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From Traditional Practice to Professional Training: Vietnamese Instruments in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT : Background : Higher education training in Vietnamese instruments must safeguard community-embedded performance knowledge while responding to new professional demands. Objective: This study identifies the tensions arising in the transition from traditional practice to professional training and proposes a curriculum framework for Vietnam. Methods: Qualitative document analysis was combined with an integrative review. The corpus comprised 50 policy documents, official sources, and academic publications on higher music education, cultural sustainability, and professional capability. The data were thematically coded and compared across source groups. Results: Four tensions were identified: oral-embodied transmission and academic standardisation; single-instrument mastery and multi-role capability; repertoire preservation and adaptive creativity; and master-apprentice authority and learner agency. The proposed TCMK framework comprises Living Tradition, Professional Performance Standards, Expanded Capability, and Ecosystem Connection. Conclusion: Professionalisation should not replace traditional practice with a uniform conservatoire model. Programmes need to ensure dual accountability: critically informed fidelity to heritage and preparation for students' sustainable participation in professional life.

KEYWORDS: higher education, Vietnamese instruments, professional training, intangible cultural heritage, curriculum, employability

1. INTRODUCTION

Vietnamese instruments are not merely means of producing sound. Performance techniques, tuning practices, pressing-vibrato-gliding finger techniques, conceptions of timbre, improvisation, relationships between instrumentalists and singers, and the rules for participating in particular genres are all forms of knowledge accumulated through practice. An important part of this knowledge exists through oral transmission, demonstration, listening, and guided imitation; it is difficult to transfer fully into notation or verbal description. Therefore, when traditional instruments enter the university, the issue is not simply to place a repertoire list within a programme. The core question is how living knowledge, embedded in people and performance environments, can be organised into courses, learning outcomes, and assessment activities without being detached from the cultural logic that produced it.

This issue has become urgent as Vietnamese higher education increasingly shifts towards outcomes-based programme design. The National Qualifications Framework defines qualification levels and corresponding competency orientations, while Circular No. 17/2021/TT-BGDDT requires programmes to specify objectives, learning outcomes, study workload, teaching methods, and assessment within a verifiable structure (Ministry of Education and Training, 2021; Prime Minister, 2016). At the same time, the Cultural Development Strategy to 2030 and the 2024 Law on Cultural Heritage emphasise safeguarding and promoting heritage values and developing cultural human resources (National Assembly, 2024; Prime Minister, 2021). These two directions create a dual requirement: programmes must be transparent and accountable to higher education standards while also protecting the capacity for change, local specificity, and the participatory rights of heritage-bearing communities.

Professional training institutions have maintained a range of programmes and specialisations in Vietnamese instrumental performance. Public information from the Vietnam National Academy of Music shows training in sáo trúc, đàn bầu, đàn nhị, đàn nguyệt, tỳ bà, đàn tranh, tam thập lục, and Vietnamese traditional percussion; practical content is also linked to Chèo ensembles, Hue court music, and Đờn ca tài tử-Cải lương (Vietnam National Academy of Music, 2026). Competition participation, exchange, and performance activities of the Department of Traditional Music at the Ho Chi Minh City Conservatory of Music likewise demonstrate connections among training, professional stages, and spaces for academic-artistic exchange (Ho Chi Minh City Conservatory of Music, 2023). However, publicly available information still mainly describes specialisation structures and activities and is insufficient to determine the principles by which programmes should integrate traditional knowledge, new professional capabilities, and heritage responsibility.

International research on higher music education has identified the limitations of training models focused almost exclusively on individual performance skills. Musical careers are increasingly portfolio-based: one person may simultaneously perform, teach, organise projects, produce digital content, work with communities, and self-manage professional activity (Bennett, 2016; Burland et al., 2023; López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2021). The concept of "musicians as makers in society" extends the image of the professional musician from a reproducer of repertoire to a creative, collaborative agent who generates social value (Gaunt et al., 2021). At the same time, research on cultural sustainability warns that education can

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support the continuity of tradition but can also impoverish it if a single version is standardised, repertoire is detached from communities, or local knowledge is marginalised (Hill, 2009; Karlsen & Westerlund, 2015).

