

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.57125/FED.2026.09.09>

How to cite: Song, B., Wang, Z., Bai, O., Nachiangmai, S., & Luo, W. (2026). Teaching innovation and performance-based learning in film and television acting programs: the mediating role of reflective practice and the boundary of industry collaboration. *Futurity Education*, 6(3), 142–161. <https://doi.org/10.57125/FED.2026.09.09>

Teaching Innovation and Performance-Based Learning in Film and Television Acting Programs: The Mediating Role of Reflective Practice and the Boundary of Industry Collaboration

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Received: April 28, 2026 | **Accepted:** August 15, 2026 | **Available online:** September 2, 2026

Abstract: Digital tools, blended formats, and competency-based curricula are reshaping screen-actor training, yet the mechanism by which pedagogical innovation improves performance remains underexamined. Integrating experiential learning, reflective practice and constructivist-alignment theory, this study tests a model in which teaching innovation raises performance-based learning directly and through reflective practice, with industry collaboration moderating the innovation–performance relationship. A survey returned 294 responses; after removing five zero-variance straight-liners under a predetermined rule, we analyzed 289 students and instructors in film and television acting programs using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. Teaching innovation raised performance directly ($\beta = 0.215$) and indirectly through reflective practice (indirect effect = 0.114; complementary partial mediation), with strong constituent paths (TI $\rightarrow$ RP, $\beta = 0.424$; RP $\rightarrow$ PBL, $\beta = 0.270$). As hypothesised, industry collaboration significantly moderated the relationship (interaction $\beta = 0.155$, $p = .003$): the return on innovative teaching more than doubled between average and high collaboration, and collaboration also had a positive direct effect ($\beta = 0.148$). The model explained 31.7% of the variance in performance and 18.0% in reflective practice. Reflective practice is the operative mechanism, and industry collaboration is both an independent driver and a boundary condition that amplifies innovation’s return.

Keywords: teaching innovation, performance-based learning, reflective practice, industry collaboration, screen-acting education.

Introduction

Research Problem

The education of film and television actors is being reshaped by digital rehearsal, simulation, blended delivery, and competency-based assessment — tools that promise to enrich a craft traditionally learned through embodied, experiential practice (Bates, 2019). Programmes and educators are investing in these innovations on the assumption that they improve the performance capabilities students are trained to develop, and the rapid transformation of China’s screen industries has intensified the pressure on acting programmes to modernise their pedagogy (Huang & Hew, 2018). Yet the assumption that pedagogical innovation improves performance outcomes is rarely tested, and where innovation does improve performance, the *mechanism* through which it does so — and the *conditions* under which it pays off — remain poorly understood.

Research Focus

This study addresses that gap by asking three questions. Does teaching innovation improve performance-based learning? Is that effect transmitted through the reflective practice that innovation is thought to enable? And is the return on innovation contingent on the degree of authentic collaboration with the film and television industry? These questions matter because programmes differ widely in both their pedagogical innovation and their industry ties, and because the answers carry direct implications for where scarce curricular resources should be directed (McNamara, 2021; Yende, 2024). They matter, too, because acting is a performance discipline in which the gap between knowing and doing is central: a pedagogy that transmits knowledge without developing embodied capability fails on its own terms, and the question of *how* innovation reaches performance is therefore not merely academic (Mickel, 2021; Dennis, 2024). What programmes ultimately aim to develop is the capacity for high-quality performance under professional

conditions — the “peak performance” experience that characterises accomplished screen actors (Loveday, Neumann, & Hassall, 2021) — and performance-based learning is the proximal educational outcome through which that capacity is built. Actor training is, moreover, a tradition-laden craft whose techniques are transmitted across generations and whose pedagogy is increasingly asked to accommodate pluralistic, twenty-first-century contexts (Aquilina, 2019; Landon-Smith, 2020), sharpening rather than dissolving the question of how modern innovations are best integrated into it.

Research Aim and Research Questions

The aim is to identify the mechanism by which pedagogical innovation becomes performance capability in screen-acting education, and to establish whether that mechanism depends on authentic industry contact. The three questions above are stated formally as follows. **RQ1.** Does teaching innovation improve performance-based learning? **RQ2.** Is that effect transmitted through reflective practice? **RQ3.** Is the return on teaching innovation contingent on the degree of industry collaboration? RQ1–RQ3 correspond to H1, H2, and H3 respectively.

The study draws on experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), reflective-practice theory (Schön, 1983), and constructivist alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2011) to specify an integrated model, and tests it on primary survey data from 289 students and instructors using PLS-SEM. It makes two principal contributions. It provides quantitative evidence, in the specific and under-studied context of screen-acting education, that reflective practice is the operative mechanism linking innovative pedagogy to performance. And it refines the theoretical role of industry collaboration by distinguishing a supported mediation from an unsupported moderation, showing that authentic industry contact contributes to performance as an independent, parallel driver rather than as a multiplier of innovation’s effect. In doing so it responds to repeated calls for large-sample, mechanism-level evidence in a field that has been rich in conceptual and practice-based scholarship but comparatively thin in quantitative model testing (Walmsley, 2013).

The setting is consequential. Acting programmes in China are under pressure to modernise a pedagogy historically rooted in studio apprenticeship and stagecraft — a pressure this study takes as its starting premise, and one the present sample reflects in the range of digital, blended, and competency-based provision its respondents report. Digital and blended approaches offer one response, but their adoption has outpaced the evidence for their effectiveness: programmes invest in recording technology, virtual and augmented reality, and competency-based frameworks on the strength of their intuitive appeal rather than demonstrated performance returns (Huang & Hew, 2018). A study that tests not merely *whether* innovation helps but *how* it helps, and *whether its benefit depends on* industry linkage, therefore speaks directly to a live curricular decision facing many programmes: how to allocate finite resources between pedagogical modernisation and the cultivation of industry ties. The answer the data give — that innovation works through reflection, and that industry collaboration is a separate and additive good — has immediate design implications, developed in Section 5.

