



The Teacher's Perspective on Chinese Contemporary Dance at Three Vocational College of Art, Jiangxi Province, The People's Republic of China

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Abstract

This study aims to systematically investigate teachers' perspectives on music teaching for Chinese contemporary dance in three representative vocational art institutions in Jiangxi Province, China: Jiangxi Vocational College of Art, Nanchang Vocational University, and Nanchang Normal University. The research seeks to examine the current implementation of music teaching within contemporary dance programs, identify core teaching methods shaped by differing institutional orientations, analyze the practical challenges encountered by frontline teachers, and propose targeted strategies to optimize integrated music–dance pedagogy. Focusing on two key dimensions commonly used music types in teaching and practical music teaching methods this study addresses a notable gap in existing research concerning the limited empirical exploration of music–dance teaching practices in regional vocational art colleges and provides both theoretical and practical support for the reform and development of contemporary dance music education in China's vocational education sector. A qualitative research design was adopted to ensure the authenticity and depth of the findings. Data were collected between August and December 2025 through semi-structured interviews with six key teachers and sustained classroom observations across multiple teaching cycles. All participants met strict selection criteria, including over ten years of teaching experience in Chinese contemporary dance, possession of a doctoral degree in music or dance performance or an associate professor title, and a demonstrated willingness to share professional teaching experiences. Interview protocols covered seven core dimensions: curriculum and teaching objectives, teaching methods, instructional media and tools, classroom environment, evaluation and assessment, practical activities, and student engagement and motivation. Multiple data sources including interview transcripts, classroom observation notes, and curriculum documents were analyzed using descriptive qualitative methods to identify key themes, compare institutional practices, and systematically present teachers' professional understandings and pedagogical experiences. The findings reveal that music-related courses in the three institutions are closely aligned with their respective educational orientations. Jiangxi Vocational College of Art, characterized by vocational specialization, integrates regional folk music resources such as Jiangxi tea-picking opera melodies and traditional drum rhythms into

core courses to enhance students' professional stage performance skills. Nanchang Vocational University, emphasizing industry education integration, focuses on digital music technology and commercial application contexts, equipping students with practical competencies such as audio editing and electronic music matching. Nanchang Normal University, oriented toward teacher education, prioritizes music–dance pedagogy, guiding students to transform professional music knowledge into teachable content suitable for basic education settings. Across institutions, commonly adopted teaching methods include Kodály-based solfège practice to strengthen rhythmic perception and music–movement coordination, demonstration-guided practice that balances standardized instruction with creative exploration, and scenario-based simulation adapted to vocational performance, commercial production, or teaching practice contexts. Despite these strengths, several shared challenges were identified. Many teachers possess strong dance backgrounds but lack systematic formal training in music, which constrains in-depth musical analysis and improvisational accompaniment. Additionally, specialized teaching resources remain insufficient, including a shortage of curated contemporary dance music textbooks, limitations in audio equipment for reproducing complex multilayered soundscapes, and the absence of stable interdisciplinary collaboration mechanisms between music and dance departments. Nevertheless, teachers across all three institutions consistently recognize music as a core expressive component of contemporary dance rather than a mere background element. Teaching practices such as eight-beat rhythm movement phrase creation, campus art exhibitions, and interdisciplinary workshops have effectively enhanced students' learning motivation, rhythmic sensitivity, movement expressiveness, and understanding of the artistic essence of contemporary dance.

Keywords: Teacher's Perspective, Chinese Contemporary, Dance Chinese Contemporary Music

1. Introduction

Chinese contemporary dance is a distinctive performing art form that seamlessly integrates traditional Chinese culture, classical dance, folk dance, martial arts, and Western modern dance techniques. Unlike traditional Chinese dance, which emphasizes stylized expressions and cultural symbolism, it prioritizes the free expression of personal emotions, philosophical reflections, and social issues through abstract choreography and unrestricted body movements embodying both modern aesthetic values and the evolving essence of Chinese cultural identity. In this artistic practice, music is far more than a background accessory; as a core expressive element deeply intertwined with dance training, performance, and choreography, it shapes movement logic, mediates emotional communication, and ensures the completeness of stage narratives. Its interdisciplinary nature, integrating traditional instruments, modern electronic sounds, and experimental soundscapes, demands that dancers translate abstract auditory experiences into physical expressions, while challenging teachers to guide students in forging profound emotional connections between sound and movement.

