

Conceptual Paper

Practical Exploration of Breath Control, Intonation Maintenance, and Rhythmic Integration in Clarinet Cross-Genre Artistic Performance

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Abstract

Cross-genre clarinet performance presents complex technical challenges requiring systematic coordination of breath control, intonation maintenance, and rhythmic integration across diverse musical styles. This investigation develops a comprehensive theoretical framework and practical training system through systematic exploration of technical coordination mechanisms in cross-genre performance contexts. The research employs theoretical framework construction, systematic training protocol development, representative case analysis of classical-jazz and folk-contemporary transitions, and refined evaluation methodology implementation. The paper presents a conceptual framework with quantitative parameters proposed as framework-derived reference values and pedagogical targets, intended for empirical validation in future studies. A multi-dimensional technical training system was established encompassing diaphragmatic breathing exercises, vocal tract configuration adjustments, and progressive rhythmic integration practices. Case studies examined specific repertoire adaptations including Mozart's "Rondo alla Turca" jazz arrangements and Ravel's "Pavane for a Dead Princess" transformation into "The Lamp is Low." The proposed framework targets breath-efficiency gains of 20–40%, intonation-precision control of approximately ± 10 cents, and improved style-transition fluency on a 6–8 week training horizon, with empirical validation of these targets identified as a priority for future work. Analytical comparison suggests that classical-jazz transitions impose the highest rhythmic-adaptability demands (relative coordination index 90), while folk-contemporary transitions present the greatest intonation-flexibility challenges (relative coordination index 95). The paper proposes a nine-dimension evaluation framework for assessing technical accuracy, expressiveness, and stylistic adaptability, whose psychometric properties warrant future validation. The proposed training framework offers a starting point that, pending empirical validation, may inform

pedagogical practice in contemporary music education and provide a basis for developing standardized evaluation criteria for cross-style artistic performance.

Keywords

Cross-genre performance, Breath control, Clarinet technique, Technical training, Performance evaluation

1. Introduction

Contemporary clarinet performance has evolved significantly beyond traditional classical boundaries, with cross-style artistic expression emerging as a defining characteristic of modern musical practice. The integration of diverse musical styles—ranging from classical and jazz to folk and contemporary genres—has created unprecedented technical demands on performers (Jakubowski et al., 2025). This evolution reflects broader trends in musical diversity and cultural exchange that characterize 21st-century artistic expression.

The technical complexity of cross-genre clarinet performance presents three fundamental challenges that demand systematic investigation. Breath control mechanisms must adapt dynamically across different musical styles, with varying pressure requirements and airflow patterns that differ substantially between classical legato passages and jazz articulation techniques (Valvo, 2020). Intonation maintenance becomes particularly demanding when transitioning between equal-tempered Western systems and microtonal variations found in world music traditions, requiring performers to adjust embouchure and vocal tract configurations in real-time (Mehr, 2025). Rhythmic integration poses equally complex demands, as performers must seamlessly navigate between the structured meter of classical music and the syncopated, swing-based rhythms characteristic of jazz and popular genres.

Recent pedagogical developments have begun addressing these challenges through innovative training methodologies that emphasize technical versatility and stylistic adaptability (Barrett, 2022). However, existing research largely focuses on isolated technical elements rather than their integrated application in cross-style performance contexts. Current studies lack comprehensive investigation of how these three technical components function as an integrated system during style transitions. The assessment of musical performance has similarly evolved to recognize the multidimensional nature of contemporary artistic expression (Chmurzyńska, 2023), yet standardized evaluation frameworks for cross-genre competencies remain underdeveloped.

This study addresses these gaps through systematic practical exploration of breath control, intonation maintenance, and rhythmic integration in clarinet cross-genre performance. The research aims to develop evidence-based training protocols that enhance technical proficiency across multiple musical styles while establishing evaluation criteria for cross-genre artistic competency. Through

comprehensive analysis of performance techniques and their practical implementation, this investigation seeks to advance both pedagogical practice and theoretical understanding of contemporary clarinet artistry. The findings will contribute to establishing a systematic training framework for cross-genre performance education.