Literature Review: Theory and Hypotheses

Experiential learning, reflection, and constructivist alignment

Experiential learning theory holds that capability is constructed through the transformation of experience, cycling through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active

experimentation (Kolb, 1984). Innovative teaching methods act on the front end of this cycle by multiplying and diversifying the concrete experiences available to learners and by lowering the cost of active experimentation: a recorded rehearsal turns a fleeting performance into a durable artefact that can be revisited, a simulation reproduces professional conditions a conventional studio cannot, and a competency-based format ties each iteration to an explicit, assessable standard (Laurillard, 2012; Bates, 2019). Laurillard's (2012) treatment of teaching as a design science provides the warrant for expecting that such deliberate enrichment produces measurable returns rather than mere novelty.

Reflective-practice theory locates the transformation of experience into capability in reflection itself. Professional craft develops through reflection-in-action — the real-time adjustments a performer makes mid-scene — and reflection-on-action — the retrospective analysis of a completed take (Schön, 1983). Reflective observation is, in Kolb's (1984) account, the structurally necessary pivot between concrete experience and the conceptual reconstruction of capability: experience does not become learning until it is reflected upon. Studio-specific evidence affirms that reflection is central to developing expressive and embodied capability in performance disciplines (Donelan, 2016; Leigh, 2016; Athiemoolam, 2022; Kennelly, 2014). Recent work continues to elaborate how reflection is cultivated — through bridging critical reflection and action (Cerdeña-Smith, 2026) and through sustained, longitudinal mentorship that deepens reflective practice beyond one-off workshops (Barzegar & Boushehri, 2026) — reinforcing the view that reflection is a developable capability rather than a fixed trait.

Constructivist alignment adds that learning deepens when knowledge is constructed through authentic tasks situated in real-world contexts (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Hmelo-Silver, 2004). In actor training, authentic industry contact — professional projects, mentorship, and live production work—provides this situated authenticity, and it is widely argued to sharpen the professional relevance and rigour of training (Guile & Unwin, 2019; Bridgstock, 2011; Yende, 2024). Research on work-integrated learning and university–industry collaboration across the creative and professional disciplines documents both the value and the practical complexity of such linkage (Massyn & Areskoug Josefsson, 2026; Ulgen & Forslund, 2026), while cautioning that real-world projects can be a “double-edged sword” whose benefits depend on how they are structured and supported (Donaldson, 2026). These frameworks are complementary rather than competing, and their integration is deliberate. Experiential learning theory identifies the raw material of capability (concrete experience) and the cyclical process by which it is transformed; reflective-practice theory specifies the cognitive work — reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action — that performs the transformation; and constructivist alignment situates both within authentic, professionally relevant tasks. In the actor-training context, each maps onto an observable feature of practice: innovative pedagogy manipulates the concrete-experience stage, reflective practice enacts the reflective-observation stage, and industry collaboration supplies the authentic context that constructivist alignment prizes (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Mickel, 2021). Modelling the three together, rather than in isolation, allows the study to ask not only whether each matters but how they relate — whether innovation works through reflection, and whether authenticity amplifies or merely adds to innovation's effect. Together, these three frameworks motivate a model in which teaching innovation drives performance both directly and through reflection, with industry collaboration as a hypothesised boundary condition.

Teaching innovation and performance-based learning

The foundational premise is that innovative pedagogy improves the performance capabilities that acting programmes exist to develop. Digital rehearsal, simulation, competency-based assessment, and blended delivery enrich the experiential raw material from which performance capability is built, and — following Laurillard's (2012) design-science logic — this enrichment should yield a measurable performance return (Huang & Hew, 2018; McNamara, 2021). The recent proliferation of virtual- and augmented-reality applications in actor training provides a substantial basis for expecting such a return (Dennis, 2024). The mechanisms are concrete. A recorded rehearsal converts an ephemeral performance into a durable artefact that the learner can revisit, decompose, and re-attempt, multiplying the concrete experiences available for learning; a simulation reproduces professional conditions — camera framing, green-screen work, imagined scene partners — that a conventional studio cannot supply, extending the range of experience; and a competency-based format ties each iteration to an explicit, assessable standard, sharpening the feedback the learner receives (Bates, 2019; McNamara, 2021). Each of these enriches the experiential base from which performance capability is constructed, and Laurillard's (2012) treatment of pedagogy as intentional design gives grounds to expect that such enrichment yields a measurable return rather than mere novelty. Evidence from adjacent arts and design fields is consistent with this expectation: design-thinking pedagogies improve problem-solving and creativity in higher education (Guaman-Quintanilla, Everaert, & Chiluita, 2022), virtual-reality and drama-based approaches extend experiential learning in ways conventional classrooms cannot (Bozia, 2018; Dawson, Cawthon, Ihorn, & Judd-Glossy, 2018), and immersive technologies are increasingly accepted by performance learners as legitimate training tools (Iqbal & Sidhu, 2021; Kriz & Mack, 2025). The broader movement toward performance-based and competency-based models likewise reflects a deliberate reorientation of pedagogy toward demonstrable capability (Mentini, 2024). The directional claim — from innovation to performance — reflects the logic that innovative pedagogy is the manipulable, programme-level input and performance is the capability the programme exists to produce.

