

**EMPLOYERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE
EMPLOYABILITY OF MUSIC GRADUATES
IN HEFEI, CHINA**

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**FACULTY OF CREATIVE ARTS
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KUALA LUMPUR**

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EMPLOYABILITY OF MUSIC GRADUATES IN HEFEI,
CHINA**

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**FACULTY OF CREATIVE ARTS
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EMPLOYERS' PERSPECTIVE ON THE EMPLOYABILITY OF MUSIC GRADUATES IN HEFEI, CHINA

ABSTRACT

For all university graduates in today's society, employment represents a significant source of stress and challenge. A range of social and personal factors contribute to this stress. The objective of this study was to examine the perceptions of employers regarding the employability of music graduates in music education institutions in Hefei City. This study sought to address two key research questions: (1) How is the employability of current music graduates perceived by the employers of music education institutions? (2) What recommendations can be made to improve the employability of music graduates from the employers' perspective? Five employers were interviewed to ascertain their perceptions of the employability of music graduates. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach and employed a categorization of employability into specialist skills and comprehensive employability. The present study examined employers' perceptions of the employability of music graduates, focusing on six key areas: professional competence, communication skills, adaptability, work attitude, career planning, and teamwork awareness. Employers were invited to offer their views and provide specific suggestions on how they expected graduates to develop their employability. Furthermore, employers concurred that the underemployment of music graduates is predominantly attributable to the deficiencies inherent in the institution's curriculum and training model. Consequently, employers articulated their discontent with the prevailing levels of employability exhibited by music graduates and underscored the necessity for uninterrupted enhancement to align with the competencies demanded by the role.

Keywords: Music graduates, employability, employers, music education institutions.

PERSPEKTIF MAJIKAN MENGENAI KEBOLEHPKERJAAN GRADUAN MUZIK DI HEFEI, CHINA

ABSTRAK

Bagi semua graduan universiti dalam masyarakat hari ini, pekerjaan merupakan sumber tekanan dan cabaran yang ketara. Pelbagai faktor sosial dan peribadi menyumbang kepada tekanan ini. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji persepsi majikan terhadap kebolehpasaran graduan muzik di institusi pendidikan muzik di Hefei City. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menangani dua persoalan kajian utama: (1) Bagaimanakah kebolehpasaran graduan muzik semasa dilihat oleh majikan institusi pendidikan muzik? (2) Apakah cadangan yang boleh dibuat untuk meningkatkan kebolehpasaran graduan muzik dari perspektif majikan? Lima majikan telah ditemu bual untuk memastikan persepsi mereka terhadap kebolehpasaran graduan muzik. Temu bual dijalankan menggunakan pendekatan separa berstruktur dan menggunakan pengkategorian kebolehpasaran kepada kemahiran pakar dan kebolehpasaran am. Dalam kajian ini, pandangan majikan mengenai kebolehgajian graduan muzik terutamanya memberi tumpuan kepada enam aspek: kecekapan profesional, kemahiran komunikasi, kebolehsuaian, sikap kerja, perancangan kerjaya, dan kesedaran pasukan. Mereka mengemukakan pandangan mereka sendiri, dan kemudian mengharapkan graduan Bagaimana untuk membangunkan kebolehgajian mereka mengemukakan cadangan khusus. Di samping itu, majikan percaya bahawa kekurangan kebolehkerjaan graduan muzik adalah disebabkan terutamanya oleh model latihan kurikulum sekolah yang tidak sempurna. Oleh itu, majikan melahirkan rasa tidak puas hati terhadap kebolehpasaran yang ditunjukkan oleh graduan muzik pada masa ini dan menekankan pentingnya penambahbaikan berterusan untuk memenuhi keperluan jawatan.

Kata kunci: Graduan muzik, kebolehpasaran, majikan, institusi pendidikan muzik.

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Upon reflection, the five-year period of postgraduate study proved to be a series of objective challenges. During the initial stages, it was evident that a considerable amount of time was being invested, yet the tangible outcomes remained minimal. During this period, my colleagues were already engaged in doctoral studies or had achieved notable success in their professional endeavours. In contrast, I was still working on a project whose completion was uncertain, which gave rise to considerable anxiety, frustration, and even the idea of abandoning the endeavor. However, in my final year, I experienced a sense of calmness as I came to recognise that I had overlooked a significant proportion of the surrounding environment due to my persistent anxiety. I came to understand that I should have valued the limited time I had in Malaysia. However, under the pressure of academia, I also experienced feelings of discomfort and alienation within my living environment. It was only after I came to recognise this that I began to relax, and I subsequently discovered a newfound enjoyment in my life in Malaysia. However, I then became aware that my research career was nearing its conclusion. I experienced a degree of regret for not appreciating the unique opportunity I had to focus on my personal growth and development. Initially, I experienced feelings of remorse for having invested a significant amount of time in MASTER. However, I have since come to recognise the value of this period, during which I have developed the capacity to cultivate self-acceptance and a greater appreciation for the value of slowing down and embracing a more mindful approach to life, despite the ongoing internal challenges I have faced. Additionally, my cognitive processes are gradually becoming more expansive, enabling me to transcend the conventional life trajectory.

I would like to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Wang. Upon my return to Malaysia following a two-year absence in China, I became aware that several

students had been dropped out by their supervisors. The potential for encountering a comparable scenario was a source of concern. However, Dr. Wang was willing to continue my academic studies and was highly conscientious and responsible, assisting me in overcoming the various challenges to the best of his abilities. The learning experience was consistently organised and directed by the instructor. However, as the programme progressed, it became evident that at the master's level, learning is an individual pursuit. There is no requirement for supervision, provided individuals demonstrate a commitment to independent study. I would like to express my profound gratitude to Dr Wang for providing timely feedback on my academic progress, which has proven to be of significant benefit to my development. In addition, it is evident that Dr. Wang is committed to ongoing professional development. I am immensely grateful to have such a supervisor, who not only provides academic guidance but also facilitates the acquisition of invaluable intangible knowledge.

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I would like to extend my gratitude to my mother, as she has consistently demonstrated unwavering support and encouragement, enabling me to pursue my aspirations with confidence and autonomy. Despite my occasional feelings of inadequacy, I am immensely proud of my mother, hailing her as the epitome of maternal strength and unconditional love.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

According Huang (2017), university graduates are the most important human resources in the talent market. With the country's efforts to promote universal the education of global standard and the expansion of university enrollment in recent years, the number of university graduates is increasing year by year. On the basis of his research, according to the statistics of graduates from the Ministry of Human Resources, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Security, as showing the figure 1.1, the number of university graduates in recent years has increased from 7.95 million in 2017 to 10.76 million in 2022, exceeding 10 million for the first time, which means that employment competition is increasingly demanding for all university graduates.

Figure 1.1 : The number of college graduates from 2017-2022



Li (2020), Shang and Yang (2020), Yang (2017), Guo (2017) pointed out that the increasing number of university graduates in music major and music programs have led to over supply. Yang (2017) and Guo (2017) indicated that due to the particularity of professional skills, the employment field of university graduates majoring in music is very limited, resulting in certain difficulties in employment. Therefore, According to the research of Li (2013), Guo (2017) and Yang (2017) on the employment of music students shows that the cultivation of all-round music teaching and music talents are much needed through development type, such as comprehensive development of moral

education, intellectual education, physical education and aesthetic education; comprehensive type, such as comprehensive ability of various aspects, and innovative type such as ability to create music and inspire and promote the development of creative spirit. It is an important task faced in music education at present, and it is also the need for every music student to realize and improve the ability conducive to their future development in society.

According to research conducted by Yan (2013), Li (2013), Li (2020), Yang (2017), Li (2009), Yang (2014), Guo (2017), and Shang and Yang (2020), a multitude of internal and external factors have contributed to the unemployment of music graduates. Despite ongoing research, these issues persist and remain unresolved. A key factor in this issue is the disparity between supply and demand, leading to intense competition for available positions. The music industry is currently experiencing an oversupply of highly skilled professionals. In contemplating their future career opportunities, music students frequently ascribe significant importance to the congruence between their chosen discipline and their professional aspirations. Consequently, they are more likely to pursue careers in industries related to their field of study, which can result in a more limited range of employment opportunities. For instance, it is a common occurrence for those who have successfully completed a music degree to pursue a career in teaching at middle schools. However, the demand for music teachers is relatively limited.

Blackstone's (2019) study on the career development process of music school graduates suggests that improving self-knowledge and evaluating values is crucial for developing employment aspirations. Graduates' lack of self-awareness is among the internal challenges that impede the employment prospects of music graduates (Yan, 2013; Yang, 2014, 2017). Yan (2013) contends that employers priorities professional

skills and comprehensive qualities over a degree or other qualifications. For instance, although music students tend to be more inventive and imaginative than students from other fields, they often struggle with critical thinking, self-awareness, and teamwork. Yang (2017) and Yang (2014) have highlighted that numerous graduates fail to adopt the "employment first, then choosing a career" mindset upon graduating. The employment expectations of the subjects under scrutiny include high-level roles, positions and benefits. It is evident that there is a clear lack of interest demonstrated towards lesser known schools and companies. Furthermore, remote areas are also rejected by them when it comes to employment opportunities. A considerable number of recent university graduates are of the opinion that the value they provide in the workplace is not aligned with the compensation they receive. This discrepancy can often result in a high rate of job turnover among this demographic. Some music students may even opt to remain unemployed rather than accept a job below their expectations.

Yang and Guo (2017) identified weak entrepreneurial awareness as a common issue among music graduates in terms of their employment difficulties. To foster innovation and employment in the field, the state has introduced various incentives and encourages graduates to start their own businesses. Despite the prevalence of an entrepreneurial spirit amongst music graduates, only a small percentage of them pursue self-employment, primarily due to a lack of entrepreneurial consciousness (Yang, 2014). Guo (2017) posits that music graduates exhibit deficiencies in their entrepreneurial aptitudes, signifying an absence of long-term strategic planning and a paucity of market acumen in the context of entrepreneurship. This is predominantly attributed to music graduates' professional skills only, but not other comprehensive skills such as communication, organization and management.

Many domestic and foreign scholars, including Yan (2013), Li (2009), Yang (2014), Yang (2017), Bennett (2007), and Latukefu and Pollard (2022), have identified issues within colleges and universities that contribute to the challenge of finding employment for music graduates. These problems include a discrepancy between the curriculum and the skills required for employment. It is evidenced that the entry requirements for cultural subjects at university are less stringent than those for other subjects in the national university entrance examination. Consequently, students may enter degree programmes with a paucity of fundamental knowledge. Music students acquire in-depth knowledge of the subject and enhance their professional capabilities during their university education. Despite the expansion of enrolment, universities persist in utilizing teaching methodologies without implementing comprehensive reforms. This has resulted in inadequate infrastructure, including teaching facilities, which have been unable to meet the professional needs of teachers and pupils (Yang, 2017). Li (2009) posits that enhancing the quality of teaching is the primary method of improving employability for art graduates. The extensive enrollment expansion has negatively impacted the quality of music students. There are numerous issues concerning the teaching quality of several art universities, and the overall quality of students needs to be improved. A divide exists between education and employer requirements, and the training methods do not align with the social demand for talent (Yan, 2013). The lack of career diversity opportunities for music graduates within conservatory programs limits their potential transferable skills into the broader cultural industries post-graduation, resulting in largely unrealized potential (Bennett, 2007).

The absence of career-related guidance in universities is among the external factors (Yang, 2014; Guo, 2017; Latukefu and Pollard, 2022). Career guidance teaching in universities is unidimensional, with a sole emphasis on form and content. Teachers

responsible for career guidance and music core courses lack shared comprehension in each other's field, hence, failing to incorporate the two (Yang, 2014). Guo (2017) contends that universities ought to collaboratively work with national policies, intensify publicity campaigns, enhance graduates' awareness of self-employment, blend theoretical knowledge with practical implementations, and foster numerous aspects of graduates' social practice. Latukefu and Pollard (2022) have proposed a programme with the objective of enhancing students' awareness of career choices. This is to be achieved through seminars and individual tutoring. It is contended by the aforementioned parties that the support network and educational initiatives offered by the conservatoire represent the pinnacle of organisational and educational assistance that graduates will receive prior to embarking on their professional careers.

From the above statement, it is evident that current research focuses on analyzing factors causing employment difficulties for students and universities, but lacks perspectives from employers regarding the necessary graduates in the industry.

1.2 Statement of Problem

In Gao's (2008) study of the employment situation of university graduates in Hefei from 2004-2006, the initial employment rate showed a downward trend annually for undergraduates, master's degree graduates, and doctoral degree graduates. Gao (2008) also compared the employment rates of graduates from various majors and found that some majors had lower employment rates than the overall average, including music majors. As the number of graduates increases each year nationally, music graduates will face increasing challenges in the job market.

Existing research on the challenges faced by music students in completing their

courses primarily focuses on the analysis of the factors contributing to employment difficulties among graduates, along with the proposed solutions from the perspectives of individuals, society, and universities. However, the perspectives of employers are absent from this discourse, despite their crucial role in delineating the employability skills required by graduates.

As music students must enter the job market and society following graduation, investigating the perspective and demands of employers is crucial to provide future graduates with a valuable point of reference. While graduates often consider the type of company or job they wish to pursue, they seldom consider the specific abilities employers expect them to have.

Furthermore, employers have varying requirements at different stages of human resource development and distinct expectations of their employees. Consequently, enterprises and organisations have divergent criteria for their employees. In determining a suitable position, it is imperative for graduates to prioritise a comprehensive understanding of the employer's requirements.

Referring to the aforementioned factors, a significant portion of graduates exhibit a lack of adaptability upon entering the workforce. It is common for them to discover that the actual work environment differs significantly from their expectations, frequently leading to job changes (Yang, 2017; Yang, 2014). Consequently, a significant proportion of graduates experience a decline in confidence, which hinders their capacity to apply the knowledge acquired during their academic pursuits in a manner that leads to professional success and personal fulfilment.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study examines the employability of music graduates from the perspective of employers who establish music education institutions.

The aim of this research is to investigate:

- (1) To investigate the employability needed from the employers' perspective.
- (2) To provide employer-oriented employment guidance for music graduates to better adapt to the job position.

1.4 Research Questions

These research questions are stated below:

- (1) How do the employers of music education institutions perceive the employability of current music graduates?
- (2) What are the recommendations of improving employability of music graduates from the employers' perspective?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study can assist music graduates in developing a reflective comprehension of their employability and making targeted improvements. By doing so, they can seize the chance of their first employment in an increasingly competitive environment.

This study constituted a valuable academic resource for universities and colleges, enabling them to adjust and expand their respective social practice projects based on the results of this study. Such changes will enable graduates to assume diverse roles, thereby exercising their varied abilities and better comprehending their societal worth in the post-graduation phase.

Existing studies primarily focus on educational reforms in higher institutions or the cultivation of graduates' individual competencies, with limited attention to employers' perspectives on the actual demands and skill expectations for music graduates. This study introduced the "employer perspective" by conducting an empirical investigation into employers' understanding and requirements of employability skills for music graduates. It aims to more accurately capture labor market needs, fill a gap in current domestic research, and offer practical insights for optimizing music education curricula and enhancing graduates' professional competencies.

