

The Impact of Reality Singing Competitions on Curriculum and Pedagogy in Tertiary Education in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of reality singing competitions on music education in Sri Lanka's tertiary institutions. Since 2005, the rapid expansion of reality television, particularly through shows such as *Sirasa Superstar*, *The Voice Sri Lanka*, and *Dream Star*, has transformed public perceptions of music education and career pathways for aspiring musicians. Using a qualitative research approach, the study analysed literature, media content, and audiovisual material while also conducting interviews with contestants, educators, and industry professionals. The research explores how these competitions influence music curricula, pedagogical approaches, and student aspirations. The findings suggest that while formal music education provides theoretical and classical training, reality shows prioritize commercial appeal and stage presence. Consequently, students increasingly view television competitions as more viable career opportunities than traditional academic routes. The study highlights a growing demand for curricula that integrate vocal training, performance techniques, and music technology to better align with industry expectations. The paper concludes by advocating for a balanced approach that bridges the gap between academic music education and the professional entertainment industry.

Keywords

Curriculum, Pedagogy, Reality Singing Competitions, Tertiary Education

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Introduction

Television significantly impacts Sri Lankan society, influencing politics, ethics, cultural habits, and various lifestyle preferences. It has become an essential and influential part of daily life. Music, as a powerful medium, shapes people's behaviour and opinions. It is observable, based on the literature and audiovisual material available on social media. In this context, it can be noted that reality singing competitions appear to impact certain aspects of society in Sri Lanka, including that of tertiary music education.

Tertiary music education upholds strong societal values by promoting critical thinking, cultural preservation, and long-term career stability, especially in fields like music. It equips students with theoretical knowledge, discipline, and credibility, offering opportunities beyond the stage, such as teaching and research. While the economic gains of becoming a successful music star through reality shows can be significant, bringing fame, quick income, and impact, such success is rare and often short-lived. This study captures this shift at a critical moment, as student career goals increasingly align with popular media exposure rather than traditional academic outcomes. It highlights the urgent need for educational reforms to keep pace with evolving industry standards, such as integrating voice training, stage performance techniques, and music technology into curricula. This paper analyses literature, insights and information gathered from discussions and individuals involved in education and television. The study explores key elements of how such "reality" television shows impact tertiary music education in Sri Lanka.

Background of Television Consumption in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's first television station, the Independent Television Network (ITN), was founded in 1979 by Anil Wijewardena and Shan Wickremasinghe and was later taken over by the government. In 1982, with funding from Japan, the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC) became the second state-owned channel. Since the introduction of television services in this manner, private channels have become increasingly common, popular, and a staple among the Sri Lankan community² (Brady, 2005; Kariyawasam, 2006). The television channels

² Television remained a government-controlled monopoly for a decade until 1992, when the authorities allowed private investors to participate in the industry under the oversight of the SLRC (Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation). By 1998, six private channels were on air, including Maharaja Television, which has since been renamed MTV, along with its Sinhala counterpart, Sirasa. Other channels in operation were Swarnavahini and ETV, both owned by the EAP Edirisinghe group, as well as TNL and Dynavision (Brady, 2005). Subsequently,

primarily consisted of educational programs, news, cultural shows, and imported television series for the community that could afford televisions. Later, increased commercial advertisements included categories such as food, perfumes, and industrial reports (Priyankara et al., 2017).

In 2005, television musical shows that involved competition with competitors were embraced, and these shows aired for the first time in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan television channel *Sirasa* by Capital Maharaja Private Limited, introduced a reality television show named '*Sirasa Super Star*' through a television network adapted from '*American Idol*'³. Such television shows are also named 'reality shows'⁴. In these competitive shows, young contestants with musical talents participate in these so-called reality shows for fame and monetary prizes. These musical shows are now being produced for the younger generation and people of all ages. Those open events pave the way for competitors to showcase various singing skills. Reality television shows are categorized as semi-scripted⁵ or unscripted programs to showcase the 'reality' in them (Aubrey et al, 2020; Sriram, 2019).

Sirasa Superstar, a musical reality show presented by Sirasa TV, which is a television broadcast channel belonging to Capital Maharaja Private Limited. Sirasa has played a pivotal role in impacting the perspectives of Sri Lankan television viewers who used to experience rather formal narrations and sequences in television shows. The initial four seasons⁶ drew inspiration from the American Idol singing competition series. After the completion of '*Sirasa Super Star Season 1*', several television channels in Sri Lanka, such as Derana, Hiru TV, and Siyatha, commenced airing a variety of reality television shows (**Table 1**). The organizers acknowledged that these programs had the potential to greatly enhance the popularity of the

³ American Idol is a singing talent show television series that was started in 2002. It is an adaptation from the Pop Idol, which is a British musical television talent show series. Although the 1st season of American Idol started in June and ended in September of the same year, the following 21 seasons started between January and March and ended in May.