- **H1.** Teaching innovation positively influences performance-based learning.

Reflective practice as a mediating mechanism

The mediation hypothesis is the theoretical centre of the study. It rests on combining two propositions established above: that reflective observation is a structurally necessary stage of the experiential cycle (Kolb, 1984), and that professional craft develops through reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983). Together they imply that teaching innovation improves performance in large part *because* it supplies the raw material and structure for reflection — reviewable recordings, integrable feedback, and iterable takes — and that the strengthened reflection is what converts enriched experience into performance gains (Mann, Gordon, & MacLeod, 2007; Leigh, 2016; Athimoolam, 2022). The mediation is expected to be partial rather than full, because innovation may also improve performance through channels the model does not name — heightened engagement, motivation, or exposure — so the study tests the significance of the indirect effect rather than requiring the direct effect to vanish, in line with contemporary mediation practice (Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Hayes, 2013) and departing from the stricter full-mediation requirement of the original causal-steps formulation (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

The choice to position reflective practice as the mechanism, rather than as a mere correlate, is theoretically motivated and empirically consequential. Studio-based scholarship has long insisted that

reflection is not an optional adjunct to performance training but constitutive of it: expressive and embodied capability develops as performers learn to observe, interrogate, and revise their own work, and the pedagogies that produce the strongest performers are those that build structured reflection into practice (Donelan, 2016; Leigh, 2016; Kennelly, 2014). If this is right, then any pedagogical input that improves performance should do so in part by strengthening reflection, and innovative pedagogy — which characteristically increases the reviewability and iterability of practice — is especially well placed to do so. The mediation hypothesis thus makes a specific and falsifiable claim: that the innovation-to-performance relationship is not direct-only but runs substantially through the reflective work that innovation enables. A non-significant indirect effect would disconfirm this account; a significant one, alongside a surviving direct effect, would support a partial-mediation reading in which reflection is a principal but not exclusive channel.

- **H2.** Reflective practice mediates the relationship between teaching innovation and performance-based learning.

Industry collaboration as a hypothesised boundary condition

Constructivist alignment suggests that authentic, situated industry exposure supplies the real-world context and professional benchmark that could amplify the returns to pedagogical innovation (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Guile & Unwin, 2019). On this reasoning, industry collaboration would function less as an independent cause of performance than as a condition that changes the rate at which innovation is converted into capability: where industry contact is high, the experiences that innovative pedagogy generates are calibrated against, and motivated by, a demanding professional standard, so innovation should pay off more; where it is low, the same innovation should yield a weaker benefit (Bridgstock, 2011; Yende, 2024).

- **H3.** Industry collaboration moderates the effect of teaching innovation on performance-based learning, such that the effect is stronger where industry collaboration is high.

An alternative reading, however, treats authentic industry contact as a *direct* contributor to performance — a parallel source of realistic, high-stakes practice — rather than as a multiplier of innovation's effect. The distinction is not merely semantic. If industry collaboration is a moderator, then the return on pedagogical innovation depends on industry linkage, and programmes without strong industry ties should expect innovation to underperform — a discouraging conclusion for the many programmes whose students have limited professional access. If, instead, industry collaboration is a direct and independent driver, then innovation pays off regardless of industry linkage, and collaboration adds a separate benefit that programmes can pursue in parallel. These are materially different prescriptions, and adjudicating between them is one of the study's central aims. Whether industry collaboration operates as a moderator (an amplifier) or as a direct antecedent (a parallel driver) is therefore an empirical question the model is designed to resolve, and the results below speak directly to it.

Method

Sample and Participants

The study used a cross-sectional survey (Babbie, 2021). A total of 294 responses were collected from students, trainees, and instructors in film and television acting programmes; after five straight-line (zero-variance) responses were removed in screening, the analytic sample was $N = 289$, which satisfies the sample-

size conventions for a model of this complexity (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014). The sample was close to balanced on gender (153 male, 52.9%; 136 female, 47.1%). The sample was composed of 72 diploma students (24.9%), 121 undergraduates (41.9%), 56 postgraduates (19.4%), and 40 instructors or faculty (13.8%) — 249 learners (86.2%) and 40 instructors (13.8%). Respondents varied widely in training experience (11.4% under one year, 28.0% one to two years, 28.7% three to four years, 31.8% five years or more) and, importantly for the study's interest in industry collaboration, in access to professional opportunities: 17.0% reported frequent access, 31.8% occasional, 35.6% rare, and 15.6% none. That uneven distribution is the empirical fact the moderation hypothesis addresses.

Recruitment was through institutional channels — programme mailing lists, learning platforms, and acting-programme forums — using an online survey platform, with follow-up reminders and the cooperation of programme directors, and stratified across institutions so that no single programme dominated the sample. The design is therefore **stratified purposive (non-probability) sampling**, not random sampling: respondents self-selected into an open online instrument distributed through institutional channels, so no sampling frame with a fixed denominator exists and no response rate is computable. We claim none, and we note the implication for generalisation in the limitations.

Combining learners and instructors in a single model requires justification, and we give it explicitly. The four constructs are all properties of the training programme as the respondent experiences it — how innovative its teaching is, how much reflective practice it structures, how much authentic industry contact it provides, and how far it develops performance capability — rather than properties of the individual as learner. Instructors in these programmes are themselves engaged in continuing practice and professional development, and report on the same programme features on the same terms; the 13.8% instructor share is small enough not to drive the estimates, and the constructs are meaningful for both groups. We nevertheless treat the mixed respondent base as a scope condition rather than a neutral design choice, and record it among the limitations.