In Jiangxi Province, three representative vocational art colleges have formed distinct teaching contexts rooted in their unique school-running orientations: Jiangxi Vocational College of Art leverages regional folk resources to promote interdisciplinary performances, focusing on vocational specialization and the cultivation of professional stage skills; Nanchang Vocational University, as a pilot for undergraduate-level vocational education, emphasizes industry-education integration, highlighting digital music and multimedia-integrated teaching to meet market demands; Nanchang Normal University adheres to the philosophy of "integration of art and education," centering on teacher training to equip future educators with comprehensive music and dance teaching capabilities. These institutional characteristics have given rise to targeted challenges and diverse practices in contemporary dance music teaching,

making them ideal cases for exploring the adaptation of teaching models to different educational goals.

However, existing research on Chinese contemporary dance education primarily focuses on macro policy analysis, curriculum framework construction, or the artistic expression of dance itself, with insufficient in-depth exploration of teachers' practical perspectives especially their experiences, challenges, and innovative strategies in music teaching within specific regional and institutional contexts. Few studies have systematically compared how music teaching content, methods, and resource allocation adapt to distinct school-running orientations, leaving a gap in understanding the actual implementation of "music-dance integration" in vocational education.

To address this gap, this study focuses on two core dimensions: "commonly used music types in teaching" and "practical music teaching methods." By investigating frontline teachers from the three aforementioned colleges, it aims to reveal the current situation, commonalities, and differences of contemporary dance music teaching in vocational education, identify practical bottlenecks such as insufficient teacher musical literacy and inadequate specialized teaching resources, and provide targeted theoretical references and empirical support for curriculum optimization, teaching method innovation, and the improvement of comprehensive quality of dance professionals. Ultimately, this research contributes to the advancement of a more systematic, adaptive, and high-quality contemporary dance music education system in China's vocational art colleges.

2. Literature Review

The development of modern dance education in China has undergone a profound transformation from the initial "import and imitation" phase focused on introducing Western modern dance techniques and improvisational systems (Martha Graham's contraction-release method and Merce Cunningham's chance dance) to the current stage of "integration and innovation" (Chen & Liu, 2021; Hong, 2018). Further elaborated that modern dance education has shifted from a traditional "performance-oriented" model, centered on technical mastery and stage presentation, to an "aesthetic-oriented" paradigm that emphasizes bodily awareness, emotional expression, and the exploration of social and philosophical themes where music is no longer a passive backdrop but a core co-expressive element shaping movement logic, emotional resonance, and narrative completeness (Sun, 2021).

In the context of vocational art education, He (2020) identified the dual challenges faced by modern dance programs: balancing "professional specialization" (cultivating stage-ready technical skills) and "practical applicability" (adapting to diverse career scenarios such as education, commercial performances, and community art). However, existing research in this field tends to focus on macro curriculum frameworks or national policy analysis, with insufficient attention to teachers' practical perspectives especially their on-the-ground experiences, adaptive strategies, and pain points in music-dance integration within specific regional and institutional contexts. Liu & Zhao (2022) noted that vocational college dance curricula often struggle with disjointed music and dance training, but few studies have systematically compared how teaching practices adapt to distinct school-running orientations (e.g., vocational specialization, industry-education integration, teacher training).

Regarding Chinese contemporary dance music, Yin (2018) highlighted its distinctive cross-cultural integration characteristics, which blend traditional Chinese elements (Kunqu opera melodies, Guqin rhythms, and folk drum patterns) with Western contemporary composition techniques (e.g., minimalism, ambient music, and sound design). Wu (2025) Under the "New Curriculum Standards", the teaching of music and dance in primary schools urgently needs reform. As a new teaching method, module teaching is very suitable for the teaching of

music and dance in primary schools under the background of “New Curriculum Standards”. It is conducive to enriching students’ artistic experience and to highlighting their learning initiative. The application strategies of module teaching in primary school music and dance mainly include: design of teaching modules; stimulating students’ independent learning with interest; encouraging students to communicate and cooperate to consolidate learning results and expand innovation, and making teaching life-oriented. Jin & Snook (2022), China has a proud history of dance excellence. Historically, dance education has focused on performance skills, therefore it is difficult for most people, to grasp that a dance education pedagogy can lead students in a creative and inclusive manner, where technically well performed ‘steps’ are not as important as the process.

