MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF ARTS EDUCATION**

**ĐO THI LAM**

**Teaching Vietnamese Pop Songs to Female Mezzo-Soprano Students at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism**

**SUMMARY OF THESIS**

**THEORIES AND METHODS OF MUSIC TEACHING**

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**INTRODUCTION**

**1. Reason for choosing the topic**

Vietnamese pop music is one of the genres that has garnered widespread affection among young people. Modern pop songs, particularly genres such as Jazz, Rock, and Pop, have become popular and developed extensively in European and American countries since the early 20th century. In Vietnam, Vietnamese pop music officially began to take shape and develop nationwide after 1975. Since then, it has evolved into a vibrant musical genre in terms of composition and performance, enriching the spiritual life of music lovers. Notably, the singing style of pop music has introduced a fresh breath into the field of vocal performance.

Today, alongside classical and folk vocal training, pop vocal instruction has been integrated into the curriculum of many professional vocal training institutions in Vietnam, such as the Military University of Culture and Arts, Ho Chi Minh City Conservatory of Music, Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism, and Hanoi College of Arts and Culture. From these institutions, many renowned pop singers have emerged. The success of pop singers can be attributed in part to their vocal talent and innate musicality, as well as their artistic sensitivity; however, a critical factor remains their consistent practice and the effective application of appropriate vocal techniques they have acquired.

As a vocal instructor at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism, with a focus on teaching mezzo-soprano students to perform Vietnamese pop songs, the researcher has observed various issues related to the instruction of pop vocal techniques - particularly for mezzo-sopranos. These include articulation, vocal register coordination, breath control, and distinctive techniques such as vibrato and accentuation, which still spark debate. The current methods of teaching pop vocals among instructors lack consistency within professional departments, and the curriculum is still heavily weighted towards classical vocal training, with limited emphasis on pop vocal techniques.

Many mezzo-soprano students at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism possess naturally beautiful voices. However, some common challenges remain: inconsistency in vocal color across registers (chest, mix, and head voice), unclear vibrato characteristic of pop music, lack of rhythmic flexibility, and limited personal expression. Furthermore, many students still apply classical vocal techniques to pop songs in a rigid and inflexible manner, which often diminishes the intrinsic qualities of pop music performance.

In light of these issues, we have chosen the topic: "Teaching Vietnamese Pop Songs to Female Mezzo-Soprano Students at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism" as the subject of our doctoral dissertation in the field of Music education theory and methodology.

**2. Research purpose and tasks**

***2.1. Research purpose***

Based on the study of theoretical foundations and practical aspects of teaching light music singing, this dissertation proposes several pedagogical methods for teaching Vietnamese light music songs to female mezzo-soprano students majoring in Vocal Music at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism, with the aim of improving the quality of vocal training.

***2.2. Research tasks*** To achieve the above-stated purpose, the dissertation focuses on the following key tasks:

- Review existing literature related to the dissertation topic and construct a theoretical foundation for teaching light music singing to female mezzo-soprano students in undergraduate vocal programs.

- Briefly explore the historical emergence and identify the characteristics of Vietnamese light music songs in terms of themes, musical language, vocal techniques, and performance styles.

- Survey, analyze, and assess the current state of teaching Vietnamese light music songs to female mezzo-soprano students in the Vocal Music Department at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

- Propose pedagogical solutions for teaching Vietnamese light music to female mezzo-soprano students at the University. Conduct pedagogical experiments to verify the feasibility and effectiveness of the proposed methods in practice.

**3. Research object and scope**

***3.1. Research object***

Teaching Vietnamese light music songs to female mezzo-soprano students in the Vocal Music Department at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

***3.2. Research scope***

*3.2.1. Geographical scope*

The dissertation investigates the current state of light music teaching and implements experimental teaching for female mezzo-soprano students in the undergraduate Vocal Music program at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

*3.2.2. Content scope* The dissertation focuses on teaching selected representative Vietnamese light music songs in the pop style that are suitable for mezzo-soprano voices and can be integrated into the university’s vocal curriculum.  
 These selected songs are not limited to original compositions in their published keys; they may be transposed to fit the mezzo-soprano vocal range, as is commonly practiced by singers in real-world performances.

*3.2.3. Survey subjects and implementation of proposed solutions* The surveyed subjects and recipients of the proposed teaching methods are female mezzo-soprano students with a strength in light music singing. The study also surveys vocal music lecturers, students in the vocal program, and administrative staff of the Music Department at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism to gather broader insights related to the research topic.

*3.2.4. Time scope*

- Dissertation implementation period: from 2021 to 2024.

- Regarding the context in the research: The dissertation examines the development of the University and the Music Department from 1967 to the present, focusing particularly on the period from 2011 onwards, when the institution was officially recognized as a university.

- The Vietnamese light music songs used in the study are selected from works composed between 1975 and the present.

**4. Research questions and scientific hypothesis**  
***4.1. Research questions***

- Why is it necessary to teach Vietnamese light music songs to female mezzo-soprano students in the Vocal Music Department at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism?

- What components are involved in the process of teaching these songs to the students?

- What are the musical and vocal characteristics of Vietnamese light music songs, and how are these relevant to the vocal training of mezzo-soprano students?

- What is the current state of light music instruction for mezzo-soprano students at the university, and what limitations or challenges need to be addressed?

- What methods and strategies can be employed to effectively teach Vietnamese light music to this group of students?

***4.2. Scientific hypothesis*** If the theoretical foundation and current teaching practices are correctly identified, and pedagogical methods suitable to both the students’ vocal abilities and the institutional teaching context are proposed, then the quality of light music instruction for mezzo-soprano students at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism can be significantly enhanced.

