From Heritage Knowledge to Audible Choice: Designing a Culture-to-Sound PIC Pedagogy for Anhui Folk-Song Learning in Chinese Higher Education

Zheng Yongling, Rita Milyartini*, Diah Latifah, Julia

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia
*Corresponding author, email: ritamilyartini@upi.edu

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Abstract
Introducing folk songs into a university syllabus does not by itself teach students how to interpret them. This study examines the point at which knowledge of Anhui folk-song culture begins to shape a singer's audible decisions. A design-based pilot at one university in Anhui Province involved three vocal lecturers and nine undergraduate students. Its evidence comprised eight curriculum and course records, lecturer interviews, lesson observations, student interpretation statements and reflections, performance assessments, and multidisciplinary expert feedback. The revised Presentation–Interaction–Creation (PIC) model began with diagnostic performance, developed interpretation through guided comparisons and singing experiments, and ended with a culturally defensible personal interpretation. At baseline, students usually identified a song's place or general mood, but struggled to connect dialect, social use, or regional performance practice to phrasing, timbre, rhythm, and ornament. Across the nine documented cases, later accounts became more specific and decisions more independently justified; changes in basic vocal control were comparatively modest. The article identifies culture-to-sound pedagogical translation (CSPT) as the process linking cultural evidence to an audible hypothesis, performance trial, explanation, and revision. The findings support a situated account of pedagogical design and interpretive development, not a causal estimate of PIC effectiveness. They also point to the need for fuller intervention records and direct involvement of community culture bearers in future evaluations.

1. Introduction

A traditional song can be examined, performed, and awarded a high mark while remaining poorly understood as a cultural practice. The repertoire has entered the classroom; its ways of shaping the voice have not necessarily done so. Consider a singer who knows where a song originated but cannot explain why one word needs a particular stress or why a polished legato phrase obscures the local manner of address. Adding historical information will not, by itself, resolve that difficulty. The more exacting educational question concerns the movement from knowledge to sound: by what means does a student use evidence about dialect, livelihood, setting, and performance convention to make and defend a decision in singing?

The distinction is consequential in Chinese university vocal education, where established technical instruction encounters forms of musical learning shaped by local participation and oral transmission. Yang and Welch (2016) show, through Hua'er singing, how institutional teaching may preserve repertoire yet alter its vernacular learning conditions. The issue is not simply a conflict between academic technique and tradition. Curriculum design, teacher knowledge, and the organization of musical practice also matter. Xie (2025) discusses intercultural competence in vocal curricula; Jiang et al. (2026) identify policy, institutional, technological, and pedagogical conditions in a review of 64 Chinese-language studies; and Jiang et al. (2024) connect interpretive depth with historical and cultural learning in higher voice education. Wang and Webb (2024) similarly map an uneven field of praxis-oriented Chinese music-education research. These studies establish why repertoire selection alone is an inadequate unit of curricular reform. They do not, however, specify what a singer should do with cultural evidence inside an individual lesson.

Living-heritage scholarship gives this problem a sharper edge. UNESCO (2003, 2022, n.d.-a, n.d.-b) treats heritage as transmitted and continually recreated and distinguishes learning about it from learning with and through it. Schippers (2006) likewise cautions against treating authenticity as a frozen set of surface traits; Abril (2009) and Hess (2015) show why the presence of culturally diverse music need not unsettle the assumptions governing its teaching. In the voice studio, the practical consequence is direct: cultural knowledge should affect

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what is heard, attempted, evaluated, and discussed, rather than occupy a few introductory minutes before supposedly 'real' technical instruction begins.

This distinction also speaks to culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1995) and Paris (2012) do not equate cultural participation with representation on a reading list. Music-focused discussions draw attention to situated meaning-making and the knowledge teachers bring to diverse traditions (Bond & Russell, 2021; Barton & Riddle, 2022). Rector's (2026) review likewise warns against treating repertoire diversity as sufficient. PIC addresses only one part of this broader agenda: how a particular piece of cultural evidence becomes relevant to an individual singing decision. It does not purport to resolve the larger questions of identity, power, or community maintenance addressed in that literature.

The same precision is needed in accounts of vocal learning. Much that a singer recognizes is initially difficult to put into words, as Polanyi's (1966) discussion of tacit knowing suggests. Participation, experiment, and reflection offer ways of developing that knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Kolb & Kolb, 2005). More recent embodied approaches relate musical understanding to the continual exchange between hearing, action, bodily feedback, and context (Reybrouck & Schiavio, 2024; Jiang & Wu, 2025). Yet an exact imitation after a lecturer's demonstration is not necessarily a transferable understanding. Research on one-to-one music instruction has long identified the tension between individualized expertise and the student's artistic independence (Gaunt, 2008, 2011; Holmgren, 2022).

