

# 태국 음악 기관의 학부 대중음악 교육과정 개발 및 개혁 탐구

## Exploring the Development and Reform of Undergraduate Popular Music Curricula in Thai Music Institutes

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**Abstract** Popular music has emerged as a significant sector within the global economy, prompting educational institutions in Thailand to recognize the escalating demand for skilled professionals within the music industry. In response, these institutions are refining their curricula to more effectively enhance student competencies, aligning with industry requirements and facilitating successful careers in the music sector. This qualitative study aimed to evaluate the strengths and challenges of the Popular Music programs' curricula across Thai music institutes, with an objective to propose reforms for elevating their quality. Data were gathered through document analysis, interviews, and focus group discussions, employing purposive sampling to select fifty participants from five music institutes, including students, faculty members, program chairs, associate deans, and industry employers. Content analysis was utilized to interpret the data. Findings highlight the curricula's efficacy in nurturing musical talents, directly addressing the core needs of music students. Recommendations for curriculum enhancement include fostering individual student identity, preparing students for technological advancements, and integrating soft skills with essential technical competencies. These strategic directions aim to augment students' readiness for the dynamic demands of the music industry, ensuring their adaptability and success.

**Key words:** curriculum, curriculum development, direction, popular music, reformation

**초록** 대중음악은 세계 경제에서 중요한 부문으로 부상하였으며, 이에 따라 태국의 교육 기관들은 음악 산업에서 숙련된 전문가에 대한 수요가 증가하고 있다. 이에 대응하여 기관들은 산업 요구에 부응하고 음악 분야에서 성공적인 경력을 쌓을 수 있도록 학생들의 역량을 효과적으로 향상시키기 위해 교육과정을 정교화하고 있다. 본 연구는 태국 음악 기관들의 대중음악 프로그램 교육과정의 강점을 평가하고, 그 질을 높이기 위한 개혁을 제안하는 것을 목표로 한다. 자료는 문헌 분석, 인터뷰 및 포커스 그룹 토론을 통해 수집되었으며, 학생, 교직원, 프로그램 책임자, 부학장 및 산업 고용주를 포함한 다섯 개 음악 기관에서 50명의 참가자를 선정하였다. 연구 결과는 음악적 재능을 육성하고 음악 학생들의 핵심 요구를 직접적으로 다루는 데 있어 교육과정의 효율성을 강조한다. 교육과정 개선을 위해 개별 학생의 정체성 함양, 기술 발전에 대한 대비, 필수 기술 역량과 함께 의사소통 능력 통합이 요구된다. 이러한 전략적 방향은 학생들이 음악 산업의 역동적인 요구에 대비하고 성공할 수 있도록 적응력을 높이는 것을 목표로 한다.

**주제어:** 교육과정, 교육과정 개발, 방향, 대중음악, 개혁

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## I . Introduction

Popular music plays a pivotal role globally, transcending cultural and linguistic barriers. In this study, the term *popular music* is understood through a nuanced and pluralistic lens, reflecting the complexity and varied perspectives surrounding *popular* and *popular culture*. Etymologically, *popular* refers to what is widely embraced by the people, gauged through indicators such as sales, downloads, and streaming numbers, pointing to a broad, inclusive appeal (Kopanski, 2020). Moreover, academic discourse has evolved from viewing *popular culture* as merely the antithesis of high culture - a debate historically marked by figures like Gottfried August Bürger and Friedrich Schiller - to recognizing its intrinsic value and potential for resistance against hegemonic norms, as highlighted in subculture theory since the 1970s (Martinson, 1998; Sasaki, 2017). This perspective champions the idea that popular culture, including music, is not deficient but rather a vibrant, dynamic force capable of expressing criticism and signalling societal grievances (Werber et al., 2023). John Fiske's concept of popularization, emphasizing the polysemic nature of media texts, further enriches this understanding, suggesting that popular music, like other forms of popular culture, thrives on its ability to entertain and resonate across diverse groups and cultures without diminishing its cultural or aesthetic worth (Turner, 2022). This sentiment was also shared by Hans-Otto Hügel (2017), who asserted that 'the popular' essentially equates to what entertains, thereby bridging the gap between art and popular culture without degrading the value of either. Popular music is thus an expressive form that communicates emotions and messages universally, without the need for explicit understanding of its lyrics or notes (Brackett, 2023). This unique characteristic of popular music underscores its profound impact on individuals and societies alike, and justifies the critical demand for skilled professionals qualified in the nuances of popular music.