⁴ Reality TV features diverse, often unscripted content and aims to entertain rather than inform. Previous studies described it as showcasing non-actors or reenactments and claiming to present real-life situations (Lindemann, 2020).

⁵ Television programs are categorized into scripted, semi-scripted, and unscripted formats. Scripted programs, such as dramas and sitcoms, adhere to pre-written narratives that guide actors' performances, ensuring consistency in storytelling and character development. Semi-scripted shows, often found in reality television, follow general outlines or structured prompts while allowing participants some degree of spontaneity (Johnson, 2019). Unscripted television includes live news broadcasts, documentaries, and competitive reality shows, where content is driven by real-time events and unfiltered interactions. These classifications impact audience engagement, production techniques, and the authenticity perceived by viewers, shaping the overall media landscape (Chalaby, 2016; Brown, 2021).

⁶ The rounds of a reality show in Sri Lanka are known as seasons. The commencement and termination of a season are generally determined by the TV channel or, depending on various internal and external factors managed by the channel itself.

television channels, with the main goal being the generation of revenue behind the scenes. There is an important picture shown in 2013, published in Sunday Times Magazine on 24th March, 2013, containing a row of participants in stage outfits.

Table 1: Overview of Television music shows that took place in Sri Lanka from 2005 onwards

Channel	Year	Title of Musical Show	Advertisement Slogan
Sirasa TV	2005-2016	Sirasa Super Star	Who wants to be a star
	2006	Daintee Extra Rasapana	Not specified
	2016	Sirasa Junior Star	Not specified
		Sirasa Dancing Star	
	2017	The Voice Sri Lanka	Not specified
	2020	The Voice Teens	Not specified
	2023	The Voice Kids	Not specified
TV Derana	2008-up to date	• Dreams Star	Way to be a star
		• Derana City of Dance	
	2009- up to date	• Dreams Junior Star	
		• Derana Battle of the Bands	Not specified
Hiru TV	2019- up to date	Hiru Mega Star/ Hiru Star	Reality television that elevates lives on earth Hiru Star
		Hiru Super Dancer	
		Hiru Kids Star	Not specified
Rupavahini	2011	Ranaviru Real Star (for military employees)	Warrior star
ITN	N/A	N/A	N/A
Shakti TV	2006	• Shakti Super Star	Not specified
	2011	• Shakti Junior Star	
Siyatha TV	2020	• The Voice of Asia	From Asia to the world, Are you an international brand?
	2025 to be started	• Tuk Tuk Star	Not yet announced
Swarnavahini	2012	Mega Star	Not specified
	2019	Golden Voice of the North	Not specified

Music Education in Sri Lanka

Government-sponsored education has continued in Sri Lanka following its liberation from British colonial rule (Little, 2011). British educational administration methods, organizational structures, and policies have been maintained with periodic modifications up to the present day (Gamage & Fernando, 2018). Tertiary education in Sri Lanka refers to the stages of university undergraduate education level that were developed between the 1950s and 1970s by the government of Sri Lanka (Gunatilleke, 2015). The students those who pass the General Certificate of Examination Advanced Level (G.C.E. A/L) will be selected for tertiary education (the candidates must pass subjects with the required grades will be selected for tertiary education). This is equivalent to the NVQ's level 3 (National Vocational Qualification) upward and SLQF (Sri Lanka Quality Framework) level 3 upward. There are three main stages of education in Sri Lanka (**Figure 1**). They are early childhood education, school education, and tertiary education.

