

# **BEYOND SINGING: IMPLICATIONS OF CHORAL MUSIC PERFORMANCE IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS**

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## **Introduction**

Choral music has existed in varying forms for hundreds, if not thousands of years. Its incorporation within school settings poses a conundrum about the relationship between education and musical artistry – whether the educative process is of greater importance than the performance product. Perhaps the debate itself is misguided, and choral music teachers can be positioned to achieve both endeavors with students through a balance of excellent performance and acquiring musicianship skills. According to Mbeche (2000), students' participation in musical activities such as the choir develops an immeasurable depth of musical knowledge and skills. These activities expose students to music material that classroom music experience does not usually avail with excellence in the acquisition of skill and sensitivity in performing choral music. The focus of this study is to examine the implications of choral music performance, and how it improves students' musicianship skills.

According to De Beer (2012), there has been evidence of average and below-average choral music performance at the secondary school level which seems to be a continuation of the same trend of musical knowledge. Music teachers, having gone through music training are expected to contribute immensely to the development of students' musicianship skills while preparing them for the choral music competition. Developing a sensitive musical ear is of great importance since it forms a foundation through which musicianship skills are built (Akuno, 2012). Beyond singing, participation in choral music performance requires that performers of the genre should have basic performance skills, while the music teachers are expected to be knowledgeable about the art of transmitting musical knowledge and skills (Ugoo, 2017). Choral music teachers are to influence the students through a

process known as audition which involves recruitment, the qualifiers exhibit satisfying potential in singing and/or playing an instrument(s) amongst other musical activities.

Aural skills in this case are of paramount importance because it is the main channel through which auditions take place with the classification and placement of students into various voice parts which sets the choir ready for performance. Bakare and Babalola (2019), observe that clarity of melodies and style, the educational value of the text, and the use of poetry contribute greatly to the improvement of students' musicianship, and also exposed them to diverse musical activities during choral practice. The technical exercises during vocal warm-ups in most choirs not only sharpen their aural ability but also bring quality to their sound as it expands their vocal range. During choral practice students are exposed to the rudiment of music in terms of the keys used, melodies, intervals, time signature, rhythm, harmony and structure, form and finally prepares them for sight-singing or sight-playing where accompaniment is needed (Akinsanya, 2016). The study was conducted among three Lagos state public schools under three (3) Education Districts; Education District 1 (Eko Junior College Orile Agege),

Education District 2 (Lagos State Junior Model College, Agbowo,) and Education District 3 (Ikeja Junior Grammar School, Ikeja). It only investigates the implication of choral music performance in schools and how it has improved students' musicianship skills. It was observed that the findings apply to other Lagos State public schools with similarities in the noticeable outcomes as each Education District was represented during the choral music competition held in 2022.

## **An Overview of Choral Music**

Choral music, also known as choir music, refers to vocal music performed by a group of singers or a choir. It is a form of music that involves multiple voices singing together in harmony, creating a rich and powerful sound. Choral music encompasses a wide range of styles, genres, and historical periods, making it a versatile and diverse form of musical expression. Choral music can be performed in a cappella (without instrumental accompaniment) or with instrumental accompaniment, such as piano, organ, or an orchestra. It often features complex harmonies, counterpoint, and various vocal techniques, including blending, dynamics, and vocal ornamentation. The repertoire of choral music is vast and

includes sacred and secular works. Sacred choral music consists of religious texts and compositions written for religious ceremonies, such as masses, oratorios, and hymns. Secular choral music encompasses a broader range of themes, including folk songs, art songs, madrigals, and choral arrangements of popular music.

