

## Basic Properties of Chorus and Fundamental Approaches to Improve

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### Abstract

Through choral education, individuals learn to use their voices both correctly and effectively, as well as acquire certain personal characteristics. The level of applicability of the chorus training is high and it provides the student's convenience to participate in the musical atmosphere. In choral studies, children learn how to use the basic elements and functions of music, the formation of sound, the characteristics of their own voice and how to use it correctly and to breathe properly and regularly. Chorus have various functions as social, individual, cultural and educational. In this study, these functions were examined and the effects of choral education on children's mental and behavioral development were investigated, the importance of choosing repertoire was discussed and the importance of organizing various organizations in terms of increasing the quality of choral education is emphasized.

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## **Introduction**

The term chorus comes from the words *khoreia-Horus* in Greek and *chorea* in Latin. The word *chorus* was first used for the dancing and hand holding community, and later the singing ensemble began to be given this name. At the beginning, the chorus was singing singles. In parallel with the general development of the music, the chorus and choral works also improved (Egüz, 1998).

There are different definitions of choral education; "Choral education is the process of giving musical behaviours to the individuals who are in the chorus, aiming them through their own experiences, in order to use their voices correctly, beautifully and effectively" (Çevik, 1997). Each chorus must be in an intensive and regular working process within a certain order and system in order to reach the best, correct, beautiful and effective way of singing. The way of introducing these musical behaviours requires an intense and uninterrupted work that repeats at regular intervals. According to Ucan (2001), "Choral education is the process of giving certain socio-musical behaviours purposefully and methodically to the individuals (members) that form the chorus through their common experiences; or it is the process of changing, transforming, developing and empowering purposefully and methodically the socio-musical behaviours of the individuals in the chorus through their common experiences. ".

In addition, choral education plays an important role also in the development of some personal traits. These features are the earnings in improving self-confidence and self-discipline, making individuals active, spending qualified time away from harmful habits, being emotional- sensitive-programmable and sharing, gaining sense of responsibility, using physical language in a good way, protecting traditions and customs, keeping up with the era and carrying it forward, developing cultural pleasures, thinking multi-directional and multi-dimensional, organizing and being organized. These achievements of choral education are also reflected in school education and school success in larger scales (Erol, 2013).

As a high level of applicability and ease of providing students with the opportunity to participate in the musical environment, chorus activities that music teachers have enjoyed to a great extent are taking place as a lesson in music teaching education/training programs. The ability of a musical work to be performed with a high level of achievement requires that the commentator(s) individually possess technical and musical accumulation specific to that area. This is especially important in singings where multiple musicians are taking place. For example, all groups of orchestral instruments must have the technical and musical behaviour required by the whole of the party and the musical piece. Because the orchestra is a way of musical expression and environment that requires instrumental control (Köse, 2004).

### **Importance of Choral Studies**

Choral studies in music education have an important place in the development of the child. In these studies, children learn how to construct the sound, the organ producing sound, the properties and capacity of its own voice, protect and use correctly the sound while learning the basic elements and basic functions that make up the music. They provide consciousness in terms of correct and regular breathing and breathing support. By paying attention to these, they earn the ability to sing in desired quality and loving to sing by singing children's songs individually and collectively suited to their age and sound characteristics, and also dynamism, they also take care to speak beautifully (Elmas, 1998: 238).

In this period, as the voice muscles of girls and boys work in the same way, their training does not change so much. Particularly the free edges of the sound curves work. The preliminary phase of the voice change (mutation) starts at the age of 8-9 and continues until the age of 12-13 (Cooksey and Welch, 1997).

As in all training areas, principles of sound training must be established in terms of process effectiveness. The transformation of voice training practices and activities, often referred to as abstract progressions, into concrete processes and practices, that are going to make learning both easy and permanent, must be considered as the main principle (Köse, 2001).

Brown (2000) states these principles as follows:

- Instead of imitating, the student should learn how to produce the correct sound.
- The teacher should be able to act sensitively to the negativity with the awareness that voice is an important factor and to recognize the physiological properties of students in order to help to solve their problems.
- It should be taken into care that voice is entirely dependent on body comfort, and the importance of body language should be known.
- With correct breathing, correct singing, and correct start, the density and continuity in legato and staccato sounds must be ensured.
- The suitability of sound practice to the duration and level must be ensured.
- The psychological properties and conditions of the students should be monitored.
- Information about anatomical and physiological structures and functions should be given to the students in order to prevent the negative use of sound.

In a survey, Yiğit (2006: 777) found that the activities of regularly conducted voice training in the chorus had significant effects on the development and alteration of behaviour in the voice range and correct use of voice in children.