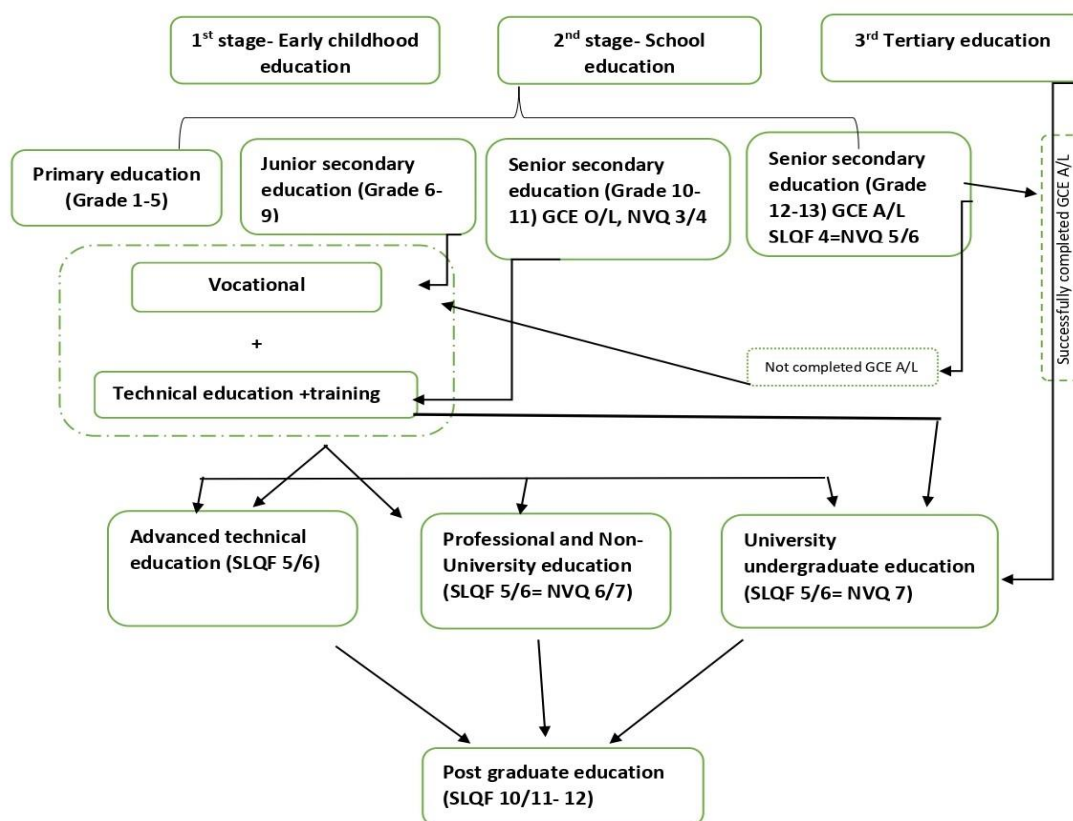


Figure 1: The structure of Sri Lankan education, Diagram of the current organizational structure by Education on First, Sri Lanka Ministry of Education on Sri Lanka, 2020 - Represented by the author

Tertiary Education of Music

At present, there are government and private tertiary education institutions that offer certificate courses, advanced certificate courses, diploma and higher diploma courses, and degrees in various music and music-related subjects, such as North Indian music, South Indian music, Western music, Musicology, and so on (Table 2). At the beginning of tertiary education in Sri Lanka in the 70s, music was included as a component in the curriculum of the Bachelor of Arts degree course at the University of Kelaniya. Additionally, some private institutions offer music courses that are affiliated with various overseas institutions such as Bhatkhande Vidyapith of India, offering music courses for Hindustani music, and other European music institutions, i.e., Trinity College London, Royal College of Music, London College of Music, and the Institute of Western Music & Speech (IWMS) examinations.

Table 2: Sri Lankan universities offering music as a subject and the year of introduced to the curricula

	The Universities	The year of commencement/ first inclusion of music as a subject in curricula	Department and offered the main subjects of music	Inclusion of additional subjects in music	The name of the Degree offered	Remarks
1	The Institute of Aesthetic Studies (Affiliated to the University of Kelaniya) The University of the Visual and Performing Arts (Renamed to become an independent University)	1974	Dept of North Indian Music <i>North Indian Music</i>		Bachelor of Performing Arts (Special) (2005-2019)	The Institute of Aesthetic Studies was affiliated with the University of Kelaniya from the 1970s. Music was offered as a subject under the Department of Fine Arts degree. Since 2001, started offering performing arts degrees/ diplomas. 2005, the institute was upgraded to a university by the University Grant Commission.
		2005	Dept of South Indian Music <i>South Indian Music (2001)</i>		Bachelor of Performing Arts in Music (2019- up to date)	

