

Perspectives on Satisfaction, Challenges, and Career Planning among Undergraduate Vocal Performance Students in China and the United States: A Cross-Cultural Comparative Study

Tingyu Yan^{1,a,*}, Hong Yu^{1,b}, Jiajun Tang^{2,c}

¹School of Music, South China Normal University, Guangzhou, China

²Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, USA

^atingyuyan@m.scnu.edu.cn, ^bhonggb@163.com, ^cjiajunta@usc.edu

*Corresponding author

Abstract: This study conducted questionnaires and in-depth interviews with 113 American and 106 Chinese students to understand and compare their satisfaction, challenges, and career plans regarding their studies in vocal performance majors in U.S. institutions of higher learning. The study results revealed the commonalities and differences between the two groups of students from different cultural backgrounds and educational systems. Regarding course satisfaction, Chinese and American students were optimistic about the teaching content and faculty but emphasized different priorities. American students emphasized creative educational methods, while Chinese students focused on essential knowledge. The competitive job market, high costs, improvement of singing skills, and study time management were common issues for students in both countries. However, there were some differences in dealing with these challenges. Regarding career planning, both Chinese and American students wanted to find opportunities in the music field. American students preferred self-employment and diverse career paths, while Chinese students valued stable career options. In summary, Chinese and American vocal performance students generally have positive attitudes toward American higher education, but as mentioned above, there are differences. Understanding these differences is essential for educational institutions to provide services that better suit students' needs.

Keywords: Satisfaction, Challenges, Career Planning, Higher Education, Chinese and American Students

1. Introduction

In today's era of globalization, higher education is no longer limited by national boundaries but has become an essential platform for cultural exchange and knowledge transfer. In recent years, China has become the world's largest exporter of international students, sending many students worldwide. According to European Commission Research ^[1], between 1978 and 2000, China sent more than 300,000 students abroad, and it is expected that by 2025, more than 645,000 Chinese students will study abroad each year. Most are the beneficiaries of the one-child policy, unprecedented in China's history, and a generation that places a high value on Western education. China is the world's largest exporter of international students to the United States ^[2]. This trend implies that Chinese students' demand for international education may continue to rise in the next decade. Chinese students have become one of the focuses of the multinational education community and university admissions offices and offer tremendous opportunities for the education sector. By gaining a deeper understanding of Chinese students' needs as consumers, foreign universities have tried to attract and nurture more and better students who fit their institutional mission well.

Over the past decade, the number of Chinese students traveling to the United States for higher education in vocal performance has grown exponentially, making it one of the most popular choices for international study. "Conservatories and institutions of higher learning in the United States offer world-class vocal education, attracting students from around the globe, especially those from China who seek excellence in voice training ^[3]. In addition, Chinese students choose to travel to the United States for professional education in vocal performance because of the diversity and openness of the American higher education system. Colleges and universities in the United States offer a wide variety of music

programs and musical genres, allowing students to explore different musical styles and creative approaches. This diversity attracts students who seek self-expression and innovation. Research shows that international opportunities and career prospects attract Chinese students traveling to the United States to study vocal performance majors ^[4].

To investigate the attitudes of Asian music students toward U.S. institutions of higher education, Choi surveyed the nine National Association of Schools of Music (NASM)-- accredited universities in the United States with the most significant number of international students ^[5]. The results showed that professor's reputations, scholarships, and programs were the most critical factors influencing program choice; good relationships with professors, good feedback from professors, and emotional stability were the most vital factors influencing academic success; and professor's teaching, professional knowledge of professors, and improvement of musical skills were the most important factors affecting student satisfaction. Schiffelbein analyzes students' perceptions and expectations of U.S. higher education institutions, determining that despite differences in student background, socio-economic status, family structure, and ethnicity, the perceptions and expectations of American higher education institutions were similar amongst all students ^[6]. Most students held expectations regarding such aspects of college life as socialization opportunities, academics, athletics, technology, and food.

International students are becoming increasingly important in U.S. institutions of higher education. Understanding and addressing the issues faced by international students are critical to ensuring that they can integrate and thrive fully. Moreover, international students enjoy the living conditions -- the environment, i.e., the greenness and cleanness, in the United States; they like having the convenience of daily necessities such as a nearby bathroom, running hot water, and so on. They also like the fair school enrollment policy and the regulated society ^[7]. Merola et al. use a quantitative approach, drawing on data from the International Student Barometer (N = 5,242), to investigate the relationship between integration, nationality, and self-reported satisfaction among Chinese, Indian, and South Korean undergraduate international students studying in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. Their findings indicate that integration is predictive of satisfaction, with academic integration having a more significant impact on satisfaction than social integration ^[8].