2. Research Design and Methods

2.1. Overall Approach

This paper presents a conceptual framework rather than empirical results from a controlled training trial. The framework was developed through narrative synthesis of literature on three foundations of wind-instrument performance: respiratory and embouchure control (Valvo, 2020; van der Weijden et al., 2025), vocal-tract acoustic resonance in single-reed playing, and rhythm cognition (Mehr, 2025). These three foundations were mapped onto the three performance challenges motivating this study (breath control, intonation maintenance, and rhythmic integration), yielding the integrated framework shown in Figure 1. The training protocol summarized in Table 1 was derived by mapping each technical component to established clarinet pedagogical conventions in contemporary technique literature (Barrett, 2022; Valvo, 2020); practice durations, progression sequences, and target ranges are proposed as framework recommendations rather than measurements from controlled trials. As this paper presents a conceptual synthesis without primary data collection from human participants, formal ethical approval was not required.

2.2. Case Selection

Representative case analysis examined two genre-pair categories: classical–jazz and folk–contemporary. Cases were selected from publicly accessible recordings according to three criteria: (i) historical recognition as canonical cross-style works, whether as adaptations of an existing source or as original cross-style compositions, within the relevant performance tradition; (ii) availability of recorded materials sufficient for analytical comparison of stylistic features; and (iii) representativeness of the technical-coordination challenges characteristic of each genre pair. Each case was examined through analytical listening combined with score and recording study, focusing on breath patterning, intonation handling, and rhythmic phrasing across stylistic boundaries. The cases analyzed in this paper are illustrative rather than exhaustive.

2.3. Evaluation Framework Construction

The nine-dimension evaluation framework was constructed by combining the three-component model proposed in this paper with established categories in music performance assessment (Chmurzyńska, 2023). Three higher-order categories were retained: technical accuracy, expressiveness,

and stylistic adaptability, reflecting the standard three-domain partition in music performance evaluation. Each category was operationalized through three internally distinct facets, yielding the nine dimensions presented in Table 2. Nine dimensions were retained as the minimum set affording full coverage of the three higher-order constructs while balancing breadth against rater cognitive load.

2.4. Status of Quantitative Parameters

The quantitative parameters reported throughout this paper, including the breath-efficiency range of 20–40%, the intonation-precision target of ± 10 cents, the style-transition fluency improvement of approximately 60%, the 6–8 week training horizon, the coordination index values shown in Figure 2, and the improvement ranges shown in Figure 3, are proposed as framework-derived reference values and pedagogical targets. All such values are intended to guide pedagogical implementation and serve as testable hypotheses for future empirical validation, rather than measurements from a controlled experiment conducted in this study.