1.6 Delimitation of the Study

The objective of this study is to examine the employability development of music graduates after they enter music education institutions. It should be noted that the study does not involve graduates outside of the music programme. The study was delimited exclusively within the city of Hefei, located in the Anhui Province of China, with no reference to other geographical areas. The participants comprised five employers of music education institutions that had been established for more than five years, with a minimum of 20 music teachers and 150 students. Moreover, the music education institutions in the present study embody a singular manifestation of social music education organizations. Consequently, it is important to note that the results of this study may not be directly applicable to other social music education groups.

1.7 Definition of Terms

1. Private Music Education Institutions: An institution that focuses on music education and combines the sales of musical instruments, which is one of the four types of social music education in China (Wei, 2006; Zhang, 2014; Li, 2016; Teng, 2021).

2. Comprehensive Employability: It can be understood as the possession of basic 'core skills' or an extended set of generic attributes or attributes specified by a particular type of employer (disciplinary, sectoral, type of enterprise). On occasion, these attributes are delineated in exhaustive detail, encompassing, but not limited to, the domain of soft skills (Harvey, 2001)

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CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The present chapter is concerned with an examination of the employment situation, the factors that influence employment, and the destinations of music graduates. The chapter is divided into three sections. The initial section of this chapter presents an analysis of the current situation of graduates' employment difficulties and discusses the reasons for these difficulties from the perspective of social and personal factors. The subsequent section examined how universities have addressed the issue of the lack of competitiveness among graduates in the job market over time, with a focus on curriculum and training methodologies. The third section of this chapter explores the vocational prospects of music students after graduation, and it emphasizes the importance of music education for society.

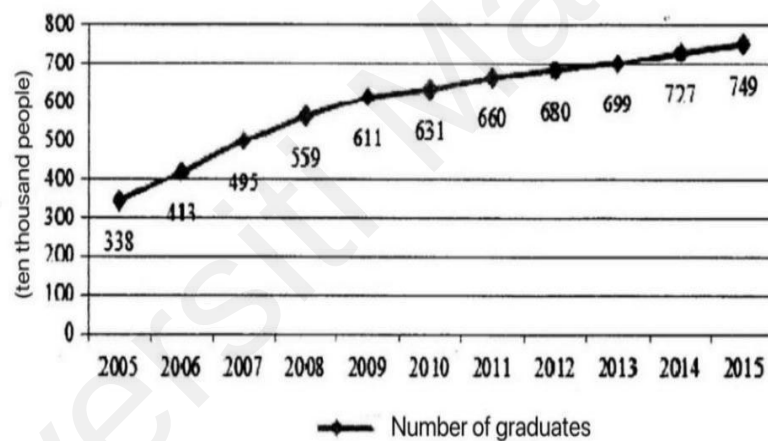
2.2 Employment status of music graduates

Based on the relevant research studies by Pan (2008), Lu (2015), Li (2016), Guo (2017), Huang (2017), and Li (2017), higher education has rapidly shifted from elite to mass education since 1999, with the enrollment rate and the number of university graduates increasing rapidly; A considerable number of individuals possessing tertiary qualifications have entered the employment market, thereby precipitating an imbalance between supply and demand and engendering challenges in the realm of employment for university students. The employment of university graduates is an issue of societal importance that is addressed annually. However, China's recent economic downturn has caused a noteworthy imbalance between the number of yearly employment opportunities and the number of university graduates. The aforementioned discrepancy has resulted in heightened levels of employment pressure and has exerted a direct influence on social stability.

2.2.1 Impact of universities expansion on employment

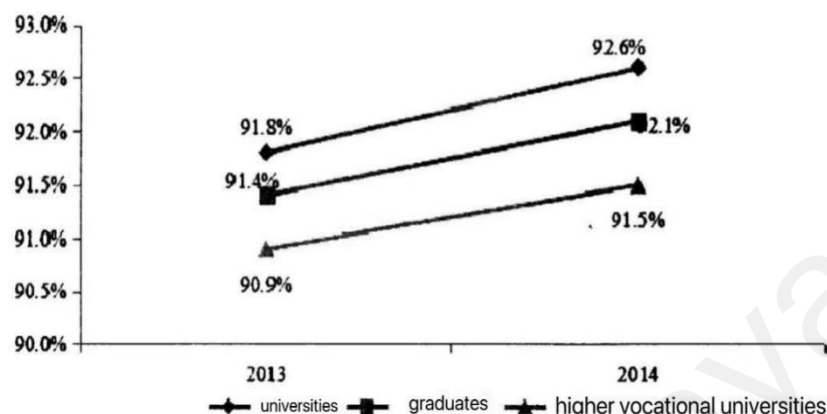
Yan (2013), Li (2016), Guo (2017), and Li (2020) contend that comprehensive universities have continually offered programs for music majors in the expanding social context, resulting in a growing number of students taking part in the "Artistic Examination" and producing a significant number of music graduates. However, this increase in graduates has also led to confusion and uncertainty regarding their future employment prospects.

Figure 2.1: The data on the employment rate of music graduates.



As demonstrated in Figures 2.1 and 2.2 of Li's (2016) study, the employment rates of music graduates indicate that music students exhibit substandard performance in comparison to the national average employment rates of university graduates. Fu (2021) lends support to this hypothesis, reporting an overall employment rate of less than 20% for music graduates. This underscores a salient issue concerning the high rate of unemployment experienced by music graduates in China.

Figure 2.2: The data on the employment of undergraduate universities, China National University Students and higher vocational universities.



2.2.2 The employment situation of music graduates from Anhui Province.

Li (2008) pointed out that, in response to the nationwide expansion of higher education enrollment, universities in Anhui Province have also increased the establishment and enrollment capacity of music programs. As a result of this policy-driven growth, the number of students majoring in music expanded rapidly from fewer than 120 to approximately 2,000. This sharp increase in student numbers has intensified competition in the job market, leading many students to experience employment pressure as early as their second year of undergraduate study and to begin planning for their future career paths in advance.

Huang (2017) analyzed the root causes of the employment difficulties faced by music graduates in Anhui Province from the perspective of higher education models. Firstly, the Chinese higher education system, especially in the field of music education, has long been influenced by the Soviet educational model and lacks localized higher education experience. Due to the relatively late establishment of music programs in

China, with weak foundations and insufficient experience, many universities, including top institutions such as the Central Conservatory of Music, still adopt the Soviet-style teaching model. This model places a strong emphasis on professional skill training while neglecting the cultivation of applied skills. As a result, the curriculum tends to be one-dimensional, focusing on the development of elite performance-oriented talents, thereby overlooking the diverse employment needs of music graduates. In practice, however, the majority of music graduates end up working in fields such as basic education, cultural communication, and grassroots art institutions. This mismatch arises because universities have failed to effectively foster students' independent learning abilities and practical skills, leading to a failure to meet the diverse talent demands of society after graduation. Secondly, with the expansion of higher education enrollment, many students enter music programs through the "art examination" pathway. These students typically have a weak professional foundation, lacking solid knowledge and skills. As a result, they struggle to adapt to the traditional elitist teaching model during their university years, which leads to poor academic performance and insufficient comprehensive abilities, ultimately making them ill-equipped to meet the demands of the music profession in the job market.

Tu and Yu (2019) highlighted that the rising number of graduates in the field of music education has led to intensified competition for employment opportunities, particularly in central Chinese provinces such as Anhui Province, where the employment landscape in music education is particularly challenging. In light of these circumstances, the researchers investigated the employment status of music education graduates in Anhui Province between 2013 and 2019. As the showing of Figure 2.3, The study revealed that the majority of graduates were employed as primary and secondary school music teachers. However, the demand for these positions is less than the supply, resulting in

increased employment pressure. Furthermore, notable disparities exist with regard to the employment status of individuals across different regions within Anhui Province, the more economically developed regions (e.g., Hefei City) have a relatively limited number of music education positions, while graduates tend to concentrate their job searches in these regions, thereby intensifying competition in the job market.

Figure 2.3: Primary and secondary school music teacher post demand data table in Anhui Province

Year	Total	Music teacher	Country music teacher	City music teacher
2014	7415	530	317	213
2015	9029	712	486	226
2016	10602	772	548	224
2017	17378	1126	871	255
2018	17158	1049	703	346
2019	15444	738	470	268

2.2.3 The employment situations of music graduates in other countries

As evidenced by the findings of Comunian and Faggian (2014), a study of the early career pathways of music graduates in the UK revealed that those entering the job market encounter a range of challenges that significantly impact their career progression and future trajectory. Firstly, the sector is characterized by an elevated level of competition. The number of employment opportunities in the music industry is relatively limited, particularly in the areas of performance and traditional education. This results in a significant number of graduates competing for a relatively constricted number of

positions. This intense competition has a significant impact on both the job search process and the ability of those lacking practical experience to secure suitable employment opportunities. In addition to competing with other graduates, they must compete with professionals who have established experience for the same positions, further contributing to an uncertain and challenging job search; Secondly, a significant number of music graduates lack a clear career planning following graduation. The multifaceted nature of the music industry offers a wide range of career prospects for graduates, including conventional performance, education, and extending to music production and management. The absence of a defined career planning process has been identified as a contributing factor to a sense of aimlessness among many graduates. It is a frequent occurrence that they engage in exploratory pursuits across a range of potential career paths. In the absence of clearly defined objectives, recent university graduates often encounter difficulties in navigating the complexities of career development. This has been shown to influence their career decisions. Thirdly, a further significant challenge is that of economic instability. It is not uncommon for graduates in the field of music to encounter fluctuations in income upon entering the workforce, and this phenomenon is particularly prevalent among newcomers to the industry. In order to maintain a basic standard of living, numerous graduates are compelled to pursue part-time or temporary employment, which frequently results in constraints on their professional advancement. In such circumstances, graduates frequently experience anxiety and unease, which may even affect their enthusiasm and confidence in their careers; Furthermore, the absence of industry experience constitutes a significant challenge for music graduates. The lack of internship opportunities provided to graduates during their studies results in a deficiency of practical experience at the point of entering the job market. Consequently, graduates in this field risk being at a disadvantage in their

job search, being unable to demonstrate their ability to compete with more experienced candidates. This ultimately affects their career self-confidence and future development.

Concurrently, psychological stress and burnout are pervasive in this field. In the context of intense competition in the job market and significant economic pressure, many music graduates experience elevated levels of anxiety, stress, and burnout. Such psychological burdens have the potential to impact both work performance and future career attitudes. Furthermore, the rapid evolution of the music industry, characterised by technological advancement and shifts in consumer behaviour, necessitates a continuous updating of skills and knowledge among graduates. However, adapting to these changes represents a significant challenge for graduates, particularly in the context of emerging technologies such as digital music production and social media promotion, which are frequently perceived as complex and stressful.

In a Canadian study of the employment status of music graduates, Brook and Fostaty Young (2019) reached similar conclusions. The study demonstrated that music graduates in Canada experience heightened career instability in their employment. The majority of graduates are employed in temporary, freelance, or part-time positions, particularly during the initial stages of their careers. This instability is reflected both in the nature of the work performed and in the volatility and uncertainty of career earnings. Although freelancing affords graduates enhanced autonomy, it created heightened financial stress and diminished job security. In comparison to graduates from more traditional disciplines, those who have studied music tend to have a more limited income and are therefore more susceptible to financial pressures, particularly given the imbalance between supply and demand in the job market and the limited number of job opportunities, which encourages many graduates to change jobs frequently.

This study additionally revealed a significant discrepancy between the music education provided in higher education institutions and the requirements of the job market. While music education is an effective means of enhancing students' artistic and performance abilities, many graduates discover that employers place a higher value on other competencies, including project management, teamwork, communication skills, and business and marketing knowledge, when seeking to fill job openings. However, conventional music education frequently neglects the advancement of these "soft skills", which places graduates at a disadvantage in the competition for employment. Furthermore, graduates frequently indicate that music education at the university level is deficient in terms of career guidance — institutions often demonstrate a lack of awareness regarding career prospects in non-music domains and opportunities for practical experience. This absence of career planning and diversified skills training results in many music graduates being inadequately prepared to enter the job market.

Faggian and Jewell (2016) examined the early career trajectories of music graduates in the United Kingdom. To this end, higher education data were analysed alongside the conduction of qualitative interviews. The authors emphasise that while many graduates enter university with aspirations of working in the music industry, the reality of the job market frequently results in employment in adjacent sectors, such as education, administration, or other creative fields. The research emphasises the prevalence of "portfolio careers" among music graduates, whereby individuals combine multiple part-time or freelance roles to sustain themselves. Notwithstanding the competitive and precarious nature of the cultural and creative industries, music graduates have been shown to exhibit strong adaptability and commitment to their artistic identity. It is therefore recommended that higher education institutions better align music curricula

with the realities of graduate employment by embedding career development support and encouraging entrepreneurial thinking within music education.

Ghazali and Bennett (2017) analysed the impact of higher education reforms in Malaysia on the employability of music graduates, focusing on the role of generic skills and how they are integrated in music education. A series of interviews with university music educators and industry practitioners has revealed that the majority of current music courses continue to be primarily aesthetically oriented, with a strong emphasis on performance techniques, theoretical knowledge and artistic expression. However, there is a noticeable lack of emphasis on preparing students for the realities of the job market. This emphasis on professional competencies does not align with the expectations of employers seeking graduates who possess a diverse range of skills. The study indicates that employers seek graduates who, in addition to their musical proficiency, can demonstrate effective communication skills, teamwork, critical thinking, adaptability to change, and a commitment to continuous reflection and learning.

2.2.4 The social factors of employment difficulty for music graduates

As posited by Yan (2013), Pan (2008), Lu (2015) and Yang (2017), the current state of the art market and the unequal distribution of employment opportunities have been identified as contributing factors to the employment challenges faced by music graduates (see also Smith, 2020). With a focus on economic development, many regions in China have experienced significant improvements in their conditions. However, certain areas continue to demonstrate notable lag, thereby exerting a substantial influence on the career choices and employment prospects of graduates. Graduates tend to prioritise cities that are experiencing rapid economic growth in their career decisions, seeking more opportunities, which consequently leads to intense competition.

2.2.4.1 Factors of market demand

The training of music majors in most universities aims to produce outstanding teachers for primary and secondary schools at the fundamental level. Music graduates face relatively uniform employment options due to the significantly limited market demand for primary and secondary school music teachers compared to other disciplines such as language, mathematics and English (Dong, 2012; Li, 2020). Due to the nature of music majors' job prospects, the demand for graduates in the field is relatively limited (Yao and Zheng, 2011).

2.2.4.2 Regional concentration of employment

The regional concentration of employment opportunities for music graduates exacerbates the problem of inadequate positions and fierce competition among job opportunities (Pan, 2008; Lu, 2015; Yang, 2017). Graduates are greatly concentrated in developed regions and typically prefer employment in primary and secondary schools, national theaters and local arts troupes, positions in music universities, and various culturally related music companies (Li, 2016; Nian, 2021). Music schools and cultural institutions experience a significant demand for talent intake, with 80% of graduates opting for careers in these sectors (Nian, 2021). Obtaining a relevant qualification through a nationally-organised examination allows non-music graduates to compete with music majors for music-related positions (Li, 2016). Li (2016) asserts that the number of music education graduates in certain regions is 40% higher than the market demands. This has resulted in an imbalance between supply and demand, which has, in turn, made it difficult to find employment.

