

# Constructing the Teaching Guidebook for Children's Chorus in Advanced Class at the Mastery Iris Blue Choir

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## Abstract

The objectives of research were: (1) To study the techniques of children's chorus teaching from key informants. (2) To construct the teaching guidebook for children in The Mastery Iris Blue Choir. (3) To experiment teaching children's chorus singing skills by using the guidebook. (4) To evaluate the learning effectiveness by using the guidebook. This research methodology was mixed research method of qualitative and quantitative research. Gathering data by interviewing three key informants. Research sample was 18 students in advanced class of Mastery Iris Blue Choir. The research tools included: interview form, teaching guidebook; formative tests and summative test and IOC form. Descriptive analysis was used to analyze the interview information from the three key informants and statistical analysis was used to analyze the scores of formative tests and summative test and the hypothesis set for formative test and summative test was at 4.00/4.00.

The results of this research were: (1) The context of children's choral education; it was imperative to take into account the distinctive cognitive framework of children. Designing appropriate pedagogical approaches to accommodate the physiological and psychological uniqueness of children during the process of learning to sing was crucial, emphasizing the continuity of knowledge in curriculum construction held paramount significance; (2) The teaching guidebook consisted of Introduction, How to use this teacher's guide, Repertoire included 7 songs; (3) The guidebook was used for conducting the experimental group of students by using 15 lessons plans 90 minutes per lesson; (4) The efficiency of teaching were evaluated from shown the rational score of formative and summative at 4.02 and 4.03, met with hypothesis which means the Teaching Guidebook For Children's Chorus In Advanced Class At The Mastery Iris Blue Choir was effective and being good for further use.

**Keywords:** Children's Choir Education; Guidebook Development; Chorus Singing Skills

## Introduction

The Mastery Iris Blue Choir, established in 2017, is a prominent children's choir in Chengdu, specializing in multilingual works with a strong focus on French musical culture. The choir has developed a close partnership with the Chœur de Filles de France, led by Professor Hugo Guitierrez, engaging in regular exchanges and collaborative performances (Freer, 2012). Despite the limited music education available in Chengdu schools, the choir has made significant strides, participating in events like the "Panda's Voice" Choral Week and hosting independent concerts.

The choir comprises 60 students, divided into three classes based on age and proficiency: Beginner (ages 4-5), Intermediate (ages 6-8), and Advanced (ages 9+), with the Advanced Class requiring assessments for entry. As the main conductor for the Advanced Class, I hold master's degrees in piano performance and choral conducting from the Odessa National Music Academy in Ukraine. My musical journey, spanning 20 years, transitioned from piano to choral music during my studies. However, with only three years of experience in children's choir education in China, I recognize the need to further develop my skills. This research aims to enhance my expertise and contribute to the field.

The choir's curriculum is divided into two main components: choral rehearsals and sight-singing/ear training. The choral rehearsals are held weekly, with 1.5-hour sessions across 15 weeks per semester, which I am responsible for teaching. Sight-singing and ear training are conducted during the winter and summer breaks, with intensive one-week courses of daily 1.5-hour lessons.

Before this research, the choir lacked a structured and progressive system for repertoire selection. The goal was to complete three target pieces each semester, including at least two two-part French works and one two-part piece in another language. However, due to competition and performance schedules, the choir often had to select more challenging pieces, leading to students relying on rote learning due to limited preparation time rather than understanding the music's rhythmic and intervallic structures.

Sight-singing and ear training classes, taught by qualified instructors, aim to improve the choir members' choral skills, focusing on rhythm, pitch, and tone. However, this teaching model has revealed several issues:

1. The shorter duration of sight-singing and ear training classes compared to choral rehearsals leads to insufficient sight-reading skills for the choir's repertoire demands.
2. The separation of teaching responsibilities among different instructors results in poor communication, reducing the effectiveness of achieving the primary teaching goals.

In response to these challenges, this research seeks to develop a comprehensive teaching guidebook. The goal is to integrate music literacy instruction into choral rehearsals, allowing continued repertoire learning while enhancing musical education. The sight-singing and ear training course will complement this by providing specialized theoretical knowledge.

