Bridging Technical–Cultural Dissonance: A Multicultural Needs Analysis and Expert-Consensus Design of a Bel Canto Instructional Module for Chinese Art Song

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ABSTRACT

Chinese art song joins Western compositional practice with Chinese poetry, yet it is usually taught through a Bel Canto pedagogy developed for European repertoire, leaving many students technically secure but unable to convey the linguistic and poetic character of the works. This study reports the first two phases of a Type 1 Design and Development Research project that examined what teachers and students need from a dedicated module and how experts translated those needs into a design. Using Banks' multicultural education framework as an analytic lens, Phase 1 combined semi-structured interviews with six university vocal teachers, analysed through summative content analysis, with a 21-item questionnaire derived from the interview themes and completed by 188 undergraduate music students. Teachers described obstacles relating to fragmented content integration, passive knowledge construction, unequal participation in group classes and skill-centred institutional norms; some of these reflect general constraints of music teaching, whereas others, such as Mandarin diction and the marginal status of Chinese repertoire, are specific to the genre. Students most strongly endorsed difficulties with lyric tones and rhyme endings (82% agreement) and the need for aptitude-based teaching, while support for standardised resources and compulsory status was more moderate (60–69%). In Phase 2, seven experts used the Nominal Group Technique to generate, discuss and vote on design options, adopting items that received at least five of seven votes. The panel endorsed an eight-week cycle, four learning objectives, three Huang Zi art songs taught in two-week units within a 45-minute lesson template, and a five-part materials package. The study contributes a traceable pathway from multicultural needs analysis to expert-supported instructional design; the module's effectiveness requires separate evaluation.

Keywords: Chinese Art Song; Bel Canto Pedagogy; Multicultural Education; Needs Analysis; Nominal Group Technique

INTRODUCTION

Chinese art song, a genre that sets classical and modern Chinese poetry to Western harmony and piano accompaniment, is a fixture of the vocal performance curriculum in Chinese higher education, valued both for developing vocal skill and for carrying national aesthetic values (Hu, 2021, 2024). Its performance, however, is taught almost entirely through Bel Canto, the dominant paradigm for classical vocal training in Chinese universities (Hoch, 2024; Stark, 1999). Because Bel Canto's phonetic and expressive conventions derive from Italian opera, whereas Mandarin is a tonal language and classical Chinese poetry favours restraint, students often produce a technically secure but "foreign-style" sound that blurs tonal contours and overstates emotion (Liu et al., 2022; Zhang, 2018). This study uses the term *technical–cultural dissonance* for this specific gap between Western vocal technique and Chinese linguistic and aesthetic expression, and distinguishes it from broader constraints, such as class size and examination pressure, that affect music teaching generally.

The present study reports the needs-analysis and design phases of a larger Design and Development Research (DDR) project that produced the Bel Canto Instructional Module for Chinese Art Song (BCME-CAS Module). Rather than evaluating the module's effects, which is the task of a subsequent phase, it addresses the earlier and

often under-reported question of how a culturally responsive vocal module should be built: what teachers and students report needing, how these needs map onto a multicultural education framework, and how a panel of experts converted them into concrete design decisions.

BACKGROUND

Literature Review

Chinese Art Song and Its Performance through Bel Canto

Chinese art song emerged in the 1920s when composers such as Xiao Youmei, Huang Zi and Zhao Yuanren, many of them trained abroad, combined Western compositional technique with Chinese poetry and pentatonic melodic material (Wang, 2020). Scholars describe the genre as a cultural hybrid in which poetry, melody and piano accompaniment form an integrated whole (Hu, 2021). Its aesthetic centre is the poetic realm (jingjie): Hu (2024) argues that timbre, phrasing and dynamics must follow the imagery and emotional stance of the poem, which often calls for subtlety and restraint rather than operatic display. Bel Canto, in turn, offers a systematic tradition of breath support, chiaroscuro resonance and register unification (Stark, 1999; Toft, 2013), and recent work presents it as a science-informed practice capable of adaptation to new repertoires (Hoch, 2024). Studies of Chinese art song performance identify the adjustments this requires—preserving tonal contours within a legato line, articulating initials and finals clearly without sacrificing resonance, and moderating dramatic intensity (Liu et al., 2022; Zhang, 2018)—and show that Bel Canto can be productively combined with Chinese vocal techniques (Yu & Yap, 2025). Pedagogical writing in China nonetheless reports that art songs are often treated as supplementary repertoire and that teaching resources designed for them are scarce (Fu & Wang, 2019; Kan, 2018; Zeng, 2018).

Multicultural Perspectives in Music Education

Multicultural education seeks to transform curricula so that diverse cultural knowledge is integrated, critically examined and equitably taught (Banks, 1993; Gay, 2018). In music, this perspective broadens repertoire beyond the Western canon and challenges the assumption that one tradition supplies universal standards (Campbell, 2003; Volk, 2004), a position reinforced internationally by the UNESCO (2005) Convention on the diversity of cultural expressions. Empirical studies show that learning outcomes depend on how deeply cultural content is integrated (Abril, 2006) and that teachers' positive attitudes towards multicultural music education are not always matched by classroom practice (Legette, 2003; Wong et al., 2016). In China, culturally responsive music teaching has been shown to strengthen students' cultural identity (Guan et al., 2023), and vocal teachers widely acknowledge the importance of cultural considerations while curriculum design lags behind (Xie, 2024). Most of this work, however, concerns general music classes or minority and folk repertoires rather than the tension, internal to Chinese conservatory training, between an imported vocal technique and a national art song tradition.

