

Full Length Research Paper

Pre-service music teachers' opinions about the significance of choir lesson

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This study aims to determine pre-service music teachers' opinions about the significance of the choir lesson. This is a qualitative research. The data were acquired with the participation of 54 pre-service teachers. An open-ended interview questionnaire was used to collect the data. The data were processed using content analysis and classified in eight categories. These categories are: perception, the consciousness of singing together, social development, harmonic ear training, technical development, musical development, professional competence and listening skills. It was found that the categories and themes created in regard to the opinions of the teacher candidates included in this study were compatible with one another.

Key words: Choral training, pre-service teachers, opinions of pre-service teachers.

INTRODUCTION

The word "choir" is khoros in Greek, chorus in Latin and coro in Italian (Egüz, 1981). The concept of singing together as a musical organization brought together the elements of socialization, the production of culture and sharing mutual feelings (Say, 2002). According to Çevik (1997), a choir is a group of voices that is balanced in terms of numeral construction, voice type and voice capacity with the aim of vocalizing and interpreting monophonic or polyphonic musical pieces according to a predetermined model. Choirs thus contribute to the cultural and artistic life of society.

Choral training is the process of enabling individuals in the choir to learn socio-musical behaviors in a purposeful and systematic way (Ucan, 2001). Along with learning to sing together or solo, choral training makes a significant contribution to ear training and musical literacy, love of

music, creativity, evaluation and social interaction. It also supports instrument education.

As a choral and instrumental trainer, Leenman (1997) said that inner senses would become stronger if choral skills were implemented in instrumental music. Choral training makes a significant contribution to training for musical literacy, taste, creativity and musical interaction. It also supports the instrument education (cited by Okay, 2012).

Choral training is the most fundamental, effective and widely studied field of music education. According to the main principles of collective vocal training and curriculum objectives, choral training includes these topics:

Practical exercises,
Reading music,

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Solfege,
Singing and interpreting,
Choral culture,
Group harmony,
Increasing awareness about responsibility,
Learning about the choral music repertoire and its stylistic features.

There are five basic principles that should be followed to generate a good choir:

1. To speak and sing together.
2. To be a group.
3. To collaborate.
4. To organize.
5. Making music and speaking with group awareness (Ucan, 2001).

Musical behaviors and forms may vary according to the level of choral training, but the purposes and functions of the choir are; Making music and singing, Musical listening and comprehension, Musical thinking and reflection and Musical enlightenment.

Egüz (1981) said, "Choral education not only teaches culture and the love of music, but also allows large numbers of people to study and train together." In many different ways individuals in the choir reflect the positive habits and discipline that they learn during choral training to society.

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This field of learning enables the music teachers of the future to attain these competences: using the voice in harmony with the choir depending on the basic principles of collective voice training, improving musical sensitivity, studying with a team spirit, getting to know choral music and its stylistic features, forming school choirs and performing with them, communicating and expressing oneself using a correct, favorable and effective use of the native language (Çevik, 2006).

Choral training is a sub-field of music education. It has individual, social, cultural, educational and economic functions. It also helps people to feel happier and calmer. The choir is also the most suitable and safe environment for children and young people to learn and implement

social rules. Friendships that are built in a loving, respectful and safe environment are also effective in creating social unity. In this environment of love and respect, individuals improve their taste. They also become more sophisticated since they are exposed to distinguished examples of both their own culture and foreign cultures. When choirs travel to other cities and give concerts, they create significant economic mobility. Individuals who receive choral training are often inclined to choose music as their profession and learn to play a musical instrument.

Individuals who sing in a choir learn how to use and control their voice. They also learn a lot of songs. They ensure that their voice is not louder or quieter than their friends' and that it harmonizes with the others. They learn to sing accurately and smoothly. These attainments allow them to enjoy learning new things and singing collectively (Sun and Seyrek, 1998).

Developing the skill of producing a correct and clear voice is among the general targets of vocal training in a choir. However, choral training also includes other behaviors and skills related to producing sounds using human body. It is possible to create meaningful sounds by moving the tongue, the palate and the lips and to accompany by moving the head, the face, arms and legs. Ucan (2001) said that choir could play a more effective, productive and determinant role in the musical development of an individual if the whole body potential was put into use.

Individuals can develop their sensitivity, aesthetic taste and creativity only in democratic learning environments where they can express themselves comfortably and improve their talents. Democratic learning environments also give life to democratic thinking (Bilen et al., 2009). Choirs are one of the most convenient settings for creating democratic learning environments. Individuals who take part in choirs gain many positive behaviors thanks to music and these behaviors are reflected in the society at large in many ways. For this reason, choirs not only contribute to the development and progress of the musical culture of the society, they also help to raise society's general educational level (Egüz, 1981).