The educational response to this demand is manifested in the development and refinement of popular music curricula within Thailand's music institutes (Laovanich, Chupunnarat, Laovanich & Saibunmi, 2021). These curricula serve as the foundational blueprint for nurturing talent, designed to equip students with the necessary skills to navigate and contribute to the music industry effectively (Xiaoli, Yan & Jia, 2022). The curriculum is more than a mere academic itinerary; it is a holistic framework that encompasses the goals, methodologies, and expected outcomes of education, fostering a comprehensive learning experience (Jaikum, Chanteyoon & Subphasri, 2022). This importance is echoed by educational theorists like Bate (2020), Haning (2021), Beauchamp (1981) and Taba (1962), who argue that a curriculum is not just a learning plan but a strategic guide that shapes the educational journey, ensuring cohesion and quality across all aspects of

teaching and learning. However, despite these rigorous standards and intentions, the landscape of popular music education faces constant challenges that necessitate continual reassessment and reform (Campbell-Phillips, 2020; Gouédard, Pont, Hyttinen & Huang, 2020).

In Thailand, the dynamic nature of the music industry, coupled with evolving technological trends, social changes, and cultural shifts, demands that music curricula remain adaptive and forward-looking (Chuppunnarat, Laovanich, Laovanich & Saibunmi, 2020; Thuntaweche, 2017). This is in line with the national educational policy, which advocates for curriculum development to be an ongoing process, reflecting the changing needs of society and the industry (Chandransu, 2010; Phumphongkhochasorn, Damnoen, Suwannaprateep & Phoomparmarn, 2021). Institutes are encouraged to periodically review and update their curricula, a practice supported by the Ministry of Education and mandated by the Office of the Higher Education Commission (Vandeweyer, Espinoza, Reznikova, Lee & Herabat, 2020). Such reforms are not merely bureaucratic requirements but essential steps toward maintaining relevance, ensuring that graduates are well-prepared to meet the current and future demands of the music industry. This necessity for curriculum reform is underscored by the rapid evolution of music technology and business practices, which are integral components of contemporary music education (Dorfman, 2022; Fang, 2021; Toscher, 2020).

This study aims to scrutinize the strengths and weaknesses of popular music curricula in Thai music institutes, identifying areas for improvement and reform. The goal is to propose actionable directions for curriculum development that not only address the technical and artistic aspects of music education but also incorporate critical soft skills and an awareness of the digital landscape. This investigation thus seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on music education, offering perspectives for educators, policymakers, and industry leaders in Thailand and beyond, fostering a more robust and interconnected music education ecosystem.

## II. Literature Review

The discourse on curriculum development and reform is foundational to understanding the evolution of educational paradigms, especially within the realm of popular music education in Thailand (Bresler, 2021). Curriculum, at its core, is a comprehensive plan that encompasses the goals, methodologies, content, and evaluation mechanisms that guide both educators and learners towards achieving educational objectives. The multifaceted nature of curriculum development underscores its role as not just a roadmap for academic instruction but also as a framework

for crafting meaningful learning experiences (Beauchamp, 1981; Gibson & Ewing, 2020; Scheib, 2020; Taba, 1962). This conceptualization is further enriched by the curriculum's role in harmonizing teaching goals with learning outcomes, thereby ensuring a cohesive and quality educational journey (Kilag, Marquita & Laurente, 2023; Shepherd & Ragan 1992). The freedom within this structured environment allows educators to tailor their teaching styles to the curriculum's objectives, fostering a dynamic and responsive learning atmosphere (Tetzlaff, Schmiedek & Brod, 2021).

Curriculum development theories offer a lens through which the process of educational planning and reform can be viewed, revealing the intricate balance between tradition and innovation. Tanner and Tanner's (1975) exploration of curriculum as a mode of thought, experience, and a technological component, for instance, illuminates the curriculum's capacity to reflect and foster human intellectual growth. This theoretical scaffold supports the modern understanding that curriculum is not static but a living entity that evolves with societal needs and educational philosophies (Barquero, Jessen, Ruiz-Hidalgo & Golding, 2023). The classification of curriculum into levels, from ideal to experiential, as identified by Sutthirat (2015), further elaborates on the curriculum's multifaceted nature, highlighting the importance of aligning educational aspirations with practical implementation. This dynamic interplay between theory and practice is crucial for the development of a curriculum that not only meets educational standards but also resonates with the lived experiences of students, preparing them for the complexities of contemporary life.