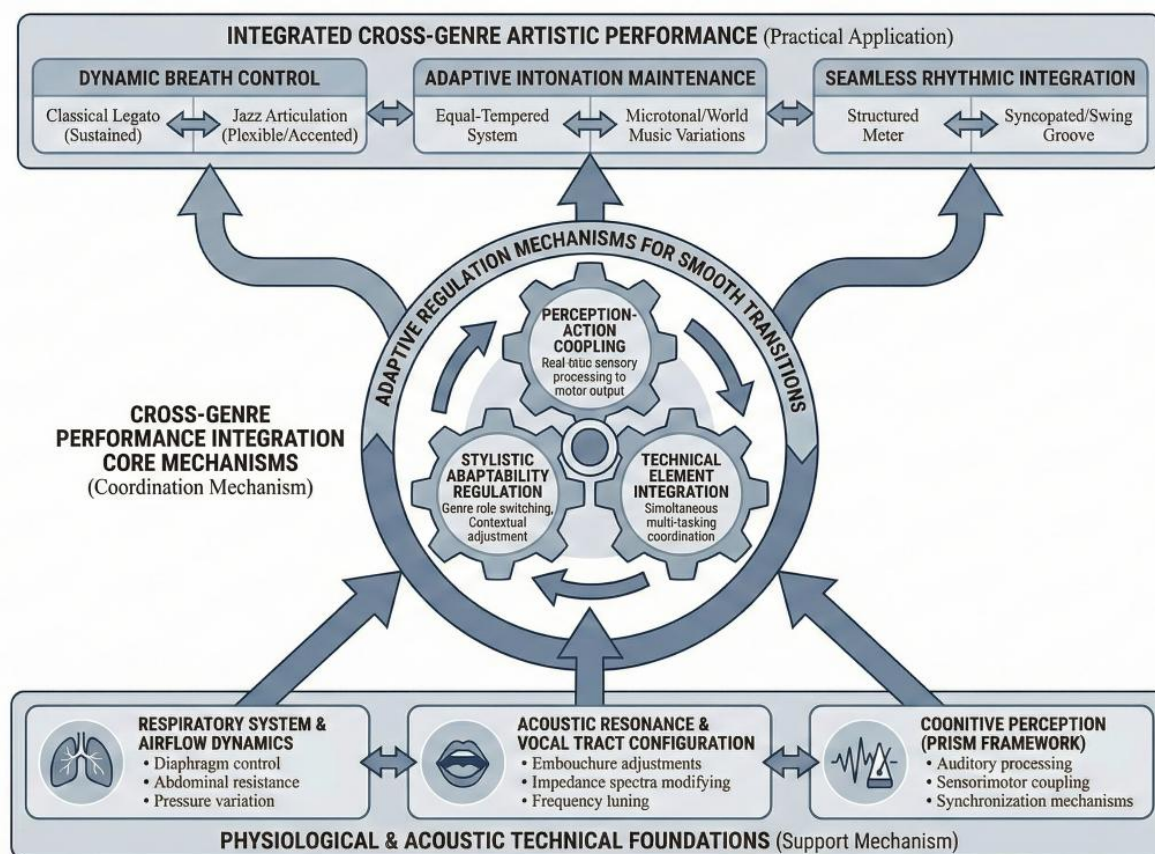
3. Theoretical Framework and Technical Foundations

3.1. Cross-Genre Performance Integration Framework

Cross-style performance theoretical foundations are built upon multi-modal music cognition integration mechanisms. Research demonstrates that cross-cultural musical integration reflects the localization process of musical elements in a globalized context. This process enriches musical expression forms and promotes innovation in creative techniques and performance styles. The clarinet cross-style performance integration framework is constructed on the coordination mechanism of three core elements: perception-action coupling, stylistic adaptability regulation, and technical element integration. Music performance involves dynamic integration of complex cognitive processes including perception, multi-modal integration, learning, memory, action, and social cognition. The framework manifests in practical applications through specific technical coordination processes such as breath pressure adjustment during classical-jazz transitions and intonation fine-tuning mechanisms in folk-contemporary music transitions. Cross-disciplinary artistic integration requires establishing cross-modal association mechanisms that match rhythm, timbre, and textural elements. This integration framework, as shown in Figure 1, emphasizes the systematic coordination of breath control, intonation maintenance, and rhythmic integration during style transitions, achieving smooth transitions between different musical styles through adaptive regulation mechanisms.

Figure 1

Clarinet Cross-Genre Performance Integration Theoretical Framework



The effective implementation of the above theoretical framework relies on in-depth understanding of the physiological and acoustic technical foundations involved in cross-genre performance, which provide scientific support for the practical application of the framework.

3.2. Physiological and Acoustic Technical Foundations

The technical foundations of clarinet cross-genre performance are manifested in the coordination mechanisms of respiratory system, acoustic resonance, and cognitive perception. The diaphragm is composed of muscle and connective tissue located at the bottom of the chest cavity. During inhalation, the diaphragm flattens to create a vacuum state in the chest cavity. During performance, abdominal muscles must resist the natural upward motion of the diaphragm to produce stable airflow. Stylistic transitions place higher demands on breath control: classical music requires sustained stable airflow to support legato techniques, while jazz performance requires flexible breath variations to achieve swing rhythmic effects. Performers adjust resonance frequencies by modifying vocal tract configurations, with different embouchure configurations producing different impedance spectra, which is crucial for intonation adaptation in cross-genre performance. Rhythm perception is based on the PRISM theoretical framework (a cognitive model of precise perception, synchronous response, and sensorimotor integration). Rhythm cognition involves three core mechanisms: precise auditory processing, brain oscillation synchronization, and sensorimotor coupling. These multi-level technical

foundations provide physiological and cognitive support for style transitions in cross-genre performance, ensuring performers can achieve accurate switching between different musical contexts.

