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Professionalism in popular music voice teacher education: Institutional conditions of a changing field in Finland and Sweden

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Abstract

There is a need to understand how higher music education can better adapt to changes in societies and professionalism. As a field that embraces change, popular music voice teaching exemplifies how professionalism can expand. Drawing on theories regarding the evolving concept of professionalism, especially in teaching disciplines, this study examines changes in professionalism within popular music-oriented voice teacher education in higher music education and explores how institutional conditions shape these perceptions and the broader development of professionalism. The multiple case study involved two cases in the Nordic context, in Finland and Sweden, where such education has existed for decades. The research material included semi-structured interviews with teacher educators, observations, a researcher diary, and institutional documents. The abductive analyses utilized a previously constructed framework for popular music voice teachers' expanding professionalism. The findings suggest that the examined voice teacher education programs foster lifelong learning, reflection, resilience, and collaboration, while emphasizing student agency and competence thinking. The article also discusses how institutional values and contexts, territorialism, and the self-replicative systems of institutionalized teacher education may influence professionalism.

Keywords

Higher music education, expanding professionalism, voice teacher education, popular music education, popular music singing, voice teaching

Introduction

Institutional change in the context of changing societies has increasingly attracted the interest of higher music education (HME) researchers (e.g., Christophersen et al., 2023; Lennon & Reed, 2012; Ski-Berg & Røyseng, 2024), with recent inspiration being drawn from professionalism studies. Previous research on the relationship between professionalism and HME has focused on professional knowledge, skills, and identities (e.g., Bouij, 1998; Creech et al., 2008; Everts et al., 2024; Georgii-Hemming et al., 2013), but the growing complexity of today's societies challenges all professions to increase the attention paid to questions of societal responsibility, social sustainability, and activism (Gaunt et al., 2021; Westerlund & Gaunt, 2022; Westfall & Akuno, 2024). However, implementing such changes is difficult due to isolated, tradition-based practices, which are especially typical of music conservatories (e.g., Burwell et al., 2019; Ferm Thorgersen et al., 2016; Pozo et al., 2022). Therefore, there have been calls for a deeper understanding of the changes in music teaching professionalism—particularly the expansion of professionalism—and the adjustment of education accordingly (Lennon & Reed, 2012; Westerlund & Gaunt, 2022).

This article examines the institutional context of a discipline actively embracing change: popular music voice teaching. The focus is on related voice teacher education in the Nordic context, specifically in Finland and Sweden, an under-researched and yet intriguing area for several reasons. Firstly, while the academically neglected field has historically been dominated by a strong classical hegemony, it has recently gained professional legitimacy through active interdisciplinary collaboration with voice research and other academically established fields (Keskinen & Juntunen, 2024; cf. Dyndahl et al., 2017). Notably, the Nordic countries have a decades-long history of institutionalizing popular music pedagogy (Kallio & Väkevä, 2017), thus providing a slightly different perspective. Sweden has offered vocational degrees in popular music voice teaching since the mid-1970s, now available at five universities

and two university colleges, whereas Finland introduced a similar degree in the late 1980s, currently offered by one university and seven universities of applied sciences.[1,2] However, due to recent legitimation efforts in the field, these institutions now face pressures to adapt their practices accordingly.

Secondly, as Nordic higher education is state-funded, institutions are obliged to align their activities with societal needs and labor market demands. Popular music voice teaching is particularly interesting in this regard, as it inherently reflects shifts in the music industry and may be more attuned to issues such as inclusion and diversity (Benson et al., 2022; Hughes, 2017). Thirdly, although instrument and voice teacher education practices vary across countries (Ferm Thorgersen et al., 2016; Lennon & Reed, 2012), in the Nordic context, the professionalization of teaching disciplines has been pursued through extensive pedagogical studies and even legitimation systems. This is true even for Finnish and Swedish popular music voice teacher education, where all except one Swedish institution grant official teacher qualifications.[3] Additionally, both countries have professional associations that are members of the European Voice Teachers Association (EVTA): Voice Teachers of Sweden, founded in 1933 with about 80 members (SSTPF, n.d.), and The Finnish National Association of Teachers of Singing, established in 1983 with over 500 members (FINATS, n.d.).

