

THE MAIN COMPETENCIES OF THE MUSIC TEACHER

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Annotation: *This article analyzes the key professional competencies required for an effective music teacher in modern education. Music teaching is not limited to performance skills or theoretical knowledge; it also demands pedagogical mastery, psychological awareness, digital literacy, creativity, communication abilities, and cultural competence. The article explores the essential competencies of a music educator, reviews scientific and pedagogical literature on the topic, and presents a structured competency-based framework. The study emphasizes the importance of integrating innovative teaching methods, inclusive practices, and technology into music education. The results highlight that successful music teachers combine artistic expertise with strong educational strategies, emotional intelligence, and continuous professional development.*

Keywords: *Music teacher, professional competency, pedagogical skills, musical literacy, performance ability, creativity, communication competence, digital competence, inclusive education, artistic development.*

In the modern education system, the role of a music teacher has become increasingly complex and multidimensional. Traditionally, music education was primarily focused on developing students' vocal skills, instrumental abilities, and basic musical literacy. However, contemporary educational reforms and competency-based learning approaches require teachers to develop broader capacities, not only in music performance but also in pedagogy, psychology, communication, and technological integration.

Music education plays a significant role in shaping students' emotional development, creativity, aesthetic taste, cultural identity, and social interaction. Therefore, music teachers are expected to act as educators, mentors, cultural transmitters, and creative leaders. They must be capable of guiding students in both technical musical development and personal growth.

The success of music education depends heavily on the teacher's competencies. Competencies refer to a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and personal qualities that enable an individual to perform professional tasks effectively. For music teachers, competencies include musical expertise, teaching methodology, classroom management, assessment skills, creative thinking, and the ability to adapt to diverse student needs.

This article aims to analyze the key competencies required for music teachers and present a structured understanding of the professional qualities needed in the modern educational environment.

The competency-based approach has become one of the most important educational concepts in the 21st century. Researchers and educational theorists emphasize that teacher professionalism should be evaluated not only by academic knowledge but also by practical and psychological preparedness.

In pedagogical literature, teacher competencies are often divided into general pedagogical competencies and subject-specific competencies. According to modern educational theorists, the teacher's role is not simply to deliver information but to organize learning activities, motivate learners, and create a positive educational environment.

Studies in music pedagogy highlight that music teachers require specialized competencies different from other subject teachers. Scholars in music education emphasize the importance of musical hearing, rhythmic sensitivity, vocal and instrumental skills, interpretative abilities, and artistic creativity. These skills are considered fundamental for professional music teaching.

In addition, educational psychology literature stresses that music education strongly influences students' emotions, self-esteem, and social behavior. Therefore, music teachers must demonstrate high emotional intelligence, empathy, and communication competence. Researchers point out that the music classroom is often an emotionally active environment, requiring the teacher to manage students' motivation and emotional expression carefully.

Modern scientific works also focus on the growing importance of digital competence in music education. The use of music software, online learning platforms, digital instruments, and multimedia tools has transformed the teaching process. Music teachers are now required to integrate technology to support effective instruction, especially in distance learning contexts.

Furthermore, inclusive education has become a major theme in teacher competency research. Music teachers must be able to adapt teaching methods for learners with disabilities, diverse cultural backgrounds, or different learning abilities. Researchers highlight that music can serve as a powerful tool for inclusion and social integration.

The main competencies of a music teacher encompass a broad integration of advanced musical expertise, sophisticated pedagogical knowledge, interpersonal effectiveness, leadership abilities, and ongoing professional commitment. These competencies apply across contexts such as school-based general music, choral, instrumental, or ensemble programs, as well as private studio teaching, though emphasis shifts depending on the setting (e.g., K-12 certification standards versus independent instruction). They draw from established frameworks like those of the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), National Association of Schools of Music (NASM), state certification guidelines (e.g., Arkansas, Michigan updates around 2025-2026), and professional bodies such as MTNA.

Deep Musicianship and Content Knowledge

A music teacher must possess comprehensive mastery of music as both an art form and a discipline. This includes:

- Thorough command of music theory fundamentals and advanced concepts: scales, modes, harmony (diatonic, chromatic, extended tertian, modal), counterpoint, rhythm/meter in complex patterns, form (binary, ternary, rondo, sonata, fugue, variation), orchestration basics, and analytical tools for structural, harmonic, and textural elements.

- High-level aural skills: advanced ear training for interval/chord identification, melodic/rhythmic dictation, harmonic progression recognition, and error detection in performance or recordings.

- Proficiency in performance on primary instrument(s) or voice at a level demonstrating technical command, expressive nuance, stylistic authenticity, and stage presence; many standards require solo recital experience and ensemble participation across varied repertoires.

- Functional keyboard skills sufficient for accompaniment, transposition, harmonization, improvisation, and classroom demonstration (e.g., realizing figured bass, playing from lead sheets, or improvising simple accompaniments).

- Broad historical and cultural knowledge: characteristics of major Western periods (Medieval through contemporary), American music traditions, non-Western/global musics, popular/commercial styles, and their socio-cultural roles and functions.

- Familiarity with diverse repertoires, including standard literature, contemporary works, world music traditions, and inclusive selections that represent varied identities, eras, and genres.

Pedagogical Expertise and Instructional Design

Effective music teaching requires translating musical knowledge into structured, student-centered learning experiences:

- Ability to design sequential, standards-aligned curricula and long-term plans that address the artistic processes of Creating (improvising, composing, arranging), Performing (selecting, rehearsing, presenting), Responding (analyzing, interpreting, evaluating), and Connecting (relating music to contexts, personal meaning, other disciplines).

- Skill in differentiated and inclusive instruction: assessing individual student aptitudes, prior experiences, developmental stages, learning styles, special needs, and cultural backgrounds to adapt methods, pacing, materials, and goals.

