

# Instructional management strategies for Isan folk music ear training in Thai higher education

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Accepted 11 May, 2026

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## ABSTRACT

Isan folk music is a significant cultural heritage of Northeastern Thailand, but ear training for this tradition in higher education is often taught through approaches influenced by Western music theory, notation, solfeggio, and conventional aural training. This study examined teaching practices for ear training in Isan folk music within Thai higher education in order to clarify how traditional musical knowledge can be organized within formal academic settings without losing its cultural identity. A qualitative descriptive research design was employed. The research sites consisted of five higher education institutions in Northeastern Thailand offering music-related programs connected with Isan folk music, music education, practical music, or ear training. Key informants were selected through purposive sampling and included teachers from the selected institutions and three Isan folk music experts, consisting of two national artists and one academic specialist. Data were collected through curriculum document analysis and structured interviews. The data were analyzed using content analysis and thematic synthesis. The findings revealed six major teaching practices: oral transmission as the foundation of learning, listening, imitation and repetition, rhythmic and melodic recognition in Isan musical contexts, instrumental sound identification, integration of Western music concepts with local musical knowledge, and performance-based assessment. The study concludes that aural training in Isan folk music should be organized as a culturally grounded and performance-based pedagogy. Further research should develop instructional materials, assessment tools, and digital listening resources that support Isan folk music learning in higher education.

**Keywords:** Isan folk music, Thai higher education, traditional music pedagogy, ear training, teaching practice.

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## INTRODUCTION

Isan folk music is an important cultural heritage of Northeastern Thailand and remains closely connected with the everyday life, beliefs, language, and social identity of local communities (Chaiyachartkittyos et al., 2025; Julakarn, 2025). It functions not only as entertainment but also as a cultural medium used in rituals, festivals, ceremonies, social gatherings, and community performances. The music reflects the way people communicate emotion, memory, humor, belief, and collective experience through sound. Its musical character is shaped by oral transmission, memorization, imitation, improvisation, local melodic patterns, rhythmic movement,

and the distinctive timbres of folk instruments such as the khaen, phin, wot, pong lang, and traditional percussion (Homhuan and Sensai, 2024; Occhipinti, 2020; Seeyo, 2021). These musical practices have been transmitted from generation to generation mainly through listening, observing, singing, and performing. Therefore, learning Isan folk music depends strongly on the ear, the body, the memory, and direct participation in musical practice rather than written notation alone (Choatchamrat et al., 2022).

In the traditional context, the teaching and learning of Isan folk music usually occur through close interaction between teacher and learner (Champadaeng et al., 2023;

Drandić et al., 2021). Learners observe how the teacher sings, plays, gestures, phrases melodies, controls rhythm, and responds to the musical situation. They gradually absorb musical knowledge through repeated listening and practice. This process allows learners to understand not only pitch and rhythm but also style, expression, tone color, melodic contour, rhythmic flexibility, and cultural meaning (Feldman et al., 2020; Guo et al., 2024). Such knowledge is often difficult to explain fully through written symbols because many important details exist in performance practice. The sound of the khaen, the articulation of the phin, the rhythmic energy of pong lang, and the vocal style of molam all require careful listening and imitation. For this reason, ear training is not an additional skill in Isan folk music education; it is a central foundation of musical learning (Jian et al., 2024; Obeng et al., 2022; Seow, 2024).

In Thai higher education, music programs have increasingly included traditional music and folk music as part of formal curricula (Hanteerapitak and Juangprakhon, 2021). This development has created opportunities for preserving and promoting local musical knowledge in academic institutions. However, the teaching of ear training in many higher education contexts has often been influenced by Western music theory, solfeggio, staff notation, interval training, chord recognition, and conventional melodic dictation (Olsen, 2025; Senchantichai and Rodsakan, 2024; Shakya, 2024). These approaches are useful for general music education because they provide systematic ways to develop listening accuracy and theoretical understanding. Nevertheless, they may not fully respond to the sound system, learning tradition, and performance practice of Isan folk music. Students who specialize in folk music may encounter difficulties when the learning materials are based mainly on Western tonal patterns, Western notation, or musical examples that are distant from their cultural and performance experience (Wang and Webb, 2024; Zhao, 2023).

