

Supporting the developing dramatic voice in higher music education: experiences of soprano students categorised as a ‘dramatic’ voice type

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Abstract

Singers classified as a dramatic voice type enter higher music education during their twenties, despite facts stating that these voices don’t reach full physiological maturity until their thirties. This extended maturation timeline shows there is a critical developmental window where student must navigate physical changes whilst simultaneously keeping up with the advance artistic demands of the higher music education. Consequently, providing adequate pedagogical support during this transitional stage is essential to ensure vocal longevity for these ‘larger’ and ‘heavier’ voices. This is why this paper will address the following research question: How do dramatic sopranos experience support for their vocal development in higher music education?

This qualitative study investigates the lived experiences of female vocal students, who identify with ‘dramatic’ soprano vocal qualities, by understanding how they were supported during their education to becoming a professional singer. This research highlights a systemic gap in pedagogical support for ‘dramatic’ sopranos through semi-structured interviews with four students and an analysis of existing literature regarding vocal training in higher music education and three higher education voice curriculums from the United Kingdom, The Netherlands and Finland.

The findings revealed three primary concerns: first ‘dramatic’ sopranos consistently receive insufficient guidance; second these students are largely left to navigate their technical development independently, effectively becoming self-taught; and third, there is a profound sense of dissatisfaction with their educational experience and university curricular is not doing enough to bridge the gap between education and working life. Crucially, despite possessing interesting insights into necessary curricular improvements, participants exhibit a deep-seated mistrust of the institution, operating under the belief that their vocal needs are marginalised, their voices will not be heard, and meaningful systemic change is unlikely. These results suggest an urgent need for pedagogical reform to better accommodate the unique physiological and musical trajectories of ‘dramatic’ voice types in higher music education.

Keywords

Dramatic voice, singing, higher music education, voice pedagogy, opera.

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1 Introduction

Have you been told you're a dramatic voice type and to wait until your thirties, when your voice will suddenly mature? Well, that is what I was told as a young voice student. Now in my thirties, nothing miraculous happened. Yes, my voice matured naturally, but I feel technically and professionally so far behind my other colleagues whose voices matured earlier and therefore received the right support for entering working life.

In the realm of opera, a 'dramatic voice' refers to a few particular categories of voice types within the parent terms of sopranos, mezzo-sopranos, tenors and basses. These voices are characterised by their powerful, rich timbre and vocal weight (Miller, 2000, 7–14). They typically mature later than lighter voice types; often not reaching full technical and expressive potential until the singer is well into their thirties or older (Brown, 1998, 13). Despite this long developmental timeline, training for dramatic voices usually begins in early adulthood within higher music education institutions and often before; following the same pedagogical trajectory designed for earlier maturing voices. This raises important questions about whether the current curriculum frameworks and teaching practices in higher music education are truly aligned with the developmental needs of young dramatic voices.

The central research problem lies in the uncertainty surrounding how current vocal pedagogy and curricula support singers with dramatic vocal tendencies, as these voices often experience prolonged maturation, which might require more specialised training than lighter, more agile voice types. However, higher music education curricula rarely make formal distinctions or accommodations for this variation in development, leading to concerns about whether dramatic voice students are equitably supported. This lack of differentiation implies there could be structural marginalisation, wherein dramatic voices receive fewer performance opportunities, are misunderstood pedagogically and are forced to navigate training models that are not well-suited to their vocal growth. Anecdotal evidence suggests that students experience feelings of isolation, fear, confusion about career pathways, and an overall lack of

professional readiness. This study, therefore, considers curriculum and pedagogy not only as instructional frameworks but also as potential sites of inclusion or exclusion.

The research task of this qualitative interview study is to investigate the lived experiences of singers who class themselves as dramatic sopranos in higher music education and to explore what kinds of challenges they encountered during their vocal education in relation to higher music education curricula. Ultimately, this study aims to shed light on an overlooked aspect of vocal training, offering insights that can inform more equitable and effective educational practices for all voice types, particularly those with dramatic potential who are still in the early stages of their vocal journey.

2 Conceptual background

In this chapter, I will discuss the usefulness of the *Fach* system and how one can define a dramatic voice. Then I briefly discuss different literature about teaching dramatic voices, before moving on to the structure of higher music education and their vocal curricula. Here I look over three case studies from the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Finland and describe the objectives and assessment methods used as well as identifying potential ‘red flags’¹ within the curriculum that could hinder a dramatic voices development.

2.1 The Fach system and dramatic voices

The German *Fach* system offers a useful framework for identifying specific qualities in various voice types. Originating in early 20th-century Germany, the system was created not just as a catalogue, but as a contractual safeguard to ensure singers were not required to perform roles that might harm their vocal longevity (Cotton, 2012, 155). Ultimately, it helps singers find suitable roles and audition arias² that showcase their vocal strengths, making it obvious to casting directors which operatic roles they could hire a singer for. In higher music education, it has become a guide for teachers and coaches when helping singers develop.

However, the system also has notable limitations, as many voices cannot fit perfectly into a single category. As Cotton (2012, 155) notes, the term *Fach* literally means ‘shelf’ or ‘subject’ which “implies restrictions or boundaries.” Therefore, these categories must be taken with a pinch of salt to avoid pigeonholing or vocal restrictions. Teachers and singers alike can use the *Fach* system to develop certain technical limitations and make training personalised for ensuing healthy, sustainable growth. Personally, there is nothing worse than feeling like a song is not right for you and your voice.

¹ ‘Red Flags’ - A term used in this paper as a warning sign for potential problems or an unhealthy situation. (Oxford University Press. (n.d.). Red flag. In Oxford Learner's Dictionaries. Retrieved June 1, 2026, from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/red-flag>)

² Aria = solo songs within operas

Defining a dramatic voice requires integrating physiological, acoustic and artistic criteria that set these voice types apart from their lighter sister voices known as *lyrical* or *soubrette*. In the operatic tradition, a dramatic voice is distinguishable by its large or heavy sound, its dark, warm or icy timbre that has the capacity to project over dense orchestration; especially the heavy strings and brass of late-romantic and Wagnerian music (Institute for young dramatic voices, n.d.). From acoustic analysis of professional singers, the dramatic voice exhibits lower formant³ frequencies, which contribute to the dark timbre and vibrational power (Müller, 2022, 2). However, it is important to note that all these variables are detectable aurally and can be replicated by different voice types who may not actually be a dramatic voice. So, if it is possible to make yourself sound like a dramatic voice, then how can one tell what is true or false?

Richard Miller (1996, 271–273) in his book *‘On the Art of Singing’* noted that to know if a voice has a large resonance capacity, the teacher and singer must understand the fundamental laws of vocal production. There is no way to make a voice bigger than it is naturally, but if the air pressure is vibrating throughout the vocal tract and formants correctly, then you begin to understand the full dramatic potential a voice has.

Physiologically, research indicates that dramatic sopranos often possess shorter vocal folds with a longer vocal tract. In the diagram below, this would result in a longer larynx and could result in a person having a longer neck (Cotton, 2007, 27). Leonardo da Vinci makes a good comparison, explaining the voice is like an organ pipe; “the pitch of the human voice is dependent on the length and diameter of the trachea” (Duey, 1951, 16). This combination enhances resonance, whilst preserving the sub-glottal pressure needed for sustained, high-intensity phonation. Empirical studies of elite performers further demonstrate that dramatic singers display greater mean fundamental-frequency stability⁴ and vibrato amplitude⁵, supporting the tech-

³ Formant = The acoustic resonance of the vocal tract (Abhang, Gawali & Mehrotra, 2016, 51)

⁴ They can hold the pitch stable for longer

⁵ larger vibrational waves

nical demands of prolonged, climactic passages without compromising vocal health (Müller, 2022, 15).

The figures below are well known among pedagogues and will most likely be shown to their students many times throughout their studies to demonstrate the components of voice production visually. There are three main components: The breathing apparatus, the vocal tract and the vocal folds.

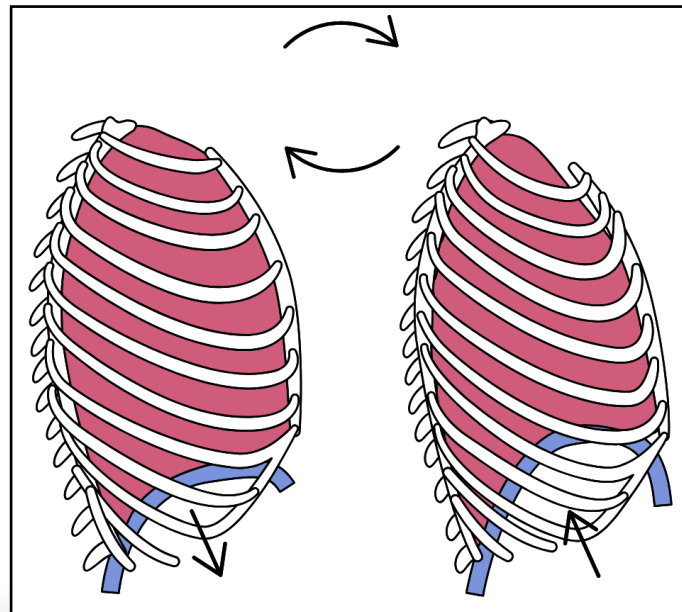


Figure 1. An illustration of the breathing mechanism and how the diaphragm muscle pulls the lungs down for inhalation and contracts upwards for exhalation.

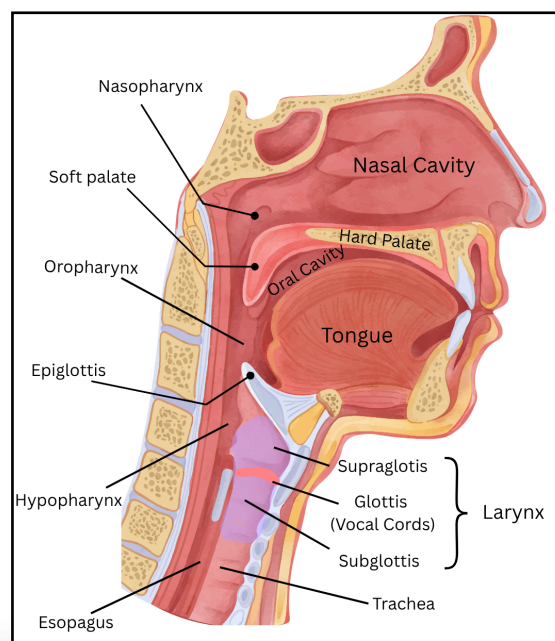


Figure 2. The vocal tract and part of the head showing all components involved in vocal production and vibrational resonance.

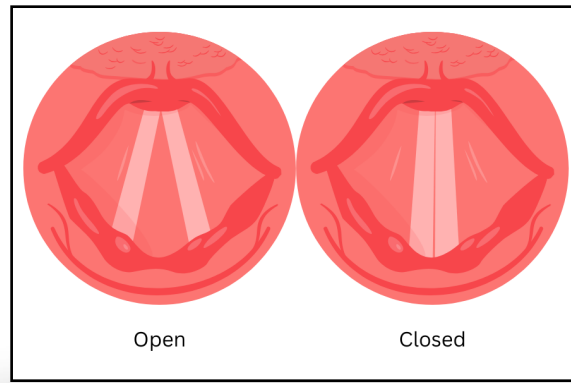


Figure 3. The vocal cords. Open for breath in. Closed for phonation.