There has been much research on career choices in U.S. higher education institutions. In the context of career choice, Bernstein noted that family influences and the support and encouragement of music teachers are considered an integral part of a student's career decision-making process ^[9]. Ploumis-Devick conducted a study of undergraduate music education majors and indicated that students who chose music education as a career received little career counseling from music teachers in high school ^[10]. As seen from the above paragraphs, research on music students is relatively extensive and covers various topics and areas. However, few studies have been conducted on international music students, especially Chinese music students, and only a few studies have been conducted on Chinese vocal performance students.

Therefore, this study aimed to discover and compare the perceptions of vocal performance majors in the U.S. and China regarding program satisfaction, challenges, and career planning. This study contains three main research questions: (1) How satisfied do students feel about the instruction quality of vocal performance majors at U.S. higher education institutions? (2) What are the difficulties encountered by vocal performance students and the solutions to them while studying at an American institution of higher education? (3) What would be your ideal career after graduating from your current university?

2. Methodologies

2.1. Participants

This study was conducted with vocal performance students in the United States (113) and China (106) who were enrolled in twelve higher education institutions in the United States. For data collection, participants completed an online consent process and questionnaire. To ensure that the most significant possible sample was covered, a request was sent to the administrators of the twelve universities, asking them to forward the link to the online survey to all vocal performance students. Ultimately, 219 participants completed the survey and served as the response sample for this study.

Among the respondents of this study, 51.6% ($n = 113$) of the total sample were American students, and 48.4% ($n = 106$) were Chinese students. In terms of gender ratio, 46% ($n = 52$) of the American students were male, 30% ($n = 34$) were female, and 23.9% ($n = 27$) were unspecified, while 42.5% ($n = 45$) of the Chinese students were male and 57.5% ($n = 61$) were female. In terms of degree proportions, 59.3% ($n = 67$) of American students were undergraduates, 27.4% ($n = 31$) were master's students, and

13.3% ($n = 15$) were doctoral students, whereas 44.4% ($n = 21$) of Chinese students were undergraduates, 76.4% ($n = 81$) were master's students, and 3.8% ($n = 4$) were doctoral students. In terms of musical background, 81.4% ($n = 92$) of American students had received classical vocal training before entering university, 14.1% ($n = 16$) had received training in other musical backgrounds, and 4.4% ($n = 5$) had received only limited musical training. 77.3% ($n = 82$) of Chinese students had received classical vocal training before entering university, and 22.6% ($n = 24$) of Chinese students had received training in other musical backgrounds. In addition, data on students' linguistic backgrounds showed that among American students, 92% ($n = 104$) were native speakers of English and 8% ($n = 9$) were non-native speakers of English. In contrast, among Chinese students, 89.3% ($n = 92$) were native speakers of Mandarin, 6.8% ($n = 7$) were native speakers of Cantonese, and 3.9% ($n = 4$) were non-native speakers of Chinese.

2.2. Data Collection Procedure

This study was conducted with web-based questionnaires and online interviews. The researchers used an online survey tool from Qualtrics for data collection. The reasons for choosing Qualtrics include: (1) Qualtrics provides an intuitive questionnaire editor that allows users to create customized questionnaires easily, where users can choose from a variety of question types (single choice, multiple choice, text boxes, etc.) and add pagination to build complex survey structures. (2) Qualtrics allows users to set up logic and jumps based on participant responses to increase the flexibility and interactivity of the questionnaire, which means that users can dynamically show or hide specific questions based on previous responses, thus creating a personalized questionnaire experience. We categorized the responses to present meaningful data in response to the "other" in the closed-item question. Responses to open-ended questions were analyzed by assigning codes, combining these codes into themes, and displaying the data. For questions related to satisfaction, we used a Likert-type scale to calculate the percentage of different degrees.

The Vocal Performance Student Questionnaire was divided into three sections containing 27 questions. After a link to the questionnaire was sent out to U.S. institutions of higher education administrators, 245 people accessed the Vocal Performance Student Questionnaire, 240 began completing the questionnaire, and 21 did not. Ultimately, 219 participants voluntarily completed the Vocal Performance Student Questionnaire, with an average completion time of 13 minutes and 45 seconds and a completion rate of 93.6%.