Education and training given in the choirs with a modern and universal perspective lets individuals be:

Psychologically open and free,
Dynamic and disciplined,
Productive,
Unselfish,
Able to create a balance between society and themselves, and also education and occupation,
In good mental health.

In social terms:

The choir creates a foundation for unity and equality in music education.

It helps to integrate Western societies' social structures and artistic development qualitatively and quantitatively.

Kaya (2014) produced a study titled "The Influence of the Constructivist Approach on Attitude, Self-Efficacy, Belief and Academic Achievement in Choral Training," which employed a pretest/post-test control group experimental design. In that study the experimental group was given choral training with the constructivist approach and the control group was given choral training with the traditional approach. Based on the findings, Kaya concluded that there was a significant difference between the control group's choral training course self-efficacy perception-scale scores and those of the experimental group.

Kose (2004) produced a descriptive study titled "The Necessity of Individual Vocal Training for the Enhancement of Choral Performance." The author obtained many findings through literature review and interviews, which revealed that individual vocal training courses had a dramatic influence on the performance of the choir in the music teaching process.

Sarıçiftçi (2006) produced a descriptive survey study on "Music Teachers' Use of the Knowledge Gained in 'Collective Vocal Training' and 'Choral Training and Direction' Courses in Undergraduate Studies during Professional Life." It was found that music teachers mainly used the knowledge gained in the "collective vocal training" and "choral training and direction" courses taken during their undergraduate studies.

This study was conducted in collaboration with students enrolled in Education Faculty Department of Fine Arts Education Music Education Program; students received choral training course and the study determined their ideas about the significance of choral training.

This study is significant because it enables pre-service teachers taking choir lessons to be aware of its benefits and helps choir leaders review the functions of the lessons. This study aims to determine pre-service music teachers' opinions about the significance of the choir lesson. The primary purpose of the study was to determine the teacher candidates' level of consciousness with respect to the general purposes of the choral training course, with consideration for their own opinions. This study contributes to the literature on the significance of choral training.

METHODOLOGY

Research model

This study has a qualitative design. Yildirim and Simsek (2000) said that in qualitative research facts are analyzed from the perspective of the individuals involved and the processes created by these perspectives are revealed. The main objective of a qualitative research is not to use numbers to obtain quantitative results that can be generalized. It is rather to present a descriptive and realistic situation related to the research subject.

Study sample

This study was conducted in the Spring semester of 2014 in collaboration with 54 pre-service music teachers who were attending choral training at Necmettin Erbakan University's Ahmet Kelesoglu Faculty of Education in the Department of Music Teaching.

Data collection tools

The data were collected using the open-ended interview questionnaire. The questions in this interview enable the researchers to discuss the facts they want to investigate using a flexible and open-ended approach (Yildirim and Simsek, 2003). The pre-service teachers were asked a single question about the significance of the choir lesson. Content analysis was done with the research data and evaluations were made considering the themes that emerged from these opinions.

Data analysis

For the analysis of the data, the answer sheets with only one question were numbered from 1 to 54. The main aim of the content analysis was to identify the concepts and connections that could explain the data. Moreover, it aimed to bring them together in frame of certain concepts and themes, interpreting the data in a way that the reader can understand (Yildirim and Simsek, 2006). Significant words and sentences were underlined and agreed on by three specialists. Then the data was categorized by semantic relationships, the frequencies of words and sentences were calculated, tabulated and they were classified in eight categories.

FINDINGS

Pre-service teachers' opinions about the significance of choir lesson were analyzed under eight sub-dimensions and each of these dimensions were tabulated separately. The 54 pre-service teachers expressed their opinions about the significance of choir lesson. Of them, 32 teachers expressed opinions about perception, 24 wrote about the awareness of singing together, 12 about social development, 10 about harmonic ear training, 10 about technical development, 9 about musical development, 7 about professional competence and 3 about the development of listening skills (Table 1).

PST46: "No other lesson is as entertaining, fun and offers as much musical development as the choir lesson."

PST41: "When I am singing my favorite pieces in choir lessons, I feel very happy and good."

PST35: "When the choir lesson is pleasant, it could be regarded as a tool for entertainment and relaxation for us students who live fast paced lives."

PST26: "The choir lesson is both the most entertaining and important lesson in my department."

According to Arikan (2008), "Perception is a mental process that can be described as comprehending the phenomenon of one's current focus by paying attention and using the senses." Based on that statement, the

Table 1. Pre-service music teachers' opinions about "perceiving the choir lesson" dimension and the descriptive distribution.