The aim of the multiple case study (Stake, 2006) reported here was to explore how professionalism and related changes are approached in the education of popular music voice teachers at two institutions in Finland and Sweden. These were regarded through the lens of *expanding professionalism*, with a focus on the influence of institutional conditions. The study addressed two questions: (1) For what kind of (expanding) professionalism does institutional popular music voice teacher education educate their student teachers? And: (2) In what ways do institutional conditions influence the broader development of professionalism? Additionally,

the study seeks to contribute to the ongoing conceptual development of expanding professionalism.

Conceptual framework

The concept of professionalism has evolved significantly over the past decades across various fields such as sociology, psychology, and organizational studies. Where professions have traditionally been understood as closed groups with normative value systems (Evetts, 2003), they are no longer considered to be inherently autonomous, independent, altruistic, or unachievable without higher education (Ackroyd, 2016). Teacher professionalism, which is particularly relevant to the Nordic context, can be regarded through Hargreaves's (2000) four stages of evolution. All of these stages persist today and are recognizable in music teaching disciplines. In the pre-professional stage, teachers replicate the styles they experienced during their own schooling, often unaware of the need to update their practice. The second stage features autonomous, pedagogically aware, yet isolated professionalism. The third collegial stage arises from societal complexities, new insights into teaching and learning, and external administrative mandates, prompting teachers to seek peer support and collaboration (see also Edwards, 2010). The fourth stage, influenced by factors like neoliberalism and the digital revolution, further challenges teacher professionalism, even pushing it towards its pre-professional forms. Suggested strategies to counteract this *de-professionalization* include a blend of the second and third stages, where teachers regain autonomy by enhancing their capacities to acquire, utilize, and create new disciplinary knowledge in a collegiate manner favoring collaboration and specialization (see Hermansen, 2017). Support from professional organizations for this kind of professional development has been advocated (Hermansen, 2017).

Previous research on professional education has mainly focused on employability and professional identity formation, leading to debates about the relevance of higher education in this context (Abrandt Dahlgren et al., 2014; cf. Everts et al., 2024). According to scholars, the relationship between professionalism and teacher education should be viewed through the institutional context (Ackroyd, 2016), through emerging tensions and dilemmas (Mausethagen & Smeby, 2016), and through students' agency in their professional identity development, as professionals are neither entirely self-made nor solely created by education (Fellenz, 2016, p. 268). Moreover, scholars emphasize that becoming a professional involves more than merely acquiring skills and knowledge to address work-related issues. It also includes an awareness of one's responsibilities within broader societal landscapes and engagement with various stakeholders, thus highlighting the importance of interaction and reflexivity (Edwards, 2010; Evetts, 2003; Noordegraaf, 2016; Solbrekke & Sugrue, 2011).

The shift in focus described above has also been recognized in HME scholarship by Westerlund and Gaunt (2022), who advocate for proactively expanding music professionalism by reconsidering the purposes of music and music professionals in society. This study builds on an existing theoretical framework, where the concept of expanding professionalism has been used to examine music teaching disciplines, especially popular music voice teaching (Keskinen et al., 2024). Figure 1 illustrates the fifteen factors of the framework, divided into elements that promote expanding professionalism and those that challenge, create friction, or offer respite from the demands of continuous development.