This situation creates an important pedagogical problem in higher education. Isan folk music requires refined listening skills, especially in recognizing melodic contour, modal character, rhythmic pattern, instrumental timbre, local vocal style, and performance nuance (Khuntajan, 2024; Li and Ismail, 2025). At the same time, university education requires course planning, learning outcomes, teaching materials, assessment criteria, and academic explanation (Biggs et al., 2022; Brown, 2020; Hidayah, 2022). Traditional oral teaching alone may not provide sufficient structure for formal curriculum design and evaluation, while Western-based ear training alone may not be culturally appropriate for students of Isan folk music. Teachers, therefore, face the challenge of combining traditional methods with formal educational procedures (Alan et al., 2026; Julakarn, 2025; Wu and Chuangprakhon, 2024). They need to design learning

activities that allow students to listen, imitate, sing, play, read, analyze, and perform while still maintaining the cultural identity of Isan folk music (Inyang, 2022; Wiset and Champadaeng, 2024).

For these reasons, it is necessary to examine how ear training for Isan folk music is actually taught in Thai higher education. Understanding current teaching practices can reveal how teachers organize content, select learning materials, use oral transmission, apply notation, integrate theory and practice, and assess student learning. This study focuses on teaching practices rather than the development of a new instructional model. It emphasizes the instructional realities found in higher education institutions and the pedagogical perspectives of teachers and folk music experts. The study aims to contribute to educational research by clarifying how traditional music knowledge can be organized within formal higher education without losing its cultural and musical identity. Its central objective is to examine teaching practices for ear training in Isan folk music within Thai higher education.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This section describes the methodological procedures used to examine teaching practices for aural training in Isan folk music within Thai higher education. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed because it is suitable for presenting a clear and direct account of participants' experiences, institutional practices, and educational phenomena (Sandelowski, 2000). Data from documents and interviews were analyzed through content analysis and thematic synthesis to identify recurring instructional patterns and pedagogical meanings (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Elo and Kyngäs, 2008).

### Research design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine teaching practices for ear training in Isan folk music within Thai higher education. This design was appropriate because the study did not aim to test an experimental treatment or measure learning achievement statistically. Instead, it sought to describe and interpret how ear training for Isan folk music was taught, how teachers organized learning activities, what kinds of musical materials were used, and how traditional folk music knowledge was adapted into formal higher education. The study emphasized the actual instructional practices found in higher education institutions and the perspectives of teachers and Isan folk music experts. Data were obtained from curriculum-related documents, structured interviews, and field information. The overall process focused on identifying recurring patterns of teaching, learning, assessment, and cultural transmission.

**Table 1.** Overview of the research design.

Component	Description
Research approach	Qualitative descriptive research
Main focus	Teaching practices for ear training in Isan folk music
Research context	Thai higher education institutions offering music-related programs
Main data sources	Curriculum documents, teacher interviews, and expert interviews
Analytical focus	Teaching methods, learning activities, materials, assessment, and cultural transmission
Expected outcome	A thematic explanation of teaching practices in aural training for Isan folk music

### Research site and informants

The research sites consisted of five higher education institutions in Northeastern Thailand. These institutions were selected because they offered music programs or courses related to music education, folk music, Isan music, practical music, music theory, or ear training. The selection of these sites allowed the study to examine teaching practices across different institutional contexts rather than relying on only one program or one teacher. This helped provide a broader understanding of how this form of aural training was positioned within formal university education.

The informants were selected through purposive sampling. They were divided into two groups. The first

group consisted of five teacher informants, one from each of the five selected higher education institutions in Northeastern Thailand. These teachers taught ear training, music theory, practical music, or courses related to Isan folk music. The second group consisted of three Isan folk music experts, including two national artists and one academic specialist. These informants were selected because they had direct experience in teaching, performing, transmitting, or academically explaining Isan folk music. No personal names are presented in this manuscript in order to maintain confidentiality and to focus the discussion on pedagogical issues rather than individual identities.

**Table 2.** Research sites and informant groups.

Category	Description	Selection rationale
Higher education institutions	Five institutions in Northeastern Thailand	They offered music-related programs connected with ear training or Isan folk music
Teacher informants	Five teacher informants, one from each selected higher education institution	They provided information about actual teaching practices in ear training, music theory, practical music, or Isan folk music courses
Folk music expert informants	Three experts in Isan folk music, including two national artists and one academic specialist	They provided perspectives on oral transmission, performance practice, and cultural knowledge

### Data collection methods

Data collection was conducted in three main stages. The first stage was document analysis. The researcher reviewed curriculum documents, course descriptions, teaching materials, and related academic documents in order to understand the position of ear training within music programs. This stage provided background information about course organization, content structure, and the relationship between formal music education and folk music learning.