2.3. Survey Instrument

The researchers designed a comprehensive questionnaire to study whether Chinese and American students satisfy with their higher education programs in the United States, what challenges they face, and what their career plans are. The questionnaire is consisted of single-choice questions, multiple-choice questions, a 5-point Likert scale, and open-ended questions for understanding students' views and experiences. In addition, open-ended interviews were also conducted with three students from each education institutions for enriching the study. During the interviews, the researcher asked open-ended questions and allowed the respondents to freely express their perceptions of course satisfaction, challenges, and career planning. After understanding the respondents' initial responses, the researchers used follow-up questions to understand more about their thoughts and feelings. Lastly, the researcher summarized the interviews to gain insight into the vocal performance students' perceptions of course satisfaction, challenges, and career planning. This series of interviews provides a powerful addition to the comparative study of higher education programs between Chinese and American students.

3. Results

Research Question 1: How satisfied do students feel about the instruction quality of vocal performance majors at U.S. higher education institutions?

To investigate student satisfaction with the quality of instruction at U.S. higher education institutions, students were asked to rate the quality of instruction in core courses using a 5-point Likert scale. Based on the data in Table 1, we can see the range of satisfaction, the mean, and the standard deviation for each course for all respondents. The results show that students in both countries were most satisfied with "Teachers' professionalism and knowledge" and "Teaching methods and resources," most satisfied with "Personal guidance and support," and least satisfied with "personal guidance and support." It is encouraging to note that students evaluated various aspects and gave some substantive suggestions. The

main elements are listed as follows: (1) Students hoped that teachers would pay more attention to each student's personality and characteristics and give personalized guidance and assistance in singing skills and performance styles. (2) Students believe that stage performance is a vital part of their growth and hope that the school can provide more performance opportunities for them to practice and show their singing talents. (3) Apart from theoretical courses, students would like more practical teaching, such as participation in choirs, orchestras, or musicals, to enrich their singing experience and stage performance. (4) Students consider it very important to establish good communication and exchange relationships with teachers (i.e., they want more opportunities to communicate with teachers, share their ideas and confusions, and receive timely feedback and guidance).

Table 1: Students' satisfaction with the quality of instruction and learning.

Factors	Chinese Students (n = 106)			American Students (n = 113)		
	Range	M	SD	Range	M	SD
Satisfaction with overall instruction quality	4 to 5	4.5	1.11	4 to 5	4.6	1.06
Teachers' professionalism and knowledge	5 to 5	4.9	0.53	4 to 5	4.7	0.84
Teaching methods and teaching resources	3 to 5	4.2	1.36	4 to 5	4.3	1.20
Teachers' attention to students' learning needs	3 to 5	4.1	1.33	3 to 5	4.3	1.27
Whether teachers provide sufficient personal guidance and support	4 to 5	4.6	0.96	3 to 5	4.2	1.33
Practicality and adaptability of the curriculum and teaching content	4 to 5	4.5	1.12	4 to 5	4.6	0.98
Teachers' focuses on fostering students' creativity and critical thinking	4 to 5	4.5	1.16	4 to 5	4.7	0.80
Whether the teacher encourages students to participate in class discussions and interactions	4 to 5	4.5	1.00	5 to 5	4.9	0.53
Whether the teacher provides timely feedback and assesses students' learning performance	3 to 5	4.2	1.35	4 to 5	4.6	1.04
Other comments or suggestions on the quality of instruction	3 to 5	4.2	1.33	3 to 5	4.3	1.30

1 = very dissatisfied; 2 = dissatisfied; 3 = fair; 4 = satisfied; 5 = very satisfied.

To check if there was a difference in student satisfaction with the quality of instruction between the two student groups, as in the previous analyses, we randomly selected 42 respondents from the U.S. student population for comparison. After statistical analysis, we concluded that with this sample size, there was no significant difference between students from the two countries regarding overall satisfaction with the quality of instruction and learning. We conducted a series of independent t-tests in each subcategory to find whether there were significant differences between Chinese and American students' satisfaction with the quality of instruction and learning. The smaller t and d values in Table 2 show no significant differences between the two groups' satisfaction with the quality of instruction and learning.

Table 2: Comparison of students' satisfaction with the quality of instruction and learning with T-test scores.