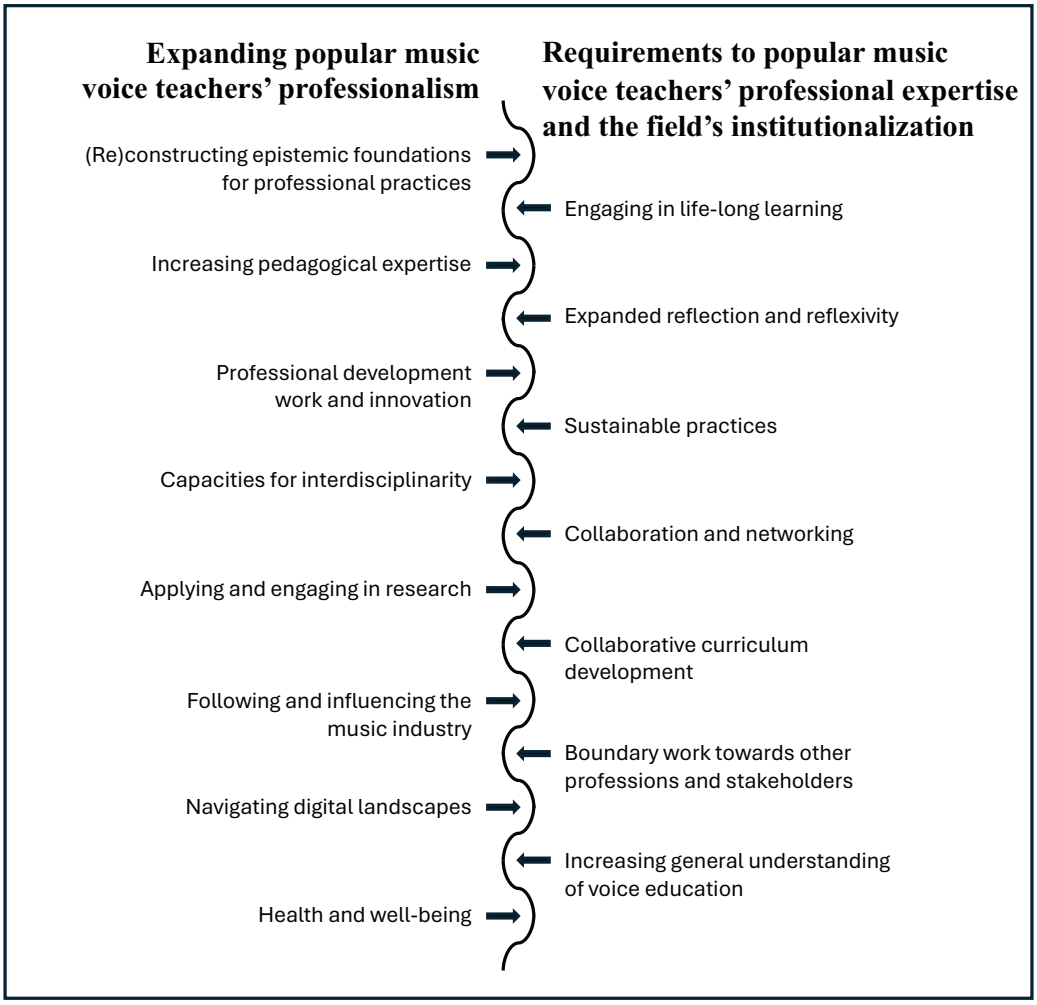

Figure 1. Factors affecting the expanding professionalism of popular music voice teachers (see Keskinen et al., 2024, p. 447)

Method

The study employed a multiple case study approach to constructively examine the phenomenon of expanding professionalism across two linked cases and to contribute to its conceptual development (Eisenhart & Graebner, 2007; Leavy, 2023; Stake, 2006). The cases represent two contexts within popular music voice teacher education in Nordic HME institutions.

Research design, data, and procedures

This study was informed by an unreported pilot case study (Stake, 2005) conducted in Spring 2021 at a Swedish institution. The pilot focused on an online further education course on popular music singing for voice teaching professionals. The case was selected for its topic and format, with the aim of exploring how instructors addressed professionalism and to identify essential elements to inform the main study. The data included 32 hours of teaching observations, an 86-page researcher diary, course materials, institutional documents, and semi-structured interviews with two lecturers totaling three hours. The pilot study helped to refine the scope of the main study to focus on *expanding* professionalism, to prioritize issues such as values and competencies over course content, and to exclude interviews with educators who were not specialized in popular music voice specifically. As is typical of qualitative pilot studies (van Teijlingen & Hundrey, 2001), parts of a pilot interview were also included in the data for the Swedish case.