The positive reflection of artistic criterion that the chorus should have, like homogeneity, chorus discipline, stage dominance, diction, articulation, clarity, etc., on the students' success in school education is seen in concrete. The students' success in school is conveyed to the upper levels by the integration of the stage mastery and discipline that the students have in the chorus, and by interpreting the language of the body-word-thought in a meaningful, clear, accentuating and effectively (Erol, 2013: 10).

### **Functions of the Chorus**

In human life, functions of chorus can be grouped into four main groups:

- 1) Social functions,
- 2) Individual functions,
- 3) Cultural functions,
- 4) Educational functions.

It is necessary to look at the function of the chorus in human life. This view is valid for all and each of the functioning groups (Uçan, 2001).

Chorus is a comprehensive and participative language in which voice, lyrics, melody, rhythm, song, movement and body languages are used. The better chorus uses choral language, the more efficient they perform their cultural functions. With this structure;

- 1- From the view of art: In addition to general music culture, chorus directly contributes to the development of cultures related to folk music, entertainment music, art music, religious music, popular music and contemporary music.
- 2- From the view of content: Chorus can also be a direct application area for the formation and development of individual, cohesive, regional, local, national, international, continental, intercontinental, global and universal cultural accumulations.

With the themes and the speaking and writing language in the songs, it is aimed to contribute to basic education, to contribute directly to general music education, to be a field of general music education and to be a field of application to professional music education (Apaydın, 2006). In fact, the artistic items that the

teacher-instructor should pay attention to when he or she runs a chorus also describes the function of the chorus in education. It is very natural that the artistic criteria of chorus is reflected in the education positively.

The elements which are gained in choral education such as choral discipline, diction, articulation, comprehensibility, intonation, homogeneity, stage dominance, musicality, musical dynamics, chorus-chef harmony, appearance, program richness and diversity, rhythmic harmony and unity, sound quality, etc. improve the educational function of the chorus (Erol, 2013).

Singing helps to facilitate social bonding (Dissnayake, 2000) and group cohesion (Freeman, 2000) between individuals, it also enhances pro-social and cooperative behaviours as well as empathy (Kirschner, 2010). Recent studies suggest that singers even without any formal training may experience flow during group singing (Bailey, 2002). Singing has some positive psychological (happiness, energy) and physical benefits (improved posture, breathing) (Clift, 2012). In fact, psychological benefits of group singing have been confirmed in a research (Clift&Nicols, 2010). Chronic illnesses can be seen among amateur choristers (Clift&Morrison, 2010; Clift&Hancox, 2010), singing is often used to manage the psychological side-effects of a range of psychosomatic and physical disorders including arthritis, lung problems, chronic pain, or cancer (Gale, 2012). Psychoneuroendocrine responses to music have been studied in various naturalistic settings including music listening and singing (Kreutz, 2012; Chanda, 2013).

For example, some (Beck, 2000) responses are reported on differential effects of rehearsing and singing in public on immune and stress in semi-professional singers. Salivary Immunoglobulin A (s-IgA) that defenses against bacterial and viral infections increases after two hours of singing (McCarty, 1996), while a stress hormone cortisol increases during a public choral performance (Beck, 2000).

Oxytocin (OT) is a hormone that is associated with intimate relationships and buffering stress in humans (Gordon, 2008). Increases of OT were found in patients after open-heart surgery when they listened to soothing music (Nilsson, 2009). In one study, it is (Grape, 2003) found that OT increased in both amateur and professional singers after 30 minutes of a singing lesson besides increasing joy and attention. Therefore, singing in groups significantly improves individual health and decreases negative effects. Moreover, group singing would increase oxytocin level (Kreutz, 2014).

### **Voice Training in Chorus**

The voice is a delicate instrument that needs good and purposive care. Much research has been done to explore and discover the most healthy and successful way to sing. The earliest roots of voice training date back to the fourth century, singing was foundational to church worship and singers were being ordained into the church to lead the singing of the worship service (Reid, 1950). This early voice training paved the way

for centuries of changing vocal techniques and training strategies. The church was the foundation for vocal music for many centuries, and directly influenced the singing styles that historically followed (Bennett, 2017).

In the earliest music records, the prevailing style of music was monophonic a cappella music, unison singing that was somewhat simple and easy to follow based on the text more than on a beautiful melody (Hoch, 2017). The focus was on the words instead of the sound. Afterwards, polyphony became the new style of singing, meaning “many-voiced”, that is sung in harmony by a choir or multiple voices. Choral polyphony created all voices equally, and was primarily melodic. These melodies were stacked on top of one another, but there was no emphasis on any part; because it was about the whole, and did not lend itself to soloistic singing (Bennett, 2017).

Voice training is named differently as singing, vocal, chorus and speech trainings according to the purposes of the educational institution given, to the types of music to be related and to the types and period characteristics of the songs to be performed. Voice training includes teaching songs and teaching individuals proper, beautiful and effective singing-related behaviours in accordance with the needs of voice education, and particularly general and specific music education.