**5. Research approach and methodology**  
***5.1. Research approach*** The dissertation adopts several approaches based on systems of theories in musicology, didactics, and vocal pedagogy, including:

- Practical approach to vocal music teaching activities

- Component-based approach to teaching and learning

- Learner competence-oriented approach

- Theoretical frameworks: music theory, didactic theory, vocal pedagogy

***5.2. Research methods*** *5.2.1. Theoretical research methods*

- Analytical method

- Synthesis method

- Comparative method

*5.2.2. Empirical research methods*

- Pedagogical observation

- Surveys and questionnaires

- Expert consultation

- Interviews

- Experience generalization

- Pedagogical experimentation

*5.2.3. Supporting methods*

Mathematical statistics, used to process data collected from the surveys and pedagogical experiments.

**6. Contributions of the dissertation**

***6.1. Theoretical contributions***

The findings enrich the theoretical discourse on light music singing pedagogy, particularly with respect to Vietnamese songs for mezzo-soprano voices. Key contributions include:

- Characteristics of the mezzo-soprano voice

- The pedagogical role of light music for this vocal type

- Characteristics of Vietnamese light music relevant to vocal instruction

- Clarifying the components of the teaching process, vocal technique, and instructional methodology for this genre

***6.2. Practical contributions***

The dissertation has practical application in improving the teaching of Vietnamese light music songs to mezzo-soprano students at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

The situation analysis highlights existing teaching conditions, faculty qualifications, curriculum design, student characteristics, and instructional challenges.

The proposed methods aim to enhance teaching effectiveness and may serve as a reference for similar vocal training programs and related research in other institutions.

**7. Structure of the Dissertation**

In addition to the Introduction, Conclusion, References, and Appendices, the dissertation is structured into four chapters:

Chapter 1: Overview of existing research and theoretical foundations for teaching Vietnamese pop songs to mezzo-soprano students.

Chapter 2: A brief history and musical characteristics of Vietnamese pop songs relevant to mezzo-soprano vocal instruction.

Chapter 3: Current state of teaching Vietnamese pop songs to mezzo-soprano students at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

Chapter 4: Proposed teaching strategies for Vietnamese pop song instruction for mezzo-soprano students.

**Chapter 1**

**OVERVIEW OF EXISTING RESEARCH AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR TEACHING VIETNAMESE POP SONGS TO FEMALE MEZZO-SOPRANO STUDENTS**

Chapter 1 spans 38 pages and focuses on two key components: an overview of previous research and the theoretical foundations for teaching Vietnamese pop songs to female mezzo-soprano students.

**1.1. Overview of existing research**

***1.1.1. Research on Pop music***

This section investigates and analyzes both domestic and international studies that address issues such as the origin, historical development, and defining characteristics of pop music.

*1.1.1.1. Books on pop music*

Key references include: American Popular Music by Larry Starr & Christopher Waterman (2003–2007), Oxford University Press, USA. Jazz - Rock - Pop (authors from both Vietnam and abroad), Music Publishing House, 1999. The Beatles: The Band of the Twentieth Century by Cao Xuan Thanh, Labor Publishing House, 1992. Vietnamese Contemporary Music: Progress and Achievements, various authors, Vietnam Institute of Music, 2000. History of Jazz - Rock - Pop by Vu Tu Lan, People's Army Publishing House, 2008. These books cover global and Vietnamese perspectives on pop music.

*1.1.1.2. Articles on pop music*

The dissertation reviews both English and Vietnamese language articles published in reputable journals since as early as 1977–1978 and continuing into recent years, which discuss pop music in Vietnam and globally.

*1.1.1.3. Dissertations and theses*

This includes doctoral dissertations, master’s theses, and undergraduate theses focusing on pop music. These works have provided useful references on definitions, the emergence of pop genres like Rock and Pop, and the features of pop songs.

***1.1.2. Research on vocal training for Mezzo-Soprano voices and pop singing instruction***

*1.1.2.1. Monographs on vocal training*

The dissertation examines works by prominent Vietnamese vocal educators such as Nguyen Trung Kien, Ho Mo La and Ngo Thi Nam, which focus on classical European vocal techniques. It also incorporates international resources such as The Contemporary Singer by Anne Peckham and vocal exercise e-books like Vocal Exercises by Cheryl Porter.

*1.1.2.2. Dissertations and theses on vocal training and pop singing*

This includes doctoral dissertations by authors such as Truong Ngoc Thang, Le Thi Minh Xuan, Nguyen Thi Tan Nhan, Do Huong Giang, Tran Thi Thu Ha, Dao Thi Khanh Chi, and Vu Thi Tuoi. These studies focus exclusively on classical vocal pedagogy.  
 A few master's theses by Nguyen Thi Huong and Nguyen Phuong Thao explore Bel Canto techniques for mezzo-sopranos, but not pop singing. One thesis by Doan Thi Thuy Trang touches on pop singing but still applies classical techniques, without examining pop-specific vocal methods.

***1.1.3. Evaluation of existing research***

*1.1.3.1. Issues that have been studied*

Existing research has achieved notable outcomes in studying pop music (including genres like Rock and Pop) from a musicological perspective: definitions, origins, development, genres, forms, etc. Some limited studies on vocal pedagogy and mezzo-soprano voices exist.

*1.1.3.2. Issues that have not been studied*

Research on pop singing instruction in general remains scarce, especially studies focused on teaching Vietnamese pop songs to mezzo-soprano students. There are virtually no in-depth studies on pop vocal techniques. These gaps present a research opportunity for this dissertation.

Conclusion, this dissertation’s focus-on teaching Vietnamese pop songs to female mezzo-soprano students at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism does not duplicate any previously published research.

***1.1.4. Research direction of the dissertation***

The dissertation aims to clarify theoretical issues related to the teaching of Vietnamese pop songs, analyze the characteristics of Vietnamese pop songs (themes, musical language, vocal approach, performance styles) in connection with mezzo-soprano instruction, assess the current state of instruction, and propose targeted teaching strategies.