			Dept of Western Music <i>Western Music 2004</i>			
			Dept of Applied Music <i>Applied Music</i>			
			Dept of Ethnomusicology <i>Ethnomusicology</i>			
			Dept of Musicology <i>Musicology</i>			
2	The University of Sri Jayewardenepura	1995	Dept of Language, Cultural Studies and Performing Arts <i>North Indian Music (1997), Western Music (2005), Musicology 2010, Music Production (2010), Music in Cinema (2016)</i>		Bachelor of Arts (1995–2021) Bachelor of Music (2022–up to date)	Music as a part of the <i>cultural studies</i> subject since 1995. In 2005-2006 started to offer music as an independent subject. In 2008-2010, music was offered as a degree
			Dept of Music and Creative Technology (2020) <i>Music Production (2021)</i>		Bachelor of Creative Music Technology (2022-Up to date)	
3	The University of Jaffna	1974	Dept of Fine Arts (1975) Dept of Music (1992) <i>South Indian Music</i>		Bachelor of Arts (1980s-up to date)	
4	The Eastern University/ Swami Vipulananda Institute of Music and Dance	1974-1981	Dept of Fine Arts (1980s) <i>Disciplines of Fine Arts (1980s)</i> <i>South Indian Music (1970s)</i>		Bachelor of Arts/ Bachelor of Arts, Honors (2002)	The music subject was offered at the Swami Vipulananda Institute of Music and Dance in the 1980s. However, the institute was assigned to the Eastern University of Sri Lanka in 2002. The music education

						follows in the Department of Fine Arts from 2002 onwards.
5	University of Colombo (Sri Palee)	1998	Dept of Performing Arts (2004) <i>North Indian Music (1998), Musicology (2010), Western Music (2004), Electronic Music (2010), Applied Music (2010), Choreography (2004)</i>		Bachelor of Fine Arts (1998-2005) Bachelor of Performing Arts (2005- Up to date)	The university curricula were developed in the 2004-2005 academic year, considering music as a subject in the performing arts category, separate from fine arts.
6	The University of Kelaniya	1974	Dept of Fine Arts <i>North Indian Music (1974-1975), Western Music, Electronic Music (2010), Music Appreciation</i>		Bachelor of Fine Arts (1974-Up to date)	The first university in Sri Lanka that started to start offering a degree in music
7	The University of Peradeniya	1970s	Dept of Fine Arts <i>North Indian Music (1970s), Western Music (1998-2000), Sri Lankan Folk (1998-2000), Film and Television (1998-2000), Theatre and Drama (1998-2000), Dancing (2004-2006), Computer and Digital Technology for Cultural Preservation (2005-2006)</i>		Bachelor of Arts (1970s-Up to date)	Music history dates back to the 1970s. However, included in 1998 in formal education

			<i>Indian Musicology (2019)</i> <i>Computer Music (2019)</i> <i>Far Eastern Music (2019)</i> <i>Ethnomusicology (2019)</i> <i>Music Therapy (2019)</i> <i>Applied Music (2019)</i>			
8	SLTC Research University, School of Music	2021	School of Music (2021) <i>Western Music (2021), Music in Media (2021)</i> <i>World Music, Music and Technology, Western Classical and Non-Classical Music, Eastern Music, Analysis of Music, Composing, Performing Music</i>		Bachelor of Music Honours (2021- Up to date)	

The Interrelation between Reality Television Shows and Music Education in Sri Lanka

Reality television shows and music education in Sri Lanka are interrelated, influencing each other in ways that have not received sufficient attention in research studies. The development of music education in Sri Lanka has been significantly influenced by North Indian music, a trend that began with the arrival of Parsi theatre from North India in the late 19th century (Meddegoda, 2020). Sri Lankans embraced the musical styles featured in Parsi theatre, leading many enthusiasts to pursue formal studies in North Indian music at institutions such as Bhatkhande Music College and other prestigious music academies in North India.

Subsequently, Sri Lankan musicians who received their training in North India played a crucial role in promoting North Indian music within the country. They contributed to the field of music education while also introducing North Indian classical music to the public through various media, including classical music performances, raga-based film songs, and other musical creations. The popularity of North Indian music continued to thrive through school education, private North Indian music academies (*Kalayathana*), and the Bhatkhande music examinations administered by Bhatkhande Vidyapith in Lucknow.

However, from the late 20th century onwards, the growing influence of popular media led to the promotion of pop music, resulting in a gradual decline in the enthusiasm for North Indian classical music. This shift in musical preference led to an expansion of music curricula in both school and tertiary education, incorporating a broader range of musical styles beyond North Indian music. As the number of universities offering music programs increased during this period, new subjects such as applied music, music technology, music production, film music, and Western music were introduced to attract a larger student base (see **Table 2**). On the one hand, music curricula were revised and new programs were introduced to meet the demands of the media and society. On the other hand, television musical shows played a significant role in promoting contestants who had a systematic foundation in North Indian classical music, acquired through school education and specialized music institutions.