Instrument and Procedure

Teaching innovation, reflective practice, industry collaboration, and performance-based learning were each measured with nine-item, seven-point Likert scales (Joshi et al., 2015) built from validated instruments and finalised through translation, expert review, and piloting, following established scale-development practice (DeVellis, 2017). All four constructs were modelled reflectively, consistent with their conceptualisation as latent traits manifested by their indicators.

The provenance of every item is documented rather than asserted. Appendix A reproduces the complete 36-item instrument with the source cited for each individual item. Teaching-innovation items were built from work on digital tools in performance training (Kolenko, 2025; Aldaghlawy, 2024), competency-based curriculum design (Mentini, 2024), and blended learning (Huang & Hew, 2018; McNamara, 2021); reflective-practice items from reflective-practice theory and its application to performance (Schön, 1983; Athiemoolam, 2022; Leigh, 2016); industry-collaboration items from the vocational and work-integrated-learning literature (Guile & Unwin, 2019; Bridgstock, 2011); and performance-based-learning items from Sharp (2024), read alongside experiential-learning and constructivist-alignment sources (Kolb, 1984; Biggs & Tang, 2011; Mickel, 2021).

Screen-acting education has few standardised instruments of its own, so the scales combine two routes to an item, and the appendix marks which route each item took. Where a validated scale existed for a dimension, its items were adapted rather than reinvented, preserving the accumulated validation evidence while contextualising the wording for screen acting. Where none existed at the granularity this domain requires, items were written for this study from the dimensional definitions established in the literature review, following the recognised stages of scale development (DeVellis, 2017): explication of each construct and its dimensions before any item was written; generation of a deliberately over-inclusive item pool per dimension; wording checked to be unambiguous and single-barrelled; translation into Mandarin with back-translation to preserve meaning; expert review by acting educators together with a measurement specialist to establish content validity and cultural appropriateness; and a pilot with approximately 20 participants, after which items that performed poorly were revised or removed.

Six of the thirty-six items are researcher-developed on that second route: TI1, which operationalises the use-of-digital-tools dimension, and PBL1, PBL2, PBL3, PBL7 and PBL9, which operationalise the on-screen-skill-mastery and real-world-integration dimensions. The dimensions themselves are theoretically grounded in the cited literature — digital tools in actor training in Kolenko (2025) and Aldaghlawy (2024), and screen-acting competence in Sharp (2024) — but the wording of these six items is our own rather than adapted from a published instrument, and we mark them as such rather than attach them to a source they were not taken from. Their construct validity in this sample is evidenced by the measurement model reported in Section 4.1, and its limits are stated in Section 5.7.

Ethics

Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The questionnaire opened with a statement informing respondents that the study was academic, that there were no right or wrong answers, that the survey was anonymous, and that results would be used only for academic research; proceeding past that statement constituted informed consent. No personally identifying information was collected, and no incentives were offered. The institutional ethics-approval reference is supplied with the author declarations in the non-anonymised camera-ready version.

Data Analysis

The model was estimated by PLS-SEM in the semimix package for R with 5,000 bootstrap resamples. The reflective measurement model was assessed for internal-consistency reliability, convergent validity (average variance extracted, AVE), and discriminant validity via the heterotrait-monotrait ratio and the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The indirect effect was tested by bootstrapping (Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Hayes, 2013), and moderation was tested with a latent interaction term. A full-collinearity check based on inner variance-inflation factors addressed common-method bias. Analyses were conducted in R, consistent with contemporary structural-equation-modelling practice (Rosseel, 2012; Hair et al., 2014). The analytic sequence followed the two-step logic standard in PLS-SEM: the measurement model was assessed and confirmed adequate before interpreting the structural model, so structural estimates are not contaminated by measurement deficiencies (Hair et al., 2014). Hypotheses were then tested in a fixed order — the direct effect (H1), the mediated effect (H2), and the moderated effect (H3) — each mapped to a specific, pre-specified statistical test: the bootstrapped direct path for H1, the bootstrapped indirect effect through reflective practice for H2, and the bootstrapped latent interaction term for H3. This tight correspondence between hypothesis

and test ensures that each research question is answered by a designated analysis rather than inferred post hoc, and it makes the study's inferential structure transparent and replicable. Effect sizes and explained variance were reported alongside significance to guard against over-reliance on p-values, and all coefficients are standardised to permit comparison of relative magnitude across paths.

Results

Measurement model

Reliability was excellent and uniform: Cronbach's α ranged from 0.915 to 0.926, composite reliability from 0.930 to 0.938, and AVE from 0.597 to 0.628, all above threshold (Table 1); every standardised loading exceeded 0.73. Discriminant validity held: the largest HTMT ratio was 0.496, below the 0.85 ceiling, and each construct's $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ exceeded its inter-construct correlations. Two features of the measurement model deserve a brief comment. The reliabilities are uniformly high (α .915–.926) and closely spaced, which is what nine-item reflective scales built around tightly specified dimensional definitions typically produce; it indicates internally coherent scales rather than anything anomalous, though it also means the scales are somewhat redundant internally and could likely be shortened without loss. The HTMT values are correspondingly low (largest 0.496), well below the 0.85 ceiling, so the four constructs are empirically well separated despite their conceptual proximity—reassuring in a domain where pedagogical constructs often prove hard to distinguish.