The second stage involved structured interviews with teachers from the five higher education institutions. The interviews focused on course organization, teaching sequence, learning activities, instructional media, use of

notation, selection of folk music materials, student learning problems, and assessment methods. These interviews helped reveal how teachers translated Isan folk music knowledge into classroom practice. The third stage involved structured interviews with Isan folk music experts. These interviews focused on traditional teaching and learning processes, oral transmission, sound imitation, memorization, rhythmic and melodic practice, local language, molam rhythm, folk instrument timbre, and the cultural meaning of performance. The expert interviews helped clarify the musical and cultural foundations that should inform ear training pedagogy in higher education. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

**Table 3.** Data collection procedures.

Stage	Data collection activity	Main focus	Procedure
1	Document analysis	Curriculum structure, course descriptions, teaching materials, and academic documents	Relevant documents, research, curriculum information, and teaching-related materials were reviewed to identify knowledge related to ear training, Isan folk music, and teaching practices.
2	Teacher interviews and field information	Teaching methods, content selection, learning activities, instructional media, and assessment	Structured interviews were conducted with teacher informants representing the five selected higher education institutions. Field information from classroom-based teaching situations was also used to support interpretation.
3	Expert interviews	Oral transmission, listening practice, folk music style, instrument sound, and cultural meaning	Structured interviews were conducted with three Isan folk music experts, including two national artists and one academic specialist.

**Data analysis**

The data were analyzed through content analysis and thematic synthesis. First, all data were organized according to source, including curriculum documents, teacher interviews, expert interviews, and field information from classroom-based teaching situations. The researcher repeatedly reviewed the data to identify meaningful units related to teaching practices, learning activities, musical content, instructional materials, and assessment. Initial codes were then assigned to recurring instructional issues, including oral transmission, listening practice, rhythm, melody, instrumental sound, notation, performance, technology, cultural context, and assessment.

The coding process was conducted in four steps. First, meaningful units of data were identified from documents, interviews, and field information. Second, initial codes were assigned to statements or information related to teaching methods, learning activities, musical materials, and assessment practices. Third, similar codes were

grouped into broader categories, such as oral transmission, listening and imitation, rhythmic and melodic recognition, instrumental sound identification, notation and theory, and performance-based assessment. Fourth, these categories were synthesized into themes that directly addressed the research objective.

Data saturation was considered during the repeated review and comparison of data sources. The analysis was considered sufficient when additional information from documents, teacher informants, expert informants, and field information confirmed existing categories rather than producing new teaching-practice themes. Theme consistency was checked through data triangulation and code-theme comparison. Each theme was compared with the original data sources to ensure that it was supported by evidence from more than one source where possible. The codes within each theme were also reviewed to determine whether they shared a coherent pedagogical meaning.

**Table 4.** Data analysis framework.

Analytical step	Description
Data organization	Arranging data by source, including curriculum documents, teacher interviews, expert interviews, and field information
Data review	Repeatedly reading and reviewing the data to identify meaningful instructional information
Initial coding	Assigning codes to data related to teaching methods, listening practice, rhythm, melody, instrument sound, notation, performance, and assessment
Code grouping	Combining similar codes into broader instructional categories
Cross-source comparison	Comparing categories across documents, teacher informants, expert informants, and field information
Data saturation consideration	Determining whether additional data confirmed existing categories rather than producing new teaching-practice themes

**Table 4.** Continues.

Thematic synthesis	Developing major themes related to teaching practices for aural training in Isan folk music
Theme consistency checking	Comparing each theme with the original data sources and reviewing whether codes within each theme shared a coherent pedagogical meaning
Interpretation	Explaining the pedagogical meaning of each theme in relation to the research objective

These procedures strengthened the trustworthiness of the analysis by linking the final themes back to the original data sources and by reducing dependence on a single source of evidence. Selected excerpts from the interview and field data were translated from Thai into English and anonymized using source-based labels, such as teacher interview data, expert interview data, and interview and field data.

