

# From Apprenticeship to Competency-Based Education: Reforming Vocal Pedagogy in Vietnamese Higher Education

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## ABSTRACT:

As contemporary performance ecologies and the music industry evolve at accelerating speed, vocal music education in Vietnamese universities faces mounting pressure to reorient its pedagogical foundations toward the development of professional competencies. Drawing on survey data from 300 lecturers, academic administrators, and students across six arts-training institutions, this study investigates how practical training is organised, which instructional methods prevail, and how governance structures shape current vocal pedagogy. The findings confirm that the apprenticeship model and one-to-one studio instruction continue to dominate the training process. Professionally collaborative practice formats — ensemble performance, stagecraft, recording practice, and project-based learning — remain sporadic and peripheral within existing curricula. Current governance mechanisms and infrastructural conditions have not yet generated sufficient institutional support for innovative pedagogical models or diversified professional practice environments. In response, the article proposes a set of reform directions grounded in competency-based vocal training: expanding experiential learning environments, cultivating learner autonomy, and progressively integrating voice science and technology-assisted instruction into pedagogical practice.

Keywords: vocal music education; apprenticeship model; competency-based education; voice science; arts education governance; Vietnamese higher education.

## 1. Introduction

The combined pressures of higher education reform and the rapid expansion of the cultural industries have compelled arts training institutions

in Vietnam to reassess pedagogical models that for decades remained largely unquestioned. Traditional vocal training focused primarily on transmitting technical craft through direct teacher–student

instruction. Contemporary performance environments, however, demand a substantially broader range of professional competencies from graduates. Young singers now routinely work with live bands, electronic sound systems, multimedia stages, and digital performance platforms — conditions under which vocal technique, though still foundational, no longer guarantees professional adaptability after graduation. University-level vocal music programmes therefore face growing structural pressure to reorient their training.

This reform imperative carries a clear policy dimension. Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW, which calls for a systemic transition toward competency-oriented education, has directly shaped curriculum design, instructional methodology, and training governance across multiple disciplines, including the performing arts. In practice, however, vocal music education in Vietnam remains deeply structured by the apprenticeship model — defined by an intensely individualised teacher–student relationship in which the instructor occupies the centre of the pedagogical process, and learning unfolds primarily through direct guidance and the transmission of professionally accumulated artistic experience.

The historical contribution of the apprenticeship model to Vietnamese vocal music education is undeniable. It established the institutional foundations of professional training and helped cultivate generations of technically accomplished performers. In a discipline where artistic growth depends heavily on stage experience, aesthetic sensibility, and interpretive individuality, sustained teacher–student interaction remains indispensable. Yet the accelerating transformation of contemporary performance culture has exposed the structural limitations of this model with increasing clarity. Training anchored too heavily in the instructor's personal experience often lacks transparent competency assessment criteria and narrows the space available for students to develop independent artistic thinking.

The consequences have become increasingly visible in professional practice. Many vocal students perform effectively within studio settings yet struggle when confronted with the demands of live

performance environments. Some possess solid technical foundations but demonstrate limited situational responsiveness on stage, weak collaborative capacity in ensemble contexts, or insufficient self-regulated practice habits. These patterns reveal a widening disconnect between a training culture centred on technical reproduction and the broader performance competencies required by contemporary musical professions.

Organisational and governance constraints compound these pedagogical difficulties. The near-exclusive concentration of one-to-one studio instruction, combined with limited access to collaborative practice environments — choral work, ensemble performance, stagecraft, and recording practice — restricts students' exposure to conditions approximating real artistic labour. At several institutions, governance structures remain administratively rigid, offering faculty little operational flexibility to experiment with alternative pedagogical approaches or diversified practice models. Reform efforts consequently proceed in fragmented ways, without sustained alignment among curriculum design, instructional practice, and academic governance.

These conditions signal that reforming vocal music education can no longer be reduced to technical adjustments within the studio. More fundamental questions are now at stake: how practical training is organised, what conceptual orientation guides pedagogy, and how far institutional governance structures facilitate or constrain innovation within higher arts education. Domestic scholarship, however, has remained concentrated largely on vocal technique, voice training methods, and individual teaching experience. Empirical studies examining training organisation, learning environments, and governance mechanisms in university-level vocal music education are comparatively rare — particularly research drawing on multi-institutional data.

Against this backdrop, the present study investigates pedagogical practices and the organisation of practical training in vocal music programmes across selected higher arts education institutions in Vietnam. Drawing on empirical survey data, the study advances several reform

directions grounded in competency-based education — an approach through which students develop not only as technically trained singers but as performers capable of professional adaptability and independent artistic thinking across diverse performance contexts. Within this framework, the instructor's role shifts gradually away from the transmission of technique toward the facilitation, organisation, and coaching of students' professional competency development. The study examines the structural factors slowing the transition from the apprenticeship model to competency-based education in university vocal training and considers the prospects for expanding professional practice modalities within the current institutional environment.

## 2. Literature Review

Within the performing arts, vocal music has long occupied a distinctive position: professional skill formation depends heavily on sustained individual practice and close pedagogical interaction between teacher and student. In Vietnam, the foundations of professional vocal pedagogy emerged largely through the reception of the European *Bel canto* tradition and its gradual adaptation to domestic training contexts. Nguyễn Trung Kiên's scholarship on vocal pedagogy and operatic art systematised several core principles of professional vocal training, particularly those related to breath management, resonance, and interpretive technique (Nguyễn Trung Kiên, 2001; 2014). Hồ Mộ La's writings on the history of Western vocal art provided an important scholarly basis for engaging with classical vocal traditions within Vietnamese arts education (Hồ Mộ La, 2008).