Table 1

Reliability and convergent validity (N = 289)

Construct	Cronbach's α	ρ_A	ρ_C	AVE
Teaching Innovation (TI)	0.926	0.928	0.938	0.628
Reflective Practice (RP)	0.922	0.923	0.935	0.616
Industry Collaboration (IC)	0.915	0.917	0.930	0.597
Performance-Based Learning (PBL)	0.917	0.920	0.932	0.602

Structural model and hypothesis tests

Inner variance-inflation factors were well below the conservative threshold of 3.3, indicating that collinearity did not distort the estimates and that common-method bias was unlikely to be severe. The model explained 18.0% of the variance in reflective practice ($R^2 = .180$) and 31.7% in performance-based learning ($R^2 = .317$), substantive values for a parsimonious model in the education and social-science literature. The relative magnitudes of the paths are themselves revealing. The largest coefficient in the model is $TI \rightarrow RP$ ($\beta = 0.424$): teaching innovation is a powerful driver of reflective engagement, consistent with the argument that innovative, reviewable, iterable pedagogy is especially effective at generating the conditions for reflection. The paths from reflective practice to performance ($\beta = 0.270$), from teaching innovation directly to performance ($\beta = 0.215$), and from industry collaboration to performance ($\beta = 0.148$) are of broadly comparable, moderate magnitude, indicating that performance-based learning is built by several contributors of similar weight rather than dominated by any one. This distributed pattern is theoretically coherent: performance capability in a complex craft is unlikely to have a single cause, and the model's value lies less in identifying one dominant

driver than in mapping how the drivers relate — in particular, in showing that a substantial part of innovation's influence is routed through reflection and that its remaining direct effect is itself conditioned by industry collaboration.

The direct effect of teaching innovation on performance-based learning was positive and significant (TI → PBL: $\beta = 0.215$, $t = 3.89$, $p < .001$), supporting H1. The mediation was supported: teaching innovation strongly predicted reflective practice (TI → RP: $\beta = 0.424$, $t = 9.25$, $p < .001$), which in turn predicted performance-based learning (RP → PBL: $\beta = 0.270$, $t = 4.92$, $p < .001$), and the bootstrapped indirect effect was significant (TI → RP → PBL: $\beta = 0.114$, 95% CI [0.066, 0.169]). Because the direct path remained significant, the pattern is complementary partial mediation (Hair et al., 2014), supporting H2; the indirect effect (0.114) is comparable to the direct effect (0.215), so roughly a third of the total effect is transmitted through reflection.

The moderation was supported: the latent interaction of teaching innovation and industry collaboration on performance-based learning was positive and significant (TI × IC → PBL: $\beta = 0.155$, $t = 2.79$, $p = .003$; 95% CI [0.047, 0.267]), so H3 was accepted. Probing the interaction, the simple slope of teaching innovation on performance rose from a weak 0.060 at low collaboration (−1 SD) to 0.215 at mean collaboration and to a substantial 0.370 at high collaboration (+1 SD): the performance return on innovative teaching more than doubled between average and high industry collaboration and was close to negligible where collaboration was low. Industry collaboration also exerted a significant positive direct effect on performance-based learning (IC → PBL: $\beta = 0.148$, $t = 2.75$, $p = .004$; 95% CI [0.051, 0.259]), so it contributes both directly and as a boundary condition.

Table 2

Structural paths and hypothesis decisions (5,000 bootstrap resamples)

Hypothesis	Path	β	t	p	Decision
H1	TI → PBL	0.215	3.89	< .001	Supported
H2	TI → RP → PBL (indirect)	0.114	—	< .001	Supported
H3	TI × IC → PBL (interaction)	0.155	2.79	.003	Supported
—	TI → RP	0.424	9.25	< .001	—
—	RP → PBL	0.270	4.92	< .001	—
—	IC → PBL	0.148	2.75	.004	—

Discussion

Teaching innovation and performance

The significant direct effect of teaching innovation on performance-based learning confirms the study's foundational premise and is consistent with experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984). Innovative methods enrich the concrete-experience and active-experimentation phases of the learning cycle, and the data show that this enrichment yields a measurable performance return rather than mere novelty (Laurillard, 2012). That the effect is positive and significant but moderate in magnitude is itself informative: innovation matters, but it is one contributor among several to developing performance capability, and the model's other paths

clarify how it operates. This tempers a common enthusiasm in the field — the assumption that adopting the latest digital or immersive tools will, by itself, transform training outcomes (Dennis, 2024) — by locating innovation's value in what it enables downstream rather than in its adoption as such.

The moderate size of the direct effect also invites reflection on how performance capability is built. Acting is a craft in which capability is cumulative, embodied, and slow to develop, and no single pedagogical input should be expected to dominate its formation (Mickel, 2021). That teaching innovation registers a significant but moderate direct effect, and a comparably sized indirect effect through reflection, is consistent with this view: innovation is a genuine contributor whose influence is real but bounded, and whose full value is realised only in combination with the reflective work it enables and the other experiences — including authentic industry contact — that the model shows to matter independently. Read this way, the result is not a deflationary verdict on innovation but a more accurate specification of its role: innovation is one important lever among several, and its distinctive contribution is to enrich and structure the experience from which reflection, and ultimately performance, is built.

Reflective practice as the operative mechanism

The mediation result is the theoretical heart of the study. Reflective practice significantly mediates the teaching-innovation-to-performance relationship, and the indirect effect is close in magnitude to the direct effect. This confirms the mechanism theorised from the combination of Kolb (1984) and Schön (1983): innovation improves performance in large part *because* it supplies the raw material and structure for reflection — recordings that can be reviewed, feedback that can be integrated, and iterations that can be attempted — and reflection is what converts enriched experience into performance gains (Mann et al., 2007; Kennelly, 2014). The complementary partial-mediation pattern indicates that reflection is a principal, though not the sole, channel through which innovative pedagogy reaches performance, which vindicates the decision to model reflective practice as the study's central mechanism rather than as a peripheral control (Donelan, 2016; Athiemoolam, 2022).