### Ethical considerations

The study respected the rights, dignity, and privacy of all participants. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the academic use of the data. Participation was voluntary, and the information was used only for research purposes. The interview forms used identification codes instead of personal names, and the manuscript presents informants by role rather than by individual identity. Institutional and personal identities were treated carefully. In presenting the results, the study avoided naming individual informants and focused instead on teaching practices, instructional patterns, and pedagogical themes. The study did not evaluate individual teachers or institutions but aimed to understand how ear training for Isan folk music could be taught more appropriately in Thai higher education.

## RESULTS

The results showed that teaching practices for ear training in Isan folk music within Thai higher education were not based on a single instructional method. Rather, they were formed through the combination of traditional oral transmission, formal music education, listening practice, practical performance, cultural explanation, and the selective use of modern instructional media. The analysis of curriculum information, teacher interviews, and expert interviews revealed that ear training for Isan folk music was understood not only as the ability to recognize pitch or rhythm, but also as the ability to listen, imitate, remember, sing, perform, distinguish instrumental timbre, understand musical context, and respond appropriately in ensemble performance. Six major teaching practices emerged from the analysis.

### Oral transmission as the foundation of learning

The first major teaching practice was oral transmission. The informants consistently indicated that Isan folk music is traditionally learned through listening, memorization, imitation, and repeated practice. This approach remains important in higher education because many musical details in Isan folk music cannot be fully communicated through written notation. These details include melodic ornamentation, rhythmic flexibility, vocal nuance, instrumental tone, expressive phrasing, and the relationship between sound and cultural meaning.

One translated interview excerpt illustrates the central role of oral transmission in this learning process: "Students should first listen to the teacher's sound. After that, they imitate the phrase by singing or playing. Some details of Isan folk music cannot be understood from notation alone" (Expert interview data). This excerpt shows that oral transmission is not simply an informal practice, but a systematic way of transmitting musical knowledge through listening, imitation, memory, and bodily performance.

In university settings, oral transmission was often combined with structured explanation. Teachers did not rely only on verbal lectures. They sang melodic patterns, played instruments, demonstrated rhythmic figures, and asked students to repeat the patterns until they could remember and reproduce them. This process developed students' listening memory and musical response. It also helped students understand stylistic features that are specific to Isan folk music, such as the flow of molam melody, the phrasing of folk instruments, and the sound identity of local ensembles.

### Listening, imitation and repetition

The second teaching practice was listening-based imitation and repetition. The findings revealed that teachers used repeated listening as a core strategy for developing aural recognition. Students were trained to listen to short musical phrases, rhythmic patterns, instrumental sounds, and melodic examples. Repetition was used to strengthen memory, accuracy, and musical confidence.

A translated interview excerpt illustrates how repeated listening supported imitation and musical memory: "The students listen first and then imitate the phrase. After

repeating it several times, they begin to remember the sound and can sing or play it more accurately” (Expert interview data). This excerpt indicates that listening, imitation, and repetition functioned as a progressive learning process. Students first internalized the sound through repeated exposure before connecting it to notation, theoretical explanation, or practical performance.

The listening activities identified in the study moved from simple to complex tasks. Students first listened to individual sounds or short patterns. They then compared different instruments, identified rhythmic figures, recognized melodic contours, and reproduced short phrases by voice or instrument. This sequence shows that aural training in Isan folk music is not only a theoretical classroom activity. It is an embodied musical practice in which listening leads to vocal response, instrumental response, and eventually performance.

### **Rhythmic and melodic recognition in Isan musical contexts**

The third major practice was the training of rhythm and melody within Isan musical contexts. Teachers and experts emphasized that rhythm is central to Isan folk music, especially in molam, pong lang ensemble, and performance-based learning. Students needed to recognize pulse, tempo, accent, rhythmic cycle, and movement. Rhythmic training was often connected with clapping, singing, body movement, and instrumental practice.

Melodic recognition was also a central teaching practice. Students were trained to hear pitch direction, repeated tones, melodic contour, phrase shape, and modal character. Instead of using only Western melodic examples, effective teaching used local songs, molam phrases, and instrumental patterns familiar to Isan music culture. A translated interview excerpt illustrates how familiar local materials supported rhythmic and melodic recognition: “Luk thung songs with clear rhythm and familiar melody can help students enter molam singing more easily. After students become familiar with the melody, it can be adapted into lam style” (Expert interview data). This excerpt indicates that culturally familiar musical examples helped students understand rhythmic movement, melodic contour, and vocal phrasing before applying them to Isan folk music performance.

