

The Application of 'Improvisational Accompaniment' in Piano Textbooks for Music Majors in Chinese Higher Education

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Abstract

This research evaluates the pedagogical application of "Improvisational Accompaniment" in piano textbooks within Chinese higher music education, highlighting its significance in enhancing students' practical skills and professional prospects. The study examines the integration of foundational piano training with improvisation, the promotion of creative teaching methods, and the unique educational features of Chinese textbooks. Empirical analysis presents a multifaceted teaching approach, including collective instruction and targeted practice, to bolster students' improvisational proficiency. The findings offer insights for global music educators on syllabus development and innovative teaching strategies.

Keywords: improvisational accompaniment, music pedagogy, textbook integration, creative teaching

1. Introduction

Music education, as a vital pathway to cultivate innovative spirit and practical skills, holds a significant position in higher education. In the field of higher music education in China, the piano improvisational accompaniment course, with its unique teaching philosophy and practical methods, is gradually becoming a core component in the capacity building of music major students. This study aims to delve into the current application of piano improvisational accompaniment courses within the Chinese music education system, teaching strategies, and their impact on students' practical music abilities.

As society's demand for musical talent continues to grow and diversify, the importance of piano improvisational accompaniment courses is becoming increasingly prominent. The course not only requires students to master solid piano performance skills but also emphasizes the cultivation of students' musical perception, adaptability, and creativity. Through learning improvisational accompaniment, students can quickly respond in various musical scenarios, create context-appropriate musical works using their knowledge, and lay a solid foundation for their future careers in music education, performance, or composition.

Chinese universities, in response to the demands of the times, have actively incorporated piano improvisational accompaniment into the music education system and committed to enhancing students' practical abilities and comprehensive qualities through optimizing curriculum design, improving textbook content, and innovating teaching methods. Chinese textbooks, characterized by their closeness to practice and emphasis on practical operation, provide students with abundant learning resources and practical opportunities, highlighting the integration of theoretical knowledge and practical operation, allowing students to continuously hone their skills and accumulate experience in simulated performance scenarios.

This study, through the application research and textbook analysis of piano improvisational accompaniment courses, aims to deepen the understanding of the combination of music education theory and practice, and to highly appraise the current teaching attempts and contributions of Chinese universities in cultivating students' practical abilities. It is anticipated that with the advancement of research and the continuous promotion of teaching practices, piano improvisational accompaniment courses will play a more significant role in the cause of Chinese music

education, contributing greater strength to the cultivation of musical talents with innovative spirit and practical capabilities.

2. Research Background

Improvisational accompaniment is a fundamental component of music education, playing a crucial role in the cultivation of students' comprehensive musical abilities. It serves as an essential metric for assessing students' musical literacy and innovative capacities, and is a key skill for their future roles in primary and secondary school music education. Research by Chen Bo [1] underscores the importance of improvisational accompaniment in the context of professional certification, highlighting its significance in enhancing students' teaching and musical expressive capabilities.

Although the importance of improvisational accompaniment courses is widely acknowledged, some Chinese universities still face issues such as the disconnection between theory and practice and a lack of practical teaching effectiveness. These issues limit the improvement of students' improvisational skills and their career development potential. Huang Yayun [2], through a comparison of different textbooks, reveals new trends in domestic piano teaching for normal students, with a particular emphasis on the importance of improvisational skills. Li Minjia [3] analyzes the evolution of piano textbooks for normal students from a historical perspective, noting innovative attempts in modern textbooks to cultivate students' improvisational abilities.

Yu Jia'an [4] explores the diverse hybrid teaching models for piano improvisational accompaniment courses in universities, proposing new teaching methods that integrate traditional instruction with modern technological approaches. Yu Shichen [5], from a practical standpoint, investigates effective ways to incorporate improvisational accompaniment in ordinary university piano teaching. Zhang Juan [6] offers insights into the expansion of teaching content for piano improvisational accompaniment in universities, emphasizing that textbook content and form should align more closely with students' actual needs.

Existing literature frequently identifies numerous challenges in improvisational accompaniment teaching, including the irrational arrangement of teaching time, singular teaching methods, and incomplete textbook content. To address these issues, researchers have proposed a range of improvement strategies, such as optimizing curriculum structure, enriching teaching methods, and updating textbook content.