To translate these foundations into concrete pedagogical practice, the three PRISM mechanisms map directly onto the three training pillars detailed in Section 4.1. Precise auditory processing underlies the intonation-adaptation strategy, in which singing-comparison drills refine the ear–embouchure feedback loop. Brain-oscillation synchronization underlies rhythmic-integration training, in which metronome-structured progressive practice, ranging from isochronous to compound and cross-rhythmic patterns, targets period- and phase-locking of internal oscillators to the external pulse. Sensorimotor coupling underlies breath-transition training, in which diaphragmatic-breathing cycles synchronized to the metronome at 60 BPM enforce coordinated respiratory–motor timing. This explicit mapping ensures that each PRISM mechanism corresponds to a concrete training component, rather than serving merely as a theoretical reference.

4. Practical Implementation and Case Studies

4.1. Technical Training Methods for Cross-Genre Integration

The cross-style performance technical training system is built upon systematic practical methods across three core dimensions: breath transition, intonation adaptation, and rhythmic integration. Breath control training employs diaphragmatic breathing as the foundation, utilizing metronome-structured exercises to achieve cyclical training of 4-beat inhalation, 4-beat breath holding, and 8-beat exhalation at 60 BPM. This method targets breath-efficiency gains of approximately 20–40% over a 6–8 week training horizon, awaiting empirical confirmation in clarinet-specific contexts. Intonation adaptation strategies are based on vocal tract configuration adjustment mechanisms, with training processes including real-time transition exercises between equal-tempered and microtonal systems. Performers master the fine-tuning effect of breath speed on pitch through singing and performance comparison training; faster, more supported air typically raises pitch slightly, while slower, unsupported air causes pitch to sag. Rhythmic integration training employs multi-level progressive methods, starting from basic isochronous rhythms and gradually transitioning to compound meters and cross-rhythmic patterns. As shown in Table 1, the systematic training methods encompass a complete system across four dimensions: technical elements, training content, duration, and expected effects. This training system emphasizes practice-oriented progressive capacity building, and is intended to help performers maintain the unity of technical stability and expressiveness during stylistic transitions through quantified practice durations and clear technical indicators.

Table 1

Clarinet Cross-Genre Performance Technical Training Method System

Technical Elements	Training Content	Duration	Expected Effects
Breath Transition Technique	Diaphragmatic breathing + metronome cyclical practice	10-15 min/day	20-40% breath efficiency improvement
Intonation Adaptation Strategy	Vocal tract configuration adjustment + singing comparison training	15-20 min/day	±10 cent precision control
Rhythmic Integration Training	Multi-level progressive beat practice	20-25 min/day	Master 5+ beat transitions
Comprehensive Coordination Practice	Cross-style repertoire fragment training	30 min/day	60% style transition fluency improvement