What is still insufficiently specified is the work between a cultural statement and a sung phrase. Calling a piece a labor song does not identify its proper stress; recognizing dialectal tone does not determine what happens to it in a higher register. The singer must investigate a possible sonic consequence, test it with the voice, listen to competing versions, and explain the choice. CSPT designates this bounded process, not a replacement for situated or experiential theories of learning. Its practical criteria are that the evidence address a specific interpretive problem, the proposed outcome be audible enough to compare, the student articulate a rationale, and the result remain open to correction when stylistically weak or vocally unsafe. The concept is offered as a proposition from this pilot, with transfer and independent confirmation still to be tested.

Anhui folk-song repertoire places this problem in unusually tangible form. Dialectal inflection, speech-like attack, ornament, rhythmic elasticity, social function, and the coexistence of local and professional-stage versions oblige the singer to choose between viable but not equivalent sounds. Huang and Phokha (2024) offer one Anhui-focused educational response through Orff-oriented teaching materials. The question here is narrower. When an undergraduate encounters contrasting versions of the same melodic line, how can an instructor help the student decide which distinctions carry cultural weight, which are compatible with healthy vocal production, and which may be adapted?

This article draws on a doctoral design project in which a Presentation–Interaction–Creation (PIC) model was developed and piloted in regular one-to-one vocal lessons. The intervention was revised through curriculum and needs analysis, multidisciplinary expert feedback, implementation, and post-lesson reflection. Three lecturers and nine students participated at a single university in Anhui Province. The classroom phase comprised one design-based pilot rather than multiple independently replicated cycles. That boundary governs what can be concluded: the records permit an account of instructional decisions and learner trajectories, not an attribution of population-level effects to the model.

The empirical contribution lies in tracing how students moved beyond naming a song's region or emotion toward relating language, context, musical detail, and vocal action. The conceptual contribution is a provisional account of that process: culture-to-sound pedagogical translation (CSPT). The term denotes the conversion of relevant cultural evidence into a performance hypothesis that can be heard, explained, compared with other possibilities, and revised. PIC offers one way to organize the work; it is not proposed as the only possible route. The intended outcome is interpretive agency accountable to both the musical result and the knowledge on which the choice rests.

Three questions guide the analysis. Which curricular arrangements prevent knowledge of Anhui folk song from informing vocal judgment? How does the PIC sequence distribute the work of listening, explanation, experimentation, and decision-making between lecturer and student? Finally, what changes and what persistent difficulties appear in cultural interpretation and artistic expression across the nine cases? The analysis addresses design and developmental patterns. It does not claim experimental proof of effectiveness.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design and Methodological Position

The study adopted a constructivist orientation toward musical understanding and a pragmatic approach to intervention design. Design-Based Research (DBR) was appropriate insofar as the inquiry concerned both a

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teaching problem encountered in practice and the design principles emerging from attempts to address it (Design-Based Research Collective, 2003; Wang & Hannafin, 2005). As Cochrane et al. (2026) emphasize for higher-education DBR, the conditions under which a design operates are integral to its claims. For this reason, the present study is described as a design-based pilot: expert appraisal informed a revision before classroom implementation, and experience informed a further revision afterward. There was no second classroom trial of the finalized version.

The purpose was to make an instructional mechanism observable and to identify the limits of its use. Neither random assignment nor a comparison group was part of the design. Although baseline and later performances were examined, their contrast cannot isolate PIC from other influences, including ordinary practice, repeated attention to repertoire, or teacher expectations. References to improvement below concern documented qualitative differences, not inferential statistical significance.

2.2. Site and Participants

The pilot took place at one undergraduate university in Anhui Province, China, where vocal teaching was ordinarily conducted through individual lessons. Three lecturers worked with nine students. Inclusion required enrolment in the target course, written informed consent, participation in at least one complete PIC sequence, and agreement to observation and necessary audio/video documentation. Records for cases without essential stage evidence, or interrupted by withdrawal or scheduling difficulties, were excluded. Lecturers used a shared implementation guide, resource set, stage objectives, observation forms, and evaluation requirements. Within those common parameters, they adjusted instruction to each student's vocal condition, dialect familiarity, and immediate interpretive problem.

The nine cases provide contrasting learning situations, not a statistically representative sample. Some students were familiar with local speech but needed help turning that familiarity into artistic decisions; others had strong academic vocal habits yet limited exposure to Anhui folk styles. The materials available for this article do not establish a verified distribution of age, gender, or year of study. Those data are neither reconstructed nor used to explain differences between students.

2.3. Evidence Sources

The material examined in this pilot combined institutional records with accounts of teaching and learning. Table 1 distinguishes each source from the analytic questions it could reasonably answer; no single source was treated as sufficient evidence of change.