De Quadros (2012), defined choral singing as an art form that exists in cultures all over the world that is used in a wide range of cultures and educational settings. Choral music is a vocal genre, it is characterized as music sung by a group of people, with each musical line performed by two or more vocalists. According to Randel (2001), it is "music to be sung by a chorus or choir (that is, with more than one vocalist for each part) with or without accompaniment. Stamer (2002), further explained that there are all-female choirs that are normally divided into three parts: first soprano, second soprano, and alto. The first tenor, second tenor, first bass, and second base are the four parts most typically found in all-male choirs. Although the terms choir and chorus are commonly interchanged, choir refers to a group of trained singers who lead the singing in a church or school, and chorus refers to a large number of trained singers who sing in dramatic works such as operas, operettas, oratorios, and cantatas.

The Gregorian chants of medieval times, according to Scott (2002), are the first records of annotated group singing in Western Europe. The use of organum with several melodic sections became popular in the middle Ages. The approach evolved into clausulae, conductus, and motet, which eventually became the most popular Renaissance form. Sacred choral music rose to prominence in Western Europe during the Renaissance. All of the choral music genres mentioned above were largely a capella or music without instrumental accompaniment. Choral music was not commonly accompanied by instruments until the Baroque period. The polyphonic style of vocal and instrumental music reached its pinnacle in the hands of G.F. Handel and J.S Bach during the Baroque period. Composers of the Classical period in the late 18th century, on the other hand, were enthralled by the new possibilities of the symphony and other instrumental music, while choir music was mostly ignored. Religious music abandoned the church and jumped onto concert stages in the nineteenth century, resulting in enormous sacred pieces that were deemed unfit for church use. Choral music, like other genres of music, went through a period of experimentation and progress throughout the twentieth century.

Despite the fact that choral music genres are typically associated with Western cultures, other non-Western cultures are known to use group singing in some form or another to accompany manual labor, express joy or sadness, or commemorate traditional religious festivals or rituals, according to Zielinski (2005). Herbst, Nzewi, And Agawu (2003), discussed new traditional choral singing based on the combination of African and Western music elements originating from various African cultures. These include Ghanaian choral anthems, the Igbo Abu from Nigeria, *nyuibozakwaya* the Swahili, *tsinyimbotsianyasyaye* of the *Luhya*, and the South African *makwaya*. They are all hymn-based choral singing that 'sound' primarily Western, but with a distinct voice leading treatment and choices of chord progressions that reflect traditional influences. Onyeji (2005), in discussing the typology of contemporary Ghanaian choral music identifies five models upon which the Ghanaian choral music tradition developed. These are:

- The choral anthem model which he referred to as the Amu model, is a model based on an adaptation of formal types of traditional music, set in the usual SATB (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) framework of contemporary choral music,
- Yaa Ampona (Highlife) Model of Choral music based on or derived from popular songs,
- Later Highlife Models developed from many standardized melodic and harmonic forms as well as rhythmic usages derived from Caribbean and African American practices
- Institutional Models based on Western hymns and songs sung in translations often distort the speech tones and rhythms of the text.

Furthermore, Ekwueme's work (1972), is widely recognised as the first standard work on Igbo choral music in Nigeria. First, he explained the structure and form of Igbo vocal music, which he defined as antiphonal group singing. He articulated ideas controlling Igbo musical practices like scales, melodic contours, horizontal harmonies, and descending scales, which are often heptatonic, through an investigation of musical instances. 2 According to Burton (1863), referenced in Adejumo (2018), at the ceremonies relinquishing Lagos to the British Crown in August 1861, 300 boys from the Mission Schools led by their missionaries sang the British national hymn. He speculated that this could have been the first European choir to form a school choral group on Nigerian territory.

## **A Brief Note on Choral Music Performance**

Choral Music performance and its impact on student participation are unique because the instruments used to perform exist within each participant, which promotes a distinctive sense of unity and accomplishment. Yarbrough (2001) quotes Persellin (2000) by stating, "All students perform and participate in a choir they experience neurological, physical, emotional, mental, and social benefits. For instance, studies revealed that choir participants exhibit lower levels of negative feelings and higher levels of positive feelings. Additionally, choral members experience better immune systems and decreased cortisol levels. Choral performances provide a unique opportunity for students to apply learned vocal pedagogy and musicianship skills. Scott (2002), asserted that choral music performance teaches students how to properly sing and exercise their voice. In the proposed methodology, students will be taught proper breathing, abdominal support, posture, tongue placement, and pronunciation.