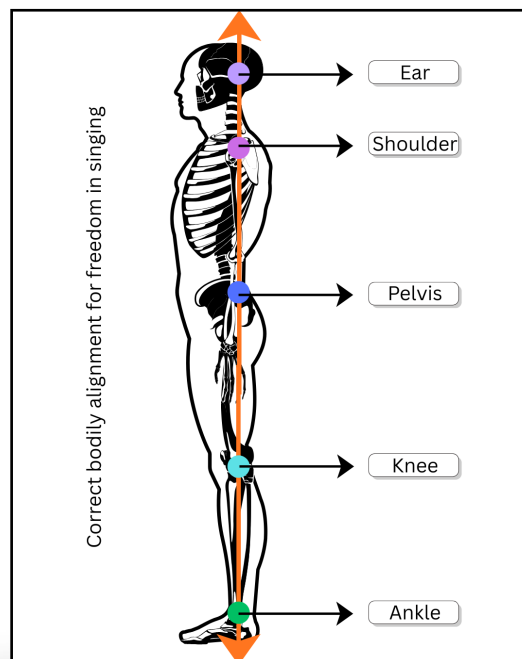


Figure 4. Correct bodily alignment for producing amplified sound.

All humans are born with a unique genetic vocal structure and the potential for great sound. However, “the vocal instrument is not solely the larynx” (Miller, 2000, 5). As you can see from the figures above, it takes the whole body and two tiny vibrating folds to produce sound. Therefore, classifying voices requires a lot more knowledge about the person as a whole, than just their vocal range or physical attributes. Miller (2000, 5–6) states that:

An important aspect of voice training is to recognise what are reasonable expectations at appropriate developmental stages for each category. The potential

dramatic soprano should not be expected to accomplish tasks suited to her sourette counterpart of the same chronological age.

Therefore, it is possible that dramatic sopranos are frequently misclassified early in their careers, being labelled as *mezzo-sopranos* or *zwischenfachsängerin*⁶, because the vocal range and timbre of these categories overlap. *Dramatic sopranos* also have great lower-range capabilities that make it comfortable for them to sing lower repertoire convincingly. Miller (2000, 12) notes that some authorities see *dramatic mezzo-soprano* and *zwischenfachsängerin* as “subcategories of the *dramatic soprano*.” This misclassification does not always have negative connotations, as it can lead young singers to focus on music that develops a strong lower register, which is key for building a good foundation for a dramatic voice.

Similarly, Clifford Ware (1998, 190) argues in his book, *Basic of vocal pedagogy: The foundations and process of singing*, that dramatic (*aka* “large” or “heavy”) voices typically do not reach full vocal stability until the mid-30s, suggesting that premature labelling may impede natural growth and increase the risk of vocal fatigue (Muir, 2021, 19). As voice classification remains partly subjective and varies among pedagogues, teachers often hesitate to assign a definitive dramatic label to young vocal students. This can be beneficial in the beginning if the teacher knows how to safely develop a young voice with dramatic potential and provides them with a solid technical foundation. Muir (2021, 57) reinforces this perspective by emphasising that repertoire selection is a critical component of long-term vocal health: “that good guidance and informed decisions are central to healthy voices and lengthy careers.” Together, these findings underscore the importance of allowing sufficient time for vocal maturation and avoiding early misclassification by designing individualised repertoire pathways to promote sustainable artistic development.

A quote from Blanche Marchesi⁷ (captured in Robert Rushmore’s book, *The singing voice*), summarises the dramatic voice as follows: “The dramatic soprano is the rarest

⁶ meaning “between *Fachs*” = A voice that can sing both dramatic soprano and dramatic mezzo-soprano repertoire. (Miller, 2000, 11)

⁷ Blanche Marchesi, a notable dramatic soprano and voice teacher bridging the 19th and 20th centuries. (Also the daughter of the infamous singing teacher Mathilde Marchesi who wrote many exercise books for training singers)

voice produced by nature... it is like a newborn Newfoundland dog, clumsy, heavy, shapeless... The heavier and bigger the voice, the more carefully must it be trained.” (Rushmore, 1971, 60)

In this paper, the term “dramatic” encompasses any voice type whose timbre exceeds the lighter, brighter qualities of a lyric or soubrette sound. Regardless of whether the singer is a soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, baritone or bass, each voice can have dramatic qualities. The soprano voice type has the most variations, accounting for 9 of the 25 categories within the *Fach* system. Therefore, this study will focus on the dramatic soprano voice categories. Within the German *Fach* system, the ‘heavier’ more ‘dramatic’ sounding voice types would be in the following categories (Cotton, 2007, 60), (Miller, 2000, 7–13), (Muir, 2021, 12–15) and (Williams, 2020, 9–10):

Jugendlich-dramatischer Sopran / aka Lirico-Spinto Soprano (or just Spinto)

Dramatischer Koloratursopran / Dramatic Coloratura Soprano

Dramatischer Sopran / Dramatic Soprano

Hochdramatischer Sopran / Highly Dramatic Soprano (or the ‘True Wagnerian Soprano’)

(See Appendix 3 for more detailed descriptions)

2.2 Teaching a dramatic voice in higher music education

Muir (2021, 25–49) raises important points regarding research indicating that many dramatic soprano voice types begin their careers singing lighter repertoire. However, nearly all of her examples involve singers who performed substantially ‘heavier’ roles before the age of thirty, which is a detail that is commonly disregarded in vocal education and industry discourse. Historically, these singers were actively performing and rehearsing larger dramatic roles from the age of thirty onwards. Consequently, it appears contradictory to tell a developing dramatic soprano between the ages of 25–30 that they are “too young” to sing their natural repertoire when their predecessors were already performing and thriving in these larger roles at the same age.

Several critical questions remain unanswered. Why did these singers begin with lighter repertoire? Was this a deliberate artistic choice? Was it because that was all they were physically capable of singing at the time? Did it even feel comfortable for them to sing outside their natural Fach? These are questions we may never know the answers to. Therefore, it is difficult to generalise without clear facts to inform current pedagogical practices accurately and just because some singers managed it doesn't mean it will work for all. There exists a considerable amount of literature cautioning singers against undertaking heavy repertoire too early. Yet, if one's voice type leans towards 'dramatic', then the Fach categories indicate which roles are suitable to sing. Therefore, why should there be need for concern?

This gap highlights a critical issue in pedagogy and higher music education. Currently, there is minimal to no empirical evidence outlining how to appropriately train the various dramatic voices. Existing research consists largely of anecdotal advice drawn from past experiences of individual singers or teachers prescribing what not to do. There is little guidance for students on what *to do*. As a result, they are left to navigate this development independently and without structured pedagogical support.

2.3 General structure and objectives of higher music education curricula

Many higher music education institutions organise the vocal curriculum around a mixture of: private tuition, ensemble singing, repertoire classes, vocal-care, master-classes and some sort of working life classes. Private vocal lessons typically last around 40-50 minutes long, once or twice a week. These sessions aim to develop technique, repertoire knowledge, monitor vocal changes or mishaps, and form a personalised pathway to help singers develop during their studies.⁸ Ensemble or choral classes differ from programme to programme, but the classes focus on vocal blending and collaborative musicianship, whilst other repertoire classes or workshops give students the chance to apply techniques to staged scenes or expand knowledge on unknown areas. Vocal-care or anatomy classes are sometimes offered for individuals

⁸ See Appendix 4

or as group sessions. These introduce the basic laryngeal anatomy, vocal hygiene, stress-management strategies and give a foundation of how to build on the voice without causing harm. Aria / audition workshops or masterclasses are often organised as one-off sessions with a specialist or as an intensive event once a year. This allows students to perform specific music that they wish to get expert advice on. Finally, many programmes now include a business or career-development module that is meant to bridge the gap between studies and working life; by covering things like: auditions, CVs, networking and creating a portfolio. However, this is not always the case. Career preparation varies notably: Royal Conservatories The Hague's Master program includes project management and ensemble work outside school, while Royal Academy of Music's (RAM) professional classes focus on CV writing and portfolio development. Sibelius Academy incorporates 'working life' and audition training as electives, suggesting that while career readiness is acknowledged, its integration remains inconsistent across institutions. It is always harder to put what looks good on paper into a functional, well-educated programme.

Students entering higher music education vocal programmes are expected to have a good foundational technique and as studies progress, these foundational skills are developed toward increasingly advanced professional benchmarks. The Royal Academy of Music (RAM)⁹, for instance, specifies that by graduation, Bachelor's students should be equipped to work as professional soloists, practice independently, understand the art of singing, analyse music, and know the basics of teaching voice. At Master's level, the expectation intensifies significantly: students must attain complete vocal mastery and expert-level proficiency in performance, musical comprehension, and stagecraft, enabling them to confidently undertake demanding solo duties as professional vocal artists. This steep climb from establishing core technique in year one to achieving comprehensive artistic autonomy by graduation, underscores the progressive demands placed upon vocal students throughout their training. Yet, are these expectations clearly expressed to the students when they start? And can they be met by developing dramatic voices? Conway believes that "Expectations must be spelled out to each student from the very beginning of each term and regular communication about a student's progress in relation to a 'grade' is essential" (Con-

⁹ See appendix 4

way, 2020, 94). While Conway emphasises the need for explicit expectations, assessment practices vary significantly. The Sibelius Academy employs clear learning outcomes with Pass/Fail and 1–5 grading, whereas Royal Conservatoire The Hague allows interpretive space in general targets but specifies critique criteria for exams under a 0–10 system. RAM offers very direct criteria with a 0–100% grading scale, yet still permits room for interpretation; therefore clarity does not necessarily eliminate ambiguity in evaluation. It has been suggested that finding and nurturing your own unique voice and way of singing can be the greatest way to make your mark in the music industry (Carriage, 2011, 1). Yet, how can one do that whilst having all these other expectations thrust upon them in order to only pass exams and complete classes? A singer who has passed all exams and completed every task on paper is not guaranteed a working life as one.

Assessment methods within higher education are usually a blend of continuous feedback from your assigned voice teacher, recital-based grading or feedback, portfolio reviews, jury-panel exams and, if lucky, some health audits. Weekly sessions with a private teacher (who usually stays with you, your entire education) are meant to help record your progress on technique, vocal range and health. End-of-year or landmark recitals are graded on vocal quality, musicality and stagecraft, whilst also trying to simulate real-world performance pressures (time crunch, deadlines, nerve control). Portfolios of compiled recordings, up-to-date performance CVs, grades and reflective essays, are all there to encourage self-directed growth and documentation of vocal evolution. However, applying Harry **Torrance's** (**Ferm** Almqvist & Vinge, 2017, 4) concept of 'criteria compliance' reveals that these developmental tools risk becoming 'task fulfilment' stepping-stones where students prioritise fulfilling grading criteria over quality of reflection and vocal development. While these models collectively give a rounded picture of a student's progress and abilities, they can put later maturing voices at a disadvantage. Especially if they are finding specific technique or repertoire challenging or confusing and are then penalised for not being able to achieve the same grades as other singers simply due to their voices needing more time to adopt certain abilities.

The rigidity of grading systems may exacerbate this issue. For example, The Hague's 0–10 scale and Sibelius's 1–5 system may compress nuanced progress into broad categories, potentially disadvantaging students whose voices develop non-linearly. In contrast, RAM's percentage-based system (0–100%) might allow finer differentiation, although there is still more emphasis on performance tests prioritising demonstrable output over developmental trajectory. Torrance (Almqvist, 2017, 5) proposes 'transformative assessment' as a solution. Rather than just checking boxes, this method balances task completion with genuine quality, viewing criteria as flexible rather than fixed. It encourages students to think critically about their own learning, allowing vocal assessments to adapt to non-linear growth. This approach values the developmental process over the final product, giving late-maturing voices the necessary time to build their identity without being penalised for missing benchmarks.