**1.2. Theoretical foundations for teaching Vietnamese pop songs to Mezzo-Soprano students**

***1.2.1. Key concepts of the dissertation***

This section explores relevant concepts such as: teaching, singing, vocal training, pop music, Rock, Pop, Vietnamese pop songs, methods, teaching methodology, vocal registers and ranges.

***1.2.2. Characteristics of the Mezzo-Soprano voice***

This section outlines the following aspects of mezzo-soprano voice:

*1.2.2.1. Classification in classical vocal music*

A discussion of mezzo-soprano classifications within the context of European classical vocal pedagogy.

*1.2.2.2. Classification and characteristics in pop singing*

Details include tone quality and vocal range, along with comparisons between classical and pop mezzo-soprano vocals.

*1.2.2.3. Notable Vietnamese Mezzo-Soprano singers*

Profiles of prominent Vietnamese mezzo-sopranos such as Thanh Lam, My Linh, and Cam Van, highlighting their vocal qualities, range, and technical strengths in pop performance.

***1.2.3. The role of the Mezzo-Soprano voice in vocal music and pop singing instruction***

In choral music, mezzo-sopranos often sing middle-range harmonies that blend soprano and alto parts.  
 In solo performance, the mezzo voice is noted for its warm, smooth timbre - suitable for lyrical pieces—and its powerful, resonant tone for energetic songs.  
Professional training in pop singing helps mezzo-soprano students expand their vocal range, maintain vocal health, understand pop styles (Jazz, Rock, Pop), and improve rhythm, creativity, and stage performance—essential skills in contemporary pop music.

***1.2.4. Components of the teaching process for Vietnamese pop songs for undergraduate Mezzo-Soprano students***

The instructional process is based on several key components: objectives, content, instructional formats, teacher and student characteristics, practical teaching activities, and available infrastructure.

**Conclusion of Chapter 1**

**Chapter 2**

**A BRIEF HISTORY AND MUSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF VIETNAMESE POP SONGS IN RELATION TO TEACHING FEMALE MEZZO-SOPRANO STUDENTS**

Chapter 2 spans 37 pages and presents a brief overview of the emergence of Vietnamese pop songs, with an in-depth analysis of their defining characteristics in terms of themes, musical features (structure, mode, melody, harmony, rhythm), vocal techniques, and performance styles. The analysis highlights both the value and distinctiveness of Vietnamese pop songs compared to songs in the European classical tradition.

**2.1. A Brief history of the emergence of Vietnamese pop songs**

Western pop songs began to emerge globally in the early 20th century, especially after the end of World War II in Europe. Since 1945, pop music has flourished and expanded widely.

Compared to the West, Vietnamese pop music appeared later. Based on references such as *Vietnamese Contemporary Music: Progress and Achievements*, various theses, and numerous journal articles, the following summary outlines the historical development of Vietnamese pop songs:

Between the mid-20th century and prior to 1975, pop music influenced by American Rock and Pop had already begun to take root in Southern Vietnam. However, it was only after the country’s reunification in 1975, following the end of the war, that Vietnamese pop songs were officially introduced and developed nationwide.

This genre has since attracted a large number of Vietnamese composers, ranging from seasoned veterans to emerging young musicians, including many renowned figures from earlier generations.

**2.2. Musical characteristics of Vietnamese pop songs in relation to teaching female Mezzo-Soprano students**

Analyzing the characteristics of Vietnamese pop songs allows us to better understand their artistic and expressive value, as well as their contributions to the national music scene. Importantly, this analysis also identifies essential musical elements that support the teaching of pop singing to mezzo-soprano students at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

Studying pop songs requires not only examining the musical components written by composers-such as structure, melody and rhythm-but also the performance practices of singers, instrumentalists, and arrangers. Together, these three elements provide a comprehensive picture of the pop genre.

However, since this dissertation focuses specifically on teaching pop vocal techniques, it does not analyze instrumental arrangement or accompaniment styles. It also excludes "pop-ified" renditions of non-pop songs. Instead, it focuses on analyzing the characteristics of Vietnamese pop songs, particularly in the Pop style, as they relate to four main areas: lyrical themes, musical structure, vocal techniques, and singer performance-factors that directly affect the instruction of mezzo-soprano students.

Generally, Vietnamese pop songs adopt features from Western pop music but are adapted to suit Vietnamese cultural sensibilities, vocal qualities, and aesthetic preferences.

***2.2.1. Themes***

Themes in Vietnamese pop songs are highly diverse. The most prominent theme is romantic love, but others include homeland, nature, people, and everyday emotions. Themes related to war are rarely found, unlike songs from the periods of 1945-1954 and 1954-1975.

***2.2.2. Musical style***

*2.2.2.1. Songs strongly influenced by Western pop*

These songs clearly adopt musical language from Western Pop in their structure, melody, rhythm, vocal techniques, and performance style. They typically do not include Vietnamese folk or traditional materials. A distinctive feature is the frequent use of syncopation and offbeat rhythms.

*2.2.2.2. Songs with folk influences*

Some Vietnamese pop songs incorporate folk elements from genres such as *Ca trù*, or traditional folk music from the Central Highlands, Northern Delta, Southern Delta, and Cham ethnic groups.

***2.2.3. Form and structure***

Vietnamese pop songs primarily follow binary (two-part) or ternary (three-part) song forms. Single-section songs are rare. Among these, the binary form is the most common.

***2.2.4. Mode and harmony***

*2.2.4.1. Mode*

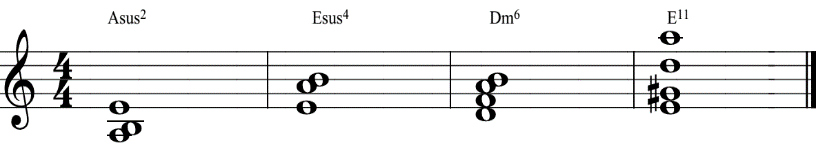
Most Vietnamese pop songs are written in major or minor modes using the Western diatonic (seven-note) scale. Some folk-influenced songs are written using pentatonic scales or a mixture of pentatonic and diatonic modes.