Table 1. Evidence Sources and Their Analytic Purposes in the PIC Pilot

Evidence source	Scope in the pilot	Primary analytic use
Curriculum documents (eight institutional and course records)	Talent-training plan, vocal syllabus, semester schedule, repertoire/material records, assessment and related course documents	Identify the actual curricular position of Anhui folk song and alignment among objectives, content, resources, teaching process, and assessment
Lecturer interviews (three participating lecturers)	Pre-implementation accounts and implementation feedback	Examine teaching knowledge, resource constraints, assumptions about technique/style, and feasibility
Classroom observation and process records	PIC lessons across Presentation, Interaction, and Creation	Trace scaffolding, dialect-to-melody transfer, student reasoning, re-performance, and shifts in teacher/student roles
Student interpretation statements and reflections	Baseline and later explanations linked to performed repertoire	Compare the specificity of culture-music reasoning and the independence of artistic justification
Baseline and post-implementation performance assessments	Recordings and evaluation of artistic expression	Examine qualitative changes in dialect integration, melodic-rhythmic treatment, timbre, regional style, characterization, context, and personal interpretation
Expert review	Multidisciplinary review from vocal teaching, ethnic music, music education, ICH, and research-method perspectives	Content validation and revision of model objectives, stage logic, support system, and evaluation

2.4. PIC Intervention and Revision Logic

The PIC sequence emerged from analysis of identified needs and a formative review involving expertise in vocal instruction, ethnic music, music education, intangible-cultural-heritage work, and research methodology. Reviewers considered the conceptual rationale, objectives, stage transitions, fit with individual lessons, cultural and linguistic specificity, practical resources, and assessment. Five changes followed. Presentation became a diagnostic encounter with the student's existing singing and understanding, not a lecture; Interaction explicitly linked aural discrimination, verbal explanation, modeling, trial, feedback, and renewed performance; Creation was restricted to evidence-governed interpretive choice rather than unconstrained rearrangement; cultural interpretation and artistic expression became distinguishable analytic domains; and a common teaching guide

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and resource set supported consistency across lecturers. The surviving records do not establish the number or individual credentials of reviewers or permit calculation of a content-validity index. Expert input is therefore reported as formative critique, not psychometric validation.

Classroom use brought three design constraints into focus. Cultural material was most useful when it illuminated a current singing difficulty, rather than expanding into a parallel history lecture. Guidance needed to recede gradually: withdrawing it before a student could discriminate between versions was as unhelpful as retaining it after the student could offer a reasoned proposal. Technical safety also remained non-negotiable. A locally inflected timbre could be explored, but cultural plausibility did not excuse strain. These constraints shaped the post-pilot model.

The lessons were part of a regular semester timetable and did not follow a laboratory-style fixed dose. In each retained case, Presentation established a baseline performance and an initial account of its meaning. Interaction then revisited relevant questions through dialect recitation, comparison of local and staged versions, modeling, experimentation, feedback, and re-performance. Creation culminated in a student-formulated interpretation, recorded performance, explanation, and subsequent revision. Song selection required salient Anhui cultural or stylistic features, suitability for undergraduate voices, and access to contrasting forms of performance evidence. The available records do not verify a uniform number of sessions or minutes, nor a complete common list of songs and dialect variants. Table 2 therefore records the repeatable instructional functions, not an invented standardized treatment dose.

Table 2. PIC Stages, Instructional Activities, and Student Responsibilities

Stage	Core question	Typical activities	Observable student responsibility
Presentation: diagnostic externalization	What is the student already hearing, doing, and assuming?	Baseline singing; initial interpretation; targeted cultural evidence; native/professional version comparison; identification of individual learning priorities	Make current understanding visible and identify a specific culture-language-style gap
Interaction: culture-language-sound translation	How can the gap be tested and reconstructed in sound?	Lyric/social-context analysis; dialect recitation; speech-to-melody transfer; listening discrimination; demonstration; imitation; questioning; feedback; re-performance; reflection; transfer to another phrase	Compare, explain, test, and revise vocal solutions while teacher scaffolding gradually decreases
Creation: culturally bounded interpretation	What will the student now choose, preserve, adapt, and defend?	Identify core traditional features; propose alternatives; assess artistic and technical feasibility; select an individualized interpretation; perform and explain the rationale	Take responsibility for an independent interpretation that remains culturally and vocally defensible

2.5. Analysis and Trustworthiness

Researcher-led thematic analysis followed the six broad phases described by Braun and Clarke (2006), using categories drawn from the questions and PIC design while retaining room for unanticipated events. Curriculum documents were read against stated objectives, materials, instructional arrangements, and assessment, then compared with lecturers' accounts. Observation and video records were considered as sequences of interaction prompt, demonstration, imitation, correction, explanation, re-performance, and transfer drawing on interaction-analytic perspectives (Mehan, 1979; Jordan & Henderson, 1995). Student statements were first compared within each case, then across cases, for changes in regional knowledge, lyric and dialect comprehension, music–culture relationships, performance context, and the justification of choices. Performances were considered in relation to vocal control, articulation, rhythm, ornament, timbre, regional character, contextual address, and individualized interpretation.