2.2.4.3 Impact of the examination system on future employment

According to Li, Xu (2007), Pan (2008), Li (2009), Yan (2013), Li (2013), Liu (2014) and Lu (2015), Chinese students majoring in music often lack intrinsic interest in the subject due to the specific nature of the "Artistic Examination" system. Consequently, a considerable number of students opt to take part in the "Artistic Examination" due to their underperformance in academic subjects and the potential poor performance in entrance requirements. In order to meet the institutional minimum entry standards, candidates are required to undertake either a one-year programme or a series of shorter courses, each with a duration of several months. It is evident that students who demonstrate an inadequate foundation in cultural and professional subjects encounter significant challenges in both domains upon their enrolment. The decline in the quality of students has had a detrimental impact on teaching quality and is a key contributor to the decline in the quality of music graduates, therefore diminishing employment competitiveness. Nevertheless, Li (2020) observe that, in the context of intense competition, employers seek not only professional aptitude but also the overall calibre of graduates when recruiting music talent. The recruitment criteria are subject to annual augmentation.

2.2.5 The individual factors of employment difficulty for music graduates

The issue of music graduates' unemployment emanates from a blend of internal and external factors, with the graduates' intrinsic factors being fundamental in determining their success in getting employed (Li, 2016). The process of finding a job may change the role of graduates from that of students to that of productive members of society, but it is difficult for graduates to make accurate judgments and perceptions about the relationship between their own abilities, the job seeking environment and society during the job searching process (Wang et al., 2022).

2.2.5.1 Expectations of music graduates on employment

Yan (2013), Li (2013), Yang (2014), Lu (2015), Yang (2017), and Guo (2017) contend that music graduates have not gained a positive impact on their employment prospects. In contemporary China, higher education is widespread, and university students are not a niche population. However, it is widely believed among employers that university students still have high expectations of their employment, and music graduates do not have realistic expectations when seeking employment. This is due to the fact that music students have been a group that has invested a lot of time and money in the learning process - the cost of tuition for specialized courses before and after university is higher than other majors, therefore, music graduates are looking for a return on their investment after graduation. Employers typically value graduates' practical skills and potential for future development when recruiting, and will not offer a starting salary at the satisfactory level that a fresh graduate would expect. As a result, a paradoxical situation arises in which there is a significant discrepancy between the high career expectations of graduates and actual employer requirements. Conversely, many graduates believe that their area of study should align with their chosen positions. For example, in economically underdeveloped cities and remote areas where conditions are lagging, a music teacher could be required to teach a number of non-music related courses at the same time, thus graduates usually do not consider employment in these areas. Some students would keep changing jobs when the positions do not match their expectations, and even prefer to stay jobless for a long time.

2.2.5.2 Non-academic skills on employment

Improving the comprehensive quality and personal ability of music graduates is the crucial point to solving the employment problem (Yan, 2013). Music majors' graduates have limited comprehensive qualities and insufficient social experience. Moreover, the knowledge and skills they acquire come only from textbooks. In addition to professional ability, their average abilities in communication, organization and coordination, and management require development as well (Guo, 2017). Recent graduates appear to lack the awareness of combining classroom learning with their careers as early as possible during their university studies. Furthermore, they are unclear about the employment situation. At the same time, they rarely participate in social practice activities during their studies, and they lack the awareness to comprehensively improve their overall ability while cultivating their professional ability (Yang, 2014). Guo (2017) identified that in the context of employer-student communication, certain employers had noted a perceived lack of soft skills among students. Additionally, education gained in schools may not be practical in the real-world workforce. Pre-service training is required for the majority of students to improve such skills.

2.2.5.3 Impact of insufficient awareness of career planning

Yan (2013), Wang et al., (2022) Li, Qian (2022) suggest that music graduates often lack effective employment goals and plans during their studies, which can hinder their ability to accurately target jobs and to adapt to changes in the job market by leveraging their strengths. Furthermore, some graduates may blindly pursue popular careers that ultimately impede their employment development.

2.3 Curriculum design in employment preparation.

Li (2016) highlights that, overall, Chinese universities' employment preparation curriculum is still unable to meet the needs of society (Lu, 2015). The quality of universities and their teaching, faculty and infrastructure affects students' academic performance and the degree of education they receive. The ability of university graduates to succeed in employment is therefore largely related to the knowledge, skills, ways of thinking and ability to deal with problems that they receive at the university, and the relevance of professional curriculum and whether it is compatible with the current needs of the job market directly affects the competitiveness of graduates' employment (Li, 2016). It is evident that certain academic institutions aspire to evolve into fully integrated universities, irrespective of the availability of facilities. This has resulted in a paucity of resources to support certain academic disciplines and curriculums, with market demand not being met by the available teaching materials (Li, 2013; Nie, 2018; Li, 2020). It is imperative that clear teaching objectives are established in order to enhance the quality of teaching and develop students' professional skills. Indeed, the enhancement of teaching quality is a fundamental means of improving the core employability of graduates (Li, 2009; Li, 2016). Therefore, universities should make an informed assessment of future employment prospects and build an effective talent cultivation model on such a basis (Li, 2009). However, there are various issues with the quality of teaching and teaching design for art majors in numerous universities. For instance, universities and students tend to prioritize professional skills education while ignoring the education and enhancement of comprehensive competence. This results in inadequate employment competitiveness among graduates (Yan, 2013). Li (2016) argues that if the curriculum design is not progressive and responsive to contemporary society and market demands, knowledge and skills will fall behind and fail to meet the demands of current society.

Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) contend that graduates who are newly entering the workforce are strongly influenced by their surroundings and face many different challenges in the early stages of their work, and that it is important for universities to try to incorporate the perceptions of the community and the influences that shape the identity of the teacher into their educational programmes in order to prepare graduates for their careers, and therefore they suggest that curricular education in universities is the starting point that allows students to develop their own perceptions of their professional identity for the real world later in their careers.

2.3.1 Establishment of Music Programs in China

Jiang (2018), Guo (2018), Yang (2019) and Zheng (2020) discuss four distinct types of higher education institutions in China that offer music majors, which are higher vocational universities, professional music colleges, comprehensive universities and teacher training universities (normal universities). The types of institutions are further divided into two directions: music education and music performance. The four types of institutions have been observed to share the objective of cultivating talents in a similar manner. Music education is designed to develop application-oriented talents who have attained mastery in the fundamental theories of education, music performance skills and basic teaching skills. The programme has been designed to equip candidates with the necessary skills and knowledge for employment in primary and secondary schools. Conversely, music performance courses are meticulously designed to equip students with the necessary skills and competencies for music performance, catering to both aspiring musicians and those engaged in professional literary pursuits. However, as Nie (2018) have noted, the curriculum design for both music education and music performance majors in universities is essentially similar, and as a result, many students

do not have a clear line of distinction between the two majors, which leads to confusion in their employment options after graduation.

2.3.3.1 The current situation of the professional training in music programs at universities

Jiang's (2018) and Yang's (2019) study highlights a lack of comprehensiveness in the talent cultivation of music performance majors within higher education universities in China. Many universities prioritize the development of students' professional skills and neglect the importance of comprehensive education, including personality and professional qualities. As a result, music performance majors excel in their technical abilities but lack soft skills such as teamwork, problem solving and adaptability. Second, there is a lack of accurate positioning of training goals: The programmes offered to music performance students in all four types of universities are identical. The goal is to train students in music performance skills and professional talent development for cultural and artistic groups. It appears that there is a lack of differentiation among universities in this aspect. Furthermore, there is an insufficient characterization of the training mode.

In this context, Wei (2020) concluded that the music performance professional training approach in China can be classified into three stages: Between 1987 and 1994, most university educators solely focused on teaching content and methods, lacking a clear concept of music professional development. From 1995 to 2011, however, an increasing number of teachers and researchers began to consider comprehensive development of the music profession from various perspectives, including training objectives, curriculum construction, and practical teaching. Whilst the prevailing opinion is that practical teaching should be prioritised in order to train professionals, there is currently

no systematic introduction of a teaching system to instruct how to train music students. Consequently, research in this domain remains in its infancy. From 2012 to 2017, researchers initiated a comprehensive analysis of the teaching and curriculum system. They identified numerous issues with the entire teaching system, evident through the low employment rates amongst music majors. These findings highlighted the significance of practical teaching for music majors. For example, Ma (2014) points out that although the music performance major is both practical and artistic in nature, China's music performance majors have continued to follow traditional teaching methods, emphasizing theory over practice. This has resulted in a lack of practical ability (soft skills) among graduates, which has made it difficult for them to find employment and has led to a low employment rate. These are all adverse consequences of the lack of practical training.

Music education majors are more common in comprehensive universities and higher teacher training universities in China, where the knowledge related to this major includes many fields such as musicology, pedagogy and music performance, and the curriculum development programme is broader and more diverse (Zheng, 2020). However, the environment for teaching and practical experience is predominantly limited to universities, with students only able to participate in social practice during their fourth year of study (Wei, 2019).

Huo (2016) argued that despite some universities taking steps to modify their student training program and increase practical coursework to match the international advanced education model, the new training modes and concepts are still unable to fundamentally eliminate the traditional teaching model. For instance, the purpose of the music education programme in higher education universities for teachers in China is to train

primary and secondary school music teachers with solid teaching ability and comprehensive quality ability, therefore the students should not only master the theoretical knowledge of music, but also master the professional skills and teaching practice ability. However, the higher education universities for teachers usually put their students on the same level as the students of professional music colleges, and the students are neither outstanding in musical performance nor have the comprehensive ability to teach music in primary and secondary schools.

2.3.3.2 The Impact of the Curriculum of Music Programs in Higher Education Universities on Employment

According to Ma (2014) and Wang (2018), the present curriculum of music performance majors in China is divided into three categories: 1. During the initial two years of university, students are required to take public courses prescribed by the state, including subjects such as politics, English, computer studies, and foreign languages. 2. Foundational music courses including basic music theory, solfeggio and ear-training, Chinese music history, Chinese and Western music history, folk music history, choral singing and conducting, harmony, and music appreciation. 3. Professional (one-to-one) courses including vocal music, piano, and other instrumental music. The curriculum structure tends to favour theory over teaching, while the curriculum content is also theory-based, from the curriculum design to the content of teaching, the curriculum is divided unreasonably between theoretical teaching and practical teaching, and the curriculum is detached from the cultivation goals of music performance majors. It is crucial to integrate theoretical and practical teaching with stage performance in higher education curricula. However, practical courses aimed at enhancing students' overall competitiveness are significantly scarce. Jiang (2018) and Liu (2023) have identified that Chinese universities' music performance majors suffer from inadequate measure of

scientific rigour and practical application in the curricula, resulting in students' training failing to meet the requirements of the job market. However, Yang (2017), Guo (2018), Xue, Yang (2020), and Sun (2020) argue that the curriculum of professional music colleges is being replicated by music education majors, resulting in a deviation from the educational philosophy of training music teachers for primary and secondary schools, and music education majors do not have the comprehensive music skills they should have. Professional music colleges typically concentrate solely on technical music skills, including playing an instrument, singing, and piano, while universities that specialize in teacher training tend to focus exclusively on education theory, such as pedagogy, psychology, and music pedagogy.

Zheng (2020) proposed that the present circumstances permit an examination of three issues. Primarily, a significant number of universities place emphasis on practical courses during graduation internships, which customarily occur three months prior to students' graduation. In recent years, it has been observed that graduates of music education courses who have recently entered the workforce as primary and secondary school music teachers, possess a significant theoretical knowledge advantage due to their university training. Nevertheless, the extent to which they are able to apply their theoretical knowledge flexibly in a teaching environment is considered to be limited. Secondly, this curriculum prioritizes the development of impressive and diverse performance techniques. However, an imbalanced emphasis on music technology is a prevailing issue in the education and training of music students in China. Thirdly, the training in music literacy is of brief duration. It covers a range of skills such as reading music, sight-singing, music listening, rhythm, harmony, music appreciation and other related aspects. The modules included in music education degree programs are extensive, with a curriculum plan in place for each individual component. Despite this,

the inadequate competence of recent music education graduates in this area has become a common issue. Long-term practice is necessary for the maintenance of skills such as sight-singing and listening. Inadequate practice can lead to a gradual decline in cognitive memory for these skills. However, universities in the UK usually only provide sight-singing and listening courses during the initial two years of study, with just one or two lessons per week. As per the author, the brevity of the training will gradually affect graduates' performance in their respective workplaces and could hinder their capacity to teach and engage in other music-associated activities.

2.3.2 The curriculum for music majors at universities in Anhui Province

Huang (2017) stated that the curricula of music majors in Chinese comprehensive universities are generally homogeneous, and that the curricula of music majors in Anhui's comprehensive universities can also be classified into three categories: 1. Professional courses (e.g. vocal and instrumental music); 2. Professional basic courses (e.g. sight-singing and ear-training, music theory, and domestic and international music history); 3. Comprehensive cultural courses (e.g. college English and politics). However, the music-related curriculum is relatively narrow in scope and lacks the support of courses such as music management and music aesthetics. As a consequence of this limited curriculum, students not only possess a restricted range of professional skills but also exhibit a lack of comprehensive abilities. The majority of music graduates are unable to pursue careers as professional singers or performers and are more likely to pursue employment opportunities in the field of social mass music. Furthermore, universities have not accorded sufficient attention to the training of students' independent learning and creative abilities. This has resulted in music graduates frequently encountering difficulties in adapting to the requirements of social mass music activities.

2.3.3 The studies of music program curriculum in higher education worldwide

This situation has occurred in other nations, and numerous scholars share the view that the formal curriculum structure and professional environment exert a powerful influence on the formation of teachers' professional identities (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Mishra, Day, Littles, & Vandewalker, 2011; Lopes & Pereira, 2012; Bennett & Chong, 2017; Haning, 2021).

Haning (2021) gathered thorough course listings for teacher training programmes in music, mathematics, and English, from the official course catalogues of 16 universities of higher learning in the United States. Subsequently, a comparative study was undertaken which illustrated that the education programmes in mathematics and English maintained a relatively equitable balance between content-based and pedagogical courses. In contrast, the music programme offered a greater proportion of content-based courses within its overall course offerings. This phenomenon bears a striking resemblance to the curriculum structure in China, wherein courses focusing on the acquisition of musical knowledge are assigned a substantially higher number of credits (30% more, to be precise) compared to those that are oriented towards the cultivation of pedagogical competencies. Haning (2021) argued that the extant literature on the subject has not yet yielded any findings pertaining to the relationship between the curriculum of pre-service teacher education programmes and the formation of teacher identity.

