



The Effectiveness of Musical and Non-Musical Choir Training Processes in Reading Sheet Music at the Student Activity Unit Vocalista Harmonic Choir, Indonesian Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta

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Abstract

This study explores the effectiveness of choir rehearsal processes in the Student Activity Unit Vocalista Harmonic Choir (VHC) at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta, particularly in music reading for both musical and non-musical members, as well as their interactions with the conductor. The research methodology employed is qualitative with an observational approach. Through participatory observation, the researcher concludes that musical members tend to be more confident in music reading and assist non-musical members. Conversely, non-musical members require additional time and practice to catch up with the repertoire. However, during the Voice in December (VID) concert, non-musical members demonstrate mastery of the material and adapt well alongside musical members, indicating the effectiveness of the choir rehearsal process in unifying the vocal quality of its members. Data collection involved note-taking, audio recordings, and video recordings during rehearsals and the concert. The findings suggest that musical choir members tend to aid non-musical members in learning, while non-musical members require extra effort to catch up with the repertoire. The conductor plays a crucial role in providing guidance and vocal technique training. The rehearsal outcomes demonstrate that non-musical members are capable of mastering the repertoire and participating effectively in concerts.

Keywords: *Choir; Vocal Learning; Rehearsal Effectiveness*

Introduction

The Vocalista Harmonic Choir (VHC) Student Choir is one of the active Student Activity Units at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta, which focuses on vocal arts. The rehearsal process at the Vocalista Harmonic Choir Student Activity Unit has its uniqueness in the learning process because the members of the assist each other during rehearsals, which makes observers interested in researching the choir's learning process. Observers are also members of the Vocalista Harmonic Choir, enabling them to identify various challenges or differences among choir members, both musically and non-musically, during rehearsals. Choir members who have singing experience come from vocal departments at institutions, so during rehearsals, they can assist members from other departments or non-music backgrounds. This results in

a higher number of musically experienced singers compared to non-musical ones. Researchers also have other interests, based on the observer's experience in knowing different learning methods from other choir.

Certainly, there are differences that occur among each musical and non-musical member. In the rehearsal process of the Vocalista Harmonic Choir Student Activity Unit, various challenges arise, one of which is the difficulty in reading musical notation for members who are not in music-related departments. This aspect interests the observer to further research the efforts made to master musical notation to accommodate members who find reading musical notation challenging.

Hence, the observer has a research idea concerning novice and professional singers in the Vocalista Harmonic Choir Student Activity Unit at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta. Each singer in the choir has different singing experiences, especially in singing classical songs by reading musical notation. This research is conducted during the choir's rehearsal process by observing how singers learn and how coaches provide techniques in singing and reading musical notation. Do coaches provide different learning strategies for novice and professional singers? by dividing them into groups, so that singers can produce the same sound or pitch.

Literature Review

1. Reading Music Scores

Reading music scores in the vocal choir rehearsal process is crucial for understanding song materials. Singers involved in choir rehearsals must understand how to read notation correctly so they can achieve optimal results and perform without any hindrances. According to Margareta, Wayan, & Made (2022), singing ability must be complemented by learning vocal techniques such as articulation, tempo, melodic accuracy, and dynamic performance to ensure optimal results and avoid disappointment when singing songs.

In Western music theory, there are theoretical elements comprising rhythm, melody, harmony, tempo, dynamics, and expression. Each of these musical elements has different measurements. When grouped, rhythm and tempo have the same measurement, relating to time, while melody and harmony relate to pitch, and dynamics and expression relate to volume. According to Siswanto & Firmansyah (2018), the ability to read musical notation at each educational level faces challenges regarding the accuracy of reading notation values, even though rhythmic concepts have been explained in terms of notation form and value.

2. Conductor Techniques in Choir Group Training

Conductors have the task of managing the needs and challenges of the choir group and its individual members during the singing process. The topic discussed in the article "The making of a choir: Individuality and consensus in Choral Singing" explains the best way to respect the individuality of each singer while maintaining cooperation (Brewer & Garnett, 2012). This underscores that each member helps address the shortcomings of others, enabling the conductor to deliver song materials effectively. Conductors and choir trainers can aid in the development of each member's learning and creativity in delivering materials, training proper vocal techniques, and addressing challenges during rehearsals (Carrington, 2011). A conductor must be meticulous in classifying each singer's voice type (Chen, 2010). Choir trainers play a role in instilling responsibility in singers and affirming their ability to improve their ensemble skills through concentration and self-discipline. Correct singing requires regular practice focusing on body posture, physicality, breathing, and voice (Atkins & Duke, 2013).

3. Learning Strategies for Novice and Professional Singers

Harmonic strength in singing quality characterizes each singer's voice. According to Winter (1978), the characteristic of a female voice is the most striking difference between experienced singers and those still learning. This serves as a guideline for novice singers to practice more diligently individually and seek new experiences, while trainers can provide or create easy access for novice singers to practice individually with clear guidelines.

Choir singers need adequate self-to-other ratio feedback to control the pitch of their singing (Ternstrom, 1999).