Within this pedagogical structure, the teacher–student relationship has remained strongly individualised. Training typically unfolds through extended one-to-one studio instruction, during which students continuously adjust breath support, tonal placement, dynamic control, and performance technique under close instructor supervision. This mechanism of direct transmission proved highly effective during the formative stages of professional training — particularly given the technical precision demanded by classical vocal

performance in areas such as resonance, vocal control, and performance sensibility. Richard Miller (1986) similarly underscored the importance of individualised instruction in the cultivation of vocal technique.

The contemporary performance environment, however, has become increasingly open, hybrid, and professionally diversified. Artistic professionalism can no longer be defined solely through technical accuracy or faithful reproduction of the instructor's interpretive expectations. The structural limitations of the apprenticeship model have therefore grown progressively more visible. Students often develop a strong dependence on the instructor's artistic judgement and experiential authority, while independent artistic decision-making, improvisational stagecraft, and collaborative performance capacity evolve far more slowly. The near-exclusive concentration of training within the one-to-one studio also restricts students' exposure to collective performance environments — despite the fact that contemporary musical practice increasingly requires ensemble coordination, spatial adaptability, and artistic interaction within complex and variable performance settings. This structural mismatch has widened the gap between conservatory-style training and contemporary professional practice.

Over recent decades, international vocal pedagogy has expanded progressively beyond the transmission of experiential knowledge toward approaches grounded in the scientific study of vocal function. Miller's (1986) foundational work situated vocal instruction in closer relation to laryngeal physiology, acoustics, and resonance mechanisms, rather than relying primarily on professional intuition or metaphorical description. Johan Sundberg and Ingo Titze subsequently deepened this scientific orientation by analysing vocal production through the combined perspectives of acoustics and physiology (Sundberg, 1987; Titze, 2000). Their scholarship provided more transparent and evidence-based frameworks for identifying and correcting technical problems that had previously depended largely on the instructor's perceptual judgement. Doscher (1994) similarly argued that contemporary vocal instructors must integrate

performance experience with scientifically grounded analysis of phonation and vocal production.

Competency-based education has simultaneously exerted a growing influence on performing arts training. Under this framework, vocal education is repositioned within the broader demands of professional practice, where students are expected to demonstrate stage adaptability, independent artistic thinking, and the capacity to perform across multiple artistic contexts. This shift has encouraged greater flexibility in classroom organisation, practical training formats, and assessment methods. Digital technology has further expanded the pedagogical possibilities available to vocal educators: acoustic analysis software and real-time feedback systems now allow students to observe pitch accuracy, spectral quality, and airflow dynamics directly during practice — phenomena previously evaluated almost entirely through the instructor's trained auditory perception. Across many international institutions, practical vocal training has also expanded beyond the traditional one-to-one studio to include workshops, masterclasses, recording practice, and collaborative performance projects.

In Vietnam, mounting pressure for educational reform and the accelerating pace of digital transformation in higher education have prompted recent scholarship to engage more directly with the renewal of practical vocal pedagogy. Đỗ Hương Giang and Ngô Thị Hòa Bình (2026) argue that vocal training environments should diversify practical formats and strengthen active learner participation rather than sustaining predominantly one-directional modes of technical transmission. Research examining the management of vocal courses through digital learning systems demonstrates that digital technology can support learning supervision, strengthen pedagogical interaction, and expand organisational capacity within arts training environments — while acknowledging that infrastructural and technological limitations at many institutions remain substantial (Đỗ Hương Giang, 2025).

Contemporary scholarship in vocal pedagogy thus reflects a clear movement beyond the narrow

boundaries of performance technique toward competency development, voice science, and technology-assisted instruction. In Vietnam, however, research continues to focus predominantly on technical training, repertoire analysis, and classroom-level pedagogical practice. Earlier studies (Đỗ Hương Giang, 2015; 2018; 2022) addressed instructional quality improvement and pedagogical renewal within arts universities, yet empirical research examining practical training organisation, learning environments, and the structural imbalance among different modes of vocal practice at the university level remains limited. Large-scale studies investigating the relationships among pedagogical approaches, governance structures, and professional competency requirements in Vietnamese university-level vocal music education are almost entirely absent. The present study addresses this gap through empirical investigation aimed at identifying the structural bottlenecks of the current training model and examining the conditions necessary for a transition toward competency-based education in Vietnamese higher arts institutions.

### 3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to identify broad patterns in contemporary university-level vocal training while capturing the contextual dimensions that survey data alone cannot adequately explain — practical learning environments, accumulated professional experience, entrenched pedagogical habits, and the unspoken conventions that continue to shape instructional practice within arts training institutions. The quantitative strand employed a structured questionnaire administered to faculty members, administrators, and students across selected institutions, generating data on the organisation of practical activities, pedagogical methods, and levels of learner participation throughout the training process. Running alongside the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with vocal music faculty and programme administrators to explore the underlying factors informing the quantitative findings — particularly

those related to training governance, classroom culture, the operational organisation of practical sessions, and instructors' professional orientations. This research design reflects an awareness of the epistemological character of arts education, where many of the most consequential dynamics of vocal training persist not as measurable indicators but as tacit professional knowledge, sedimented pedagogical habits, and inherited teaching conventions transmitted across generations of practice.

The study surveyed 300 participants drawn from six higher arts education institutions: the Vietnam National Academy of Music, the Ho Chi Minh City Conservatory of Music, the Hue Academy of Music, Vietnam National University of Arts Education, Military University of Culture and Arts and Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism. Participants were organised into three respondent groups — faculty members, academic administrators, and vocal music students — enabling the study to examine pedagogical practice, practical training organisation, and the broader institutional learning environment simultaneously from multiple perspectives.