2.4 Curriculums 'red flags' for dramatic voices

While higher music education vocal in Finland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom share many similarities within their curricula, potential obstacles or 'red flags'¹⁰ start to emerge when these structures are viewed through the lens of dramatic voice development and prolonged maturation. The rigidity of current curricula often misinterprets the developmental pace of late-maturing voices. In The Hague's handbook¹¹ it promises to train a 'flexible and creative professional' with a 'guaranteed' technical basis, but the curriculum structure reveals a rigid timeline where public performances are mandatory, and true choice via electives is deferred until 'later years.' This discrepancy between the rhetoric of flexibility and the reality of early-stage performance mandates illustrates the systemic inability of current curricula to accommodate the non-linear maturation of dramatic voices. Drawing on Jahnke et al.'s (2017, 92) '6-Facet Model,' we can see that when students are forced into premature performance roles, they are denied the opportunity for 'self-reflective learning' (Facet 1) and 'independent learning' (Facet 2). Teachers who prioritise immediate 'production' (Facet 4) or 'originality' (Facet 6) may inadvertently penalise stu-

¹⁰ Red Flags' - A term used in this paper as a warning sign for potential problems or an unhealthy situation. (Oxford University Press. (n.d.). Red flag. In Oxford Learner's Dictionaries. Retrieved June 1, 2026, from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/red-flag>)

¹¹ See appendix 4

dents who are still constructing their vocal identity (Jahnke et al. 2017, 92). Even at institutions like RAM, openly state that 'Artist Development' is a journey to 'understand and articulate what is special about you.'¹² Yet, the mechanism for this development is rigid, assessments and timelines. RAM's curriculum forces the articulation of a professional identity before the voice may be physiologically ready. This structural requirement to 'perform' one's uniqueness through graded tasks (B1–B4) risks harming later maturing voices who cannot yet meet the standardised benchmarks of 'originality' and 'professionalism.'

This paper has identified five specific structural shortcomings. First, the standard model of two 45-minute private lessons per week with a single instructor proves insufficient for building a solid technique as well as receiving constructive and consistent feedback. While students may report satisfaction, the rigidity of remaining with one instructor throughout a degree fails to accommodate the shifting physiological needs of a developing instrument (Strobbe, 2020, 43, 47). Second, ensemble and repertoire classes frequently focus on a narrow set of genres, pressurising dramatic voice types to sing music unsuited to their voice. This “one-size-fits-all” approach forces students to prioritise the “needs of the larger choir” (or class criteria) over their individual vocal health (Sweet, 2018, 142). Similarly, aria workshops are often limited to a single attendance per year or once during the entire study, failing to provide the repeated, focused feedback necessary for voices to progress. Third, vocal-care classes are typically delivered as generic group sessions, offering only an overview of healthy habits without the one-to-one guidance needed to address individual anatomical, technical, or psychological needs. Franca and Wagner found from their study *'Effects of Vocal Demands on Voice Performance of Student Singers'* (2015, 325) that: “Elite occupational voice users such as singers should be provided with quality information regarding voice care...to prevent voice disorders.” The

Finally, the curriculum often misses business or career-development courses, leaving graduates ill-prepared for the freelance reality of the industry (Strobbe, 2020, 86–87). This divide is highlighted in an interview with Lenore Rosenberg, who states that “there is a gap between what schools want singers to learn and what they actually

¹² ibid

need to survive in the industry” (White, 2007, 190). Aiding these issues is the absence of mandatory vocal health visits with an ENT doctor provided by the educational institution. A ballerina wouldn’t dance on a broken foot; thus, it is important to note that singers should not be made to do the same. Ultimately, vocal training cannot rely on a monolithic curriculum that ignores the reality that different voice types require different approaches for designing an effective educational and career pathway (Strobbe, 2020, 55).

3 Implementation of the study

Chapter three presents the implementation and data collection process of this research study. The first subchapter describes the research purpose and question, the second describes the methodology, the third and fourth present how the data was collected and analysed, whilst the last subchapter outlines the research ethics.

3.1 Research purpose and question

This study seeks to understand the lived experiences of dramatic sopranos regarding the support they received during their participation in higher music education degree programs. The term 'dramatic' is taken from the German *Fach* system and serves as an umbrella term for encompassing the heavier soprano voice classifications (see page 8 or appendix 3). This terminology allows for a cohesive discussion of voice types that are often fragmented or underrepresented within formal vocal training contexts.

Current literature reveals a significant gap regarding the specific pedagogical needs of these heavier voice types. The current 'one-size-fits-all' approach often fails to account for the unique physiological and artistic trajectory of the dramatic voice, potentially leaving students feeling misunderstood or inadequately prepared. Whilst much has been written on general vocal pedagogy and descriptions of voice types, there is a notable lack of research centred on the teaching of dramatic voices and how these students navigate the education system.

Consequently, this study prioritises the subjective perspective of the student rather than evaluating institutional policies in isolation. Its primary purpose is to illuminate how dramatic sopranos perceive, interpret, and navigate the support structures available to them during their training. The research aims to articulate the specific ways in which current educational environments succeed or fail in fostering the healthy development of the dramatic voice.

Guided by this purpose, this study addresses the following question:
How do dramatic sopranos experience support for their vocal development in higher music education?

By showcasing these lived experiences, this research also seeks to increase awareness regarding dramatic voices among teachers, institutions, and the vocal arts industry. The findings aim to provide evidence that moves beyond generic advice, inspiring targeted changes in pedagogical practice and student support to better align with the developmental needs of dramatic voices.

3.2 Methodological starting points

This empirical study is situated within an interpretivist research paradigm, which suggests that knowledge is socially constructed through interaction and shared meaning-making (Creswell, 2007, 36). Such a paradigm is appropriate for research in educational contexts where personal experience, professional identity, and pedagogical approaches are shaped by complex social, cultural, and institutional factors (Creswell, 2014, 8).

The study adopts a qualitative methodological approach (Leavy, 2017, 124), using an inductive approach to find meaning and better understand social situations. This approach is rooted in the belief that qualitative inquiry is best suited for capturing lived experiences and interpretive perspectives. Instead of relying on numerical metrics to measure outcomes or attempting to apply findings universally across diverse populations, this investigation prioritises depth of understanding from individual experiences. Consequently, the research centres on how each student in higher music education engages with and interprets the multifaceted term ‘support,’ revealing deeper personal and contextual layers in the data.

3.3 Data collection

The study focuses on students who have studied in the last ten years. It has been mentioned above that dramatic voices mature later than lighter ones (Ware, 1998, p) and therefore a longer timeframe was necessary in order to include interviewees whose voices had reached sufficient development to reflect meaningfully on their pathway to becoming a dramatic voice.

The data collection process involved gathering four research participants and organising interviews of between 60 and 90 minutes long. It was initially to be organised

as a group facilitated discussion; however, due to the eventual participants living in different countries and not being able to meet in person, the data gathering was changed to individual semi-structured interviews via Zoom or in person. The participants were chosen using purposeful sampling, which means that participants are selected to “best help the researcher understand the problem and research question” (Creswell, 2014, 189). They were either still studying or had graduated from vocal training within the last 10 years. The participants were between the ages of 25 and 40, and the interviews took place in English during January and February 2026. Two were held in person in a private space, and the other two were online via the video call application Zoom.

During the interview process, each section comprised a few guiding questions meant to centre the participant around a certain topic whilst allowing them to diverge into their own personal stories and tangents. By having the interviews in this manner, semistructured (Leavy, 2017, 157–158) and accompanied by a constructivist approach, the participant could speak freely about their experiences whilst being grounded in the topic we needed to discuss. This balance between questioning and discussion allowed the participant freedom to share as much or as little as they liked, as some topics could be uncomfortable to describe. Plus, it left room to interpret the questions in relation to their lived experiences (Creswell, 2014, 246–247).

Through a qualitative lens, each interview was personal and enriched the data by shedding light on topics that may not have been considered before. Their own descriptions were extremely valuable as they were not constrained to a specific question (Leavy, 2017, 19) and could elaborate freely. This also led to other questions being answered during the process and showed that the key concepts in this study are closely interlinked. There were many shared experiences among these few singers already, so a larger pool would be interesting to interview to work out the exact percentage of singers that this gap in education affects.

3.4 Data analysis

The data was collected by the author through an audio *voice memo* recording app on a password-protected iPhone and a short questionnaire completed by hand. Transcriptions were generated using the *voice memo* application on the author's MacBook, which resulted in eighty-eight pages in Times New Roman font, with 12pt and 1.5 spacing. To ensure data security, these files were stored exclusively on an encrypted external hard drive and a password-protected local server, with no cloud backup. The analysis followed a rigorous qualitative coding process. As Saldaña (2021, 4) notes, "coding is the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis." The author employed a two-cycle coding strategy (Saldaña, 2021, 3-13). First, 'descriptive coding' was applied to label segments of the transcript with keywords. These codes were then organised into 'second-cycle pattern codes' to identify recurring themes and conceptual umbrellas. Data diagrams were created to visualise the relationships between codes and synthesised the data into coherent thematic narratives (Charmaz, 2006, 96). The final themes were reviewed against the original transcripts to ensure credibility and confirmability of the findings; meaning "if findings from interviews, observations and analysis records all provide a similar socially constructed reality, then they are dependable" (Miles & Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2009, 422).

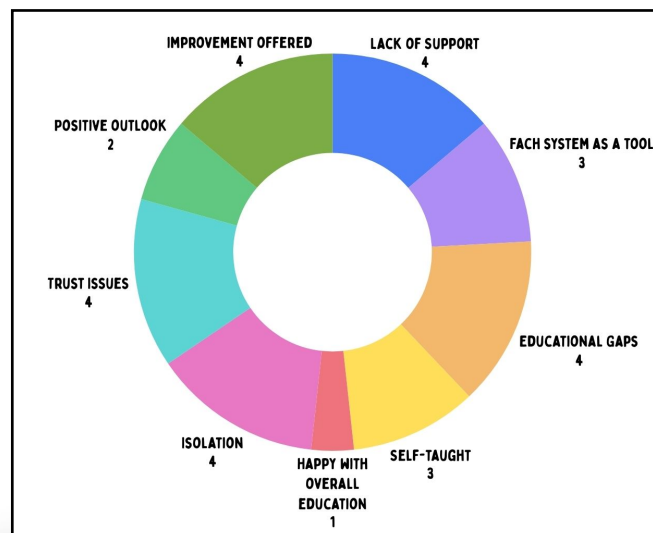


Figure 3. This is a visual representation of what kind of data was collected from the interview. It shows how many participants felt the same in relation to various topics.

After going through the initial findings again and the interviews with a better understanding of the information collected, the themes started to become clearer. First, they were split into four parent sections, which were the larger conceptual topics of conversation during the interviews: *The Fach system, Education, Experience and the Industry*. Under these four umbrella terms, many more themes became apparent and were given code names, a brief description and a few quotes from the interviews related to that subject. The data is as follows:

3.4.1 The 'Fach' system

Individualised Pathway

When applied with flexibility, the *Fach* system can become a tool that helps a teacher and student tailor a vocal development pathway that challenges their vocal limitations and builds progressive development.