A source-coded audit trail connected interpretations to curriculum documents (CD), teacher accounts (T), classroom records (CO), and student materials (S). The analysis compared unlike evidence sources where possible, kept within-student trajectories visible, and retained difficulties alongside favorable changes: dialect sometimes weakened when register demands rose, requests for teacher approval persisted, and cultural material occasionally became unwieldy. No independently completed second coding, inter-coder coefficient, or formal member-checking procedure is documented in the available material. These are material limitations, not assurances that can be supplied by terminology. The resulting account is interpretive and potentially affected by the researcher's proximity to the design.

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3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Anhui Folk Song Was Present in the Curriculum, but Integration Remained Repertoire-Level

Anhui folk song was not missing from the observed curriculum. The eight institutional and course records showed repertoire selection and general objectives concerning Chinese vocal works, diction, expressive singing, ethnic cultural literacy, and stage work. What they did not show was a staged sequence for learning how Anhui linguistic and stylistic features should guide interpretation (CD-01 to CD-04). T1 described song selection as closely tied to range, technical level, competitions, performances, and the availability of accompaniment; dialect and local meaning were commonly addressed after a difficulty surfaced rather than organized as a learning progression (T1, pre-implementation interview, Part A1-Q1).

Material provision made this imbalance clearer. Scores, accompaniments, short introductions, and polished online performances were readily at hand. Carefully explained dialect examples, local performance comparisons, context records, and guidance on ornament or regional timbre were less securely assembled (CD-04; CD-05; T3-TI-02). T3 noted that versions circulating online could differ in lyric and vocal realization, so a professionally finished recording was not necessarily reliable evidence for every local language feature. Assessment, meanwhile, chiefly rewarded pitch, rhythm, breath, diction, tone, emotion, and stage completion (CD-06). These criteria are indispensable, but they offered little explicit basis for asking whether a phrase was dialectally persuasive or culturally reasoned.

This was a problem of alignment, not a shortage of traditional titles. A student could satisfy the formal demands of a vocal assessment and still be unable to account for an ornament, a shifted accent, or the social relation implied by the lyric. The curriculum made the repertoire assessable before it made the reasoning behind its culturally specific performance assessable.

3.2. Six Interconnected Teaching Problems

The cross-source reading identified six connected difficulties (T1-TI-01; T2-TI-01; T3-TI-02; CO-T2-S5-P-01; CO-T2-S6-P-01; CO-T3-S7-P-01; S1-T1; S2-T1; CD-01 to CD-06). Lecturers' general vocal expertise did not always extend to fine regional diagnosis. Available resources privileged notation and finished stage recordings over local comparison. Modeling often enabled accurate immediate imitation without ensuring independent transfer. Dialect features could disappear when words were placed in melody, especially at speed or in the upper register. Students recalled contextual facts more readily than they could turn them into audible choices. Finally, course objectives and judgments continued to favor generic vocal polish. Table 3 sets out these six problems beside the PIC responses developed from them; it is a design synthesis, not an additional set of observed outcomes.

These difficulties should not be read as evidence of incompetent lecturers. T1 distinguished problems of breath, placement, and articulation, which could be addressed through familiar technical diagnosis, from less tractable questions about whether a note sounded wrong because of dialect, melodic behavior, or local timbre (T1-TI-01). T2 observed a related tension: the rounded tone often cultivated in academic singing does not always suit the speech-like attack, calling quality, or register contrast found in some regional songs (T2-TI-01). The necessary change was in the basis of diagnosis. A lecturer needed to ask what sort of problem the student was hearing before deciding what counted as correction.

The comparison in Table 3 makes explicit how each observed difficulty informed a particular design choice. These links are interpretive syntheses of the needs analysis, not separate measures of improvement.

Table 3. Teaching Difficulties and Corresponding PIC Design Responses

Pedagogical problem	What conventional teaching tends to do	PIC design response	Educational purpose
Regional-style diagnosis lacks explicit support	Use general vocal criteria; local traits are corrected ad hoc	Contrast language, context, and local performance evidence before prescribing a vocal correction	Differentiate technical errors from culturally meaningful variation
Teaching resources privilege polished versions	Rely on scores and readily available stage recordings	Curate paired local/traditional and professional versions with short dialect and context materials	Make the basis for stylistic comparison inspectable
Demonstration can preserve dependence	Model a phrase and ask for immediate imitation	Ask students to hear the contrast, explain the principle, re-perform, and transfer it	Move interpretive judgment gradually from lecturer to student
Dialect does not persist into melody	Correct words separately from demanding passages	Work from meaning and speech through stress, rhythmic utterance, melody, and register	Carry local language features through a complete vocal task

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Pedagogical problem	What conventional teaching tends to do	PIC design response	Educational purpose
Cultural facts remain detached from sound	Describe a song's origin before singing	Turn one relevant fact into an audible hypothesis, compare alternatives, and revise	Make cultural understanding consequential for singing
Assessment favors generic polish	Assess technical finish with few culture-specific grounds	Evaluate heard decisions alongside explanations and culturally bounded interpretation	Align the assessed outcome with heritage-learning aims

Note. Design responses were formulated from curriculum review, lecturer accounts, baseline materials, and observation records; the table does not report estimated treatment effects.

