Towards Sustainable Vocal Practices:

Exploring Experiences of Vocal Fatigue, Dysphonia, Pain and Recovery in the Voice Acting Industry







Purpose of the Study

- ✓ Investigate **vocal fatigue, dysphonia, pain, and recovery** in the **voice acting industry**.
- ✓ Explore **how performers manage vocal health** and **where industry support is lacking**.
- ✓ Propose **practical solutions** for long-term **career sustainability**.

Introduction

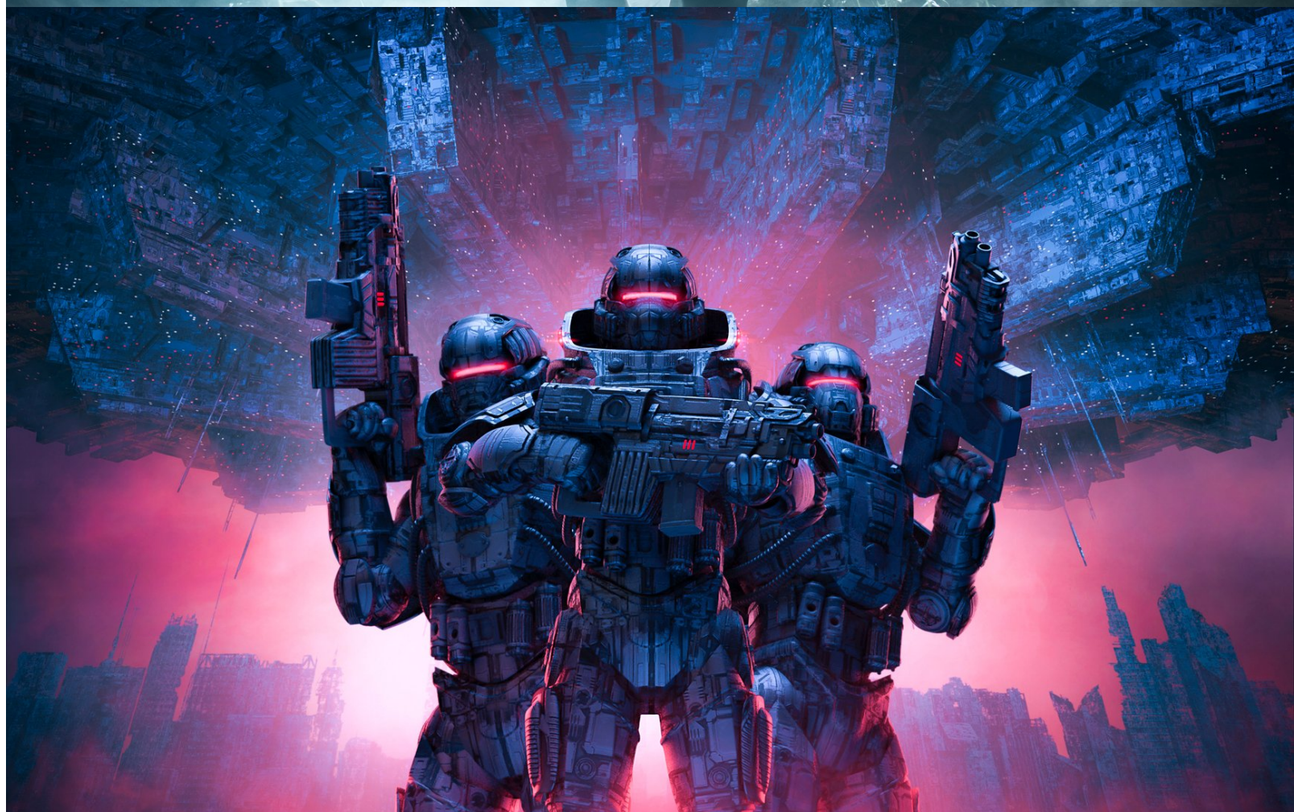
Why This Matters

The **Voice Acting Industry** has expanded rapidly due to an ever-increasing demand for **audiobooks** and **Video Games.**

Performers **often experience extreme vocal strain**, but there is **no formal industry-wide qualification** for voice performance or **specific training** on how to **manage vocal health** in this arena.

- *'Reducing Vocal Fatigue while Preserving Realism during Video Game Voice Overs using the Vocal Combat Technique: A Randomised Control Trial',* Reid et al. (2023)
- *'Listening to Video Game Voices: A Call for Action for Research into the Vocal Health of Video Game Voice Actors'*, Aiken, Rumbach & Madil (2022)
- *'Screaming for Attention: The Vocal Demands of Actors in Violent Interactive Games'*, Cazden (2017)





Research Aims

Understand Vocal Health Challenges

- Examine **how common** vocal strain is in voice acting.
- Identify the **physical and psychological effects** of prolonged vocal use.