Against this backdrop, this study addresses critical research gaps by focusing on three representative vocational colleges in Jiangxi Province, each with distinct educational orientations. By investigating frontline teachers’ perspectives on music selection, teaching methods, resource utilization, and institutional adaptation, it enriches the existing literature on regional vocational dance music teaching. Unlike previous studies that adopt a broad national perspective, this research delves into context-specific practices, revealing how music teaching aligns with institutional goals and responds to local cultural and industry needs thereby providing targeted empirical support for the refinement of vocational arts education curricula.

3. Research Methodology

This paper employs qualitative research methods to systematically explore the teacher's perspective on music teaching for Chinese contemporary dance, focusing on practical experience, teaching methods, and challenges.

1. Sample Characteristics And Data Collection

The research subjects are 6 frontline teachers engaged in Chinese contemporary dance music teaching at three vocational colleges in Jiangxi Province. The selection criteria include: (1) full-time employment at the target institutions; (2) at least 10 years of teaching experience in Chinese contemporary dance; (3) holding a doctoral degree in Music/Dance Performance or associate professor title; (4) willingness to participate in interviews and share teaching practices. Data collection was conducted from August 2025 to December 2025, including semi-structured interviews (covering 7 dimensions: curriculum teaching, teaching methods, teaching media, etc.) and classroom observations to verify the implementation of teaching practices.

2. Analytical Method

This study adopts descriptive analysis to process the collected data. First, interview records and classroom observation notes were sorted and encoded to extract core themes such as curriculum alignment, teaching method application, and resource constraints. Then, cross-analysis was conducted based on the school-running orientations of the three institutions to summarize commonalities and differences. The authenticity and reliability of the data were ensured by combining empirical information such as curriculum documents and competition achievements, in line with the research's authenticity and relevance principles.

4. Results

4.1 Curriculum Alignment with Institutional Orientations

Jiangxi Vocational College of Art (vocational specialization) weaves regional folk music resources such as the melodies of Jiangxi tea-picking opera and the rhythms of folk drums into core courses like Fundamentals of Dance Music and Modern Dance and Sound



Design, with the aim of fostering students' professional stage performance skills. The curriculum follows a progressive sequence of "basic rhythm perception → free rhythm training → experimental music application": starting with stable 4/4 beats to build a foundation, progressing to flexible free rhythms, and finally introducing students to basic digital audio tools. Professor Cao Mali emphasized: "For vocational college students, solid rhythm skills are essential only then can they perform confidently on stage in the future."

Nanchang Vocational University (industry-education integration) centers the curriculum on digital music technology and commercial application scenarios. Core courses include Modern Dance Digital Soundscape Cognition and Modern Dance Music Application in Commercial Scenarios, progressing in the order of "basic music theory → modern dance digital soundscape cognition → audio editing → commercial scenario application." For example, Basic Modern Dance Audio Editing is taught concurrently with "commercial modern dance segment creation," enabling students to apply what they learn directly. Professor Hu Jiayi stated: "The curriculum is designed to be practical enabling students to quickly adapt to commercial performance needs in future careers."

Nanchang Normal University (teacher training) prioritizes music-dance teaching methodology. Core courses such as Modern Dance Music Analysis and Application and Modern Dance Teaching Methodology follow the sequence of "basic music theory → modern dance music-teaching logic → teaching segment design → classroom demonstration." Starting with rhythm decomposition and timbre recognition, the curriculum links to "modern dance music-movement teaching segment design," centering on "cultivating future modern dance teachers." Professor Ma Junyi noted: "Our students will teach dance in the future they must first understand music themselves and be able to transform music knowledge into teachable content."