Singer 1: *It can be a choice whether you want to sing mezzo-soprano repertoire... and then ... expand and advance into dramatic repertoire.*

Singer 1: *I started with Mezzo repertoire...I just sang what felt good.*

Singer 2: *There's a big risk that they're taking on roles too early...we have to consider... that everybody evolves differently. Some people might be promising dramatics at 25...but don't put them into that Fach*

Singer 3: *Using the Fach system as a way to educate a singer rather than like sticking them in a box. So there should be a bit more flexibility.*

Singer 4: *My first teacher used to let me sing a lot of [mezzo] repertoire and... everyone was like 'oh your middle range and lower range is so good.'*

Singer 4: *We're 'which-ever key feels nice.' It doesn't matter if it's F major or E major. We choose the one that fits best.*

Gate-keeping

When teachers don't allow students to experiment outside their *Fach*. They are 'gate-keeping' certain arias and potentially hindering vocal development because of opinions rather than a student's reality.

Singer 1: *We did all these kinds of bigger light soprano roles... I don't think that ever felt very comfortable.*

Singer 1: *People are telling me like, 'no don't do Liu, you're way too heavy for Liu.'*

Singer 2: *We didn't touch Wagner... it was like forbidden...don't do that too early...*

Singer 3: *Everybody is always made to sing Mozart... but I feel like for me, it wasn't actually good...Singing Mozart in the early phases made me squeeze the voice.*

Singer 4: *There have been times when I've been cast wrong... which has forced me to try and lighten my voice a lot...it's awful.*

Singer 4: *Teachers saying, 'oh that's too heavy...you shouldn't touch that yet.' But like if it feels good... why not sing it?*

Repertoire Filter

The *Fach* system can be helpful with filtering through the vast amounts of arias but lists can also be restrictive.

Singer 3: *I think it's also very limiting [the Fach system] because many singers have skills that are not limited to only one fach...so I feel like there could be more movement between different Fachs and... I feel like some roles... they can be categorised into many Fachs.*

Singer 3: *It's also about finding what works for you and what you love to sing rather than actually putting yourself in a box.*

Multi-Fach Identity

Embracing a voice that can sing across different *Fachs* and accepting the fact that not all voices fit one category.

Singer 1: *I think that those roles can be sung by both [mezzo-sopranos and dramatic sopranos].*

Singer 2: *One singer is not one Fach...we also have to be very versatile with our voices... If there's one thing I've learned being in this opera business...opera houses want versatile people."*

Singer 3: *I feel like maybe if I wasn't categorised [as dramatic] so early... maybe I would have had a broader spectrum... and maybe my vocal development wouldn't have been so hard.*

3.4.2 Education

Talent Waste

By not catering for developing dramatic voices, the education system loses potential singers and wastes their talent.

Singer 1: *You can't make things happen, but there are certain things that you should help your students with... I actively tried to find repertoire... I just workshopped really, trying everything... and I think... now five, six years later, I finally have at least an idea of repertoire that works well.*

Singer 2: *They have a strict age limit for the masters...these things you have to do at a certain point of your life or never.*

Singer 3: *Nobody here is interested in what will happen to me after I graduate... they just want me out.*

Singer 4: *If I could skip that one production where I was cast wrong... I would go back and tell my teachers and myself that I'm not singing this role.*

Systemic Irrelevance

Higher music education systems could become irrelevant if the students (the customer) don't feel valued or supported.

Singer 1: *My opinion is that... at the end of the day you just have to sing well. And if you find a good singing teacher... then the most important thing is that you have enough money to pay them.*

Singer 2: *It's good if you have it [music degree] but... it's about how you develop in the work field... nobody asks for the masters... as a singer.*

Singer 3: *I feel like the teachers haven't always been on the map... firsthand information from the field hasn't always been so present in the teaching.*

Singer 3: *To start the ensemble [training] in the very first semester... I don't think it's a good idea because we're all finding our voices and getting to know our singing teacher... [then] we expose our insecurities to everyone.*

Industry Deafness

Higher music education has a problem bridging the gap between education and industry. When deciding curricula, it seems educators are 'deaf' to the needs of singer working life.

Singer 1: *Making bank [money]...and doing singing on the side... that's the way to go I think.*

Singer 1: *[Universities] just keep producing and producing... there are so many singers out there and the reality of making it as a freelance opera soloist... it's like winning the lottery.*

Singer 2: *Let's be real, there are more opportunities in the German-speaking world. So why would you not learn that language fluently?*

Singer 2: *There's been competition, but it's different [to] people who made their careers in the 70s....now it's like you're expected to be ready with a role [and] do everything much faster.*

Singer 3: *I feel like in my education there actually hasn't been enough discussion and explanation about the Fach system and how important it is for entering the industry.*

Singer 4: *[Having bigger voices sing lower repertoire] its done in the industry. Why is it not done in education? ... because the people in education haven't heard about this possibility.*

The 'Bloom' Myth

It is a known fact that a dramatic voice matures more slowly than others, but the 'Bloom' Myth is not a promise of future success; it's a justification for present-day neglect.

Singer 1: *You just wait and wait and wait until you're ready and then... all of a sudden you're discarded. There are also so many dramatic sopranos that are tired of waiting, and they change their profession... [or] they have lingered here and there and basically lived in poverty... then all of a sudden they turn 50 and get all the roles.*

Singer 2: *Time is not your friend...there are more people to choose from...they have to narrow it down...education being too early is because [of] money.*

Singer 3: *I sang it. I felt amazing, and my teacher was like... 'I can't believe you managed to sing this through...this is very specific repertoire and you only enter this later... but I can hear you will sing this someday'... but... I knew my voice... I already knew back then that this is my repertoire.*

Singer 4: *My first teacher said like 'I actually always knew that you would be heavier' and that my highness would blossom in its own time. I just wondered, is that a fact or is that just a way of people saying they don't know how to help me open up the voice more at the top?*

3.4.3 Experience

Trust Erosion

This happens when the student has experienced so much negativity towards them developing as a dramatic soprano, that they stop believing in the system and no longer trust teachers and education systems to support them.

Singer 3: *I felt like in all the group lessons, I was always the one who had to compromise... I was always the one who was singing too loud, etc... it felt quite embarrassing.*

Singer 3: *I don't feel like all the teachers recommend suitable repertoire for me and also didn't understand what kind of voice I have.*

Singer 3: *The school isn't actually interested in how we are going to do in life... they don't actually prepare you for the years after university... but if you do well, they are happy to use you for marketing.*

Singer 4: *[My singing teacher] told me 'oh that sounds so good' ... and I was like, this feels like the worst thing ever. No way I'm going to keep being like this... and then I started avoiding singing lessons.*

Dismissed Potential

Where a voice had dramatic potential, but they were not cared for by teachers, the system or education in general and therefore felt dismissed.

Singer 1: *With many teachers, in many circles...it's kind of like... an elephant in the room... you don't really know what to do with it, but kind of like wow, good, okay next.*

Singer 3: *I was categorised as a dramatic very early... but then later when I have come closer to entering into working life, I've been told to take steps down... sing more lyric repertoire.*

Singer 4: *Teachers told me... you're almost this [Fach], but you're not exactly... [so] I fall in-between.*

Pedagogy Deficit

It was mentioned many times that teachers did not have the tools or topic-specific knowledge to help dramatic voices develop.

Singer 1: *No teachers are qualified to advise you with this [dramatic repertoire]... I was just being told, okay, you have a big voice... but not being given specific tools... it was a bit frustrating.*

Singer 2: *People just don't understand it. You have to be your own everything... and advocate for yourself.*

Singer 3: *They need some sort of training for the ones that currently teach here.*

Singer 3: *I feel like bigger voices, we have such a different instrument. Like how our voices react to certain movement in the technique... the common problems are the vibrato... stability issues... pitch becomes flat or sharp... like the errors can be heard if something is not in the right place. But I feel in lighter voices... the sound just gets breathy... [dramatic voices] get pointed out more easily... it feels worse.*

Singer 4: *There was a time where apparently, female singers and male singers were taught completely differently... female singers were only taught with head voice... [and] most of the people that teach us are still these people... so it's a generational issue also.*

Years Lost Grief

This is grieving the time that you lost from being in education and from vocal development.

Singer 1: *[Specific course content] can make the difference of whether you get the job or not because you're not even aware that [your knowledge] should be much better ... and you lack the tools to work on [things like] languages yourself.*

Singer 3: *I sometimes felt that in rehearsals... is this actually the best use of our time for our learning process at this point?*

Singer 4: *Singing like that for half a year made everything really horrible.*

3.4.4 Industry

Pigeonholing

This happens when a singer is forced to stay within a certain box/voice category, and they are shunned for wanting to grow and change.

Singer 1: *If you are putting it on your audition list then... that also tells your audition panel that you think you're ready for [those roles]...I feel like singers, especially female singers, are often put in a certain box.*

Singer 2: *She's a bit sad that she hasn't had the opportunity to do more like Italian things... she's very much [been] typecast into Wagner... aka everything German-speaking.*

Singer 3: *[The Fach system] is useful for the opera industry They are looking for singers they can label...we are treated like cattle.*

Singer 4: *If I was 10 centimetres taller then people wouldn't have a problem with my voice... because I'm short... people expect a light high sound from me.*

Dramatic-Soprano Blindness

In the industry, they don't always differentiate between 'larger' soprano voices and lighter ones. Therefore, they become blind to dramatic voice types.

Singer 1: *National Opera Studio in the UK... they had like 400 sopranos applying. And that's also a sad thing because obviously, the dramatic sopranos, which are completely different beasts, are counted together with the soubrettes.*

Singer 2: *Dramatic sopranos [are] usually 'ah, it's these roles', and then you can count them on one hand.*

Singer 3: *[With] bigger voices... the symptoms of the vocal problems or dysfunctions are somehow more visible than with the lighter voices... and that was the reason that I felt that all other [singers] can sing and I can't.*

False Map

As singing students, we have been told we must get a degree in singing, get into an artist programme, find an agent and then we will have made it in the industry. However, the reality is that there is no one way of achieving your goals, and the education system should be exploring more options to offer their students to actually help them succeed.