The findings suggest that rhythmic and melodic training should be grounded in the sound world of Isan music. Western ear training exercises may be useful, but they should be adapted to local musical materials. When students practice listening through Isan melodies, rhythmic patterns, and performance examples, they can connect ear training with the music they actually perform.

### **Instrumental sound identification**

The fourth teaching practice was instrumental sound

identification. Isan folk music has distinctive timbres produced by instruments such as khaen, phin, wot, pong lang, and traditional percussion. The informants indicated that students should be trained to identify these instruments by sound, describe their tone quality, and understand their role in ensemble texture.

A translated interview excerpt emphasizes the importance of instrumental timbre in ensemble listening: “Students need to listen to the sound of the whole ensemble and separate the sounds of khaen, phin, drums, and other instruments. When they can identify each sound correctly, they understand how each instrument works in the group” (Expert interview data). This excerpt suggests that instrumental sound identification supports not only listening accuracy but also ensemble awareness.

In practice, teachers used listening activities in which students compared the sounds of different instruments. They identified whether a sound came from khaen, phin, wot, pong lang, or percussion. They also discussed how each instrument contributed to melody, rhythm, texture, and performance energy. In some cases, students listened to recordings or live demonstrations and then described what they heard. These activities trained students to listen beyond pitch and rhythm. They learned to recognize color, texture, balance, and musical function.

This finding is important because timbre is often less emphasized in conventional ear training, which tends to focus on intervals, scales, chords, and melodic dictation. In Isan folk music, however, timbre is central to musical identity. A student who can hear the difference between khaen, phin, and pong lang is developing a culturally specific form of musicianship.

### **Integration of Western music concepts and local musical knowledge**

The fifth teaching practice was the integration of Western music concepts with local musical knowledge. The data from higher education institutions showed that teachers often used Western notation, rhythm symbols, solfeggio, interval concepts, and theoretical explanation to support formal learning. However, these tools were most effective when adapted to Isan folk music rather than applied directly without cultural adjustment.

A translated interview excerpt shows how notation was positioned as a supporting tool rather than the main source of learning: “Notation helps students understand the structure of the music, but the main learning must still come from listening, singing, and playing. Students should connect the written symbols with the sound they hear” (Teacher interview data). This view was also supported by expert interview data, which emphasized the importance of combining musicological knowledge with practical folk music learning. The findings suggest that notation and theory are useful when they help students understand sound, but they become limited if they are treated as the

only way to learn music.

Some teachers used notation to support the learning of folk melodies and rhythmic patterns. In other cases, students compared folk notation, Thai music symbols, and Western notation. This helped them understand the relationship between oral memory and written representation. Western music concepts were also used to explain rhythm, pitch, scale, structure, and ensemble organization. However, the most effective examples were drawn from Isan folk music itself.

The integration of Western and local knowledge was therefore not a simple mixture of two systems. It required careful pedagogical decision-making. Teachers needed to decide which Western concepts were useful, how to adapt them, and how to keep the Isan musical sound at the center of learning.

### Performance-based assessment

The sixth teaching practice was performance-based assessment. The findings showed that assessment in aural training for Isan folk music did not focus only on written tests or theoretical knowledge. Teachers considered students' ability to listen, sing, imitate, read, perform, and respond musically. Assessment activities included reproducing rhythmic patterns, identifying instrumental sounds, singing melodic phrases, reading notation, performing short musical examples, and playing in ensemble contexts.

A translated interview excerpt highlights the practical nature of assessment in this context: "Assessment should focus on listening skills and real performance. Students

should be tested by listening, singing, playing, and responding to the sound. Observation of learning behavior and musical work is also important" (Interview and field data). This excerpt indicates that assessment in Isan folk music should measure both aural understanding and practical musical action.

The findings indicate that performance-based assessment is appropriate for Isan folk music because the tradition is rooted in sound and practice. A student who understands the music should be able to demonstrate that understanding through musical action. Therefore, assessment should include listening accuracy, performance ability, rhythmic response, vocal or instrumental imitation, and cultural understanding.