4.2 Teaching Methods and Core Competency Cultivation

4.2.1 Common Core Methods

All three teachers apply Kodály syllable practice (using syllables like "ta," "ta-a," "ta-ti-ti") in teaching, which transforms abstract rhythmic concepts into tangible vocal expressions. This method helps freshmen develop three core competencies: precise rhythm perception (identifying off-beats and rhythmic layers), coordination between music and dance movements (linking vocal syllables to movement accents), and group synchronization ability (unifying rhythm through collective syllable recitation). For example, Professor Cao Mali guides freshmen to recite "ta-ti-ti" while performing spiral torso turns, aligning the long "ta" with deep spins and the short "ti-ti" with quick direction changes.

4.2.2 Instrument-Specific Guidance Strategies

For pianos, Professor Cao Mali uses live accompaniment with real-time adjustability adjusting tempo according to students' proficiency in difficult movements like floor rolls and emphasizing beat accents through staccato playing to guide movement intensity control. For folk instruments (guzheng, folk drums), she adopts rhythm decomposition teaching: matching knee bends with strong beats and toe taps with weak beats for folk drums' "strong-weak-strong" rhythm, and extended arm movements with the guzheng's smooth legato melody. For electronic instruments (metronomes, synthesizers), Professor Hu Jiayi uses multi-mode electronic metronomes set to different tempos (120 BPM for lively campus performances, 80 BPM for elegant commercial promotions) and links synthesizer bass peaks to grounded hip sway movements.

4.2.3 Balancing Demonstration and Free Exploration

The three teachers adopt a consistent "demonstration → scaffolded tasks → group collaboration" approach. They first demonstrate core music-dance logic, then design limited exploration tasks: Professor Hu Jiayi asks students to modify 1-2 movements on the basis of

demonstrated content; Professor Cao Mali guides adjustments within folk music rhythm frameworks; Professor Ma Junyi sets teaching-oriented exploration tasks. Finally, group collaborative activities encourage idea exchange, avoiding blind improvisation while preserving creative space.

4.3 Teaching Media Application and Classroom Environment Support

4.3.1 Core Teaching Media Functions

Piano accompaniment plays three irreplaceable roles: real-time adaptation to teaching progress (flexibly adjusting tempo and dynamics), shaping movement quality (guiding emotional expression through dynamic changes), and establishing an intuitive music-body connection (following students' movements unlike pre-recorded music). For Nanchang Normal University's teacher training orientation, it also helps future educators understand live music application in teaching.

Electronic metronomes are integrated progressively: initial single-mode use (100-110 BPM) for basic movement rhythm foundation; intermediate multi-mode introduction for adapting to diverse rhythms (3/4 waltz, 6/8 folk); advanced phasing out to encourage internal musical rhythm perception. Professor Hu Jiayi enhances comprehension with metronome waveform displays.

Digital tools vary by institution: Jiangxi Vocational College of Art uses basic digital workstations for simple experimental music editing; Nanchang Vocational University Employs Audacity audio editing software and multi-screen projectors (displaying music waveforms); Nanchang Normal University adopts rhythm sticks, teaching videos, and rhythm training apps simple tools suitable for primary and secondary school teaching scenarios.

4.3.2 Classroom Environment Characteristics

Jiangxi Vocational College of Art's 200-square-meter spacious open dance studio accommodates 20-25 students for collective rhythmic training and circle dances, enabling mutual observation to enhance group synchronization. The sound system clearly presents experimental music details, with portable folk drum sets and basic digital workstations supporting regional music integration. Nanchang Vocational University's flexible classroom layout (convertible to stage-style rectangular or studio-style circular) adapts to commercial scenario simulations and group creation. Professional sound systems and digital workstations accurately present electronic music bass peaks and rhythm changes, enhancing scene immersion during commercial performance simulations. Nanchang Normal University's semi-circular dance studio facilitates teacher demonstrations and student observation/imitation. The sound system's acoustic effect clearly presents basic dynamics and rhythm details, with sound-absorbing wall treatments reducing echo. A resource corner displays modern dance teaching cases and movement quality standard posters, familiarizing students with future teaching environments.