The significance of curriculum extends beyond the confines of educational institutions, touching upon the societal and economic fabric of a nation. As Thumrong Buasri (1999) articulates, the curriculum serves as a mirror reflecting the educational ambitions and quality of life within a society. It acts as a guideline for educators, students, and policymakers, aligning teaching and learning processes with broader societal goals. This dual function underscores the curriculum's pivotal role in shaping informed, skilled, and adaptable citizens capable of contributing to societal advancement. The curriculum's importance is magnified in the context of music education, where the rapid pace of technological change and cultural shifts necessitate constant curriculum evaluation and adaptation to maintain relevance and efficacy in nurturing talent.

In Thai music education, theoretical frameworks on curriculum reform span three primary groups - curriculum conceptualization, epistemological and didactic processes, and the influence of cultural, social, and contextual factors - illuminating the complexity of curriculum reform (Lunenburg, 2011; Olivia, 2009). Acknowledging that changes within the curriculum are profoundly influenced by a broader educational ecosystem, models such as the TIMSS Curriculum model (Mullis, 2019), the theory of didactic transposition (Chevallard, 2018), and the didactic analysis curriculum model

(Mård & Hilli, 2022) are particularly pertinent. They underscore the journey from the intended curriculum, shaped by policymakers, to its practical application within classrooms, mediated by educators and received by students (Travers, 1992). The exploration of such frameworks in the context of Thailand's music education highlights the critical balance between global educational theories and the distinct needs and values of Thai society (Sutthirat, 2015).

The practical application of these theoretical models in music education reform is vividly illustrated through case studies that reflect the dynamic interaction between scholarly research and curriculum development. For instance, the theory of didactic transposition, as applied by Wijayanti and Bosch (2018) and Powell, Krikun and Pignato (2015), sheds light on how history and contexts shape curriculum content, while Modeste (2018) explores the intersection of mathematics and computer science within the curriculum, highlighting the importance of interdisciplinary integration. These studies, among others, emphasize the pivotal role of educators in navigating the complexities of curriculum reform, from conceptualization to implementation (Hoyos, Navarro, Raggi, & Rojas, 2018; Olsher & Yerushalmy, 2018). They advocate for a curriculum reform process that is not just a top-down imposition but a collaborative effort that involves educators, students, and the wider community (Taba, 1962). This collaborative approach ensures that the curriculum remains relevant and responsive to the evolving landscape of the music industry, societal expectations, and the cultural nuances of society (Lunenburg, 2011; Olivia, 2009).

Synthesizing these theoretical underpinnings with Thailand's curriculum reform efforts underscores a deliberate and thoughtful approach to aligning educational programs with national standards and societal needs. It exemplifies a process that is both grounded in theoretical rigor and attuned to the cultural, social, and economic contexts of Thailand (Sutthirat, 2015). By weaving together global perspectives on curriculum development with local realities, this research seeks to bridge the theoretical and practical divides in music education. The goal is to foster a curriculum that resonates with the aspirations of music students, meets the demands of the music industry, and enriches the cultural fabric of Thai society.

### III. Method

The adoption of a qualitative design in this investigation is informed by its inherent capability to elicit rich, in-depth data from natural settings (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2001). This research methodology is particularly suited to the educational research domain, especially within the context

of music education, where understanding the nuances of curriculum strengths, challenges, and potential reforms requires deep engagement with the subject matter. The qualitative approach facilitates studying phenomena in their real-world environments, enabling the researcher to gather data through direct interactions and observations in the field, thus ensuring authenticity and contextual relevance (Cresswell, 2009; Muzari, Shava & Shonhiwa, 2022). This adaptability of qualitative investigation is also crucial for navigating the complexities of music education research, where the intricacies of curriculum development and implementation demand a nuanced understanding. The choice of a qualitative design for this study is thus predicated on the need for comprehensive insights into the strengths and challenges of popular music programs' curricula at Thai music institutes, leveraging interviews, observations, and document analysis to capture the perspectives of various stakeholders. By integrating secondary data with primary qualitative findings, this research aims to construct a detailed picture of the current state of music education, identifying actionable directions for curriculum improvement.

The data collection for this qualitative study was conducted across three structured phases, each designed to incrementally build upon the insights gathered in the preceding stage.

## **1. Phase I**

Phase I focused on the examination of document data, which included curricula, employment opportunities for graduates, and official governmental documents. This foundational analysis, conducted through content analysis, aimed to capture the historical and current landscape of popular music education in Thailand. By obtaining permissions from deans of selected music institutes, the researchers accessed crucial documents that informed the development of interview questions. This phase was pivotal in establishing a contextual understanding of the curriculum's evolution and its alignment with educational standards and market demands.