This research addresses the gaps in the educational framework of the Advanced Class at the Mastery Iris Blue Choir. By creating a targeted teaching guidebook, it aims to offer a systematic approach that integrates sight-singing and ear training into the existing curriculum, ensuring a well-rounded and advanced musical education for the choir members.

## **Research Objectives**

1. To study the techniques of children's chorus teaching from key informants.
2. To construct the teaching guidebook for children in The Mastery Iris Blue Choir.
3. To experiment teaching children's chorus singing skills by using the guidebook.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of learning by using the guidebook.

## Research Methodology

This research is a mixed research of qualitative and quantitative research.

### Population, sample and Key Informants

Population and Sample: The population and the sample are the same group which consists of an advanced choir class composed of 18 children primarily aged between 8-15 years old. The 18 children were categorized into different vocal parts; 10 sopranos and 8 Altoes.

### Key informants:

Criteria of Key informants: (1) Experiences in chorus conducting for 10 years. (2) Experiences in teaching children singing for 10 years. (3) Internationally renowned in the field of choral music education.

### Data collection method

Qualitative research data collection will includes: literature review, interviewing three key informants: Quantitative research data collecting by teaching experiement, formative and summative tesr.

### Data analysis method

Descriptive analysis for qualitative research data. Descriptive analysis uses to summarize the data collected by literature review , and describe the information fot from key informants.

Statistical analysis for quantitative research data; for IOC evaluation form and formative and summative tests. The score of formative and summative tests are analyze by five levels rating scale and hypotheis set for rational of formative and summative test was 4.00/4.00.

### The scope of research

Place: The Mastery Iris Blue Choir, Chengdu, Sichuan, China

Time: From October 2023 to October 2024

Content: Children’s chorus and teaching by using the guidebook that constructed by researcher.

## Conceptual Framework

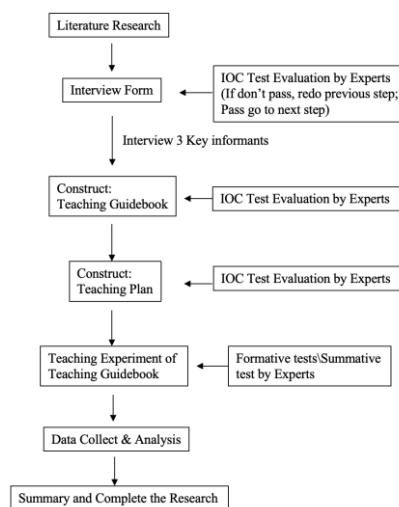


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

## **Research Findings**

### **Constructing the teaching guidebook**

The teaching guidebook is constructed for Children's Chorus at The Mastery Iris Blue Choir and the students aged are within 8-15 years old. This Teaching guidebook for children's chorus is designed to improve and enhance: 1. sense of tempo 2. understanding of meter 3. rhythmic accuracy 4. posture 5. breathing 6. tone 7. tone 8. diction 9. expressive text delivery. It aims to improve students' comprehensive singing skills and the ability of chorus singing cooperation. There were 4 choral music works for teaching which had been advised from the three key informants.

According to the information obtained from interviews with three key informants, The guitar practice book, structured into three chapters.

Chapter 1 Introduction: The presented text outlines the implementation of the Skill Building Sequence in the context of teaching seven culturally diverse treble folk song arrangements. The sequence is designed to develop choristers' comprehension of meter and tonality, fostering the ability to interpret music notation independently. The chapter emphasizes the importance of exposing choristers to diverse tonalities, meters, tempi, and styles in concert programming. Additionally, it underscores the significance of gradually incorporating Skill Building Sequences into rehearsals to cultivate musical independence. The chapter delves into the preferred rhythm and tonal solfege systems, recommending Edwin E. Gordon's rhythm syllables and a moveable do, la-based minor tonal syllable system. The comprehensive Skill Building Sequence Model is detailed, encompassing Mind and Body Warm-Up and Literature Learning Schema, each with specific steps for effective implementation in the choral rehearsal. Overall, this chapter serves as a guide for choral teachers to enhance choristers' musical abilities and understanding through a systematic and structured approach.