However, In Portugal, Lopes & Pereira (2012) detail pre-service education programmes for music students across four distinct historical periods. The programmes aim to identify curriculum content that fosters individual professional development by

exploring the core components of teacher identity. Based on their research, the authors divide pre-service education into two categories: formal (theoretical) and informal (practical). To examine teacher identity, we interviewed 40 teachers and collected their biographies. Results show that formal pre-service education curriculum was not the primary focus, as the theoretical curriculum did not suffice for practical teaching in professional careers. The non-formal curricula, such as activities, were instead highly appreciated. For instance, individuals perceive teamwork, community activities, and attending seminars as significant components of their professional identity establishment. Elaborating further, formal programmes hold limited relevance in terms of acquiring teaching skills. Conversely, informal programmes are more effective in facilitating personal professional development, commonly through innovative methods of learning, or practical tasks, outside of university premises.

Myers (2016) explored the current state of music curricula through an investigation of creativity, diversity and integration. He highlighted that music curricula in higher education institutions in the United States and China exhibit certain similarities in terms of their homogeneity. The study indicated that traditional Bachelor of Music (B.M.) programmes tend to prioritise classical music, with an emphasis on the teaching of skills and focus on technical proficiency. Nevertheless, such curricula are evidently deficient in their capacity to cultivate creativity and innovative thinking among students. Concurrently, a considerable number of music programmes prioritise the transmission of theoretical knowledge, thereby overlooking the significance of practical experience. The dissociation between theoretical concepts and practical application hinders students' capacity for adaptability and their ability to apply learning to diverse musical contexts. Furthermore, the curriculum appears to lack sufficient exposure to diverse musical

styles and cultures, which limits students' musical literacy and prevents them from fully understanding and appreciating musical cultures on a global scale.

A further area of concern is that the traditional curriculum is relatively fixed and lacks the flexibility to adequately address the diverse interests and evolving industry needs of students. In light of the accelerated evolution of the music industry, the market demands for professionals are undergoing a constant transformation. However, many music programmes demonstrate a lack of responsiveness to such changes, which can result in graduates facing significant challenges in adapting their careers upon graduation. Consequently, the curriculum content frequently neglects to sufficiently address the operational nuances of the music industry and the requisite career readiness skills, which results in graduates frequently reporting a lack of preparedness upon entering the workforce.

Concerning the significance of internships for the career advancement of music students while enrolled at universities, Bennett and Chong (2017) carried out a study in Singapore to investigate the teacher identity of pre-service music teachers during their training. The research was undertaken at the National Institute of Education (NIE) within Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore. Unlike the current pre-service music teacher education model in China, the National Institute of Education (NIE) in Singapore focuses on pre-service teacher education for mainstream schools. They offer a professional diploma for primary music teachers, as well as a postgraduate diploma in primary music education. The research conducted interviews with 60 postgraduate teachers in music education, finding that a majority of them possessed a sense of professional identity. They had greater potential for a long-term career plan in teaching compared to their peers. The study argues that early internships are necessary

for promoting pre-service music teachers to develop stronger identities, reconcile their dual identities as musicians and music teachers, and realize their multiple career aspirations. This inquiry highlights the importance of assisting pre-service music teachers in integrating their identities as a unified musician.

Mishra et al., (2011) conducted a study to examine the curriculum content of university music education degrees. The absence of a curriculum for pre-service music teachers was identified as a factor that impairs students' comprehension of the pedagogical profession, which subsequently impacts their career planning. They collected data from 59 nationally accredited conservatories, which revealed that 28 institutions devised an introductory music education course, 25 devised a more general introductory pedagogy course, four institutions devised both courses, and only six institutions did not devise a course that could be identified as an introductory course. However, the data demonstrated a paucity of course descriptions that would reflect a student's suitability to become a music teacher. This is evidenced by the absence of individualised courses that analyse a prospective teacher's personal goals and competencies. Furthermore, only three courses made specific mention of teaching experience. The results indicate a consensus that introductory music courses should provide an overview of the profession, with particular emphasis on historical and philosophical aspects. However, the incorporation of curriculum and instruction, along with the role of the music teacher, was not universally endorsed. This was despite the view that music education majors should be considered distinct from those in education. Consequently, students lacked a more comprehensive introduction to the teaching profession.

2.4 Social music education

Wei (2006) provided a classification of music education into professional and public sectors. Professional music education aims to train professional artistic talents, while public music education emphasizes popularity and includes school music education and social music education. Social music education includes music-related education provided to members of the community by arts and cultural organizations or individuals outside of schools, as well as music education services provided to the community by various types of schools.

Wei (2006), Tu (2009), Li (2011), Zhang (2014), Fan (2017) emphasize that the school music education programme employs a uniform textbook, aiming to train musical instincts and popularize musical knowledge without developing specific musical skills. This is due to the fact that the school music education programme is an unfocused curriculum, so there is no need to arrange enough teachers and teaching time. In this context, students frequently participate in music programmes outside of school, thus rendering social music education an integral component of public music education. This not only complements music education in schools but also serves all citizens of society. The domain of social music education encompasses all aspects of music education that take place outside of the formal school environment. These include music examinations, instrumental training, vocal ensembles, and adult music education. It is crucial for the comprehensive development of musical culture and quality in China.

In other countries, similar forms of social-musical education known as "community music" (CM) provide individuals who for various reasons are unable to participate in music learning with the opportunity to develop their musical potential, with the same emphasis on universality, and are also recognized as an essential complement to music

education in schools, and therefore have a powerful educational potential in the history of the development of music education. Unlike in China, CM offers a diverse range of informal and short-term music learning activities that only experienced teachers can organize (Koopman, 2007). The roles of participants are versatile, with opportunities for everyone to become creators and leaders, while CM prioritizes musical knowledge regarding music creation and application, with less emphasis on music theory such as music history (Veblen, 2007).

However, the social music education organizations in China adopt a more methodical approach and are more precise in their training of young people, specifically those aged between 6 and 15 years old, with four primary types of such education. 1. Social organizations, including juvenile centers, cultural centers, and childhood activity centers, are among the various options available for individuals seeking training in the arts. 2. Participation in all kinds of art groups or enrolling in professional training courses offered by academic institutions, typically designed for centralized training for arts examinations. 3. Private Music Education Institutions, combine the sale of musical instruments and training. 4. Individual studios or private tutors offer another avenue for training in the arts. With the popularization and development of social music education, private music education institutions have become important institutions of social music education, which is more extensive and professional than other forms of social music education. Therefore, the private music education institutions are the most influential and socially concerned institutions of social music education at present (Wei, 2006; Zhang, 2014; Li, 2016; Teng, 2021).

Teng's (2021) study examined the employment situation among music graduates in Shanghai during 2015 and 2016, revealing that less than 50% (44.8%) secured work in

school music education or other related fields. Additionally, a survey was conducted on current students providing social music education services from 2016-2019, finding that a certain percentage of students in each grade worked part-time in social music education organizations. Overall, these findings demonstrate that social music education has emerged as a necessary career for music graduates.

2.4.1 The employment situation of music graduates in social music education institutions from Anhui Province.

As the showing in Figure 2.4, Tu and Yu (2019), the majority of music graduates pursue careers in the field of music education, particularly in primary and secondary schools. However, the increase in the number of graduates has led to a saturation of employment opportunities in primary and secondary schools, resulting in a highly competitive job market. Consequently, a significant proportion of graduates have opted to pursue employment with social music education institutions, with the number of individuals in employment rising steadily until 2019, reaching a figure that is almost double that of 2013. Furthermore, the rate of entrepreneurship amongst music graduates is relatively limited, however, amongst those who choose to establish their own business following graduation, the majority select social music education institutions as their chosen field of endeavour.

Figure 2.4: Career Opportunities for Music Graduates

Year	Education	National Project	Art training	Pursue advanced studies	Entrepre neurship	Go abroad	Government sector	Others	Job-wating	Headcount
2013	582	52	248	66	6	2	269	8	80	1313
2014	348	50	327	71	7	2	359	7	113	1284
2015	522	13	231	80	19	3	225	5	135	1233
2016	521	2	265	67	14	11	308	0	156	1344
2017	447	13	378	80	14	15	316	0	135	1398
2018	322	7	431	81	0	12	335	0	124	1312
2019	305	4	475	53	22	21	309	0	111	1300

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The objective of this qualitative investigation was to explore the perspectives and expectations of employers in private music education institutions in Hefei, with a view to understanding the employability required of graduates.

The following presents the sections are organized as follows: (1) research design; (2) data collection; procedure and (3) data analysis procedures.

This chapter discusses the methods used to examine and address the following research questions:

- (1) How do the employers of music education institutions perceive the employability of current music graduates?
- (2) What are the recommendations of improving employability of music graduates from the employers' perspective?

3.2 Research Design

This study is exploratory, utilizing semi-structured interviews to gain the employer's perspective on the skills required for ideal employability.

3.2.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research aims to gather and examine non-numerical (descriptive) data in order to understand the social reality of individuals, which can include their attitudes, beliefs, and motivations. This type of research is characterized by its ability to provide a deep understanding of the studied subject. In-depth interviews, focus groups, or observations are often implemented to collect data that is rich in detail and context.

Qualitative research is frequently utilized to explore intricate phenomena or to attain a better understanding of people's experiences and perspectives on particular themes. It proves particularly significant when researchers uncover the significance individuals attach to their experiences or aim to disclose the fundamental reasons behind individuals' conduct. Qualitative research entails gathering and assessing non-digital data, such as text, audio, or video, to grasp concepts, ideas, or experiences in-depth. Qualitative research can offer insight into problems and generate new research ideas. It is a flexible approach that prioritizes the retention of rich meaning during data interpretation. The study of the nature of phenomena is at the core of qualitative research, making it particularly useful for investigating why something is observed or evaluating complex multi-component interventions, and focusing on their improvement (Bhandari, 2023).

The study utilized qualitative interviews, which are known to offer valuable insight into the subjective experiences, opinions and motivations of employers when assessing the employability of music graduates (Smith, 2019). The utilisation of a quantitative approach is rendered unfeasible by virtue of the intrinsic subjectivity that characterises this particular topic.

3.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews combine structured and unstructured elements. The interviewer has a general outline for the questions but they do not have to adhere to a particular phrasing or sequence. Open-ended questions and probes are used to allow participants to respond in their own words, rather than choosing from predefined responses. Open-ended inquiries yielded comprehensive and interpretive responses that were unforeseen by the researchers, as they connected with participants taking into account their individual qualities and encouraging them to describe their replies in detail.

The approach is descriptive and non-numerical in nature, with the objective of comprehending meaning, emotions, and depicting scenarios. Interview questions are meticulously prepared in advance of scheduled interviews, thereby allowing sufficient time for researchers to formulate and objectively assess these questions. This process engenders flexibility in the generation of responses to research inquiries. Researchers are at liberty to structure their questions in whichever format they deem most appropriate. The utilisation of interviews as a data collection method has been demonstrated to yield reliable qualitative insights (George, 2023).

The purpose of this study explored employers' perceptions of graduate employment and the participants' perceptions of their responses were entirely subjective, hence the choice of semi-structured interviews. The openness of semi-structured interviews allowed the participants the freedom to express any of their perceptions and the researcher was able to focus on topics of interest in time to explore them further during the interviews.

3.3 Participant Sampling

In qualitative research, the selection and size of the sample represent a crucial element. Weyant (2022) emphasized the importance of understanding the strategies and principles of sampling. Firstly, qualitative research typically employs purposive sampling, whereby participants are selected based on the research objectives and possess pertinent experience and a comprehensive understanding of the research topic to ensure the data are representative. Secondly, there is no fixed sample size in qualitative research. In general, the sample size in qualitative research is relatively modest, typically ranging from 5 to 30 participants, with the sample size determined based on the principle of saturation, which is considered to have been reached when the

researcher discovers new themes or data with no further insights to be gained from the data analysis; thirdly, the selection strategy of the sample can be based on typical case sampling, whereby the participants are selected to represent the viewpoints and experiences of the whole group.

This study utilised semi-structured interviews, with a total sample size of five, and was designed based on the information power theory proposed by Malterud et al. (2016). Theory posits that the sample size should be determined based on a combination of factors, including the degree of focus of the research objectives, the specificity of the sample, the clarity of the theoretical framework, the quality of the interviews and the analysis strategy. Given the clarity of the subject matter of this study and the representativeness and experience of the interviewees, who are key figures in the target group with the capacity to provide highly relevant and substantial information, the selection of five interviewees is effective in supporting the study's objectives. Furthermore, the study adopts a theory-driven analytical approach that prioritises in-depth understanding of individual cases over cross-sectional comparisons, thereby ensuring a high level of informativeness.

For this study, five employers of private music education institutions were interviewed, and the research was conducted in the form of one-on-one in-depth interviews. These employers met the specified qualifications:

- (1) Employers are required to have an institution that has been in operation for more than three years.
- (2) The employer's training institution must have at least 150 students.
- (3) For employers to be eligible they must have more than twenty employees.

(4) It is a prerequisite for employers to possess an undergraduate degree or training in music, coupled with an in-depth understanding of at least one musical instrument.

(5) Employers were born in Anhui Province and has worked in Anhui in a music-related capacity.

Employers who met these criteria were able to offer more in-depth views on the employability of recent music graduates and make recommendations to improve the employability of music graduates in the workplace, thereby facilitating organisational and individual career development. The employers interviewed were either sole proprietors of their organisations or had been involved in teaching activities.

3.4 Data collection procedure

Before an interview takes place, informants will be informed of the details of the study and reassured of research ethical principles such as anonymity and confidentiality. To ensure transparency, participant information will be provided to inform participants of what to expect during their involvement (Gill et al., 2008).

After verifying participants met the basic criteria, they were sent consent forms through email. Upon receipt, participants would sign a consent form using a pseudonym of their choosing. Before commencing the interviews, participants were informed of the identity of the research and her academic affiliation. Additionally, the researcher conducting a research study concerning the employability of music graduates and would appreciate a comprehensive conversation on the employability that employers should expect from them. It is imperative to note that the researcher not making any subjective evaluations in this study. The research was carried out through a face-to-face and one-on-one interview, lasting for approximately 30 to 60 minutes, and recorded both in

audio and text format. Participants' genuine information remained absolutely confidential, and personal data was not utilized for anything beyond this study. The researcher was the sole person who had access to all the data. A relationship of trust was easier to establish as the researcher had worked in one of the participants' organizations for one year and was able to contact the other participants through this participant.

The interview guides include questions related to employers perception about employability of music graduates, and what are the desire employability in employer's expectation, and what their perception about the employability of existing music graduates in their institutions.

Interview questions are set based on the research questions. It was ensured that key themes related to the research questions could be explored in depth. To ensure the accuracy and validity of the questions, the interview outline for this study was reviewed and feedback by the mentor after the initial design was completed. The mentor, in conjunction with his extensive research experience, meticulously examined the structure and formulation of the questions, as well as the core concepts involved, and made suggestions for changes. Based on the mentor's guidance, the researcher made adjustments to the questions to ensure that they covered the study comprehensively while effectively guiding the interviewees to provide in-depth information. In addition, the researcher conducted a pre-interview test with an employer in advance to further validate the feasibility and effectiveness of the question design.