The gap lies at the intersection of these two strands of research. Discussions of higher music education often arise from European and North American conservatoires and Western classical traditions, whereas studies of traditional music preservation seldom translate their findings into university programme structures with learning outcomes, assessment, and career pathways. This article addresses that gap through three questions:

1. What tensions arise when Vietnamese instrumental practices are organised as professional training in higher education?
2. What groups of capabilities need to be combined to sustain the vitality of tradition while preparing students for contemporary careers?
3. How can these capability groups be translated into principles for programme design, teaching, and assessment?

The contribution of this article is an analytical and curriculum-design framework called TCMK. It is a conceptual model developed from document synthesis and is not yet an accreditation standard validated through field research. Its value lies in providing a shared language through which training institutions, lecturers, master artists, students, and employers can discuss quality.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. From the conservatoire model to a broader conception of professionalism

The conservatoire model has clear strengths in developing advanced technique, disciplined practice, and performance standards. One-to-one lessons between lecturers and students enable the transmission of subtle adjustments in posture, movement, timbre, and interpretation. However, this structure can also produce asymmetrical power relations and make learners dependent on the judgement of a single teacher when objectives, criteria, and feedback mechanisms are not transparent (Gaunt, 2010, 2011; Oti Rakena et al., 2016; Perkins, 2013). Peer learning and transformative teaching in the instrumental studio can help students develop ownership of their learning through reflection, dialogue, and collaboration (Carey et al., 2017, 2018; Coutts, 2019; Hanken, 2016).

Transformation does not mean lowering artistic demands. It requires placing mastery within a broader professional structure and carefully managing the relationship between curriculum innovation and institutional tradition (Duffy, 2013; Minors et al., 2017; Myers, 2016). Creech et al. (2008) describe the transition from student to professional as a process of forming identity, networks, and adaptive capability; Southcott and de Bruin (2022) show that performer and teacher identities can develop in intertwined ways. Bennett (2016), Munnelly (2020), and Rowley et al. (2026) all show that degrees and performance skills alone do not automatically secure a stable career pathway. Students need to understand how to create work, collaborate, teach, communicate with the public, and move among multiple roles. Employability, therefore, should not be reduced to self-marketing skills; it includes the capacity for continued learning, relationship building, sustaining professional well-being, and creating artistic-social value.

Bridgstock (2013) and Burland et al. (2023) emphasise the ecosystemic nature of artistic careers. Professional opportunities depend not only on individual capability but also on relationships among training institutions, arts organisations, policy, technology, performance venues, and communities. For Vietnamese instruments, this argument is especially important: the "labour market" includes not only salaried positions in arts troupes or teaching posts, but also festivals, heritage clubs, tourism stages, interdisciplinary projects, media production, and community education activities.

Research on student entrepreneurship at a university of culture, sports, and tourism in Vietnam also shows that professional capability does not arise from narrow specialisation alone. Limitations in management, finance, access to information, and support connections highlight the role of a university ecosystem capable of linking learners with mentors, resources, and practice environments (Tran, 2024a). Although entrepreneurship is not the sole objective of instrumental training, this evidence reinforces the need to incorporate career management and project-development capability into a "core-branch" structure rather than treating them as optional extracurricular activities.

2.2. Transmission, authenticity, and cultural sustainability

UNESCO's 2003 Convention defines the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage as measures that ensure the viability of heritage, including identification, documentation, research, transmission, and promotion, with the broad participation of heritage-bearing communities (UNESCO, 2003). This perspective shifts the focus from fixing an "object" to supporting people, knowledge, and the conditions of practice. Education can create spaces for intergenerational transmission, but it should avoid separating knowledge from practitioners or using heritage merely as illustrative content without a community voice (UNESCO, 2026).

Recent studies in Vietnam further indicate that heritage vitality depends on memory, identity, attachment to place, and meaningful resident participation. In cultural tourism contexts, these factors are associated with support for conservation and sustainable development; education and behavioural change also contribute to shaping heritage-protection awareness within communities (Nguyen, 2025; Vu & Nguyen, 2026). Although these studies do not concern instrumental students, they indicate that university transmission should connect learners with specific memories and cultural subjects rather than merely transferring repertoire detached from place.