In order that the correctness of any training procedure may be accurately estimated, and its value determined, it is essential for every teacher and student of singing to have an exact knowledge of the mechanical capacities and limitations of the human voice (Bennett, 2017). He believed that one must know the physiological functioning of the voice in order to be successful in both the teaching and the studying of singing. Knowing the science of the voice is important for vocalists because it changes the way that they view their voice.

At every age level, chorus carries a purpose for individuals to sing every kind of song effectively and beautifully by creating the right sound. It is the basic voice education at the beginning level. The basic behaviours of sound education, which are correctness in using breath (in accordance with breath), accuracy in making sound (in accordance with the anatomical and physiological structure), accuracy in articulation (in accordance with language characteristics and rules used in the song) and accuracy in music making (in accordance with music rules) constitute the purpose and content of the teaching of singing (Töreyn, 2001).

Choral voice training is a classroom environment. In terms of each chorus member, it should be considered as a training process that can increase the individual's ability to use the voice more efficiently in forming the common tune of the chorus. However, this is largely based on the individual voice education experiences prior to the choral voice training. This is because the choral voice education is being applied to

gain more attitudes towards the sound and narrative, technical and musical harmony rather than the basic behaviours of individual voice usage (Köse, 2004).

In the chorus, sound has a very important place. The general purposes of voice education in chorus must be applied correctly and intentionally to be successful and improved. The sound education in the chorus enables the individual to establish a healthy music environment with correct and clear voices while contributing and listening to music and enhancing the cultural richness in this area. The most productive implementation of choral education in all its contexts is also contributing to the success of the school. (Erol, 2013: 18).

### **Importance of Chorus in Child Education**

Modern approaches to the training of future music teachers determine the consideration of its universality. The music teachers become the child's first leader in the world of music and art. Professional training of the future teacher of musical art includes both general art and purely musical factors: artistic knowledge of the world, influence on the needs-motivational sphere of the person, development of the general culture, etc. The professional competence of young teachers acquires completeness, integrity, filled with personal attitude to the profession (Lu, 2015). Society expects the teacher not only to broadcast knowledge but also to maintain a fruitful cultural-value and creative interaction with students in order to successfully educate the younger generation.

In urban areas besides low academic achievement, teachers encounter some problems at schools like poverty and violence. There are some assumptions and negative aspects for the students living in the urban areas in big cities, it is thought that they are at risk especially by the help of media (Benedict, 2006). Teachers in urban areas can and are able to make positive social changes on these students. The funding resources of public schools in some cities are not distributed equally between neighbourhoods, and this increases the gap between social boundaries (Erickson, 2008).

According to some policies at federal departments funding and instructional time for arts education may be reduced in many schools at some decades (Hazelette, 2006), therefore there arises huge emphasis on teachers to follow the based old-fashioned curricula, which reduces the creativity and causes unprofessional teaching (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2012; Delpit, 2003).

When all these complex situations are considered, it is important to recruit and retain effective teachers for urban areas (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010; Ingersoll, 2004). There are documents about the preservice teachers and their feelings of being unprepared in their teacher education programs, which are positioned in culturally urban areas for their first jobs (Cannella & Reiff, 1994; Fiese & DeCarbo, 1995; Parker & Hood, 1995). They do not have the necessary experience, and so they feel uncomforted and

anxiety for working at urban schools (Kindall-Smith, 2004). Teachers need to navigate the dynamic cultures of their classroom environments for effective teaching in order to have success in urban teaching (Fitzpatrick, 2008).

According to a study (Shaw, 2015) which is done to explore how successful urban choral music educators use contextual knowledge to inform pedagogical practice, it was understood that field experiences in urban settings were among the best opportunities for preservice teachers to deepen their personal understanding of the urban context. It was also mentioned that experiences with genres such as popular music, world music, and gospel were essential preparation for choral teaching in urban schools.

Choral educators should use knowledge of learners (Shulman, 1987), context (Grossman, 1990), and personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1985, 1989) so that they can successfully navigate the urban context. According to Clandinin (1985), a person-centred language and perspective for accounting for school practices can lead the teachers to succeed. Appropriately, the teachers can use this knowledge through culturally responsive teaching, that is a child-centred approach placing students' strengths and needs, rather than musical products and processes, at the centre of the curriculum (Shaw, 2015).

Having the knowledge of one's particular learners, community, and educational context can be helpful for selecting repertoire, programming concerts, designing instruction, engaging the audience during performances, and recruiting and retaining students. This student-centred orientation serves not only urban teachers but all teachers well (Shaw, 2015).