The questionnaire was structured using a five-point Likert scale and organised across three thematic domains: forms of practical vocal training, pedagogical methods, and the enabling conditions of the training environment. Survey items examined the frequency of different learning formats, including one-to-one studio instruction, group practice, choral work, stagecraft, and recording practice, as well as both students' and instructors' perspectives on teaching methodology, the quality of the practical learning environment, and the level of infrastructural and technological support available within vocal training programmes. Prior to implementation, the instrument underwent linguistic revision and structural adjustment to

ensure its suitability for the specific pedagogical conditions of higher arts education.

Semi-structured interviews with faculty members and administrative personnel complemented the quantitative strand by deepening the interpretive dimensions of the study. Particular attention was directed toward obstacles to pedagogical renewal, the reorganisation of practical training, and existing governance arrangements within university vocal education. Interview discussions focused on instructors' lived professional experiences, their orientations toward the apprenticeship model, and the transformations they perceived within the contemporary vocal training environment.

Following data collection, survey responses were cleaned, coded, and processed using SPSS. Descriptive statistical procedures — including percentage distributions, means (M), and standard deviations (SD) — were employed to identify the principal patterns characterising vocal training practices across the surveyed institutions. Qualitative interview data were subsequently synthesised and triangulated with the quantitative findings to strengthen the analytical depth and interpretive reliability of the study.

## 4. Results

This section presents the principal findings derived from 300 valid survey responses and a series of in-depth interviews conducted across six higher arts education institutions. The analysis focuses on four dimensions: sample composition, the organisation of practical vocal training, prevailing pedagogical methods, and the infrastructural and governance conditions shaping current reform efforts in university vocal education.

### 4.1. Sample Composition

An overview of the sample structure clarifies the institutional and professional scope of the dataset underpinning this study.

Table 1. Sample Composition by Institution and Respondent Group (N = 300)

| No. | Institution                                         | Administrators (n) | Faculty (n) | Students (n) | Total (N)  | Percentage (%) |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------|--------------|------------|----------------|
| 1   | Vietnam National University of Arts Education       | 5                  | 15          | 40           | 60         | 20             |
| 2   | Vietnam National Academy of Music                   | 4                  | 20          | 36           | 60         | 20             |
| 3   | Ho Chi Minh City Conservatory of Music              | 4                  | 15          | 31           | 50         | 16.7           |
| 4   | Hue Academy of Music                                | 3                  | 12          | 25           | 40         | 13.3           |
| 5   | Military University of Culture and Arts             | 3                  | 12          | 35           | 50         | 16.7           |
| 6   | Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism | 2                  | 8           | 30           | 40         | 13.3           |
|     | <b>Total</b>                                        | <b>21</b>          | <b>82</b>   | <b>197</b>   | <b>300</b> | <b>100</b>     |

*Source: research team survey*

The sample was designed to capture the diversity of vocal training models currently operating across Vietnam, encompassing elite conservatory performance education, music teacher training, and arts programmes situated within regional cultural contexts. The institutional composition reflects four distinct pedagogical orientations: advanced professional performance training (conservatories and academies combined, 50%), music teacher education (Vietnam National University of Arts Education, 20%), arts training within the armed forces sector (Military University of Culture and Arts, 16.7%), and regionally embedded arts education (Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 13.3%).

The inclusion of three respondent groups — administrators (n = 21), faculty members (n = 82),

and vocal music students (n = 197) — substantially reduces the perspective bias associated with single-group studies. This multi-stakeholder design strengthens the analytical reliability of the findings by incorporating viewpoints from multiple levels of the vocal training environment.

#### 4.2. Structural Imbalances in the Organisation of Practical Vocal Training

Table 2 reveals the most striking pattern to emerge from the dataset: a pronounced imbalance between individual and collaborative forms of practical training. Within a competency-based framework, professional competencies are expected to develop through repeated exposure to diverse and professionally authentic performance situations. The current practical training environment remains considerably removed from this expectation.

Table 2. Distribution of Practical Training Formats in Vocal Music Education

| No. | Training Format                              | Responses (n) | Percentage (%) |
|-----|----------------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| 1   | Individual practice with piano accompaniment | 167           | 55.6           |
| 2   | Independent solo singing                     | 110           | 36.6           |
| 3   | Group practice, ensemble, and choral work    | 8             | 2.66           |
| 4   | Stagecraft with integrated ancillary skills  | 12            | 4              |
| 5   | Recording practice                           | 3             | 1              |

