

From Classical Repertoire to Piano Accompaniment: Development of a Learning Model Based on the needs of the Music Industry

Olan Yogha Pratama¹, Firnando Sabetra², Alrizka Hairi Dilfa³, Ahmad Fauzan Yusman⁴, Ayuthia Mayang Sari⁵

¹²³⁴Department Sendratasik /Faculty Language and Arts, Padang State University, Padang, Indonesia

Abstract: Formal music education in college, especially for piano majors, has emphasized classical repertoire and profound solo playing techniques. However, previous graduate evaluations show that many have difficulty adjusting to the demands of the popular music industry, which demands more flexibility in piano accompaniment, improvisation, and harmony. This research aims to practice the piano accompaniment learning model in grade 3 of the current major. Action research is the methodology used, and a descriptive qualitative approach is needed using document analysis, observation, and interviews. The findings of this study are expected to help music education institutions better understand their students' business demands and professional requirements after graduation.

Keywords: Piano accompaniment; Music Industry; Music Education; Action Research; Accompaniment Piano; Popular Music.

1. Introduction

The music industry is constantly evolving, especially in popular music, which includes various genres such as pop, jazz, and other contemporary music (Bennett, 2008). However, formal music education in higher education is still oriented towards classical repertoire, often not in line with the job market's needs (Regelski, 2023). Piano major graduates who have undergone intensive training in solo playing techniques and classical music analysis often find it difficult to adjust to the demands of the popular music industry (Scharff, 2017). This creates a significant gap between the academic curriculum and their professional realities after graduation (Munirah, 2015).

This research is important because it identifies piano major graduates' main challenges in entering a more diverse workforce. Various studies have revealed that the gap between formal music education and industry needs occurs in the field of piano and other musical disciplines (Hallam & Bautista, 2018). Music education institutions still do not explicitly teach the skills required in accompaniment piano playing, such as improvisation, understanding flexible harmonies, and reading lead sheets and chord charts. As a result, graduates often experience obstacles in obtaining job opportunities outside of the academic environment they are familiar with (Lubna, 2014).

Previous studies have addressed the difference between formal music education and industry needs. (Green, 2002) highlights the importance of practice-based learning in music education to better suit the industry's needs. In addition, research (Jorgensen, 2009) emphasizes that music institutions should be more flexible in adapting their curriculum to the development of contemporary music trends. For example, (Yang & Welch, 2014) highlights how the music curriculum tends to be oriented towards classical repertoire. Research (Johnson, 2022) shows that musicians with improvisation skills and harmony flexibility are more adaptable in the popular music industry. Another study (Johnson, 2022) also revealed that a more inclusive music education towards various music genres can increase graduates' readiness to face the professional world.

Correspondence:

olanyogha@fbs.unp.ac.id,

olanyogha@fbs.unp.ac.id

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This study aims to build on previous findings by further exploring the gap in accompaniment piano skills in formal music education and offering practical solutions for educational institutions to bridge this gap (Andriyanto & Annisa, 2023)

Based on the problems described, this study proposes the main hypothesis that integrating piano accompaniment learning in the curriculum of major three students will improve their competence in adapting to the needs of the popular music industry (Andriyanto & Annisa, 2023). The second hypothesis is that students who receive accompaniment piano training will have higher job readiness than students who only focus on classical repertoire (Lebler & Weston, 2015). This hypothesis is based on a theoretical study that shows that graduates with flexible skills in harmony and improvisation have wider job opportunities in the popular music industry (Baker et al., 2018) ; (Johnson, 2022). This study also differs from previous studies because the focus is on analyzing industry needs and directly implementing more applicable learning strategies in grade 3 majors. Considering this study's theoretical and practical implications, it is hoped that its results can provide new insights for music education institutions in designing a curriculum more relevant to the industrial world (Leong, 2012). In addition, this study seeks to offer solutions in the form of integrated piano accompaniment learning strategies to increase piano major graduates' readiness to face professional challenges.