Explore Prevention & Recovery Strategies

- Investigate **what techniques voice actors currently use**.
- Assess their **effectiveness and accessibility**.

Identify Industry Gaps & Solutions

- Where does **training and industry support fall short**?
- How can **systemic changes improve vocal sustainability**?

Goal

To advocate for sustainable vocal practices that protect the long-term careers of Voice Actors.

Key Challenges Facing Voice Actors

Demand for Extreme Vocal Efforts

Shouting, screaming and character voices for long periods of recording time.

Lack of Formal Training

Voice actors rarely receive **adequate structured vocal health education** relative to the **nature of occupational demands**

Industry Inconsistencies & Limited Support

No **universal standards** for **rest breaks, warm-ups** or **recovery protocols**.

Freelancers **must self-manage health risks**.

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A survey conducted in 2021 by the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA) found that 74% of voice-over actors reported that their sessions included loud/projected, aggressive, or vocally extreme work “very often” or “almost always” and 38% of performers experienced vocal fatigue or stress during their sessions with the same frequency.10 Most notably, 19% reported that they found it difficult to recover their normal vocal quality after a session, with 43% stating that it could take two or more days to return to baseline. More than one-quarter of performers (28%) revealed that they considered turning down a session for fear of the impact that it would have on their voice or the work that it would cause them to lose.

'Reducing Vocal Fatigue while Preserving Realism during Video Game Voice Overs using the Vocal Combat Technique: A Randomized Controlled Trial’

Reid, et al. (2023)

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...professional vocal effort was associated with voice handicap among teachers [...] result indicates that there is a need to revise the aspects of how teachers’ work is organized that determine the extent of professional voice use.

‘Vocal Effort and Voice Handicap Among Teachers’

Sampaio, et al. (2012)

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Specifically, the use of voice amplification systems was not associated with decreased experience of vocal fatigue in teachers as was hypothesized.

'*Factors Influencing Teachers’ Experience of Vocal Fatigue and Classroom Voice Amplification’*

Banks, et al. (2025)

Methodology

(Planned) Research Approach

- **Mixed-Methods Study**:
  - **Quantitative** (surveys)
  - **Qualitative** (interviews).
- **Participants**:
  - Voice actors with some professional experience in at least one of the following areas:
    - video game
    - audiobook
    - audiodrama/podcast
    - animation.



Data Collection Methods

- **Surveys & Questionnaires**: Capturing frequency & severity of vocal fatigue.
- **Semi-Structured Interviews & Focus Groups**: Exploring **lived experiences** and **recovery strategies**.

Data Analysis

- Used **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)** to **identify key themes**.

Key Findings

Prevalence of Vocal Fatigue as a Widespread Issue

Limited Awareness & Training

No Standardised Industry Support





Prevalence of Vocal Fatigue

“I've definitely felt vocal fatigue, especially after long audition marathons or trying to do high-energy character voices. My throat feels tight, and my voice becomes raspy or strained. It’s frustrating because I can’t hit the tones I want, and I have to stop before finishing what I planned. It makes me worry about whether I’m damaging my voice long-term.” – SO

“It’s normally screaming, like death stuff, that’s quite painful at times. I did a demo a while ago for a zombie game, and it was really tough because it uses a very different part of your voice that you don’t normally use. Even though I warmed up, my voice was like, 'What the hell are you doing to me?'” – BM

“The amount of vocal strain I was getting… physically, after half an hour, it really hurt.” – BM

“I had to do a solid three minutes of fake vomiting for a video game scene. Then, in the same session, I had to do coughing for a fire death scene. The director immediately went, 'We’re not doing that until the end of the day, and we know you’re not recording for another few weeks so you have time to recover.' That decision probably saved my voice.” – BM

Limited Awareness & Training

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“I didn’t have formal voice training, but I practised what I could with the resources I found, like vocal warm-ups and reading scripts aloud. I’d love to get more professional guidance to refine my preparation.” – SO

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“I didn’t really get any formal vocal training. It's something I’ve noticed particularly since starting video game work, where I have to switch between multiple extreme voices in a single session. Unless I plan carefully, I risk pushing my voice too far.” – MR

“

“Honestly, the industry leaves you to figure out a lot on your own. There are resources out there, but they’re scattered, and some are too expensive for someone just starting out. I’d love to see beginner-friendly workshops focused on vocal health.” – SO