*Source: research team survey*

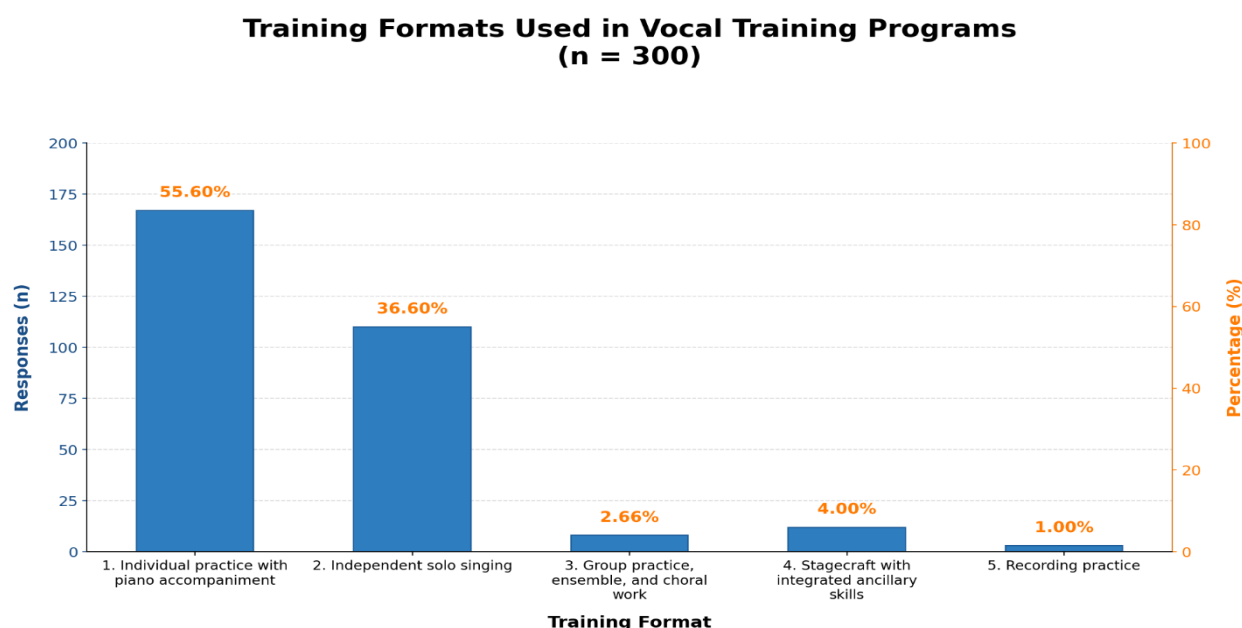


Figure 1. Distribution of Practical Training Formats in Vocal Music Education

*Source: research team survey*

Practical vocal training in Vietnamese universities operates predominantly within an individual learning paradigm. The two most prevalent formats — individual practice with piano accompaniment (55.6%) and independent solo singing (36.6%) — clearly reflect the continuing influence of the apprenticeship model, which centres technical development within sustained one-to-one studio instruction. This stage of training remains indispensable: it is within this highly focused pedagogical environment that students cultivate breath management, resonance control, and foundational performance sensibility.

Measured against contemporary performance culture, however, the distribution of practice formats reveals a substantial professional mismatch. Collaborative activities such as ensemble work,

stagecraft, and recording practice appear only marginally within the training process, limiting students' opportunities to encounter performance conditions resembling real artistic labour. Such a distribution systematically narrows students' exposure to ensemble coordination, collaborative performance processes, and situational stage responsiveness — competencies of growing importance within contemporary professional music practice.

#### 4.3. Pedagogical Method Trends in Contemporary Vocal Instruction

The study also examined the frequency with which major pedagogical methods are employed in university vocal instruction. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Very rarely used; 5 = Very frequently used).

Table 3. Frequency of Pedagogical Methods in Current Vocal Instruction

| No. | Pedagogical Method                                 | M    | SD   |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------|------|------|
| 1   | Modelling and imitation                            | 4.65 | 0.42 |
| 2   | Repetitive technical drill                         | 4.5  | 0.51 |
| 3   | Repertoire analysis through theoretical commentary | 3.2  | 0.85 |
| 4   | Project-based performance learning                 | 2.15 | 1.1  |
| 5   | Role-play and stage situation simulation           | 1.85 | 1.05 |
| 6   | Peer assessment                                    | 1.6  | 0.95 |

*Source: research team survey*

### Frequency of Pedagogical Methods in Current Vocal Instruction Mean scores and standard deviations

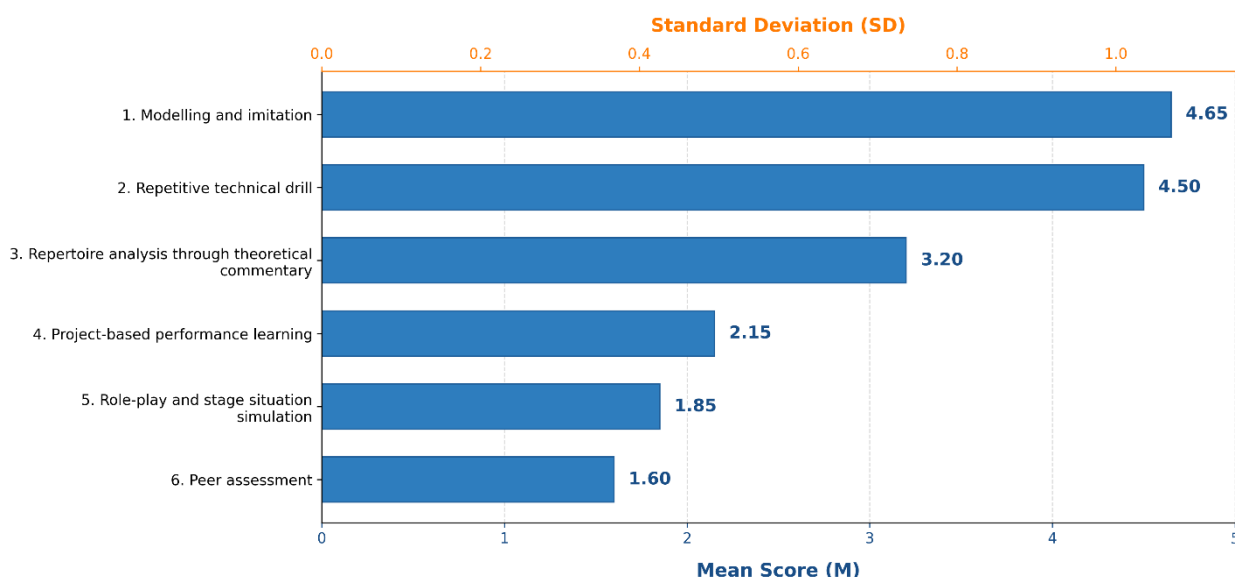


Figure 2. Frequency of Pedagogical Methods in Current Vocal Instruction

*Source: research team survey*

Demonstration-oriented methods continue to dominate the instructional landscape. Modelling and imitation recorded the highest mean score ( $M = 4.65$ ;  $SD = 0.42$ ), followed closely by repetitive technical drill ( $M = 4.50$ ;  $SD = 0.51$ ). These results reflect the operational logic of the contemporary vocal studio, where learning still unfolds primarily through live demonstration, correction, and continuous instructor guidance across breath support, tonal placement, and dynamic control. Within the foundational stages of technical vocal development, such methods are difficult to replace. Pedagogical formats designed to cultivate more active and professionally interactive learning experiences, however, appear far less frequently. Project-based performance learning recorded only  $M = 2.15$ ; stage simulation and role-play reached  $M = 1.85$ ; peer assessment registered the lowest mean score at  $M = 1.60$ . This disparity indicates that current training environments remain oriented

predominantly toward the transmission of individual technique rather than the development of multidimensional professional competencies. The issue is particularly consequential given that contemporary performance practice increasingly demands artistic collaboration, peer critique, and the capacity to respond flexibly to unpredictable stage situations — all competencies that are difficult to cultivate where interactive and professionally proximate learning formats remain limited.