The music competitors are introduced to the public in a narrated video clip before their performances. The short video clip briefs the family background and musical history of the competitors. Some participants have studied music as a subject during their school years, while others have learned music in private institutions or through self-study. The video clip is narrated to showcase their activities related to music, such as how they learn, what they learn, and how they rehearse. Among these activities, playing musical instruments, singing popular songs, and North Indian classical compositions with *Alap*⁷ and solfege singing (*Sargam*) are prevalent. Competitors who are capable of singing North Indian raga-based songs are often portrayed as classical music learners, creating an image for the audience implying that they possess a strong musical background. The video clips demonstrate the raga compositions that participants have learned during their secondary education and in private institutions. Some of

⁷ *Alap* is the introductory section of a classical Indian music performance, where the artist slowly unfolds the mood and structure of the raga. Without rhythm or percussion, it allows the musician to explore the raga's key tones, phrases, and emotional essence in a free-flowing, expressive manner. This segment sets the tone for the performance and helps the listener connect with the raga's character.

the participants are recipients of music examinations in five levels offered by Bhatkhande Vidyapith in Lucknow, such as *Praveshika*, *Prathama*, *Madhyama*, and *Visharad*⁸ part I and II in North Indian music.

Interviews with participants from reality shows reveal that they often perform songs and musical compositions learned in school or university. They are proud to present the musical pieces that they performed during inter-school and all-island school competitions, and how they were trained and guided by their school teachers. This reciprocal relationship between television musical shows and music education continues to shape the evolving musical landscape of Sri Lanka.

Impact of Music Idolism on Music Education

What this paper means by music idolism is that the concept of music idols or musical idols typically refers to the blind admiration of individuals, usually musicians or performers, who have gained a high level of popularity. Music idols often have a significant influence on their fans, not only through their music but also through their appearance, style, and overall image.

The contestants in the ‘Grand Finale’ become the potential music idols of the fans. Not only do these winners become idols, but some of them have also built up their identity/recognition as idols before the semi-final and final rounds. For example, consider the case of Shihan Mihiranga in 2005 and Kanchana Anuradhi in 2019. Within nearly half a year of the competition, these contestants have increased their fan base in various ways in addition to singing. Not only in stage performances but also on social media platforms and live streaming services. This includes presenting themselves to the audience through acting, gesturing, behavioural style, and other marketing strategies that help attract the audience. Interestingly, these idols, at one point, had followed and imitated the songs of eminent artists in Sri Lanka

⁸ The *Visharad* examination in Sri Lanka is a certification in Indian classical music, assessing both theoretical knowledge and practical performance. Conducted by recognized institutions such as Bhatkhande Sangit Vidyapith and Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, this examination is structured into multiple levels like *Prathama*, *Madhyama*, *Visharad* and *Nipun*, progressing from basic to advanced proficiency. The syllabus includes music theory, practical performance of Ragas, musicology, and semi-classical compositions. Typically requiring four to six years of study, successful candidates can get an additional qualification for careers as musicians, composers, or educators. These examinations were originally conducted in India, but Sri Lankan musicians who pursued this qualification there played a significant role in establishing examination centres in Sri Lanka. Visionaries such as Premadasa Mudunkotuwa, Sanath Nandasiri, and Premasiri Illesinghe contributed to establishing centres of Bhatkhande Sangit Vidyapith in Sri Lanka, creating opportunities for local students to study and sit for these prestigious exams without having to travel abroad.

for the contest. While some have released new songs on social media like YouTube. Significantly, contestants face restrictions when selecting songs for each performance, such as they must choose songs for which the television channel owns copyright access, and they cannot select songs that have recently gained popularity on another television channel. Moreover, each stage of the competition has a specific theme, and contestants must select songs that align with that theme.

Primarily, the idols who followed Hindustani music were imitated in terms of their voice production, but not necessarily their appearance and behaviour on stage, as the audience found this to be too traditional and unattractive. The modern audience is mostly captivated by the contestants' imitative skills, appreciating the assumed originality in vocal nuances and intonation of the original song with a slightly modern touch, which must be sufficiently obvious. Chinthaka Meddegoda shared his personal experience related to the latter notion: 'Once, I was teaching a *khyal* composition to a student who had recently participated in a music idol TV contest. She modified the *khyal* singing with strange intonation while imitating my rendering. Her singing sounded as if there was a slight touch of vibrato. Every phrase ended with a clear vibrato, which is typical in present-day Sri Lankan mainstream songs. When I asked the student the reason for singing *khyal* compositions that way, she replied she was participating in a reality television show and the trainers appointed by the television channel directed her to sing in such a way to make it more melodious and attractive to a modern audience.