3.5 Data analysis procedure

In this study, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with five employers to explore their views and experiences regarding graduate employability, recruitment

preferences, and professional adaptability. Given the nature and richness of the qualitative data collected, thematic analysis was employed as the primary analytical method. This was supported by a systematic process of coding, which enabled the identification, organization, and synthesis of recurring meaning units within the interview transcripts.

According Kiger and Varpio (2020), thematic analysis is particularly well-suited to handling a small set of high-quality, in-depth interviews. Its methodological flexibility allows researchers to inductively construct an analytical framework from the data itself, rather than imposing pre-existing theoretical categories. Through thematic analysis, it becomes possible to uncover the implicit value judgments and behavioral logic embedded in employers' recruitment decisions, thereby providing a multi-dimensional perspective on the relationship between employer expectations and the realities of graduate performance.

Moreover, the themes generated through thematic analysis are both conceptually rich and analytically robust, enabling researchers to present their findings in a structured and coherent manner. As Kiger and Varpio (2020) point out, thematic analysis is a powerful and versatile qualitative method applicable across diverse research domains. By following a systematic analytical process and maintaining a critical stance throughout, researchers can use thematic analysis to reveal deeper layers of meaning in qualitative data and to gain a nuanced understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives.

Interview data often consists of extensive and complex textual information. Thematic analysis helps researchers extract insights relevant to their research questions by identifying recurring patterns of meaning (themes) across this complexity. The method

allows for the inclusion of direct quotes, preserving the authenticity of participants' expressions and supporting the representation of diverse viewpoints and lived experiences.

Coding, as the foundational step in thematic analysis, involves segmenting the raw text and assigning codes to meaningful data units. This process brings structure and clarity to the analysis and ensures that findings are systematically derived. Furthermore, a well-developed coding framework and clearly defined themes can enhance the transparency and reproducibility of the research, as well as support consistency among members of the research team, thereby reducing the potential for subjectivity and interpretive bias.

Therefore, following the conclusion of the interviews, the notes were reviewed and the audio recordings were listened to in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the content. Secondly, the highly repetitive features of the data were identified, the participants' responses were categorised and coded, and the coding was organised into underlying themes. When coding was carried out, the same data were placed in the same groups, which used different keywords as the identifying points. The keywords provided key points for data identification; thirdly, all data were pooled according to the themes organised by the keywords; and finally, the appropriateness and consistency of the themes were assessed and each participant was assigned a number for organisational purposes (George, 2022). The present study therefore employed a thematic analysis approach for the quantification of frequently occurring themes and concepts.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presented the results of a qualitative study that categorized employability into two directions: specialized competencies, which are professional skills required by employers, and comprehensive competence and is divided into two sections: (1) Employers' perceptions on the current employability of music graduates; (2) Employability competencies that employers recommended from music graduates.

The research questions are addressed by the presentation of the results, which include:

- (1) How do the employers of music education institutions perceive the employability of current music graduates?
- (2) What are the recommendations of improving employability of music graduates from the employers' perspective?

The following sections discussed the study's findings. Due to the need of keeping participants' identity confidential, all participants are coded as P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5.

4.2 RQ1: How do the employers of music education institutions perceive the employability of current music graduates?

Five participants were interviewed about employers' perceptions of the employability of music graduates. Among them, P1, P2, and P3 were also before becoming employers. All employers were asked how they are satisfied with the employability of their current staff, with all four employers being generally satisfied with their current staff and only P5 being moderately satisfied.

4.2.1 Employers' perceptions on the professional skills of music graduates

Employers considered professional skills to be a necessity rather than being the most important. Professionally relevant skills are viewed as a basic requirement, therefore, the deemed as prerequisite.

Professional ability was identified as the primary factor by participants P1, P3 and P5, and was subsequently elaborated upon by P1 and P3 :

The fundamental requirement is the demonstration of professional, which are prerequisites for employment. A common phenomenon has been observed among recent graduates seeking employment: those applying for a position as a piano teacher are typically asked to perform a piece that they are most familiar with to assess their playing skills. In this care, they often claim to not have been practicing. Subsequently, their ability to sight-read unfamiliar pieces is evaluated, and the results are similarly unsatisfactory. In such instances, their other comprehensive employability are not considered (P1).

It is essential to assess the professional skills of graduates at the outset of the hiring process. Those who possess the requisite professional skills will be offered employment and will then enter into a probationary period. During this period, they will have the opportunity to demonstrate the full range of their comprehensive employability, such as their ability to adopt a positive work attitude and to the full scope of the institution's expectations. In the event that the candidate's comprehensive employability is significantly lacking, even if their professional skills are particularly strong, it may be necessary to reconsider the decision to hire (P3).

Prior to examining professional skills, P2 would assess the availability of comprehensive employability:

The initial focus will be on the communication and teaching abilities of the staff in question. This will entail an assessment of their proficiency in the music matter, the teaching style they will employ, and their approachability in the communication process. Subsequently, the professional skills will be examined. It is typical for music graduates to possess the requisite professional skills, however, teachers can be grouped into three categories—junior, intermediate, and senior—based on their professional skills. The largest proportion of teachers falls into the junior category.

In contrast to P1, P3 and P5, P4 maintains an emphasis on comprehensive employability, even in the absence of professional skills:

As a music teacher, the possession of qualified professional skills represents the most fundamental prerequisite for the role. These skills can also be most intuitively reflected, and thus warrant further examination. Subsequently, we can turn our attention to the domain of comprehensive skills. In the past, I encountered a music student who exhibited deficiencies in professional skills, however, I observed that he possessed robust communication abilities and a high aptitude for learning. Consequently, I arranged for him to undertake roles outside the realm of music instruction. After he had enhanced his professional skills through his own efforts, I then appointed him to the role of a music teacher.

4.2.2 Employers' perceptions on the comprehensive employability of music graduates

According to P1, recent recruitment trends have resulted in graduates possessing only one dimensional skill set, with comprehensive employability being a rare commodity, and most of the comprehensive employability were developed on the job:

Upon graduation, music students often lack the comprehensive employability skills necessary for practical work. It typically takes one to two years of training for them to develop some of the comprehensive employability required for employment. In some cases, even after one or two years of training, they may still be unable to fully meet the requirements of the job. In the current context, it is not uncommon for the overall employability of music graduates to fall short of the requirements of their roles.

In response, P2 presented a similar perspective and posits that the majority of current employees possess only the fundamental employability necessary for the position:

The majority of teachers possess only fundamental communication and teaching abilities, which are sufficient for the delivery of music instruction. However, they often lack the broader comprehensive employability necessary for more advanced career development roles. For instance, the position of head of teaching at an educational institution requires exemplary professional skills but also enhanced teaching, management, and organizational abilities. Consequently, the majority of teachers are primarily focused on the core competencies of teaching.

P4 added:

The majority of competent communication and teaching skills, which are developed passively during the teaching process.

P3 and P5 espoused a similar perspective on these comprehensive employability, with P5 providing a concise and detailed account:

Overall, I am not highly satisfied with the employability of existing employees, mainly due to a lack of comprehensive employability. These include a lack of team spirit and an inactive work attitude. Employees will only do the work that I have arranged and will not take the initiative to complete the work as long as it is not arranged. Furthermore, the majority of employees lack the capacity to enhance their own abilities or to learn. They are generally disinclined to take the initiative to develop their employability outside of work. For instance, they are unlikely to practise their professional skills, assuming that as long as they are able to the fundamental requirements of their role, this will be sufficient.

4.2.2.1 The influence of communication skills in the workplace

P1, P3, P4 and P5 hypothesized that recent graduates are typically deficient in in-depth communication skills. It was posited by P1 that a proportion of graduates may have pursued internships during their academic studies that may not align with the responsibilities of a music teacher. These experiences, which included clerical work in government departments with minimal interaction with individuals, lacked the requisite communication skills for teaching music.

P5 identified communication skills as one of the comprehensive employability with which employees are dissatisfied:

A monthly meeting is held with all teachers to discuss the difficulties encountered in their work. It was found that there is a lack of communication between the majority of teachers and the parents of their students. The issue is prevalent, with almost all teachers reporting a similar problem — some of the students they are responsible for teaching display a lack of interest in learning the instrument, resulting in slow progress. One teacher in particular was experiencing that one of his students had not attended class for an extended period. Upon learning of this, I inquired with the student's parents about the reason for this absence, they informed me that the teacher had not taken the initiative to communicate with them about the lessons after each session. Furthermore, even when the parents inquired about the lessons, the teacher provided only basic responses, leaving the parents uncertain about how to assist the student in practising the lessons after they returned home. Consequently, the student was unable to practise the instrument and subsequently lost interest, ultimately declining to join lessons.

Additionally, P4 posited that insufficient communication could precipitate a dearth of trust between parents and institution. It is noteworthy that P4 has asserted that communication skills represent the most expeditious attainment of comprehensive employability among employees through training. Prior to their graduation, the majority of students have not yet acquired work experience and have not communicated with their parents, including requesting financial support for the purchase of musical instruments. Therefore, they have limited experience in this area. However, after

training, the vast majority of students show significant improvement in their ability to communicate with parents. Should they encounter any issues during the teaching process, they will approach their employer for clarification. The employer will then provide guidance to the employee:

Institution's primary source of revenue is not solely derived from the sale of educational courses; it also encompasses the sale of musical instruments. However, instances of a lack of trust among parents may result in their preference for purchasing musical instruments from alternative sources, rather than from our institution. On occasion, parents express a desire to purchase a piano from our institutions, however, the communication between teachers and parents is insufficient, whether regarding the purchase of the piano or the provision of feedback following lessons. Consequently, parents may not place sufficient trust in the teachers, resulting in their decision to seek instruction for piano purchases elsewhere. This ultimately leads to a loss for the institution. Nevertheless, the majority of graduates will demonstrate a notable improvement in this particular ability following the training period.

4.2.2.2 lack of adaptability of newly hired teachers.

P1 and P2 proposed the implementation of pre-service training to facilitate a more expedient adaptation of graduates to the workplace. P1 emphasised that the most prevalent issue observed in recent years is the tendency of recently graduated music graduates to encounter difficulties in the training process, particularly with regard to adapting to the demands of their roles. This is frequently ascribed to an absence of clarity in their self-perception and understanding of the specific responsibilities and requirements of their positions.

It is a common assumption among recent music graduates that they possess the requisite professional and pedagogical abilities to qualify them for teaching positions. Nevertheless, as an employer, I consider that these abilities still require improvement. Consequently, after hiring, I will require them to continuously enhance their professional abilities, while also providing training in teaching skills. In addition, it is not uncommon for newly graduated music students to believe that the role of a teacher is simply to disseminate knowledge. However, in practice, they frequently find themselves required to possess a broader range of skills in order to the duties associated with the role. This can result in a discrepancy between the expectations of the role and the abilities of the individual, which can lead to difficulties in adapting to the workplace at the outset of their employment.

Similarly, P5 proposed a distinctive methodology for guiding novice teachers in familiarising themselves with novel work environments and subject matter in the early stages of their professional development. The postulation was that maladjustment would be a primary focus in the development of new staff, yet also the most rapidly evolving aspect, followed by the advancement of other comprehensive employability:

At the outset of their work, new teachers and other staff, students and parents require an appropriate period of time to become acquainted with one another. It is possible that some students may be more accustomed to the teaching style of the previous teacher. Therefore, the current teacher will have to appropriately adjust the teaching style to be more acceptable to the students. Additionally, at the initial stage, parents will need to

communicate with each other to understand each other. Consequently, at the outset, I will arrange for other experienced teachers to provide assistance to the new teacher in teaching, including communication with parents following the lesson. These are the primary responsibilities of teachers. Although newly-hired graduates may initially struggle to adapt, they can adapt to these tasks within a relatively short period of time and then gradually accept other tasks.

P3 mentioned another phenomenon caused by adaptability: full-time teachers in institutions of learning will have more job content than part-time teachers. Furthermore, the working system is more restrictive than that of part-time teachers. Consequently, some full-time teachers feel uncomfortable after a period of time and switch to part-time teaching, despite the fact that those graduates applying for full-time teaching positions are aware of the job content of both types of prior to entering the field. Despite this awareness, graduates still face challenges in the actual work:

The distinction between a full-time and a part-time teacher is significant. A full-time teacher is expected to be present at the institution from the start of the workday until its conclusion, even in the absence of scheduled instrumental lessons. This is due to the necessity of providing support to other staff members and being prepared to address unexpected tasks that may arise at any time. In contrast, a part-time teacher is only required to attend the scheduled lessons and does not have to remain at the institution during non-teaching hours. This allows for greater autonomy over their personal time. Additionally, there are music events, such as concerts, where only full-time teachers are requested to collaborate with a team to arrange the venue, coordinate students and parents, and so forth. In

contrast, some full-time teachers may find themselves unable to cope with the volume of work required of them over time and may therefore seek a reduction in their teaching hours in order to have more personal time.

According to P5, adaptability is the fastest developing attribute during the training of new employees.

4.2.2.3 Absence of career planning

Recent music graduates have been found to frequently demonstrate an absence of clarity in their career plans, as indicated by the findings of P1, P3 and P5. P5 posited that prior to the cultivation of other employability skills, such as the capacity for independent study and critical thinking, it is imperative for graduates to formulate a comprehensive career development plan. However, the prevailing sentiment among employees is one of a paucity of career planning acumen, with many believing that by merely performing their own work. Consequently, it is challenging to enhance their overall employability post-work, and only a limited number of employees will continue to develop themselves in their current roles.

Furthermore, the attribute of employee dissatisfaction mentioned by P4 is the phenomenon of high individuality and weak teamwork. This can be defined as the tendency to act independently, without consideration for the interests of the institution. P3 hypothesised that the weak teamwork exhibited by some graduates could be attributed to their career planning, as they perceive positions within the private music education institution to be temporary post-graduation engagements.

Students who have just graduated are uncertain about their future career plans and do not intend to work in institutions for an extended period. They do not perceive institutional work as a lifelong career path, which is

likely the key reason why they do not invest significant time and effort into such work. Instead, they prepare for examinations that will enable them to pursue employment at schools or universities.

4.2.2.4 Disparity of Working Attitudes

P2 supposed that insufficient work attitude could to some extent affect the development of other competencies, and there is no need to continue to develop them. P3 and P4 hold the same view that the current teaching a lack of commitment, accountability and motivation in their work. A significant proportion of music students display a tendency towards individualism, as evidenced by their approach to teamwork. The majority of graduates exhibit a certain resistance of part of the work content, which is then treated perfunctorily. P3 provided a detailed explanation of this phenomenon:

Individualistic and a lack of motivation to work in a team are characteristics that are commonly observed among music students. This is exemplified in instances where employees are assigned tasks that are perceived as menial, such as cleaning work. Music employees may regard such work as beneath their dignity, leading to a reluctance to cooperate and even a declaration that they are suitable for any role except those that do not involve cleaning when they are being recruited. Furthermore, they will only undertake the tasks that have been assigned to them and demonstrate a lack of initiative in relation to other responsibilities. It is my contention that employees are obliged to perform any task they are assigned, and that this is a matter of work attitudes.