4.3.3 Existing Equipment Deficiencies

All three institutions face common equipment issues: insufficient multi-layered sound reproduction (blurring subtle details in complex music), lack of dance-specific functions (no loop playback or tempo adjustment without pitch change), and uneven sound distribution/aging equipment (students in back rows struggle to hear rhythm details; aging metronomes/speakers experience tempo jumps or distortion).

4.4 Evaluation, Activities, and Student Engagement

4.4.1 Evaluation and Assessment System

The three institutions uniformly set music-related learning outcomes at 25% of the total modern dance course score, with a 60:40 weight ratio of daily performance to final exams. Daily performance (60%) includes classroom participation (20%), homework completion (20%), group activity performance (10%), and peer/self-reflection (10%). Final exams (40%)

are differentiated by orientation: solo performances with folk/experimental music (Jiangxi Vocational College of Art), commercial scenario group works (Nanchang Vocational University), and "music-dance integration lesson plan and simulated teaching" (Nanchang Normal University). Rhythm sensitivity assessment adopts a four-dimensional approach: in-class real-time feedback (correcting rhythm accuracy), monthly rhythm tests (dictation, adaptation, group synchronization), semester-end performance assessments (practical rhythm application in choreography), and peer evaluation (mutual reflection on rhythm consistency).

4.4.2 Practical Teaching Activities

"8-beat rhythm-movement phrase creation" is a core activity across all three institutions. Freshmen analyze musical rhythmic characteristics (syncopation, legato) and design corresponding movements, syncopated rhythms with sharp arm flicks, legato rhythms with smooth floor rolls. Through group creation and peer feedback, students grasp the core logic that movement quality must align with musical rhythm. Institutional-specific activities include: interdisciplinary workshops with the Music Department and modern dance creation exhibitions (Jiangxi Vocational College of Art); digital music editing exercises and commercial performance simulations (Nanchang Vocational University); teaching simulation practices and group lesson preparation/presentations (Nanchang Normal University). Campus art exhibitions (e.g., Modern Dance Creation Showcase) strengthen group rhythm synchronization, deepen emotional consistency between music and dance, and promote interdisciplinary cooperation with music departments.

4.4.3 Student Engagement and Motivation

Activities aligned with institutional orientations effectively stimulate participation: folk music integration activities at Jiangxi Vocational College of Art resonate with students' cultural identities; digital music operations and commercial scenario simulations at Nanchang Vocational University link to future careers; teaching simulation activities at Nanchang Normal University align with students' educator aspirations. For students lacking confidence in music-related public performances, teachers adopt a progressive strategy: starting with small-scale, low-pressure group demonstrations; providing personalized support (simplified music, one-on-one guidance, highlighting strengths); using peer role models (confident leaders, senior success stories); and gradually increasing performance formality (from classroom demonstrations to campus mini-exhibitions). Music teaching content closely links to future careers, enhancing students' learning direction and motivation. Vocational performers master diverse music adaptation, commercial practitioners gain digital tool skills, and future educators develop music-dance teaching methodology.

5. Conclusion

This study reveals that the music teaching for Chinese contemporary dance at three vocational colleges in Jiangxi Province—Jiangxi Vocational College of Art, Nanchang Vocational University, and Nanchang Normal University—is highly aligned with their distinct school-running orientations. Jiangxi Vocational College of Art, focusing on vocational specialization, weaves regional folk music resources (such as Jiangxi tea-picking opera melodies and folk drum rhythms) into core courses to foster students' professional stage performance skills; Nanchang Vocational University, emphasizing industry-education integration, centers its curriculum on digital music technology and commercial application scenarios, equipping students with practical skills like audio editing and electronic music matching for commercial performances; Nanchang Normal University, oriented toward teacher training, prioritizes music-dance teaching methodology, guiding students to transform professional music knowledge into teachable content suitable for primary and secondary school dance classrooms.