- Command of multiple methodologies and approaches (e.g., Kodály, Orff-Schulwerk, Dalcroze, Suzuki, comprehensive musicianship, modern technology integration, project-based learning) and the ability to select, modify, or combine them based on context and evidence of effectiveness.

- Expertise in teaching specific domains: vocal technique and health (breath support, resonance, diction, register transitions), instrumental technique across families (posture, embouchure, bowing, fingerings), ensemble skills (blend, intonation, balance, phrasing), and general music concepts (literacy, listening, creative expression).

- Integration of technology: notation software, digital audio workstations, recording/editing tools, online platforms for remote/hybrid instruction, apps for practice and assessment, and understanding of their pedagogical applications and limitations.

Conducting, Rehearsal Leadership, and Ensemble Direction

For teachers working with groups (choirs, bands, orchestras, etc.):

- Advanced conducting technique: clear, expressive gesture; score study integrating analysis, historical performance practice, instrumentation/orchestration, and interpretive decisions; ability to lead rehearsals that build musical independence and ensemble cohesion.

- Rehearsal strategies: diagnosing ensemble issues (intonation, rhythm, dynamics, articulation, style), implementing targeted fixes, pacing rehearsals efficiently, fostering student leadership roles, and preparing musically compelling performances.

- Knowledge of appropriate literature selection: matching difficulty to student ability while challenging growth, ensuring diversity in style/culture/era, and addressing programming balance and educational value.

Assessment, Feedback, and Reflective Practice

Competent music teachers systematically evaluate progress and refine their own work:

- Designing and implementing varied assessments: formative (observation, questioning, self-reflection), summative (performances, portfolios, written/theory tests), and authentic measures aligned to standards and learning goals.

- Providing specific, actionable, growth-oriented feedback that addresses technique, musicality, expression, and conceptual understanding while building student self-assessment capacity.

- Using data to adjust instruction, modify plans, and document student growth over time.

- Engaging in ongoing self-reflection, professional learning, and adaptation to evolving educational research, standards revisions (e.g., recent state updates emphasizing musicianship, professionalism, and development), and classroom realities.

Interpersonal, Classroom Management, and Professional Dispositions

These "soft" but essential competencies enable sustained student engagement and program success:

- Exceptional communication: clear verbal/non-verbal explanation of abstract musical ideas, active listening, encouragement, and the ability to motivate diverse learners.

- Patience, empathy, cultural responsiveness, and equity focus: creating psychologically safe, inclusive environments that honor student identities, backgrounds, and perspectives while addressing biases.

- Strong classroom/lesson management: establishing routines, maintaining engagement, handling disruptions constructively, and fostering positive group dynamics in both individual and large-group settings.

- Professionalism: ethical conduct, collaboration with colleagues/parents/administrators, advocacy for music education, program administration (budgets, scheduling, equipment), and commitment to lifelong learning through conferences, research, and certification maintenance.

In summary, an exemplary music teacher integrates profound musical artistry with expert teaching craft, adaptive leadership, and genuine care for students' holistic development. They go beyond transmitting knowledge to cultivate lifelong musical literacy, creativity, appreciation, and emotional connection to music, while continuously evolving to meet the needs of changing learners and educational landscapes.

The results indicate that music teacher competencies are broader than subject knowledge. While musical expertise remains central, the effectiveness of teaching depends on a combination of pedagogical and psychological abilities.

One major issue in music education is that some teachers focus primarily on performance skills while ignoring modern pedagogical requirements. This creates difficulties in engaging students, especially in competency-based learning environments where creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking are emphasized.

Another important finding is the increasing role of digital competence. The rapid development of technology has transformed the music classroom. Teachers who cannot use digital tools may fail to meet student expectations and modern educational standards. Technology also provides new opportunities for music creativity, composition, and interactive learning.

The discussion also highlights the importance of inclusive competence. Music has unique therapeutic and emotional power, making it especially valuable for students with special needs. A competent teacher can use music not only for education but also for social and emotional support.

Furthermore, cultural competence remains crucial. Music teachers have a responsibility to preserve national musical heritage while also introducing students to global musical traditions. This balance strengthens students' cultural identity and intercultural understanding.

In general, the competency framework demonstrates that music teachers must combine artistic talent with modern educational skills. The teacher's personality, emotional intelligence, and ability to inspire learners are equally important as technical musical mastery.

Conclusions

The study concludes that the key competencies of a music teacher include musical-professional competence, pedagogical competence, methodological competence, psychological and emotional competence, communication competence, creative competence, digital competence, cultural competence, inclusive competence, and reflective self-development competence.

A modern music teacher is not only a performer or musician but also a педагог, psychologist, leader, innovator, and cultural guide. The success of music education depends on how effectively teachers integrate these competencies into their daily professional practice.

Competency-based education requires music teachers to focus on developing students' creativity, emotional intelligence, teamwork skills, and cultural awareness alongside musical abilities. Therefore, professional training institutions must provide future music teachers with comprehensive preparation in both artistic and educational aspects.

Based on the analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

Strengthen teacher training programs by integrating pedagogy, psychology, and technology alongside music performance education.

Develop digital skills of music teachers through workshops on music software, online learning platforms, and multimedia tools.

Promote creative teaching approaches such as improvisation, project-based learning, and interdisciplinary integration.

Encourage inclusive music education by training teachers in adapting methods for learners with special needs.

Improve assessment methods by using competency-based evaluation models focusing on creativity, performance, and participation.

Support continuous professional development through conferences, master classes, and international collaboration programs.

Increase cultural awareness by including national and world music heritage studies in teacher professional development.

Enhance reflective practice by encouraging teachers to analyze their lessons and adopt innovative methods regularly.

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