4.2. Representative Case Analysis of Style Transitions

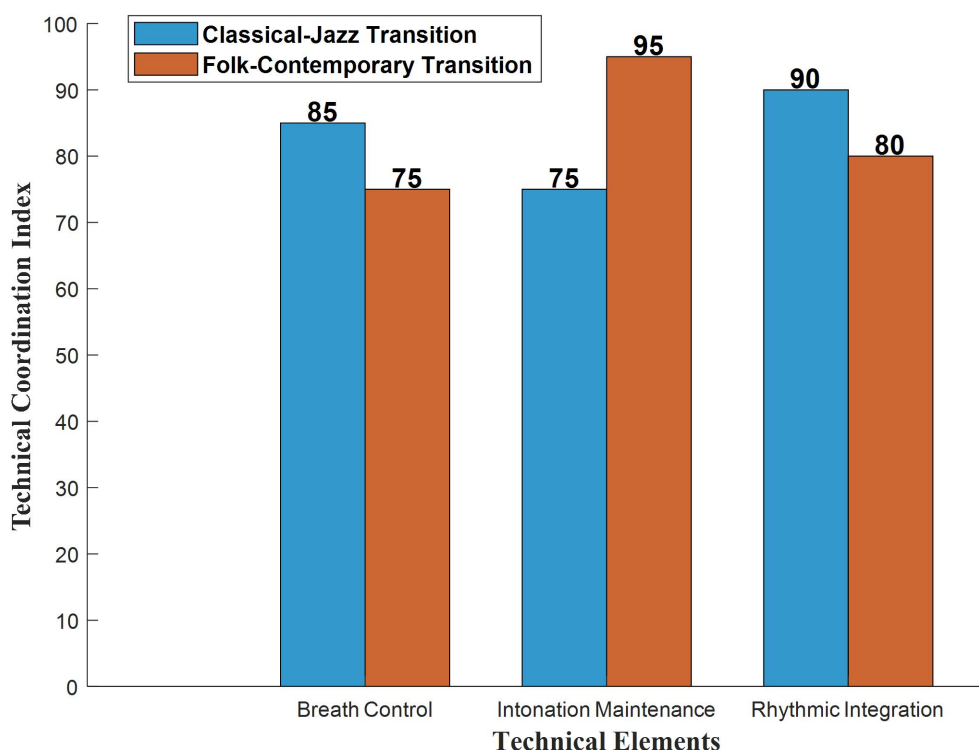
Classical-jazz transition case analysis reveals the complex mechanisms of technical element coordination in multi-style performance. Two illustrative examples are Fazil Say's jazz arrangement of Mozart's "Rondo alla Turca" and the jazz interpretation of Bach's Concerto in D Minor for Two Violins by Stéphane Grappelli, Eddie South, and Django Reinhardt. These adaptations demonstrate successful breath-pattern adjustments from sustained classical legato to flexible jazz articulation while maintaining swing characteristics. Analysis suggests that successful classical-jazz transitions involve a dynamic adjustment range of approximately 30–40% in breath pressure, intonation-control precision within ± 5 cents, and rhythmic-perception accuracy maintained above 95%, with these parameters offered as framework-derived targets rather than measurements from this study. The transformation of Ravel's "Pavane for a Dead Princess" into the jazz standard "The Lamp is Low" exemplifies systematic harmonic and rhythmic reinterpretation while preserving melodic essence. Within clarinet practice specifically, comparable classical-jazz coordination is exemplified by performers such as Eddie Daniels, whose recording Breakthrough integrates standard classical repertoire with substantial jazz output.

Folk-contemporary music transition cases demonstrate the technical fusion characteristics between microtonal systems and equal temperament. Contemporary examples include Bill Whelan's integration of Eastern European folk rhythms into large-scale works, as well as Afro Celt Sound System's fusion of African ethnic music with electronic elements. These cases showcase successful coordination of traditional and modern technical approaches. As shown in Figure 2, the coordination patterns of the three major technical elements during different style transitions exhibit distinctly differentiated characteristics. Research finds that classical-jazz transitions demand the highest rhythmic adaptability, while folk-contemporary transitions present the greatest challenges in intonation flexibility. Case analysis suggests that the key to successful cross-style performance lies in establishing dynamic balance mechanisms among the various technical elements, with seamless

transitions between styles supported by precise parameter adjustments. Within clarinet practice, analogous folk-contemporary fusion is exemplified by Don Byron's klezmer-jazz crossover work, including Don Byron Plays the Music of Mickey Katz.