No Standardised Industry Support

“Voice actors often receive 24-hour turnaround requests for multiple characters with vastly different vocal demands. Auditions rarely factor in vocal health, forcing actors to push through extreme roles without proper preparation.” – AM

“I didn’t really get any formal vocal training. It's something I’ve noticed particularly since starting video game work, where I have to switch between multiple extreme voices in a single session. Unless I plan carefully, I risk pushing my voice too far.” – MR

“Some studios are great at respecting vocal limits, but others push actors too hard. Break policies and workload expectations vary widely between studios, and extreme vocal performances are often scheduled without actor input, leading to increased vocal strain.” – AM

“Studios and game developers should implement mandatory breaks, structured warm-ups, and improved scheduling to ensure voice actors are not subjected to damaging conditions.” – AM



Vocal Fatigue

- Frequently reported across multiple participants.
- Often linked to long recording sessions, audition marathons, and vocally extreme performances (e.g., shouting, character voices).
- Disrupts performance, limits vocal range, and causes frustration.

Dysphonia

- Recurring issue; especially after high-energy sessions.
- Participants noted inconsistent ability to hit tones and strain affecting performance quality.
- Some applied singing techniques to help manage vocal endurance.

Reported Vocal Health Issues Across Participants (continued)

Pain and Discomfort

- Throat pain reported when pushing too hard, especially for loud, gruff, or extreme voices.
- Jaw tension noted from exaggerated articulation and character voices.
- Many participants relied on self-directed techniques like warm-ups, hydration, and pacing their sessions to minimise pain.

Vocal Injury Risk and Recovery Strategies

- Some actors recognised vocal strain patterns early and adjusted their approach (e.g., requesting breaks, changing technique).
- A participant described vocal trauma and long-term strain, demonstrating the need for structured injury prevention training.
- Rest, hydration, and vocal rest were the most commonly mentioned recovery methods, but there is no structured guidance on recovery within the industry.





Prevalence of Vocal Health Issues

“I injured my voice at 10 years old, screaming in a school production with no guidance on how to do it safely. It took about two years to recover. Even now, I’m very aware that my voice is more vulnerable to damage.” – BM

100% of participants who took part in this study acknowledged experiencing **vocal fatigue and strain** as part of their routine work.

Dysphonia and pain were **common experiences**, particularly among those working in **high-intensity recording environments. 75%** reported experiencing dysphonia and pain.

Vocal injury risks exist, but participants largely rely on **self-education and personal coping strategies** due to the **lack of structured industry guidance**. **50%** of participants reported vocal injury.

(Dysphonia = Hoarseness, Voice Loss, or Impairment. Pain/Discomfort = Throat Pain, Jaw Tension, Vocal Strain. Vocal Injury Risk =Long-term Damage, Trauma, Recovery Issues)

“My voice has dropped mid-session before because I pushed it too far. That’s my warning sign that I need to stop, or I risk losing my voice completely for days.” – BM

Strategies for Prevention & Recovery

Common Self-Care Strategies

- **Hydration & Humidifiers**
- **Vocal Warm-ups & Cooldowns**
- **Voice Rest & Recovery Periods**

Advanced Techniques

- **Vocal Combat Technique (VCT)**: Developed to **reduce strain** in extreme performances.
- **Breath control & phonation exercises**: Help sustain voice over long sessions.

> **“Taking care of my voice is a form of self-respect. Voice acting is a marathon, not a sprint—if I don’t pace myself, I won’t have a career in ten years.” – AM**

> **“I’ve had throat pain when I push too hard, especially on loud or gruff voices. Recovery for me usually means taking breaks, drinking warm tea, and using a steam inhaler, but I know I need to get better at preventing the pain in the first place.” – SO**

Industry Gaps & Systemic Issues

No Standardised Training

No industry-wide guidelines for vocal health training.

Scheduling & Recording Conditions

Studio recording sessions can ignore vocal fatigue risks.

Home Studio set-up poses risks of overwork.

Audition and sample requests with limited turn-around time.

Limited Access to Vocal Health Support

Freelancers and new voice actors struggle to afford adequate set-up, vocal coaching, therapy, or medical assistance.

Research Process & Reflections

Evolution

- From mixed-methods study to a qualitative-only approach.

Challenges

- Availability & Time Constraints.

Personal Learning & Growth

- Developed advanced research skills in qualitative analysis.
- Gained greater empathy for industry struggles.
- Recognised the urgent need for industry reform.



Conclusion & Recommendations

Industry-wide Training & Education

Workplace Protections (Breaks, Scheduling Changes)

Accessible Vocal Health Resources

Collaboration with Unions & Industry Bodies



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