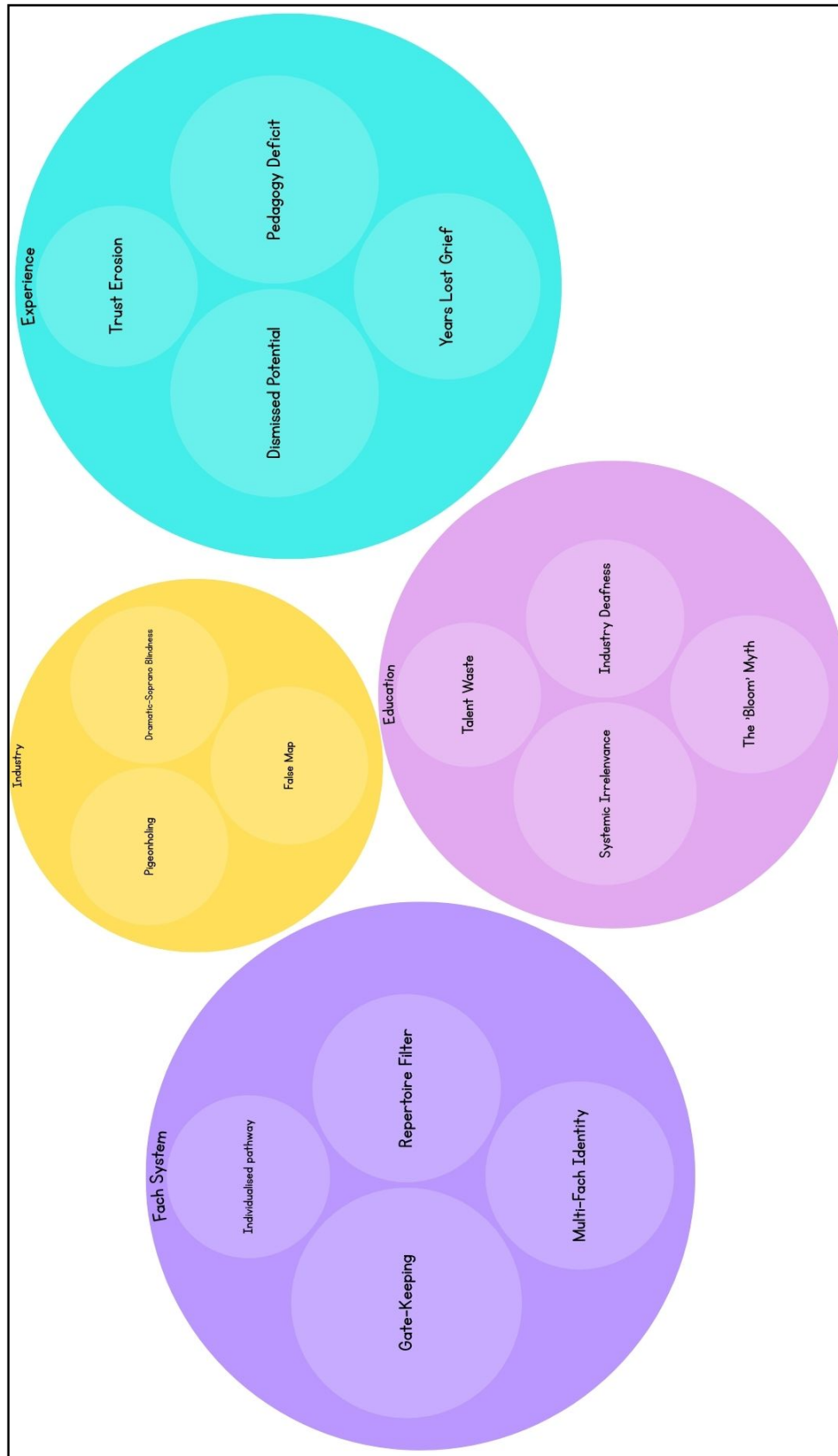
Singer 1: *Creating the dreams of everyone getting an agent right out of school and nailing their auditions. I feel it's irresponsible... I feel like more teachers should keep it real... keep your options open... the sad reality is that the market is so oversaturated.*

Singer 2: *I don't have a master's... I guess my [opera] studio experience was my master's... I do think that in the world today we are all...overqualified.*

Singer 3: *[There's] only one opera house in Finland and [there] isn't really any cooperation with that house [and universities]. I feel like that is ridiculous.*

Singer 3: *We should have much more guidance on how to make yourself presentable to the industry... the university could work with some casting directors or artistic directors... what are they expecting to see in the videos... performing to a camera and performing to a live audience is different.*

Figure 4. This is a visual display of the second-cycle pattern coding. Under the conceptual parent terms are other recurring themes that came up during the interview process.



3.5 Research ethics

This study follows the ethical guidelines set by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK, 2019 and 2023). All research methods, data collection, and analysis meet the scientific standards outlined in TENK and were conducted responsibly. Every source used in this research is properly cited in the reference list. To protect the well-being and privacy of participants, any potential harm was avoided by removing all personally identifiable elements, such as making the data anonymised and giving each participant a code name to be used in the paper. Everyone who participated in the interviews did so voluntarily and had the right to stop or leave the study at any time. Before participating, all interviewees were clearly informed about the research goals, how their personal data would be handled, and how the study would work. They also signed a consent form confirming they understood and agreed to participate (TENK 2019, pp. 50–52).

To ensure privacy, we removed all unnecessary personal details, such as names, from the data. Instead, participants were given pseudonyms (e.g., Singer 1, Singer 2, etc.), and no other identifying information was shared. Participants were reminded of their rights and data processing details before each interview and gave explicit permission for their interview data to be used in the research. They were also allowed to review the paper before it was published.

Due to geographic challenges, two interviews were conducted via video call using Zoom, following official recommendations.

4 Findings

This chapter presents the findings collected from a qualitative approach involving private interviews with four dramatic sopranos, focusing on their experiences with vocal development support within higher music education. The analysis reveals three primary patterns emerging from the data. First, participants identified a systemic lack of support for the dramatic soprano voice types within current higher music education curricula. Second, the findings suggest that the *Fach* system, while theoretically robust, is frequently misunderstood or underutilised in teaching environments; participants argued that a more explicit application of this classification system could enhance pedagogical support. Finally, the data analysis highlights a broader societal and ideological barrier: deep-seated stereotypes within the opera industry create substantial limitations for dramatic sopranos, affecting both their educational trajectory and their ability to establish sustainable careers. Collectively, these findings illustrate the multifaceted challenges this voice type faces in navigating the path from student to professional.

4.1 Lack of institutional support for Dramatic sopranos

The analysis of interview data revealed a consistent and systemic lack of support for dramatic sopranos within higher music education. Most of the participants reported struggling to progress at the same pace as their peers in other voice classifications, a delay they attributed not to a lack of talent, but to a profound pedagogy deficit. As *Singer 1* noted, the issue was not merely a lack of interest, but a lack of specific tools: “With many teachers, in many circles it's kind of like... an elephant in the room... you know it's there, but you don't know really what to do with it... I feel like I was just being told that ‘you have a big voice’ and whatnot, but not given specific tools.”

This knowledge gap forces dramatic sopranos into a state of self-reliance, effectively becoming self-taught at the expense of their development time. *Singer 1* described this arduous process: “I was just workshopping really, trying everything and I think like now, five, six years later, I finally have like at least an idea of repertoire that works well.” Similarly, *Singer 4* highlighted the generational disconnect, noting that

many instructors still rely on outdated pedagogical models that fail to account for the unique physiological reactions of larger voices, such as stability issues or pitch fluctuations that differ from lighter voice types.

The consequences of this instructional void extend beyond technical stagnation; they erode the fundamental trust required for effective learning. While Latasha Thomas-Durrell (2023, 174) asserts that “students learn better from teachers whom they respect and trust,” the findings suggest that for dramatic sopranos, this trust is often fractured by the teacher's inability to provide relevant guidance. *Singer 4* recounted a moment of trust erosion where positive feedback from a teacher felt dissonant with their physical reality: “[My singing teacher] told me ‘oh that sounds so good’ and I was like, this feels like the worst thing ever. No way I'm going to keep being like this... and then I started avoiding singing lessons...” When teachers cannot accurately diagnose or support the specific needs of a dramatic instrument, the student begins to view the educational system as irrelevant or even hostile.

Furthermore, participants identified the *Bloom Myth* [the belief that dramatic voices will simply fix themselves, lay maturing later] as a dangerous justification for present-day neglect. Rather than a promise of future success, participants framed this myth as a mechanism that allows institutions to avoid the difficult work of tailoring curriculum. *Singer 1* expressed the frustration of this passive approach: “You just wait and wait and wait until you're ready and then... all of a sudden... you're discarded. There are also so many dramatic sopranos that are tired of waiting, and they change their profession... then all of a sudden they turn 50 and get all the roles.” This sentiment was echoed by *Singer 3*, who felt that the lack of proactive support led to a sense of dismissed potential, where the system prioritised the convenience of the teacher over the development of the student.

Finally, the lack of support is compounded by a disconnect between education and the realities of the industry. *Singer 3* pointed out the absurdity of this isolation: “We only have one opera house in Finland, and the singing department isn't doing really any cooperation with that house. I feel like that is ridiculous.” Without bridges to the professional world, students are left to navigate a complex industry landscape without a map, leading to what can be described as *Years Lost Grief*: the mourning of

time spent in education that failed to equip them with the necessary tools for a sustainable career.

4.2 The ‘Fach’ system as a tool

Three out of four participants acknowledged that the *Fach* system is a vital industry ‘tool’, yet they unanimously argued that its application in higher music education is often counterproductive. While the system functions efficiently for casting directors and opera houses seeking to ‘label’ singers for logistical ease, the data suggests it operates as a restrictive cage within the classroom. Participants described a tension between the system's utility for the industry and its potential to stifle individual vocal development through premature classification and *Gate-keeping*.

The primary critique centred on the rigidity of early categorisation. *Singer 3* warned against using the system to ‘stick [singers] in a box,’ advocating instead for its use as an educational framework that allows for movement: “Using the *Fach* system as a way to educate a singer rather than like sticking them in a box. So there should be a bit more flexibility.” This sentiment was emphasised by *Singer 2*, saying that the system was designed for professional efficiency, not indefinite labelling: “One singer is not one *Fach*... we also have to be very versatile with our voices... if there's one thing I've learned being in this opera business... opera houses want versatile people.” When teachers enforce rigid boundaries too early, they risk *Gate-keeping* repertoire that could be essential for a student's growth. *Singer 1* recalled being told, “No don't do Liu, you're way too heavy for Liu,” while *Singer 2* noted that teachers often forbid exploration of the chest voice or Wagnerian repertoire simply because it is ‘too early,’ ignoring the student's actual acoustic reality.

Conversely, participants highlighted the value of an *Individualised Pathway*, where the *Fach* system is applied flexibly to allow dramatic sopranos to explore the diversity of repertoire during their developmental years. *Singer 1* described starting with mezzo-soprano roles to build confidence and technique before advancing: “I started with mezzo-soprano repertoire... I just sang what felt good... it can be a choice whether you want to sing mezzo-soprano repertoire... and then... expand and advance into dramatic repertoire.” Similarly, *Singer 4* shared that their first teacher

allowed them to sing a wide range of repertoire, which helped them discover their true range: “My first teacher used to let me sing a lot of [mezzo] repertoire and... everyone was like ‘oh your middle range and lower range is so good’.” This approach aligns with the concept of *Multi-fach Identity*, where singers are encouraged to embrace versatility rather than a single label. As *Singer 4* stated, “We’re ‘which-ever key feel nice’ singers... It doesn’t matter if it’s F major or E major. We choose the one that fits best.”

However, the data also revealed the dangers of *Repertoire Filtering*, where the *Fach* system is used to restrict access to arias based on arbitrary lists rather than the singer’s current capability. *Singer 3* noted that such lists are “very limiting” because “many singers have skills that are not limited to only one *Fach*.” The consequences of this rigidity were illustrated by *Singer 4*’s experience of being cast incorrectly in a production that did not align with their vocal reality; “if I was 10 centimetres taller, then people wouldn’t have a problem with my voice... because I’m short... people expect a light high sound from me... They forced me to try and lighten my voice a lot... it’s awful.” This mismatch led to vocal strain and a disconnect between the singer’s identity, and it took them many years after this experience to regain their voice and confidence. Ultimately, the participants agreed that the *Fach* system should serve as a guide for informed repertoire choices, not a barrier to experimentation. As *Singer 2* concluded, removing the stigma around “too dramatic” or “Wagnerian” repertoire is essential, allowing students to explore their full potential without the fear of violating a categorical boundary.