The main study involved two slightly differing voice teacher education programs specializing in popular music genres, situated in Swedish and Finnish HME institutions. These countries were chosen due their relatively long histories with popular music education and my familiarity with the contexts. Selecting one institution per country enabled the exploration of varied perspectives within each context and simplified data generation. Generally, the degree programs accept 2-6 voice teacher students annually, with popular music singers outnumbering applicants in all instruments. Most applicants, aged 20–40 with occasional exceptions, typically have prior vocational training in singing and advanced knowledge of music theory.[4]

The research data comprised (1) semi-structured interviews with five voice teacher educators, (2) teaching observations and researcher notes, and (3) policy documents such as curricula and syllabi, along with planning documents and some course materials. The selection of the interviewees and observations was informed by the pilot study and based on

recommendations using snowball sampling (Leavy, 2023). Teaching observations included lectures by various faculty members and one-to-one lessons with voice teachers. The five participants in the semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014) had obtained higher education degrees in popular music voice teaching before becoming teacher educators, collectively representing 78 years of experience in voice teacher education. In the findings, the Swedish participants are referred to as A and B, and the Finnish participants as C, D, and E. Because this multiple case study focuses on the institutional level and aims to protect the identities of the interviewees, who belong to a small field, further details about them or the cases are withheld (see Table 1 and *Ethical considerations*).

The institutions were contacted during Spring 2021, with the observations and interviews carried out between May and December of 2021. The interviews were conducted individually in Swedish or Finnish, four face-to-face and one online, totaling 8 hours and 45 minutes. The interview questions were provided 1–3 weeks in advance, but each conversation took unique directions, yielding rich and nuanced data. The interviews were transcribed shortly after each interview using Microsoft Word dictation and were anonymized simultaneously (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014).

Analysis

The interview data was analyzed abductively (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018) using both empirically and theoretically derived codes. The initial coding used the fifteen factors listed in Figure 1, and twelve more codes were added later (Saldaña, 2011). The five most-used codes were (a) institutional structures, (b) (re)constructing epistemic foundations for professional practices, (c) specialist vs. generalist knowledge, (d) working life, entrepreneurship, and unknown future, and (e) student agency. Regarding the first research question, the codes were arranged into three categories (Saldaña, 2011) examining the perceived professionalism and

changes emerging across the cases: (1) *teacher and student roles*, (2) *approaching increasing information flood through collegiality*, and (3) *growing complexity of working life*. However, since the further aim of the study was to contribute to the conceptualization of *expanding professionalism* through institutional cases, a fourth category—(4) *the impact of institutional context*—was added. The inclusion of this category allowed for a more institutional reading of the findings and revealed tensions within the original three categories (see Mausethagen & Smeby, 2016). Throughout the analysis of the interview data, I referred to my notes and institutional documents to test my interpretations and assess saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Additional confirmation was obtained through participants' feedback and comments on relevant manuscript sections before submission (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Leavy, 2023).

Ethical considerations

Given my background as a voice teacher in the Nordic context, I acknowledge and have reflected on the inevitable biases in my research (Leavy, 2023). To counteract some of these biases, both data triangulation and methodological triangulation were used (Fusch et al., 2018). Before initiating the study, I consulted both The Finnish National Board on Research Integrity guidelines and my institution's guidelines (TENK, 2019; 2023; Uniarts, 2024). Permissions were obtained from the institutions, and the interviewees signed informed consent for anonymous interviews. Due to the high risk of recognizability, direct quotations have been kept to a minimum. To showcase the participants' voices, translated sample quotes, approved by the participants, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Examples of quotes from participants

A	I think there are many people who know a lot more nowadays than maybe 10 years ago. Who have attended ... various courses simply, which have come in the last 10-15 years. … I think it's noticeable in this thread too, the voice teacher forum on Facebook.
B	You have to like keep up with what's happening. And you won't become any the wiser for it. Or we'll never get to a point where "yes well, this is how the singing voice works, period." We'll never agree on it [laughs]. But that's the fun part.
C	So that they could like somehow find vocabulary, so that they could like express what I do and what I know, what I'm good at and what skills and knowledge I'm still developing here.
D	One significant reason why I don't give them ready-made answers is that you really learn to think with your own brain and kind of like constantly innovate and create, starting from that vocal exercise. Learn to come up with exercises; they learn to come up with concepts … to make themselves useful.
E	I've often said to students that the best thing this building has to offer them is not us teachers, nor is it this knowledge, nor is it anything else, but it's that [student café] community over there. And that your phone number is on as many people's WhatsApp as possible.