2. Materials and Methods

This study uses an action research approach with a descriptive qualitative design. The action research model refers to the model (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2002), which consists of four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. This research cycle allows for repeated evaluation and continuous improvement in the learning process. In addition, this classroom action research approach can also be linked to the model (Elliott, 1991), which emphasizes critical reflection in improving educational practice.

The subject of the study was a third-year piano major student observed in a classroom setting where a new accompaniment learning model was applied. Unlike experimental studies that had control groups and treatments, all participants received the same training.

The purposive sampling method (Lenaini, 2021) involved seven third-year students from the Music Education Study Program at Padang State University. Although the sample size is limited, the qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of students' learning experiences and skill development. This study is not intended to be a broad generalization but to provide practical insights into the effectiveness of this learning model.

2.1 Accompaniment Piano Learning Materials

The material taught in the accompaniment of piano learning intervention includes

- 2.1.1. Basics of reading lead sheets – Students are taught how to read chord progressions on lead sheets that include song lyrics and chord symbols.
- 2.1.2. Harmony improvisation techniques – Students are trained to develop harmony with a flexible approach to the musical context (Yogha Pratama & Ferdian, 2022)
- 2.1.3. Accompaniment techniques by genre – Learning includes accompaniment techniques in various popular music styles, such as pop, rock n roll, march/polka, waltz and bossa nova (HAN & CHEN, 2017)
- 2.1.4. Live accompaniment practice – Students practice directly with singers or accompany a song.

Applying this material aims to improve students' flexibility and skills in dealing with various musical situations professionally.

2.2 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a qualitative thematic analysis approach, which allowed for identifying patterns in developing students' skills. This analysis is carried out through several stages:

- 2.1.1 Initial Coding – Identify key themes in reflective interviews and classroom observations.
- 2.1.2 Data Categorization – Grouping findings based on student skill improvement.
- 2.1.3 Data Triangulation – Comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation of student development to increase validity.
- 2.1.4 Quantitative Analysis – Data from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using the percentage increase in scores. In contrast, the Likert scale was used to measure student satisfaction with the learning methods applied. The formulas used in quantitative analysis are:

2.1.4.1 The Score Increase Percentage uses the following formula:

$$\text{Peningkatan \%} = \frac{(\text{Nilai Akhir} - \text{Nilai Awal})}{\text{Nilai Awal}} \times 100\%$$

2.1.4.2 The average Pre-test and Post-test scores use the following formula:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum x}{N}$$

where \bar{x} is the average value, $\sum x$ is the sum of the scores, and N is the number of students.

Average Score of Likert Scale with the formula: **Skor Rata – rata =**

$$\frac{\sum \text{Skor Responden}}{\text{Jumlah Responden}}$$

3. Results and Discussion

This research is carried out in several cycles according to the Action Research approach, which includes planning, action, observation, and reflection stages. Each cycle aims to improve the effectiveness of piano accompaniment learning and adjust teaching methods based on feedback from students and teachers.

3.1 Cycle 1, Initial Planning and Implementation

In the initial stage, students are given basic materials on lead sheet reading, flexible harmony techniques (Scott, 1998), and accompaniment approaches based on genres. The material consists of five songs from different genres, ranging from pop, rock n roll, Polka or Mars, Waltz, and Bossanova. These five materials enable students to apply flexible harmony techniques and the right accompaniment pattern approach according to the music genre. The researcher provided provisions in proper accompaniment techniques, flexible harmony to adjust song genres, and how to move chords according to the existing lead sheet. Early observations show that some students have difficulty adapting their classical techniques into more dynamic accompaniment patterns. In response, additional sessions are given to students who need more practice dalam memahami struktur akor dan pola ritmis yang digunakan dalam musik populer.

Below, the author attaches one of the examples of lead sheets for the pop genre (Chiu & Chen, 2012). This lead sheet is a reference for students to determine the desired accompaniment pattern, the type of chord used, and the guidelines for good and correct chord shifting. In one lead sheet, there are five types of accompaniment patterns that students can choose from, there are types of chord harmony that the author has adjusted to the genre of the song, and there is a proper chord voicing guide (Harrison & Pearce, 2019). With a clear lead sheet guide, it is hoped that students can explore their abilities at the beginning of learning the piano accompaniment style.