Needs Analysis and Expert Consensus in Instructional Design

Design and Development Research distinguishes Type 1 studies, which build and evaluate a specific instructional product, from Type 2 studies, which build generalisable models (Richey & Klein, 2007). Type 1 projects typically begin with a needs analysis and then use expert judgement to shape the product, as in the development of a flipped-classroom module through interviews, surveys and Fuzzy Delphi consensus (Padzil et al., 2021). The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) offers a structured alternative to open discussion: silent idea generation, round-robin sharing, clarification and voting give every expert an equal voice and produce explicit priorities (Delbecq & Van de Ven, 1971; Harvey & Holmes, 2012). Reviews document its use mainly in health and professional education (Vahedian-Shahroodi et al., 2023), and its potential for music curriculum design remains largely untested.

Problem Statement

Three problems recur in Chinese art song teaching: students' musical expression is hindered, teaching methods are homogenised around Western-centric training models, and targeted resources are scarce (Fu & Wang, 2019;

Zeng, 2018). Because Bel Canto texts do not address Mandarin phonetics and research on the genre is largely musicological, teachers improvise, for example by applying Italian vowel drills to Chinese articulation, but these ad hoc strategies lack an evidence base and risk diluting both Bel Canto's technical precision and the genre's cultural depth.

Some of these problems are shared with music teaching in general—limited lesson time, mixed-ability groups and examination-oriented practice—while others arise specifically from the meeting of a Western vocal tradition with Chinese language and aesthetics. The culture-specific problems can be read as symptoms of an absence of multicultural education principles: where the curriculum privileges Western Bel Canto standards, the cultural connotations of Chinese art songs are marginalised; where teaching relies on a single training model, students' linguistic and cultural resources are ignored; and where teachers lack intercultural preparation, they struggle to create resources that bridge Western technique and Chinese aesthetics (Banks, 1993; Gay, 2018; Xie, 2024). Without a systematic account of what teachers and learners actually need, curriculum reform is likely to repeat the fragmentation it seeks to resolve.

Gap in the Literature

The literature reviewed above establishes the cultural meaning of Chinese art songs, the phonetic adaptations they demand of Bel Canto singers and the general value of multicultural music education, but three gaps remain. First, empirical needs analyses that triangulate the perspectives of both teachers and students in Chinese art song instruction are scarce; most claims about classroom difficulties rest on practitioner reflection. Second, Banks' (1993) dimensions of multicultural education have rarely been operationalised as an analytic lens for studio or group vocal teaching in China. Third, published accounts of vocal curriculum design seldom document how expert judgement transforms needs into specific decisions about duration, objectives, repertoire, lesson structure and materials. Consensus methods such as NGT have scarcely been applied to such decisions in music education.

Research Objectives

The study pursued two objectives corresponding to the first two phases of the DDR project:

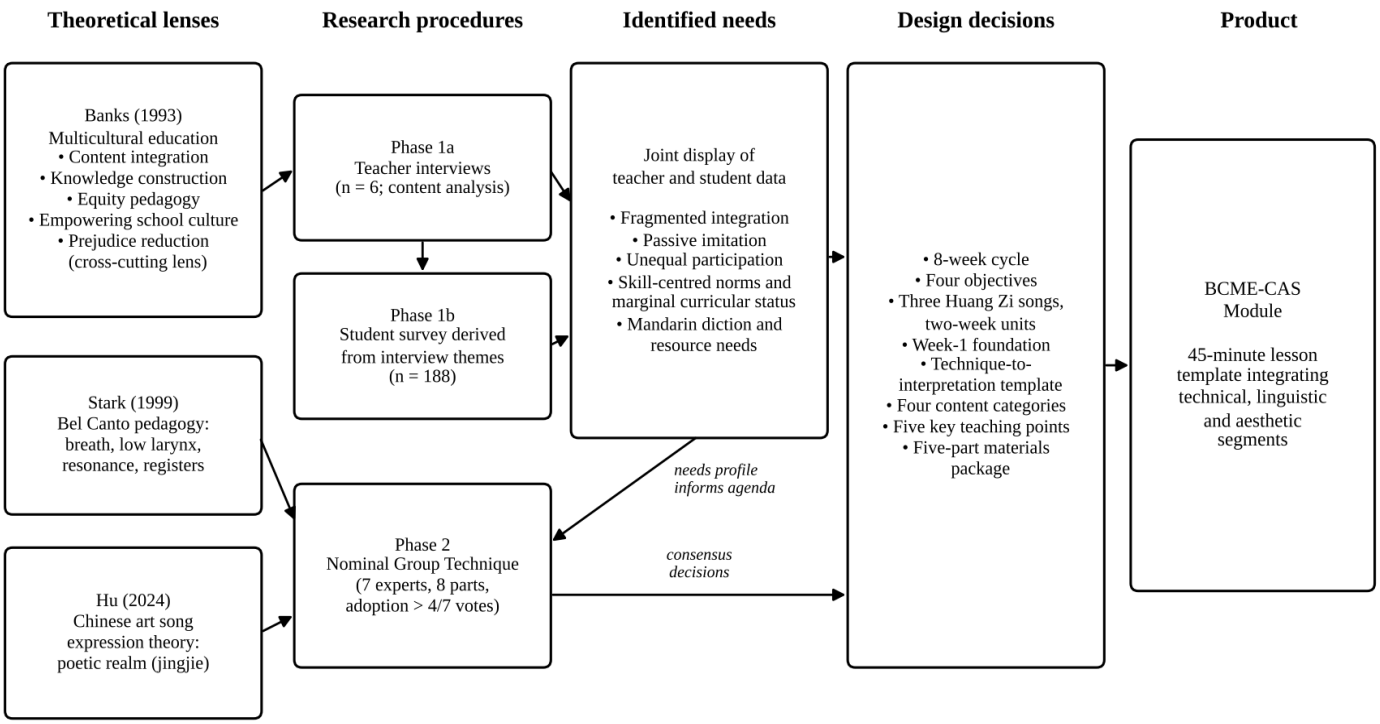
- To explore the needs for developing a Bel Canto instructional module for Chinese art song among university music teachers and students, using Banks' multicultural education framework as the analytic lens (RO1).