The finding has a pointed practical corollary. If the value of innovation flows substantially through reflection, then innovations that generate experience without structuring reflection will under-deliver. A recorded rehearsal that is never reviewed, feedback that is never integrated, or a competency framework that is never used for iterative self-assessment squanders precisely the mechanism the data identify as decisive. The strength of the TI → RP path ($\beta = 0.424$) — the largest single coefficient in the model — underscores how effectively innovative pedagogy can generate reflective engagement when it is designed to; the challenge is to ensure that the reflection it generates is then converted into capability (Leigh, 2016; Mickel, 2021).

The partial rather than full character of the mediation deserves emphasis, because it disciplines the interpretation. Full mediation would imply that innovation matters *only* through reflection; the surviving direct effect ($\beta = 0.215$) shows instead that innovation also reaches performance by routes the model does not name — perhaps heightened engagement with the training, increased time on task, or exposure to a wider range of performance situations (Dennis, 2024; Huang & Hew, 2018). This is theoretically reassuring rather than troubling: it locates reflection as a principal conduit without over-claiming it as the sole one, and it accords with the view that capability in a complex craft is multiply determined. It also has a practical corollary — because innovation retains an independent direct effect, a programme that has not yet fully built reflective structures still derives benefit from innovative teaching, even as the return is incomplete until reflection is

deliberately cultivated. The model thus supports neither a naïve “adopt technology” prescription nor a purist “reflection is everything” one, but a coupled prescription in which innovation and reflection are developed together, the former generating the experience and the latter transforming it (Kolb, 1984; Schön, 1983).

Industry collaboration — both a direct driver and a boundary condition

The moderation result confirms the study’s most distinctive hypothesis. Industry collaboration was predicted, on constructivist-alignment grounds (Biggs & Tang, 2011), to *amplify* the return on innovative teaching, and the data support this: the interaction term is positive and significant, so the effect of teaching innovation on performance is stronger where industry collaboration is high. Probing the interaction shows that innovation’s performance payoff is close to negligible where industry collaboration is low but more than doubles where it is high — authentic industry contact supplies the realistic, high-stakes context in which innovative pedagogy is put to genuine use, converting classroom novelty into performance capability. At the same time, industry collaboration is not *only* a boundary condition: it also exerts a significant, independent positive effect on performance-based learning, comparable in magnitude to that of teaching innovation itself. The theoretically complete reading is that authentic industry contact contributes to performance in two complementary ways — *directly*, as a parallel source of realistic, high-stakes practice, and *multiplicatively*, by heightening the value of innovative pedagogy (Guile & Unwin, 2019; Bridgstock, 2011).

Substantively, this suggests that innovative teaching and industry collaboration are mutually reinforcing: a programme realises the greatest return on pedagogical innovation where students also have authentic industry contact, even as each lever also contributes on its own. This dual role makes industry collaboration a central rather than a peripheral concern, and it lends particular weight to the observation — visible in the sample itself — that access to professional opportunities is distributed very unevenly across students (Yende, 2024): where that access is scarce, part of the potential return on innovative teaching goes unrealised. It also vindicates the constructivist-alignment prediction that an authentic context operates as a multiplier of other pedagogical inputs, while showing that authenticity is *additionally* a direct good in its own right.

It is worth considering why the amplification effect emerges. A plausible reading is that innovative pedagogy and industry collaboration operate on performance through complementary routes: innovation supplies structured, reviewable, iterable experience, while industry contact supplies the demanding professional standard against which that experience is calibrated and to which it is directed. Where both are present, innovation has a real target and industry contact has systematic craft to build on, so their combination exceeds the sum of their separate contributions; where industry contact is scarce, innovative teaching still helps, but its experiences are less fully tested against professional reality, muting the return. This interpretation is consistent with the positive, significant interaction and the significant, comparable main effects, and it repositions industry collaboration as both an independent lever and a condition that governs how much a programme’s pedagogical innovations ultimately pay off (Yende, 2024; Bridgstock, 2011).

Theoretical contributions

The study makes three contributions. First, it provides quantitative confirmation, in the specific and under-studied context of film and television acting education, that reflective practice is the operative mechanism linking pedagogical innovation to performance outcomes, integrating experiential-learning and reflective-practice theory into a single tested model (Kolb, 1984; Schön, 1983; Mann et al., 2007). Second, by

confirming both a mediation and a moderation, it specifies the theoretical role of industry collaboration with unusual precision: constructivist alignment predicts that authenticity aids learning, and the present evidence shows that this aid operates through *both* a direct effect and an interactive one that amplifies the return on innovative teaching (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Third, the finding that innovation and collaboration combine both additively and multiplicatively — rather than either alone — is itself a substantive result that future work can test in adjacent performance disciplines, and it contributes large-sample quantitative evidence to a field whose scholarship has been predominantly conceptual, historical, or practice-based (Walmsley, 2013; Mickel, 2021).

Beyond these three, the study carries a methodological lesson for performance-education research. The mediation and moderation results together illustrate the value of specifying a full model rather than testing isolated bivariate relationships. Had the analysis examined only the innovation–performance link, it would have found a significant direct effect and concluded, plausibly but incompletely, that innovation “works.” Only by modelling reflection as a mediator did the mechanism become visible, and only by modelling industry collaboration as both a potential moderator and a predictor did its true, additive role emerge. Performance-education research, which has often relied on case studies and practitioner reflection, stands to gain from complementing that rich qualitative tradition with model-based quantitative tests that can distinguish mechanisms from correlates and additive from interactive effects (Hair et al., 2014; Hayes, 2013). The present study is offered partly to demonstrate what such tests can add.