3.3. Presentation Made Prior Understanding Diagnosable

Presentation began with singing, followed by the student's own account of the song. Before PIC-specific guidance, most students could name a place of origin, an expressive mood, or the general subject, and could sing the notated melody. The difficulty appeared when they were asked to connect those descriptions with a particular phrase: whose voice was being enacted, how did the words behave in local speech, and what audible choice followed?

Contrasting performances revealed distinctions that an undifferentiated judgment of 'good singing' had concealed. In S3's Presentation record, what initially sounded like inconsistent vocal placement in a folk performance was reconsidered, after comparison, as a feature related to dialect and character speech (S3-CO-02). This did not make every nonstandard tone automatically appropriate. It taught a more discriminating first question: before correcting a deviation from the stage norm, determine whether it carries meaning. The stage ended with an identifiable problem rather than a general request to sing more expressively.

3.4. Interaction Linked Dialect, Culture, and Audible Choices

Interaction addressed that problem through short cycles of listening, trying, and accounting for the result. The clearest record is CO-T2-S6-P-01. S6 could repeat dialect words in isolation, yet shifted toward Standard Mandarin when singing them, particularly in rapid or higher passages. The lecturer contrasted dialect recitation with Mandarin, located stress points, and rebuilt the passage through individual words, connected speech, rhythmic utterance, and melody. The instructional problem was not a lack of correctable consonants alone. It was the failure of a language feature to survive the additional demands of singing.

The same procedure applied to cultural claims beyond dialect. Calling a piece a labor song, for example, provided a possible interpretive context, not a ready-made dynamic marking. The student still had to investigate whether bodily activity, response between singers, social distance, or the wording suggested a particular weight of accent, breath pacing, or vocal address. Character and courtship contexts similarly generated alternatives in pace, timbre, and ornament rather than a fixed expressive formula. Demonstration remained useful for tacit sound qualities, but an imitation was followed by an explanation, another performance, and an attempt to carry the principle into a different phrase.

Who proposed the next attempt also mattered. At first, students frequently waited for a lecturer's confirmation. As support diminished, the student was expected to nominate a solution, identify the cultural and vocal reasons for it, sing, listen back, and decide whether to retain it. Work on individual-lesson feedback has shown that its educational value depends on whether it sustains teacher control or prompts reflection and regulation by the learner (Sandberg-Jurström, 2022; McPherson et al., 2022; de Bruin, 2023). The pilot records suggest a similar distinction, although they do not isolate support withdrawal as a causal variable.

3.5. Cultural Interpretation Became Performance Reasoning

Across the nine students, the available cultural-interpretation records indicated movement toward more articulated relationships between musical and contextual evidence. The starting accounts were often segmented: a region, a theme, a mood, perhaps several dialect words. S1's score-led, relatively even rendition gave little account of how labor context might affect attack or stress (S1-T1); S2 treated slides and lining syllables largely as ornament, without a clear relation to the character's intention (S2-T1). Later accounts more often connected language, livelihood, social relationship, and melodic behavior to a performance decision. This is a qualitative within-pilot description, not evidence that every student advanced equally or that the model alone produced the change.

Specificity is the important distinction. Rather than saying simply that a song should sound 'local,' students increasingly discussed which word would carry weight, where rhythm might be elastic, how an ornament would support a character, and why a timbre need not remain uniformly rounded. Cultural grounding did not mean mechanically imitating a vernacular performer. A stylistic principle could be carried through different technical

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realizations if a singer's instrument or health required it. The argument for a choice therefore had to be both cultural and vocal.

Differences between learners complicate any single progress narrative. Prior familiarity with dialect helped speech sound natural, but did not itself organize that speech musically. Students from elsewhere improved their explanations while sometimes retaining a learned quality in fine intonation. Strong technicians could implement a new inflection promptly and yet resist departing from established academic tone; less technically secure singers occasionally understood the expressive problem before they could reproduce the intended solution reliably. The conceptual and audible dimensions did not always develop at the same speed.

3.6. Artistic Expression Became More Locally Differentiated

The assessment records point to greater change in stylistic judgment than in fundamental control. Basic production was generally functional at baseline and altered comparatively little. More evident differences concerned how dialect moved through melody, how rhythmic flexibility or slides were handled, which timbre suited a regional or dramatic character, and whether students could explain a personal interpretation. S3's reflection is particularly informative: when approaching a higher passage, the student retained professional breath support but moderated an overly rounded tone to preserve linguistic character (S3-RJ-08). Here technique was not rejected; its expressive aim was reconsidered.