Perception	n	%
It is an important lesson.	14	25.9
It is an entertaining lesson.	8	14.8
It is a lesson that requires care and discipline.	3	5.5
It is a lesson that gives peace and comfort.	3	5.5
It is not an important lesson.	2	3.7
It is nice in terms of integrity.	2	3.7
It is a lesson that arouses emotions.	1	1.8

Table 2. Pre-service music teachers' opinions about the awareness of singing together sub-dimension and the descriptive distribution.

The awareness of singing together	n	%
It is important in terms of group awareness.	9	16.6
We act as a group.	8	14.8
It helps to make music together.	7	12.9
It is important in terms of integrity.	2	3.7

perception of choral training as an important course by teacher candidates has been accepted as a mental process included among the categories created in accordance with student reviews.

Individual needs, such as the desire to relax, have fun or attain spiritual fulfillment are usually accompanied by music. In the "perception" category, teacher candidates expressed that the choral training course was an entertaining one that made them feel happy and relaxed, which was consistent with the needs in question (Table 2).

PST52: "Studying together means taking a beautiful musical piece and bringing it to the highest level together. It also means social unity and warmer relationships."

PST51: "In my opinion, the choir lesson is the best lesson for improving our spirit of unity. I also see that this spirit gets even more intense when we sing the songs that we love and enjoy performing."

PST50: "I think the choir lesson is very entertaining and also very beneficial for doing things with the group, that is, living and learning the spirit of a group. I think students learn how to adapt themselves to the group in this lesson."

PST48: "I think the most important aspect of the choir lesson is that we internalize group work and are able to do that."

PST40: "To me, the choir lesson plays a significant role in improving students' awareness about learning together. When everyone takes an active role in the preparation of a piece that will be staged and acts with team spirit, this will bring out the best performance of the piece, along with the awareness of working together and the impor-

tance of group work."

PST30: "The most significant benefit that students gain from the choir is that they learn to sing as a group, create a group spirit and adapt themselves."

Another main objective of choral training is to imbue in students the consciousness of thinking, acting and sharing thoughts in conjunction. It is an obligation for the members of the choir that they listen to and watch the other members, and that they remain in harmony with one another as they sing (Eguz, 1980).

The teacher candidates sharing thoughts in this category used statements similar to that of Eguz, which he had qualified as obligatory (Table 3).

PST54: "If they have social phobias, choir lessons will help them to become more social."

PST32: "The choir lesson is not just a lesson, but a situation that improves the connections between people and makes them feel peaceful and relaxed. It is a lesson that creates individual and social harmony besides providing continuous learning experiences.

PST12: "I feel that friendships are getting stronger, and above all, we benefit from acting as a group.

Music, from the standpoint of social development, is a cultural activity that helps individuals socialize, enhance their abilities and helps them gain skills such as solidarity and sharing in terms of human relations (Uslu, 2007). In regard to social development, teacher candidates said the choral training lesson not only strengthened their social association and helped them work more effectively as a group, but it was also helpful in dealing with their

Table 3. Pre-service music teachers' opinions about the social development sub-dimension and the descriptive distribution.

Social development	n	%
Friendships grow stronger.	3	5.5
Group study skills are improved.	2	3.7
I also learn about adaptation and other behaviors related to life.	2	3.7
It is really nice to do things together.	1	1.8
It might influence the connection between teacher and student.	1	1.8
It teaches people how to share music.	1	1.8
It is not individual work, but group work.	1	1.8
It enhances social unity.	1	1.8
It helps students to overcome their social phobias.	1	1.8

Table 4. Pre-service music teachers' opinions about the harmonic ear training sub-dimension and the descriptive distribution.

Harmonic ear development	n	%
It is a significant factor in terms of polyphony.	7	12.9
It enhances both harmony and my ear.	3	5.5
It teaches about polyphony.	1	1.8

Table 5. Pre-service music teachers' opinions about the technical development sub-dimension and the descriptive distribution.

TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT	n	%
It is important for the development of the voice.	3	5.5
I believe every individual has improved their tone color.	2	3.7
It is the practical version of individual vocal training.	2	3.7
It teaches how to use the voice without pushing its limits.	1	1.8
It is very important to do relaxation and warm-up exercises before starting the lesson.	1	1.8
It teaches us how to use our voice correctly.	1	1.8
It teaches to sing with a more comfortable use of the diaphragm.	1	1.8

social phobia (Table 4)

PST49: "The lesson teaches about polyphony and improves musical intelligence along with solfege skills."

PST41: "The choir lesson is very important in terms of understanding the musical concept of polyphony and learning musical pieces."