*2.2.4.2. Harmony*

One of the defining features that sets Vietnamese pop songs apart from traditional Vietnamese music is their approach to harmony. The conceptualization of harmony and chord construction in pop songs differs from that of traditional song arrangements.

Instead of relying solely on triads (built on thirds), pop songs often include chords built with seconds, fourths, or sixths, resulting in extended harmonies such as:

* Suspended chords (sus chords): where a tone is replaced, typically the third;
* Add chords (add chords): where additional tones are layered into the chord structure.



​In pop singing, it is possible to modulate the key of a song by a whole tone or a semitone abruptly, without the need for harmonic preparation.

***2.2.5. Melody***

*2.2.5.1. Musical Characteristics*

- Some melodies are lyrical in nature.

- Others are cheerful, vibrant, or energetic.

- Very few Vietnamese pop songs have heroic or militant characteristics, unlike songs from earlier wartime periods.

*2.2.5.2. Distinctive elodmic features*

- Climaxes are often built throughout the entire second or third section, rather than concentrated in a single phrase.

- Many melodies are rhythmically complex and not easy to memorize or sing, often featuring syncopation or dissonant intervals.

- Frequent use of repeated notes is a notable trait in many melodies.

*2.2.5.3. Vocal range*

The vocal range of most songs is relatively moderate, typically spanning between a tenth and a twelfth (10–12 semitones).

***2.2.6. Rhythm***

Rhythm is one of the defining elements that distinguishes pop music from other genres. It can be considered the “soul” of the pop song.

*2.2.6.1. First characteristic*

Pop songs often use rhythmic patterns derived from globally popular dance styles such as Slow Surf, Chachacha, Rumba, Pasodoble, Disco, Tango, Slow Rock, and Mambo. These patterns create a cyclical rhythmic structure.

*2.2.6.2. Second characteristic*

Heavy use of syncopation and offbeat accents creates rhythmic displacement. This is a hallmark of pop rhythm, especially the use of uneven syncopation that emphasizes unexpected beats in the melody.  
 Pop and Rock music, which have their roots in Rhythm and Blues (R&B), inherit this trait.  
 Among the 68 Vietnamese pop songs analyzed in the dissertation:

* 63 songs feature syncopation or both syncopation and offbeat rhythms.
* 52 of them use asymmetrical syncopation or offbeat patterns.
* 11 use symmetrical syncopation.

Notably, asymmetrical syncopation often appears at the end of phrases, even in the final bars-something that contrasts sharply with classical and traditional Vietnamese music.

In the study sample, 21 out of 68 songs end with asymmetrical syncopation.

After analyzing these rhythmic traits, Table 2.1 *is presented to compare similarities and differences between Vietnamese pop songs and those written in the European classical style.*

***2.2.7. Vocal techniques***

Classical European singing, particularly in the Bel Canto tradition, emphasizes beauty, resonance, clarity, and smoothness of tone. Clean, well-rounded sound is the goal, and strict adherence to technique is required both in training and performance.

In contrast, pop singing prioritizes unique vocal color, personal expression, and creative interpretation. Pop voices may be less polished-sometimes even raw or edgy-but they must be emotionally compelling.

*2.2.7.1. Posture, articulation and breathing*

In pop music, singing posture must be trained not only for standing still but also for movement and dance. Even vocal warm-ups may include physical motion to stabilize breathing and tone during performance.

Mouth position should be relaxed and natural - often more horizontal, without raising the soft palate excessively, in order to avoid creating an artificial tone.

For certain vocal colors (e.g., flattened tones), mouth shape may follow the singer’s expressive intent rather than traditional standards.

Breathing techniques from classical singing-chest, lower rib, and abdominal breathing - are all used. However, in pop singing, especially for mezzo-sopranos, breath support should emphasize speech-like clarity, projecting outward rather than upward into the head voice.

*2.2.7.2. Vocal registers in pop singing*

Mezzo-sopranos predominantly use chest voice, transitioning to mixed voice in higher passages. The vocal tone should be clear and speech-like.

*2.2.7.3. Distinctive vocal techniques in pop singing*

Pop singing includes techniques that differ from classical singing: Exaggerated vibrato, which may feel like separating individual syllables; Accentuation combined with gliding between notes, especially effective in syncopated phrases.

After this section, the dissertation provides Table 2.1 to compare classical and pop vocal techniques.

***2.2.8. Performance style***

Vietnamese pop songs often adopt cyclical rhythmic patterns tied to dance, which leads to a dynamic stage presence. Pop singers are expected to dance well as part of their performance.

In addition to vocal ability, pop performances often rely on visual elements-costumes, hairstyles, stage visuals (e.g., 3D graphics, fog effects)-to enhance audience appeal.

After this analysis, Table 2.1 is used to highlight similarities and differences in performance style between Vietnamese pop and classical music.

**Conclusion of Chapter 2**

**Chapter 3**

**THE CURRENT STATE OF TEACHING VIETNAMESE POP SONGS TO FEMALE MEZZO-SOPRANO STUDENTS AT THANH HOA UNIVERSITY OF CULTURE, SPORTS AND TOURISM**

Chapter 3 spans 34 pages and provides an in-depth examination of the current state of teaching Vietnamese pop songs to female mezzo-soprano students enrolled in the undergraduate vocal program at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

**3.1. Overview of Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism**

This section includes three main components:

**3.1.1. A Brief history and faculty**

**3.1.2. Facilities**

Based on the two sections above, the dissertation highlights the following points: Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism, officially established in 1967 as the College of Culture and Arts, was upgraded to university status in 2011 by decision of the Government. Over the years, the university has built a strong reputation and affirmed its role in the field of cultural and artistic education in Vietnam. The university currently trains students in multiple academic disciplines at the undergraduate level. Its teaching staff includes 223 members, among them 03 Associate Professors, 31 PhDs, 20 doctoral candidates, 160 Master's degree holders, and 28 Bachelor's degree holders. The faculty at the university are highly qualified in their respective areas of expertise, meeting the demands of both teaching and research. The university also possesses essential infrastructure to ensure the effectiveness of training in music and the arts.