Method

The research method used is qualitative with data collection through observational approach. This study aims to observe the vocal choir learning process in the VOCALISTA HARMONIC CHOIR, particularly in terms of music score reading for both musical and non-musical members, as well as the interaction between choir members and the coach. The observation method allows researchers to gain a deep understanding of the behaviors and interactions that occur within the research context. Subsequently, after all observational data is collected, the author proceeds to the data analysis stage using coding to facilitate analyzing and clarifying the findings from observations.

1. Researcher Characteristics and Reflections

In this study, the observer serves as a researcher who is not directly involved but has easy access to obtain information. The ease of access to observe research subjects is due to the researcher being a member of the VOCALISTA HARMONIC CHOIR and having previously been involved in the rehearsal process. Therefore, the observer is interested in observing a specific focus, namely music score reading for music and non-music students. This is because 70% of the VOCALISTA HARMONIC CHOIR members are music students, while 30% are students from other fields. Most of the observers are familiar with each other and with the choir coach, facilitating the observation process.

2. Context

The first, second, and third rehearsal sessions take place in the Multipurpose Building of the Indonesian Institute of the Arts located at Jl. Parangtritis KM. 6.5 RW. 5. Glondong, Panggungharjo, Sewon, Bantul DIY. The rehearsal process is conducted on the second floor of the building, which has dimensions of 8 x 8 meters. The room also contains chairs corresponding to the number of choir members, a keyboard, keyboard stand, cajon, bellyra, tambourine, two stands for the coach, two air conditioners, a round table located in the left corner of the stairs, and two other percussion instruments. Physical environment during rehearsal includes two occurrences: (1) grouping of musical choir members rehearsing the next song and practicing difficult parts of the song, and (2) non-musical choir member groups rehearsing difficult repertoire in reading musical notation and repeating repertoire to achieve harmony comparable to musical members. Additionally, some members are busy writing dynamics and numerical notations on song scores, using a tuner app to determine pitch accuracy, and communicating with each other in whispers so as not to disturb other practicing members.

The rehearsal location for dress rehearsals and concerts is the Concert Hall of the Indonesian Institute of the Arts, also located at Jl. Parangtritis KM. 6.5 RW. 5. Glondong, Panggungharjo, Sewon, Bantul DIY. This building is a performance stage with an area of approximately 4500 m² and accommodates approximately 200 audience seats. The hall contains a grand piano on stage and chairs arranged according to the choir members. Access doors for choir members are located on the east side of

the stage. The hall has a cool temperature due to several air conditioners, providing comfort for members during rehearsals and concerts. Additionally, the hall has good soundproofing, preventing sound leakage from outside.

The physical environment during dress rehearsals involves members warming up by practicing breathing and engaging in activities similar to a concert. Therefore, each repertoire is performed only once or without repetition. This aims to simulate concert-like activities that will be encountered during the scheduled performance. However, after the dress rehearsal, an evaluation is conducted to address and discuss any issues encountered to prevent recurrence during the performance.

3. Data Sampling

Data sampling is done by: (1) noting down any activities performed by choir members and the coach during each observation, (2) using audio recording during the third observation, (3) using a video recording device on a smartphone during the fourth observation, and (4) during performances, the observer attends the VOCALISTA HARMONIC CHOIR's annual concert and notes body movements, expressions, music score readings, costumes worn, and other relevant aspects.

4. Ethics Related to Subjects

The observer communicates with the VOCALISTA HARMONIC CHOIR management to request permission before conducting observations. During rehearsals, the researcher also seeks permission to take pictures, record audio, and video.

5. Data Collection

The observer collects data by observing every movement of each choir member, their responses to the coach, the coach's responses to members, communication between the coach and choir members, musical instruments used as accompaniment, expressions, and cooperation among members. Data collection involves using a notebook to write down important details such as song materials used, musical instruments, individual members' learning progress, duration, the coach's teaching methods, and the observer's descriptions of small details observed during the vocal choir learning process.

In addition to written notes, the observer also records videos and audio using a smartphone with a duration of 20.09 minutes. Video recording is prepared before the rehearsal process begins, with the observer positioning themselves in a corner to record. The video recording starts when the coach gives instructions to each member to sit according to their voice type and prepares the song material to be rehearsed, lasting for 41.04 minutes.

Audio recording is done so the observer can hear detailed instructions given by the coach to members and the blending of voices (soprano, alto, tenor, and bass) from both musical and non-musical choir members' perspectives. Through these video and audio recordings, the observer can review the rehearsal process repeatedly.

After the observation sessions, the observer re-reads the notes, reviews the video recordings, and listens to the audio recordings to summarize in detail the differences between musical and non-musical aspects observed during rehearsal and throughout the concert.

The rehearsal process takes approximately 2 hours, with the first observation covering the entire duration, and subsequent observations lasting for about one hour each due to other choir groups using the rehearsal space afterwards. The third and fourth observations last for about 1 hour each, and the fifth observation covers the entire duration of the concert from start to finish.