The status of notation also changed. A score remained necessary, but no longer settled every question of timing, attack, or inflection. Comparing a native version with a professional adaptation could reveal what the notation left unspecified. The resulting freedom was conditional: a variation needed support from language, local style, social meaning, and feasible vocal technique. An attractive effect without such support was not automatically a better interpretation.

By the later stage, several students could name features they wished to retain, compare possible vocal treatments, and explain which version they chose. Others still needed confirmation or time to stabilize the outcome. Table 4 gathers the recurring baseline and later patterns across domains. It deliberately reports contrasts in the evidence rather than numerical gains or effect sizes.

Table 4. Qualitative Patterns Across Nine Student Cases

Outcome domain	Typical baseline pattern	Post-implementation pattern	Interpretation
Cultural interpretation	Region/theme facts; broad emotion; culture and music discussed separately	More explicit chains linking place, dialect, social function, musical behavior, and singing decisions	Knowledge became relational and performative rather than merely declarative
Dialect and lyric work	Isolated pronunciation; features lost when melody or register demands increased	More continuous speech-to-melody transfer; attention to tone, stress, semantics, and character	Dialect became a musical-formation variable, not decorative accent
Artistic expression	Technically complete but often generalized; reliance on teacher/model versions	More differentiated timbre, rhythm, ornament, regional style, character, and context	Cultural understanding became audible
Interpretive agency	Wait for demonstration or confirmation	Propose, test, explain, revise, and sustain an individual performance plan	Responsibility shifted from reproducing an answer to defending a choice
Basic vocal control	Generally stable with individual weaknesses	Slight improvement or maintained stability while style work increased	The model's main effect was not simply extra technique training

Note. These are qualitative cross-case patterns derived from the study records. The pilot does not provide a basis for population-level effect-size estimates.

3.7. Feasibility Depended on Resources and Specialist Knowledge

The one-to-one lesson format made individual adjustment possible. A common guide kept the stages recognizable across three lecturers, while their emphases differed: dialect and conversational nuance for one, technique in relation to local timbre for another, and version comparison and questioning for the third. The model was therefore practicable under the observed conditions, though this should not be mistaken for evidence of ease of adoption across institutions.

The limits were just as informative. Reliable recordings and dialect materials took time to assemble; speech work could occupy more of a lesson than planned; and distinguishing a regional feature from a technical error demanded specialist judgment. Students sometimes continued to seek approval after giving a sensible rationale. The post-implementation revision consequently favored a small, task-specific evidence set—core context, key language, and a relevant performance version—over large undifferentiated cultural packets. This

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is a practical design response to resource constraints, not a claim that three materials can represent an entire tradition.

3.8. CSPT: Explaining the Work Between Knowledge and Sound

What merits attention in this pilot is not the three-letter label but the instructional work occurring between knowledge and sound. A fact about a song's origin did little until the student used it to propose something audible. Once proposed, the choice could be sung, compared, questioned, and changed. The article terms this sequence culture-to-sound pedagogical translation (CSPT). The records are compatible with the mechanism; they do not demonstrate that it operates independently of the teaching relationship or other elements of the intervention.

Context does not come with an automatic set of performance instructions. Knowing that a song accompanied agricultural work, for instance, does not determine a single accent pattern or amount of rhythmic freedom. Those possibilities require listening to versions, examining the words, considering what the social setting permits, and trying alternatives with the voice. The lecturer's expertise becomes visible in choosing evidence and asking discriminating questions, not merely in supplying a model answer. The singer's corresponding responsibility is to make the reasoning audible.

This interpretation complicates the conservatoire–vernacular opposition discussed by Yang and Welch (2016). Students were not asked to abandon trained breath management or to replicate local vocal production irrespective of their own voices. They were asked to distinguish a cultural principle from a particular performer's technique, then seek a technically viable realization of that principle. The consequence is modest but important: academic technique becomes a means of pursuing an evidenced expressive aim rather than the unexamined standard against which every local variant is corrected.

3.9. Interpretive Agency Within Cultural Constraints

The word Creation can mislead if it is taken to require novelty for its own sake. Expert discussion led the project to narrow this stage. New lyrics, conspicuous ornament, or stylistic embellishment may display inventiveness without showing that the singer has understood the inherited practice. In the final design, creation meant proposing competing interpretations, identifying the features that ought to survive them, and selecting an option whose cultural, musical, and technical grounds could be stated.

Interpretive autonomy in higher music education is associated with dialogue and a space for students' own artistic judgments (Holmgren, 2022); musical agency also entails meaningful action within practice (Karlsen, 2011). Anhui folk song adds a constraint that such accounts must confront explicitly. A learner's artistic voice cannot simply cancel the linguistic and social relationships carried by the material. Equally, a tradition need not prohibit choice. The pedagogical task is to ask where variation is supportable and what evidence makes that boundary persuasive. Such autonomy is accountable rather than unlimited.