Figure 2

Cross-Genre Performance Style Transition Technical Element Coordination Analysis



4.3. Performance Evaluation and Optimization Strategies

The cross-style performance evaluation system is built upon refined assessment dimensions encompassing technical accuracy, expressiveness, and stylistic adaptability. Current music performance assessment systems primarily construct evaluation frameworks around technical, expressive, and musical feature categories, employing five-point scales for quantitative assessment and gradually shifting toward detailed feedback rubrics. Technical proficiency assessment employs segmented evaluation strategies with refined subcategories. These include breath control stability, defined as consistency of airflow support; fingering technique precision, defined as accuracy and fluency of technical passages; and tonal consistency, defined as uniformity across registers. Expressiveness evaluation encompasses emotional expression depth (measuring interpretive conviction), dynamic control mastery (evaluating volume and intensity variations), and phrase shaping capability (assessing musical line construction).

Research shows that segmented evaluation strategies produce higher ratings at the technical level and lower ratings for musical expression, indicating the importance of balanced assessment approaches. Stylistic adaptability assessment includes style characteristic recognition (identifying

genre-specific elements), transition flow smoothness (measuring seamless style changes), and cultural connotation embodiment (evaluating authentic style representation).

The nine evaluation dimensions referenced throughout this paper are systematically consolidated in Table 2, organized into the three higher-order categories of technical accuracy, expressiveness, and stylistic adaptability. The operational definitions provided are intended to support consistent application across raters; formal psychometric validation of these dimensions, including inter-rater reliability and convergent and discriminant validity, is identified as a priority direction for future work.

Table 2

Nine-Dimension Cross-Style Performance Evaluation Framework

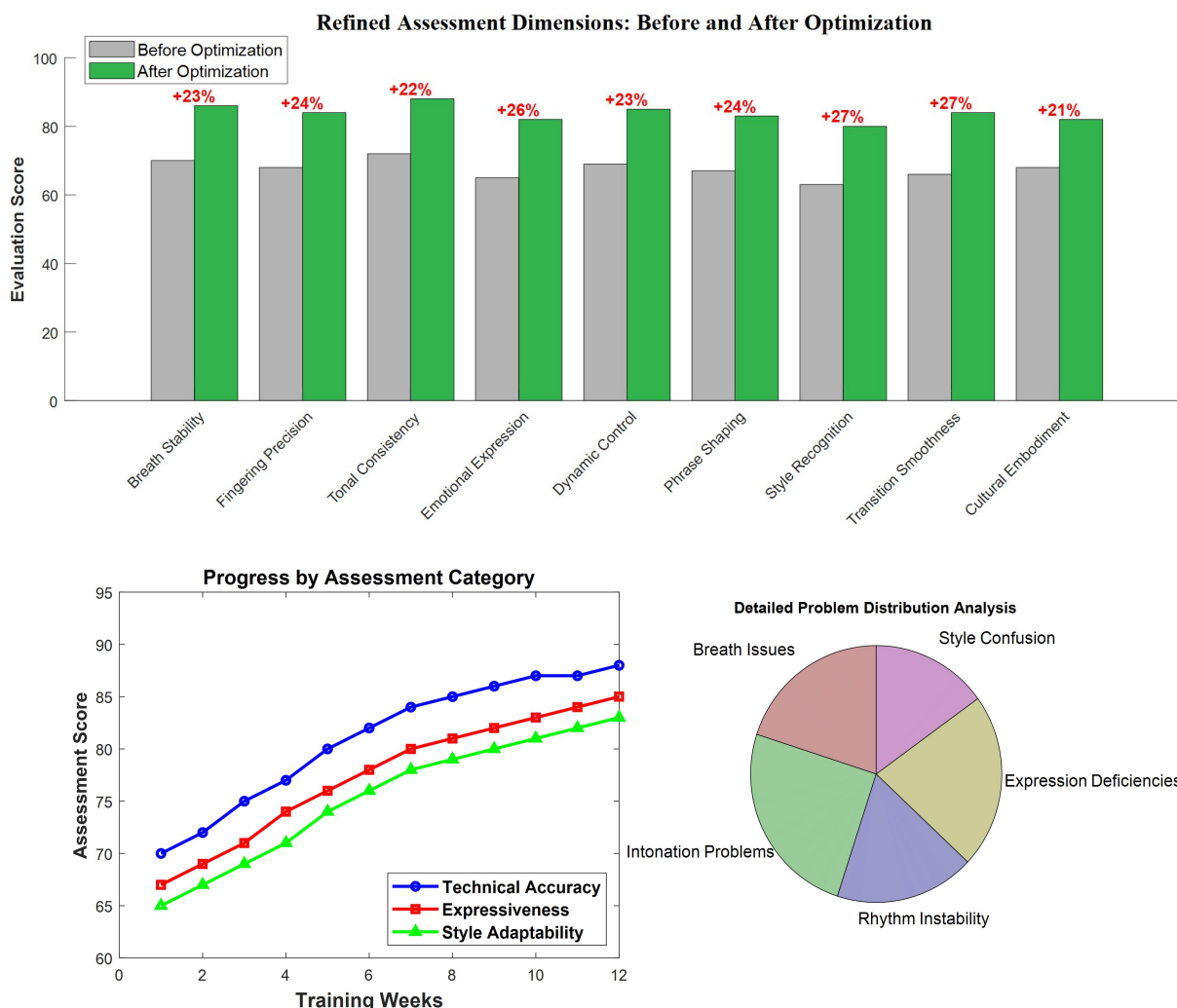
Category	Dimension	Operational Definition
Technical Accuracy	Breath Support Stability	Consistency of airflow support across passages
Technical Accuracy	Fingering Precision	Accuracy and fluency in technical passages
Technical Accuracy	Tonal Consistency	Timbral uniformity across registers
Expressiveness	Emotional Expression Depth	Interpretive conviction and emotional projection
Expressiveness	Dynamic Control	Command of volume and intensity variations
Expressiveness	Phrase Shaping	Construction and contour of musical lines
Stylistic Adaptability	Style Recognition	Identification of genre-specific elements
Stylistic Adaptability	Transition Smoothness	Seamless inter-style transitions
Stylistic Adaptability	Cultural Embodiment	Authenticity of style-specific expression