**3.1.3. Music department and Vocal music faculty**

*3.1.3.1. Music department*

The Music Department was established alongside the university’s development. Currently, it employs 18 full-time lecturers. The department also collaborates with leading experts including PhDs, Meritorious Artists, artisans, and renowned performers. It has maintained partnerships in training and performance with music institutions in Vietnam and internationally (e.g., Italy, Switzerland, Poland, Russia, South Korea, and China).

*3.1.3.2. Vocal music Faculty*

The Vocal Music section includes 9 lecturers, most of whom graduated from the Vietnam National Academy of Music. Some hold doctorates and master’s degrees in Music Education from the Central University of Arts Education, and several are pursuing PhD studies. These lecturers are not only qualified to teach but also regularly perform at university-sponsored political and social events. Both faculty and students have achieved high accolades in national singing competitions.

**3.2. Vocal music curriculum and teaching materials**

***3.2.1. Curriculum content***

The undergraduate vocal program comprises 120 credits over 4 years. The subject “Vocal Music” includes 4 course units within the major knowledge block, spread across 8 semesters. Each course is worth 2 credits (equivalent to 30 class hours per semester). Instruction is delivered in a 2-student-per-session format, with each student attending 2 lessons per week.

Pop singing is not a separate subject in the curriculum but appears in the third course unit alongside classical vocal techniques. The lack of a dedicated pop singing curriculum poses challenges for pop vocal students—particularly mezzo-sopranos—as they are still required to study advanced classical techniques and perform arias, which may not align with their vocal strengths.

***3.2.2. Teaching materials***

The department has yet to adopt specialized materials for pop singing instruction. Current resources include books such as: *Vocal Pedagogy* by Nguyen Trung Kien, *Vocal Teaching Methodology* by Ho Mo La, *Vocal Music Studies* by Mai Khanh, *Effective Vietnamese Diction in Singing* by Tran Ngoc Lan. These materials are rooted in classical vocal pedagogy and do not address pop-specific techniques. Some lecturers reference performance videos on YouTube to adapt their teaching. The researcher also consulted online sources and vocal exercise books by Cheryl Porter.

**3.3. Psychological and vocal characteristics of female Mezzo-Soprano students**

***3.3.1. Psychological characteristics***

The majority of pop-singing mezzo-soprano students are aged 18–25 and have completed high school. This is an ideal age for physical, intellectual, and professional vocal development.

***3.3.2. Vocal characteristics***

These students typically exhibit the vocal traits of young Vietnamese women-voices that may not be as loud or resonant as those of Western singers, but with a naturally beautiful tone well-suited to pop music. However, skill levels vary, as some students have no prior music training, while others hold diplomas in vocal music. This requires lecturers to adopt differentiated instruction.

A survey of four undergraduate cohorts (as of 2024) revealed 52 vocal students, 34 of whom are female. Among them, 12 are mezzo-sopranos specializing in pop singing.

**3.4. Current state of pop vocal instruction for Mezzo-Sopranos**

***3.4.1. Survey methods and ppproach***

The researcher employed various data collection methods (questionnaires, interviews, expert consultation) to support the analysis of the current instructional landscape.

**3.4.2. Lecturer instruction**

*3.4.2.1. Classical technique instruction*

All students, including mezzo-sopranos studying pop singing, are required to master foundational European classical techniques (breath support, articulation, resonance, legato, staccato, melismatic runs) and perform classical romances or arias.

While some lecturers incorporate pop-specific techniques—such as vibrato, note sliding, and offbeat accentuation—evaluation and performance criteria are still rooted in classical standards. This creates difficulty for pop-oriented students, who are often unable to meet performance expectations in classical repertoire. Therefore, a separate curriculum with distinct assessment criteria for pop singing is necessary.

*3.4.2.2. Pop technique and related issues*

Since the curriculum is designed around classical singing, lecturers must independently select repertoire and adapt teaching methods. Techniques such as emphasized vibrato, note sliding, and treatment of syncopated rhythms are incorporated at the lecturers’ discretion.

Despite these efforts, much of the guidance is based on personal experience. Some instructors’ classical orientation influences how they teach breath control, articulation, and vocal resonance in pop singing. This can confuse students—especially when learning register transitions and mixed voice techniques. A few lecturers without strong pop backgrounds may struggle to provide effective vocal demonstrations.

*3.4.2.3. Lecturer survey results*

The researcher conducted five survey questionnaires with 9 vocal instructors: Table 3.1: Student profile – mezzo-sopranos in pop singing; Table 3.2: Instructor participation in pop vocal instruction; Table 3.3: Instructor perceptions of pop vocal curriculum and course assignments; Table 3.4: Instructor opinions on challenges in teaching pop vocals; Table 3.5: Instructor use of pedagogical methods in pop vocal teaching. Each table is accompanied by detailed analysis and conclusions about the current teaching situation.

***3.4.3. Student learning outcomes***

*3.4.3.1. Technical proficiency and attitude*

Students receive comprehensive classical vocal training, helping them develop range and technique. Some can sing up to A5 or B5 and use mixed voice to navigate vocal transitions. They are well-practiced in chest voice control.