While existing research provides theoretical support and practical guidance for improvisational accompaniment teaching, there are still many areas worthy of further exploration. Future research could focus on the evaluation of teaching effectiveness, innovation in teaching methods, and the application of technology in teaching, to foster continuous improvement and development in the field of improvisational accompaniment instruction.

3. Current Status of "Improvisational Accompaniment" Courses and Textbook Usage Issues in Music Education Majors

At present, China's music higher education institutions recruit students from all over the country, leading to a diverse educational background and varying levels of piano performance skills among students. Additionally, there is a disparity in the emphasis placed on piano improvisational accompaniment courses across different institutions. Due to certain objective reasons, the teaching quality of piano improvisational accompaniment in some schools is not guaranteed or has not been significantly improved. The main reasons include the following aspects.

3.1 Discussion on the Rationality of Improvisational Accompaniment Course Timing

In the curriculum system of higher normal music education majors, "Piano Basics" and "Piano Improvisational Accompaniment," though existing as independent courses, are inherently closely connected and complementary in terms of teaching content and skill development. Currently, some universities have failed to fully recognize the logical connection and mutually reinforcing relationship between the two in their course arrangement, leading to unsatisfactory teaching outcomes.

Piano basic courses typically span the entire study period of students, lasting two to four years, teaching a wide range of musical styles and performance techniques. In contrast, piano improvisational accompaniment courses are often scheduled in the last year before graduation, a timing that limits students' opportunities for in-depth learning and practice, affecting their ability to master improvisational skills and theoretical knowledge.

Considering the inseparable connection between piano basics and improvisational accompaniment, where piano basics provide the necessary foundation for improvisational accompaniment, and the practice of improvisational accompaniment deepens students' understanding of piano works and performance techniques, separating the teaching times of the two courses not only violates the intrinsic laws of music education but also weakens the teaching effectiveness.

To improve this situation, it is recommended that universities re-evaluate and adjust the scheduling of improvisational accompaniment courses. The ideal adjustment would be to offer improvisational accompaniment courses concurrently with or slightly earlier than piano basic courses, allowing students to gradually learn and master improvisational accompaniment skills while solidifying their piano foundation. This concurrent or advanced course arrangement helps to achieve a synergistic effect between the two courses, promoting the comprehensive improvement of students' overall musical literacy.

3.2 The Impact of Homogenized Teaching Methods on the Cultivation of Students' Comprehensive Practical Abilities

The piano improvisational accompaniment course, as an interdisciplinary subject, goes beyond teaching piano performance and accompaniment skills to more critically develop students' abilities to synthesize and apply musical knowledge across disciplines. This includes sophisticated piano performance skills, flexible application of composition techniques, a profound understanding of harmony theory, precise analysis of song styles, and creative use of accompaniment patterns, among other multi-dimensional competencies. However, current teaching practices tend to focus excessively on imparting basic skills, neglecting the cultivation of students' comprehensive practical abilities.

This pedagogical inclination results in multiple obstacles for students learning improvisational accompaniment. Although they may master basic playing and accompanying techniques, they often feel inadequate when dealing with diverse musical styles, arranging complex musical textures, or creating personalized harmonies. Moreover, the lack of practical opportunities hinders students from accumulating rich experience, which in turn limits the enhancement of their improvisational skills and their potential for development in the fields of music education or performance.

In light of this, it is particularly urgent to reform teaching methods and strengthen the cultivation of comprehensive practical abilities. Educators should adopt diversified teaching strategies, integrating elements such as piano performance, composition, harmony, and song analysis into improvisational accompaniment teaching. Through teaching methods like case analysis, group discussion, and practical operation, not only can the students' interest and creativity be stimulated, but their comprehensive musical literacy and practical skills can also be enhanced. Concurrently, the curriculum should be appropriately adjusted to ensure that students have ample time and opportunities for in-depth study and extensive practice, laying a solid foundation for their professional development.