Table 3: Some expressions by the music idol contestants (The names of the informants are not revealed due to ethical considerations)

Informant	Competitor's Personal Opinions	Author's interpretations and remarks
Participant 1 <i>Derana TV</i> <i>Dreams Star</i> <i>2019</i> <i>Top 18</i>	'The biggest issue for me was choosing the right songs to compete. Fortunately, I received help from my college lecturers to find them. I had never performed in front of a large audience before. Nevertheless, due to my vocal training at university, I felt somewhat comfortable performing at any time.	The participant had a training from childhood in Indian Classical music. Having less experience with an audience until he became a university student (after having been a student in music in school) is a considerable issue for students in music/ performing arts.

Participant 2 <i>Derana TV</i> <i>Dreams Star</i> 2011 Top 20	‘Unfortunately, in my university, we don’t get many opportunities to showcase our singing like performers. We study theory more than practice. I believe we should have lectures in voice training and guidance on how to perform on stage, along with a solid technological background.’	Lacking of experience to sing for an audience has weakened the student’s capacity to face an audience. Participant strongly believes that they do not get regular systematic voice training. Performances with technological equipment, like microphone usage, need to be offered in the curricula.
Participants 3 and 4 <i>Derana TV</i> <i>Dreams Star</i> 2012 Top 20	‘We intend to become famous singers, not classical musicians or teachers. We had never experienced singing in front of a huge audience or performing with a technological background. We were nervous at first, but with experience, we discovered what we had been missing in training at the university’.	The participants highlight that the curricula should consist of more practical aspects than theory, as they intend to become musicians who are regular in performing.
Participant 5 <i>Derana TV</i> <i>Dreams Star</i> 2008 Top 10	‘I wanted to be a <i>brand</i> . You can see everyone come to television shows to be a brand. I know we will finally have an academic qualification like others, but we need an audience to be famous. We do not have enough activities on our campus to be a star. They ask to do exams in theory and practice. But when I started performing in television shows, I had a big stage and an audience, which gave me the feeling I wanted.	The <i>brand</i> concept spread among competitors through television programs, where contestants build their own identity, present themselves in society with that identity, and expect others to imitate it. The participants entered university just to obtain a qualification. According to this contestant, university education is not particularly helpful in becoming a musician or a star, whereas reality television shows offer more opportunities.
Participant 6 <i>Sirasa TV</i> <i>Sirasa Super Star</i> , 2007 Top 10	‘I wanted to be famous, as we know that fame cannot be achieved through education alone. To gain recognition, we must connect with the community that appreciates music. In Sri Lanka, recognition often depends on fame, and the talent of a musician may go unnoticed without it. I won several school all-island competitions and completed my bachelor’s degree in music. However, even with these achievements, I couldn’t secure a job before participating in reality shows. It was only after gaining fame through these shows that people	According to the participant, university education is not very useful for getting a job or becoming an artist. By gaining fame through reality television shows, he was able to find a job at a university, where his fame served as an unofficial additional qualification for a position at the university level. As a result, having an academic qualification has become less valuable.

