

Practical Exploration of Choir Club Training in Primary Schools: A Case Study of Sheng Lake Primary School in Zhangdian District

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Abstract:

Chorus, as an important form of expression in music teaching, plays a crucial role in primary school education. Primary school students improve their aesthetic ability, cultivate their sentiments, and are more willing to participate in music cultural exchange and inheritance by mastering basic music knowledge, thereby forming a good core music literacy. This article takes the choir club of Shenghu Primary School in Zhangdian as the research object, exploring effective practical methods for training primary school choir clubs. Through continuous exploration of this topic, the quality of primary school choir club training can be further improved, promoting the comprehensive development of students' music literacy.

Keywords:

Choir Club, Primary School Music, Zhangdian Shenghu Primary School

1. Introduction

Choral singing refers to an artistic form in which two or more vocal parts cooperate and coordinate according to specific interval relationships and voice combinations to perform a song or piece of music together. Children's choir refers to a musical ensemble composed of children, with choral singing as its primary performance form. Children's choral singing usually requires children to perform gentle and slow-paced musical pieces. It plays a positive role in training children's vocal techniques, enhancing musical literacy, cultivating good performance qualities, and strengthening their sense of collectivity. Children's choir is widely welcomed around the world and has become an important part of music education.

As a musical form primarily featuring children's voices, elementary school choir has long been regarded as an effective way to improve students' musical literacy and foster their spirit of cooperation and teamwork. However, there are also certain problems and challenges in the actual training of school choir clubs. This paper takes the choir club of Shenghu Primary School in Zhangdian as an example, combining the

author's internship experience and analysis of relevant choral works, to explore how to more effectively organize and implement choir training in elementary schools, so as to comprehensively improve students' musical literacy and overall qualities.

2. Overview of the Shenghu Primary School Choir Club in Zhangdian

The Shenghu Primary School Choir Club in Zhangdian, also known as the “Melody of the Mountain” Choir of Shenghu Primary School in Zhangdian District, Zibo City, has an organizational structure that includes a conductor, two artistic instructors, and six key student leaders such as the president, vice president, and section leaders. The choir consists of 43 students—15 boys and 28 girls—from grades one to three, with most students between the ages of 6 and 8.

Through systematic training, the Mountain Melody Choir of Zhangdian Shenghu Primary School has significantly improved its members' musical literacy and teamwork skills. While mastering complex rhythmic techniques, the choir has completed six classic works including “Little White Boat” and “Spring Breeze,” supplemented by basic pieces for daily practice. During 2023-2024, the choir achieved remarkable success: it won the Excellence Award at the 9th District Choral Festival, received recognition at the Provincial High Art on Campus Concert, earned third prize at the 31st District Arts Festival, and saw its work “Spring Breeze” selected for the municipal New Year Gala auditions. In 2024, the choir placed 7th in the 32nd District Arts Festival Choral Competition. These accomplishments demonstrate the choir's solid training system and continuously improving artistic performance.

3. Problems in Choir Club Training

During the training practice of the Shenghu Primary School Choir Club in Zhangdian, many related difficulties and problems have arisen, which affect the implementation and progress of choir training. In the choir training at this school, there are problems such as inaccurate rhythm and pitch. The cultivation of choral technique is also an important part of the choir training at Shenghu Primary School. By strengthening music theory education, focusing on rhythm and pitch training, and guiding proper vocal techniques, these measures can effectively help students overcome difficulties. [2]

3.1. Inaccurate Mastery of Complex Rhythmic Patterns

During the rehearsal of the choral piece *Xiabaiyu*, complex rhythmic patterns such as dotted notes, major and minor syncopations, and anacrusis measures appear. In measure 18 of the piece, the ending G-F belongs to the anacrusis part, with the “X X” rhythmic pattern as the beginning of the anacrusis, followed by overlapping singing of high and low voices. Some students have difficulty mastering the more complex rhythms.

In measures 19 and 20, there appears a special rhythmic pattern of “X—” (dotted half note). In daily rehearsals, students of the Shenghu Primary School Choir Club often sing the dotted half note (three beats) as two or two and a half beats, leading to an issue of insufficient duration for this special rhythmic pattern.

In addition, during the rehearsal of the choral piece *Into the Forest*, similar rhythmic patterns such as dotted notes and anacrusis measures also appear. For example, in

measure 31, the ending G-B ♭ belongs to the anacrusis part, starting with the “X X” rhythmic pattern, followed by measure 32’s two eighth notes and a complex melody and rhythmic pattern consisting of slurs within the measure, continuing the musical development. Meanwhile, measure 32 also contains a combination of “X—” (dotted half note) plus an “X” (eighth note) slurred within the measure.

3.2. Pitch Deviations Cause Harmonic Color Distortion

Pitch accuracy is one of the common problems in primary school choir rehearsals. In choral singing, there are mainly two types of pitch accuracy: melodic pitch and harmonic pitch.