#### 4.4. Infrastructure and Governance Conditions in Vocal Music Training

The feasibility of pedagogical innovation in university vocal education depends heavily on the organisation of practice facilities, the availability of institutional resources, and the operational logic governing the academic environment.

Table 4. Adequacy of Infrastructure and Governance Conditions in Vocal Music Training

| No. | Dimension                                                                           | Agree / Strongly Agree (%) |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1   | Soundproofed individual practice rooms meet adequate standards                      | 65.5                       |
| 2   | Dedicated spaces available for experimental performance and group singing           | 22.3                       |
| 3   | Teaching-load governance is sufficiently flexible to support pedagogical innovation | 28.5                       |
| 4   | Integration of acoustic technology into instructional practice                      | 12                         |

Source: research team survey

Three constraints emerge clearly from the data.

First, a significant spatial imbalance. Although 65.5% of respondents regarded individual practice rooms as adequately equipped, only 22.3% reported access to dedicated spaces for collaborative vocal practice or experimental performance. This asymmetry reflects the long-standing operational logic of professional vocal training, in which the individual studio continues to dominate the organisation of practical instruction. Collaborative learning formats — ensemble practice, performance projects, and simulated professional environments — consequently lack the physical conditions necessary for regular and sustained implementation.

Second, substantial administrative rigidity. Only 28.5% of faculty respondents regarded existing teaching-load structures as sufficiently flexible to accommodate pedagogical experimentation. Fixed credit-hour frameworks governing both theoretical and practical instruction continue to constrain the organisation of large-scale arts activities. Within vocal training specifically, the prevailing governance structure frequently cannot absorb the intensive time demands associated with workshops, collaborative performance projects, or extended rehearsal processes.

Third, technology integration remains extremely limited, reported by only 12% of respondents. Despite extensive evidence from voice science research demonstrating the pedagogical value of acoustic analysis software in visualising vocal production processes, adoption across surveyed institutions is minimal. Technical identification and correction therefore continue to rely predominantly on the instructor's trained auditory perception and accumulated professional experience.

Taken together, these findings confirm that university-level vocal training in Vietnam remains deeply shaped by the individual learning model across multiple dimensions: practice organisation, pedagogical methods, infrastructural design, and institutional governance. Collaborative, professionally simulative, and technology-assisted activities appear at substantially lower frequencies than individual practice formats. Direct instruction and one-to-one studio practice nevertheless remain indispensable foundations of technical vocal development. The central challenge lies not in dismantling the apprenticeship model, but in expanding the practical learning environment so that students develop professional competencies across a broader and more professionally representative range of artistic contexts.

## 5. Discussion

The findings indicate that the core challenges confronting university-level vocal music education emerge simultaneously across pedagogical practice, practical training organisation, and institutional governance. Four issues are particularly consequential: the feedback structure within the vocal studio, the evolving performance environment and its implications for professional competency, the integration of voice science and technology-assisted instruction, and the governance constraints limiting pedagogical reform.

### 5.1. The Teacher–Student Relationship and the Structure of Feedback in the Vocal Studio

The most conspicuous pattern in the survey data is the substantial disparity between modelling and imitation ( $M = 4.65$ ) and peer assessment ( $M =$

1.60). This gap indicates that the vocal studio continues to operate within the logic of the apprenticeship model: the instructor retains central authority over both technical instruction and aesthetic judgement, and students learn primarily through observation, listening, correction, and repeated rehearsal under direct supervisor guidance. In technically specialised domains such as breath support, tonal placement, and resonance management, this mode of instruction remains highly effective — a significant portion of professional vocal knowledge simply cannot be transmitted through formal curriculum structures or theoretical explanation alone (Nguyễn Trung Kiên, 2014).

Interview data from the Vietnam National Academy of Music and the Military University of Culture and Arts reveal a more specific dynamic. Students reported considerable hesitation when asked to comment on one another's performances, expressing concern about making inaccurate technical judgements or appearing to challenge the instructor's authority. A third-year student at the Vietnam National Academy of Music described most practical sessions as fundamentally one-directional: the teacher demonstrates, corrects, and instructs; students listen, adjust, and continue practising, with relatively limited discussion of interpretive choices or artistic alternatives. Faculty interviewees acknowledged similar difficulties when organising peer critique within practical sessions — particularly in studios long shaped by the apprenticeship tradition. The pedagogical atmosphere consequently prioritises technical reception and correction over artistic discussion or critical exchange.

At the foundational stage of professional training, this structure may support discipline and stabilise technical development. Sustained throughout an entire university programme, however, it progressively narrows students' opportunities for artistic experimentation and independent judgement — with consequences that become especially visible when graduates enter contemporary professional environments demanding far greater artistic autonomy. Today's singers are expected not only to perform accurately

but to define their own artistic identity, manage stage situations independently, and establish meaningful interaction with audiences. Vocal technique remains indispensable, yet technical proficiency alone no longer guarantees professional adaptability. A training environment shaped too heavily by instructor imitation risks producing technically stable performers who nevertheless struggle to develop self-constructed artistic perspectives — gravitating toward the aesthetic preferences of their teachers rather than building interpretive choices grounded in their own artistic thinking and performance experience.