4.3 The Dramatic Soprano Paradox

A central finding across all interviews was what can be described as the *Dramatic Soprano Paradox*: a catch-22 between the industry and education. Heavier voice types are constantly told to wait until they are ‘ready’ before singing more dramatic repertoire. However, by the time the industry deems them ‘ready’ (around 30 years old), they are considered too old for many artist programmes and lack sufficient main roles on their CV. *Singer 2* laid out the structural age limits that reinforce this paradox plainly: “In Germany it’s like 23... You have to be under 23 to get accepted to a bachelor’s and then preferably start your Master’s at 26... These things you have to

do at a certain point of your life or then never.” These institutional timelines conflict directly with the biological reality of later-maturing voices. The system demands credentials at an age when dramatic sopranos are only beginning to grow into their instrument, creating a timeline that is impossible to meet. As *Singer 1* put it, “You just wait and wait and wait until you're ready and then... all of a sudden... you're discarded.”

Whilst some voices do develop earlier, *Singer 2* cautioned that early classification carries its own risks: “There are voices that mature faster... but there's a big risk that they're taking on roles too early... so some people might be promising dramatics at 25. Good, but don't push them into that fach and only doing those roles, because those roles are a lot of responsibility.” This tension between rushing and waiting lies at the heart of the paradox. *Singer 4* questioned whether the waiting was even pedagogically sound, or simply a cover for not knowing how to help: “my first thecae said ‘I actually always knew that you would be heavier’ and that my highness would blossom in its own time...I just wonder, is that a fact or is that just a way of people saying they don't know how to help me?” What is framed as patience may in fact be neglect. A point reinforced by *Singer 3*, who was told they would sing dramatic repertoire “someday” but already knew their voice was ready now: “I sang it. I felt amazing...but I knew my voice...I already knew back then that this is my repertoire.”

Beyond the rigid age constraints, the paradox is deepened by a profound lack of understanding within the industry itself. Participants expressed frustration that the very people tasked with evaluating and casting them often lack the specific knowledge required to identify or nurture dramatic talent. As *Singer 2* said: “I feel like the system is just against dramatic sopranos, because I think... first of all, it's the fact that people, even people in the industry, don't know the repertoire, which is quite dramatic soprano specific.” This Dramatic-Soprano Blindness means that larger voices are routinely lumped together with lighter sopranos in auditions and competitions, despite being fundamentally different instruments. *Singer 1* pointed out that at one national audition, “they had like 400 sopranos applying... the dramatic sopranos, which are completely different beasts, are counted together with the soubrettes.”

Compounding this ignorance is a stigma surrounding dramatic repertoire in educational settings. Young singers report being actively discouraged from exploring heavier works, often framed as “forbidden” or dangerous for developing voices. *Singer 2* recalled: “We didn’t touch Wagner... it was like forbidden... don’t do that too early.” *Singer 1* described the anxiety this taboo created: “I was really afraid of it... I had been told in my education that we didn’t touch Wagner. Not even one phrase or even one song... it was like forbidden.” This protective stance, intended to safeguard the voice, backfires in two ways. First, it creates a psychological barrier where singers feel they must hide their natural capabilities, fearing that their own voice is somehow dangerous. Second, it leaves them unprepared for the professional world, and when they finally enter the industry, they have no experience with the very repertoire they are expected to sing. This confusion was captured by *Singer 2*, who highlighted the impossible position it creates when trying to present oneself professionally: “If you put all these dramatic roles on there [an audition list], then you know... good luck with that! No one’s going to properly cast you... but if you put a bipolar list of Con-tesa and then Ariadne... then that just signals that you don’t even really know who you are.” The singer is trapped: they cannot list the dramatic repertoire they were never allowed to learn, and they cannot convincingly present a lighter repertoire that does not reflect who they are.

4.4 Summary of the key findings

The findings of this study map a clear trajectory from the input of a dramatic soprano into higher music education to the output of a “trapped singer,” illustrating how systemic failures at each stage compound to create a crisis of support. The data reveals that the current educational infrastructure acts as a broken filter, failing to identify and nurture the specific needs of heavier voices. Instead of providing a supportive foundation, this broken system funnels students directly into three primary mechanisms of harm: *Industry Deafness*, *the Bloom Myth*, and a *Pedagogy Deficit*. Teachers, lacking specific knowledge of the dramatic instrument, often default to the “wait and see” approach, a protective stance that paradoxically becomes a form of neglect.

This failure is exacerbated by the *Fach* system, which, in the hands of rigid educators, transforms from a classification tool into a weapon. Rather than guiding devel-

opment, it enforces *Gate-keeping*, restricting access to repertoire and creating a sense of *Dismissed Potential*. Participants described being told their voices were “too heavy” or “forbidden” to explore, leading to a profound *Trust Erosion* where students no longer believe their teachers can guide them. This internal breakdown is mirrored by the external reality of the Industry, which acts as the final barrier. Here, the singer encounters *Dramatic-Soprano Blindness*, where their unique instrument is lumped in with lighter voices, and the *False Map*, where the promised path of degree-to-career proves nonexistent. The result is *Pigeonholing*, where singers are typecast or discarded before they are ready, leading to the ultimate Output: *the Trapped Singer*. This state is characterised by *Years Lost Grief*; the mourning of time wasted in ineffective training and a deep sense of *Systemic Irrelevance*, where the education system fails to prepare students for the realities of professional life.

However, the data also identifies a path to redemption, though it is one that the system fails to provide currently. Some singers managed to bypass the broken filter by reclaiming agency and forging *Individualised Pathways*. By treating the *Fach* system not as a cage but as a flexible *Repertoire Filter*, these singers were able to sift through vast amounts of music to find what worked for their unique instruments, developing a *Multi-fach Identity* that embraced versatility. Crucially, this redemption was rarely achieved through the institution; instead, it was the result of *Forced Autonomy*. As the data shows, these singers essentially became self-taught, navigating the complexities of their development alone.

This leads to the critical conclusion of the study: the current ‘alternative’ for the dramatic soprano is not a viable solution, but a costly burden. The path to success requires *Extra Costs*, both financial, for prolonged private sessions with knowledgeable mentors and time spent “workshopping” repertoire that should have been taught in the first place. The findings suggest that until higher education shifts from a broken filter to a supportive framework that empowers agency rather than forcing autonomy, the dramatic soprano will remain trapped in a cycle of isolation, waiting, and unnecessary struggle.

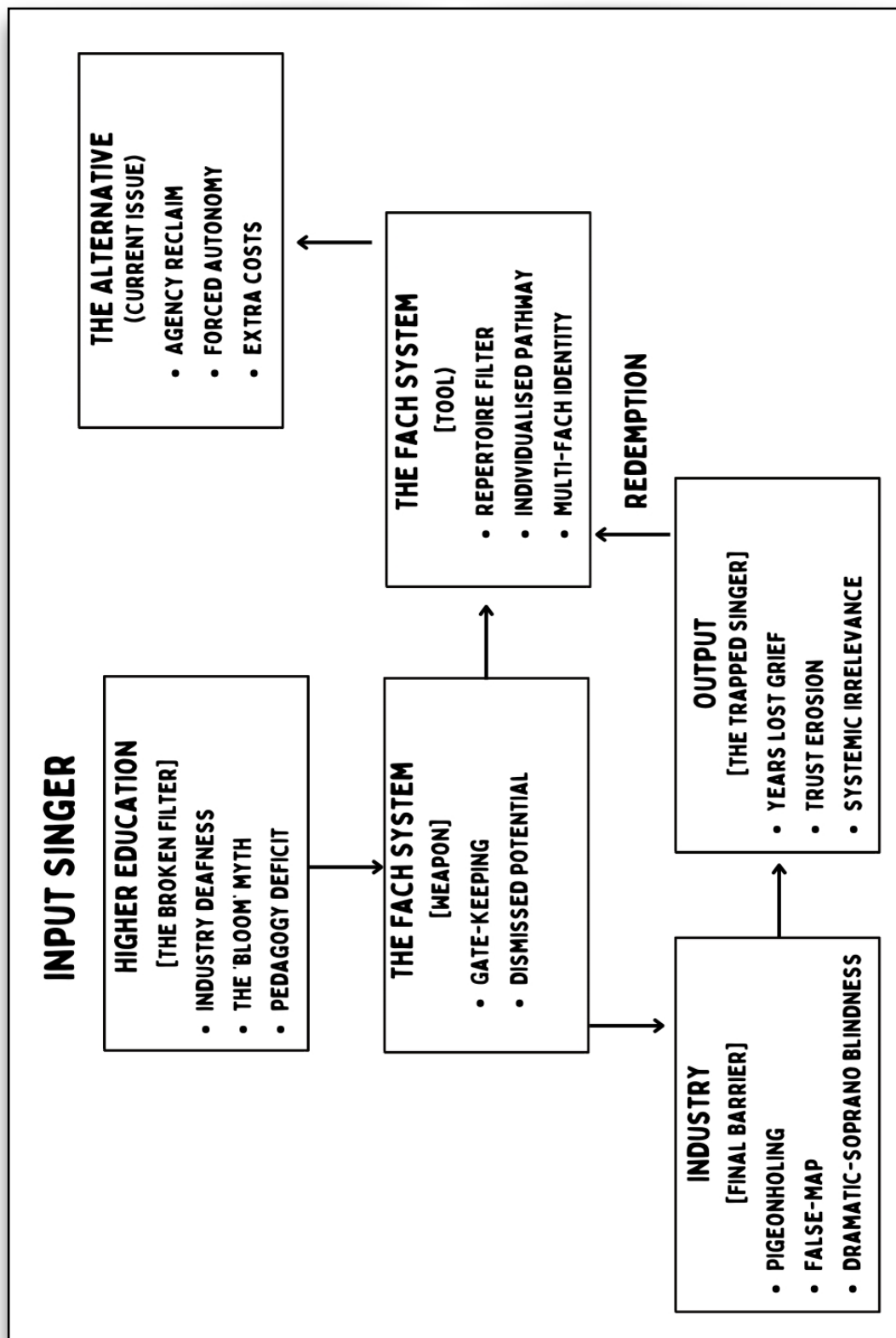


Figure 5. Visual summary of how the codes affect each other and what happens to a developing dramatic voice as they go through higher music education and enter working life.

5 Conclusion and Discussion

This study set out to investigate the support structures available to dramatic sopranos within higher music education. The findings reveal a systemic failure characterised by a *Dramatic Soprano Paradox*: a catch-22 where singers are told to wait for their voices to mature, only to be discarded by the industry once they are ‘ready’ due to rigid age limits. The data identifies three primary mechanisms driving this crisis: a *Pedagogy Deficit* where teachers lack specific knowledge of heavier voices; a *Broken Filter* in the *Fach* system that functions as a weapon of *Gate-keeping* rather than a tool for development; and *Industry Deafness*, where the professional world fails to distinguish dramatic voices from lighter sopranos. Consequently, the ‘output’ of the current system is often a ‘trapped singer’ suffering from *Years Lost Grief*, *Trust Erosion*, and *Systemic Irrelevance*. While some singers achieve success, it is almost exclusively through *Forced Autonomy* and becoming self-taught at significant financial and temporal cost rather than through institutional support.

5.1 The Obsolescence of the Traditional Model and the paradigm shift

A significant implication of these findings is the questioning of the traditional higher music education model itself. As one participant noted, the rigid structures of university curricula may actively hinder rather than help a singer's development. The suggestion that private, flexible mentorship might offer a more effective pathway than extended postgraduate degrees challenges the assumption that longer academic study equates to better preparation. If institutions cannot adapt their curricula to include industry-centred connections, comprehensive language training, and a flexible approach to repertoire, they risk becoming an obsolete stepping stone that delays rather than accelerates a singer's entry to the profession.