	recognized me as a good singer. Eventually, I was offered a job at a university’.	
Participant 7 <i>Derana TV</i> <i>Dreams Star</i> 2011 Top 20	‘My dream was to become a star like those I saw on television, surrounded by fans. My intention in entering university was to develop my voice further. However, I unexpectedly found that the curriculum focused more on theory and offered limited practical content. Opportunities to perform were also rare. When I started participating in reality shows, I found the real platform I needed. Through these experiences, I learned essential skills like using microphones, working with earpieces, and arranging sound—all of which are crucial for a singer.’	It is a significant finding that, as a university student, the participant found their ideal idols in reality television shows, individuals who had no boundaries when it came to participating in music without institutional education qualifications. The participant seems to have been misguided, thinking that a university education would lead them to become a star. After gaining admission, they realized that the university curriculum was not particularly helpful in achieving their goal of becoming a star.
Participant 8 <i>Sirasa TV</i> <i>Sirasa Junior</i> <i>Super Star,</i> 2018 Winner	‘I believe I found great opportunities by being part of both reality shows and university life. I have always been a dedicated learner and was fortunate to have excellent lecturers at my campus. I used the knowledge and skills I gained from my studies in the reality shows, and I think this played a significant role in helping me reach the final three in the competition.’	The participant could balance both experiences in television shows and education. the informal and formal education was helpful to win the competition in reality television shows.
However, the participant was eliminated midway through the competition based on the SMS vote results. Nevertheless, his final performance became famous on social media, and (FB and Instagram) the YouTube channel views of the TV channel increased significantly. As a result, the management of the reality television show reconsidered and decided to bring the contestant back into the competition for further attention and fame (revealed by the other competitor in the same competition).		
Participant 9 <i>Sirasa TV</i> <i>Sirasa Junior</i> <i>Super Star,</i> 2018 1 st Runner up	‘I worked hard to win, and eventually, I succeeded in the competition. I come from a supportive family background; my parents are musicians, and I grew up watching reality television shows from a young age. I also received private training from a prominent artist, which strengthened my skills and prepared me	The participant's formal and informal education in music was instrumental in winning the competition. Her school teachers and parents provided significant support, not only in training her voice but in every aspect. As a school student, she

	for competitions. Additionally, my parents were acquainted with my music teacher at school, who provided me with invaluable guidance and support to become a star. I participated in several inter-school and all-island competitions, winning many of them. These experiences helped me build resilience and adapt to the diverse styles of singing required in reality shows, which boosted my confidence. One major difference I've observed between formal education and reality shows is the platform these shows provide to connect with the community. Reality shows help participants overcome nervousness, shyness, hesitation, and stage fright. In schools and universities, I often notice students hiding their talents due to such fears. To overcome this, they need opportunities to perform, and reality shows offer an excellent platform for that.'	participated in several music competitions at the school level, such as all-island competitions, which made her stronger and better prepared to face the challenges of reality television shows.
Participant 10 <i>Hiru TV</i> <i>Super Star,</i> <i>2019</i> <i>Top 10</i>	'Reality television shows and Sri Lankan music education are vastly different—like comparing the earth to the sky. Reality shows provide a stage, but our curricula do not. In my opinion, if someone earns a degree in performing arts, they must be prepared to adapt to the stage environment. Our education needs more explorative and practical curricula. Currently, our programs seem to train students primarily to become teachers. However, there should be more diverse opportunities, such as training for roles like sound engineers, composers, and producers. Other countries offer degrees that align with students' specific interests. For example, international universities often allow students to specialize in practical or theoretical studies, depending on their goals. In contrast, our curricula focus heavily on theory and are tailored to local job markets, particularly teaching positions. I believe we should aim to elevate our curricula to international standards, providing students with broader opportunities and global relevance, rather	Sri Lankan university education is not very helpful for a career in music due to the lack of practical study and voice training. If someone wants to find a job as a musician, they must gain fame through other platforms like reality television shows. Moreover, formal education in Sri Lanka is not sufficient for careers such as sound engineering, composing, producing, and other music-related fields.

	than limiting them to Sri Lankan job prospects.’	
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Summary of the Information Gathered and Opinions of the Contestants

The informants are former contestants of television music shows. They are at the moment engaged in studying music in higher education institutes in Sri Lanka, and five of them are quite popular music idols. The majority have not been satisfied with the training that they had from Sri Lankan higher education institutes, as they strongly believe that the higher education institutes should include a subject called ‘Voice Training’ with modern technology. As a matter of fact, the professional trainers who conduct ‘Voice Training’ sessions as courses/workshops in Sri Lanka have designed and developed their training steps and exercises, which derive from their musical taste and education. However, no one knows which methods are effective or should be followed by music learners since most trainers are sort of popular idols in the music sphere in Sri Lanka. What they mean by voice training is not well defined, but the main idea of their narratives implies that ‘Voice Training’ is the kind of thing that helps them sing mainstream songs.

Additionally, all respondents believe that the use of technology, such as using microphones, earpieces, and understanding of the feedback from monitors, and sound management for microphones, is a must to have in learning music. However, it is still a puzzle what the content of these Voice Training courses should be, as various music styles may be applied in singing popular songs. Some universities have attempted to facilitate these requirements partly by implementing courses titled Applied Music, Creative Music Technology, Voice Training, Audiovisual Media Studies, Recording Art of Music and Sound Technology, Study of Yogic Practice for Music Performances, Multi-media Application, Orchestration and Conducting, Live Sound Engineering and Sound Design for Film and Visual Media, Film and Television Technology, Music Business and Digital Marketing. However, the curricula do not elaborate on the content of the voice training lessons.