In music, "preservation" understood as freezing a repertoire often does not reflect how tradition operates. Teachers' repertoire choices, notation practices, and technical standardisation are all interventions with cultural consequences (Karlsen & Westerlund, 2015). Research on the folk music programme at the Sibelius Academy shows that higher education can enhance the social status and creative capacity of traditional music while also changing authority relations and forms of performance (Hill, 2009). Bartleet et al. (2020) show that intercultural music-making can develop identity and artistic practice when learners participate reflectively rather than merely collecting surface-level musical material.

Cases outside music provide useful comparisons. The development of brocade weaving demonstrates that heritage value can be promoted when product quality, community linkages, and sustainability are addressed simultaneously (Pham et al., 2025). Research on marine cultural heritage in Thanh Hoa further emphasises the combined role of heritage-based products, trained human resources, infrastructure, community participation, and conservation policy (Hung & Tuyen, 2026). The implication for instrumental training is that performance capability should be positioned within a value-creation chain that includes mechanisms for safeguarding heritage, rather than being measured solely by the quality of an individual performance.

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Another body of evidence concerns heritage interpretation and communication. The quality of content, attractiveness, delivery methods, and the integration of conservation messages can change how the public understands and behaves towards heritage (Ha et al., 2026). Participatory storytelling, interactive technology, and co-creation can deepen experience, while community feedback and social communication channels can help adapt messages to context (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2026; Phuong & Lam, 2025). For instrumental education, these findings support treating interpretation, storytelling, and public communication as professional capabilities directly linked to conservation responsibility.

The concept of culturally sustaining pedagogy provides another foundation. Its focus is not merely on "bringing culture into the classroom" but on sustaining communities' capacity to reproduce, debate, and transform their own practices. Rector's (2025) review groups representative practices into three directions: mobilising the knowledge capital of learners and communities; decentring dominant norms; and developing critical reflection. Applied to Vietnamese instruments, this approach requires programmes to recognise multiple regional styles, multiple lineages of master artists, and disagreements about technique or aesthetics rather than presenting a single standard version as the sole representative.

2.3. Learning outcomes and authentic assessment

Outcomes-based design can clarify programme accountability, but it is useful only when learning outcomes fully reflect the nature of practice. If all capabilities are expressed as isolated technical indicators, the programme will overlook listening, improvisation, conduct within ensembles, contextual understanding, and aesthetic judgement. Conversely, if the only criterion is being "true to tradition" without describing evidence and judgement procedures, assessment can easily become dependent on individual authority.

Research on feedback and collaborative learning in arts education suggests a combined solution. Students should be assessed through multiple forms of evidence: live performance, practice journals, explanations of artistic choices, group projects, digital products, and feedback from practice partners (Gaunt & Treacy, 2020; Georgii-Hemming et al., 2020). Involving master artists or practising musicians in assessment helps safeguard cultural credibility; rubrics and multi-source feedback increase academic transparency. These two requirements complement one another when criteria are co-created rather than imposed unilaterally.

Experience from teaching garment cutting and sewing techniques to fashion design students at a university of culture shows that practical-skills modules need to be updated in response to job requirements, technology, and product quality while maintaining a structured practice process (Tran, 2024b). This provides a close comparison with instrumental training because both involve learning through action, demonstration, and performative products. It reinforces the choice of assessment through capability portfolios and authentic professional tasks rather than relying only on examinations that reproduce technique.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Research design

The study used qualitative document analysis combined with an integrative review. Document analysis is appropriate when research questions concern how texts establish objectives, norms, and structures of action; the method requires attention to the origin, purpose, audience, and context of each document rather than treating texts as neutral reflections of reality (Bowen, 2009). An integrative review makes it possible to connect empirical research, theory, and policy documents in order to develop a conceptual framework (Snyder, 2019).

3.2. Scope and criteria for selecting materials

The search and screening were conducted in August and early September 2026. Three groups of materials were used: (1) legal and policy documents directly related to higher education programme standards, cultural development, or heritage safeguarding; (2) programme, admissions, and professional-activity information published on the official websites of Vietnamese music training institutions; and (3) peer-reviewed articles on higher music education, instrumental training, musical careers, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and the sustainability of traditions.