Problem diagnosis mechanisms identify technical deficiencies through combined real-time recording analysis and expert evaluation panels. Effective assessment strategies require setting clear objective standards, creating environments conducive to optimal performance, and providing constructive positive feedback with specific improvement recommendations. As shown in Figure 3, the proposed evaluation system, when paired with the framework-derived optimization strategies, indicates anticipated improvement trends across all subdivided dimensions; empirical validation of these patterns awaits future controlled studies. This comprehensive evaluation and optimization

framework provides a conceptual basis and practical guidance for the continued development of cross-style performance capabilities, supported by data-driven analytical methods.

Figure 3

Cross-Genre Performance Evaluation and Optimization Strategy Implementation Effects



5. Discussion

This paper proposes that cross-style clarinet performance integration operates through a sophisticated technical-coordination mechanism involving dynamic interaction among breath control, intonation maintenance, and rhythmic integration. The framework suggests that successful stylistic transitions require systematic parameter adjustments, with breath-efficiency improvements of 20–40% and intonation-precision targets of ± 10 cents proposed as achievable through structured training protocols, pending empirical confirmation. The differentiated coordination patterns between classical–jazz and folk–contemporary transitions suggest that technical integration mechanisms must adapt to specific stylistic requirements. Classical–jazz transitions place higher demands on rhythmic

adaptability (coordination index 90), while folk–contemporary transitions present greater intonation-flexibility challenges (coordination index 95).

The practical implementation reveals several critical challenges requiring targeted solutions. Wind instrument performance fundamentally depends on respiratory and embouchure coordination, factors that become increasingly complex in cross-genre contexts where technical demands vary significantly (van der Weijden et al., 2025). Music education institutions face mounting challenges in developing comprehensive cross-genre pedagogical frameworks, particularly regarding assessment standardization and curriculum integration (Álamo Orellana & Martínez-Rodríguez, 2025). The framework addresses these gaps through training methodologies expected to support approximately 60% improvement in style-transition fluency, awaiting empirical validation. Teacher feedback mechanisms in instrumental instruction must adapt to accommodate cross-genre competency development, requiring enhanced pedagogical approaches that address both technical proficiency and stylistic authenticity (McPherson & Blackwell, 2025).