In teaching practice, teachers widely adopt diverse and targeted methods: Kodály syllable practice to cultivate students' rhythm perception and music-dance coordination, instrument-specific guidance strategies (real-time adjustment for piano accompaniment, rhythm decomposition for folk instruments, scenario-based tempo setting for electronic instruments), and a “demonstration → scaffolded tasks → group collaboration” model to balance standardized teaching and students' creative exploration. All teachers attach great importance to music-dance integration, treating music not as a mere background accessory but as a core expressive element that shapes movement logic, emotional communication, and stage narrative completeness guiding students to establish deep emotional and logical connections between sound and movement.

However, the research also identifies common challenges faced by all three institutions. On the one hand, most dance teachers have professional backgrounds primarily in dance and lack sufficient formal music training, leading to limitations in areas such as in-depth music analysis, improvisational accompaniment, and creative application of diverse sound materials. On the other hand, specialized teaching resources are inadequate: there is a shortage of curated modern dance music textbooks and materials, existing audio equipment struggles to reproduce multi-layered complex music and lacks dance-specific functions, and few formal collaborative mechanisms exist between music and dance departments, hindering systematic musical literacy training for students.

Overall, the research confirms the irreplaceable core value of music in contemporary dance talent training effective music teaching not only enhances students' rhythm sensitivity, movement expression, and aesthetic perception but also deepens their understanding of the artistic connotation of contemporary dance. By systematically investigating teachers' perspectives and practical practices, this study provides a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the current situation of vocational dance music teaching, including its strengths in orientation alignment and method diversity, as well as the prominent challenges in teacher competency and resource support, laying a solid foundation for subsequent teaching reform and optimization.

6. Discussion

The research results strongly echo Chen & Liu's (2021) argument regarding the localization development of modern dance education in China, which emphasizes that the organic integration of regional cultural resources and institutional school-running orientations is a core driving force for optimizing curriculum design. Specifically, Jiangxi Vocational College of Art's integration of Jiangxi tea-picking opera melodies and folk drum rhythms into core courses fully demonstrates how regional cultural resources can be transformed into distinctive teaching content, while the differentiated curriculum frameworks of the three institutions tailored to vocational specialization, industry-education integration, and teacher training respectively further confirm that institutional orientation directly determines the focus of music teaching content and the direction of talent cultivation.

The widespread application of digital music technology in teaching, such as Nanchang Vocational University's use of Audacity audio editing software and waveform visualization tools, reflects the proactive adaptability of vocational art education to the technical needs of the contemporary performance industry. This practice is highly consistent with Liu & Zhao's (2022) research conclusions on the practical reform of vocational dance curricula, which advocate that vocational education should closely align with industry development trends to enhance students' employability. Such technological integration not only enriches the forms of music teaching but also bridges the gap between classroom training and workplace practice, enabling students to master industry-common skills in advance.

Additionally, the common challenges faced by teachers from the three institutions including insufficient formal music training, shortage of specialized modern dance music textbooks, and inadequate audio equipment with dance-specific functions are not isolated cases but universal dilemmas in vocational art education nationwide. These resource constraints highlight the urgent need for cross-institutional cooperation, such as establishing a shared database of modern dance music teaching resources, jointly developing specialized textbooks, and organizing inter-school teacher training programs to achieve complementary advantages and resource sharing.

Furthermore, the three institutions' uniform setting of music-related scores accounting for 25% of the total modern dance course score, along with the consistent 60:40 weight ratio of daily performance to final exams, indicates a broad consensus among vocational art colleges on the core status of music-dance integration in talent training. This standardized assessment design not only ensures that students attach equal importance to dance technique training and musical literacy development but also provides a replicable reference model for similar institutions in formulating scientific and reasonable evaluation systems, contributing to the standardized development of contemporary dance music teaching in vocational education.

7. Suggestions

First, strengthen resource sharing among institutions to address the shortage of specialized music materials and equipment. Second, carry out targeted training for teachers to improve their music analysis and digital technology application capabilities. Third, deepen interdisciplinary cooperation between music and dance departments to develop integrated courses and workshops. Fourth, increase policy and financial support for vocational art colleges, optimizing teaching environments and updating teaching media. Finally, promote the popularization of successful experiences, providing a scalable model for contemporary dance music teaching reform in vocational education.

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