3.3 The Lack of Comprehensiveness in Textbook Selection and Improvement Strategies

Current piano improvisational accompaniment textbooks commonly exhibit biases in content and training methods. Some textbooks focus heavily on the impartation of theoretical knowledge while neglecting the cultivation of practical skills; others overly emphasize hands-on practice while disregarding the importance of a theoretical foundation. This imbalance leads to an incomplete coverage of knowledge and an unsystematic training system in the textbooks, lacking coherence and logic. It fails to meet students' needs to effectively apply theoretical knowledge to practice, resulting in a disconnect between theory and practice.

The lack of comprehensiveness in these textbooks weakens teaching effectiveness and limits the holistic development of students' musical literacy. The textbooks' lack of professionalism and specificity makes it difficult to meet the personalized learning needs of music education students. Moreover, the separation of theory and practice hinders students from building a complete knowledge system, affecting their long-term development in the field of music.

To address this issue, selecting a systematic, standardized, and comprehensive piano improvisational accompaniment textbook is particularly important. There are already some excellent textbook resources on the market, such as the "Piano" textbook (2006 edition) authored by Li Heping, Tang Chongqing, Zhang Hui, and others. This textbook balances theory and practice in its content design, focusing on the impartation of basic knowledge and the cultivation of practical skills. It provides a systematically organized training program and a scientifically reasonable layout of knowledge points, offering strong support for students' learning.

3.4 Diversified Teaching Methods and the Cultivation of Integrated Practical Abilities

The piano improvisational accompaniment course, as an interdisciplinary subject, holds significance not only in imparting piano performance and accompaniment skills but, more importantly, in fostering students' abilities to integrate and apply musical knowledge across various disciplines. However, current teaching practices tend to be overly focused on the instruction of basic skills, neglecting the cultivation of students' comprehensive practical abilities.

This pedagogical approach leads to students encountering bottlenecks in dealing with diverse musical styles, arranging complex musical textures, and creating personalized harmonies. As improvisational accompaniment courses are often scheduled just before graduation, students face academic pressures and time constraints, making it difficult to accumulate practical experience. This affects the enhancement of their improvisational skills and their potential for future development.

Therefore, it is particularly urgent to reform teaching methods and strengthen the cultivation of comprehensive practical abilities. Teachers should employ diversified teaching strategies, integrating elements such as piano performance, composition techniques, harmony theory, and song analysis into improvisational accompaniment teaching. Through methods like case analysis, group discussion, and practical operations, they can stimulate students' interest in learning and creativity, enhancing their overall musical literacy and practical skills. Concurrently, the curriculum should be appropriately adjusted to ensure that students have ample time and opportunities for in-depth study and extensive practice, thereby laying a solid foundation for their professional development.

4. Features and Advantages of "Improvisational Accompaniment Course" in New Textbooks

The distinctive features and advantages of the new textbooks provide a solid foundation for the teaching of improvisational accompaniment courses. By strengthening the "teacher education" concept, balancing theory with practice, designing systematic and orderly training programs, adopting innovative teaching methods, considering personalized and differentiated teaching needs, and focusing on the cultivation of comprehensive abilities, the new textbooks are expected to significantly enhance the teaching effectiveness of improvisational accompaniment courses and contribute to the cultivation of high-quality music education talents.

4.1 Deepening the Connotation of "Teacher Education" to Comprehensively Promote the Improvement of Comprehensive Abilities

Against the backdrop of 21st-century music education, the compilation of the new textbooks particularly emphasizes the importance of the "teacher education" characteristic. This feature is mainly reflected in the in-depth exploration of standard accompaniment and four-hand 联弹 (Note: The term "联弹" seems to be a typographical error or missing translation; it is assumed to mean "ensemble playing"), as well as the extensive selection of music pieces. Especially in the keyboard harmony practice section, the new textbooks have made a qualitative leap, providing a clear learning path and practical guide for the improvement of improvisational accompaniment skills. Through carefully designed exercises, the new textbooks effectively promote students' ability to transform theoretical knowledge into actual performance skills, while strengthening the integration and application of interdisciplinary knowledge.