## **2. Phase II**

In Phase II, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with students, teachers, program chairs, and employers in the popular music field. This phase was instrumental in capturing the nuanced perspectives and experiences of those directly engaged with the curriculum. The selection of interview participants was guided by specific criteria to ensure a broad representation of views. Interviews, lasting between sixty to ninety minutes, were conducted using various communication

methods to accommodate participants’ preferences. The main topics covered during the interviews were: 1) strengths of popular music curricula; 2) structure of popular music curricula; 3) learning outcomes and assessment; 4) directions for reform and development of popular music curricula; 5) opportunities for curricular development; 6) needs of the popular music market in Thailand; 7) user suggestions. Data gathered were transcribed, coded, and analyzed to highlight the curriculum’s strengths and identify potential areas for reform. This iterative process, coupled with participant verification of the findings, ensured the accuracy and relevance of the insights derived. In Phase II data was analysed based on a six-step approach derived from Kvale’s (2007) analytical framework: designing, interviewing, transcribing, analysing, verifying and reporting.

Interview data were collected from five music institutes in Thailand, each hosting a popular music program with a proven track record of excellence for over five years. The selection of participants was meticulously planned to ensure diversity and depth, employing random sampling within specific criteria for inclusion and exclusion to ensure the quality of the dataset. This approach facilitated a comprehensive exploration of perspectives across various stakeholders, including students, teachers, program chairs, and employers in the popular music field. The criteria for selection were defined to encompass a wide range of experiences and viewpoints, ensuring a rich, multi-dimensional understanding of the strengths, challenges, and potential directions for curriculum reform. Ethical considerations were paramount, with informed consent obtained from all participants, underscoring the respect for individual autonomy and confidentiality throughout the research process. The list of research participants is provided in full in <Table 1>.

<Table 1> Participants selected for interviews during this investigation

Institute	Program	No. of Chairs	No. of Teachers	No. of Students	Gender (M / F)
College of Music, Mahidol University	Popular Music Program	1	3	4	7 / 1
Conservatory of Music, Rangsit University	Music Production Program	1	3	4	7 / 1
College of Music, Silpakorn University	Commercial Music Program	1	3	4	7 / 1
Faculty of Education and Liberal Arts, Hat Yai University	Popular Music Department	1	3	4	5 / 3
Faculty of Music and Performing Arts, Burapha University	Popular Music Program	1	3	4	7 / 1
Private Employer					4 / 1

The interview segment of the study was structured to capture a broad spectrum of insights, with each individual participant selected based on criteria reflective of their unique position within the music education ecosystem. This selection strategy aimed to gather a balanced mix of ‘bird’s eye’ and ‘user’ perspectives on the curriculum, allowing for a nuanced analysis of its efficacy and areas for improvement. The diversity among participants was further ensured by varying the questions across different interview forms tailored to each participant group, thereby facilitating more meaningful and contextually relevant responses. The emphasis on qualitative richness and specificity in participant selection underscores the study’s commitment to capturing the intricacies of music education from multiple angles.

### 3. Phase III

Phase III focused on focus group discussions with specialists in the field. This phase was critical in synthesizing the individual insights collected during the interviews into collective recommendations for curriculum reform. By engaging six to ten specialists in discussions that ranged from sixty to one hundred and twenty minutes, the study fostered a collaborative environment where diverse viewpoints could converge on actionable strategies for curriculum development. The discussions were structured around key themes identified in the earlier phases, facilitating a focused dialogue on the future directions of popular music education in Thailand. The main themes of the discussions were the strengths, challenges and directions for popular music curricula. The following key questions were used as discussion aids: 1) What is the strongest point of Popular Music Program’s Curriculum for undergraduates in Thailand’s Music Institutes? 2) What are the strengths of Popular Music Program’s Curriculum for undergraduates in Thailand’s Music Institutes? 3) What subject should be added or cut off? 4) What are the challenges for Popular Music Program’s Curriculum for undergraduates in Thailand’s Music Institutes? 5) What will be the challenges of Popular Music Program’s curricula in next twenty years? 6) What are the desired characteristics of the graduates in Popular Music Programs? 7) For Future curricula, what is the vision, mission, objectives and purpose? 8) What will be the needs of the music industry in the next twenty years? And what will music institutes need to prepare for? The transcription, coding, and summarization of these discussions, followed by participant verification, ensured the findings’ validity. The researchers also employed methodological and source triangulation to cross-validate the findings. Phase III discussions were analysed using the ‘scissors and sort’ technique described by Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook (2007). This involves transcribing and identifying data to find relationships, systematically

classifying data, and reporting by interpreting the data, topic by topic.