Factors	Chinese Students (n = 57)			American Students (n = 57)			t Test	
	Σ	M	SD	Σ	M	SD	t	d
Satisfaction with overall instruction quality	189	4.5	1.19	193	4.6	0.96	0.42	0.09
Teachers' professionalism and knowledge	202	4.8	0.36	206	4.9	0.37	1.26	0.27
Teaching methods and teaching resources	197	4.7	0.95	189	4.5	1.09	0.90	0.20
Teachers' attention to students' learning needs	189	4.5	1.13	176	4.2	1.44	1.06	0.23
Whether teachers provide sufficient personal guidance and support	164	3.9	1.23	155	3.7	1.37	0.70	0.15
Practicality and adaptability of the curriculum and teaching content	176	4.2	1.44	185	4.4	1.27	0.68	0.15
Teachers' focus on fostering students' creativity and critical thinking	189	4.5	1.13	193	4.6	0.99	0.43	0.09
Whether the teacher encourages students to participate in class discussions and interactions	193	4.6	1.04	197	4.7	1.05	0.44	0.10
Whether the teacher provides timely feedback and assesses students' learning performance	193	4.6	1.04	189	4.5	1.23	0.40	0.09

1 = very dissatisfied; 2 = dissatisfied; 3 = fair; 4 = satisfied; 5 = very satisfied.

To investigate the similarities and differences between Chinese and American students' approaches

to repertoire selection, we asked them, "How do you select your singing repertoire?" Students from both countries generally answer in similarities, including the following: first, selecting repertoire based on personal musical preferences and styles, and second, referring to their voice teachers' or instructors' suggestions to make repertoire choices.

However, according to Table 3, there were also some differences in repertoire selection between the two student groups. Chinese students considered the technical requirements of the repertoire and their voice ability when selecting the repertoire, and they also studied the historical background and cultural significance of the repertoire in depth. One Chinese student said, "If the repertoire requires a difficult singing style and range, I will first evaluate whether I have enough skills and ability to sing." In contrast, American students would consider the emotional expression and storytelling when selecting repertoire, as well as focusing on musical development goals and directions." One American student said, "I like repertoire conveying deep emotion or being of storytelling because it can easily make audience engaged and empathized."

Table 3: Differences and similarities in repertoire selection styles between Chinese and American students.

Chinese Students ($n = 106$)
Select repertoire based on personal musical preferences and style.
Choose repertoire by referring to your voice teacher or instructor's suggestions.
Select repertoire according to the occasion and the targeted audience's preferences.
Consider the technical requirements of the repertoire and your voice ability to make a choice.
Choose repertoire by referring to the popularity and popularity of the repertoire.
Study the repertoire's historical background and cultural significance to choose.
Refer to recordings or performance videos of other singers for inspiration.
Discuss and share repertoire choices with classmates and peers.
American Students ($n = 113$)
Select repertoire based on personal musical preferences and style.
Choose repertoire by referring to your voice teacher or instructor's suggestions.
Consider the emotional expression and storytelling of the repertoire to make choices.
Select repertoire to showcase your strengths and skills when participating in music competitions or performance opportunities.
Refer to professional music publications and websites for repertoire recommendations and popular choices.
Consider the adaptability and practicality of repertoire and make choices according to singing occasions and needs.
Refer to repertoire recommendations in music textbooks and teaching resources to make choices.
Choose repertoire according to your own musical development goals and directions.

To survey the difficulties encountered by vocal performance students during their studies at U.S. higher education institutions, all students were asked, "What are some of the difficulties you have encountered in your voice studies at U.S. institutions of higher education?" A total of 17 options were provided for them to choose from, from which students could select all that applied to their situation. The results in Figure 1 indicated that the difficulties commonly encountered by students from both countries included (1) a competitive job market, (2) high tuition and living costs, (3) continual improvement and adjustment of singing technique, and (4) academic and practice time allocation challenges. In addition, Chinese students reported foreign language and pronunciation difficulties ($n = 59$, 93.7%), and the competitive job market ($n = 58$, 92.1%) were also the main difficulties. One Chinese student said, "When singing pieces in foreign languages, I often need to overcome language barrier and try to pronounce the words accurately. Learning and practicing may take me more time and energy, but I also know it is necessary to improve my voice skills." Another student said, "In various lessons, I need to communicate and work with native English-speaking teachers and classmates. I often feel unconfident to open my mouth and communicate too much with my classmates and teachers because of the language limitations." Another student said, "I hope to find an opportunity in the United States that suits my voice career development. However, it is difficult to get a job here, and you need to face competition from native students and other international students. This makes me feel much pressure."

Research Question 2: What are the difficulties encountered by vocal performance students and the solutions to them while studying at an American institution of higher education?