P1 also highlighted a similar issue, proposing that work attitudes may be influenced by familial factors:

Some graduates emerge from affluent backgrounds and pursue employment as a means of occupying their time or as a way of avoiding the leisure. In such cases, it is probable that the aforementioned individuals will evince a lack of motivation to complete their own work, demonstrate uncooperative behaviour in the context of team-based tasks, and exhibit a reluctance to engage with the training provided by the teaching staff. Furthermore, it is likely that they will not adopt a work-oriented mindset when confronted with these tasks.

4.2.2.5 The phenomenon of a discrepancy in the manifestation of teamwork

P1 and P2 highlighted graduates' insufficient sense of teamwork as a concern emerging from their observations of workplace attitudes. In contrast, P4 pointed out this deficiency to the inherent nature of the teaching profession——A comparison of the workloads of full-time and part-time teachers reveals that, despite the difference in hours, both roles require a comparable degree of teamwork. In addition to their duties with students, full-time teachers are required to collaborate with teaching staff to fulfil associated teaching responsibilities. In addition, they collaborate with the institution to foster positive relationships between students and their parents, as well as to organise events such as concerts, competitions, and examinations. It is important to note that the aforementioned regulations also apply to part-time teachers. In certain instances, sales work may also be a component of the role:

It is imperative that teachers convey to parents the notion that students who have acquired proficiency in playing at our institution will be eligible for the most favourable discounts and the lowest prices when they purchase their instruments. Furthermore, they should be encouraged to make their

purchases from our institution, regardless of other considerations. This message must be instilled in parents from the outset and reiterated throughout the learning process. However, teachers are frequently reluctant to collaborate with us in conveying this message to parents. Furthermore, on occasion, when customers visit the establishment and the receptionist is required to demonstrate the piano, some teachers will frequently decline to assist, for instance, by playing two pianos of disparate prices so that the parents can perceive the distinction in sound quality. A significant proportion of teachers are solely responsible for the delivery of tuition and are therefore reluctant to become involved in any additional duties.

P3 said that a considerable proportion of students in contemporary society are only children and exhibit an elevated sense of self-centredness, which has the potential to impede their capacity for effective teamwork in professional contexts. Moreover, the role of a music teacher encompasses a substantial degree of collaboration, including organization of concerts, sustaining a conducive working environment, and executing other tasks as assigned by the employer. However, a significant proportion of teachers tend to focus on the aspect of the job that involves teaching music courses to the students:

If you're egotistical, you only think of yourself. You may do what I tell you, but you'll never think of doing anything unless you're told to.

4.2.3 Findings for Research Question 1

RQ1 identified that the absence of these competencies is associated with factors related to the educational and familial environments. The objective of the present study

was to analyse employers' perceptions of the employability of music graduates. The employment sector is characterised by a multifaceted and intricate nature, encompassing a wide range of professional competencies and a comprehensive array of employability skills. Professional skills were considered the fundamental prerequisite, while employers placed greater emphasis on graduates' comprehensive employability, encompassing communication skills, adaptability, and career planning. The study revealed that the majority of employers expressed satisfaction with the professional competencies of their current employees. However, they identified deficiencies in graduates' comprehensive employability skills, particularly in communication, adaptability, work attitudes, and teamwork. Additionally, there was a general dissatisfaction with career planning among employers. It has been asserted by employers that training has the capacity to enhance the comprehensive employability of employees to a considerable degree. However, it is often observed that graduates lack these soft skills at the commencement of their careers and require more guidance and development.

4.3 RO2: What are the recommendation of improving employability of music graduates from the employers' perspective?

Cheong et al. (2021) argued that employers are the ultimate decision makers when it comes to employability attributes., employers are the ultimate consumers of the knowledge, skills and other comprehensive employability acquired by higher education graduates, and the key question that needs to be understood is: which attributes are considered most important by employers?

Employers regard graduates as being employable only insofar as they meet the specific requirements of the job for which they are applying. Nevertheless, they continue to encounter a multitude of challenges in the real world and have yet to attain full

competence in their roles. Consequently, there is an ongoing obligation on the part of teachers to continue developing their skills and abilities in order to become effective teachers and to enhance their prospects for career advancement. The following section presents a detailed account of the employability skills that employers expect graduates to acquire.

4.3.1 The professional skills expected of graduates by employers

It was noted by P1 that the graduates who had applied for the position were primarily qualified in terms of professional skills. However, it was recommended by P1 that further training and development be undergone by the successful candidate in order to meet the requirements of the role. The relationship between professional skills and job development was discussed:

It is acknowledged that not all graduates will have excellent playing skills. Consequently, it is necessary to allocate a period of at least half a year or even longer to facilitate their improvement. Furthermore, their knowledge of the instrument, teaching materials, instrument competitions and instrument exams, which are to be developed in later stages. In addition, if graduates possess management skills, they may be able to progress to teaching management positions.

P2 discussed the requisite professional skills from various perspectives—teachers in private music education institution are categorized into teaching three levels, namely junior, intermediate and senior. The primary responsibility of the junior is to initiate children into the field, thus necessitating a higher level of theoretical knowledge. In contrast, intermediate and senior teachers are expected to demonstrate a higher level of

professional proficiency. As previously stated, the preponderance of junior teachers in institutions can be attributed to the influence of the Chinese art examination system. Within this paradigm, a significant proportion of music students are deemed to be "halfway" in their musical development, exhibiting an absence of systematic training during their early years. This has been shown to result in a paucity of professional competencies. Consequently, it is incumbent upon teachers to perpetually enhance their professional competencies in order to meet the requirements of intermediate and senior teachers:

It is not sufficient for teachers to be able to play the basic pieces with fluency; they must also be able to perform works by composers such as Chopin, Beethoven and Mozart, which are required at the level of performance in question.

One distinction between P3 and other employers is that P3 expected a higher level of professional skills and considers it essential for music graduates to have learned music from an early age. During the interview process, professional skills are the primary focus, but personal qualities become the most significant factor after the graduate is hired. This finding is consistent with the approach of other employers.

P4 identified several key reasons underlying the expectation that teachers enhance their professional competence:

Firstly, it was posited that the maintenance of teaching quality is contingent upon educators' capacity to engender students' enthusiasm for music. Secondly, P4 emphasised that strong professional skills are perceived as a critical factor in strengthening the institution's competitiveness, which is viewed as beneficial for its long-term

development. Thirdly, the interviewee proposed that a superior degree of professional expertise might possibly decrease the probability of teaching-related disputes and complaints.

4.3.2 The expectations of employers regarding the comprehensive employability of graduates

P1 proposed that private music education institutions have a limited number of positions available, and employees need to have a variety of abilities to cope with different work content. Therefore, employers are more concerned with comprehensive employability when recruiting graduates.

For instance, P1 indicated that even if a graduate's professional competencies are somewhat deficient at the time of the interview, they would still be employed if they demonstrate some robust comprehensive employability:

Some graduates who have part-time jobs before graduation will have better teaching and communication skills, and we will hire them as a highlight. In this case, the professional ability can be developed, because the lack of professional ability is usually due to the lack of practice after graduation, which leads to the rustiness of playing skills.

Additionally, employers pay attention to job seekers' attitudes towards the profession, their willingness to study and their career planning, in order to assess whether they have the potential for long-term development. Therefore, during the recruitment process, employers assess graduates' overall employability based on their attributes, rather than relying solely on the assessment of professional skills.

Employers believed that part of the overall employability is reflected in the interview, and these skills include personal quality and communication skills.

During the recruitment and probationary period, employers considered not only the professional competencies of graduates, but also their comprehensive employability competencies, in order to ascertain whether graduates have the potential for long-term development. The aforementioned employability is characterised by a comprehensive nature, encompassing personal qualities and communication skills. In the event of a successful recruitment, employers recommended that graduates should build on their existing competencies and continue to develop more comprehensive employability competencies. The purpose of this would be to meet job requirements and facilitate career development. Furthermore, P1, P3 and P5 posited that the dearth of comprehensive employability among music graduates can be attributed to the absence of pertinent abilities training during their academic tenure and a paucity of practical experience. P1 highlighted that graduates who had engaged in practical activities or part-time employment during their academic tenure were more readily adaptable to the workplace and exhibited greater potential for growth. Consequently, employers were more inclined to recruit graduates with practical experience. Consequently, employers were more expected to recruit graduates who have gained practical experience.

4.3.2.1 The importance of personal qualities in work

In the course of their recruitment activities, employers were invited to identify the abilities they considered most important in prospective graduates. The respondents' responses indicated a discernible predilection for personal attributes over prior

professional experience. Numerous respondents highlighted specific qualities such as responsibility, work attitudes and teamwork as key indicators of future success. P1 and P4 asserted that personal qualities are innate or fixed attributes that have been formed during growth through external influences such as family and school and are difficult to change. While P3 figured that personal qualities are of primary consideration, he acknowledges that he may not fully comprehend them during the interview and will have to observe them at a later stage.

P4 posited that the possession of a robust working attitudes and responsibility is a prerequisite for the development of other valuable employability, such as the ability to study, adapt, perform and teamwork. Furthermore, they contended that a commendable working attitudes and responsibility is contingent upon the influence of personal quality:

In the process of training teachers, it becomes evident that there is a significant disparity between them. For instance, when instructing novice employees, we educate them on how to motivate students to learn musical instruments, how to communicate with parents when they express interest in purchasing musical instruments, and how to assist students in planning for the piano level certificate examination. Those teachers who possess the requisite qualities will demonstrate an attitude of receptivity to the training provided. However, there are some teachers who do not demonstrate a positive work attitude and a strong sense of responsibility, and therefore do not engage with our training programmes with the requisite seriousness, nor do they interact with their students in a sufficiently caring manner. Over time, the discrepancy in proficiency between teachers in these domains will become evident. Teachers who are of better personal quality

tend to foster greater motivation in their students, leading to higher attendance rates at concerts organized by the institution and an increased propensity for students to purchase instruments from the same institution.

P5 posited that a positive campus culture, excellent instructors, a superior pedagogical approach and an optimal learning atmosphere are key elements of a good university. These elements have the capacity to shape an individual's thoughts and actions to a certain extent, and the graduation university is advised to take this into account:

I observed that individuals who encountered difficulties in their work often sought communication with me, and these individuals were typically graduates of more prestigious universities. They often exhibited a desire to excel in their work, a proclivity for better study habits, and certain self-imposed standards. They are eager to learn and develop their abilities, and are proactive in pursuing career advancement. Despite viewing the role as a temporary position, they demonstrate a commendable work attitude, which is an asset in any professional setting. In contrast, other employees may feel that it is sufficient for them to complete their work in a competent manner, without concern for the quality of the work done. As a result, they seldom provide feedback on their work. Consequently, in considering graduates for recruitment, the graduate university from which they have obtained their qualifications will be a primary factor.

4.3.2.2 In-depth requirements for communication skills

In addition to professional competencies and personal attributes, all employers placed a significant emphasis on communication skills, recognizing that teaching is a highly

interactive profession that necessitates regular communication and feedback from students and parents. It can thus be concluded that communication skills are of significant importance to any candidate, and that these skills can be most intuitively demonstrated during the recruitment process.

P5 would like to assess the graduate's communication skills through in-depth discussion on a range of topics during the interview:

A series of questions will be posed to the graduate in order to assess their communication skills. These will include queries regarding their expected salary, future plans, and views on the industry. The aim is to ascertain the extent to which the graduate can make a positive impression through simple communication.

P2 added:

It is not realistic to expect that recent graduates will possess a comprehensive set of employability. However, communication skills are an essential component. The efficacy of communication in an interview setting can serve as a reference to gauge if the graduates have the logic in their thinking and their approachability in conversation. If an individual's communication skills are deemed inadequate, it is essential to undertake a thorough evaluation before making a hiring decision.

P1 posited that communication skills have become an integral component of a piano teacher's comprehensive employability in the context of the highly competitive art training industry. It is anticipated that the communication skills of staff will be predominantly manifested in their interactions with students and parents:

For students of the organisation, effective communication is conducive to a more efficacious understanding of the students' learning status and psychological state, thus enabling the tailoring of teaching to their needs and the enhancement of teaching efficacy. In the context of parent-teacher communication, educators are expected to provide clear and professional feedback on students' progress, accompanied by reasonable learning suggestions. This practice has been shown to have a significant impact on students' renewal rates, as well as on the level of trust they and their parents have in the educational institution. Conversely, an assertive, patient and meticulous communication style can assist teachers in establishing a positive teacher-student relationship, stimulating students' interest in learning, and enhancing overall course satisfaction.

P3 additionally indicated that the communication skills in question are not only reflected in the relationship with parents and students, but also with employers, which affects career development. It was further stated that graduates are recommended to enhance their communication with colleagues and employers.

Some teachers are accustomed to departing at the conclusion of the course, whereas others prefer to remain within the institution and chat with their colleagues. For this latter group, I am willing to offer them priority when it comes to arranging students or those who are charged a higher fee for the course. Furthermore, I am willing to provide them with more opportunities for professional development.

4.3.2.3 The impact of professional identity on career development

Lamote & Engels (2010) conducted a comprehensive examination of the views of numerous scholars on the attribute of professional identity. Their findings suggest that teachers' professional identity is an important area of research. Scholars have made significant contributions to this field, offering compelling arguments from a multitude of perspectives. These arguments demonstrate that professional identity not only significantly influences teachers' teaching styles, professional development, and attitudes towards educational change, but also has a profound impact on the development of teachers' practice as students.

During the interviews, employers also mentioned a number of personal qualities, such as responsibility, execution, working attitudes, personal career planning, etc. It was recognised that these qualities are contingent on graduates having a sense of professional identity, which to a certain extent will motivate graduates to plan their own careers and to be motivated in their work. Furthermore, emphasis was placed on the significance of working attitudes, responsibility, and execution. It was posited that teachers' professional identity exerts a certain degree of influence on these attributes. Consequently, graduates are counselled to cultivate a professional identity:

It is imperative that a teacher is able to recognize the nature of their profession and the standards of professionalism that they are expected to uphold. Without this understanding, it is impossible for them to effectively educate their students. This is of paramount importance. (P2)

P4 highlighted that employees who have alternative career aspirations, even if they are utilising the temporary position offered by the employer, will demonstrate qualified competence in their work if they possess a clear professional identity:

Naturally, if a student has a sense of self-identity with his or her chosen profession, this will have a positive effect on their attitude and behaviour. A positive attitude is a certainty. It is often said that, first and foremost, teachers must recognize their own profession. If a teacher has a sense of identity with the profession, they are likely to be more resilient to the challenges of the role. All aspects of the situation will be manageable.

P3 believed that full-time teachers who recognize the institution and respect the employer after working for some time would have a sense of professional identity and their working attitudes hence the other attributes will gradually improve.