Academic sources were searched through Google Scholar, Crossref, and publisher websites using combinations of the English keywords "higher music education", "conservatoire curriculum", "instrumental tuition", "musician employability", "portfolio career", "traditional music higher education", "cultural sustainability", "culturally sustaining pedagogy music", "heritage interpretation", "digital preservation", "community participation", and "practice-based higher education". Vietnamese-language sources were searched using corresponding terms relating to traditional instrumental training, higher education programme standards, heritage interpretation and communication, digitisation, and cultural development strategy. A document was included when it met all three conditions: direct relevance to at least one research question; verifiable bibliographic information or issuing authority; and provision of an argument concerning objectives, content, methods, assessment, or professional context. Unsourced commentary, commercial promotional pages, and duplicate materials were excluded.

The final analytical corpus comprised 50 documents: 42 peer-reviewed articles; 6 documents or official sources on policy, law, and heritage safeguarding; and 2 information pages from training institutions. Materials published before 2016 were retained only when they had foundational value or directly addressed folk traditions and master-apprentice relationships; most arguments concerning careers and curriculum innovation were based on publications from 2016-2026.

3.3. Analytical procedure

The procedure consisted of four rounds. In the first round, each document was entered into a matrix with the following fields: source type, context, subject, conception of quality, capabilities addressed, teaching methods, assessment forms, and the role of community. In the second round, meaningful passages were openly coded using labels close to the data, such as "oral transmission", "standardisation", "teacher authority", "multiple roles", "performance-based assessment", "community participation", and "digital technology".

In the third round, codes were grouped and continuously compared to develop themes. Reflexive thematic analysis was used as a process of interpretive construction rather than mechanical frequency counting (Braun & Clarke, 2021). A theme was retained only when evidence came from at least two source groups or when one source group revealed an important contradiction with another. In the final round, the themes were compared with learning-outcome requirements and arranged into pillars for programme design. A decision log was maintained to distinguish findings directly derived from documents from the author's inferences; a source-theme crosswalk was used to improve auditability (Nowell et al., 2017).

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3.4. Trustworthiness and methodological limitations

Trustworthiness was strengthened through three measures: prioritising original sources or publisher pages; checking DOIs and issuing information; and triangulating policy and institutional descriptions with peer-reviewed research. However, the study did not observe classrooms or interview lecturers, master artists, or students. Programme webpages were therefore treated as evidence of published structures, not as complete evidence of the enacted curriculum. The proposed framework needs to be tested through multi-institutional research in the next stage.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Four structural tensions

The analysis shows that professionalisation is organised around four interrelated tensions (Table 1). These are not mutually exclusive choices. Each pair represents two values that need to be maintained and balanced through programme design.

Table 1. Tensions in Vietnamese instrumental training in higher education

Tension	Risk when leaning towards the first pole	Risk when leaning towards the second pole	Balancing principle
Oral-embodied transmission / academic standardisation	Knowledge remains person-dependent, difficult to verify, and difficult to transfer across cohorts	Technique becomes detached from timbre, context, and lineages of practice	Standardise outcomes and evidence, not the artistic pathway absolutely
Single-instrument mastery / multi-role capability	Students perform well but struggle to build sustainable livelihoods	Artistic depth is diluted by too many generic-skills courses	Keep performance capability as the core and expand along career pathways
Repertoire preservation / adaptive creativity	Tradition becomes frozen and distant from audiences and new practices	Superficial creativity, appropriation, or loss of genre logic	Creativity grounded in contextual understanding and accountability
Master-apprentice authority / learner agency	Learners become dependent, have limited voice, and struggle to develop artistic identity	Lack of discipline and neglect of the deep knowledge of tradition bearers	Shift from unaccountable authority to dialogic mentoring

Oral-embodied transmission and academic standardisation

The literature on instrumental teaching affirms the irreplaceable role of demonstration, imitation, immediate feedback, and long-term relationships between teachers and learners. For Vietnamese instruments, these interactions also carry professional language, ways of listening, and memories of style. At the same time, regulatory documents require learning outcomes that can be published and assessed. Tension arises when institutions attempt to convert every nuance into rigid criteria or, conversely, use the "difficulty of articulation" as a reason to avoid transparent assessment.