Yavuzer (2007) suggests that music education will improve children's ability to express themselves, creativity and aesthetic sensibility, and also it will contribute to children's motor and rhythmic, voice and language, cognitive and abstract thinking developments and winning social and group skills.

In music education, choral education is also important in ensuring these developments of the individual and always plays an effective and decisive role. Choral education is an important way to gain positive personality traits and behaviours, to deliver general music education, to transfer social culture, and thus it contributes enormously to the socialization process of individuals (Sökezoğlu and Örddekçi, 2015).

Özata (2010; 13) points out that the study of child chorus made with 7-13 age groups is extremely important for the musical development of children who are capable of music. "Child choruses are the foundation of youth choruses and youth choruses are the foundation of adult choruses, they are prefixes and preliminary building blocks. In general, this situation increases the importance of choral education and necessitates the dissemination of it in a qualified way "(Apaydın and Türkmen, 2013: 449).



Class choruses are communities of all children's voices, starting with the pre-school children until the adolescence which is the end of the child's voice. The main purpose here is to reach the sound integrity of each class to a choir quality (Egüz, 1991). School chorus and class chorus are the main choruses in our country to increase the number of choruses numerically, and class choruses are considered to be a criterion in the development of music culture of a country (Sökezoğlu and Ördemci, 2015).

Yiğit (2006), as a result of his research, found that chorus studies have benefited children in terms of healthy sound production, improve adolescents' voice problems more easily and develop positive behaviours; and emphasized the necessity of choir education in order to raise healthy and beautiful voices and good social relations in the future.

### **Results and Discussion**

In a study, Erol (2013) found that chorus education was effective in improving children's mental development, working disciplines in their lessons by improving self-discipline (planned-programmed), using their ability gained in choral education to define themselves in lessons, improving their sense of responsibility, eliminating behavioural disorders, to the reduction of extreme dependence on non-habits. As a result of the choral work, the children stated that they liked going to the chorus and they were happier individuals.

Saklıca (2010) observed in his research that technical methods, problems, and solutions to these problems of individual voice education were similar to those of collective voice education. The selection of the repertoire used at the beginning of the individual voice education is a preliminary to the selection of the repertoire used in the initial phase of the collective voice education. According to the results of the questionnaire, while the first choice in the selection of the individual voice training repertoire is in Italian, the first order in choir education is in Turkish. It is seen that instructors who give individual voice education also know chorus education to a considerable extent. Because, in the majority, they have already given or are currently giving lectures on collective voice education. In the same way, the lecturers who give collective voice training believes that the lecturers of collective voice education should also know the details of individual voice education.

In addition, in order to be successful in both individual voice education and collective voice/chorus education, it is suggested that repertoire selection should be given importance, educators should do researches on repertoire and determine works that are new and suitable for student development instead of constant works. To be able to obtain information about the periods and the styles in the selection of repertoire, it is suggested that these courses should be given and specified especially in their programs in the higher education institutions providing vocational music education.

Alpuğan (2010) notes that in recent years there has been an increase in good-right-good-quality choruses by the effect of the increase in the communication between chorus managers and the spread of chorus festivals and various competitions in Turkey. The quality of the recorded works has also triggered compositionists, it is stated that the efforts of integrating the music culture on both new and decoded structures or arrangements by considering poetry and so words are increasing. With the increase in the number of chorus and chorists in Turkey, quality managerial selectivity has been introduced. Thus, the chorus and chorus manager portfolio has also changed. Parallel to this, the level of appreciation has increased as the quality of the sensation in the audience has differentiated.

### **Suggestions**

The age and voice characteristics of children should be taken into consideration in choosing the songs to be used in choir training since the voice muscles of the same age girls and boys have the same working style. Since the moods of the children in the group can vary according to their age, a repertoire should be created by selecting the children's songs that are suitable for the group's dynamism and interests so that the children can gain correct and beautiful vocalization as well as singing skills and love.

It should be taken into consideration that the moods of the children may vary according to age groups or their current problems. Using voice correctly and in quality depends on the body and brain comfort, so it is possible to organize group activities that will enable children to relax before choral studies. These activities can be a funny and entertaining game, such as mimicking a known person or choosing a recent song that is not in the repertoire of the chorus and attracts children's attention, so that they can work together to free their heads and relax.

The duration of choral work is important for children's productivity and should be determined in accordance with the age group of children in the chorus. For example, children between the ages of 7-9 and children between the ages of 11-13 do not have the same attention period. In addition, short breaks can be given during the choral work, so that attention periods can be increased by ensuring that children are rested.

It is known that choral studies have positive effects on school success in children. In this respect, the regular participation in choral work is very important. From time to time, children can be encouraged by regularly changing their workplace in order to ensure that children are willing to participate in choral studies. According to weather conditions, choral studies can be done sometimes in the classroom and sometimes in the school garden or park.

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