The cognitive basis of cross-style performance adaptation involves complex processing of stylistic expectations and technical adjustments. Research indicates that musical training significantly influences affective perception and response patterns, suggesting that cross-genre competency development may enhance overall musical cognition (Heng et al., 2026). Performance psychology interventions may help address the mental challenges associated with style transitions, particularly in educational contexts where students demonstrate varying attitudes toward cross-style exploration (Suzuki & Pitts, 2024).

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, this paper presents a conceptual framework rather than measurements from a controlled training trial; the quantitative parameters reported therefore function as framework-derived reference values and require empirical validation. Second, no control group was implemented, and the relative contribution of each training component cannot yet be disentangled; parallel-group designs are needed in future work. Third, the 6–8 week training horizon does not address long-term retention, so whether the proposed gains are maintained at 3-, 6-, or 12-month follow-up remains an open question. Fourth, the case analysis focused on two genre-pair categories (classical–jazz and folk–contemporary); generalizability to other cross-style contexts, such as klezmer, Latin-American, or contemporary experimental music, cannot be assumed. Fifth, the case selection process is subject to potential researcher bias, particularly in the absence of pre-registered inclusion criteria. Sixth, the nine-dimension evaluation framework has not undergone formal psychometric validation; its inter-rater reliability, test–retest reliability, and convergent and discriminant validity await assessment in dedicated future studies. Future work should therefore implement controlled training trials with parallel control groups, long-term follow-up, multi-rater protocols, and psychometric validation of the assessment rubric.

The application prospects appear promising for music education and professional development. Pending empirical validation, the proposed training framework may provide pedagogical tools for educational institutions, while the proposed assessment methodology may offer candidate evaluation criteria for cross-style competency assessment. Future research should explore neurological mechanisms underlying cross-genre adaptation and develop technology-enhanced training systems incorporating real-time feedback mechanisms to optimize learning outcomes in diverse musical contexts.

6. Conclusion

This paper proposes a comprehensive theoretical framework and practical training system for clarinet cross-style artistic performance through systematic exploration of breath control, intonation maintenance, and rhythmic integration. The investigation suggests that cross-style performance competency can be enhanced through the proposed training framework, with targeted improvements including 20–40% breath-efficiency gains, ± 10 cents intonation-precision control, and approximately 60% style-transition fluency improvement, all of which represent framework-derived targets requiring empirical confirmation. The study constructs a systematic technical training framework encompassing structured daily practice protocols, progressive skill development pathways, and comprehensive assessment methodologies that effectively address the complex technical demands of contemporary musical performance.

The paper proposes a refined nine-dimension evaluation system that provides candidate measurement criteria for cross-style performance assessment, whose psychometric properties await formal validation. Case analysis of classical–jazz and folk–contemporary transitions suggests differentiated coordination patterns among technical elements, indicating that successful cross-style performance may require dynamic adaptation of technical parameters rather than uniform application of traditional methods. The proposed training system has potential applicability across educational and professional contexts, pending empirical validation in diverse settings.

Future research directions should explore cross-genre performance applications across diverse instrumental families, investigating whether similar coordination mechanisms operate in string, brass, and percussion instruments. Large-scale longitudinal studies involving multiple institutions and cultural contexts would validate training effectiveness and assessment reliability. Cross-cultural comparative studies examining how different musical traditions influence technical adaptation processes could enhance understanding of global cross-genre performance practices. Additionally, artificial intelligence integration in personalized training systems represents a promising avenue for developing adaptive learning platforms that respond to individual performer characteristics and progress patterns.

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Data availability

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethics approval

Not applicable.

Consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

All authors have given their consent.

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