The issue, therefore, is not the value of direct instruction itself but the limited feedback architecture currently available within the vocal studio. When students are trained progressively to give and receive professional commentary — and when peer exchange is organised within an appropriate pedagogical framework — the teacher–student relationship can retain its foundational role while the learning environment becomes more dialogic, flexible, and conducive to the development of independent artistic competency.

## **5.2. The Changing Performance Environment and the Expansion of Professional Competency**

Across the surveyed institutions — the Vietnam National Academy of Music, Vietnam National University of Arts Education, and the Military University of Culture and Arts — one-to-one studio instruction continues to anchor the organisation of vocal training. Given the specialised nature of vocal technique, many aspects of technical development genuinely require close individual supervision and sustained corrective guidance. Most instructional time therefore concentrates on piano-accompanied practice and solo singing, while collaborative activities such as ensemble work, stagecraft, and recording practice occur far less frequently. Several faculty respondents observed that the core structure of vocal lessons has remained relatively unchanged for many years: students practise individually while instructors address technical issues related to breath management, tonal placement, articulation, and interpretive delivery. This arrangement preserves important pedagogical

advantages — it allows forms of highly individualised technical correction that collective environments cannot easily provide — and many instructors accordingly continue to regard the individual studio as indispensable, particularly during the early stages of development.

The limitations of this structure become increasingly visible, however, when measured against the realities of contemporary artistic labour. Faculty members at the Military University of Culture and Arts noted that many students perform confidently in studio settings yet become hesitant in collaborative or large-scale performance contexts requiring high levels of coordination. Students at the Vietnam National Academy of Music similarly reported that opportunities for sustained engagement with realistic performance simulation remain limited, as most learning time continues to revolve around individual technical preparation and examination performance.

The contemporary performance environment has changed substantially over the past decade. Young singers now work routinely with live bands, electronic sound systems, multimedia stages, digital production technologies, and media-oriented performance settings characterised by constant variability and rapid interaction. These conditions differ markedly from the relatively controlled, solo-centred environment of traditional studio training. Professional expectations have consequently expanded beyond technical singing proficiency to include ensemble coordination, stage adaptability, and situational responsiveness under unstable performance conditions.

Interview findings indicate that the gap between studio training and professional practice no longer appears as an abstract concern but emerges concretely through specific performance difficulties. Several instructors observed that students who perform effectively during specialist lessons often struggle with microphone technique, synchronisation with live bands, or maintaining psychological stability before large audiences. From the perspective of competency-based education, professional performance competency develops through repeated exposure to diverse practice situations carrying genuine artistic pressure and

professionally interactive conditions. Repetitive technical drilling within stable studio environments remains necessary during foundational training. When this model dominates the entirety of the educational process, however, students risk remaining confined within the protected conditions of the studio. Workshops, project-based classes, and collaborative performance environments create additional opportunities to negotiate interpretive choices, practise peer critique, and engage in forms of artistic cooperation rarely available within isolated individual practice.

The pressure to expand the practical learning environment in Vietnamese vocal education is likely to intensify as performance culture continues to evolve under the influence of digital platforms and the cultural industries. The question confronting university vocal training is therefore not simply whether a few supplementary skills modules should be added to the curriculum. More fundamentally, it concerns the overall architecture through which practical training is organised. When most instructional time remains concentrated within the individual learning model, students may achieve technical comfort within studio settings while remaining insufficiently prepared for the unpredictability and complexity of contemporary professional performance — a reality that helps explain why the transition toward competency-based education has become increasingly urgent within higher arts education.

### **5.3. Voice Science and Technology-Assisted Instruction in Vocal Music Training**

Among the most striking findings of the study is the extremely limited level of technology integration within vocal instruction, reported by only 12.0% of respondents. This figure reflects the extent to which technology-assisted instruction remains underdeveloped across Vietnamese higher arts institutions relative to prevailing international trends. From the late twentieth century onward, the scholarship of Richard Miller, Johan Sundberg, and Ingo Titze substantially reshaped modern vocal pedagogy by integrating vocal physiology and acoustics into technical analysis. Their work contributed directly to the development of acoustic

analysis software and measurement tools capable of tracking pitch, resonance, airflow, and spectral quality — providing vocal instruction with a more objective and analytically verifiable foundation (Miller, 1986; Sundberg, 1987).

Observations conducted at the Vietnam National Academy of Music, Vietnam National University of Arts Education, and Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism indicate that technical correction in vocal lessons still depends heavily on the instructor's auditory judgement and accumulated professional experience. In most practical sessions, guidance is delivered primarily through sensation-based instructions — "push the sound forward," "open the mouth shape," "place the sound higher" — reflecting a long-established pedagogical convention in which professional knowledge is transmitted through experiential description and embodied demonstration rather than measurable technical criteria. For highly experienced instructors, such methods can remain remarkably effective, particularly in shaping tonal quality and interpretive nuance.

Interview data nevertheless reveal a recurring structural limitation. Identical technical instructions frequently elicit very different responses across students because of variations in laryngeal anatomy, resonance structure, and articulatory habit. Some students require repeated cycles of experimentation before locating an appropriate vocal configuration even after detailed instructor explanation. Without visual analytical tools, technical correction follows a repetitive listen-and-adjust process dependent largely on the instructor's expertise and the student's proprioceptive self-regulation during practice — placing considerable professional pressure on instructors responsible for managing multiple students with divergent vocal conditions and technical difficulties.