- To design and develop the BCME-CAS Module on the basis of expert consensus, translating the identified needs into concrete design decisions (RO2).

Accordingly, two research questions guided the study: (RQ1) What are the needs for BCME-CAS Module development for university music students? (RQ2) How should the module be designed according to expert consensus?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study combines three frameworks, each assigned a distinct role (Figure 1). **Banks' (1993) multicultural education framework** serves as the analytic lens for the needs analysis and informs the aesthetic and equity components of the design. **Stark's (1999) Bel Canto pedagogy** supplies the progressive logic of the technical components (breath, low and stable laryngeal position, resonance and register integration). **Hu's (2024) Chinese art song expression theory** defines the expressive target: delivery that follows the poetic realm, distinguishing a "self-involved" stance that infuses emotion into the scene from a "self-transcendent" stance requiring detachment and restraint. Technical–cultural dissonance arises where Stark's technical logic is applied without Hu's expressive target; Banks' framework explains why this happens institutionally and what curricular change would address it.



Banks informs the analytic lens and the aesthetic/equity components; Stark the technical sections; Hu the expressive goals and poetic interpretation.

Figure 1. Relationships among Theoretical Lenses, Research Procedures, Identified Needs, Design Decisions and the Instructional Product

Banks' dimensions were adapted to the vocal context as follows. *Content integration* refers to whether Bel Canto technique, Chinese diction, poetry and cultural interpretation are taught as a whole. *Knowledge construction* concerns whether students actively build an understanding of how meaning is made in the repertoire or reproduce models passively. *Equity pedagogy* is interpreted beyond differentiation by vocal ability: it concerns whether instruction gives all students—regardless of vocal preparation, confidence, major or linguistic background—equitable opportunities to participate, to offer their own interpretations and to achieve. *Empowering school culture* is examined at both classroom and institutional levels, including course status, class-size policy, assessment conventions, resources and support for culturally responsive teaching.

Prejudice reduction required particular consideration. During validation of the interview guide, the expert panel rejected a direct question about prejudice (I-CVI = .33), judging that asking Chinese teachers about prejudice among Chinese students would be poorly understood. However, prejudice reduction in Banks' sense also includes challenging cultural hierarchies and assumptions about artistic legitimacy, such as the belief that Western operatic norms are the universal standard of good singing. Because this hierarchy lies at the heart of technical–cultural dissonance, the study treated prejudice reduction as a cross-cutting lens: it was applied during analysis to identify hierarchical assumptions within the other four dimensions, and it was explicitly operationalised in the module design through comparative Chinese–Western aesthetic tasks. The absence of a dedicated interview prompt is acknowledged as a limitation.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted Type 1 Design and Development Research, which focuses on producing a context-specific instructional product while generating knowledge about its development (Richey & Klein, 2007). Phase 1 used a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design in which qualitative interview data informed the construction of a student questionnaire (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Because the questionnaire was built from interview themes, a degree of convergence between the datasets was expected by design; integration therefore focused on

the strength of student endorsement, on points of divergence and on information the survey added. Phase 2 used the Nominal Group Technique to reach expert consensus on the module design.

Research Settings, Participants and Recruitment

Six university vocal teachers were recruited by purposive sampling and invited individually; interview times and modes (online or face to face) were arranged in advance. Inclusion criteria were at least three years of experience teaching both Bel Canto and Chinese art song, familiarity with university vocal curricula, and willingness to participate in an extended interview. The group comprised four women and two men aged 28 to 43, with four to 17 years of teaching experience; two held doctorates and four master's degrees, three were associate professors and three senior lecturers, and several had studied abroad. Two led teaching and research offices and one was a college dean, so that both classroom and administrative perspectives were represented.

An initial sample of five to eight teachers was planned, with three regarded as a minimum for focused qualitative inquiry (Constantinou et al., 2017). Interviews were analysed as data collection proceeded, and new codes were tracked across successive interviews (Guest et al., 2006). Saturation was judged at the level of the four analytic dimensions and the module requirements rather than for every possible idiosyncratic experience, which is appropriate for a focused needs analysis.

For the survey, non-first-year music students who had studied Chinese art songs through Bel Canto were eligible; the questionnaire included a screening item on prior study of the genre. The online questionnaire received 202 responses. After excluding eight first-year respondents, two questionnaires with patterned responses and four completed in under 120 seconds, 188 valid cases remained. Respondents were 109 women (58.0%) and 79 men (42.0%), aged 18 to 24 (M = 20.97, SD = 1.19), in their second (26.1%), third (33.5%) or fourth (40.4%) year of study, and studying in nine provincial-level regions, with Fujian the largest (25.5%). They majored in vocal performance (38.8%), music education (27.7%), instrumental performance (26.6%) and musicology (6.9%). The pilot questionnaire was completed by 80 second-year vocal performance students, of whom 73 provided valid responses.

The NGT panel comprised seven experts recruited by purposive sampling and invited by formal letter, which described the purpose, the four NGT stages, the agenda and confidentiality arrangements, and asked them to reflect beforehand on Chinese art song teaching, module construction, repertoire selection and materials. Inclusion required at least eight years of university Bel Canto teaching and the rank of associate professor or a doctoral degree. The panel (four women, three men; aged 36 to 48; nine to 17 years of experience) included five doctorate holders, one professor, four associate professors and two senior lecturers, and combined Bel Canto teaching, curriculum and programme design, and professional stage performance. An odd-numbered panel reduces the likelihood of ties in binary votes, although it cannot prevent ties when several options compete; such ties were to be resolved by further voting rounds (Vahedian-Shahroodi et al., 2023).