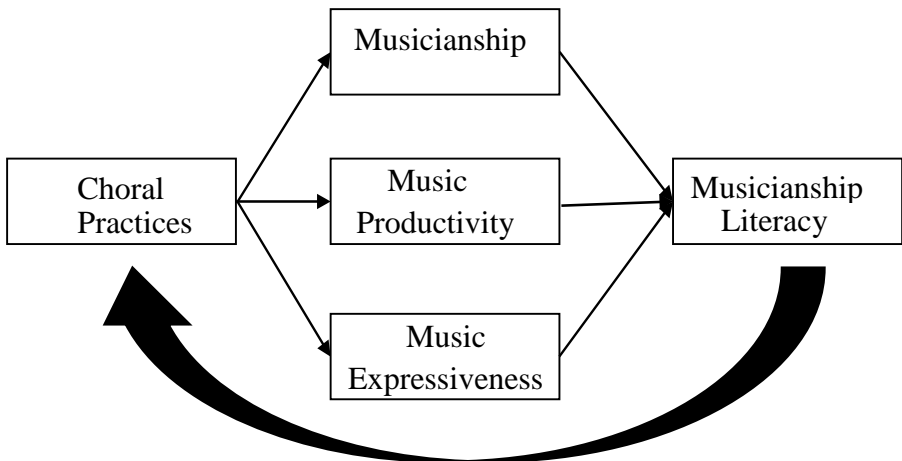
Within performance, students will be able to apply proper vocal pedagogy skills and refine them. The student, therefore, will be able to apply knowledge and identify when their technique is correct or incorrect. Specifically, in the context of choral singing, music serves as a catalyst for performance. When performing, students may experience adverse emotions, such as nervousness, anxiety, inflated view of self, second-guessing, or self-doubt. As a response to potential student performance distress, music teachers have a chance to teach performance coping skills applicable to any adversity students might experience in the future. Karna (2012), suggests that choral performance can help students counter negative perceptions of the self and others after performances, and inspire sobriety of thought.

While reflection on one's performance is both beneficial and necessary, one must still have a positive outlook when evaluating oneself and others—choral performance can help students strike a healthy criticism balance. For example, students will be encouraged to think of what could be improved after a performance, instead of dwelling on what went "badly." When observing performances through the lenses of "good" or "bad," students might be reducing their performing experience to shallow, barren terms. Yet, if music teachers teach students how to effectively evaluate their performances through a positive scope, students might have more room to grow. Karna further opined that students could be encouraged

to ask themselves, “What went well? What could be improved? What was our best? Is there something one of your classmates did really well? How can the choir improve in the future?” The presented thoughts and reflections could help students view their performance as a positive team effort – a mindset that will inspire growth instead of stagnation.

### Conceptual Framework

The study conceptualizes the skills gained at the pre- and post-choral music competitions and during choral music performances. The variables were utilized to gain more knowledge in music literacy, productivity, and expressiveness to develop students’ musicianship skills.



### Musicianship

What constitutes musicianship has been a subject of debate for a lot of researchers and educators alike. According to Adeogun (2012), musicianship is a broad concept that covers a complex range of musical abilities. It is loosely defined as the ability to ‘think in sound’. This occurs when a musician can produce music that they perceive internally and in the imagination, whether through playing by ear, singing, and reading from notation, or through improvisation. Reimer (1989) looks at musicianship as the expertness by which the material of music is molded into expressiveness and that it is the expertise that characterizes one as creative, resourceful, or productive in music-making. Elliot (1995) on the other hand regards musicianship as a form of practical knowledge or put in another way, a reflective

practice that is demonstrated in action rather than words. It is logical in this respect to equate musicianship with a working understanding of music. According to Abramo (2014), a good musician needs a well-trained ear, a well-trained intelligence, a well-trained eye, and a well-trained heart. All four must develop together in constant equilibrium. As soon as one is left behind or rushes ahead, there is something wrong.