The synthesis indicates that what should be standardised is the minimum level of capability, the types of evidence, and the judgement process-not a single timbre, ornament, or version of a repertoire item. Students may demonstrate the same standard through different repertoires and styles, provided that they can justify their choices and are assessed by a panel with appropriate cultural competence.

Single-instrument mastery and multi-role professional capability

Studies of musical careers consistently indicate that careers often comprise several parallel activities. However, expanding a programme by simply adding many disconnected courses can reduce time for core practice. The analysis suggests a "core-branch" structure: all students should attain high standards in technique, repertoire, ensemble performance, and stage practice, then choose one or two developmental branches such as pedagogy, digital production, project management, research-documentation, or interdisciplinary creation. This structure protects depth while allowing learners to develop distinctive professional profiles.

Repertoire preservation and adaptive creativity

Policy documents regard safeguarding and promotion as two aspects of the same task. Academic research adds that traditions are continually recreated through selection and interaction. The findings therefore reject both extremes: merely reproducing a "classicised" repertoire, or encouraging fusion without understanding sources. Responsible creativity requires at least four layers of evidence: understanding the structure and function of the source genre; identifying the relevant people or communities; making explicit how material has been transformed; and assessing the product's effects on the image, rights, and continuity of the practice.

Master-apprentice authority and learner agency

The master-apprentice relationship enables the transmission of subtle skills but can limit students' ability to question, change teachers, or develop an artistic voice. The analysis indicates that this relationship should not be replaced by wholly self-directed learning. The solution is to distribute authority: specialist lecturers take responsibility for technical progress; master artists and guest practitioners validate cultural credibility; peers provide ensemble feedback; students conduct self-assessment through learning portfolios; and panels ensure consistent criteria and procedures. Agency, in this sense, is the ability to make well-founded choices, not freedom from standards.

4.2. The TCMK framework for professional training

The four tensions are translated into the TCMK framework, comprising Living Tradition, Professional Performance Standards, Expanded Capability, and Ecosystem Connection (Table 2). The pillars should be present simultaneously and developed progressively across the entire programme.

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Table 2. The TCMK framework and evidence of learning

Pillar	Capability content	Typical learning activities	Assessment evidence
Living Tradition	Listening-memorising-recreating; style; genre context; history of transmission; heritage ethics	Learning with master artists; guided fieldwork; comparative analysis of versions; practice in genre ensembles	Annotated performance; source portfolio; reflective journal; validation by practitioner experts
Professional Performance Standards	Technique; timbre; repertoire; ensemble performance; reading/writing notation where appropriate; professional health and stage conduct	Individual lessons; ensemble classes; simulated performance; recording and feedback	Recital; technical examination; ensemble performance; audio-video portfolio; self-assessment
Expanded Capability	Pedagogy; digital technology; project design; public communication; research; career management	Branch-based electives; interdisciplinary projects; content production; practice teaching	Lesson plan; digital product; budgeted proposal; small research report; career portfolio
Ecosystem Connection	Collaboration; network building; community service; understanding institutions and cultural industries	Internships; projects with arts troupes/schools/communities; festivals; career talks	Partner assessment; public-facing product; participant feedback; career development plan

The Living Tradition pillar ensures that students do not merely play the correct notes but understand why a sonic choice carries meaning within a particular genre, setting, and social relationship. "Living" emphasises the capacity for continuity and agentic transformation. Notation, recording, and digital archiving are support tools; they do not replace listening, observation, and participation.

The Professional Performance Standards pillar establishes an observable level of mastery. Standards need to encompass solo and ensemble performance, repertoire preparation, collaboration with other artists, time management, professional health, and stage conduct. The outcome is not equivalent to a technical competition; it is the capacity to produce a convincing, stable, and contextually appropriate performance.

The Expanded Capability pillar responds to the reality of multi-role careers. Rather than requiring every student to learn the same broad set of skills at a shallow level, the programme allows students to select branches with integrated outputs. For example, students on a pedagogy branch develop and trial a sequence of lessons; students on a digital branch produce a set of recordings with metadata and rights documentation; and students on a project branch design a performance programme for a defined audience group.