For the focus group discussions, the recruitment strategy prioritized individuals with significant expertise and credibility within the academic and music communities, specifically targeting Associate Deans or Curriculum Committee members from the selected music institutes. This approach was informed by the belief that such participants could offer valuable insights into the academic and practical dimensions of music education, contributing to a robust discussion on potential curriculum reforms. Ethical considerations were again carefully managed, with a keen focus on ensuring participant privacy and the voluntary nature of participation, aligning with the ethical guidelines set forth by the Ethics Committee of [redacted for peer review]. This ethical rigor not only safeguarded the participants' rights and well-being but also enhanced the study's integrity, fostering a respectful and ethical research environment.

## **IV. Results**

### **1. Strengths and Challenges of Popular Music Programs in Thailand**

The study revealed that a primary motivation for students enrolling in popular music programs was to enhance their individual musical skills, emphasizing the necessity for these programs to cater to this aspiration. Challenges encountered in fulfilling their educational objectives were also highlighted by participants, suggesting a need for music programs to adapt to evolving trends and closely align with student needs. Respondents further suggested that popular music programs should not only aid in the professional growth of students but also facilitate their personal discovery. Three key elements were identified to potentially enhance curriculum development along these lines: ensuring student access to information about popular music programs and curricula, aligning the structure of these programs with student learning objectives, and bolstering trust in the programs and their curricula. Participants identified six preferred career paths: musical artists, music production, education and training, technology, entrepreneurship, and freelance work. The most favored careers were in musical performance and production, indicating a direct correlation with the objectives and outcomes of popular music programs. This alignment underscores the programs' effectiveness in meeting student aspirations. However, the challenge persists for popular music programs to support students' career aspirations comprehensively, which includes acknowledging student objectives, enhancing employment prospects, and offering practical work experiences.

Three main purposes for popular music curricula in Thailand were found, as indicated below:

- ① To educate students to make them more intelligent consumers, enhancing their musicianship and developing the skills to work in the music industry.
- ② For students to become more concerned with good behavior and musical ethics.
- ③ To cultivate innovators who exhibit critical-thinking and creativity.

Undergraduate programs mandate a minimum of 120 credits, divided among general education, specific requirements, and electives, with totals ranging from 124 to 139 credits across different full-time programs. The challenge within popular music curricula lies in balancing these credit requirements with the need to shorten program duration to better meet student demands, emphasizing practical work experience and real-world applicability. Feedback from respondents highlighted the critical role of core subjects in fostering inspiration, motivation, and a deeper connection to music, underscoring the importance of music performance as a pivotal area of focus. Such subjects not only aim to enhance performance and popular music skills but also promote an appreciation for Thai music, enriching students' musicianship. Additionally, the incorporation of music business concepts within the curriculum aims to equip students with relevant industry knowledge, preparing them for future career opportunities in the music sector.

Enhancing core subjects within popular music programs involves integrating musical technology, acknowledging its significance and the interplay between music, business, and technology. Professional subjects aim to cultivate students' musical, technological, business, and creative skills essential for the music industry. Highlighted strengths of professional subjects include the freedom for students to pursue areas of direct interest, aligning with their future professional goals; the effectiveness of certain required subjects in developing pivotal skills in popular music, technology, and production; and fostering students' musical creativity. However, challenges persist in expanding students' autonomy to choose subjects that align with their interests and recognizing the role of creativity in their professional development. Specialized subjects are designed to enhance music skills and introduce research methodologies, aiding in students' comprehension and application of research to music projects. Despite these intentions, participants noted difficulties in applying research skills to practical music work, suggesting a gap in translating academic research capabilities into industry-relevant competencies. Addressing these challenges involves providing more targeted opportunities for students to engage with research and experimental projects, thereby equipping them with skills applicable to their future careers in the music industry.

Major program subjects, emphasizing performance skills, are pivotal in developing students'

competencies in popular music. Acknowledging the importance of improvisation and ensemble courses, these subjects enable students to engage in group performances and original compositions, fostering an understanding of the nexus between popular music and its industry applications in Thailand. This alignment with career aspirations represents a program strength. However, enhancing these subjects necessitates a greater emphasis on project-based learning and the augmentation of practical subjects to bolster performance abilities: “...We must focus about educate music personnel and create them to work in music industry because the internships in music labels cannot develop working skills of music students in Popular Music Programs. The identity of each music student must be created by learning experiences, working experiences, and experiences of music creations...” (specialist interviewee, personal communication, 2023). Elective music subjects offer students the flexibility to explore additional areas of interest, adapting to evolving trends within the music field: “...the purposes of Popular Music Programs Curriculum should be flexible and can be changed and develop through times...” (Student interviewee, personal communication, 2023). Respondents felt that the curriculum should incorporate cooperative subjects, supportive activities, and internships, facilitating real-world employment opportunities within the music industry. By integrating these elements, programs can equip students with the necessary skills to address challenges and achieve their professional objectives, bridging theoretical knowledge with practical. The summary of key findings are as follows:

- ① There are limitations to credits and course durations.
- ② Internships should be part of supporting activities.
- ③ Cooperative activities should be developed to provide an opportunity for music students to work with music professionals from within the industry.