Overall, the results reveal that teaching practices for aural training in Isan folk music within Thai higher education are culturally grounded and practice-oriented. They combine oral transmission, repeated listening, rhythmic and melodic recognition, instrumental sound identification, adapted notation, formal theory, technology, and performance-based assessment. These practices show that this form of aural pedagogy should not be understood as a direct transfer of Western ear training into a folk music curriculum. It should be organized as a culturally responsive listening pedagogy that connects hearing, memory, imitation, notation, performance, and cultural transmission.

Table 5 summarizes the evidence matrix of the six teaching practices identified from curriculum documents, teacher interviews, and expert interviews. The table shows how each practice was supported by the data and how it contributed to pedagogy for aural training in Isan folk music.

**Table 5.** Evidence matrix of teaching practices for Isan folk music ear training.

Teaching practice	Main evidence from data	Pedagogical interpretation
Oral transmission	Teachers and experts emphasized listening, memorization, imitation, and teacher demonstration.	Oral transmission remains the foundation for transmitting musical nuance that notation cannot fully represent.
Listening, imitation, and repetition	Informants described repeated listening, phrase imitation, and correction through teacher feedback.	Repetition helps students internalize sound before connecting it with notation or theory.
Rhythmic and melodic recognition	Teachers used molam phrases, folk songs, rhythmic patterns, and ensemble materials.	Ear training becomes more meaningful when based on local musical materials rather than abstract exercises.
Instrumental sound identification	Students were trained to distinguish khaen, phin, wot, pong lang, and percussion timbres.	Timbre recognition develops culturally specific listening and ensemble awareness.
Integration of Western and local knowledge	Teachers used notation, solfeggio, rhythm symbols, and theory as supporting tools.	Western concepts are useful when adapted to Isan musical contexts and not used as replacements for oral learning.
Performance-based assessment	Assessment included listening tasks, singing, playing, rhythmic reproduction, and ensemble response.	Musical understanding should be measured through practical sound-based demonstration.

Taken together, the six teaching practices indicate that this form of aural training operates as an integrated pedagogical framework within Thai higher education. This framework is summarized in Figure 1.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of teaching practices for aural training in Isan folk music within Thai higher education. The framework consists of six interconnected practices: oral transmission as the

foundation, listening, imitation and repetition, local rhythmic and melodic contexts, instrumental sound identification, hybrid knowledge integration, and performance-based assessment. These components show how this form of ear training balances traditional oral learning with formal academic requirements while maintaining local musical identity, practical listening skills, and culturally grounded performance competence.