The Ecosystem Connection pillar transforms the professional environment from a place that merely "receives graduates" into a partner in the training process. Partners may include master artists, theatres, arts troupes, cultural centres, schools, museums, creative spaces, festivals, and media organisations. Partnerships need clear learning objectives, mentors, feedback mechanisms, and benefit-sharing principles; otherwise, internships can easily become auxiliary labour that does not build capability.

4.3. A pathway for curriculum integration

The TCMK framework can be implemented in three stages. The foundation stage focuses on basic technique, listening-memory, genre history, ensemble performance, and university learning skills. The development stage expands repertoire, stylistic comparison, reflection, technology, and group projects. The integration stage requires students to complete a graduation project connecting performance with at least one professional or community issue.

An integrated graduation project need not replace the recital. The recital remains central evidence of performance capability, but it is accompanied by a portfolio containing an explanation of choices, a log of work with transmission sources, communication materials, partner feedback, and a post-graduation development plan. This structure clarifies the relationship between the artistic product and the professional process.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Professionalisation as dual accountability

The findings broaden the concept of professionalisation. In a narrow understanding, professionalisation means transferring folk practices into institutions, standardising technique, awarding degrees, and creating a specialised performance workforce. This approach can enhance status and enable systematic practice, but it risks treating the institution as the sole validator of value. The TCMK framework proposes dual accountability: accountability to higher education quality standards and accountability to the cultural ecosystem from which the knowledge originates.

Dual accountability is consistent with Gaunt et al.'s (2021) argument about musicians as makers in society and also makes UNESCO's (2003) community principle more concrete. Students should not only reproduce heritage accurately; they must learn to recognise who has a voice, how benefits are distributed, and what consequences arise when materials are moved onto new stages. Ethical capability is not external to professional expertise; it is a component of professional judgement.

5.2. Avoiding an opposition between master artists and university lecturers

An important practical implication is to avoid dividing roles into "master artists who preserve tradition" and "lecturers who possess methodology". Many people may perform both roles simultaneously, and their value should not be ranked on a single scale. What is needed is a mechanism for co-teaching and co-assessment in which different forms of expertise are explicitly recognised. Master artists can lead on style, memories of transmission, and community standards; lecturers can support process design, alignment with learning outcomes, reflection, and research; practising artists can provide information on stage requirements and professional networks.

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This mechanism also reduces the risks of concentrated authority identified by Gaunt (2011) and Perkins (2013). A multi-member panel is not automatically fair; institutions still need rules on conflicts of interest, students' rights to respond, and how aesthetic disagreements are handled. Nevertheless, openly recognising that several reasonable judgements may coexist is an important step towards protecting stylistic diversity.

5.3. Authentic assessment and transparency

The TCMK framework shows that a solo examination cannot represent the full range of professional capability. Assessment should be designed as an interconnected set of evidence. A rubric may contain four domains corresponding to the framework, but weighting should reflect the objectives of each course. In specialist performance courses, Professional Performance Standards may carry the greatest weight; in community projects, Ecosystem Connection and Living Tradition need to be assessed more explicitly.

Rubrics should not assess vague concepts such as being "soulful" without describing observable signs. Such concepts can be reframed as judgement questions: how does the performer control timbre and pitch; is the treatment of variants consistent with the logic of the style; how does the performer respond to ensemble partners; can the performer explain artistic choices; and what do practitioner experts' views indicate? Transparency does not eliminate artistic judgement; it clarifies the basis on which that judgement is made.

5.4. Digital capability and cultural rights

Technology creates opportunities for documentation, distance learning, public access, and professional portfolio building; digital practices can also expand how learners construct musical identities and learning communities (Partti, 2014). In the field of Vietnamese heritage, Phuong (2026) identifies the access, storage, and dissemination potential of smart technologies while also noting limitations relating to infrastructure, data standards, capability, and authenticity. Research on heritage storytelling likewise shows that interactive technology creates clearer value when combined with authenticity, participation, and co-creation (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2026). Digitisation in the programme, therefore, should not be reduced to recording and uploading.