## 2. Directions for the Development of Popular Music Programs

Future directions for the curriculum development for popular music programs curricula include five key areas: 1) changes in students’ learning purposes over time, 2) changes to career paths, 3) less learning, more working, 4) changes to course structure that reflect skills required for the music industry; 5) flexibility of courses.

In Thai popular music programs, students navigate four primary learning domains: future occupational skills, the development and application of popular music skills, institutional skill enhancement, and the cultivation of individual musical identity. Among these, the development of popular music abilities and the exploration of personal musical identity stand out as the most

reported educational goals by students. Many enter these programs with a basic foundational knowledge of popular music, often gained through informal learning channels, underscoring the importance of designing foundational courses that align with their learning styles. The study suggests music institutes should aim to simplify and enhance students' musical abilities, fostering a higher capacity for musical understanding. Moreover, the intersection of students' educational objectives with their journey towards self-discovery, self-discipline, and autonomy is noteworthy. Discovering one's musical identity was identified by research respondents as a primary motivator for enrollment in popular music programs. This quest for identity is intricately linked to their professional aspirations and the cultural significance of a music degree for future employment. Employers echoed this sentiment, valuing individual identity as a pivotal attribute for success in the music industry. However, the study also identified three significant barriers to student success within these programs: familial dynamics, societal perceptions of music careers in Thailand, and prevailing gender norms within Asian culture.

The research highlights a robust link between the aspirations of students in popular music programs and their ambitions to carve out careers within the music industry. Students enroll in these programs with the expectation of acquiring the requisite skills and knowledge to propel their professional journeys. Among the array of career paths students aspire to, educational roles, performing as music artists, engaging in music production, technological roles, entrepreneurship, and freelance opportunities stand out, with particular interest gravitating towards careers as music artists and in music production. This preference underscores the alignment of popular music curricula with the industry's needs, aiming primarily to nurture talent for Thailand's music sector. The diversity of career aspirations among students also mirrors the comprehensive objectives of popular music programs, suggesting a synergy between student ambitions and program goals. An emerging trend identified in the study was the inclination towards entrepreneurship in music, signaling a shift towards more autonomous career paths. Music institutes are thus adapting their curricula to equip students with enhanced skills in music, business acumen, and technology: "... internships are important skills that music students experienced from working in music industry as intern before they become the employees or owner after they graduated from the programs. The students will face the problems that they cannot face in the classrooms. I strongly recommended that the internships are required for music students in Popular Music Programs." (specialist interviewee, personal communication, 2023). This educational approach is expected to empower graduates to navigate the music industry's multifaceted landscape independently, whether as artists, producers, composers, or technicians, without relying solely on traditional employment models like

music labels. This evolving paradigm also anticipates an increase in competition among freelancers, with implications for budget autonomy and the quality of work. Employers predict a market where freelancers will have greater leverage in dictating project terms, reflecting a significant shift towards more equitable and self-directed professional environments within the music industry.

Research participants advocated for a shift in educational focus within popular music programs, suggesting a reduction in classroom time in favor of increased real-world exposure and experiential learning: “giving opportunity to create musical works help music students to develop and improve their skills more effectively, so the developers must think about the supportive activities and the integrated subjects that can develop students’ learning and help them to have ability to apply their skills for working...” (student interviewee, personal communication, 2023). This preference stems from the belief that active participation and hands-on experience are more effective for skill acquisition and professional training. They highlighted the value of project-based learning, collaborations with industry professionals, and internship opportunities as key methods for gaining practical knowledge. However, it was noted that certain programs face challenges in integrating substantial practical experiences due to limited availability of internships and applied learning options. This limitation was identified as a significant hurdle in curriculum development across not just music but also other academic disciplines at the undergraduate level.

<Table 2> Participant perspectives on the required skills expected of graduates from Thai popular music programs

Contents	Music Institutes					Types of Participants			
	A	B	C	D	E	Students	Teachers	Employers	Specialists
21 <sup>st</sup> Century Skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
Work Experience			✓	✓	✓				✓
Management Skills		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Business Skills	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓
Responsibility		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Lifelong Learning		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
Adaption and Application				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

The feedback (<Table 2>) also underscores a universal design principle across music programs: the prioritization of skill development pertinent to the music industry. Therefore, while it is crucial for popular music curricula in Thailand to enhance musical competencies, there is a pressing need for these programs to also focus on preparing students for the realities of the music industry.