Instruments

The semi-structured interview guide initially contained 17 questions in five sections: background, the importance of Chinese art song, teaching objectives and content, pedagogical challenges organised by Banks' dimensions, and requirements for the proposed module. One teacher pre-tested the guide, leading to simplified wording and added probes. The student questionnaire was developed from the interview themes and initially contained 24 five-point Likert items (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) in four parts, each including one negatively worded item. Three experts with more than 15 years of university teaching rated the relevance of every item on a four-point scale. Ratings of 3 or 4 were coded as agreement, and only items with unanimous agreement (I-CVI = 1.00) were retained (Polit & Beck, 2006; Yusoff, 2019). Table 1 summarises the validation history. The scale-level indices for the original item pools are reported for transparency; because all retained items reached I-CVI = 1.00, the retained versions necessarily have S-CVI/Ave and S-CVI/UA of 1.00.

Table 1 Validation History of the Phase 1 Instruments

Instrument version	Items	Retained	Removed items and reason	Validity and reliability evidence
Interview guide (original)	17	14	Age question (I-CVI = .33); direct prejudice-reduction question; question on existing school provision (I-CVI < 1.00)	Original pool: S-CVI/Ave = .84, S-CVI/UA = .82; retained 14 items: S-CVI = 1.00
Questionnaire (original)	24	22	One perception item and one item on whether group classes meet personal needs (I-CVI = .67 each)	Original pool: S-CVI/Ave = .97, S-CVI/UA = .92; retained 22 items: S-CVI = 1.00
Questionnaire (pilot, n = 73)	22	21	Reverse-worded Part 2 item ("I can integrate scattered knowledge points…") with corrected item–total r = .061	Alpha: Part 1 = .870; Part 2 = .931 after removal; Part 3 = .915; Part 4 = .885; overall = .913. Corrected item–total r = .58–.84
Questionnaire (main survey, N = 188)	21	21	—	

The final 21-item questionnaire comprised Part 1, perceptions of learning Chinese art songs (5 items); Part 2, learning difficulties and knowledge construction (6 items); Part 3, teaching model, equitable teaching and classroom atmosphere (6 items); and Part 4, needs for the module (4 items). The four parts were defined by the interview themes and confirmed through expert review; no factor analysis was conducted because the survey served a descriptive, triangulating purpose and the parts were not assumed to form a single construct. Reliability is therefore reported per part, and the overall alpha is not interpreted as evidence of unidimensionality. Three retained items were negatively worded in the questionnaire (Q1.5, Q3.5 and Q4.1; see Table 3 note). Their scores were reversed ($6 - x$) before all analyses, so that higher values consistently indicate stronger endorsement of the positive statement.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim and closed with member checking, in which the interviewer summarised key points for the teacher to confirm or correct. The interview guide asked about each Banks dimension, and the teachers were familiar with the framework before the interviews; the analysis was therefore deductive at the level of the four dimensions but inductive within them. Following the three stages of summative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Vaismoradi et al., 2013), transcripts were first read repeatedly and divided into meaning units labelled by phase, respondent and turn (e.g., P1S04T018). Open codes were then assigned to manifest content (e.g., "45-minute group class") and latent content (e.g., belief that skill outweighs interpretation), grouped into subthemes, and placed under the most relevant dimension; codes that did not fit a dimension, such as module requirements and coping strategies, were retained as separate categories. The number of teachers contributing to each subtheme was counted, and contradictory or minority accounts, such as teachers who reported few difficulties, were reported rather than merged. Credibility was supported through member checking, an audit trail of coded utterances and peer review (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Survey data were analysed descriptively in SPSS. For each item, the mean, standard deviation, 95% confidence interval and percentage of students selecting "agree" or "strongly agree" are reported. Means were classified as low (1.00–2.33), moderate (2.34–3.66) or high (3.67–5.00), but these bands are treated as descriptive conventions; agreement percentages and confidence intervals are used to judge the strength of endorsement. Integration of the two datasets used a joint display (Fetters et al., 2013).

The NGT meeting took place online through Tencent Meeting on 3 and 8 April 2026 and was organised into eight parts (Table 5), using shared online documents and an anonymous polling tool. In each part the moderator (the first author) presented the topic; experts generated ideas silently for about five minutes; ideas were recorded verbatim in round-robin order, with duplicates merged and variations retained; and a clarification stage allowed questions but prohibited criticism. Experts then restated their positions, which allowed them to revise or maintain their views, and voted anonymously. The researcher prepared the agenda, informed by the Phase 1 findings, and the experts generated the design options recorded in Table 5 during the idea-generation and round-robin stages; no draft module was presented in advance. Two types of decision were distinguished. For competing alternatives (duration, number of pieces, lesson models, composer), each expert cast one vote. For complementary elements (objectives, content categories, repertoire items, teaching points and materials), each item received a separate yes/no vote, so several items could be approved unanimously. An item was adopted when it received more than four of seven votes, that is, at least five (71%). This threshold was chosen to require a clear qualified majority rather than a bare majority while allowing for one or two dissenting experts, and further rounds were permitted when no option reached it. Silent generation, round-robin turn-taking, a ban on criticism during clarification and anonymous voting were used to limit the influence of seniority and group dynamics. Transcripts were content-analysed to record the reasons for each decision.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were adults and took part voluntarily. Teachers and experts gave informed consent face to face or by formal email, and students received consent information through university academic platforms stating that participation was voluntary, anonymous and confidential. Interviews were recorded only with permission, and participants are identified by codes (S01–S06, E01–E07).

FINDINGS

Teachers' Pedagogical Challenges through a Multicultural Lens

Table 2 presents the coding matrix, showing for each dimension the subthemes, the teachers who contributed to them and representative evidence.