Findings

The following three subsections present the abductively identified categories, each describing how professionalism and recent developments are generally viewed and approached in the case institutions and how the education and institutional conditions respond to these perceptions.

Supporting student individuality and agency

The findings reflect a shift from a traditional master-apprentice mindset (Mesiä, 2019) to one emphasizing students' well-being, individual needs, and agency in the learning process. Concepts such as student-centeredness (Ski-Berg, 2022), facilitation of learning (Juntunen, 2014), dialogical pedagogy (Poole & Norton, 2023), and student agency (Jørgensen, 2000) emerged as central to the conveyed professionalism. Based on interviews and teaching

observations, the role of the voice teacher had transitioned from providing definitive answers to collaborating with students in problem-solving and knowledge acquisition. For example, a diminishing emphasis on sheet music and the availability of backing tracks seemed to reinforce students' agency and independence in choosing repertoire. This shift allowed teachers to more easily avoid "preferentiating" (participant E) certain repertoires, styles, or approaches, which sometimes extended the scope of voice tuition beyond just popular music. Extensive interaction and communication were seen as fostering reflection and intrinsic motivation.

Teacher educators often adopted the role of an "older colleague" (participant D), and instruction was highly individualized, tailored to each student teacher's prior knowledge and skills (see *andragogy* in Knowles et al., 2020). They addressed the well-being of both teachers and voice students by preparing student teachers to navigate the possible challenges posed by highly interactive teacher-student dynamics. These challenges included issues such as feelings of inadequacy and voice students' potential "cherry-picking attitudes" (participant C). The discussions with students also covered the occasional negative perceptions of singers within the music field, with teacher educators acknowledging that these attitudes might be related to singing and voice teaching being predominantly female domains in a male-dominated field. Finnish teacher educators, in particular, had encountered tensions related to these attitudes and the varied teacher identities (Bouij, 1998) within their institution, which resulted in teachers adopting slightly protective stances towards their students.

The implementation of student-centeredness was somewhat constrained by the institutional structures and curricula, which allowed little or no elective studies. Therefore, the individualization of content occurred within the curricular structures. The teacher educators were mandated (see *autonomy* in Hargreaves, 2000) to ensure that student teachers developed the essential knowledge and skills needed in their future profession. However, syllabi were regularly updated based on immediate feedback from students and course evaluations, and

students bore the primary responsibility for their own learning. Even assessment was approached mainly as a tool to support learning rather than to measure it (Partti et al., 2015). Particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, the institutions demonstrated a greater understanding of the diverse life and work situations of students. For example, online participation had become accepted, and students had become more proactive in suggesting alternative ways to complete their studies.

Towards reflective expertise and collaborative professionalism

The findings indicate that the knowledge landscapes for popular music voice teachers are constantly evolving and include diverse perspectives on professional knowledge shaped by factors such as cultural contexts, interdisciplinary interests, and commercial methods. The overall development of the field is evident in the increasingly advanced vocal techniques demonstrated by the new students entering the programs, which the teacher educators assumed derived from singers' earlier exposure to knowledgeable voice teachers. The increased voice science research output was seen as enabling the profession to move beyond a reliance on practitioners' personal experiences towards evidence-based knowledge. However, the educators found it challenging to keep pace with the rapid developments and trends within voice pedagogy and popular music. While the increasing amount of globally available online further education opportunities were seen as valuable for broadening voice teachers' understandings of the voice and the field, the participants also emphasized that any human-related further education beyond voice-specific topics is beneficial for professionals. Furthermore, professional discussions are ongoing in social media and professional associations, but the teacher educators' engagement in them varied based on personal time resources and the perceived relevance and constructiveness of the discussions.