Several faculty interviewees expressed strong interest in voice-analysis technologies — spectral display software, pitch monitoring systems, and airflow analysis tools — yet reported having little or no regular access to such equipment. At most institutions, investment in vocal training facilities continues to prioritise acoustic insulation and conventional piano accompaniment, while

recording practice spaces and acoustic analysis systems remain limited. From an educational governance perspective, voice science offers a significant pathway toward greater transparency and consistency in competency assessment. When students can observe fluctuations in pitch, spectral quality, or airflow stability through visual feedback, learning becomes increasingly self-regulated and less exclusively dependent on the instructor's auditory perception. Rather than diminishing the teacher's importance, this repositioning gradually shifts instructors toward roles centred more strongly on facilitation, technical analysis, and the support of students' independent vocal development.

The findings consistently suggest that integrating voice science into university vocal education cannot be separated from broader transformations in the organisation of practice activities, the structure of technical feedback, and the cultivation of students' capacity for self-observation during vocal development. When acoustic data become part of the learning process, vocal pedagogy acquires an additional analytical dimension — connecting professional expertise with students' growing ability to regulate and interpret their own technical progress.

#### **5.4. Governance Constraints and the Limits of Pedagogical Reform**

The finding that only 28.5% of faculty respondents regard existing governance structures as sufficiently flexible to support pedagogical innovation points to a broader pattern across arts training institutions. While contemporary performance environments and professional demands evolve rapidly, university governance systems remain organised primarily around procedural stability, fixed credit-hour allocation, and administrative standardisation. This tension emerged particularly clearly in interviews conducted at Vietnam National University of Arts Education, the Vietnam National Academy of Music, and Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

Faculty respondents consistently noted that vocal instruction resists strict division into fixed instructional time units: technical vocal

development depends heavily on each student's physical condition, psychological readiness, and artistic responsiveness during individual sessions. Issues related to breath management, performance psychology, and interpretive development often require extended and repetitive engagement across multiple lessons before meaningful progress becomes visible. Under prevailing credit-based governance systems, however, practical vocal training must frequently operate within rigid frameworks governing instructional hours, timetabling, assessment procedures, and workload allocation.

Several instructors reported attempts to organise workshops, project-based classes, or collaborative practice activities integrating stage performance, live ensembles, and audio technology, only to encounter significant procedural barriers — inflexible workload regulations, limited approval flexibility for specialist activities, and bureaucratic processes that slowed implementation considerably. At many institutions, expanded practice formats beyond the individual studio continue to depend primarily on individual faculty initiative or extracurricular arrangements rather than functioning as stable curricular components. Pedagogical reform in vocal music education consequently tends to remain confined to adjustments within the individual lesson, while more substantial structural transformations — expanding professional practice environments, strengthening project-based learning, and building interdisciplinary connections with contemporary performance contexts — progress far more slowly. The infrastructure findings reinforce this pattern. Individual practice rooms are comparatively well equipped; dedicated spaces for collaborative rehearsal, experimental performance, and digital music production remain limited. Spatial organisation therefore continues to privilege the individual studio as the central organisational unit of vocal training, placing competency-oriented practice formats under significant structural constraints.

Within the broader context of expanding university autonomy, higher arts institutions now confront two competing pressures simultaneously.

Universities are expected to standardise governance systems, optimise resource allocation, and satisfy increasingly rigorous accreditation requirements. Yet arts training depends fundamentally on maintaining a degree of academic flexibility — particularly in the organisation of practical activities and the assessment of performance competency. When procedural stability and quality assurance mechanisms become overly dominant, arts education environments risk losing the operational flexibility necessary for meaningful pedagogical experimentation.

The governance implications are clear. Reforming vocal music education cannot depend solely on individual instructors' initiative or professional commitment. Once training objectives become explicitly oriented toward comprehensive professional competency, institutional operating mechanisms must also evolve sufficiently to support new practice models as stable and legitimate curricular components rather than isolated initiatives sustained only through individual effort.

## 6. Recommendations

The findings indicate that reforming university-level vocal music education can no longer be confined to adjustments within the individual studio lesson. The issues identified in this study cut across pedagogical method, practical training organisation, learning environment design, and the governance structures shaping higher arts education. The transition from the apprenticeship model toward competency-based education should therefore be understood as a systemic transformation in which curricular reform, pedagogical renewal, and institutional governance evolve in coordinated ways — responsive to the distinctive conditions of performing arts training.

*First*, vocal pedagogy should shift progressively toward the development of learner competency, accompanied by a stronger emphasis on students' active participation in the artistic learning process. Modelling and imitation dominate practical vocal instruction, while peer assessment, academic discussion, and project-based learning remain comparatively limited. This imbalance confirms

that the vocal studio still operates primarily within the logic of the apprenticeship model — a structure that unquestionably preserves professional continuity and provides students direct access to instructors' accumulated performance experience. The model retains significant pedagogical value, particularly in areas requiring immediate and highly individualised correction of breath management, resonance control, and tonal production. Problems emerge, however, when learning remains organised predominantly around the reception and repetition of the instructor's established interpretive approach over prolonged periods of training. Under such conditions, students may gradually become dependent on inherited artistic templates while losing opportunities to develop independent performance identity and interpretive judgement. Survey and interview data both indicate that the current studio atmosphere tends to privilege individual correction over collegial exchange or reciprocal artistic feedback among students. Alongside one-to-one studio instruction, institutions should therefore progressively expand more interactive learning formats — performance workshops, thematic seminars, project-based courses, and structured peer assessment activities — that create opportunities for students to articulate artistic perspectives, engage constructively with professional critique, and develop increasingly autonomous performance thinking throughout their training.