However, due to the abstract and inconsistent approach to pop technique instruction, students often struggle. Some are unable to use mixed voice effectively, and others apply breath control or vocal projection techniques inappropriately, resulting in strained or rigid singing. The lack of rhythm training in syncopation and pop styles makes many students uncomfortable with modern rhythmic patterns.

*3.4.3.2. Performance training*

In addition to the four vocal course units, students take an “Acting Techniques” course, which is essential for performance skills. Students enjoy this course, but there is minimal coordination between vocal and acting instructors.

*3.4.3.3. Student survey results*

Four survey questionnaires were administered: Table 3.6: General survey on vocal studies (52 students); Table 3.7: Survey of 12 mezzo-sopranos regarding classical technique emphasis; Table 3.8: Survey of 12 mezzo-sopranos evaluating the importance of various pop vocal elements; Table 3.9: Survey of 12 mezzo-sopranos identifying difficulties in singing Vietnamese pop songs

The following section presents *Table 3.7, detailing the survey results on student perceptions of classical technique training in the vocal music program.*

| **Question** | **Very necessary** | **Necessary** | **Not necessary** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. In your opinion, is it necessary to reduce classical vocal exam pieces for students with a talent for pop music and instead increase the number of pop-style exam pieces? | 04/12  = 33,33% | 07/12  = 58,33% | 01/12  = 8,34% |
| 2. Is it necessary to sing arias in classical style when learning to sing pop music? | 0/12  = 0% | 02/12  = 16,7% | 10/12  = 83,3% |

***3.4.4. Evaluation of the current situation***

Following the investigation of the current state, the dissertation evaluates the conditions of training, teaching methods, and learning approaches. It highlights the strengths of the current instructional practices, points out existing limitations, and analyzes the root causes of these shortcomings.

**Conclusion of Chapter 3**

**Chapter 4**

**PEDAGOGICAL MEASURES FOR TEACHING VIETNAMESE POP SONGS TO FEMALE MEZZO-SOPRANO STUDENTS**

Chapter 4 spans 43 pages and provides an in-depth study of specific teaching measures for instructing Vietnamese pop songs to female mezzo-soprano students. The chapter also includes pedagogical experimentation to test the feasibility and effectiveness of the proposed methods.

**4.1. Bases and principles for proposing measures**

***4.1.1. Bases for proposing measures***

- Based on theoretical foundations specific to Vietnamese pop music, the musical characteristics of pop songs suitable for the mezzo-soprano voice, the role of pop vocal instruction for mezzo-sopranos, and the unique technical features of Vietnamese pop singing.

- Based on practical conditions of pop vocal instruction for female mezzo-soprano students in the undergraduate vocal program at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

***4.1.2. Principles for proposing measures***

The proposed pedagogical measures must adhere to the following principles: Alignment with instructional objectives, Relevance and appropriateness, Scientific basis, Practicality and effectiveness

**4.2. Measure 1: Adjusting the Curriculum Content in Selected Vocal Courses**

It is proposed that certain vocal course units be adapted to better suit students specializing in pop music. From the third academic year onward, the curriculum should branch into a separate path focused on pop vocal instruction, with classical techniques serving as complementary elements.

Only in the first course unit should classical vocal technique be taught as a foundational skill. In subsequent units, instruction should focus on pop-specific techniques such as vibrato, accentuation, vocal slides, syncopated rhythms, movement-based vocal warmups, and singing in various pop dance styles including Swing, Pop Ballad, Slow Surf, Waltz, Chachacha, Bossa Nova, and Rumba.

In the fourth year, students may be required to sing arias—but from 20th-century musical theatre productions that include pop-styled compositions (e.g. *Cats*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Hamilton*, *Wicked*).

**4.3. Measure 2: Training in vocal techniques**

***4.3.1. Vocal articulation (Mouth shape)***

Pop vocal performance includes a wide variety of styles and individual expressions, including horizontal mouth shapes, unpolished or raspy tones, and less emphasis on round, refined sounds typical of classical singing. However, for professional pop vocal training, students should still practice basic classical mouth shapes for applying techniques like legato and staccato.

For mezzo-sopranos, whose voices are closer to speech, the mouth should be opened comfortably, sometimes horizontally, without overly raising the soft palate or uvula, to avoid creating operatic tone which is not suitable for pop music.

***4.3.2. Breathing techniques***

Mezzo-sopranos must master all three types of breathing: chest, lower rib, and abdominal breathing, and apply them appropriately for pop vocal delivery.

*4.3.2.1. Inheriting classical breathing techniques*

Breathing techniques from classical training can serve as a foundation for further development in pop singing.

*4.3.2.2. Breathing for Vietnamese pop songs*

In pop singing, vocal tone must be speech-like and clearly articulated. Breathing should be light, relaxed, and allow for natural sound projection.

- Breathing should be aligned with the more relaxed mouth shape of pop singing, directing airflow outward toward the mouth rather than upward to avoid creating an artificial “lifted” tone.

- Vibrato may be added spontaneously to long notes, depending on the student's style and interpretation.

- Breathing exercises may be paired with physical movement (e.g., swaying, light choreography) to strengthen breath control during performance.

***4.3.3. Register and vocal range training***

*4.3.3.1. Expanding vocal range*

Pop mezzo-sopranos primarily sing in chest voice, transitioning to mix voice only on higher notes. Many new students can only sing in chest voice, resulting in strained high notes and long-term vocal fatigue. Proper warmups must train all three registers—chest, mix, and head voice—so students can comfortably extend their range and maintain vocal health.

*4.3.3.2. Developing mix voice and register transitions*

The transition from chest to mix voice can be uneven, especially for mezzo-sopranos. Training to blend the two registers requires long-term practice (up to a year or more). Students must consistently practice ascending vocal exercises, focusing on producing the same tone quality across both registers. Breath support should remain forward-focused without raising the soft palate, and pitch must remain stable during vibrato.