Discussion: Changes and Consequences

Music education is typically geared toward job opportunities and is associated with institutions that provide certificates in Sri Lanka. Institutional education is qualification-rooted. Music

learning is a process focused on capacity building in music by refining musical skills and improving overall musical proficiency.

The study suggests that what television show music competitors need is not music education but music learning. As some music competitors have mentioned in the interviews, the majority of their music skills, training, and knowledge were acquired from their family background and music training under various Gurus. Learning in such a manner has allowed them to focus on what they truly want to achieve, despite the time and financial investment required in an institutional learning setup. According to the participants, school music education did not contribute significantly to their current success. This might be because students are often required to learn what is prescribed in government university curricula, irrespective of their interests, which is also highly impacted by the previous music idols and media promotions on how a singing idol should be. Therefore, what truly matters to the TV show competitors is what the contestants learn with enthusiasm for the business.

Some students study *Sangeeth Visharad* and *Sangeeth Nipun* courses in music informal (tuition) settings in Sri Lanka. Almost all the candidates obtained higher grades and receive the latter-mentioned titles. Participants believe that having titles such as *Visharad* and *Nipun* is a good opportunity to increase their fame and is helpful to win the competition. However, these examinations have not been fairly conducted as the students have been allowed to write the theory examination by referring to textbooks, which they are allowed to keep while appearing in the examinations at respective centres. Most popular singers have obtained the *Visharad* title without having learned the entire course as required. The examiners from India travel all the way to Sri Lanka to conduct the examinations and pass almost all the candidates in order to motivate the students to appear for the next level and to attract new candidates to enrol in future turns. The teachers and learners of the latter-mentioned process are well aware that these titles and certificates can be obtained without standard practical skills and theoretical knowledge as demanded in the curricula designed by the educators in Bhatkhande Music Vidyapit in Lucknow.

Thus, this raises the question of whether curriculum changes are made merely for the sake of media impact. During my service as a temporary lecturer in the Department of Music and Creative Technology at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, I had the opportunity to interview Pradeep Ratnayake. Ratnayake often shared with me his previous efforts to implement an education that meets the needs of society and industry. He said,

"I was appointed to the University of Sri Jayewardenepura in 1997, and since then, I have recognized the need for students to be connected with technological advancements. Then, there was a very small amount of music added to the syllabus in a subject named cultural studies. Then I could develop music up to a main subject which was directed for a degree course. The name of the department was changed to 'Department of Language, Cultural Studies and Performing Arts'. Technology was not as widespread, and there were no television shows like today. At that time, students primarily aimed to become artists or teachers. Through great effort, I introduced a degree program in Music and Creative Music Technology, allowing students to learn music production and creative music technology for the first time, free of charge, through the free education in Sri Lanka, alongside Indian and Sri Lankan traditional music. In 2020, I established a new department as the 'Department of Music and Creative Technology'. Additionally, they can learn instruments, orchestral music, and ensemble performance. I believe that if students want to participate in television contests or pursue a career as artists, they should be able to showcase multiple talents."

This is not the only university providing education that media indirectly handles since the University of the Visual and Performing Arts and the University of Kelaniya offer courses that include the media and industrial requirements, which are mostly impacted by the music idols showcased in India and the Western world.

Conclusion

This study examined the evolving relationship between reality singing competitions and tertiary music education in Sri Lanka. The findings highlight how television competitions such as *Sirasa Superstar*, *The Voice Sri Lanka*, and *Dream Star* reshape student aspirations, curriculum structures, and pedagogical approaches. While music education emphasizes theoretical knowledge and classical training, reality shows prioritize commercial appeal, stage presence, and audience engagement. As a result, many students and aspiring musicians perceive television competitions as more direct career pathways than formal education.

The study also reveals gaps in the current music education, particularly in practical training, performance techniques, and the integration of music technology. Contestants in reality shows frequently cite the need for curricula that better prepare them for the entertainment industry, including training in voice modulation, stage presence, and sound engineering. Although some universities have introduced courses in applied music and music technology, a disconnect remains between academic training and the industry's demands.

To address these challenges, Sri Lankan tertiary music education must adopt a more balanced and industry-relevant approach. This includes incorporating modern performance practices, expanding access to music production and digital media training, and fostering greater collaboration between educational institutions and media industries. By bridging the gap

between traditional education and contemporary music careers, institutions can ensure that students receive comprehensive training that aligns with both academic and professional aspirations.

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