The concept of a musician being well-rounded was further broadened to include the concept of auditions or “thinking in sound” (Kavanaugh 2005). Kavanaugh believed that classroom music courses could be augmented by involvement in ensemble programs. He further noted that auditions can be best developed through singing experiences and recommended the use of vocalization as an aid in improving the sight-reading skills of instrumentalists. From these perspectives, it can be concluded that students should have strong aural skills, intellectual clarity, an ethical perspective, and a well-developed technique. All these must then be brought together in the making of music. The implication is that when one knows how to do something competently, proficiently, or expertly, his/her knowledge is logically manifested practically and may not be meaningful if described verbally because music knowledge is in our action (Wanjala, 2004). Musicianship is therefore characterized by music knowledge identified through various forms seen in terms of verbal facts, concepts, descriptions, and theories.

The type of knowledge manifests itself through non-verbal psychomotor activities like dancing and playing musical instruments. Informal knowledge is often associated with practical common sense which allows us to learn through situational experiences. Impressionistic knowledge is related to the affective domain. Finally, the supervisory music knowledge is reflected in evaluating the way we assess and organize teaching and learning (Wanjala, 2004). The development of musicianship can be looked at as the attainment of a total concept of music which can be realized only by total musical instruction; not only with insight into music history, theory, and form but also through appreciation, performance, and teaching of music. As Harrison, Bryan, and Barret (2011) point out, that musicianship is not dedicated only to notes and rhythms, but to discovering how the music is put together, to the total structural pattern. The serious student of music deserves to understand the artistry of the composer and the combinations of various musical ideas arranged in a manner designed within the uniform whole.

This might include identifying sequences of phrases, motives, modulations, repetitions, rhythmic transformations, cadences, imitation, and inversions, as well as the total form - binary, ternary, rondo, sonata, fugue. This requires a knowledge of form and analysis that should be part of the professional equipment of conscientious teachers. A deeper enjoyment will be afforded teachers and students who make an effort to understand the anatomy of music; and by searching below the surface structure to find musical fulfillment, the ability to communicate with the listener will be enhanced (Finley, 2017). These attributes almost presuppose music education that combines classroom music lessons, with ensemble experience and private instruction. According to Mbeche (2010), Wanjala (2004), and Akuno (1997) some music graduates hardly go beyond the informational level of musicianship, which explains the apparent lack of resourcefulness in music-making among them because their foundation of musicianship is faulty. The problem arises when the focus on performance dominates literacy of music. In this study, the researcher intends to recognize the need for integrating musical literacy with participation in choral music activities to attain a more meaningful type of musicianship.

### **Dimensions of Musicianship Development**

Musicianship is a multidimensional concept and its definition would not be complete without looking at its key component namely: music literacy; music productivity; and music expressiveness;

### **Music Literacy**

Gordon (2007) pointed out that musicianship involves the ability to hear, identify, and work conceptually with the elements of music rhythm, melody, harmony, and structure. This is what literacy in music implies. Music literacy refers to the ability to read and write musical notation and to read notation at sight without the aid of an instrument. It also refers to a person's knowledge of and appreciation for a wide range of musical examples and styles (Abramo, 2014). In the Nigerian context of music education, the system has probably greatly contributed to the parochialism of over-emphasizing performance at the expense of nurturing a music model for the future who can read and write music in the form of theoretical and historical symbolism (Bakare, & Babalola 2018). As Akuno (1997) pointed out music must also facilitate artistic development and aesthetic awareness so that people of all ages can participate in music-making. This is a point of view that looks at music literacy acquisition as more than mere cognitive and music performance processes.