The new textbooks have carefully selected classic pieces such as "Homesickness" and "Butterfly Lovers," which are not only closely related to students' lives and easy to resonate emotionally but also have a subtle influence on cultivating students' musical appreciation and expressive abilities. This not only allows students to master the correct interpretation and performance methods while enjoying the beauty of music but also greatly enhances their enthusiasm for learning and desire to explore.

Looking forward, subsequent versions of the new textbooks have the potential to further broaden their horizons and explore more diversified training models for comprehensive keyboard application abilities. By introducing innovative teaching methods and means, such as virtual reality technology and interactive teaching software, a richer and more vivid learning experience can be provided for students, helping them to achieve more outstanding accomplishments in the field of improvisational accompaniment. At the same time, the new textbooks will continue to pay attention to the latest trends and research results in the field of music education, constantly absorbing fresh blood to ensure the timeliness and forward-looking nature of the textbooks, and contribute to the cultivation of high-quality music education talents.

Deepening the connotation of "teacher education" is key to improving the comprehensive abilities of music education students. The new textbooks provide students with comprehensive learning resources and practical opportunities by strengthening the combination of theory and practice, carefully selecting educationally meaningful pieces, and introducing innovative teaching methods. These measures help cultivate students' musical literacy, stimulate their creativity, and cultivate talents with high professional capabilities and innovative spirit for the future music education career.

4.2 Integration of Piano Foundation and Improvisational Accompaniment: Innovative Teaching Practices

Currently, traditional piano foundation courses and improvisational accompaniment courses often exist in a state of separation within the teaching framework. To address this situation, new textbooks have adopted innovative

design concepts that achieve an organic integration and synchronized teaching of both. This teaching model, through meticulously designed content, aims to construct a learning pathway that combines theory with practice, starting from the basics to advanced levels.

The first three volumes of the new textbooks systematically arrange music theory teaching and piano performance skill training according to the principle of progressing from simple to complex. This arrangement ensures that students can gradually improve on a solid knowledge framework and skill foundation. In the fourth volume, the textbooks broaden students' musical horizons by introducing the analysis of classical works from different musical periods and genres, deepening their musical perception abilities and providing rich inspiration and materials for the study of improvisational accompaniment.

This synchronized and integrated teaching strategy not only enhances learning efficiency but also subtly promotes the comprehensive development of students' abilities. Students are enabled to transcend the boundaries between theory and practice, applying their knowledge flexibly to the creation and performance of improvisational accompaniment.

In future teaching practices, it is recommended that teachers take full advantage of the strengths of the new textbooks, flexibly adjusting teaching content and methods. Teachers should actively guide students to explore the intrinsic connections between piano foundation and improvisational accompaniment, stimulating students' creativity and imagination through a variety of teaching methods and interactive learning activities. This will enable students to achieve leaps and enhancements in their personal abilities while enjoying the beauty of music.

The compilation of the new textbooks provides an innovative practical path for the integrated teaching of piano foundation and improvisational accompaniment. Through this teaching model, the learning efficiency of students can be effectively improved, their comprehensive abilities can be developed, and professional talents with an innovative spirit and practical capabilities can be cultivated for the field of music education.

4.3 Fostering Innovative Thinking and the Cultivation of Personal Expression

In the philosophy of compiling the new textbooks, stimulating students' innovative thinking and encouraging personal expression hold a central position. The textbooks facilitate the integration of advanced performance skills with innovative thinking in improvisational accompaniment by deconstructing the harmonic structure of classical pieces and exploring diverse transformations of accompanying textures. This teaching method transcends traditional performance modes and further deepens the shaping of students' individual musical languages and styles.

The textbooks construct a practical platform full of challenges and opportunities for students through four-hand ensemble playing, instant song accompaniment composition, and a variety of keyboard harmonic exercises. On this platform, students can transform theoretical knowledge into music creation with practical significance, where each attempt is an in-depth exploration of personal potential, and each innovation contributes to the musical arts.

Teachers play a crucial role in this teaching process. They should act as guides and motivators, encouraging students to express their musical views and attempt different accompaniment designs and fingering arrangements. Through heuristic teaching and personalized guidance, teachers help students accumulate practical experience while consolidating foundational knowledge, gradually building their personal music creation systems.