A closely related dimension of reform concerns the pedagogical competency of teaching faculty themselves. Most current instructors were trained primarily within specialist performance programmes, with expertise centred on technical mastery and professional stage experience. Contemporary arts education increasingly requires instructors to attend not only to singing technique but also to the organisation of learning activities, the structure of pedagogical feedback, and the assessment of professional competency development. Institutions should therefore establish sustained opportunities for faculty to engage with emerging developments in music pedagogy through specialised professional

development programmes, scholarly exchange, and international academic collaboration.

*Second*, universities should diversify practical learning environments and training formats to narrow the growing gap between educational settings and contemporary professional performance practice. Instructional time remains overwhelmingly concentrated within individual studio lessons, while ensemble singing, choral work, stagecraft, and recording practice appear with far lower frequency. This distribution reflects the continuing dominance of the individual studio model despite the fact that contemporary artistic labour increasingly demands competencies extending well beyond the boundaries of solo vocal technique cultivated within traditional studio settings. Expanding practical formats beyond the one-to-one lesson has therefore become urgent. Alongside foundational studio instruction, institutions should strengthen ensemble vocal coaching, stage rehearsal, performance workshops, guest-artist masterclasses, and interdisciplinary performance projects — formats that expose students more directly to the highly interactive conditions of professional artistic work while helping them develop ensemble coordination, stage psychology, and real-time artistic decision-making within professionally authentic contexts.

Greater institutional investment in multipurpose practice environments — recording studios, experimental performance spaces, and acoustically equipped technology-integrated classrooms — is equally necessary. At a time when music production and distribution are being rapidly transformed by digital platforms, early engagement with recording practice, audio processing technologies, and performance production environments can substantially strengthen graduates' professional competency and long-term adaptability.

*Third*, governance structures within higher arts education should become substantially more flexible, and technology integration in vocal instruction should be expanded more systematically. Many instructors encounter institutional resistance when attempting to implement workshops, project-based modules, or interdisciplinary performance activities — blocked by rigid credit-allocation

systems, inflexible timetabling, and cumbersome administrative procedures. Performing arts education depends fundamentally on flexibility in the organisation of time, space, and pedagogical format: many practical activities must evolve according to the rhythms of rehearsal and live performance rather than conforming mechanically to standardised class periods. Arts institutions should therefore develop discipline-specific academic regulations more closely aligned with the operational realities of vocal music and performing arts training. Beyond fixed-schedule classroom models, universities may authorise practical course components to be organised through thematic intensives, collaborative performance projects, or specialised workshops with variable duration — arrangements that allow instructors to construct learning experiences more closely approximating professional artistic practice while providing students broader opportunities to cultivate collaborative skills, stage fluency, and professional performance thinking across diverse contexts.

Alongside governance reform, the pedagogical application of technology deserves significantly greater attention. Acoustic analysis systems and voice science software can provide students with more precise visual feedback concerning pitch accuracy, spectral quality, and airflow stability during independent practice — supporting self-regulated vocal development between lessons. These tools should function as supplements to instruction rather than substitutes for instructors' professional judgement and artistic sensibility. In vocal music education, the integration of performance experience, pedagogical guidance, and evidence-based feedback remains essential to cultivating durable professional competency.

The recommendations advanced here aim primarily to create conditions under which university vocal education can respond more effectively to the changing demands of contemporary performance culture. Recent transformations in technology, labour markets, and music production have generated mounting pressure throughout higher arts education. Reforming vocal training cannot therefore be reduced to refining pedagogical technique within the studio lesson — it necessarily

encompasses the organisation of practical environments, the orientation of teaching philosophy, and the flexibility of institutional governance. These dimensions are deeply interconnected: each directly influences students' ability to develop professional competency within contemporary artistic life. Substantial differences persist among institutions in terms of governance structure, curricular orientation, and available resources; the implementation of these recommendations must accordingly remain calibrated to the operational realities of individual institutions.

## 7. Conclusion

As arts education faces mounting pressure from international integration, the expansion of the cultural industries, and the growing influence of competency-based educational frameworks, Vietnamese vocal music education confronts an increasingly urgent need to reconsider both its pedagogical organisation and its professional learning outcomes. Drawing on survey data from 300 participants across six higher arts education institutions, this study demonstrates that university-level vocal training in Vietnam remains deeply structured by the apprenticeship model and one-to-one studio instruction. Direct instruction, modelling, and imitation continue to anchor technical vocal development and performance sensibility — and remain indispensable, particularly in areas requiring highly individualised technical correction. When situated within a rapidly transforming performance environment shaped by digital technology, contemporary music production, and the cultural industries, however, the existing training model reveals several limitations relative to current professional expectations.

These limitations do not originate from any single pedagogical method in isolation. They emerge simultaneously through the interaction among practical learning environments, entrenched pedagogical habits, governance structures, and the physical infrastructure supporting artistic training. Across many surveyed institutions, professionally collaborative practice formats — performance workshops, stage projects, recording practice, and

structured peer exchange — remain comparatively underdeveloped. Students' learning experiences consequently continue to revolve predominantly around the individual studio despite the fact that contemporary professional practice increasingly demands ensemble coordination, stage adaptability, and the ability to navigate diverse and unpredictable artistic situations.

The study argues that reforming vocal music education must be understood through the interconnected relationship among pedagogical method, practical training organisation, and institutional governance — rather than being reduced to technical adjustments within individual lessons alone. Expanding opportunities for professional practice, deepening students' active engagement in the learning process, and progressively integrating technology-assisted

instruction can together create conditions under which university vocal education aligns more closely with the realities of contemporary performance culture.

The findings remain bounded by several limitations. The analysis draws primarily on cross-sectional survey data and interviews conducted across a selected group of representative institutions, and the scope for broader generalisation is accordingly limited. Future research should pursue more sustained longitudinal and empirically grounded investigation capable of evaluating the effectiveness of hybrid training models integrating performance practice, audio technology, and competency-based education as higher arts education in Vietnam continues to evolve.

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