## **Music Productivity**

Music productivity deals with an understanding of compositional processes, aesthetic properties of style, and the ways these shape and is shaped by artistic and cultural forces. A musically literate person can generate musical ideas, and organize those ideas into cohesive musical phrases, themes, sections, movements, pieces, and so forth. This requires that the literate person be able to imagine sounds and sound combinations and sequences in an action called “audition,” and then reproduce them through performance or notation, Gordon (2007). The most common settings are band, choir, and orchestra. This has been the case since the early 20th century when performing groups were introduced to public schools (Reimer, 2004). Based on the prominence of these ensembles over the past several decades, it is likely that they will continue to be an important part of school culture. In these ensembles, students' abilities to master the technical requirements of the repertoire being performed often serve as the primary evidence of learning for teachers.

## **Music Expressiveness**

This dimension addressed the disposition and ability to monitor and adjust one's musical thinking in action. Expression is an important aspect of music. It is the added value of a performance and is part of the reason that music is interesting to listen to and sounds alive. Musicianship in Nigeria is manifested in various ways. Many musicians tend to engage in music-making activities that attract an audience of one kind or another as well as activities organized for students in learning institutions. The common way through which musicianship is expressed includes:

Performing: The pleasure people derive from sounds has always been closely related to the pleasure they derive from making the sounds themselves, it is difficult to conceive music as separate from an act of musical performance. According to Akosua (1998), inhuman musical performance, acoustical or perceptual changes in sound are organized in a complex way by the performer to communicate different emotions to the listener. The same piece of music can be performed trying to convey different specific interpretations of the score, by adding mutable expressive intentions. A textual or musical document can assume different meanings and nuances depending on how it is performed. Performance is essentially crucial in expressiveness because by direct interaction with voice, instrument, or body movement one develops the fluency necessary to understand music better. The

quality of interpretation in a musical work conveys the level of musicianship possessed by the performer involved.

## **Methodology**

The target population for this study was the selected public secondary schools that attended choral music competitions within Lagos metropolis. There were a total of 25 students from each school. Half of the choral group (n=44) students were the control group (Performance only) while the second half (n=44) were the experimental group (both performance and musicianship skills). Other students were not involved in the study because they were not selected and auditioned for the competition. The study was conducted a month before the choral music competition to examine the audition process and rehearsals. The musical scores used were compositions of one Western composer and Nigerian composer. As a qualitative research design, the study involves observation of rehearsals and performances, interviews, and analysis of generating methodologies. Musicianship questions that cover the rudiment of music and performance direction questions were collated. Bashorun (2017), describes this as a method of collecting information through observation, interviewing, or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals.

## **Data Analysis**

The data analysis for this study is grouped into two major categories: Experiencing (rehearsal observations), and Enquiry (Oral interviews and Questionnaires). Secondary sources of data collection included research journals, magazines, and articles. Three public schools from 3 Education Districts were purposefully selected by the researcher based on their outstanding performance at Festivals of Choral and Classical Music held in 2022 by the Lagos State Ministry of Education. The three public schools are:

- Education District 1 (Eko Junior College Orile Agege),
- Education District 2 (Lagos State Junior Model College, Agbowa,)
- Education District 3 (Ikeja Junior Grammar School, Ikeja)

The selected schools are located in Lagos State and they share similar characteristics in terms of the age group of students, the type of music they sing, administration strategies, and music teacher recruitment processes. From the participating groups, three music teachers were selected through purposive

sampling procedures. The teachers that were sampled were both specialists and generalists. Their selection was based on their experience and qualifications as music teachers.

## Results

**Table 1: Age bracket**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 10 to 13	31	33.3	33.3	33.3
13 to 16	55	48.0	48.0	81.3
16 to 19	40	18.7	18.7	100.0
Total	125	100.0	100.0	