It is worth mentioning that the new textbooks grant teachers greater autonomy in teaching, enabling them to flexibly adjust teaching content and methods according to the specific situations and learning progress of students, ensuring the pertinence and effectiveness of teaching. This student-centered teaching philosophy not only meets the personalized learning needs of students but also provides a broad space for the development of their musical talents.

The compilation of the new textbooks emphasizes the importance of innovative thinking and personal expression, providing students with a comprehensive music education environment by building practical platforms, strengthening the guiding role of teachers, and granting teachers autonomy in teaching. This teaching model is expected to cultivate future music educators and performers with innovative capabilities and personalized musical styles.

5. Application Strategies of New Textbooks in Improvisational Accompaniment Course Teaching Practice

5.1 Integration of Collective and Small Group Discussions: A Teaching Model to Promote Interactive Communication

To optimize teaching outcomes, this study proposes the integration of collective lectures with small group discussions to create a structured yet flexible learning environment. Teachers should design topics such as "Exploration of Chord Art and Refinement of Playing Techniques" based on students' learning progress and core

knowledge points. They should explain theoretical knowledge in an accessible manner during large lectures, ensuring that students can establish a solid foundation. Furthermore, in small group discussions, students engage in practical operations and innovative attempts around themes like "The Tacit Cooperation of Four-Hand Ensemble Playing" or "Creative Expression of Song Improvisational Accompaniment." This not only deepens their understanding of improvisational accompaniment skills but also hones their teamwork and music composition abilities. Students are encouraged to actively prepare in advance, gather information independently, and be well-prepared for classroom discussions.

In this process, the role of the teacher should transform into that of a facilitator and listener, encouraging students to share their learning experiences and creative ideas. Through methods such as group discussions, outcome presentations, and peer reviews, the enthusiasm of students' participation is stimulated, promoting the exchange and integration of different thoughts. The teacher's timely intervention, by affirming and encouraging students' performance and providing supplementary explanations and summaries for common issues, ensures the achievement of teaching objectives.

This teaching model has improved teaching effectiveness and fostered the development of students' independent learning, cooperative communication, and innovative abilities. It injects vitality and inspiration into students' musical learning journey, laying a solid foundation for their future musical career development. By strengthening collective and small group discussions, the teaching model effectively promotes interactive communication among students, improves teaching quality, and cultivates students' comprehensive musical abilities. This student-centered teaching approach has significant practical significance and application value in achieving the depth and breadth of music education.

5.2 In-Depth Integration of Piano Foundation and Improvisational Accompaniment: Shaping Comprehensive Musical Literacy with "The Moon Represents My Heart" as a Case Study

In the process of integrating piano foundation teaching with the cultivation of improvisational accompaniment skills, exploring the combination of theoretical knowledge and practical skills is an important issue in music education. Taking the widely sung classic song "The Moon Represents My Heart" as an example, an in-depth analysis and demonstration of the teaching method that combines music theory with practice can be provided.

Starting with piano foundation teaching, teachers should guide students to deeply analyze the harmonic structure of the song, understand its simple yet affectionate I-VI-IV-V harmonic progression, and learn how to create a gentle and nostalgic musical atmosphere through these harmonies. Students will learn about the function and color of chords and their flexible application in improvisational accompaniment.

Furthermore, teachers can select etudes that include specific patterns such as arpeggiated chords, allowing students to master these patterns before attempting to apply them to the improvisational accompaniment of "The Moon Represents My Heart." This cross-piece practice helps students enhance their ability to transfer and apply musical elements between different pieces.

The new textbook's additional accompaniment patterns provide practical material for improvisational accompaniment teaching. Teachers can guide students to explore different accompaniment patterns such as broken chords and columnar harmonies, and teach them how to choose suitable accompaniment methods based on the song's emotions and artistic conception, making the improvisational accompaniment more fitting for the song's emotional expression.

In the case analysis section, teachers can invite students to present their own improvisational accompaniment works and encourage peer reviews and discussions. This interactive communication not only stimulates students' enthusiasm for creation but also promotes their growth through mutual learning.

Through in-depth analysis and practice with "The Moon Represents My Heart," students will experience the close connection between piano foundation and improvisational accompaniment, master solid playing skills, and continuously improve their improvisational accompaniment abilities, laying a solid foundation for future music learning and career development.