PST36: "A capella has a great place in the musical world. Since polyphony made use of the human voice—that is the first instrument—it also has a specific and significant place, having been used in various music types."

PST24: "The choir lesson teaches polyphony in practice."

PST8: "I think different voices make a beautiful harmony together, and I develop my listening skills since I am able to hear my own voice. I believe that I improve my harmony skills, in particular."

Sevgi, (2005), in his study titled "A Harmony Education

Based on the Professional Requirements of Music Education" claimed that knowledge of harmony gave students the skill of understanding the musical work being interpreted. Additionally, he stated that the sound to be produced by the group that makes music collaboratively could be given an identity with the help of knowledge regarding harmony.

Teacher candidates said the choral training course was helpful in the sense that it assisted them in perceiving the concept of polyphony and also helped develop a "harmonic ear" (Table 5).

PST33: "It teaches us to sing more comfortably by using the diaphragm."

PST32: "The choir lesson is a type of lesson that improves the individual in every possible way. It is quite influential in gaining confidence along with using your voice correctly and so feeling relaxed."

Table 6. Pre-service music teachers' opinions about the musical development sub-dimension and the descriptive distribution.

Musical development	n	%
We have been improving our musicality.	6	11.1
It enhances our musical aptitude.	2	3.7
It enhances intonation.	1	1.8
It teaches about nuances.	1	1.8
It helps you see the details more closely.	1	1.8
It enhances our musical intelligence.	1	1.8

Table 7. Pre-service music teachers' opinions about the professional competence sub-dimension and the descriptive distribution.

Professional competence	n	%
It is very important since we will work as music teachers.	3	5.5
It provides continuous learning experiences and makes us improve.	2	3.7
It is a lesson that I can also benefit from in the future.	2	3.7
It is important in music education.	1	1.8
It is very useful in professional terms.	1	1.8

PST31: "The repertoire has a very important part in the exercises that students do. We correct our use of the voice and are able to perform polyphonic songs in harmony."

PST26: "Doing relaxation and warm-up exercises before starting the lesson is very important."

PST21: "It allows you to use and develop your voice correctly without pushing its limits, by dividing music into four parts in the most suitable way for your tone color and voice range."

PST2: "It is important for strengthening the voice."

PST8: "I believe that I have improved my voice in the choir lessons."

PST12: "I believe that every person has found and improved their own tone color."

The choir is a type of musical expression that requires vocal control. In order for the choir to achieve a complete facility of expression, its members are supposed to have exactly the same technical and musical competencies (Köse, 2004).

Regarding the opinions stated in the category of technical development, teacher candidates said they learned how to use their voices in the choral training course and that it was an important lesson for vocal development, specifically in terms of technique (Table 6).

PST35: "I am aware that playing an active role in a choir with successful intonation will help us improve our musical aptitude. I also claim that it will help us to have better intonation while playing our instruments."

PST9: "Choir lessons improve our musicality since it is polyphonic in general."

PST47: "To me, choir lessons are an essential part of musical polyphony."

Önder and Yildiz, in their study titled "The Dimensions of Classical Guitar Education" (2008) stated that collective music implementations could develop students' skills in making music together and contribute to their musical development. The teacher candidates' statements on the choral training lesson, which is included in the collective music implementations, were in accordance with the ideas of Önder and Yildiz (Table 7).

PST53: "By the time we start to work as teachers, we will have learned how to establish a choir, manage it, train it and be successful with it. The choir lesson is also important in this respect."

PST46: "The most useful information for our professional life after school is taught in the choir lesson."

PST43: "The choir lesson will be important for me when I start to work as a teacher."

PST34: "I want to start a choir when I become a teacher, so this is a beneficial experience for me. That's why the choir lesson is very important to me."

PST26: "The choir lesson gives us the information that we will use and that will benefit us most when we become professional teachers."

Music teachers are supposed to know about the concepts and information on voice and instruments in the curriculum and have the competency needed to turn them into student behavior while providing students the means to learn about these subjects.

According to Şahin (2004), the concept of competence

Table 8. Pre-service music teachers' opinions about the listening skills sub- dimension and the descriptive distribution.

Development of listening skills	n	%
The choir lesson teaches us how to listen.	1	1.8
It requires us to listen to each other.	1	1.8
I make use of this competence to develop awareness of listening in orchestra.	1	1.8

is the knowledge and skill that an individual must possess in order to perform a task in an effective way (Table 8).

PST35: "It is a very important issue to listen to each other in the choir. I am playing in an orchestra in addition to the choir. I believe that people are supposed to have the awareness to listen to each other in orchestras, too. So I also make use of this competence in the orchestra."