Table 2 Coding Matrix of Teacher Interviews (n = 6)

Dimension	Subtheme (illustrative codes)	Teachers (n)	Representative evidence
Content integration	45–60-minute classes shared by three to six students; 10–20 minutes per student	All (6)	"It is very chaotic… it is difficult to integrate them comprehensively" (P1S01T018)
	Routine separation of technique, diction, melody, emotion and culture	S04 (1)	"Each section is taught separately and fragmented" (P1S04T018)
	Mixed abilities and voice types within one group	S05, S06 (2)	"I may need to prepare several sets of plans" (P1S06T016)
Knowledge construction	Polarised learning initiative	S01, S02, S04, S06 (4)	"You push a little before moving forward" (P1S01T022)
	Passive imitation, fragmented knowledge, fixed singing templates, little exploration of cultural context	S04, S06 (2)	"Learning techniques only involves memorizing techniques" (P1S04T022)
	Slow, effortful progress lowering motivation	S05 (1)	"Vocal music is… tiring… and yields results slowly" (P1S05T020)

Dimension	Subtheme (illustrative codes)	Teachers (n)	Representative evidence
	Minority account: few difficulties owing to text-first pre-work	S03 (1)	Students read and explain lyrics before technical work (P1S03T022)
Equity pedagogy	Fair, aptitude-based teaching as a professional norm	S01, S03, S04, S06 (4)	"I will treat every student fairly and highly respect their individual differences" (P1S04T024)
	Unequal starting points, confidence and participation; weaker students "dare not speak up"	S02, S04, S05, S06 (4)	"Disadvantaged students… are afraid of singing incorrectly… and are easily overlooked" (P1S04T024)
	Pacing conflicts and heavy workload of multiple plans	S04, S06 (2)	"You will have countless plans due to different students" (P1S06T022)
	Communicating abstract technique to students with psychological differences	S05 (1)	"Vocal music is an abstract art that you cannot see or touch" (P1S05T022)
Empowering school culture	Shared ideal: autonomy, confidence and aesthetic literacy alongside technique	All (6)	Balance technical training with humanistic aesthetic education
	Skill-, pitch- and grade-centred norms; students afraid to interpret	S04 (1)	"Vocal music teaching has tended to focus more on skills and neglect artistic connotations" (P1S04T027)
	Institutional constraints: group-class policy, elective course status, few campus aesthetic activities	S02, S04, S05 (3)	Dean seeking smaller groups and more hours from the school (P1S05T016)
	Coping strategies: stage habits, reverse classrooms, respecting non-performers, "no single right answer"	S01, S02, S03, S05 (4)	"Music has no answer, no right or wrong" (P1S03T028)
	Generational difference: adapting from one-to-one to group teaching	S05, S06 (2)	Early-career teacher trained in group classes reports few difficulties (P1S06T024)
Cross-cutting: cultural hierarchy	Western standards as default; need to avoid "foreign accents and tones"	S05 (1)	"Avoid foreign accents and tones, and sing the unique temperament… of Chinese art songs" (P1S05T030)
Module requirements	Need for a standalone course	All (6)	"I really need this course" (P1S02T033)
	Systematic, cross-linguistic pronunciation training	All (6)	Comparison of Chinese and Western phonetics (P1S01T039)
	Blended resources; graded resource package; genre guidance; peer platform; compulsory status; oral training	S01, S02, S04, S05, S06 (5)	Repertoire library, lesson templates, demonstration videos (P1S04T037)

Content Integration

All six teachers identified fixed lesson length combined with institutional group teaching as the primary barrier to integration: with 45 to 60 minutes shared among three to six students, each learner received roughly 10 to 20 minutes for every aspect of performance. These constraints are not unique to Chinese art song, but teachers

explained that they bite harder in this repertoire because diction, poetic meaning and Bel Canto adjustment must be addressed simultaneously. One teacher described a habitual separation of training components that persisted even when she tried to centre lessons on whole works.

Knowledge Construction

Four teachers described a polarised student body in which a minority of self-directed learners synthesised knowledge rapidly while others waited to be told what to do. The consequence was fragmented knowledge in which techniques and melodies were memorised separately and rarely connected to the cultural background or poetic logic of the work. Perspectives differed: one teacher reported few difficulties because she required students to read and explain the lyrics before technical work (P1S03T022), and another attributed passivity mainly to the slow, effortful nature of vocal progress rather than to students' attitudes.

Equity Pedagogy

Four teachers explicitly framed fair, aptitude-based teaching as a professional norm, but most described practical barriers. Beyond differences in vocal ability, teachers emphasised unequal participation: less confident students "dare not speak up" and were "easily overlooked" (P1S04T024), so that opportunities to interpret and perform were unevenly distributed. Teachers with longer experience and smaller rosters, or who assessed students before the course, reported fewer tensions than early-career teachers leading mixed groups.

Empowering School Culture

All teachers agreed that an empowering culture should foster autonomy, confidence and aesthetic literacy, and one teacher described in detail how vocal teaching remained biased toward accurate pitch, vocalisation and grades, leaving students afraid to offer personal interpretations; an early-career teacher reported few current difficulties in this area. At the institutional level, teachers pointed to the policy of 45-minute group classes, the elective status of Chinese art song courses in many programmes and the scarcity of campus aesthetic activities. Coping strategies included daily stage-presentation habits, "reverse classrooms" in which students teach one another, and respect for students who chose not to perform publicly. Teachers trained under the one-to-one system found the shift to student-centred group formats harder than early-career teachers trained in group settings.

Cultural Hierarchy and Module Requirements

Read through the lens of prejudice reduction, several accounts reflected an implicit hierarchy in which Western operatic norms served as the default standard and Chinese art song as secondary material; one teacher called for students to sing "without foreign accents and tones" and to recover the "unique temperament" of the genre. All six teachers wanted a standalone course and prioritised systematic, cross-linguistic pronunciation training; other requests—blended resources, graded resource packages, genre-specific guidance, a peer platform and compulsory status—were each raised by one or two teachers.