The concept also avoids a common binary between authenticity and innovation. Schippers (2006) has argued for dynamic understandings of authenticity and context. The PIC findings support that orientation at the level of lesson design: preservation can involve informed variation, provided the learner can identify what is being sustained, what is being changed, and why.

3.10. Fading Support Changes Who Judges

The fading of lecturer support changed more than classroom procedure. Modeling made an unfamiliar sound available quickly, but repeated dependence on that sound could leave the authority to judge entirely with the lecturer. In the later PIC work, students were increasingly expected to state and sing an interpretation before being told whether it was acceptable. Similar concerns about conscious, self-directed practice appear in individual-lesson research (Mateos-Moreno et al., 2025). What the pilot adds is a specific object for student judgment: the relationship between local cultural evidence and a particular audible decision.

This also places reports of growing confidence in perspective. Greater confidence did not imply that the repertoire had become easy. For some learners, comparison disclosed complexities they had not previously noticed. What changed was their capacity to begin an inquiry: ask about the lyric, test speech against melody, compare versions, and revise the phrase. That procedural independence is more defensible as an outcome than an unqualified claim of artistic mastery.

3.11. Assessment Must Attend to Reasons and Sounds

A curriculum cannot claim to teach living heritage while assessing only generic polish. UNESCO's account of continuing transmission and recreation makes education part of the practice rather than a neutral container for it (UNESCO, 2003, n.d.-b). Zhang et al. (2026) identify both the promise and inconsistent use of formative assessment in higher music education. In this pilot, a vocal result and its explanation carried different

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information. Explanation alone might show cultural recall without an audible change; sound alone might be an accomplished imitation. Together, they provided a more demanding basis for discussing learning.

An assessment conversation could therefore ask: Which evidence supports the stress on this word? What alternative timbre was considered? Can the singer sustain the chosen feature in a complete phrase without strain? These questions do not reduce cultural judgment to a checklist, nor do they presume one uncontested version of a song. They require reasons to accompany heard outcomes. Helton and Schaller (2025) likewise note the gap between favorable attitudes toward culturally responsive assessment and the design of usable assessment practices. The PIC evidence suggests one way of narrowing that gap, while leaving rubric validity for future testing.

3.12. Cultural Appropriateness Remains an Argued Judgment

'Culturally appropriate' must remain a qualified expression here. Neither a university lecturer nor a small expert review panel can certify an entire living tradition. The pilot treated a performance decision as defensible when several kinds of evidence converged: local or traditional performances, dialect and lyric details, social context, differences among versions, expert comments, and safe vocal realization. A single recording did not function as an immutable original. The relevant question was whether the student could justify the chosen sound in the presence of plausible alternatives.

This standard remains incomplete because the project did not formally share authority over assessment with singers, culture bearers, or local organizations rooted in the tradition. Thus 'culturally reasoned' and 'culturally defensible' describe the actual evidential basis more accurately than categorical claims of authenticity. Figure 1 brings together the proposed sequence from cultural evidence to audible trial and justification. Its return arrow is essential: an unsuccessful or poorly supported result should send the student back to the evidence, not merely toward a more polished rendition.

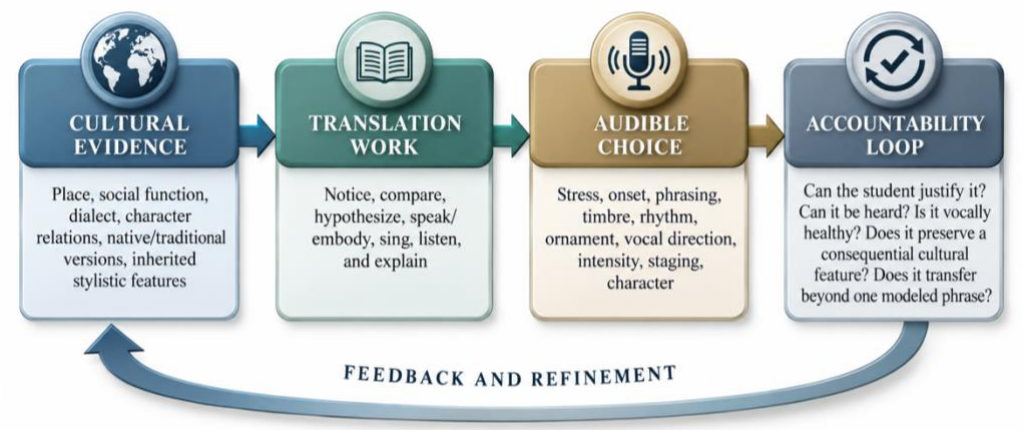


Figure 1. Proposed Cycle of Culture-to-Sound Pedagogical Translation in PIC

Note. The process is recursive. Feedback may lead a singer to reconsider cultural evidence, revise a vocal technique, or test a different interpretive hypothesis.