In this regard, P1 provided a more general description, posited that in the arts education (training) sector, the requirement for teachers' 'individual charisma' constitutes a significant demand, and that a sense of professional identity is a fundamental motivation for teachers' long-term commitment to and innovation in teaching:

The encouragement and support of teachers in the development of a robust sense of professional identity is instrumental not only in the stabilisation of the teaching force, but also in the enhancement of the quality of teaching and the overall level of education services. The encouragement and support of teachers in the development of a strong professional identity has been demonstrated to have a dual effect: firstly, it contributes to the stabilization of the teaching force, and secondly, it has a direct bearing on the quality of teaching and education services. Teachers who exhibit a high

level of professional identity typically demonstrate a greater degree of enthusiasm for their vocation, a higher level of commitment to ongoing professional development, and a greater aptitude for confronting the vicissitudes inherent in the teaching process.

4.3.2.4 The increased demand for the teaching skills in accordance with different age groups.

P2 emphasised that the majority of students enrolled in private music education institutions are children between the ages of 3 and 15, with the majority of these institutions offering a formative education. In view of this, it is imperative to scrutinise the teacher's affinity as a pivotal requisite attribute within the framework of teaching aptitudes. In order to facilitate a seamless transition and adaptation, it is recommended that teachers undergo a period of teaching training prior to assuming their roles:

It can be observed that children of a younger age display certain characteristics that are typical of their age group. Every individual possesses a unique set of characteristics and personality traits. New teachers may be perceived as having a blank slate, requiring an adjustment period to become familiar with the children in their care. Additionally, each parent may have distinct expectations for their child's development and education. For example, how might we teach different children? It would be beneficial to ascertain the methodologies employed for children with introverted characteristics and those with extroverted characteristics. This is the objective of our training.

P5 additionally highlighted the significance of formative education in private music education institutions:

It is not necessarily the case that a good professional who has not undergone the process of formative education will be able to teach students effectively, therefore, it is important to have teachers who are not only professionally qualified but also have the requisite teaching abilities. In order for us to conduct training in this industry, If the formative education is not conducted effectively, it will be impossible for individuals to learn and the future of the industry will be jeopardized. Subsequently, it is similarly important to consider the value of teaching in later life, although it is perhaps more crucial to focus on the significance of formative education.

P4 and P5 posited that the ability of graduates to demonstrate professional skills cannot be equated with their ability to teach, however, it is susceptible to influence from professional skills. Therefore suggested the implementation of a distinct examination and training process., furthermore, P2 noted that the teaching abilities of teachers in private music education institution across the entirety of Anhui Province is generally average. Consequently, according to P2, greater importance is placed on pedagogical ability than on other aspects of comprehensive employability. It is recommended that music students possess distinct personalities, necessitating the use of a variety of pedagogical approaches rather than the imposition of a uniform system of teaching styles:

I attach greater importance to the personal charisma of the teacher, and it is my hope that he will possess his own ideas and style of teaching, and develop his own characteristics. In our broader planning, there is no

requirement for every teacher to teach in accordance with a uniform textbook (P2).

P1 made reference to another aspect of teaching ability, graduates were advised to develop a wide range of teaching skills:

The objective is to recruit individuals who are able to train the next group of new teachers through their own teaching experience.

4.3.3 Findings for Research Question 2

It was a commonly held view amongst employers that the comprehensive employability exhibited by music graduates during interviews was often constrained and could not be fully evaluated. In many cases, it is necessary to observe and enhance comprehensive employability in the workplace. The recommendation and needs of employers with regard to the enhancement of the employability of graduates in the field of music encompass a number of dimensions. Firstly, professional skills are the foundation, and employers tend to prefer to recruit graduates with better comprehensive employability. It is important to note that even in cases where professional skills are deemed inadequate, these competencies can be cultivated through training programmes or other educational interventions at a subsequent stage of one's career. In contrast, personal qualities, such as emotional intelligence or adaptability, are often innate or developed during one's formative years and are, as a result, more challenging to acquire through training post-employment. Employers generally noted that music graduates were mostly 'competent' in terms of professional skills, but were still far from 'good'. It was asserted by certain employers (for example, P1, P2, P3) that a significant proportion of graduates exhibited deficiencies in performance skills and pedagogical knowledge, attributable to their non-academic background or absence of systematic training. It was further posited that these graduates would require a protracted transition

period in order to enhance their professional competence upon joining the organisation. Furthermore, a certain level of knowledge of musical instruments, mastery of teaching materials, and knowledge of competitions and examinations were identified as fundamental components of teacher development. In some cases, employers even associated managerial competence with job promotion, perceiving the enhancement of professional competence as a prerequisite for teachers to progress to teaching and managerial positions.

Specifically, this encompasses not only fundamental musical abilities but also a comprehensive understanding of the instrument, instructional resources, competitive events, and assessment procedures. Professional identity is regarded as a pivotal factor influencing teachers' pedagogical approaches, career advancement, work attitudes and teamwork. Teachers who embody this quality have been shown to demonstrate heightened levels of dedication and effectiveness. In contrast, teaching ability is of paramount importance for a music teacher's success, particularly when teaching students at the beginning level, where the teacher is recommended to demonstrate approachability and proficiency in teaching is the intention of employers to facilitate the continued improvement of music graduates in these areas through the implementation of a structured training programme and the provision of on-the-job experience. It is their hope that graduates will become exemplary teachers, demonstrating competence in their teaching roles and the capacity for long-term professional development. In conclusion, the acquisition of these comprehensive employability will not only facilitate the professional development of the individual teacher but will also enhance the quality of teaching and the reputation of the educational institution as a whole.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATION, AND RECOMMENDATION

This chapter comprises of discussion, implication and recommendation of the study. This chapter is structured as follows: (1) discussion of findings; (2) conclusion; (3) implication of the study; (4) future study; and (5) closing remarks.

The findings of the study indicated that recent music graduates exhibited deficiencies in both their comprehensive understanding of the employability competencies required for employment positions and the employability competencies that are sought by employers.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five employers to reveal the multi-layered complexity of employability through their perceptions of the employability of music graduates, covering two key aspects of professional skills and comprehensive employability. It was generally agreed among employers that while professional skills are a necessary foundation for entering the workplace, more importance is placed on comprehensive employability. The majority of employers expressed satisfaction with the professional competencies of their existing workforce. However, there was a general dissatisfaction with the performance of graduates in terms of comprehensive employability, particularly with regard to communication, adaptability and attitudes. Moreover, a dearth of competencies in career planning is a prevalent issue.

Consequently, employers will initially select music graduates with potential for development during the recruitment process. Subsequent to this, the students will be required to observe and enhance the employability skills that are in demand by

employers following the commencement of their role. The purpose of this is to guarantee that the graduate is able to continue refining their professional abilities in order to satisfy the requirements of their position.

While professional skills are the fundamental prerequisite for admission, employers were not content with mere qualifications; they expected graduates to demonstrate a commitment to ongoing development and improvement in practical work, in order to meet the demands and challenges of higher-level roles. In addition, personal qualities are regarded as a significant criterion for the assessment of graduates. It is the view of employers that these fundamental qualities not only determine an employee's performance at work, but also affect their capacity to develop other abilities.

Furthermore, communication skills and professional identity are regarded as pivotal factors influencing job effectiveness and career development. The capacity to communicate effectively is a key factor in enabling teachers to establish positive interactions with students and parents. Professional identity is also a crucial element in determining an individual's work attitudes and long-term career development. In addition, teaching ability is a significant factor, particularly in regard to interactions with students and parents. It is anticipated that teachers will be able to enhance the effectiveness of their teaching through their personal teaching style and approach, and to effectively train and mentor new teachers in order to improve overall teaching standards. In conclusion, employers seek graduates who not only exhibit superior professional competencies but also exemplify comprehensive employability and prospective career advancement, enabling them to achieve long-term career objectives and advancement within the workplace.

Findings

The findings of the data collected from the participants in this study are presented in the following section. The data were collected from employers who had established their own private music education institutions. The findings are presented in response to the research questions of the study: (1) How do the employers of music education institutions perceive the employability of current music graduates? (2) What are the recommendation of improving employability of music graduates from the employers' perspective? Therefore, the study aims: (1) to investigate the employability needed from the employers' perspective. (2) to provide employer-oriented employment guidance for music graduates to better adapt to the job position.

RQ1: How do the employers of music education institutions perceive the employability of current music graduates?

The results of the interviews indicated that all music graduates exhibit deficiencies in employability, which encompasses both professional skills and comprehensive employability. It was apparent that employers placed a greater value on comprehensive employability than on professional skills. However, the majority of music graduates demonstrate possession of professional competencies; yet, they exhibit an absence of the comprehensive employability skills that are essential for seamless adjustment during the probation period and the initial two years of career development. In conclusion, employers have expressed a general dissatisfaction with the comprehensive employability of graduates. This finding is consistent with Yan (2013)'s study, which indicated that employers tend to value comprehensive competencies over diplomas or professional skills alone.

As posited by Yan (2013), Yang (2014), Guo (2016), and Guo (2017), music graduates encounter the obstacle of acquiring comprehensive employability, which directly impacts their competitive edge in the job market. Typically, these individuals have limited opportunities to engage in internships and social practice during their academic tenure, which impairs their capacity to effectively translate theoretical knowledge into practical work. In addition to professional skills, the dearth of soft skills, such as effective communication and teamwork abilities, is also a concern for employers. It is therefore of particular importance to enhance the comprehensive employability of music graduates, including encouraging participation in interdisciplinary projects, promoting the accumulation of practical work experience and providing targeted pre-employment training. Initiatives of this nature have the potential to not only compensate for deficiencies in students' academic education, but also effectively enhance their competitiveness and adaptability in the job market.

It was highlighted by employers that music graduates' deficiency in communication skills directly impacts the quality of the work they produce. Wang and Yang (2013) conducted a study on the significance of communication skills in the context of employment. The findings revealed a notable discrepancy between the expectations of enterprises regarding students' communication skills and the self-perception of students regarding their communication skills. Furthermore, the study concluded that communication skills are the most crucial among the skills that the college students should require. The capacity to communicate effectively has become a crucial means of transmitting information and fostering harmonious interpersonal relationships. It has also become a fundamental ability for achieving career success. Communication ability is not an innate capacity; rather, it is a skill that can be acquired through learning and

practice. The acquisition and enhancement of communication skills will markedly enhance the quality of work and facilitate career advancement.

P1, P2 and P3 have indicated that music graduates are not adapted to their actual work due to a lack of clear information regarding their employment position and insufficient knowledge about themselves. Lu (2015) and Wang et al. (2022) have proposed that during the employment process, graduates frequently encounter difficulties in accurately assessing and perceiving the relationship between their own abilities, the job-seeking environment and society. This confusion can be attributed to two key factors: firstly, an individual's inadequate assessment of their own skills and experience; and secondly, the complexity and variability of the job-seeking market, coupled with the various uncertainties brought about by social development. Graduates may overestimate their abilities and lack clarity regarding their position in the highly competitive job market. This can result in a discrepancy between their actual performance and their perceived abilities.

The employers who participated in the survey identified a lack of career planning as a significant barrier to music graduates integrating into the workforce and developing their careers. Furthermore, institutional positions were perceived as temporary, with respondents attributing this perception to a perceived lack of clarity regarding the desired career path and the role's suitability for the individual. In this regard, Li and Qian (2022) posited that career planning is of paramount importance for the personal development and job readiness of university students. Firstly, it was demonstrated that clear career planning enables college students to establish clear life goals and directions, facilitates the early identification of personal attributes, clarifies career direction, and enhances competitiveness in the job market through targeted preparation. Secondly,

career planning empowers college students to gain an in-depth understanding of their own strengths and potential, formulate a scientific career development path, enhance their comprehensive abilities and social adaptability, and establish the foundation for the stability and satisfaction of their careers. It is therefore recommended that college students be made aware of the importance of career planning during their school years.

Another factor that affects the development of comprehensive employability among music graduates is inadequate work attitudes, characterized by a strong sense of self, which manifests itself in teamwork. This is evidenced by the findings of Yan (2013), Li (2013), Yang (2014), Lu (2015), Guo (2016), Yang (2017) and Guo (2017), who suggested that music students are more individualistic and, although more creative, lack crucial thinking about the problem. Furthermore, a self-centered disposition is particularly discernible in teamwork, which may result in a lack of coordination and cooperation within the group, thereby constraining the potential for comprehensive development.

It was proposed by P1, P3 and P5 that the absence of comprehensive employability among graduates was attributable to the training provided by universities. In China, the training mode and curriculum of music majors in universities exerts a considerable influence on the employment prospects of graduates. Music programmes at universities across the country have been found to be failing to align with societal needs in an effective manner. The quality of teaching, the calibre of faculty and the standard of infrastructure have been demonstrated to have a direct impact on students' learning and subsequent employment (Smith, 2019; Brown, 2021; Johnson, 2023). The constructiveness of the curriculum and its alignment with the demands of the job market are directly related to the competitiveness of graduates' employment opportunities (Li, 2016; Lu, 2015). Presently, some universities are experiencing deficiencies in both the

curriculum of their music majors and the resources available to them, which is negatively impacting the competitiveness of their students in the job market (Li, 2013; Nie, 2018). Furthermore, the training of students pursuing a degree in music at the university level tends to prioritize the development of professional skills, while placing less emphasis on fostering comprehensive quality and practical working abilities. This approach may impede students' ability to adapt and grow in professional settings (Jiang, 2018; Yang, 2019).

These issues are prevalent in comprehensive universities in Anhui Province, and the perceptions of employers reflect the deficiencies of the music curriculum in Anhui universities. Huang (2017) highlighted that the curriculum for music majors at universities in Anhui Province is undiversified and inadequate for fulfilling the comprehensive development of students. For instance, the existing curriculum is unduly concentrated on music theory instruction, with an inadequate allocation of practical courses. As a consequence, students receive inadequate training in music performance, creation and practical operation abilities. Furthermore, the curriculum is deficient in diversity and flexibility. The programme has not been subdivided according to students' individual development requirements and future career plans, which impedes the acquisition of the practical skills necessary for employment in the industry when students are subsequently employed. Moreover, the content of the courses exhibits a paucity of integration with the evolving trends in music and local characteristics. It is evident that the courses in question make insufficient use of the rich musical heritage of Anhui Province, thereby restricting students' access to learning opportunities that focus on regional and cultural music. The absence of a structured programme of practical courses and the lack of integration with local culture result in graduates possessing

inadequate skills to meet the demands of the competitive music market upon graduation. Consequently, this hinders the preservation and advancement of local music traditions.

In conclusion, it can be stated that music graduates encounter considerable difficulties in the job market, which are primarily attributable to the discrepancy between their professional skills and the comprehensive employability that are required in the modern labour market. While the majority of graduates possess the requisite professional skills, they often exhibit deficiencies in comprehensive employability, particularly in the areas of communication, teamwork, and career planning. This has resulted in a lack of preparation for adapting to the realities of the professional world. It is often necessary to supervise individuals during the probation period and the early stages of their career.

Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that music graduates frequently lack sufficient internship and social practice experience during their academic studies. This has been shown to impede their ability to effectively apply their theoretical knowledge in practice. Inadequate communication and teamwork skills have been demonstrated to have an adverse effect on the quality of work and career development.