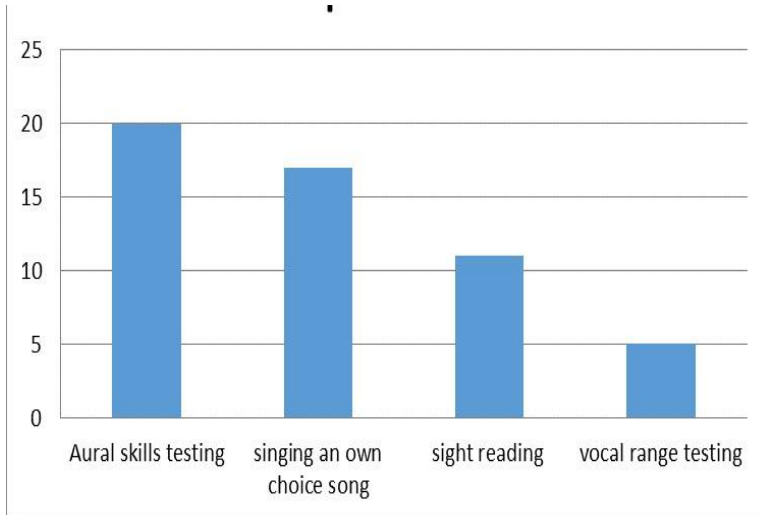
Source: Field survey, 2022

**Table 2: Experiencing and Enquiring (observations, interviews and questionnaires)**

Students auditioned?	frequency	percentage
Yes	36	83.7
No	7	16.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The similar results of the activities carried out in the selected schools during rehearsals were summarized

During the rehearsals, aural skills testing which includes pitch recognition, rhythm, and sight reading was used to examine the highest and lowest pitch of the students.



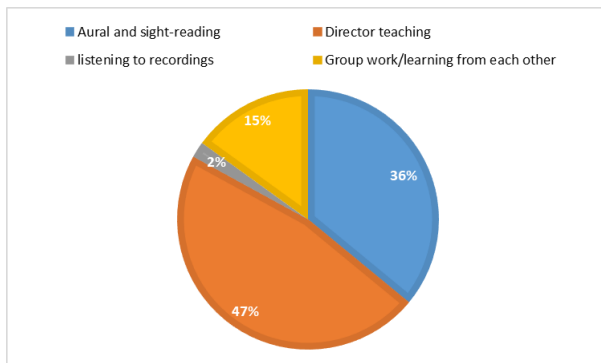
**Figure 1: Summary of audition process activities during rehearsals**

According to observation, students were asked to sing their own song to further determine their voice part before they are allowed to join the choir. According to the findings of the current study, 90.7% were selected as vocalists, 2.3% played the role of instrumentalists and 7.0% played both vocalist and instrumentalist roles. The statistic mean of rehearsal per week was carried out to understand the training time input requirement for choral music class. Using the formula ( $\text{mean} = \frac{\sum f}{n}$ ), the findings indicated that the frequency of rehearsal ranged from one time to five times a week in preparation for the Lagos state choral music competition ( $M=3.17$ ;  $SD=1.09$ )

**Table 2.1 Descriptive statistics for frequency of rehearsal**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>How often do you hold rehearsals</b>	41	1	5	3.17	1.093

- Learning methods during rehearsal were summarized in figure 1 as follows



**Figure 2: Learning methods during rehearsals**

The highest proportion of learning (47%) was through direct instruction from teachers, followed by aural and sight-reading (36%) while the lowest proportion was through the respondents training others (2%). The research sought to understand the respondents' level of competence while the results showed that the majority (62.8%) had an intermediate level of competence because they belong to the choir group in their churches, while the rest had beginner (11.6%) and advanced (25.6%) levels of competence respectively.

**Table 3: Ease in sight-reading**

Easy?	frequency	percent
Yes	23	15.0
No	16	75.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>100.0</b>

When asked about students' sight-reading experience, (80%) of respondents reported that they could only understand the music piece in context. Only 20% of students could understand fragments of the music pieces because of their musical knowledge from their various church choirs. The researcher sought the opinions of the respondents on whether the skills learned during rehearsal had a positive impact

on their music literacy. The result indicated that all the respondents who participated in the choral ensemble reported that it affected their confidence and not musicianship skills positively. The results are summarized below:

**Implication of choral music performance on student’s musicianship skills**

Theme	Frequency
Improved in music literacy	1
Improved in music expressiveness	2
Improved in music productivity	1
Increased general knowledge about music	2
Improved performance skill	20
Improved music interpretation skill	1
vocal improvement	8
Improved teamwork	2
Meet new friends during competition	4
Learned other choral aspects	2
Exposed to a different genre of music that broadens your singing	7

A Pearson correlation analysis was carried out to establish a relationship between participation in choral music class and musicianship skills. It was measured using the aggregate score of competence on elements of music including pitch recognition, sight-reading, and rhythm. The results revealed that there was a statistically significant ( $r=.570$ ,  $P<0.01$ ) correlation between participation in choral music and musicianship as indicated below.

**Correlations between Musicianship and Participation in Choral Music Class**

		Elements of musicianship	Have you taken part in any choral music class?
Elements of musicianship.	r	1	.570**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	53	52
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).			

### **One-group Pre-test Post-test.**

The one-group pre-test and post-test designs were employed in each selected school. Before the Lagos State Choral Music Competition, the groups were evaluated twice. The purpose of exposing them to notated music was to find out their musicianship skills level and consciously make them relate every detail embedded in the piece of music as a continuous way of learning. Each respondent was expected to identify the key signature, time signature, pitch, and musical note values among others.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Within the ambit of choral music studies, this paper examines the implication of choral music performance in Nigerian schools and how it improves student musicianship skills within Lagos State public schools. The study corroborates existing ones that have appreciated choral music as sociological and musicological dimensions. Using simple percentage techniques, the study analyses the rehearsals and performances of the selected schools that participated in the Festival of Classical and Choral Music organized for public schools within the six Educational District in Lagos State. The analysis of the data focuses on referring to what the student learned during rehearsals and at the music competition for improving students' musicianship skills, which are divided into experiencing and enquiring. The findings highlight the various social, cognitive, emotional, and cultural dimensions impacted by choral music performance in Nigerian schools.

Firstly, the social implications of choral music performance encompass fostering teamwork, enhancing interpersonal skills, and building a sense of community among students. The choral setting provides a platform for collaboration, cooperation, and leadership development, facilitating social integration and promoting cultural diversity.

Secondly, the cognitive implications reveal that choral music performance nurtures critical thinking, memory retention, and problem-solving abilities. The complexities of choral repertoire, including harmonies, rhythms, and lyrics, challenge students' cognitive skills and promote intellectual growth.

Thirdly, the emotional implications of choral music performance emphasize its role in emotional expression, self-confidence, and emotional well-being. Singing in

a choir provides a supportive environment for self-expression and emotional release, positively impacting students' self-esteem and overall mental health. Lastly, the cultural implications of choral music performance highlight its significance in preserving Nigerian musical heritage and fostering cultural identity. Through the exploration of traditional Nigerian songs, languages, and rhythms, students gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of their cultural roots, contributing to cultural sustainability.

However, this study also acknowledges the challenges faced in implementing and sustaining choral music programs in Nigerian schools, such as limited resources, inadequate training for music educators, and the dominance of exam-oriented curricula. The data engaged in this study shows that choral music performance can be a great source of improving student musicianship if managed properly. This paper equally suggests that music teachers should use the rehearsal time to introduce the rudiment of music to students before teaching the designated songs for music competitions. Students' auditions for music proficiencies should take place to determine the level of competence and the entry behavior of students before joining the choir. Beyond singing for school social events, there should be a developing strategy for the inclusion of choral music rehearsal time in the school timetable to ease the mastery and retention of students' musicianship skills. In conclusion, this research demonstrates that choral music performance in Nigerian schools extends beyond singing, encompassing social, cognitive, emotional, and cultural dimensions. Recognizing the holistic benefits and addressing the challenges can inform policymakers, educators, and communities to further support and integrate choral music as an essential component of education in Nigeria.

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B. M. Adeleke: *Beyond Singing: Implications of Choral Music Performance in Nig...*

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