6. Observation Units

The observer observes the vocal choir learning process in the Vocalista Harmonic Choir for both musical and non-musical members. In this learning process, the observer observes how choir members read music scores with different backgrounds. Non-musical choir members typically require more time to learn the song material because they need to translate musical notation into numerical notation and mark the dynamics correctly on the song score.

The coach divides the choir groups according to voice type: soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. With this division, the coach expects musical members to assist non-musical members in catching up with the learned material, thus achieving harmonious results and prioritizing ensemble sound that can be heard clearly.

7. Data Processing & Analysis

During the coding stage, the observer notes down important details observed during vocal rehearsals. The observer reviews video recordings repeatedly and listens to audio recordings again. Coding is done repeatedly to allow the observer to write down important details observed during the observations in detail.

Findings and Discussion

After conducting the observation process, the observer noted several developments in vocal choir learning involving all members participating in the rehearsal process, including musical members, non-musical members, and the coach.

1. Musical Choir Members in Music Score Reading

During vocal learning, the observer noticed several instances where choir members acted as coaches/instructors for those who couldn't read musical notation properly by helping to mark the song score according to dynamics, pronunciation, and adding numerical notations to complex musical scores. As rehearsals progressed, musical choir members displayed confidence in singing, evident when they mastered the songs and sang them loudly. Musical choir members have their own way of learning to sing, as seen during group division where they use aids such as listening to the melody on an electronic keyboard. However, musical choir members also faced challenges during rehearsals, particularly in pronouncing lyrics in difficult languages that they rarely encounter.

2. Non-Musical Choir Members in Music Score Reading

Non-musical choir members have a different learning approach compared to musical members. They are required to master the song material just like musical members, so in subsequent rehearsals, non-musical members can keep up with the material. The usual rehearsal frequency of twice a week is not enough for non-musical members to practice the song material, so the coach assigns a responsible musical member from each voice group (alto, soprano, tenor, and bass) to create their own practice schedule to catch up with the material. During rehearsals, non-musical members are given the opportunity to write numerical notations on the song score if they are not familiar with reading musical notation. Non-musical choir members often discuss with musical members in their voice groups when they make mistakes in singing. Sometimes, non-musical choir members furrow their brows and feel confused when they mispronounce song lyrics. Some members still hesitate in reading the score, resulting in less audible or suboptimal singing. Some non-musical members become silent during rehearsals because they have difficulty understanding the song material, and they occasionally glance around when they miss the tempo of the song being sung.

3. Coach

The coach frequently gives instructions for marking important sections on the song score such as precise intonation, song dynamics, and transitions. During rehearsals, the coach feels that some members' voices are not audible enough, so they instruct those members to sit in the front row to make their vocals clearer. The coach often demonstrates the correct pronunciation, accurate lyrics delivery, and proper song dynamics to all choir members. During rehearsals, the coach sometimes stops when they feel that the sung song does not match the dynamics on the studied song score, and repeatedly practices that part of the song. Before approaching the concert, the coach becomes stricter with each member because some still haven't mastered the song material.

4. General Behavior of Choir Members

During song practice, some members tap their feet to the beat, some sway their hands to the rhythm, and occasionally, some members tap their thighs to adjust to the tempo of the song.

5. Training Results

There are three song materials prepared for the VID (Voice In December) concert preparation: (1) "Thankful," which has a slow tempo and is practiced with full appreciation, (2) "Jabberwocky," which is in German, presenting some difficult lyrics to pronounce, but with unique instrumentals aided by musical instruments, and (3) "Don't Stop Me Now," where singing is accompanied by movements to enhance members' enthusiasm. During the dress rehearsal (GR - Gladi Resik), members are encouraged to no longer use song scores and are required to memorize the lyrics and movements for "Don't Stop Me Now." However, during the dress rehearsal, some members, both musical and non-musical, sing less audibly when performing "Don't Stop Me Now" without song scores because they haven't memorized the lyrics and movements yet. During the VID concert, the observer observed the progress of non-musical members in understanding the rehearsed material. Non-musical members were able to master the song material, and there was no noticeable difference in singing between non-musical and musical members.

Conclusion

Based on the observations, it can be concluded that there are significant differences in the learning process between musical and non-musical choir members in Vocalista Harmonic Choir. The learning process for musical members is considered sufficient to learn the song material and help non-musical members in music score reading. Meanwhile, non-musical members must catch up with the song material by attending additional rehearsals organized by the responsible musical members assigned by Vocalista Harmonic Choir. The vocal choir rehearsal process for musical and non-musical members has proceeded smoothly. Musical members effectively helped non-musical members during the VID concert preparation. This is evidenced by non-musical members mastering the song material and being able to adjust their choir singing abilities to match those of musical members during the concert.

Attachment

1) Training Process

2)



Figure 1. Choir Rehearsal Process (Multi-Purpose Hall)



Figure 2. Choir Rehearsal Process (Concert Hall) Part 1



Figure 3. Choir Rehearsal Process (Concert Hall) Part 2

3) Rehearsal (GR)



Figure 4. Rehearsal (GR)

4) Concert VID (*Voice in December*)



Figure 5. Voice in December Concert

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