In addition, the absence of structured career planning is a significant contributing factor to the career development of graduates. The implementation of a structured career plan enables students to establish objectives, identify their personal strengths, and devise a scientific career development trajectory. Nevertheless, a considerable proportion of music students lack an adequate comprehension of the significance of career planning, which consequently impairs their capacity for career adaptation.

Finally, the training mode and curriculum of universities exert a direct influence on the employment competitiveness of music graduates. It was evident that the curricula of certain universities do not align with the needs of society. The quality of teaching and the reasonableness of the curriculum have a significant impact on the comprehensive quality and practical working ability of students. In order to enhance the comprehensive employability of music graduates, it is recommended that communication skills be strengthened, internship opportunities be increased, and guidance on career planning be provided. It is posited that this will assist in enhancing their competitiveness and adaptability within the context of the job market.

RO2: What are the recommendation of improving employability of music graduates from the employers' perspective?

In the absence of adequate employability skills among graduate candidates, employers were compelled to evaluate the potential for graduates to develop comprehensive skills during the interview process. Personal qualities are regarded as the primary factor influencing graduates' professional conduct. Employers perceived personal qualities as a potential determinant of graduates' commitment to their work attitude, responsibility capacity for teamwork. Employers recognised that these qualities were shaped by school and family factors and cannot be developed on the job, and therefore must be present. Zhai (2016) posited that the foundation for the quality and moral growth of young people is laid in the family, which serves as the primary institution for the formation of their basic worldview, outlook on life and values. Consequently, the family can be considered the first school of life and the foundation of school education. Yang and Yu (2008) pointed out that the fundamental objective of school education is to enhance individuals' ideological, moral and cultural attributes. Moral education is regarded as the primary focus, with intellectual education subsequently imparting

knowledge on how to conduct oneself and behave. The sequence of moral and intellectual education is thus: moral education precedes intellectual education, which in turn provides guidance on how to conduct oneself.

This study was conducted on the basis of a series of interviews with employers, with a view to ascertaining the competencies that they expect music graduates to be able to continue improving in their positions. In addition, the study discussed the impact of China's art examination system on professional skills, with the result that the majority of music students have only a passable level of professional skills. Furthermore, the study concluded that teaching ability is also constrained by the level of professional skills, which must therefore be continuously enhanced in accordance with the requirements of the role. Within the context of China's "Artistic Examination" system, a significant proportion of music students opt to major in music not out of a genuine passion for music, but rather as a consequence of unsatisfactory outcomes in their cultural studies. Consequently, these students select the "Artistic Examination" route. It was evident that these students typically dedicate a brief period, ranging from a few months to a year, to preliminary preparations prior to the examination. This is often insufficient to meet the admission criteria and results in their expeditious entry into the music profession. Nevertheless, it has been observed that these students frequently encounter challenges in maintaining their cultural and professional studies following enrolment (Li, Xu, 2007; Pan, 2008; Li, 2009; Yan, 2013; Li, 2013; Liu, 2014; Lu, 2015).

Furthermore, employers highlighted the impact of professional identity on career development, suggesting that professional identity exerts influence on career planning to some extent and constrains comprehensive competencies. Beauchamp & Thomas (2009), Lamote & Engels (2010) examined the significance of teachers' professional

identity in education, emphasising the necessity of teachers' professional identity for the quality of teaching and professional development. The conclusion drawn was that professional identity needs to be cultivated during the university years, and that the structure of the curriculum exerts a significant influence on the professional identity of music teachers. It was thus determined that educational institutions are required to furnish guidance and assistance to those undergoing training to become music teachers, with a view to fostering the development of a robust professional identity.

In conclusion, as graduates lack comprehensive employability, employers will assess their potential for development during interviews, placing particular emphasis on personal qualities that are largely influenced by family and schooling rather than something that can be developed after work. Furthermore, music graduates must continually enhance the professional competencies essential for their roles in the workplace. A considerable number of music students opt to undertake the "Artistic Examination" as a consequence of unsatisfactory outcomes in their cultural studies, which results in the acquisition of only passable professional skills. In conclusion, the formation of a professional identity also affects career planning and the development of comprehensive employability. This emphasised the necessity of cultivating music teachers' professional identity and the importance of educational institutions providing adequate support.

5.1 Conclusion

The primary conclusion of the first research question was that the primary challenge faced by music graduates in the employment market was the discrepancy between their professional skills and their comprehensive employability. Employers placed a greater emphasis on the latter than on the former, which consisted of professional skills and

diplomas alone. While the majority of graduates possess the requisite professional skills, they often exhibit deficiencies in comprehensive employability, which impede their ability to adapt effectively in the workplace. Consequently, these professionals frequently require pre-employment training and a period of professional development in areas such as communication, teamwork, work attitudes, and career planning. The paucity of adequate internship and social practice experience for music graduates during their university education engenders difficulties in the effective application of theoretical knowledge to practical work. Furthermore, the absence of adequate career planning constitutes a significant element that has a detrimental effect on the career development of graduates. The mismatch between the curriculum of universities and the needs of the society expands these contradictions, and many music students do not have enough understanding of the importance of career planning, which affects their career adaptability. The training mode and curriculum of universities directly impact the employment competitiveness of music graduates. It is evident that the curricula of certain universities are not adequately aligned with societal needs. The quality of teaching and the rationality of the curriculum have a direct impact on the comprehensive quality and practical working ability of students.

While graduates will have acquired the fundamental employability skills necessary for the role through a period of training, it is essential that these skills are continuously enhanced. Consequently, the second research question sought to ascertain the views of employers on how graduates can improve their employability skills. In the initial phase of the recruitment process, employers will evaluate the graduates' potential for cultivation. It is widely accepted that personal qualities are an essential prerequisite for entering a position. It is commonly accepted that good personal qualities are a prerequisite for the training of comprehensive employability skills. This is because such

skills are largely influenced by factors outside of the workplace, such as those encountered during one's familial and educational upbringing. The presence of good personal qualities in graduates can indicate a sense of responsibility, teamwork, and a positive work attitude. These attributes have the potential to be cultivated in the workplace. The importance of effective communication skills is widely acknowledged by employers, who recognized them as a key employability skill that requires ongoing development. During the recruitment process, employers frequently request that candidates provide evidence of their communication abilities, thereby ascertaining whether they meet the initial requirements. In subsequent stages of their professional development, it is expected that graduates will enhance their communication skills not only with students and parents, but also with their employers and colleagues. Furthermore, it is imperative that music graduates demonstrate an unwavering dedication to sustained professional skill development and the continual enhancement of their pedagogical capabilities within the workplace. Employers have noted that China's art examination system has led to a significant number of students attaining a level of professional proficiency that meets the fundamental requirements of their occupations. However, it was noted that these students would benefit from continuous improvement of their professional skills in order to meet the evolving needs of the job. It is essential to develop teaching skills in a manner that is aligned with the advancement of professional abilities. This suggested that the capacity to teach should not be regarded as a standalone proficiency, but rather as a component of a broader set of skills that are continuously evolving throughout one's career. Moreover, the capacity to not only instruct students but also to enable the transmission of their pedagogical expertise to the subsequent cohort of novices was emphasised. In conclusion, employers placed significant emphasis on the cultivation of a professional identity among music graduates. They suggested that this can assist graduates in articulating their career

development goals with greater clarity to themselves and others, and to some extent, enhance their comprehensive employability. Furthermore, they highlighted the necessity for educational institutions to provide more robust guidance and support to students in developing a professional identity, as this can enhance their competitiveness in the job market and their potential for career advancement.

5.2 Implication of the Study

This study explored the specific needs and perceptions of employers regarding the professional skills, communication abilities, teamwork, and career planning of music students in Hefei. The findings of the study demonstrated that the primary challenges encountered by music graduates are the absence of comprehensive employability and the dearth of sufficient internship and social practice experience during their university years. This ultimately results in difficulties in adapting to the real world of work. In order to enhance career adaptability and development potential, academic institutions must refine their curricula to align with societal demands and reinforce career guidance and planning. Moreover, it is crucial to underscore the impact of China's art examination system on students' professional competencies. It is of the utmost importance to provide avenues for the continuous enhancement of skills in order to facilitate career advancement. Concurrently, fostering students' professional identity can assist them in defining their career objectives and self-awareness, thereby enhancing their comprehensive abilities and career competitiveness. Furthermore, it is recommended that universities facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration between music majors and other academic disciplines. Such collaboration has the potential to enhance students' comprehensive employability. Through interdisciplinary projects, students can develop a range of skills and enhance their adaptability and career development potential. Overall, the improvement of comprehensive employability, the accumulation

of practical work experience and clear career planning have a significant impact on the successful employment and career development of music graduates.

Although the present study focuses specifically on Hefei, China, the findings obtained possess broader applicability and offer valuable insights into the global employment landscape of music graduates. Existing literature has consistently highlighted the pervasive issue of inadequate employability among music graduates. This phenomenon has attracted considerable scholarly attention both within China and internationally. In the Chinese context, scholars such as Yan (2013), Guo (2017), and Yang (2014) have drawn attention to structural deficiencies in higher music education, particularly in terms of curriculum design and practical training, which they consider to be primary barriers to the effective development of graduates' employability. In a similar vein, international researchers, including Comunian and Faggian (2014), Faggian and Jewell (2016), and Ghazali and Bennett (2017), have identified challenges faced by music graduates in the global job market that are analogous. It is a commonly held view that the issue is attributable to a misalignment between higher education training models and the actual demands of the industry.

However, the prevailing focus of current research in China is on educational reform within higher institutions or on the personal skill development of graduates, often neglecting a systematic exploration of employer perspectives. This study thus offers a novel contribution by incorporating the viewpoint of employers. The investigation, of an empirical nature, examines in depth the manner in which employers perceive and define the employability requirements for music graduates. This approach is said to facilitate a more precise understanding of the actual demands of the labour market. The adoption of this employer-oriented approach not only fills a notable gap in domestic

research but also yields practical implications for the refinement of music education curricula and the enhancement of graduate employability in China.

5.3 Future study

Firstly, the present study commenced with in-depth interviews conducted with five employers in the city of Hefei. The objective of the study was to ascertain the respondents' assessment of the employability of music graduates and their specific needs. The employers provided invaluable insights into the performance of music graduates in actual workplaces. In order to obtain more comprehensive and representative data, future research should expand the sample size and study area, and employ a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. This would entail conducting systematic data surveys of a larger number of employers and in a greater variety of areas, in order to collect a wider range of feedback and data. By employing this comprehensive research methodology, it is possible to obtain a more precise understanding of the job market requirements for music graduates. Consequently, this facilitates the development of more scientific training programmes and suggestions for improvement to be made to educational institutions.

Secondly, this study focused on the employability of music graduates. Future research could expand the scope of the study to include graduates from other academic disciplines. This will facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the performance and challenges of university students with different professional backgrounds in the job market. Furthermore, it will provide valuable suggestions for universities to improve their curricula and career planning, thereby enabling university graduates to better meet the needs of the job market. This extended study will not only reveal the strengths and weaknesses of graduates from different majors in the job market, but will also explore

ways to enhance their comprehensive employability and competitiveness, with a view to facilitating a more seamless transition to the world of work.

Thirdly, enhancing collaboration between academic institutions and the music industry, introducing additional practical training programmes, providing students with more realistic work environments and offering them a wealth of hands-on experience, will facilitate the transition from theoretical knowledge acquired in the classroom to practical work. The future research would be to examine the existing arrangements and implementation of internships and social practices in higher education institutions. This would facilitate a better understanding of the role these opportunities play in the career development of music students. Concurrently, it would be beneficial to examine methods for optimising and expanding these practice opportunities, with the objective of aligning them more closely with the requirements of the industry and enhancing students' practical abilities. This initiative will serve to reduce the disparity between education and employment, thereby enhancing the employability of music majors and promoting the advancement and innovation of the entire music education system. The implementation of such measures will have two primary benefits. Firstly, it will enhance the employability of music students. Secondly, it will facilitate the advancement and innovation of the entire music education system.

Fourthly, the artistic examination system requires improvement. It is necessary to further explore the specific impact of the artistic examination system on the skill development of music majors. Based on this exploration, policy suggestions for improving the artistic examination system and subsequent educational support must be put forward. This will enhance students' professional competence and vocational adaptability.

Fifth, the objective of this study is to examine the alignment between the current music major curricula in universities and the social needs they serve, with the aim of providing recommendations for improvement. This study demonstrates that the curriculum for music majors in numerous universities are predominantly oriented towards the instruction of conventional music theory and professional skills. However, this approach is inadequate in addressing the actual requirements of the contemporary music industry. It is therefore recommended that future research should conduct an in-depth study of the curriculum content of music majors in universities, with a view to proposing scientifically and reasonably based improvement measures. By optimising the curriculum, the discrepancy between university education and the requirements of the music industry can be addressed, thereby enhancing the provision of high-quality talent in the modern music industry.

Sixth, the future study needs to gain a deeper understanding of the specific impact of the art exam system on the skill development of music students. The art examination, which constitutes a significant aspect of the curriculum for music students, exerts a direct influence on their skill development. However, the current art examination system appears to place undue emphasis on students' performance in the examination, with a concomitant neglect of their skill development in long-term learning and practice. It would be beneficial to examine policy recommendations on how to improve the arts examination system and subsequent educational support in the future, with a view to enhancing students' professional competence and career adaptability.

Finally, a further recommendation is the development of professional identity. The impact of professional identity on the career development of music graduates should be studied, and effective methods of cultivating professional identity during university

years should be explored. This will enhance career planning ability and comprehensive employability.

These research directions will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the employment challenges faced by music graduates and provide them with effective support for their career development. It will not only reveal the specific difficulties that music graduates may encounter when entering the job market, as well as the diversity of employability requirements for music graduates in the job market, but will also provide insights into other factors affecting their career development, such as their educational background and internship experiences. Furthermore, the systematic analysis of these issues will provide valuable feedback to the music education industry, enabling them to optimise their curriculum, strengthen internship opportunities and establish industry connections, thus better preparing students for their future careers. In conclusion, the findings of this research can provide a scientific basis for policy makers and universities to develop more targeted support measures and policies, with the aim of facilitating the transition of music graduates into a wider range of career fields, thereby achieving career diversification. The comprehensive and in-depth studies will provide valuable guidance and support for the career development of music graduates.

5.4 Closing Remarks

The objective of this study was to identify the specific employability competencies that employers require. This was undertaken with a view to providing a detailed reference for music graduates and offering guidance to educational institutions on how to optimise their curriculum. The study revealed that the primary obstacle encountered by music graduates in the job market is the absence of a comprehensive set of employability skills. Notwithstanding the demonstration of specific professional

competencies, these individuals characteristically exhibit an absence of practical experience and pertinent expertise, thereby impeding their capacity to adapt efficaciously within the workplace. The curricula currently in place fail to align fully with the actual requirements, while the Chinese art examination system exerts an influence on the level of students' professional skills. Furthermore, the absence of a professional identity represents a significant obstacle to their career advancement. It is therefore recommended that steps be taken to enhance the comprehensive employability of music graduates, provide more internship opportunities, optimise the curriculum and strengthen the cultivation of professional identity, in order to facilitate their successful transition into the workplace.

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