, which requires singers to maintain self-expression while responding to external musical relationships.

4.4 Improving On-the-spot Performance and Cooperative Awareness through Stage Simulation

Many learners can sing stably in classroom practice, but after entering the stage or simulated performance situation, they often experience accelerated tempo, floating breath, rigid emotions, or disconnection with accompaniment due to nervousness. The flexibility of improvisation accompaniment can buffer this unstable state to a certain extent--accompanists can appropriately adjust tempo, extend interludes, or strengthen harmonic support according to the singer's on-the-spot breath and emotional fluctuations, giving learners time to reorganize their voice and emotions. More importantly, long-term cooperation with improvisation accompaniment can cultivate learners' awareness of stage interaction, making them understand that performance is not an isolated personal display, but an artistic communication process composed of singers, accompanists, works, and audiences. Modern music aesthetics emphasizes the interactive relationship between people and music, people and situations in musical performance, which provides a theoretical basis for vocal music teaching to move from "skill training" to "performance practice".

5. Implementation Strategies for Integrating Piano Improvisation Accompaniment into Vocal Music Teaching

To make improvisation accompaniment truly serve learners' transition from technical mastery to artistic expression, this paper puts forward implementation strategies from five aspects: pre-class diagnosis, classroom circulation, teacher-student collaboration, content integration, and diversified evaluation. Teachers need to diagnose learners' vocal range conditions, breath length, rhythm stability, work comprehension degree, and emotional expression habits before class, and select appropriate tonality, tempo, and accompaniment textures accordingly. Classroom implementation should highlight the circular structure of "Listen-Sing-Adjust-Evaluate", enabling students to gradually improve their expressiveness through listening, singing, adjustment, and feedback. Teacher-student collaboration should be an important organizational principle of teaching, guiding students from passively following accompaniment to active cooperation through negotiated learning. In the arrangement of teaching content, improvisation accompaniment should be combined with vocal skill training, work analysis, and stage practice to realize the progressive arrangement from skills to works and from classroom to stage. The evaluation mechanism should shift from single result evaluation to diversified process evaluation, focusing on students' growth in listening, reflection, and revision.

6. Conclusion and Prospect

Piano improvisation accompaniment has clear educational value in enhancing the musical expressiveness of vocal music learners. It is not an accessory technical link in vocal music teaching, but an important medium connecting work comprehension, vocal training, emotional experience,

and classroom interaction. Improvisation accompaniment can provide learners with a stable and varied auditory environment through harmonic colors, rhythm support, texture changes, and tempo elasticity. Centering on the three research questions proposed in this paper, the following understandings can be formed: First, the educational functions of piano improvisation accompaniment different from fixed accompaniment are mainly reflected in generativeness, adaptability, and interactivity; second, the paths through which improvisation accompaniment affects musical expressiveness mainly include: promoting technical stability through auditory references, activating emotional expression through musical situations, deepening work comprehension through structural cues, enhancing musical perception through interactive listening, and improving cooperative awareness and on-the-spot performance through stage simulation; third, at the level of teaching implementation, teachers should make improvisation accompaniment truly serve learners' transition from technical mastery to artistic expression through pre-class diagnosis, layered accompaniment, "Listen-Sing-Adjust-Evaluate" circulation, teacher-student collaboration, content integration, and diversified evaluation.

This paper still has certain limitations. First, this paper mainly conducts theoretical analysis and model construction from a pedagogical perspective, without carrying out strict classroom experiments and quantitative evaluations. Second, the analytical model and classroom circulation proposed in this paper need to be further verified in real teaching scenarios. Future research can adopt a quasi-experimental design to set up an improvisation accompaniment intervention group and a conventional fixed accompaniment group for comparison; it can also combine classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and expressiveness scales to continuously track the learning process before and after improvisation accompaniment intervention. Only when piano improvisation accompaniment is truly integrated into the objectives of vocal music teaching, teachers' professional development, and evaluation system can it continuously exert its educational value in promoting the improvement of learners' musical expressiveness.

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