Digitisation also raises questions of consent, copyright, related rights, personal data, and the separation of recordings from context. Students need to know how to record metadata, identify sources, obtain permission, select licences where appropriate, describe restrictions on use, and safely preserve originals. These requirements transform digital capability from equipment operation into responsible digital heritage stewardship.

This is where conservation and employability intersect. An ethically produced digital collection can support communities and research while also demonstrating students' production capability. Conversely, a widely circulated product that fails to acknowledge sources or misrepresents a practice cannot be considered a complete professional success.

5.5. Implications for programme governance

For the framework to move beyond declaration, training institutions need to map the curriculum and identify which courses provide opportunities to develop and assess each capability. Every learning outcome should appear along an "introduced-developed-mastered" progression to avoid both duplication and omission. Programme committees should include representatives of specialist lecturers, master artists/practising musicians, alumni, students, and professional partners.

Quality should be monitored using both academic and ecological indicators. In addition to graduation rates and performance results, institutions can track the diversity of transmission sources, the number of co-created community projects, the quality of partner feedback, alumni engagement in multi-role employment, and whether digital products comply with rights-related rules. Alumni data should be examined along 1-3-5-year trajectories because musical careers often develop non-linearly (Rowley et al., 2026).

Community indicators should be built from substantive feedback rather than attendance numbers alone. Research in Hanoi shows that education, resident participation, engagement with cultural narratives, and interactive channels are associated with awareness and the effectiveness of conservation communication (Nguyen, 2025; Phuong & Lam, 2025). At a broader governance level, evidence from Thanh Hoa emphasises that human resources, heritage-based products, and community participation are effective only when supported by conservation policy and coordination mechanisms (Hung & Tuyen, 2026). Programme committees should therefore monitor the quality of partnerships, the extent of community participation in decision-making, and how benefits are returned to heritage bearers.

5.6. Limitations and directions for future research

The study has three limitations. First, the analysis is based on publicly available documents and therefore does not fully reflect programmes as taught in everyday practice. Second, international sources on higher music education remain weighted towards Western institutions; applying them in Vietnam is an interpretation that requires testing. Third, the TCMK framework remains conceptual, with no data yet on the reliability of its indicators or its effects on learner outcomes.

Future research should conduct multi-institutional case studies combining analysis of course syllabi, observation of individual lessons and ensembles, interviews with master artists, lecturers, and students, and alumni tracking. Another important step is to co-design rubrics with representatives of specific traditions, because criteria appropriate for đàn tranh in Đờn ca tài tử cannot automatically be applied to đàn nguyệt in Chèo or court music.

6. CONCLUSION

Bringing Vietnamese instruments into higher education creates opportunities to develop performance standards, research, transmission, and the social standing of heritage. However, this process is sustainable only if professionalisation is not equated with one-way standardisation. The document analysis identified four tensions: oral-embodied transmission and academic standardisation; single-instrument mastery and multi-role capability; repertoire preservation and adaptive creativity; and master-apprentice authority and learner agency.

The TCMK framework translates these tensions into four curriculum pillars: Living Tradition, Professional Performance Standards, Expanded Capability, and Ecosystem Connection. It places performance capability at the centre without isolating it from history, ethics, technology, community, and livelihood. The practical value of the proposal lies in its potential to be translated into maps of learning outcomes, learning activities, assessment evidence, and partnerships.

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For institutions, the immediate priority is to review programmes using a core-branch structure, establish co-teaching mechanisms with master artists and practising musicians, and replace single examinations with integrated sets of evidence. For research, the priority is to test the framework using field data and alumni outcomes. The ultimate aim is not only to train accomplished instrumentalists but to develop artists capable of continuing traditions knowledgeably, autonomously, and responsibly in contemporary life.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Research Ethics

This study used only publicly available documents, collected no data from human participants, and involved no animals; therefore, ethical approval and participant consent procedures were not required.

Author Contribution

Đỗ Mạnh Thắng: Conceptualization; methodology design; document collection and analysis; manuscript writing; review and editing.

Data Availability

All data used in this study consist of publicly available documents listed in the References. The coding matrix may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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