Employers participating in the study emphasized the importance of graduates' readiness and their experiential background as decisive factors in hiring. They recommended that popular music programs should tailor their course structures to equip students with a comprehensive skill set - including music production, business acumen, creativity, and essential soft skills for the 21st century - ensuring graduates are well-prepared to enter and excel in the music industry.

The study highlighted a strong desire among participants for increased flexibility within the curricula of popular music programs in Thailand, which are perceived as overly rigid due to stringent higher education standards. These standards, while intended to elevate the quality of popular music education nationally, inadvertently constrain music institutes' ability to innovate and adapt their curricula to contemporary needs. Restrictions on course duration, credit allocation, and structure were cited as primary barriers to curriculum development. Participants advocated for a curriculum design that allows students more autonomy in selecting subjects that align with their interests and career aspirations. If music institutes can more precisely identify and respond to individual student preferences, they can tailor their offerings to better support emerging trends and prepare students for the future. Moreover, participants emphasized the importance of curricula that not only align with students' interests but also enhance their career prospects, suggesting a need for educational frameworks that are both responsive and forward-looking (<Table 3>).

<Table 3> Comparative summary of present and future Thai popular music curricula for undergraduate students.

Curriculum	Duration	Teaching and Learning Style	Product	Working Opportunities
Present curriculum	4-8 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lectures and practice</li><li>• Simulation and experiments</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strong foundation in music and performance skills</li><li>• Less work experience</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Minimal duration of work</li><li>• Minimal employment opportunities</li></ul>
Future curriculum	Less than 4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lectures and practice</li><li>• Project-based</li><li>• Experiments</li><li>• Based on real situations</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Minimal foundation in music</li><li>• Fewer opportunities to develop performance skills</li><li>• More work experiences</li><li>• Creative experiences and specialization</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More opportunities to work in real situations</li><li>• More duration of work</li><li>• More connections to the music industry</li><li>• More employment opportunities</li></ul>

## V. Discussion & Conclusion

The empirical findings from this study on Thailand's popular music programs reveal a direct alignment with theoretical discourses on curriculum development, emphasizing the need for curricula that not only bolster musical skills but also facilitate personal discovery and professional preparedness. This alignment echoes the theoretical perspectives of Beauchamp (1981) and Gibson and Ewing (2020), who advocate for curriculum as a structured yet adaptable framework designed to achieve educational objectives while fostering meaningful learning experiences. The emphasis on integrating practical work experiences and core subjects to inspire and connect students to music further reflects the dynamic nature of curriculum development, supporting the notion that curricula must evolve with societal and technological changes (Barquero, Jessen, Ruiz-Hidalgo & Golding, 2023; Kilag, Marquita & Laurente, 2023).

Throughout the study, the aspiration of students to pursue careers in musical performance and production was clear. This underscores the curriculum's capacity to respond to industry needs and student ambitions, resonating with Tanner and Tanner's (1975) view of curriculum as a reflective and growth-fostering entity. The present study's advocacy for internships and experiential learning also aligns with theoretical frameworks that emphasize the curriculum's role in bridging theoretical knowledge with practical application, ensuring students are prepared for the complexities of the contemporary music industry (Shepherd & Ragan, 1992; Tetzlaff, Schmiedek & Brod, 2021).

Furthermore, the call for increased curriculum flexibility and the inclusion of business acumen within music education programs highlight the curriculum's crucial role in adapting to cultural, social, and economic contexts. This need for flexibility and industry relevance echoes the theoretical discussions by Lunenburg (2011) and Olivia (2009) on the impact of cultural and contextual factors on curriculum reform. Such a holistic approach to curriculum development, which balances global educational theories with local societal needs, exemplifies a collaborative reform process that is both theoretically grounded and pragmatically oriented towards enhancing the educational experiences of music students in Thailand (Sutthirat, 2015; Taba, 1962).

This study has uncovered a paradigm shift regarding the perceived value of bachelor's degrees in Thailand's music industry, particularly within the younger generation. A notable trend emerged from the findings, illustrating a growing inclination among Thai youth to treat undergraduate music programs as a stepping stone for career progression, rather than the pursuit of purely academic musicianship. It was also apparent that many youths are bypassing undergraduate education in favour of direct entry into the workforce. This reflects a broader societal shift towards valuing direct

work experience and personal exploration over traditional higher education paths. Such a perspective, while common in Western contexts, marks a significant cultural shift in Asian countries where higher education has traditionally been synonymous with success and social status. This evolving mindset could potentially lead to a decline in enrollment in popular music programs, mirroring broader educational trends observed in developed nations (Chen, 2007).