The described changes have prompted a shift from attempting to train fully equipped voice teachers during their education towards embracing lifelong learning (Smilde, 2008), peer and collaborative learning (Carey et al., 2018; Gaunt & Westerlund, 2013; Lebler, 2008), reflection (Johansson, 2012), and (decentralized) communities of practice (Nerland & Hanken, 2011; Partti et al., 2015). In other words, the education focused neither on imparting tradition nor on the very latest knowledge, but on providing a versatile overview of the field and related phenomena. Thus, the learning of the actual "handicraft" (participant A) of voice teaching was seen to truly begin *after* the education, primarily when helping students with their specific vocal challenges. Therefore, the goal was to equip student teachers to navigate changing landscapes through critical and reflective approaches to seeking and evaluating information (see *learner identity* in López-Iñiquez & Bennett, 2021).

To counteract the culture of competition and teacher isolation (e.g., Burwell et al., 2019) that student teachers were assumed to encounter in their professional lives, the education strove to foster a sense of community and promote collaborative professional development (e.g., Mesiä, 2019). Building professional networks during one's studies combined with each student specializing in their chosen area, such as a particular genre, approach, or teaching context, were seen to enhance employment prospects and provide low-threshold support for navigating future professional dilemmas (see *collegiality* in Hargreaves, 2000). In the Finnish program, voice teacher educators, who were usually alumni of the institution and hired for their specialized expertise, were permitted to exchange students for a few lessons. The students were expected to learn from multiple voice teachers during their studies, replacing a mentality of *my students* with *our students* (participant E). However, this collaboration was limited by the restricted work hours of the many hourly-paid teachers (see Juntunen, 2014), who did not receive additional hours for planning or collaborative activities. Financial constraints affected even the recruitment of expert visitors. While both institutions recognized that the hybrid lecture format

enabled them to invite international experts, the relatively modest compensation offered led institutions to increasingly substitute such experts with YouTube videos (cf. *digital revolution* in Hargreaves, 2000 and *expert models* in Nerland & Hanken, 2011).

Preparing for a complex working life

The teacher educators saw the working life of popular music voice teachers as increasingly complex, competitive, and challenging. The findings link with concepts like portfolio careers (Bartleet et al., 2019), employability (Bennett, 2016), resilience, and flexibility (Karlsen, 2019), and an entrepreneurial mindset and competence thinking (Johansson, 2012). Despite existing tertiary voice teacher education opportunities, it was acknowledged that voice teaching remains an unregulated field (cf. Everts et al., 2024) and that many practitioners rely solely on commercial methods or their experiences as performers. Particularly in urban areas, the participants recognized the growing competition, the limited number of institutional positions, and the challenges for young professionals seeking work. Their previously graduated students had ended up working in diverse roles and juggling multiple jobs across various settings, including music schools, adult education, kindergartens, eldercare, and entrepreneurial and health care settings, often while maintaining careers as musicians. Many had also pursued further degrees in fields such as music education, speech therapy, or vocology.

The competition was likely reflected in the institutions' entrance exams, creating an institutional cycle that favors applicants with specific institutionally cultivated backgrounds, leading to a somewhat homogenic selection of students. However, versatility was fostered through, for example, teaching practicums that ran throughout the study programs, including both individual and group instruction with various age groups and skill levels. Both institutions had formal application processes for practice students, who, if selected by the student teachers, paid the institution for their lessons. In Sweden, however, to ease their workload, student

teachers could also complete their teaching practicums through their existing teaching positions. To aid employability, both programs required students to document their reflections in pedagogical portfolios. Also, the unpredictability of working life required student teachers to "toil through" (participant B) certain courses, such as children's singing methodology, despite their differing views about their future professional identities (cf. Fellenz, 2016).