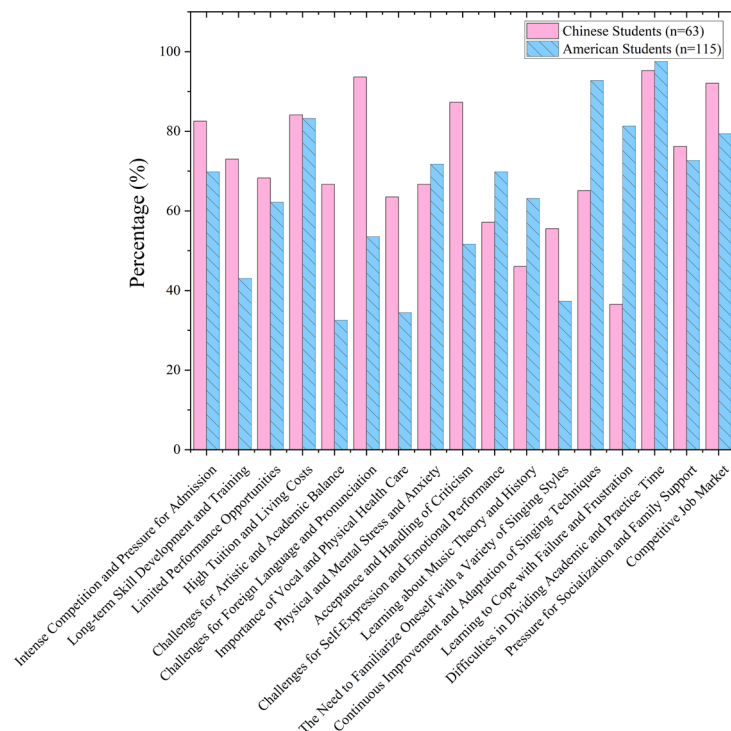


Figure 1: Difficulties encountered by vocal performance students during their studies at higher education institutions in the United States.

Responding to the abovementioned issues, all students surveyed were asked, "Are there any programs that could be offered to solve the above difficulties?" Students provided free response data for this question. Suggestions provided by students included (1) actively participating in relevant internships and performance opportunities, building a personal artistic brand, seeking career guidance and networking resources, and continuing to expand contacts and career development opportunities in a competitive job market; (2) seeking scholarship and grant opportunities, controlling living expenses, considering part-time or on-campus jobs, and seeking financial support from the school when facing high tuition and living costs issues; (3) formulating a reasonable study and practice plan, plan time wisely, and making full use of study and practice breaks to ensure a two-way promotion of study and practice in response to the challenge of allocating time for study and practice; and (4) Chinese students actively learning English and pronunciation skills, acquiring knowledge of grammar, participating in language courses and pronunciation training, and communicating more with native English speakers.

Research Question 3: What would be your ideal career after graduating from your current university?

In the interviews, when students were asked what factors influenced their choice of career intention, some respondents gave the following answers:

"I look up to some of the successful vocal performers who have been my role models, making me more determined to choose this career."

"I have a deep interest and love for music and performing, which makes me feel that vocal performance is the perfect career choice."

"My family and teachers have supported my choice to major in vocal performance, which has been encouraging and supportive."

"I have learned that there is a great demand in the vocal performance industry, and I believe I am capable and talented enough to meet the employment challenges ahead."

The last question of the questionnaire was: "What would be your ideal career after graduating from your current university?" In Figure 2, we can see that the most desirable career for students in both countries is to be a university voice teacher, followed by a professional singer. A Chinese student said, "If I can become a college voice teacher in the future, I can continue to participate in various performances and music activities and perform with students, which will be an excellent opportunity for me to keep performing on the music stage." An American student said, "A university voice teacher can

conduct music research and academic exchanges so that I can keep deepening my musical knowledge and skills." Besides, some American students want to be music critics or journalists ($n = 84$, 73%) and movie scorers ($n = 82$, 71.3%). One American student said, "I like to express my opinions and feelings about music through words and media, and if I am a music critic, I can be involved in reporting and commenting on music events to provide audiences with valuable information and opinions about music." Another American student said, "Film scoring is the art of combining music and images perfectly, which can make the movie more storytelling and enhance the audience's emotional experience. If I become a movie score artist, I can use my musical talent and creativity to create a unique musical atmosphere for movies."