Students' Perspectives

Table 3 reports the survey results. All item means fell in the descriptive "high" band, but endorsement was not uniform: agreement ranged from 60% to 84%, and standard deviations close to 1.00 indicate substantial variation in responses.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of the Student Needs Survey (N = 188)

Item	Statement (abridged; positive form)	M	SD	95% CI	Agree (%)
Q1.1	Learning Chinese art songs is important for my professional study of Bel Canto	4.20	1.03	[4.05, 4.35]	83.5

Item	Statement (abridged; positive form)	M	SD	95% CI	Agree (%)
Q1.2	Chinese art songs help me understand traditional Chinese culture	4.14	1.04	[3.99, 4.29]	80.3
Q1.3	Singing Chinese works expresses genuine emotion better than foreign works	4.07	1.10	[3.91, 4.23]	78.2
Q1.4	Chinese articulation and tone are core competencies in Bel Canto performance	3.97	1.07	[3.82, 4.12]	75.5
Q1.5†	Chinese art songs are effective training materials for Bel Canto skills	3.90	1.09	[3.74, 4.06]	73.9
Q2.1	Difficulty with recitation, rhyme endings and tones of Chinese lyrics	4.15	0.94	[4.02, 4.28]	81.9
Q2.2	Difficulty integrating Bel Canto technique with Chinese articulation	4.01	1.02	[3.86, 4.16]	—
Q2.3	Difficulty understanding the creative background and cultural connotation	4.07	0.98	[3.93, 4.21]	—
Q2.4	Difficulty expressing emotion through melody, dynamics and tempo	3.91	1.04	[3.76, 4.06]	—
Q2.5	Difficulty integrating technique, articulation, emotion and culture simultaneously	3.85	1.00	[3.71, 3.99]	68.6
Q2.6	Reliance on mechanical imitation rather than active comprehension	3.79	1.06	[3.64, 3.94]	—
Q3.1	Teaching in accordance with my aptitude and vocal conditions is important	4.01	1.02	[3.86, 4.16]	73.4
Q3.2	I hope to obtain sufficient targeted instruction time in group classes	3.97	1.04	[3.82, 4.12]	81.4
Q3.3	I hope not to be neglected because of a weak foundation	3.86	1.06	[3.71, 4.01]	69.1
Q3.4	I hope for an inclusive atmosphere that encourages personal interpretation	3.79	1.07	[3.64, 3.94]	63.8
Q3.5†	Teachers should cultivate my stage confidence and artistic literacy	3.74	1.10	[3.58, 3.90]	64.9
Q3.6	Teaching should include humanistic and aesthetic education, not only skills	3.67	1.02	[3.52, 3.82]	60.6
Q4.1†	I need a specialised course to improve expression in Chinese art songs	3.97	0.96	[3.83, 4.11]	72.3
Q4.2	The course should be compulsory and foundational	3.87	0.94	[3.74, 4.00]	69.1
Q4.3	I need specialised training in Chinese articulation and pronunciation	3.77	0.98	[3.63, 3.91]	61.2
Q4.4	I need a standardised repertoire and systematic learning resources	3.68	0.91	[3.55, 3.81]	60.1

Note. Agree = percentage selecting 4 or 5; — = not reported in the source analysis. Items marked † were negatively worded and reverse-scored ($6 - x$) before analysis; the original wording was: Q1.5 "I don't believe that Chinese art songs are effective training materials for improving Bel Canto performance skills"; Q3.5 "I don't

hope teachers attach importance to cultivating my stage confidence and comprehensive artistic literacy"; Q4.1 "I don't need a specialized course to improve my expressive ability in singing Chinese art songs with Bel Canto." Agreement for these items refers to the reversed scores.

Endorsement was strongest for the value of Chinese art songs (74–84% agreement in Part 1) and for difficulties with the tones and rhyme endings of Chinese lyrics (Q2.1, 82%). It was weaker for items describing culture-related classroom expectations: only 61% wanted more humanistic and aesthetic education (Q3.6), and the confidence intervals for Q3.4, Q3.6, Q4.3 and Q4.4 extend into the moderate band. Thus, although most students supported the proposed directions, roughly one-third to two-fifths were neutral or disagreed on several items, and the survey indicates a clear majority rather than a strong consensus. Subgroup comparisons by major or year were not conducted and remain a task for future work.

Integration of Teacher and Student Data

Table 4 presents the joint display. Because the questionnaire was derived from the interviews, convergence on the existence of each difficulty was expected; the more informative results concern how strongly students endorsed each issue and where their emphasis differed.

Table 4 Joint Display of Teacher and Student Findings and Their Design Implications

Teacher theme	Student evidence	Integration outcome	Design response
Dual value of Chinese art song for technique and culture	Q1.1–Q1.5: 74–84% agree	Convergence (anticipated by design)	Literary interpretation and cultural awareness objective
Mandarin diction needs systematic training (all teachers)	Q2.1 highest difficulty (82%); Q4.3 need for diction training only 61%	Divergence in framing: students experience the difficulty but are less sure that a separate drill is the answer	Diction embedded in every lesson through four-tone singing and recitation, plus pronunciation notes
Fragmented integration in short group lessons	Q2.5: 69% agree	Convergence, weaker than teachers' unanimous account	Piece-centred two-week units; fixed 45-minute template integrating all strands
Passive imitation	Q2.6: $M = 3.79$	Partial convergence: students acknowledge imitation less strongly than teachers portray it	Sustainable learning objective; recitation and analysis tasks
Unequal participation in mixed groups	Q3.2: 81% want targeted time; Q3.3: 69% fear neglect	Convergence, with students adding demand for individual attention	Tiered objectives and homework; adaptive teaching category
Skill-centred culture undervalues aesthetics	Q3.6: 61% (lowest in Part 3)	Divergence: aesthetic education matters more to teachers than to many students	Aesthetic content embedded in technical work rather than taught as separate lectures
Scarce, unstandardised resources	Q4.4: 60% (lowest need)	Divergence: a teacher-side priority (workload) more than a student one	Teacher materials package; student practice resources to be developed
Compulsory course status	Q4.2: 69% agree	Partial support	Treated as a recommendation for institutional consideration

Expert Consensus on Module Design

Table 5 provides the record of the consensus process, including competing options, vote type, votes and the main reasons given. Most decisions on complementary elements were unanimous, whereas decisions between competing alternatives typically attracted one dissenting vote, which was retained in the record.