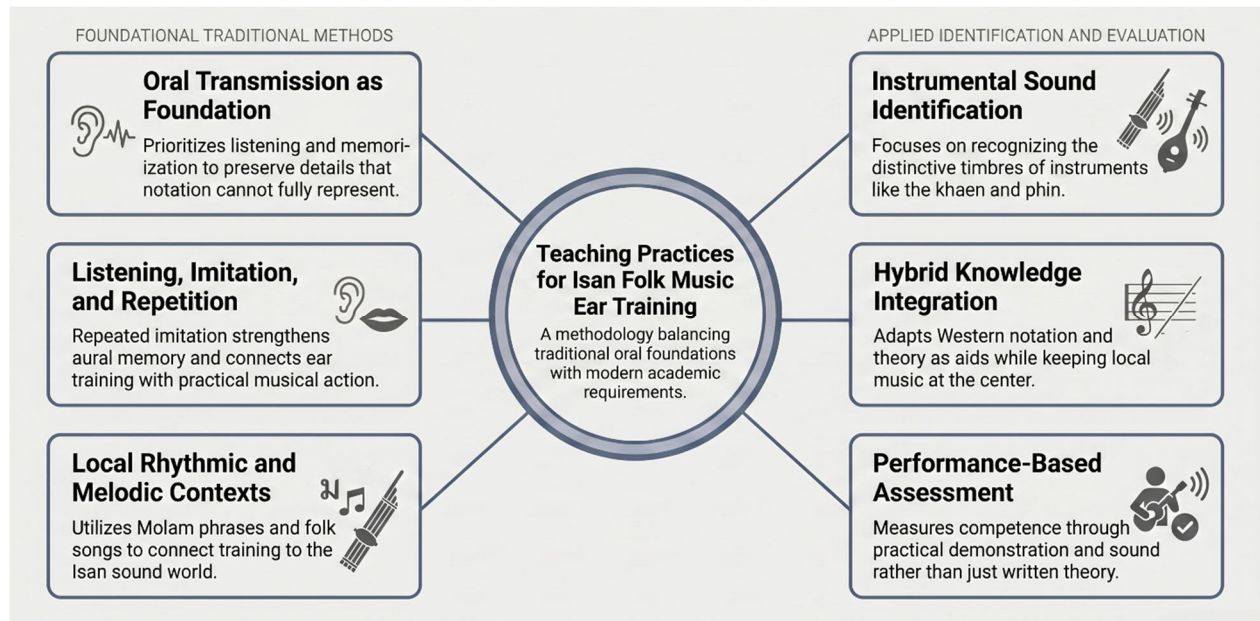


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of teaching practices for Isan folk music ear training in Thai higher education.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that instructional management for aural training in Isan folk music within Thai higher education should be understood as a culturally grounded pedagogical process rather than a direct transfer of conventional Western ear training. The six teaching practices identified in this study, namely oral transmission, listening and repetition, rhythmic and melodic recognition, instrumental sound identification, hybrid knowledge integration, and performance-based assessment, show that ear training in Isan folk music is deeply connected with sound, memory, imitation, performance, and cultural meaning. This finding is consistent with studies emphasizing that traditional and folk music education depends strongly on oral transmission, embodied learning, and teacher-learner interaction (Champadaeng et al., 2023; Drandić et al., 2021; Occhipinti, 2020). It also supports the view that musical understanding is not limited to theoretical knowledge but develops through active listening, repeated practice, and performance experience (Feldman et al., 2020; Seow, 2024).

The results are also consistent with the theoretical principles of constructive alignment in higher education, which emphasize the alignment of learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment methods (Biggs et al., 2022). This curricular orientation is also consistent with Blândul's view that curriculum should be organized around educational objectives and the learning experiences through which students are expected to demonstrate achievement (Blândul, 2023). In the context of Isan folk music, effective ear training requires learning activities that align with the actual sound world of the music. Students should not only identify intervals, rhythms, or notation symbols but should also recognize melodic contour, rhythmic movement, instrumental timbre, molam style, and ensemble response. This supports the argument that higher education curricula should be designed around authentic learning tasks and meaningful assessment (Brown, 2020). However, the findings also reveal a partial inconsistency with conventional ear training pedagogy that often privileges Western notation, solfeggio, chord recognition, and melodic dictation. While these methods are useful, they may become insufficient when applied to

Isan folk music without adaptation. Similar concerns have been raised in studies on traditional music education, where culturally distant examples may limit students' engagement and understanding (Wang and Webb, 2024; Zhao, 2023).

Another important discussion point is the role of notation and formal theory. The study found that Western notation and theoretical concepts can support learning, but they should function as pedagogical tools rather than replace oral and listening-based learning. This finding is consistent with research on the transmission of indigenous and folk music, which suggests that local musical knowledge must remain central when traditional music is taught in formal education (Julakarn, 2025; Wiset and Champadaeng, 2024). In this study, teachers used notation, theory, and structured curriculum procedures to support academic learning, while still maintaining listening, imitation, and performance as the core of instruction. Therefore, effective instructional management requires a balanced relationship between traditional transmission and formal educational requirements.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that ear training for Isan folk music in Thai higher education should be organized as a culturally responsive and performance-based pedagogy. The findings suggest that instruction should begin with oral transmission and repeated listening, move toward rhythmic and melodic recognition, include instrumental sound identification, integrate notation and theory selectively, and assess students through practical musical demonstration. This approach can help preserve the cultural identity of Isan folk music while making it teachable and accessible within higher education. Future research should examine the effectiveness of these teaching practices with students in actual classroom settings, develop standardized learning materials for aural training in Isan folk music, and compare different approaches to assessment across higher education institutions. Further studies may also explore the use of digital tools, audio databases, and interactive applications to support listening practice without weakening the role of teacher demonstration and cultural transmission.

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**Citation:** Seeyo, W., Karin, K., and Chuangprakhon, S. (2026). Instructional management strategies for Isan folk music ear training in Thai higher education. *African Educational Research Journal*, 14(2), 408-417.

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