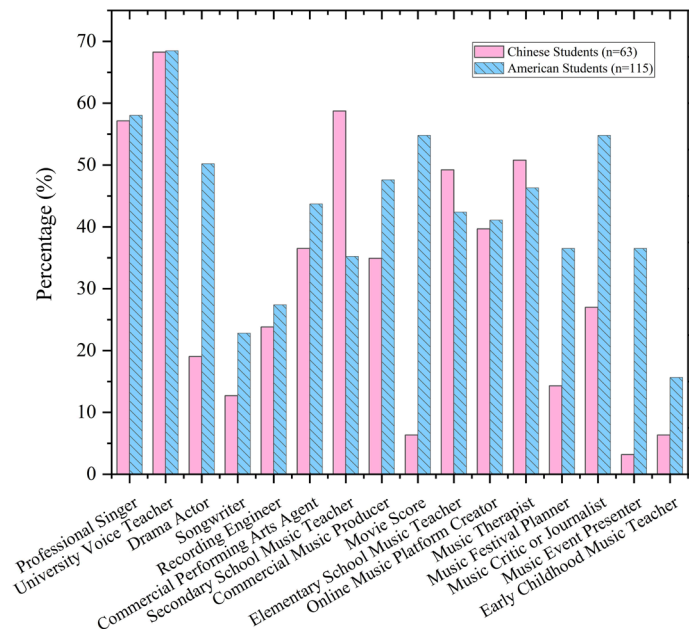


Figure 2: Students' consideration of future career choices.

4. Discussions

4.1. Satisfaction with Instruction Quality

Regarding students' satisfaction with the quality of instruction, the results showed that students in two groups were most satisfied with "teachers' professionalism and knowledge" and "teaching methods and resources," supporting the previous findings that "teachers' professionalism and knowledge" is the most satisfying aspect for music students. A possible implication of this finding is that U.S. higher education institutions should (1) provide ongoing professional development opportunities for faculty, including participation in seminars, training programs, and scholarly conferences, to continually improve faculty's professional competence and teaching ^[11], (2) encourage faculty to use diverse teaching methods to meet the students' diverse learning needs and interests, and, meanwhile, invest more resources in providing state-of-the-art music facilities and instructional resources to support students' holistic development in music learning ^[12], (3) actively encourage students to participate in concerts, studio classes, and other performance opportunities, which can help increase student satisfaction with the quality of instruction and, meanwhile, establish a positive learning atmosphere and an interactive platform allowing students to form closer bonds and communication with their teachers ^[13], and (4) establish an effective teaching evaluation mechanism to collect students' feedback regularly to understand their satisfaction with the quality of instruction and their needs, and make timely improvement of teaching methods and curriculum based on students' feedback to improve the overall instruction quality ^[14].

4.2. Difficulties Encountered by Chinese Students and Solutions

According to the results of the study, the language barrier is a commonly cited problem for Chinese students during their adaptation to study and life in the United States and is supported by previous literature ^[15]. Most Chinese students who come to the United States have high scores on the TOEFL and

GRE. However, once they arrive in the United States, they realize their English skills are insufficient for daily and academic use ^[16]. Some respondents indicated feeling awkward in social activities because of the language barrier. They were afraid of saying the wrong thing or causing misunderstanding; thus, they were initially unwilling to participate in social gatherings. This led to a certain distance between them and the local students, and sometimes they felt lonely. Other respondents said their English could have been more proficient, and they could not communicate fluently with local students. They often could not understand the teacher's explanations in the classroom and found it difficult to express their views. This caused much trouble in their learning and adaptation. In addition, Chinese students believed that their written English skill level was the lowest among English skills, which agreed with the previous findings ^[17]. To address the above issues, the students made several suggestions: (1) Enhancing their English language learning and attending language training programs before studying abroad to strengthen their speaking and writing skills since this will enable them to adapt to the English-speaking environment more quickly upon arrival in the United States, (2) participating in as many social activities and English corners as possible and being brave enough to communicate with local students, (3) working and studying with native English speakers to learn, help each other, and improve your oral expression, (4) practicing written English, such as writing diary or essays and participating in class discussions, through continuous practice, improve their written English skills and gradually overcome the difficulties in English writing, and (5) maintaining a positive mindset when facing language barriers is of imperative importance.