Table 5 Record of Nominal Group Technique Decisions (7 Experts)

Design part	Vote type	Options proposed (votes)	Main reasons recorded
1. Duration	Single choice	8 weeks (7); 12 weeks (0); 16 weeks (0)	Expected to concentrate thematic teaching and reduce fragmentation and attrition; 12 weeks judged to lack distinct advantages
2. Learning objectives	Yes/no per item	Vocal technique (7); literary interpretation and cultural awareness (7); artistic interpretation (7); sustainable learning (7)	Fourth objective added during discussion to reduce dependence on teachers
3. Number of pieces	Single choice	Three pieces, two weeks each (6); four pieces (1); two pieces (0)	Balance of depth and stylistic variety; minority preferred more poetic variety
4a. Week-1 unit	Single choice	Technique foundation + humanities focus (6); appreciation first (1); interleaved (0)	Establish laryngeal and four-tone foundations early; minority held that meaning should precede technique
4b. Two-week template	Single choice	Technical breakdown → complete interpretation (6); concurrent phrase and poetry work (1); vocal adaptation + metre (0)	Follows Stark's progression and suits weaker learners; minority favoured synchronous text analysis
5. Content categories	Yes/no per item	General technique (7); repertoire-based differentiation (6); poetic aesthetics (7); adaptive teaching (7)	One expert concerned that differentiation points were too granular
6. Core composer	Single choice	Huang Zi (5); Liao Shangguo (1); Zhao Yuanren (1)	Wide range, clear difficulty gradient, classical poetry; Liao judged too dramatic, Zhao too narrow in range
7a. Repertoire	Yes/no per item	*Flowers Are Not Flowers* (7); *The Three Roses' Wishes* (7); *Homesickness* (7); *Spring Longing Song* (0)	*Spring Longing Song* judged stylistically similar to *The Three Roses' Wishes*
7b. Key teaching points	Yes/no per item	Five points (7 each)	Initial concern about rigid practice rules resolved through discussion of vocal health
8. Materials	Yes/no per item	Five components (7 each); piano accompaniment notes (0)	Accompaniment notes judged non-core

These decisions represent professional judgements about what is appropriate and feasible; for example, experts expected the eight-week cycle to correct vocal habits more efficiently than a sixteen-week schedule, but this expectation was not tested in this phase.

The Resulting Instructional Module

The consensus decisions were assembled into a teaching guide for the eight-week module. Every lesson follows a fixed 45-minute template: (1) a five-minute warm-up for relaxation and a low, stable laryngeal position; (2) a 20-minute technical segment following Stark's sequence of breath, four-tone singing, resonance and the challenging phrases of the current song, using the lyrics as practice material; (3) a ten-minute aesthetic segment presenting the poem, its historical context and a comparison with a German or Austrian art song, followed by a Chinese–Western aesthetic comparison task; (4) an eight-minute piece-refinement segment; and (5) a two-minute review with tiered basic and advanced homework. The aesthetic segment includes a standard statement

that Western Bel Canto is a technical tool and that Chinese classical poetry singing is an independent aesthetic system, "with no inherent hierarchy or superiority between the two"—an explicit operationalisation of prejudice reduction. Because segments 2 and 3 appear in every lesson, poetic and cultural understanding is present during the technical weeks rather than postponed until the interpretation weeks. Table 6 presents the weekly sequence and the song-specific demands that justify the order of the repertoire.

Table 6 Week-by-Week Sequence of the BCME-CAS Module

Week	Repertoire and Phase	Song-Specific Technical, Linguistic and Expressive Focus	Assessment and Differentiation
1	Foundation week	Breath and low-laryngeal technique; four-tone vocal exercises; short-sentence diction reading; composer biography, historical context and full texts of the three poems; Chinese–Western aesthetic comparison	Tiered profiling of students' foundations; comparison task sheet
2–3	Flowers Are Not Flowers (text by Bai Juyi); Week 2 technical deconstruction, Week 3 full performance	Narrow range; gentle, sustained breath; soft, hazy timbre; elusive imagery requiring restraint	Basic tier: short phrases and humming with recitation; advanced tier: full-piece self-assessment from recordings
4–5	The Three Roses' Wishes (text by Long Yusheng); same two-phase structure	Stable 6/8 rhythm; small register shifts; layered dynamics within phrases; aspiration expressed through an object	Tiered homework; weekly review and feedback
6–7	Homesickness (text by Wei Hanzhang); same two-phase structure	Wide range with mixed resonance; high–low leaps; long, lingering phrases	Weaker students simplify leaps and explosive passages; advanced students refine dynamics
8	Comprehensive assessment	Full performance of the repertoire	Four-domain rubric: technical proficiency, lyrics pronunciation, musicianship, cultural authenticity

Table 7 translates the four objectives into observable outcomes. The first three are assessed through the four-domain performance rubric developed for the module; for the sustainable-learning objective, we recommend an independent task in which students analyse and prepare a new art song.