Although alumni pursued diverse career paths, the curricula revealed some contextual perceptions of the profession. In Sweden, graduates were primarily envisioned as working in institutional settings, such as music schools or folk high schools. As part of their studies, student teachers planned, executed, and documented work-life projects in small groups, usually within institutional settings, to gain insight into institutions' administrative and communicative tasks. The Swedish program also included both popular music and classical voice studies to ensure foundational teaching skills in both disciplines, assumed to be important for those who may be the only voice teacher in their area or school.

In line with Finnish vocational training, the program in Finland included entrepreneurship and multidisciplinary innovation studies, involving real-world entrepreneurs and companies, sometimes leading to actual job opportunities. Student teachers were thus encouraged to expand their understandings of their competencies in wider contexts (cf. Lennon & Reed, 2012). For example, viewing oneself as "professionals in interpersonal interactions" (participant E) could open more extensive employment possibilities. Creativity in finding one's professional niche was encouraged (Creech et al., 2008; Karlsen, 2019), with an emphasis on the ability to articulate and offer one's competencies and expertise in different contexts. This kind of agency was considered beneficial not only for individual career development but also for advancing the professional field outside the institution, as exemplified by the teacher educators themselves.

Discussion

In this section, I will first summarize for what kind of (expanding) professionalism the two case institutions educated future popular music voice teachers (RQ1), and then discuss how institutional conditions may influence professionalism (RQ2). Two perspectives emerged regarding the perception of the professional field and its recent developments: that of the popular music voice teacher educators responsible for delivering the education, and that of institutions shaped by certain conditions (see Evetts, 2003). These perspectives were also affected by the student teachers' perceptions, whose contribution to content and agentic approaches were encouraged to some extent (see Fellenz, 2016). Generally, voice teaching professionalism was seen to require flexibility, reflexivity, creativity, interactive skills, and resilience (see Edwards, 2010; Noordegraaf, 2016). Aligned with broader Nordic teacher education tendencies, student teachers were educated for a holistic, pedagogy-centered professionalism, where the teacher's role is supportive and facilitative, promoting student agency. Ongoing changes influenced approaches to knowledge and skills, reflecting the increasingly complex nature of working life. Therefore, the focus of the education had shifted from specific content to competence construction, lifelong learning, and collaboration. Although students were encouraged to envision their own career paths and specialize, the mandatory broad generalist education—while limiting agency—was intended to support employability (see Fellenz, 2016).

Following these findings, the second research question explored how institutional conditions may impact professionalism more broadly. The case institutions supported the development of the profession by allowing teacher educators to autonomously adjust course contents and teaching practices, and by enabling the creation of external courses and development projects. However, some tensions arose from institutional conditions such as existing structures, traditions, external mandates, and underlying values. These were reflected

in how target student teachers were selected, the prior and future knowledge and skills required, the exemplified working contexts, and the typical profile of voice or practice students, possibly affecting the development of the profession in the following ways.

Firstly, although higher education is not needed to enter the field of voice teaching, in countries where a relevant degree is required for institutional roles, gatekeeping and cultural reproduction occur. In the examined cases the highly competitive admission processes emphasized prerequisites indicating prior enculturation within local music education systems, often linked to specific socio-economic backgrounds (see note 4). This aligns with previous research on Swedish art and music schools, where the successful student is often "a Swedish-born girl with well-educated parents" (Jeppsson & Lindgren, 2018, p. 205). Thus, the question of who gets to be a voice teacher also expands to include who the voice student is and what kind of people succeed in the established music education environments, or apply to be practice students in the first place. These then reflect back to the image that student teachers receive about their future work environments and conditions.

Secondly, the effects of prior enculturation could be reinforced by external mandates to educate teachers for specific work contexts (e.g., art and music schools) or follow certain curriculum models (e.g., entrepreneurship and innovation studies), derived from higher-level actors and steered by legislation (see Ski-Berg & Røyseng, 2024). As a result, perceptions of professionalism may stem from meeting—sometimes outdated or slightly neoliberal—administrative demands *from above* rather than the realities of working life (see Evetts, 2003). Thirdly, some persisting narratives about the professional field and professionalism are constructed by the institutions themselves to defend and uphold the existing structures rooted in underlying values (see Jørgensen, 2000). For example, including both popular and classical music genres, or restricting a program's label to popular music despite featuring diverse styles, reflects certain values. Thus, rigid institutional structures, especially combined with inefficient

feedback systems, may limit both perceived professionalism and student agency (see Fellenz, 2016).