Research shows that the second major problem Chinese students encounter is facing different cultural and social habits. This includes differences in academic culture, social etiquette, and eating habits. Most of the participants indicated that differences in cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs seriously affected their studies and daily lives. In China, they are used to building deep friendships with friends through frequent social activities and shared interests. They usually dined together, partied, and participated in various club activities, and such interactions were natural and familiar. After coming to the U.S., they found that local students acted more independently, and their emphasis on privacy often prevented them from building friendships. This made them feel somewhat confused and overwhelmed. Other interviewees said that the Chinese education system is usually more rigorous and respectful of authority and that students have a respectful attitude toward their teachers. Nonetheless, education promotes active participation and individual independence in the United States, and there is usually more teacher-student equality and openness. This shift may lead Chinese students to be confused about how to communicate and get along with their American teachers effectively. In addition, they need to be familiar with academic and pedagogical practice, where, for example, students are encouraged to express their opinions creatively and independently rather than merely mechanically memorizing and accepting the teacher's views. It may take a long time for Chinese students to adapt to the shift. The above results confirm previous studies that explored Chinese students' cross-cultural adaptation in the United States, suggesting differences in cultural and social practices impacted their lives and learning ^[18]. It is difficult for Chinese students to establish friendships and socialize with local students ^[19]. The researchers provided some suggestions for facilitating Chinese students' study and living in the United States, including: (1) Chinese students can take the initiative to ask teachers for advice and participate in classroom discussions, gradually adapting to the more equal and open academic atmosphere. (2) Understanding the cultural background of American values helps them better understand and adapt to American society.

4.3. Career Goals

No significant difference was shown between Chinese and American students' perceptions of factors influencing career intentions. The main influences encompassed self-efficacy, personality and musical fitness, education, family expenditures, successful role models and recognition, educational opportunities and funding, job prospects and industry demands, as well as career interests and talents. This finding agrees with previous literature. For example, positive educational environment and recognition of student achievement help self-efficacy development being achieved ^[20]; students' personality and musical experiences are connected with career interests in specific fields ^[21]; and can students' confidence in their abilities and future careers are strengthened by a positive educational environment and family support ^[22]; successful role models and role recognition motivate students to seek for a certain job ^[23]; and successful role models and role recognition can motivate students to have a particular career; Students may be more motivated to commit to a field if the job prospects in that field are favorable ^[24]; and students will choose careers matching their interests and talents for better satisfaction and chances of success ^[25].

5. Conclusions and Further Research

In this study, we conducted an in-depth comparative study of Chinese and American vocal performance majors' program satisfaction, challenges faced, and career plans at American colleges and universities. The study results reveal the two student group's commonalities and differences. Regarding course satisfaction, the study found that Chinese and American students were generally positive about the content and faculty of the vocal performance program but differed in their emphasis on educational methods and learning support. American students emphasized a creative approach to education, while Chinese students were more concerned with imparting essential knowledge. In terms of challenges faced, the study points to the competitive job market, high tuition and living costs, the constant improvement and adaptation of singing techniques, and the allocation of study and practice time as common issues for students in both countries. However, American students may focus more on self-expression and critical thinking, while Chinese students focus more on language overcoming and cultural adaptation. Regarding career planning, the study shows that Chinese and American students want to seek opportunities in the music field. Still, there are differences in assessing the choice of pathways and opportunities. American students are more likely to favor self-employment and diverse career paths, while Chinese students may value stable career options.

Although this study revealed some differences and commonalities, some aspects still deserve further in-depth research including (1) Exploring the influence of cultural factors on the course experiences and career planning preferences of Chinese and American students and understanding the role of culture in shaping academic values, educational approaches, and career goals. (2) Conducting a long-term follow-up study to observe students' changes and development at different stages to understand their realities in the job market and the evolution of their career paths. (3) Examining educational policies in China and the United States to understand the impact of policy context on students' experiences and career planning and explore whether the policies can meet students' needs. To summarize, through in-depth research on Chinese and American vocal performance students, we can better understand the commonalities and differences between the two countries and provide valuable references for educational reform and international educational exchanges.

Acknowledgements

We appreciate professional advice from Prof. Eugenia Costa-Giomi at the School of Music, Ohio State University, and Prof. Tianjun Yang at the School of Music, South China Normal University.

Funding:

The research was financially supported by the Guangdong Province Outstanding Young Scientific Research Talent International Training Program for Postdoctoral Fellows, the Guangdong Higher Education Association '14th Five-Year Plan' 2024 Annual Higher Education Research Project (Project No.: 2023GXJK101), and the Guangdong Provincial Department of Education 2023 Annual Education Science Planning Project (Higher Education Special) (Project No.: 24GQN02).