Employers' preferences further underscore this shift, with a pronounced emphasis on practical experience over formal academic qualifications. The industry's demand for multifaceted skills - spanning popular music, business acumen, and technological proficiency - highlights a critical gap in current educational offerings. Employers advocate for curricula that prioritize experiential learning, suggesting that project-based initiatives and internships are more effective in preparing students for real-world challenges (Bennett, 2016, 2007). Such approaches not only enhance students' employability but also foster a deeper connection between educational institutions and the music industry, suggesting a collaborative model of learning where professionals share insights and experiences through workshops and on-site training (Suwansomboon, 2004).

To address these challenges, the curriculum development for popular music education in Thailand must embrace a more holistic and practical approach. Incorporating a wider array of semi-theoretical and hands-on learning opportunities, alongside an increased focus on internships, can bridge the gap between academic preparation and industry expectations. This strategy not only enriches students' learning experiences but also strengthens the ties between academia and the music industry, fostering a vibrant community of practice. Moreover, in anticipation of demographic shifts and the aging population in Thailand, there's a pressing need to adapt educational strategies to support lifelong learning. This entails curricular reforms that accommodate diverse age groups, integrating flexible and accessible teaching methods to ensure continuous professional development and relevance in a rapidly evolving job market.

The interviews conducted as part of this study highlight a critical insight into the Thai music industry's labor market demands, emphasizing the importance of individuality and personal identity in the music creation process. Despite the comprehensive knowledge and technical skills imparted by popular music programs, the industry places a premium on graduates who bring a unique musical style to the table. This demand for uniqueness, as underscored by Bennett (2016, 2007) and Brook and Fostaty Young (2019), is particularly crucial in navigating the competitive landscape of the digital music market, where individuality not only distinguishes one's work but also enhances memorability and marketability. These results also echo the theoretical perspectives discussed in the literature review, where the development of a personal musical identity is seen

as pivotal to educational and professional success within the realm of music education (Lunenburg, 2011). This study's findings suggest a significant alignment between the curricular goals and the evolving needs of the music industry, reinforcing the idea that music programs should prioritize fostering students' unique artistic expressions. In practice, this could mean integrating more personalized projects and diverse creative assignments within the curriculum, thereby enabling students to explore and refine their individual styles throughout their studies. Such an approach not only aligns with the theoretical frameworks outlined by Sutthirat (2015) and the collaborative reform processes advocated by Taba (1962) but also prepares students to meet the specific demands of the music industry, enhancing their employability post-graduation.

This exploration of popular music curricula in Thailand reveals a dual focus on nurturing individuality within curricular frameworks and fostering a vibrant community of popular music education. Each music program is characterized by its unique philosophy and objectives, reflecting a tailored approach to teaching and learning that caters to the diverse needs of students. This emphasis on individualized curriculum design, as highlighted by Bennett (2007), plays a crucial role in aligning educational offerings with the aspirations and professional goals of learners. By concentrating on their distinct strengths, programs can streamline their development towards a cohesive educational direction and collaborative synergy with industry stakeholders, which is imperative for the cultivation of a thriving ecosystem that supports the continuous production of skilled music professionals. This collaborative endeavor is not just beneficial for the enrichment of the curriculum with real-world insights and opportunities but is also essential for adapting to the rapid changes within the music sector.

In conclusion, this investigation has identified strengths and areas needing enhancement within Thailand's popular music curricula, aligning closely with the research objectives to critically evaluate and suggest pragmatic reforms. The findings advocate for a curriculum evolution that not only hones the artistic and technical prowess of music students but also integrates essential soft skills and digital fluency, addressing the pressing needs of the modern music landscape. By fostering a curriculum that emphasizes hands-on learning and prioritizes student autonomy in course selection, this study underscores the necessity of adapting educational frameworks to the dynamic digital and social contexts of music. While the research offers valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and industry stakeholders, aiming to invigorate Thailand's music education ecosystem, it is circumscribed by its focus on Thai institutes, inviting further exploration into the global applicability of these findings. Future endeavors should delve into the shifting paradigms of Thailand's music and labor markets, alongside an examination of curriculum management

within the constraints of credit limitations, to forge pathways towards cultivating graduates distinguished not only by their expertise in popular music but by their unique creative identities.

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