*4.3.3.3. Using a single exercise for all three registers*

In addition to traditional classical warmups, students should sing the same melodic pattern in all three registers to distinguish tone quality differences and build control.

*4.3.3.4. Applying all three registers in song performance*

***4.3.4. Vibrato technique***

Pop vibrato differs significantly from classical singing. It is slower, more exaggerated, and sometimes segmented-often used at the ends of phrases or held notes. Students require both natural aptitude and focused training.

Vibrato is typically applied in slow or moderate-tempo songs. It should not be used on short notes and must not interrupt airflow. While vibrato in pop should be expressive, it must still be subtle and controlled. Poor breath management can alter pitch, so students must learn to maintain steady airflow.

Initial training involves practicing vibrato on isolated notes, followed by phrases that end with vibrato. The dissertation includes exercises from Cheryl Porter's *E-Book Vocal Exercises*.

Although vibrato in pop singing requires innate musical sensitivity and creativity, it can be improved through consistent practice. Personal aesthetic, interpretive skill, and artistic identity are critical to mastering this technique.

***4.3.5. Accentuation, vocal slides and rhythmic flexibility***

Pop accentuation differs from classical *marcato*. In pop, it often involves both vocal slides and slight stretching of note duration—typically on syncopated beats.

For example, in the opening line of *Oi Que Toi* (Le Minh Son), the word *"mái"* falls on a syncopated beat and should be emphasized with a vocal slide and subtle rhythmic delay before *"nhà"*. The same technique applies to other phrases such as *“khói chiều”*, *“no gió”* and *“chim sâu”*.

As with vibrato, accentuation must be applied tastefully—overuse can negatively affect musical phrasing.

**4.4. Measure 3: Practicing with rhythmic patterns specific to pop music**

***4.4.1. Vocal exercises using syncopated rhythms with accent and slide techniques***

Syncopated rhythm is essential for developing fluency in pop singing. Students must be trained to handle complex rhythms while maintaining proper vocal technique. Variation in rhythm, timing, and expressive elements is acceptable in vocal warmups.

Practicing syncopated rhythms is challenging and time-consuming; therefore, students must supplement in-class instruction with at-home practice. Exercises should also combine syncopation with accentuation and vocal slides.

***4.4.2. Singing in pop rhythms with accompaniment***

*4.4.2.1. Practicing songs with pop dance rhythms*

To enhance rhythmic sensitivity, students should practice songs in a variety of dance rhythms such as Slow Surf, Slow Rock, Rumba, Chachacha, Waltz, and Tango, using instrumental backing tracks.

*4.4.2.2. Applying different rhythmic styles to the same melody*

Students should not only practice a range of rhythms across different songs, but also learn to adapt the same song to various rhythmic patterns. For instance, *Dau phai boi mua thu* by Phu Quang (lyrics by Giang Van) can be performed in Pop Ballad, Slow Rock, or Blues styles.

*4.4.2.3. Combining rhythm exercises with movement*

Lecturers can design warmups using vowel sounds (i, ê, a, ô, u) and consonants (n, m), incorporating physical movement. These exercises may involve singing on the same pitch but in different rhythmic styles while moving in time with the music.

*Practice with the Slow Surf rhythm*

**A close-up of a music note

Description automatically generated**

*Practice with the Slow Rock rhythm*

**A sheet music with notes

Description automatically generated**

**4.5. Measure 4: Integrating pop vocal instruction with related subjects**

***4.5.1. Developing dance competency through the "Acting techniques" course***

- Developing basic movement and dance skills through popular dance forms

- Encouraging creativity in designing choreography for performances

***4.5.2. Enhancing Rhythmic Competency through the "Music Theory and Solfège" Course***

Rhythmic sensitivity and accuracy in pop singing can be further developed through rhythm exercises and musical dictation in the Solfège curriculum.

**4.6. Measure 5: Applying active teaching methods to foster student creativity**

There are many types of active teaching methods, but this dissertation focuses on two key approaches: the method of self-discovery and the problem-solving method. These are crucial for fostering initiative and creativity in students. These methods may be applied as follows:

***4.6.1. Using the self-discovery method to encourage creative interpretation and performance***

a. Students propose their own ideas for interpreting and performing songs  
b. Lecturers analyze and provide feedback on these ideas

***4.6.2. Encouraging improvisation in vocal exercises and phrases***

Another method to foster creativity is allowing students to improvise melodies during warmups or specific lines in a song. This approach reflects the improvisational nature of jazz, which influenced rock and pop. This technique is advanced and should be used with students who already demonstrate strong vibrato control, melodic sensitivity, and accurate tonal memory. It is most suitable for students in their third or fourth year.

**4.7. Pedagogical experiment**

***4.7.1. Purpose of the experiment***

The experiment aims to test the feasibility and effectiveness of the teaching methods proposed in this dissertation by applying them in the instruction of Vietnamese pop songs to mezzo-soprano students in the undergraduate vocal program at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

***4.7.2. Subjects and location of the experiment***

- *Subjects:* Two groups of second-year female mezzo-soprano students with equivalent academic levels and vocal ability: Experimental group: 2 students. Control group: 2 students. Instruction was one-on-one: 1 student per 1 lecturer, with 1 session per week.

*- Location:* Music Department, Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

***4.7.3. Experimental plan and rreparation***

*- Plan:* The experiment was conducted over 4 weeks (4 sessions per student, not including assessments), scheduled during Semester 2 (held every Saturday from April 6 to April 27, 2024), within the Vocal Music 2 course of the 2023–2024 academic year.

*- Preparation:* Included lesson planning, coordination with students, and instructional materials.

***4.7.4. Methods, content and assessment criteria***

*4.7.4.1. Experimental method and content*

A controlled experiment was designed using the same song for both groups: *“Dau phai boi mua thu”* by Phu Quang, poem by Giang Van.