Melodic pitch refers to the relationship between each note within the melody—that is, the accuracy between notes during melodic movement. Harmonic pitch refers to the vertical pitch alignment among different voice parts in a choir, where different pitches are sung simultaneously by different parts to create various musical colors.

For example, pitch deviation occurred during the rehearsal of the choral piece Spring Breeze.

In measure 21, the upper and lower voice parts are mainly composed of intervals of seconds and thirds, but in measures 22 and 24, harmonic intervals of perfect fourths, perfect fifths, and major sixths appear. Additionally, in measure 21, there are accidentals “C#” and “A#” in the upper and lower voice parts, creating melodic motion with minor second intervals between the parts.

Students find it difficult to grasp the interval span of minor seconds and tend to sing them as major seconds instead.

3.3. Diction and Articulation Affect the Expression of the Work

In choral training, issues with diction and articulation often arise in the lyrics. When singing choral works, inaccurate articulation or unclear enunciation can cause the audience to misunderstand the meaning of the lyrics. At the same time, differences in articulation placement and the size of the oral cavity may lead to pitch inconsistencies, potentially resulting in tonal differences during pronunciation and affecting the overall harmonic effect of the choir. Pitch deviation issues appeared during the rehearsal of the choral piece Spring Breeze. Diction and articulation issues appeared during the rehearsal of Xia Bai Yu. For example, in measures 24 and 26, the word “xia” in “xia bai yu,” and in measures 25 and 27, the words “baba mama,” were prone to lateral articulation by the students.

Additionally, diction and articulation problems also occurred during the rehearsal of the choral piece Little White Boat. For example, in measure 35, the words “piao” and “xing” happen to fall on the vocal register transition point of E ♭ for primary school students. Furthermore, the pinyin syllables “piao” and “xing” are open vowels, which pose challenges for students when articulating them in high registers. This leads to deviation from the proper vocal placement required for singing and causes students to articulate these words too flatly.

4. Implementation of Choral Training

4.1. Rhythm Training

In the works *Xia Bai Yu* and *Into the Forest*, complex rhythmic patterns such as dotted rhythms, various syncopations, and anacruses often appear. These pieces begin with an “X X” rhythmic pattern as the opening of the anacrusis, followed by overlapping singing from high and low voice parts. The relatively complex rhythmic sections are difficult for students to grasp, resulting in unsatisfactory coordination between voice parts during rehearsals.

Based on my personal internship experience, the Dalcroze Eurhythmics method is used in most cases. “Eurhythmics,” as the name suggests, involves bodily movement, aiming to fully engage the body’s sense of perception through rhythm. The method mainly encompasses three areas: eurhythmics, solfège and ear training, and improvisation.

To address the issues of inaccurate rhythm and insufficient note value in measures 31–32 of *Into the Forest*, the instructor in the school’s daily choral rehearsals would have students split into different voice parts, ensuring each student has a full score in hand. During the rehearsal of *Into the Forest*, since the piece is in 4/4 time with the strong beat on the first beat, the teacher would guide students to be aware of the strong-weak pattern of 4/4 when clapping in time and to stay aligned with the metronome’s tempo. Since the choral part in measure 31 for Voice Part I is an incomplete measure, the teacher would guide students to use leg tapping to fill in the value of the dotted half rest, allowing the last beat of measure 31 to connect smoothly with the rhythm of measure 32.

4.2. Pitch Training

Pitch issues are among the most common problems in elementary school choir rehearsals. During the performance of a piece, factors such as inconsistent singing speed, dynamics, melodic complexity, uncoordinated breathing, low vocal placement, and poor coordination between voice parts often arise.

From my personal internship experience, both the Kodály method and its accompanying hand signs are frequently used as instructional aids. [4] Kodály hand signs are symbolic gestures designed by Zoltán Kodály to visually support pitch awareness and vocal production. These hand signs not only help prompt accurate vocalization but also convey pitch height through hand position.

In my daily work during the internship, exercises ranging from interval solfège to harmony practice between voice parts and basic vocal warm-ups were used to address pitch challenges in measures 27 and 29 of *Xia Bai Yu*, where wide interval leaps appear in the first voice part. These exercises made it easier for students to tackle difficult sections of the piece. The instructor used Kodály hand signs to adjust pitch accuracy and introduced solfège syllables (“Do-Re-Mi-Fa-Sol-La-Ti”) to guide students through pitch recognition and interval singing.

4.3. Diction and Pronunciation

During the rehearsal of the choral piece *Xia Bai Yu*, taking the word “xia” in measures 24 and 26 in “xia yu le,” as well as the words “baba mama” in measures 25 and 27 as examples, students tended to pronounce “xia” with a horizontal mouth shape, making it sound flat and narrow, which caused the piece to lose its overall beauty.