3.13. Educational Implications

For applied vocal teaching, the first implication concerns the timing of cultural information. A large historical packet may be educationally worthy, yet useless at the precise moment a student is deciding how to begin a phrase. The revised PIC design used a limited task-specific set: core context, key language, and a typical version. Its purpose was to make cultural evidence usable in an immediate singing problem, not to represent the whole archive of Anhui tradition.

Dialect work needs to survive melody. A student who pronounces isolated words convincingly may revert to familiar speech habits at speed or in a higher register. Moving deliberately from meaning and pronunciation through sentence stress, rhythmic speech, melody, and complete performance makes that loss visible and therefore teachable.

Demonstration remains valuable, especially for qualities difficult to name. It becomes more educationally productive when followed by discrimination between versions, the student's explanation of what has changed, a second sung attempt, and transfer to an unmodeled phrase. The last step tests whether the student acquired a principle or merely remembered a sound.

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Assessment should preserve breath, intonation, and vocal health while asking additional questions about dialect, local style, context, and the logic of interpretation. No rubric can capture the entirety of a living tradition. Nevertheless, leaving these matters entirely outside evaluation effectively declares them optional. Future rubric development should involve community practitioners and examine whether different judges understand the criteria comparably.

Finally, this work presupposes teacher learning. Lecturers need opportunities to compare local and professional realizations, consult dialect specialists, and discuss disputed stylistic judgments with practitioners. A shared and carefully attributed resource collection would reduce dependence on the knowledge of one enthusiastic instructor. Without such support, the PIC stages may remain formally intact while losing the cultural discrimination on which they depend.

3.14. Limitations and Research Agenda

The pilot's boundaries are substantial. It took place in one university with three lecturers and nine students. The available records do not provide a verified demographic breakdown, uniform lesson dose, or complete song-and-dialect inventory across cases. Expert feedback informed useful changes, but the panel's size and individual credentials are not adequately documented for a formal content-validity claim. Coding was researcher-led without a documented independent second coder or member-checking procedure. These omissions limit reproducibility and make selective interpretation a continuing risk.

The baseline–later contrast cannot demonstrate that PIC caused the observed change. Students had further lessons and practice, and the final design was amended after the phase on which the findings rest. Equally important, the criteria used to discuss cultural appropriateness were not co-governed by the communities whose practice was being taught. The account is therefore best treated as an empirically informed design proposition rather than proof of effectiveness or cultural authorization.

Subsequent research needs to document lesson duration, repertoire, dialect variety, and intervention adaptations prospectively; compare conditions where feasible; and follow singers beyond the immediate course. Partially blinded performance judgments and carefully tested rating criteria would improve evaluation, alongside qualitative analysis that remains attentive to individual change and failure. The strongest transfer test would ask whether a student can investigate a previously unmodeled song, explain the relevant cultural evidence, and make a credible audible choice without lecturer prompts.

A further step concerns the location of expertise. Local singers, culture bearers, dialect specialists, and cultural organizations should take part not only in supplying recordings but in deciding which differences matter and how acceptable variation is judged. That involvement may complicate evaluation; disagreement between versions is itself part of a living practice. It would nevertheless make the model's proposed accountability more genuinely reciprocal.

4. Conclusion

The Anhui repertoire studied here was already present in university lessons. Its curricular presence, however, did not ensure that students knew how to use dialect, social setting, or local performance practice when making vocal decisions. The gap was not between knowing a song and never having encountered it. It lay between being able to perform it and being able to explain why it should sound a particular way. PIC responded by making students' initial assumptions audible, directing practice toward specific culture–language–sound problems, and requiring a defensible personal decision as lecturer support diminished. Within the nine documented cases, later interpretations were generally more precise, and stylistic decisions more varied and better explained. Fundamental vocal control changed less. Students' difficulties and differences remain important qualifications to that account. CSPT names the proposed instructional mechanism connecting these observations: cultural evidence becomes a hypothesis about sound; singing tests that hypothesis; comparison and explanation permit revision; and responsibility for the choice gradually passes to the student. The pilot cannot establish that mechanism as a general theory. It does show what a subsequent evaluation should examine: not only whether a folk song is performed well, but whether a learner can construct, hear, and defend an interpretation without treating either the score or the lecturer as the final answer.

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Ethics and Consent Declarations

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participation was voluntary, withdrawal was possible without academic penalty, and involvement did not affect course grades or academic rights. The study materials describe coded participant identities and research-restricted recordings; any public presentation of audio or video material was to avoid identification. No separate institutional ethics-committee approval or exemption number is documented in the materials available for this article. Accordingly, the manuscript makes no claim to such approval.

Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declaration on AI Use

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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