This raises a provocative question: Do we even need higher education as musicians? Several participants suggested that the current system, driven by the economics of ‘big business’ education, forces singers into prolonged schooling that offers diminishing returns. One interviewee argued that offering extended postgraduate options for later-maturing voices might be less effective than focusing on private,

niche technical development. Given that the industry changes faster than educational institutions can adapt, the ‘generational deafness’ of educators means that students are often trained for a world that no longer exists. If a singer can build a stronger, more personalised instrument through private mentorship without the baggage of obligatory, misaligned classes, then the traditional degree may indeed become redundant for this specific voice type at least.

Ultimately, the future of dramatic soprano training requires a paradigm shift. Drawing on broader trends in educational sciences that emphasise ‘student-centredness,’ the field must move away from rigid categorisation and toward a holistic, individualised approach. This shift demands that institutions prioritise vocal health, artistic versatility, and realistic career planning over the convenience of standardised curricula. Until higher music education acknowledges its role not just as an educator but as an active partner in the professional ecosystem, the cycle of misclassification and under-preparedness will continue. The *Fach* system must be reclaimed as a flexible *Repertoire Filter* to facilitate *Individualised Pathways* and *Multi-fach Identity*, rather than serving as a barrier to experimentation.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

The primary limitation of this study was the scarcity of relevant literature regarding dramatic voices in higher music education. Initially, the research aimed to cover all dramatic voice types (men and women); however, reliable data for mezzo-sopranos, tenors, and basses was virtually non-existent. Consequently, the study was narrowed to focus exclusively on dramatic *sopranos*. This gap reflects the nature of operatic training itself. As Atkinson, Watermeyer, and Delamont (2013, 496–497) note, expertise in this field is often passed down through “embodied” knowledge, live demonstrations, gestures, and personal guidance rather than formal textbooks; because this knowledge rarely appears in academic journals, the literature base remains thin. Additionally, the small sample size (four participants) limits the generalisability of the findings. While the depth of the qualitative data provided rich insights into the lived experiences of these singers, a larger participant pool might reveal variations in experience based on geography, specific conservatory culture, or

socioeconomic background. Future research should aim to expand the scope to include other dramatic voice types and employ mixed methods to quantify the prevalence of the *Dramatic Soprano Paradox* across different educational systems.

5.4 Final Thoughts

The dramatic soprano is not a problem to be solved, but a voice type that the current system is ill-equipped to nurture. The ‘waiting game’ is a myth that serves the convenience of the institution rather than the needs of the artist. As the industry continues to evolve, the burden of adaptation must shift from the individual singer to the educational system. Without a fundamental restructuring of how dramatic voices are identified, taught, and prepared for the stage, the industry will continue to lose its most powerful voices to a system that tells them to wait until it is too late.

To address the limitation of the current sample and deepen the understanding of the *Dramatic-Soprano Paradox*, future research should prioritise a ‘mixed-methods¹³’ approach (Leavy, 2017, 164) involving a significantly larger cohort of participants. Focus group interviews could be used to help capture the collective dynamics of shared experiences, revealing patterns of *Years Lost Grief* and *Trust Erosion* that might remain isolated in one-to-one sessions. These group discussions could also facilitate a comparative analysis across different geographic regions and conservatories, testing whether the *Pedagogy Deficit* is a universal phenomenon or localised to specific places or institutions. Furthermore, moving beyond theoretical critique future studies should aim to translate these qualitative findings into actionable resources. A primary goal could be the co-creation of a comprehensive practical guide for both singers and pedagogues. This resource would serve as a navigational tool for developing dramatic voices, offering evidence-based strategies for repertoire selection, vocal health maintenance and career planning. By bridging the gap between academic research and studio practice, such a guide could empower the next generation of dramatic sopranos to navigate their development with greater autonomy and institutional support, ultimately dismantling the ‘waiting game’ that currently defines their trajectory.

¹³ Mixed methods = “integrating quantitative and qualitative data in a single project” (Leavy, 2017, 164)

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview guide & Questions

Semi-structured Interview Guide for Group Discussions

Supporting the Developing Dramatic Voice in Higher Education: Experiences of soprano students categorised as ‘dramatic.’

Yolanda Harding, Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki 7.12.2025

(Quote from classic sociologist Burgess (2002): interviews are “conversations with a purpose”.)

Collecting interviewees:

1. Message singers who market themselves as dramatic sopranos
2. Cut off: students who are currently studying and those who have graduated in the last 10 years (want to keep it current but also understand dramatic sopranos mature later)
3. In message, we briefly explain the research topic: ‘To understand how dramatic sopranos have experienced training in higher education.’
4. If they are interested, I will ask them to fill in the poll sheet for potential dates
5. Once participants agree to the date and to be interviewed, I will send them the consent form, data protection document and information sheet

Timetables:

1. All interviews completed by end of January (Ideally between 19th-28th)
2. Ideally an interview group, but if the 4 participants are not available at the same time, individual interviews will be held
3. Private interviews approximately 2hrs

Introduction:

1. Intro and reminder of the purpose of the interview: to find out how everyone experienced higher education in relation to becoming a dramatic soprano. Find out if there are any shared experiences or things that have changed in 10 years.
2. Informed consent (reading data protection document + participant information sheet + signing consent form) * to be signed in person.
3. And the last date they can withdraw from the research (which is stated on the form)

Orientation:

1. How the interview will run: It is a semi-structured interview. All perspectives are all equally valuable, and you can share as much or as little as you like. I am here as an observer and will provide prompts (open-ended questions) during the discussion. At the beginning, I will ask each of you to introduce yourselves to the group.
2. The interview will be no longer than 2 hours
3. I understand the difficulty of explaining experiences and emotions in a language that is not your mother tongue. Therefore, take as much time as you need for explanations. (I cannot help with language, unfortunately; otherwise, I am leading the conversation.)
4. This is a safe space, and we all agree to not share any thoughts from the discussions outside of this space. We agree to not judge each other and be supportive and listen whilst others are speaking. Be understanding of yourself and others, for emotions may arise during this session, which is ok and acceptable.

Theme 1 – Background information (The Dramatic voice and Fach)

First four will be Questionnaire questions

1. Your name, when and where you studied, your voice type (specific Fach)?
2. At what age were you classified as a “dramatic voice type”? (Who classified your voice)
3. Do you believe you are a “dramatic voice” and why?
4. What does being a “dramatic voice” mean to you?
5. What are your opinions on the Fach system?
6. What do you think about training a young dramatic soprano on mezzo-soprano repertoire? Good points? Bad points? (Discuss)
7. Have you ever felt lost about what repertoire to sing? (What is ‘healthy’)
8. Discuss this statement: “You shouldn’t touch that aria yet you're too young, it’s too big.”

Theme 2 – Training focused

1. What aspects of your training have you perceived as most helpful or most challenging?
2. What have teachers said or done that have benefited you positively while developing as a dramatic voice?
3. Do higher education institutions have a duty to provide career supporting classes for dramatic sopranos as their voices mature later? *(How do you see the responsibility of higher education institutions for opportunities and career supporting classes?)*
4. What comes to mind when you hear this quote “A teacher once told me to sink or swim after graduating”
5. Do you have a plan for what to do after graduation (include the others who have graduated)

Theme 3 – Curriculum (Highlight most important)

1. Which elements of the voice curriculum have been challenging during your training?
2. Have you ever felt that classes are not designed for dramatic voice types? (Discuss)
3. Have you ever felt rushed or behind other singers?
4. Have you ever been made to sing something that you feel is not right for you?
5. Do you think two 45min lessons a week with a voice teacher are enough to help support a dramatic developing voice? (Change this to more open... example open question and then 45min lessons as an example)
6. Did you receive any guidance on how to develop your voice as a young dramatic soprano?
7. Have curriculum examples - discuss how any of these could be developed.*
8. How did you build your career?

**To find out the tension between the course description of the class and then the class in practice.*

Ending: if we don't get through all the points I want and need for the study, then email them.

Appendix 2 Questionnaire

About you

Name: _____ Current age: _____

Fach: _____

Age at start and end of studies: _____

When and where you studied: _____

Do you like using the Fach
voice classifications? _____

At what age were you classified as a
dramatic voice type? _____

Who classified your voice as dramatic
and do you know why? _____

Do you believe that you are a “dramatic
voice type” and why? _____

What does being a “dramatic voice”
mean to you? _____

Appendix 3 Table of detailed descriptions of dramatic soprano voice types

German Fach Terms	Translations	Meaning	Range	Roles linked to this Fach
Dramatischer Koloratursopran	Dramatic Coloratura Soprano	The term 'coloratura' literally means 'colouration' (to colour) therefore, this voice has the ability to add musical embellishments. It is agile which means it can easily sing tricky fast moving scale passages. But it possess a warm, dark timbre that gives added weight to their high notes, making them sound more dramatic.	Range is usually between C4 - F6	1. Queen of the Night (Die Zauberflöte - Mozart) 2. Violetta Valéry (La Traviata - Verdi) 3. Lucia di Lammermoor (Donizetti) 4. Marguerite (Faust - Gounod) 5. Donna Anna (Don Giovanni - Mozart)
Jugendlich-dramatischer Sopran	Youthful-dramatic = Also named by the Italians as 'Lirico-spinto'	Lirico-Spinto literally means lyrically 'pushed' sound. These voices have a lyrical tone and can produce long melting phrases, but they also possess great volume and a darker timbre that allows them to add drama to their voice. They also have more vocal weight and sound to be able to penetrate larger orchestras	Range is usually between C4 - C6	1. Elsa (Lohengrin - Wagner) 2. Elisabeth (Tannhäuser - Wagner) 3. Cio-Cio-San (Madame Butterfly - Puccini) 4. Jenůfa (Janáček) 5. Desdemona (Otello - Verdi)
Dramatischer Sopran	Dramatic Soprano	This voice must be dramatic in colour, weight and personality. They have immense power and know how to command the stage both physically and vocally. They have good stamina as they are able to sing long phrases over heavy orchestration. This voice might also have more of a metallic sound.	Range is somewhere between a G3 - C6	1. Santuzza (Cavalleria Rusticana - Verdi) 2. Aida (Verdi) 3. Leonore (Fidelio - Beethoven) 4. Tosca / Turandot (Puccini) 5. Arabella (Strauss) 6. Sieglinde (Die Walküre - Wagner)
Hochdramatischer Sopran	Highly Dramatic Soprano (or also known as the 'True Wagnerian Soprano')	The largest voice to be born naturally. They tend to sing very specific repertoire. They have a strong middle and lower register that can project beyond complex orchestration. They can sing long sustained passages without getting vocally tired. Their top notes are a force to be reckoned with and tend to also have a metallic sound that feels like a blade cutting through the orchestra.	Range is usually between G3 - C6	1. Brünnhilde (Der Ring - Wagner) 2. Elektra (Wagner) 3. Venus (Tannhäuser - Wagner) 4. Senta (Die fliegende Holländer - Wagner) 5. Isolde (Tristan und Isolde - Wagner) 6. Kundry (Parsifal - Wagner)

Appendix 4 Course content for Bachelor and Master of Vocal Art from Finland, The Netherlands and The United Kingdom

Royal Academy of Music (RAM)

BMUS Specifications: <https://supercool-ram.files.svdcdn.com/production/public/documents/BMus-Programme-Specification.pdf>

BMus Curriculum: https://supercool-ram.files.svdcdn.com/production/public/BMus-handbook-2025-26-V5_David-Piper.pdf?dm=1774015714

Master of Arts specifications: <https://supercool-ram.files.svdcdn.com/production/public/documents/MA-Programme-Specification-Performance-or-Composition.pdf?dm=1746175697>

Brief BMus content list: singing lessons / performance classes / masterclasses / ensemble coaching / lectures / seminars / academic tutorials / performances / recitals / Portfolio / skills test and written test

Brief Master content list: singing lessons and coaching / masterclasses / ensemble classes / lectures / seminars / performances / recitals / professional classes (artistic development CV writing) and a performance portfolio.