During the rehearsal of the choral piece *Xiao Bai Chuan*, the words “piao” and “xing” in measure 35 happen to lie on the vocal register transition point “E ♭” for elementary school students. Meanwhile, the pinyin for “piao” and “xing” are both open vowels, which make diction at high pitches difficult for students, deviating from the proper vocal placement required for singing.

To address the issues found in the two pieces above, solutions related to the initial, medial, and final parts of pronunciation were applied:

When singing, initials (consonants) should be short, light, and accurate. The initial refers to the beginning of the pronunciation, generally classified into five categories: lips (such as b, p, m, f), tongue (such as d, t, n, l), teeth (such as j, q, x), dental (such as z, c, s, zh, ch, sh, r), and throat (such as g, k, h). In singing, the initial plays a key role in transmitting the lyrics. The initial should be tightly closed or closed and pronounced with strength. As the saying goes, “Each word weighs a thousand gold; listeners will naturally understand.”

During the rehearsal of the choral piece *Xia Bai Yu*, taking the word “xia” in “xia yu le” in measures 24 and 26, and the words “baba mama” in measures 25 and 27 as examples, the pinyin of “xia” is “xia,” and “x” belongs to the “teeth” category mentioned above. Therefore, in rehearsal, the consonant “x” in “xia” must be pronounced clearly and firmly, so that the students’ articulation becomes more precise. Another difficulty is with “baba mama,” whose pinyin is “ba” and “ma”; “b” and “m” belong to the “lip” category, thus special attention must be paid to lip strength when articulating these consonants. The consonants “b” and “m” should be clearly expressed before linking to the vowel “a.”

The medial part of the pronunciation refers to the extended sound during singing and is the core part of the syllable. Depending on the shape required for different finals, the extended part is categorized into four types: even, open, rounded, and combined, which we call the “four calls.” These emphasize the throat, dental, lips, and full-mouth areas respectively. The medial part in singing is the foundation for vocal placement, which differs greatly from normal speech. The melodic line in singing is primarily formed by the continuous connection of various vowels. The roundness of the tone depends mainly on the accuracy, fluency, and continuity of vowel pronunciation. At the same time, the medial part is also the basis for tone color richness in singing. Therefore, round articulation is crucial for stabilizing the shape of the syllable, allowing the initial and final to attach properly, thereby achieving correct pronunciation and resonant tone.

The final part of the syllable must be clearly pronounced: it refers to the ending of the syllable, or what we commonly refer to as the rhyme ending. The final should be natural, short, accurate, and light. The articulatory position should be precise, the volume moderate, and the duration such that the sound stops immediately upon completion.

During the rehearsal of the choral piece *Xiao Bai Chuan*, students had difficulty articulating the words “piao” and “xing” in measure 35. The pinyin of “piao” and “xing” are “piao” and “xing” respectively. “p” belongs to the “lip” category, and “x” to the “teeth” category. During rehearsal, attention must be paid to the strength of the lips and teeth when articulating these two consonants. The “p” and “x” should be clearly articulated and then connected to the finals “iao” and “ing,” making the overall pronunciation more rounded and full.

In conclusion, choral training is an important part of elementary music education and one of its key musical performance forms. [3] Through analysis and suggestions on rhythm, pitch accuracy, diction, and pronunciation problems, the professional abilities and musical literacy of the Shenghu Elementary School Choir in Zhangdian District have improved accordingly, making the students in the choir enjoy and love choral singing more. Meanwhile, teachers should also improve their own comprehensive qualities and professional skills by learning from instructors of other excellent choirs, participating in external training and masterclasses, and listening to experts' diverse perspectives on teaching methods. They should think proactively and apply what is suitable to their own teaching practice so as to become more adept at addressing problems that arise in repertoire.

5. Conclusions

In summary, this paper takes the chorus club of Zhangdian Shenghu Primary School as the research subject, and analyzes and elaborates on three aspects: rhythm, pitch accuracy, and articulation, in order to explore effective practical methods for training primary school chorus clubs. Firstly, by outlining the current situation and general overview of the chorus club at Zhangdian Shenghu Primary School, the paper briefly introduces relevant information and the main conditions of the chorus club. Secondly, based on the author's personal experience participating in the rehearsal of the primary school chorus club during the internship, the paper identifies three common problems encountered during chorus training. It then analyzes these issues in combination with the internship experience, and subsequently proposes corresponding solutions and suggestions, discussing the outcomes of resolving these problems accordingly. It can be seen that in the teaching process at the primary school level, choral music teaching, as one of the more important musical forms, has gradually gained attention. As Xiaomeng Wang and Yamei Wang [1] point out, "It is not only acknowledged that music can have an impact on people's spirit and emotion, but also acknowledged that music can also have an impact on people's physiological state."

As a student majoring in music education, the author has deeply realized that a solid theoretical foundation and rich practical experience are essential elements in both teaching and practical exploration. The author also hope that through the exploration and research of this topic to provide some theoretical reference for future researchers and practitioners, and contribute modestly, to the practical exploration of chorus training in primary schools.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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