PST19: "It teaches us how to listen to each other."

Training for listening skills is an education in tastefulness, consciousness, shared feelings and development. It arouses desire in the interpreter, and it engenders respectability (Özgüç, 1984).

Emiroğlu and Pinar (2013), in her study titled "The Correlation between Listening Skills and Other Skill Types", proposed that listening possibly had an influence on other fields and types of skills. She added that listening was the conscious use of the hearing function of the ears.

The P.S.T 35 supported that statement, saying they attained this skill in choral training and used it in their orchestral works.

DISCUSSION

This study aims to determine pre-service music teachers' opinions about the significance of choir lessons. The data were collected in collaboration with 54 pre-service teachers and it was classified in eight categories. These categories were: perception, the consciousness of singing together, social development, harmonic ear training, technical development, musical development, professional competence and listening skills. Regarding the themes created through these categories, the research looked for similarities and contrasts in the data.

Kalyoncu (2004) said: "Courses that aim to teach musical behaviors to students are dominant in the curricula. This can be explained by the fact that psycho-motor objectives and products of this branch are deemed most important. However, this dominance should not cause a process of learning in which the development of intellectual skills is ignored and motor skills are the primary focus. The curriculum should be improved with courses that encourage students to listen to music and analyze it." This research found that the rate of pre-service teachers who expressed opinions about listening skills development was very

low at 1.8%. This supports Kalyoncu's assertions.

The choir is a psycho-social and socio-cultural phenomenon, and the underpinning quality of the choir is the fact that the individual is a social product. According to White (1956), nowadays individuals are not evaluated individually, but they are rather seen as group members. Thus, it is common for individuals to be understood through their roles in the group. The concept of "group" is thus attained, and we can begin to understand productivity and motivational behavior from this perspective. Apaydin (2001) claimed that in the process of choral training, individuals acquire the habit of working collectively by singing together, increase their self-confidence, gain self-respect by respecting others and are socialized by making new friends. In the consciousness of singing together sub-dimension, 16.6% of the pre-service music teachers supported this notion by stating that: "It is an important lesson in terms of collective consciousness." Moreover, Özgül (1996) said that individual and collective studies encourage students to become more conscious and sensitive about music and music education. They socialize, become part of a group, and their sense of responsibility is increased. In the social development sub-dimension, participants said that their friendships got stronger at a rate of 5.5%, which corresponds to Özgül's claims.

According to Fenmen (1997), the primary goal of musical training is to help students develop their musical skills. Since the aim of music is to express beauty, this should be the main expectation from the students. The primary concern is not technical talent, but the richness of expression and the musical emotions that students have inside. The real achievement of teachers is to direct their students to this path. Gordon claims that singing will help students develop their skills in volume, tonality, intonation, musical phrasing and articulation. In this research, the idea that we develop our musicality dominated the musical development sub-dimension; however, the idea that it improves intonation was only expressed by 1.8% of the students.

Deniz and Gundogdu (2008) conducted a study entitled "An Analysis and Assessment of Music Teachers' Professional Competencies." They found that music teachers felt their colleagues had low levels of competence in creating a polyphonic choir. The researchers indicated that one reason for this was insufficient time spent on choral studies. In this research, the rate of the opinions expressed in the professional competence

sub-dimension was 5.5%, which is significantly low. This implies that the duration of choral training in institutions that train music teachers should be reviewed.

In the same study, Deniz and Gundogdu (2008) determined that music teachers thought their colleagues were competent at an intermediate level in vocal training while they were less competent in technical-based categories such as breathing with diaphragm support and doing vocal exercises. When the percentages in the themes in the technical development sub-dimension of this study are assessed, it can be observed that the rates are very low, which is % 5.5. This is a study of undergraduates and the research done by Deniz and Gundogdu looked at professionals, but the two studies are compatible in the sense that they both demonstrate how inadequacies in undergraduate education influence professional life.

Conclusion

The choral training course curriculum consists of the following objectives, which are classified as general purposes, main skills, attitudes, learning fields and sample activities:

1. Learning to think and act collectively and share through choral studies;
2. Developing the sense of responsibility in group work;
3. Producing and spreading the correct voice;
4. Becoming a conscious listener of music;
5. Developing the skills of thinking, interpreting and musical sensitivity; and
6. Acquiring the skill of singing collectively.

It was found that the categories and themes created in regard to the opinions of the teacher candidates included in this study were compatible with one another. The primary purpose of the study was to determine the teacher candidates' level of consciousness with respect to the general purposes of the choral training course, with consideration for their own opinions.

Conflict of Interests

The author(s) have not declared any conflict of interests.

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