References

- [1] European Commission Research. *Our World in 2025* [EB/OL]. (2009-09-23) [2024-07-09]. <http://ec.europa.eu/research/index.cfm?pg=newsalert&lg=en&year=2009&na=na-230909>.
- [2] Allen-Ebrahimian B. *Chinese students in America: 300,000 and counting* [J]. *Foreign Policy*, 2015, (215).
- [3] Esslin-Pearl M S, Shorrocks T. *Using reflection to develop insights into musical practice and performance: A pilot study with Chinese M Mus students* [C]//Musical Cultures Conference/SEMPRE Conference Proceedings 2017, 2017: 50.
- [4] Alberts H C, Hazen H D. "There are always two voices...": *International students' intentions to stay in the United States or return to their home countries* [J]. *International Migration*, 2005, 43(3): 131-154.
- [5] Choi J H. *Attitudes of international music students from East Asia toward US higher education institutions* [J]. *International Journal of Music Education*, 2013, 31(3): 346-358.
- [6] Schiffler S K. *Perceptions of American Higher Education Experiences before and after College Admission* [D]. Caldwell University, 2016.
- [7] Wan G. *The learning experience of Chinese students in American universities: A cross-cultural perspective* [R/OL]. (1999) [2024-07-09]. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED439653.pdf>.

- [8] Merola R H, Coelen R J, Hofman W H A. *The role of integration in understanding differences in satisfaction among Chinese, Indian, and South Korean international students* [J]. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 2019, 23(5): 535-553.
- [9] Bernstein C M. *Experiential factors influencing choice of career for orchestra musicians: An exploratory study* [D]. University of Colorado at Boulder, 1986.
- [10] Ploumis-Devick E. *Career development patterns of male and female music education majors at the Florida State University* [D]. The Florida State University, 1983.
- [11] Kholis N, Murwanti M. *Teacher Professionalism in Indonesia, Malaysia, and New Zealand* [J]. *TARBIYA: Journal of Education in Muslim Society*, 2019, 6(2): 179-196.
- [12] Cook-Harvey C M, Darling-Hammond L, Lam L, Mercer C, Roc M. *Equity and ESSA: Leveraging Educational Opportunity through the Every Student Succeeds Act* [R]. Learning Policy Institute, 2016.
- [13] AlJeraisy M N, Mohammad H, Fayyumi A, Alrashideh W. *Web 2.0 in education: The impact of discussion board on student performance and satisfaction* [J]. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology-TOJET*, 2015, 14(2): 247-258.
- [14] Lee I C. *The effect of learning motivation, total quality teaching and peer-assisted learning on study achievement: Empirical analysis from vocational universities or colleges' students in Taiwan* [J]. *The Journal of Human Resource and Adult Learning*, 2010, 6(2): 56.
- [15] Park H, Lee M J, Choi G Y, Zepernick J S. *Challenges and coping strategies of East Asian graduate students in the United States* [J]. *International Social Work*, 2017, 60(3): 733-749.
- [16] Yan K, Berliner D C. *An examination of individual level factors in stress and coping processes: Perspectives of Chinese international students in the United States* [J]. *Journal of College Student Development*, 2011, 52(5): 523-542.
- [17] Choi J H. *Attitudes of international music students from East Asia toward US higher education institutions* [J]. *International Journal of Music Education*, 2013, 31(3): 346-358.
- [18] Oramas J E, Gringarten H, Mitchell L. *Chinese students in US universities: A qualitative study of cross-cultural learning experiences, transition and adaptation* [J]. *Journal of International & Interdisciplinary Business Research*, 2018, 5(1): 21-40.
- [19] Wu H P, Garza E, Guzman N. *International student's challenge and adjustment to college* [J]. *Education Research International*, 2015.
- [20] Klassen R M, Chiu M M. *Effects on teachers' self-efficacy and job satisfaction: Teacher gender, years of experience, and job stress* [J]. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 2010, 102(3): 741.
- [21] Kuckelkorn K L, de Manzano Ö, Ullén F. *Musical expertise and personality – differences related to occupational choice and instrument categories* [J]. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 2021, 173: 110573.
- [22] Teague A, Smith G D. *Portfolio careers and work-life balance among musicians: An initial study into implications for higher music education* [J]. *British Journal of Music Education*, 2015, 32(2): 177-193.
- [23] Dolloff L A. *Imagining ourselves as teachers: The development of teacher identity in music teacher education* [J]. *Music Education Research*, 1999, 1(2): 191-208.
- [24] Bennett D, Bridgstock R. *The urgent need for career preview: Student expectations and graduate realities in music and dance* [J]. *International Journal of Music Education*, 2015, 33(3): 263-277.
- [25] Branscome E E. *Music career opportunities and career compatibility: Interviews with university music faculty members and professional musicians* [D]. University of North Texas, 2010.