Fourthly, while collaborative community-building efforts aimed to reduce teacher isolation and competition, these often remained confined to groups within the institution, department, or instrument. Protective, isolated environments, where shared approaches and professional identities (Bouij, 1998; Partti et al., 2015) are amplified by hiring like-minded educators, often alumni, can foster juxtaposition and territorialism. This may promote limited conceptions of professionalism based on self-interest, leading to self-fulfilling prophecies, institutional resistance, and difficulties in developing the professional field collectively beyond these boundaries.

In sum, consistent with theories on teacher professionalism, the findings highlighted teacher autonomy, collaboration, and specialization supported by the institutions (see Evans, 2008; Hargreaves, 2000; Hermansen, 2017). However, actual *expansions* of professionalism at the institutional level may require re-evaluating the underlying values supporting certain structures. Although students were encouraged to examine their competencies in new contexts and think innovatively, established norms and narratives—sometimes sustained by curricula within collaborative but isolated environments—can steer professional socialization in the opposite direction. Consequently, an *enacted* mentality shift alone is insufficient to drive meaningful change (cf. Evans, 2008). Lack of forums for teacher interaction (see Juntunen, 2014) and mandates to participate in the wider community may limit professionals' understanding and wellbeing, even within the same institutions. While educators acknowledged some of these systemic challenges, many accepted them as inherent dilemmas within institutionalized music education. Territorialism further complicates the representative tasks of professional associations (cf. Hermansen, 2017), posing obstacles to collective development and the fostering of altruistic societal engagement. Though much of the

professional development work occurs outside the institution and in practitioners' free time, the mental models formed during education influence these efforts. Therefore, pursuing collaboration across units and expanding professional narratives with inclusive values can potentially drive meaningful changes in teacher education and future professionalism.

Conclusion

This multiple case study examined how changes in professionalism are understood within institutions offering tertiary voice teacher education for popular music in Finland and Sweden. Over recent decades, the focus of such education has shifted from delivering specific content to developing competencies that support survival in complex work environments. Student-centeredness and teachers' lifelong learning, reflection, creativity, resilience, and collaboration were emphasized. However, certain institutional conditions reinforced outdated, self-replicating mechanisms, while the promotion of specific professional identities and narratives occasionally fostered territorialism. This challenged the development of collaboration and collegiality beyond isolated groups and hindered the broader expansion of professionalism towards a stance of societal responsibility.

Despite the rich data, the scope of the study was limited; nevertheless, it can inform future research on the development of voice teaching disciplines and has broader implications for music education. Future investigations should explore practices that challenge existing norms, examine how societal perceptions of singing and voice teaching are shaped, and amplify student perspectives. Such research could help counter stagnation caused by institutionalization and enculturation.

Notes

[1] In Finland and Sweden, studies in popular music voice teaching may be pursued in bachelor level programs (180 or 240 ECTS) or integrated into general music education bachelor-master programs that include instrumental pedagogy (300 or 330 ECTS). Additionally, Finnish universities of applied sciences offer complementing master's studies (60 ECTS), and a Swedish university college provides diploma studies (90 or 120 ECTS).

[2] Swedish universities (*universitet*) have the authority to award licentiate and doctoral degrees, unlike university colleges (*högskola*) (Heimonen, 2004, p. 26). Finnish universities of applied sciences (formerly polytechnics) are tertiary vocational institutions offering bachelor's and master's degrees that focus on applied knowledge rather than scientific research.

[3] Teacher qualification is generally not required by music schools or universities; however, most other institutions that offer voice teaching do have such requirements (Heimonen, 2004).

[4] The Swedish institution recently enhanced its program accessibility by reducing the emphasis on the theoretical component of entrance examinations, and now offers additional tuition in theory subjects for those requiring extra support.

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