Assessment criteria: Very clear, direct criteria, whilst allowing there to be room for interpretation. 0–100% grading system:

0% – 39%: Fail (Below the pass threshold).

40%: Minimum Pass (The lowest mark you can get to pass a module).

40% – 49%: Pass (but often considered a "bare pass").

50% – 59%: Merit / Good Pass.

60% – 69%: Distinction / Very Good.

70%+: High Distinction / Outstanding.

Royal Conservatoire The Hague

BMus curriculum handbook EN: <https://www.koncon.nl/storage/documents/Curriculum-Handbook-Bachelor-Vocal-Studies-25-26.pdf>

Masts of vocal music curriculum EN: <https://www.koncon.nl/storage/documents/Curriculum-Handbook-Master-Vocal-Studies-25-26.pdf>

Brief BMus content list: Artistic development classes (singing lessons, languages, repertoire classes etc...) / Musicianship skills (rhythms, music history, theory etc...) Academic skills (anatomy, music history, critical classes...) Professional work (tutoring, teaching skills, career skills etc...)

Brief Master content list: Artistic development (singing, coaching, group lessons, languages, masterclasses) Research classes. Professional classes (project management, working in ensembles and lied outside school, working life class...)

Assessment criteria: Generalisation of targets; allow space for interpretation. But for exams it is clearly stated what they critique you on. 0-10 marking system and a Pass/fail system.

Sibelius Academy

BMus study guide EN: <https://opinto-opas.uniarts.fi/en/programme/15203>

Masters of vocal arts study guide EN: <https://opinto-opas.uniarts.fi/en/programme/16145>

Brief BMus content list: Main studies (languages, singing lessons, essays, performances, ensembles) Pedagogy classes / Vocal health / General studies (piano classes, music history, theory) / Optional courses.

Brief Master content list: Main studies (singing lessons and coaching, performances, essays, speaking technique, masterclasses, song classes) General studies (vocal music, culture, literature, working life, languages) Elective (pedagogy, improvisation, acting, dance, audition training etc...)

Assessment criteria: Generally clear learning outcomes. Pass / Fail and 1—5 grading systems.

Appendix 5 Research participant consent form

Ethical review of research

SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPING DRAMATIC VOICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXPERIENCES OF SOPRANO STUDENTS CATEGORISED AS 'DRAMATIC.'

The research is about exploring how dramatic voice types are supported during higher education through how students experience their vocal development and whether there are areas that could be improved in their education.

To be filled in by the research participant:

Participation in the research is voluntary. I can discontinue my participation in the research at any time without stating the reason. The discontinuation will not have any consequences for myself, but data that has been collected of me up until that point may still be used in the research.

I have read the data protection statement, which includes the grounds for processing personal data.

Yes ☐

No ☐

I give my consent for the interview to be recorded for transcription purposes.

Yes ☐

No ☐

I give my consent for being contacted for follow-up research.

Yes ☐

No ☐

By signing the consent form, I express my willingness to participate in the research and approve that my data will be used for research as described in the information sheet and give my consent for having my data used for the purpose stated above the “Yes” boxes that I have ticked. If I have ticked the box that says “No”, it means that I do not give my consent to use my data for the stated purpose. I will still participate in the research.

Research participant’s signature

Name in block letters

Researcher’s contact details:
Yolanda Harding
Uniarts Helsinki

Appendix 5 Participant information sheet

SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPING DRAMATIC VOICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXPERIENCES OF SOPRANO STUDENTS CATEGORISED AS 'DRAMATIC.'

Request to participate in the research

The research is about exploring how dramatic voice types are supported in higher education through understanding your individual experiences in relation to your vocal development and journey to becoming a 'Dramatic Soprano'.

The research is also to see if there are any shared experiences, or reoccurring themes in relation to vocal education and teaching practices. Plus, to find out how systems, thinking, approaches have changed in 10 years. I would also like to know what you would improve or like to see change within the education system and curriculum

Contact person for the research

Researcher: Yolanda Harding

Email:

Puh:

Research organisation(s) and funding

Research organisation(s): *Uniarts Helsinki*

Research funding: No funding

Voluntary participation

Participation in the research is voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the research or discontinue your participation at any time without reporting the reason and without consequences. If you want to cancel your participation, inform the researcher:

Research process

There will be one official interview on Zoom or in person.
after that I may contact you in order to verify quotes, information or follow up on some questions via email.
Please reserve around two hours maximum for the interview time.
it is a semi-structured interview in order to facilitate discussion rather than a series of questions.
Before or after the interview date, please fill in and email back the short questionnaire.

Compensation paid for participation

No remuneration is paid for participation in the research.

Research results

The final paper, as part of this study, will be published through the university of Arts Helsinki library.

It will be available online

Appendix 6 Data protection notice

SIBELIUS ACADEMY
UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS
HELSINKI

4th November 2025

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET PRIVACY NOTICE

SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPING DRAMATIC VOICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXPERIENCES OF SOPRANO STUDENTS CATEGORISED AS 'DRAMATIC.'

REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

You are requested to participate in a research project that examines how dramatic voices are supported in higher education.

A total of 4 individuals are requested to participate in the research, including students and alumni of a higher music education programmes (including universities and conservatoires) within Europe.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in the research is voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the research or discontinue your participation at any time without reporting the reason and without consequences. If you want to cancel your participation, inform the researcher:

RESEARCH PROCESS

The research is about exploring how dramatic voice types are supported during higher education through how students experience their vocal development and whether there are areas that could be improved in their education.

The research will be conducted during the academic year of 2025-2026.

Each participant will be interviewed at least once and please reserve two hours for the interview time.

FUNDING FOR THE RESEARCH

No funding

COMPENSATION PAID FOR PARTICIPATION

No remuneration is paid for participation in the research.

RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS

***The final paper, as part of this study, will be published through the University of the Arts Helsinki library.
It will be available online.***

DATA CONTROLLER(S) AND RESEARCHERS

The data controller of this research is:

- a) A researcher or a research group: this option is applicable when the principal investigator / research group is funded by a grant or some other funding or if the researcher is a doctoral student who does not have an employment relationship with Uniarts Helsinki. Provide the contact information of the researcher.
- b) Uniarts Helsinki, P.O. Box 1, 00097 Uniarts, business ID 2500305-6.
Uniarts Helsinki's Data Protection Officer: [privacy\(at\)uniarts.fi](mailto:privacy(at)uniarts.fi).

Principal investigator: Yolanda Harding

Contact person(s):

Processors of personal data:

The processor of personal data is Yolanda Harding

A DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCESSING OF PERSONAL DATA IN SCIENTIFIC RE-SEARCH ((EU 2016/679) articles 13, 14 and 30)

1. Personal data to be processed in the research

The following personal data about you will be collected: name, email address, phone number, audio recording, interview notes, voice, age, nationality, where you studied.

Data that concerns you and is needed in the research is also collected from other personal data files.

2. Legal grounds for processing personal data in research/archiving (Archives Act 831/1994)

The research participant's explicit consent (article 6 (1) (a) of the EU GDPR (EU 2016/679))

3. Transfer of personal data outside the EU/EEA area

- ☐ will be transferred
- ☐ will not be transferred

outside the EU/EEA area.

4. Protection of personal data

Personal data to be processed in the research will be protected:

- ☐ **by allowing access only with a user account and password**
- ☐ by registering each use
- ☐ by storing the data in a locked (physical) space
- ☐ **the members of the research group have completed data protection training where they have learned about the processing of personal data**
- ☐ in some other way, how: pseudonymisation

If the research requires an ethical review, has the review been carried out? (more information: www.tenk.fi):

- ☐ Yes ☐ **No**

A **separate impact assessment** has been carried out, and the data protection officer has been consulted concerning the impact assessment:

- ☐ Yes ☐ **No**, because the principal investigator has checked that an impact assessment is not mandatory.

5. Anonymisation

- ☐ **The data is anonymised in the compilation phase of the material (all (direct and indirect) identifiers are removed completely, making it impossible to restore identifiable data and no new data can be added to the material).**
- ☐ Direct identifiers are removed as a precaution at the time of compiling the material (pseudonymised material, in which case identifiable data can be restored with a code or equivalent information and new data can be added to the material).
- ☐ The material is analysed with direct identifiers, because...

- ☐ You will be requested for your explicit consent to have your personal data published when reporting research results (e.g. expert interviews).

6. Processing of personal data after the research has been completed

The research register is destroyed by deleting all files and any metadata related to it, by the end of 2027.

The consent forms will also be destroyed.

RIGHTS OF THE DATA SUBJECT

Withdrawal of consent (article 7 of the GDPR)

You have the right to withdraw your consent, if the processing of personal data is done based on consent. The withdrawal of consent shall not affect the lawfulness of processing based on consent before its withdrawal.

Right of access to the data (article 15 of the GDPR)

You have the right to receive information on whether your personal data is being processed and what personal data is being processed. You may also choose to request a copy of the personal data that is being processed.

Right to rectification (article 16 of the GDPR)

If there are inaccuracies or errors in your personal data that is being processed, you have the right to request that the data is rectified or supplemented.

Right to erasure (article 17 of the GDPR)

You have the right to request the erasure of your personal data in certain circumstances. However, the data subject has no right to have data erased if the erasure of data renders impossible or seriously impairs the achievement of the objective of the processing in scientific research.

Right to restriction of processing (article 18 of the GDPR)

You have the right to restrict the processing of your personal data in certain situations, for example in case you contest the accuracy of your personal data.

Right to data portability (article 20 of the GDPR)

You have the right to receive the personal data that you have provided in a structured, commonly used and machine-readable format as well as the right to transmit the data to another controller, if it is possible and if the processing is carried out by automated means.

Right to object (article 21 of the GDPR)

You have the right to object to the processing of your personal data if the processing is based on public interest or legitimate interest. In this case, the university cannot process your personal data unless it can demonstrate compelling legitimate grounds for the processing which override your rights.

Derogation from the rights of the data subject

In specific individual cases, derogations from the aforementioned rights may be possible in accordance with what has been laid out in the GDPR and the Data Protection Act in so far as these rights prevent or greatly impair the achievement of a scientific or historical research purpose or a statistical purpose. The need to derogate from the rights is always assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Profiling and automated decision-making

Your personal data will not be used in automated decision-making in the research. In the research, the aim of the processing of personal data is not the assessment of your personal qualities, i.e. profiling, and instead, your personal data and characteristics will be assessed from the perspective of more large-scale scientific research.

Yolanda Harding

Exercise of the rights of data subject

If you have questions about the rights of the data subject, you can contact the Data Protection Officer of Uniarts Helsinki (privacy(at)uniarts.fi).

Requests concerning exercise of rights: <https://www.uniarts.fi/en/general-info/data-protection-at-uniarts-helsinki/>

Notifications on suspected or confirmed information security breaches to Uniarts Helsinki: privacy(at)uniarts.fi

You have the right to lodge a complaint especially to the supervisory authority of your permanent place of residence or work if you find that the processing of personal data violates the EU's General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679. In Finland, the supervisory authority is the Data Protection Ombudsman.

The up-to-date contact details of the Office of the Data Protection Ombudsman are available here: <https://tietosuoja.fi/en/contact-information>