Genre Pop (Lagu Komang)

The image shows a musical score for a pop song. It consists of three systems of music. The first system includes a vocal line with lyrics, a piano accompaniment, and a guitar part. The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The third system shows a guitar part with five measures labeled POA.1 through POA.5. The lyrics are in Indonesian and describe a scene of a person looking out a window at a sunset.

Figure 1. Lead Sheet Song Pop Genre.

3.2 Cycle 2, Observation and Evaluation of Progress

After several learning sessions, students began to show improvement in their accompaniment skills. Through class evaluations and reflective interviews, it was found that:

- 3.2.1 Students previously only used to classical notation began to feel more comfortable reading lead sheets.
- 3.2.2 The main difficulties remain in harmony improvisation and quick response to chord changes.
- 3.2.3 Some students feel that practising in real situations (accompanying singers) helps them better understand the accompaniment pianist’s role.



Figure 2. Explanation of Harmony and Voicing Chord

3.3 Cycle 3, Intensive Method Adjustments and Exercises

Based on the second cycle evaluation results, the learning method is adjusted to more practice-based exercises. Students are given exercises in the context of accompanying singers, where they have to adjust their playing to the singers in real time.



Figure 3. Classical Piano and Accompaniment Semester Final Exam

3.4 Cycle 4, Final Reflections and Conclusions

After going through several learning cycles, the final evaluation is carried out by looking at students' individual development. The final results show that:

- 3.4.1 All students experienced a significant improvement in escort skills.
- 3.4.2 Students' confidence in playing as accompanists has increased, especially in flexibly adapting harmony.
- 3.4.3 The ability to read lead sheets and understand chord structures is better than the study's beginning.

Table 1. Accompaniment Piano proficiency level

Student Name	Pre-test	Post-test	Increased (%)
Laura Dwi Davelta	60	80	33,33%
Lesti Zebua	50	78	56,00%
Hefri Gusnadi	75	90	20%
Kiki Ardika	75	90	20%
Narti Utari	70	88	25,71%
Rama Hedayat	75	90	20%

The following graph compares students' skill improvement in Accompaniment Piano material before and after training.

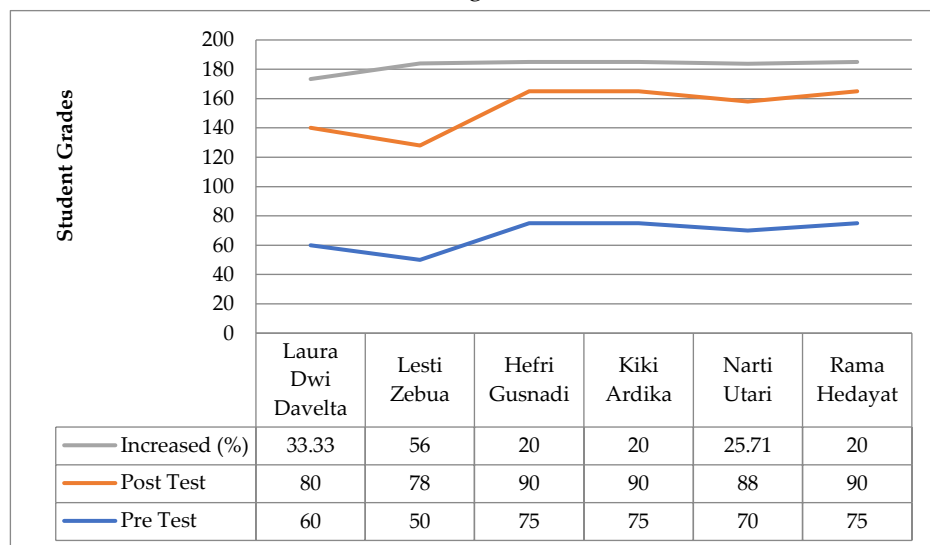


Figure 4. Accompaniment Piano Student final ability chart

This improvement shows that the Action Research method in this study effectively improves student competence in accompaniment by providing a flexible and responsive learning cycle to student needs.