5.3 Enhancing Post-Class Practice Sessions: Strengthening Improvisational Accompaniment Skills through Examples

In the cultivation of musical skills, post-class practice plays an essential role as a key pathway to consolidate learning outcomes and deepen the mastery of techniques. The new textbooks, catering to this need, have meticulously designed post-class exercises aimed at bridging classroom knowledge with practical performance skills.

Taking "chord progression and texture variation" as an example, the new textbooks not only list specific chord patterns, such as C-G-Am-F, but also provide a variety of accompanying textures, such as arpeggios, broken chords, and block chords, for students to explore in practice. Teachers can select exercise content that is targeted and suitable for each student's level, ensuring that every student can effectively improve based on their individual abilities and progress.

During the teaching process, teachers actively encourage students to view post-class exercises as opportunities for self-improvement, deeply understanding the objectives and requirements of each exercise. Through repeated playing and fine-tuning, students can experience the impact of different chord progressions and accompanying textures on the expression of musical emotions. For instance, when practicing "A Wedding in Dream," students can feel the soft and dreamy effect brought by the arpeggiated texture, as well as the firmness and strength added by the block chords.

To enhance learning outcomes, teachers have established a feedback mechanism for post-class exercises, regularly assessing students' practice results to promptly grasp their learning progress and difficulties encountered, and providing targeted guidance and suggestions. This feedback mechanism helps teachers design personalized practice plans for students. For example, for students who have difficulty with chord transitions, teachers can design specialized exercises and demonstrate correct fingering and wrist movements to help students effectively overcome technical obstacles.

Through this teaching method and feedback mechanism, post-class exercises are transformed into an interesting process full of exploration and discovery. Students not only consolidate classroom knowledge in this process but also gradually master the core skills of improvisational accompaniment, laying a solid foundation for their future musical learning and performance practice.

The new textbooks, by deepening the post-class practice sessions, effectively strengthen the teaching of improvisational accompaniment skills, improving the efficiency and depth of teaching, and providing strong support for cultivating music education talents with a solid musical foundation and innovative capabilities, showcasing new directions and possibilities in the practice of music education.

6. Conclusion

This study provides an in-depth exploration of the application and teaching practices of "Improvisational Accompaniment" in the "Piano" textbooks of music majors at ordinary higher education institutions in China, revealing the central role of improvisational accompaniment in cultivating students' musical practical abilities and innovative thinking. Through an in-depth analysis of the characteristics of Chinese textbook compilation and teaching methods, this paper not only highlights the important position of improvisational accompaniment courses in the music education system but also reflects their unique value and practical significance in the global perspective of music education.

This paper clearly points out that improvisational accompaniment courses are key to enhancing students' comprehensive musical quality and innovative capabilities. The compilation of new textbooks, especially in strengthening the "teacher education" concept, achieving synchronous integration of piano foundation and improvisational accompaniment teaching, and stimulating students' innovative thinking and personal expression, provides strong support for teaching. Through the combination of collective classes and small group discussions, in-depth integration of piano foundation and improvisational accompaniment, and deepening of post-class practice sessions, new textbooks effectively promote the comprehensive improvement of students' musical literacy and improvisational accompaniment abilities.

At the same time, this paper also soberly points out the challenges in the teaching process of improvisational accompaniment, including the rationality of course scheduling, the singularity of teaching forms, and the dilemma of cultivating students' comprehensive practical abilities. The existence of these issues requires educators to continue to explore and innovate, flexibly applying a variety of teaching methods and means to ensure the continuous improvement of teaching quality and student learning outcomes.

Looking forward, with the continuous renewal of music education concepts and the continuous innovation of teaching methods, improvisational accompaniment courses are expected to play a more important role in the music education cause in China and around the world. By continuously optimizing course settings, improving textbook content, and strengthening teaching practices and feedback mechanisms, we are confident in cultivating more music education talents with a solid foundation in music, good innovative capabilities, and high practical abilities.

Ultimately, this study hopes that through these efforts, it will contribute more to the high-quality development of China's music education cause, promote innovation and progress in music education, and provide Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions for the development of global music education.

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