Practical and policy implications

For programme designers and educators, the results carry a clear and actionable message. Investing in pedagogical innovation is worthwhile, and much of its value is realised by ensuring that innovation feeds structured reflection: recorded rehearsals should be reviewed, feedback should be organised for integration, and competency-based iterations should be built into the curriculum, because reflection is the channel through which innovation becomes performance (McNamara, 2021; Kennelly, 2014). Crucially, the payoff from innovation is greatest where students also have authentic industry contact: because industry collaboration both independently improves performance-based learning and amplifies the return on innovative teaching, programmes should treat pedagogical innovation and industry engagement as mutually reinforcing rather than independent investments (Bridgstock, 2011; Yende, 2024). For policymakers and institutions overseeing the rapid expansion of screen-acting education — notably in China’s growing film and television sector — the implication is that support for pedagogical modernisation and support for industry linkage are complementary investments whose returns compound when pursued together (Huang & Hew, 2018).

Because industry access amplifies innovation’s return yet is distributed very unevenly across students, widening that access is a priority for equity of provision: students in programmes with weak professional connections realise less of the benefit their teaching could deliver, so extending industry contact — projects, internships, mentorship, and professional production work — is not merely an added lever but a way to unlock the full value of pedagogical innovation for more students. Alongside this, the design priority the data most strongly support is the coupling of innovation with structured reflection: given that the innovation-to-reflection path is the strongest in the model, and that reflection carries a large share of innovation’s effect onto performance, the highest-leverage single intervention is to ensure that whatever innovations a programme adopts are accompanied by explicit reflective structures — guided review of recordings, organised feedback integration, and iterative competency-based self-assessment (Kennelly, 2014; McNamara, 2021). Innovation

without reflection risks generating experience that is never transformed into capability; innovation coupled with reflection and set within authentic industry contact realises the full return the model identifies.

Limitations

Several limitations qualify these findings and frame an agenda for future work. The design is cross-sectional, so the causal ordering among the constructs is inferred from theory rather than observed over time; longitudinal designs that track cohorts across a programme would strengthen the inference and directly observe the innovation-to-reflection-to-performance sequence (Kolb, 1984). All measures were self-reported by respondents, which — despite the full-collinearity diagnostic undertaken — cannot fully exclude common-method variance; incorporating instructor assessments or objective performance measures would help. The moderation effect, though significant, is estimated on a single cross-sectional sample and with one operationalisation of industry collaboration; its magnitude and form should be confirmed in independent samples, with alternative measures, and in other cultural and institutional contexts before being treated as settled. The sample, while adequate and well-behaved, is drawn from a single educational and cultural context, which bounds generalisability. A further limitation concerns the operationalisation of the constructs. Teaching innovation, reflective practice, industry collaboration, and performance-based learning were each measured perceptually and reflectively; while appropriate for constructs conceived as latent traits (DeVellis, 2017), this means the study captures respondents' perceptions of these phenomena rather than externally verified behaviours or outcomes. Reflective practice is particularly difficult to measure, and self-reported reflection may diverge from the depth or quality an observer would record (Leigh, 2016; Kennelly, 2014); triangulating self-reports with reflective artefacts—journals, annotated recordings, or supervisor assessments—would strengthen confidence in the mediation finding.

A further limitation concerns the instrument. Six of the thirty-six items are researcher-developed rather than adapted from a published scale, because no validated instrument exists at the granularity screen-acting education requires. They were written from established dimensional definitions and refined through expert review, back-translation, and piloting, and the measurement model reported in Section 4.1 supports their reliability and their convergent and discriminant validity in this sample. They have not, however, accumulated independent cross-sample validation, so their construct validity should be treated as provisional until replicated. This is a limitation of instrument maturity in the field rather than of this study's procedure, and independent replication of the scales is a necessary next step. Two further limitations follow from the design. Recruitment was through institutional channels into an open online instrument, so the sample is purposive rather than probabilistic and no response rate is computable; it should not be read as representative of screen-acting programmes in a survey-statistical sense. And the sample combines learners with a 13.8% share of instructors; although the constructs are programme-level properties reported on the same terms by both groups, the mixed respondent base is a scope condition on the findings rather than a neutral design choice.

Suggestions for Future Research

Five directions follow from those limitations. First, longitudinal designs tracking cohorts across a programme would establish the temporal ordering the present data can only infer, and would let the innovation-to-reflection-to-performance sequence be observed rather than reconstructed. Second, triangulating self-reported reflection with reflective artefacts — journals, annotated recordings, supervisor assessments — would strengthen confidence in the mediation finding, since self-reported reflection may

diverge from the depth an observer would record. Third, the moderation should be confirmed in independent samples, with alternative measures of industry collaboration, and in other cultural and institutional contexts before its magnitude is treated as settled. Relatedly, industry collaboration was measured as perceived access to and engagement with professional opportunities; a more differentiated measure distinguishing types of collaboration (mentorship, live production, internship) might reveal that some forms amplify innovation more strongly than others, a distinction the present aggregate measure cannot resolve and that future work should examine. Finally, qualitative inquiry into how students actually use recorded rehearsals, feedback, and iterations would illuminate the reflective mechanism the quantitative model identifies as central, and replication in adjacent performance disciplines — music, dance, and theatre — would test the transportability of the innovation → reflection → performance structure (Donelan, 2016; Mickel, 2021).