3.5 Discussion

The results of this study show that integrating piano accompaniment learning in the curriculum of major three students contributes to improving their competence in facing the needs of the popular music industry. These findings support previous research by (Green, 2002) and (Jorgensen, 2009) which emphasizes the importance of flexibility in the music curriculum to be more relevant to the demands of the world of work. The study also aligns with (Baker et al., 2018), who found that improvisation and accompaniment skills are key factors for pianists in various professional contexts.

The changes observed during the Action Research cycle show that students who were initially only used to the classical approach have improved in reading lead sheets, improvising harmonies, and adapting their playing to the needs of other musicians in various genres. These findings show that the practice-based learning approach is more effective in building accompaniment piano competencies than traditional methods focusing on classical repertoire.

The implications of the results of this study can be seen in two main aspects: music education and student readiness to face the world of work. In music education, these results indicate that higher education institutions need to update their curricula by adding practice-based learning, improvisation, and harmony flexibility. This improves students' skills and prepares them to compete more in the ever-evolving music industry.

From the world of work perspective, increasing student competence in accompaniment piano can open up more career opportunities for piano major graduates. Many music graduates have careers as accompanists, studio session pianists, or even composers and arrangers of popular music. By having better accompaniment skills, graduates can be better prepared to face the demands of a dynamic job market.

Based on the results of this study, several opportunities for further research can enrich the understanding of the effectiveness of piano accompaniment learning:

- Research with a control group – This study did not use a comparison group, so future research may compare the effectiveness of this method with classical teaching methods to measure its impact more objectively.
- Long-term evaluation – Examining how the skills acquired during these interventions continue to develop after students graduate and have careers in the music industry.
- Development of accompaniment piano learning modules – Develop a more systematic curriculum for practice-based accompaniment piano learning, including improvised approaches in various music genres (Sari et al., 2024).
- Quantitative study of the effectiveness of this method – Using statistical measurement methods to measure the improvement of students' skills more objectively.
- With further research, it is hoped that formal music education can further develop and align with the needs of the modern music industry. The integration of accompaniment piano learning benefits piano majors and can serve as a model for other institutions looking to adapt their curriculum to broader professional demands.

4. Conclusions

The results of this study support the main hypothesis that the integration of piano accompaniment learning in the curriculum of major three students can improve their competence in adapting to the needs of the popular music industry. Students previously accustomed to the classical approach progressed in reading lead sheets, improvising harmonies, and increasing their confidence as accompaniments. The secondary hypothesis is also supported, where students receiving accompaniment piano training show higher job

readiness than teaching methods focusing only on classical repertoire. This is based on the dominance of popular music far exceeding the existence of classical music in western Sumatra. Furthermore, the results of this study are in line with pre-vious research by (Green, 2002) and (Jorgensen, 2009), which emphasizes the im-portance of flexibility in the music curriculum in improving the professional readiness of graduates (Lee et al., 2020). Compared to previous studies that focused more on classical-based curricula, this study reinforces the argument that practice-based learn-ing is more effective in preparing students for the world of work. The study also found that harmony, improvisation and interpretation skills are the most challenging aspects for students, as revealed by [10]in his research on transitioning from classical to popular music. Some limitations in this study need to be noted. Small Sample Size – This study involved only six students major-ing in 3, So this finding cannot be generalized to all music students. No Comparison Group – This study did not use a control group, so the method’s effectiveness cannot be directly compared to traditional learning methods. Variety of Student Experience – Stu-dents have different backgrounds and tastes or genres of music, which can affect their success rate in mastering a given accompaniment piano technique. However, this limita-tion does not reduce the validity of the findings, as this study focuses on improving indi-vidual skills through an Action Research-based learning cycle.

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