Table 7 Learning Objectives, Observable Outcomes and Evidence of Achievement

Objective	Observable outcome	Evidence
Vocal technique	Sustains phrases with steady breath and a low, stable larynx; produces correct tones, initials, finals and rhyme endings within legato lines; avoids forced high notes	Rubric domains 1 (technical proficiency) and 2 (lyrics pronunciation)
Literary interpretation and cultural awareness	Explains the poem's imagery, historical context and type of realm; compares Chinese and Western expressive conventions	Aesthetic comparison task sheets; rubric domain 4 (cultural authenticity)
Artistic interpretation	Shapes phrases, dynamics, tempo and timbre in line with the poetic imagery and coordinates with the accompaniment; avoids exaggerated operatic delivery	Final performance; rubric domains 3 (musicianship) and 4
Sustainable learning	Identifies difficult passages in a new song, plans practice and self-assesses from recordings	Recommended: independent preparation of a new song with a written self-analysis

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

General Constraints and Culture-Specific Dissonance

The first research question asked what teachers and students need. A central finding is that the reported difficulties are of two kinds. Limited lesson time, mixed-ability groups, slow skill development and examination-oriented teaching are general constraints that appear across music education and should not be attributed to cultural difference. Other difficulties arise specifically where Bel Canto meets Chinese language and aesthetics: tonal contours and finals that conflict with Bel Canto vowel logic, an expectation of restraint that conflicts with operatic intensity, and the treatment of Chinese repertoire as secondary to the Western canon. The survey supports this distinction: students' strongest difficulty concerned lyric tones and rhyme endings, a culture-specific issue, while general concerns such as targeted time and fear of neglect were also widely shared. The culture-specific difficulties correspond to acoustic and pedagogical work on adapting Bel Canto to Mandarin (Liu et al., 2022; Yu & Yap, 2025), whereas the general constraints echo evidence that expressive aspects of performance receive little explicit attention in many teaching settings (Broomhead, 2006; Karlsson & Juslin, 2008). The general constraints amplify technical–cultural dissonance but do not constitute it.

The analysis also shows how Banks' dimensions apply in a context where teachers and students share a national culture. The relevant hierarchy is not between ethnic groups but between musical traditions: an implicit assumption that Western operatic norms define good singing. Treating prejudice reduction as a cross-cutting lens made this hierarchy visible in teachers' accounts of skill-centred norms and "foreign-style" singing, and the module addressed it explicitly. Equity pedagogy, likewise, concerned not only differentiation by vocal ability but the unequal distribution of opportunities to participate and interpret in group classes. These findings support the view that teachers value multicultural integration but lack operable frameworks to enact it (Xie, 2024).

The joint display shows where the student data added to the teachers' account. Students were less convinced than teachers that separate diction drills, standardised resources or more aesthetic education were needed, and about two-fifths did not endorse more humanistic content. One interpretation is that students experience the difficulties concretely but associate improvement with practical singing rather than additional theory; another is that students socialised into skill-centred norms may undervalue aesthetic education. These possibilities informed the decision to embed diction and culture within technical work rather than add separate components.

From Needs to Design through Expert Consensus

The second research question asked how expert consensus would shape the module. The NGT produced decisions that can be traced to the needs profile (Table 4) and to the three frameworks: Banks' framework is visible in the aesthetic comparison segment and tiered instruction, Stark's in the technical sequence, and Hu's in the emphasis on restraint and poetic imagery. These decisions align with evidence that expression can be taught alongside technique rather than postponed (Brenner & Strand, 2013; Hurley & Atkins, 2023). The adopted two-week template moves from technical breakdown to complete interpretation, which might appear to postpone culture; in practice, the fixed lesson template keeps poetic and aesthetic work in every lesson, so the two-week progression concerns the depth of musical integration rather than the presence of cultural content.

The process also illustrates how consensus methods can surface disagreement productively. Minority positions—appreciation before technique, synchronous text analysis, more varied repertoire—were recorded rather than suppressed, and they mark alternatives that later evaluations could test (Harvey & Holmes, 2012; Vahedian-Shahroodi et al., 2023). At the same time, agreement among seven experts establishes the professional acceptability and rationale of the design, not its effectiveness. Claims that the eight-week cycle is more efficient, that the materials will reduce teachers' workload, or that the chosen sequence improves learning remain expectations to be examined empirically.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

The study extends multicultural education into specialised vocal pedagogy by showing how Banks' dimensions can be adapted when the cultural tension lies between musical traditions rather than social groups. Reinterpreting prejudice reduction as the challenge to hierarchies of artistic legitimacy, and equity pedagogy as equitable access to participation and interpretation, gives these dimensions concrete meaning in conservatory teaching. The study also clarifies how a technical framework (Stark), an aesthetic framework (Hu) and a curricular framework (Banks) can play complementary roles in one design.

Practical and Institutional Implications

The following are informed recommendations rather than demonstrated outcomes. For teachers, recitation-first sequencing, piece-centred lessons, tiered objectives and explicit Chinese–Western aesthetic comparison are practical responses to the needs identified. For curriculum designers, a fixed lesson template that keeps technical, linguistic and aesthetic strands together may help prevent fragmentation, and student-facing practice resources deserve development alongside teacher materials. For institutions, the moderate student support for compulsory status (69%) suggests that a foundational Chinese art song course merits consideration, but such a decision must weigh staffing, existing curricular requirements, student specialisations and the opportunity cost of additional compulsory credit. General constraints such as class size and lesson length require institutional rather than curricular solutions.

Limitations and Future Research

The findings should be read in light of several limitations. The teacher sample was small and the institutional coverage of both samples was limited, which restricts transferability. All Phase 1 data were self-reported, and no classroom observation or performance assessment was used to verify the reported difficulties. Because the questionnaire was derived from teacher interviews, its structure partly reflects the teachers' framing, and its four parts were established through content validation rather than factor analysis. The survey analysis was descriptive, and subgroup differences by major or year were not examined. Prejudice reduction was not addressed by a dedicated interview prompt. Finally, the design reflects one expert panel and the repertoire of one composer.

Future research should pilot the module to examine its feasibility and acceptability, and then evaluate its effects with appropriate performance measures—for example, Mandarin articulation, vocal technique, poetic interpretation and artistic expression assessed with a defined rubric—using comparative or quasi-experimental designs; such an evaluation forms the next phase of this project. Further work could also test the design with other composers and institutions and explore whether the needs-to-design pathway transfers to other national art song traditions, while recognising the specific cultural, institutional and musical conditions represented here. The study's most defensible contribution is a structured, theory-informed pathway from multicultural needs analysis to an expert-supported instructional design.

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