\* Control group (2 students): Received instruction based on traditional teaching methods.

\* Experimental group (2 students): Received instruction based on the new methods proposed in this dissertation, including:

- Assigning at-home study of the song’s content, melody, and stylistic interpretation

- In-class activities focused on pop techniques: syncopated rhythm exercises, breathing control, vocal warmups with movement, vibrato training, stylistic interpretation

- Watching performances by artists such as My Linh, Siu Black, and Phuong Diem Huyen to analyze their approaches to high notes, vibrato, breath use, and articulation

- Open discussions between lecturer and students about interpretation ideas

- Peer feedback and collaborative in-class performance practice, combined with content from the "Acting Techniques" course

*4.7.4.2. Evaluation criteria*

Evaluation was based on: Learning outcomes defined in the curriculum for Vocal Music 2; Student performance of Vietnamese pop songs; Assessment criteria developed and detailed in Table 4.1: Evaluation Criteria for Vietnamese Pop Song Performance; Pre-experiment evaluation results presented in Table 4.2 (Appendix)

***4.7.5. Implementation of the experiment***

The experimental teaching sessions were carried out over a 4-week period following the instructional plan and content described above.

***4.7.6. Evaluation of experimental results***

After 4 weeks, both groups of students were assessed.

Based on Table 4.3: Post-Experiment Evaluation Results (included in Appendix 4), it was found that:

The experimental group showed clear improvement in phrasing, creativity, rhythm flexibility, and appropriate use of vibrato.

The control group also showed some progress in scores, but lacked creativity and continued to rely on classical technique for high notes, with limited rhythmic agility in pop performance.

These results demonstrate that the teaching methods proposed in the dissertation are more effective for enhancing the performance abilities of mezzo-soprano students studying Vietnamese pop songs at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism.

**Conclusion of Chapter 4**

**CONCLUDE**

Modern pop music-especially Rock-Pop-has become one of the most popular musical genres in the world since the second half of the 20th century. In Vietnam, pop music was introduced to the southern region before 1975; however, after the reunification of North and South Vietnam in 1975, Vietnamese pop songs began to form and develop nationwide. Pop music songs differ significantly from traditional classical songs in terms of subject matter, melody, rhythm, harmony, performance style, vocal technique, and even in the audience’s listening psychology.

The vocal techniques used in pop songs are also distinct from those of classical singing, and are one of the key factors contributing to the uniqueness of this genre. While classical vocal training emphasizes rigorous technical precision—from breath control to mouth position and sound placement—pop singing is characterized by greater freedom and stylistic flexibility. A single pop song can be performed in various tempos and styles.

The mezzo-soprano voice is especially well-suited to pop singing and is widely favored by audiences. In contrast to classical vocal music—where sopranos often dominate and take lead roles in operas requiring the most advanced techniques-mezzo-sopranos in pop music tend to receive more listener appreciation and engagement.

In pop singing, the mezzo-soprano voice mainly relies on chest breathing. The mouth shape is naturally open and relaxed, and breath is projected outward through the mouth rather than upward toward the head, avoiding the raised, resonant placement typical in classical singing. Regarding vocal registers, pop mezzo-sopranos sing primarily in chest voice, using mixed voice for higher notes. Moreover, pop vocal technique includes unique features such as expressive vibrato and the need for heightened rhythmic sensitivity and creative interpretation.

Pop vocal instruction has been integrated into the curriculum at many professional music training institutions, including Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism. This dissertation has dedicated Chapter 3 to analyzing the current state of pop vocal training for mezzo-soprano students at the university, focusing on aspects such as curriculum design, teaching faculty, infrastructure, instructional methods, student learning attitudes, and identifying strengths and limitations, along with their underlying causes.

Based on that analysis, Chapter 4 proposed specific pedagogical solutions and teaching methods for Vietnamese pop songs. The novelty of the dissertation is primarily concentrated in Chapter 4, which presents detailed proposals and instructional strategies for pop-specific vocal techniques—particularly those found in Pop music—including: Breath control and mouth shaping techniques, Vibrato, accentuation, and vocal sliding, Tone production across vocal registers.

In addition to these technical aspects, the dissertation also introduces teaching methods and strategies that reflect the unique nature of pop music instruction, such as: Singing in various pop dance rhythms, Practicing syncopated patterns and off-beat phrasing, Melodic improvisation, Employing problem-based and discovery-based learning approaches to foster students’ creativity in song interpretation and stage performance.

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**LIST OF DISCLOSED WORKS RELATED TO THE THESIS**

**Scientific Articles**

1. Do Thi Lam (2023). *Some Characteristics in the Performance of Pop Songs*. Proceedings of the Annual Scientific Conference for Postgraduate Students – Graduate School, Vietnam National University of Arts Education, Hong Duc Publishing House, ISBN: 978-604-476-394-1, July 2023.
2. Do Thi Lam (2021). *Extending Vocal Range for a Mezzo–Soprano in Vocal Teaching for Light Music*. GPH-International Journal of Educational Research, E-ISSN 2795-3272, P-ISSN 2795-3264, Vol. 4, Issue 05, May 2021.
3. Do Thi Lam (2023). *Enhancing Pop Performance Techniques for Vocal Music Students at Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism*. Principal Investigator. University-level Scientific Research Project. Accepted in 2023.
4. Do Thi Lam (2024). *Performance Techniques in Pop Song Singing*. *Journal of Culture and Arts*, ISSN 0866-8655, Issue No. 575, July 2024.
5. Do Thi Lam (2024). *Characteristics of Vietnamese Pop Songs*. *Journal of Arts Education*, Issue No. 50/2024.
6. Do Thi Lam (2024), “Pratice the Technique of Singing Vietnamese Light Music Song for Middle-age female voices”*, JHED journal of Humanities and Education Development,* Vol 6 Issue 4, 30 June 2024