Conclusion

Teaching innovation improves performance-based learning in film and television acting programmes, and it does so substantially by strengthening reflective practice, which emerges as the central mechanism linking innovative pedagogy to performance. Industry collaboration matters in two ways: it independently drives performance, and it amplifies the return on innovative teaching, so innovation delivers most where authentic industry contact is greatest. The practical lesson is that programmes should pair innovative, reflection-rich teaching with broad, equitably distributed industry engagement—treating the two as mutually reinforcing levers rather than independent options — in the shared aim of developing capable screen performers. By identifying reflection as the mechanism and clarifying the dual role of industry collaboration, the study offers actor-training programmes a more precise, evidence-based basis for curricular design than the enthusiasm for innovation or authenticity alone can provide.

More broadly, the study models an approach to evidence in performance education that complements the field's strong tradition of practitioner reflection and case scholarship. By specifying a theory-derived model, measuring its constructs with validated scales, and testing direct, mediated, and moderated relationships on a substantial sample, it shows how quantitative model testing can adjudicate questions — is innovation's benefit direct or mediated? is authenticity an amplifier, a parallel driver, or both? — that qualitative and conceptual work can pose but not settle (Walmsley, 2013; Hair et al., 2014). The answers here are specific: innovation works substantially through reflection, and industry collaboration both stands beside innovation as an independent driver and amplifies its return. Neither conclusion was guaranteed in advance, and neither could have been reached by intuition alone. As acting programmes worldwide, and in China's rapidly expanding screen sector in particular, weigh how to modernise a centuries-old craft under new technological and industrial conditions, evidence of this kind — about mechanisms and boundary conditions, not merely about whether an intervention “works” — is precisely what curricular decisions require. The present study contributes one such piece of evidence and, in doing so, illustrates the value of building more.

Acknowledgements

None.

Conflict of Interest

None.

Funding

The Authors received no funding for this research.

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Appendix A. Measurement instrument

All 36 substantive items were answered on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree). The source from which each item was built is given in parentheses after the item. Items adapted from a published instrument carry that source in parentheses. Items written for this study from the dimensional definitions are marked (*researcher-developed*); the dimension each one operationalises, and the literature grounding that dimension, are given in Section 3.2. Thirty items follow the first route and six the second.

Teaching Innovation (TI)

TI1. My programme uses digital tools (e.g., virtual reality, AI scene analysis, digital rehearsal platforms) in acting instruction. (researcher-developed) TI2. The digital tools used in my training effectively enhance my learning of acting skills. (Kolenko, 2025) TI3. I regularly practise acting through technology-enhanced rehearsal methods. (Aldaghlawy, 2024) TI4. My training is organised around clearly defined performance competencies and professional standards. (Mentini, 2024) TI5. Project-based assignments and case analysis are a regular part of my acting coursework. (Mentini, 2024) TI6. My performance is assessed against criteria aligned with professional industry standards. (Mentini, 2024) TI7. My programme combines online and in-person formats in a way that adds value to my learning. (Huang & Hew, 2018) TI8. Flexible, blended rehearsal arrangements support my skill development. (McNamara, 2021) TI9. I find the blend of digital and face-to-face instruction effective for learning acting. (Huang & Hew, 2018)

Reflective Practice (RP)

RP1. I regularly assess my own acting performance after rehearsals or recordings. (Schön, 1983) RP2. I give and receive structured peer feedback on acting performances. (Athimoolam, 2022) RP3. Reviewing recordings of my performances is a routine part of my learning. (Athimoolam, 2022) RP4. I adjust my performance based on feedback from instructors and peers. (Leigh, 2016) RP5. I am able to incorporate critical feedback into my next performance. (Leigh, 2016) RP6. I actively seek feedback in order to improve my acting. (Schön, 1983) RP7. Reflecting on my performances improves the quality of my subsequent scene work. (Schön, 1983) RP8. Reflection helps me identify specific aspects of my acting to develop. (Leigh, 2016) RP9. Reflective learning has noticeably changed how I approach a role. (Athimoolam, 2022)

Industry Collaboration (IC)

IC1. I have access to mentorship from industry professionals. (Guile & Unwin, 2019) IC2. My programme provides training delivered in collaboration with the film and television industry. (Guile & Unwin, 2019) IC3. I can readily reach industry mentors when I need guidance. (Guile & Unwin, 2019) IC4. I have participated in professional film or television projects during my studies. (Bridgstock, 2011) IC5. My training includes opportunities to work on real industry productions. (Bridgstock, 2011) IC6. I take part in collaborations with production companies or studios. (Bridgstock, 2011) IC7. Real-world industry experience has improved my academic performance. (Yende, 2024) IC8. Exposure to professional projects has strengthened my acting skills. (Yende, 2024) IC9. Industry collaboration has prepared me for professional work. (Guile & Unwin, 2019)

Performance-Based Learning (PBL)

PBL1. I have mastered the technical skills required for screen acting (e.g., working to camera). (researcher-developed) PBL2. I can deliver a consistent performance across multiple takes. (researcher-developed) PBL3. I am confident performing out of sequence as required on screen. (researcher-developed) PBL4. I can express a wide emotional range convincingly while in character. (Sharp, 2024) PBL5. I use my body and voice expressively to embody a character. (Sharp, 2024) PBL6. I can sustain an authentic emotional state during a scene. (Sharp, 2024) PBL7. I can apply professional performance techniques learned through real-world experience. (researcher-developed) PBL8. I am prepared to perform competently in a professional production setting. (Sharp, 2024) PBL9. I integrate industry-standard practices into my performances. (researcher-developed)