Chapter 2: How to use the teacher's guide: This chapter outlines the "Mind and Body Warm-Up" section of the Skill Building Sequence, a comprehensive approach to teaching choristers rhythm and tonality in choral settings. The section begins with ten Movement Exercises designed to develop a sense of tempo and meter through rhythmic chants, instructing choristers on specific body movements. These exercises align with the tempo and meter of the corresponding choral octavo, fostering rhythmic congruence. The Healthy Singing Mantra follows, reinforcing principles of healthy singing, including posture, breathing, tone, diction, and expressive text delivery. The mantra is chanted in rhythmic context, emphasizing the integration of rhythmic elements into vocal practices. The second part, "Literature Learning Schema," introduces Meter Orientation, Preparation Patterns, Rhythm Reading Exercises, Tonality Orientation, Preparation Patterns, Tonal Reading Exercises, and Music Reading Exercises. Each step builds on the previous, gradually guiding choristers toward comprehensive music reading, including rhythm, tonality, and expressive elements, contributing to a holistic approach in choral education.

Chapter 3: Repertoire: This chapter is about repertoire and practical teaching process includes 7 main parts of different music pieces. After the data collection and analysis of literature study and interview for key informants, the music had been chosen under the standards of diverse tonalities, meters, tempo, and styles in concert programming. In this chapter, not only does it include the sheet music, but it also contains detailed teaching steps aligned with the Skill Building Sequence, providing teachers with detailed guidance for the teaching process.

### **Teaching experiment by using the guidebook on teaching children's chorus.**

The lesson plan was developed for choral students in advanced class at the mastery Iris Blue Choir. It includes 16 lessons; each lesson takes 45 minutes. "The lessons focus on the goal of complementing the repertoire, which can improve and enhance the singers' comprehensive abilities. The aim of the repertoire for this 16 lessons which consists of 7 choral pieces: The Sally Garden, Marienwürmchen (Ladybug), Who can sail?, Dodi Li, The Drunken Sailor, Old Joe Clark, Arirang.

The evaluation of the teaching plan took by 3 experts through IOC form. Based on the same principles of scoring as mentioned before in the part of evaluation of the Teaching Guidebook, the IOC form results is 0.96 (conform). This data value shows that the group of experts is satisfied with the feasibility of "Teaching Guidebook For Children's Chorus In Advanced Class At The Mastery Iris Blue Choir".

### **Evaluate the teaching effectiveness by using the guidebook**

In the Formative test, In the formative tests, the highest score range of 20-25 points are 0. The second highest score range of 15-20 points includes 3 people. The third highest score range of 10-15 points includes 14 people. Score range which under 10 points are 0. Formative total mean score is 14.5 .

In the summative test, the highest score range of 20-25 points includes 7 people. The second highest score range of 15-20 points includes 6 people. The third highest score range of 10-15 points includes 6 people. Score range which under 10 points are 0. The lowest score was 3.66 for student 6. Summative total mean score is 4.49.

After the researcher's data analysis, the conclusion drawn is that, following the practical implementation of the guidebook, all 18 students demonstrated significant improvement in their musicianship during choir performances.

### **Discussion**

The construction of the teaching guidebook for children in The Mastery Iris Blue Choir represents a groundbreaking initiative in children's choral education. The multifaceted aspects embedded in the creation of this guidebook have far-reaching implications and potential impacts on pedagogy.

**Pedagogical Innovation and Systematic Learning:** The incorporation of the Skill Building Sequence showcases a commitment to pedagogical innovation (Pinzino, 2022). This systematic learning framework offers a clear and organized method, providing teachers with effective tools to impart essential skills to young choristers. The structured approach ensures a comprehensive and progressive learning experience.

**Cultural Diversity and Inclusive Programming:** By emphasizing cultural diversity in treble folk song arrangements and advocating for diverse concert programming, the guidebook promotes inclusivity (Kim, 2000). This aligns with contemporary educational ideals that recognize the importance of exposing students to a variety of cultural expressions. The guidebook's approach enriches the musical journey for children, fostering a global perspective.

**Independence and Music Literacy:** A noteworthy departure from traditional methods is the guidebook's emphasis on developing choristers' ability to read music independently. This move towards fostering genuine musical literacy empowers young musicians beyond the choral rehearsal, aligning with the broader aim of nurturing confident and independent learners (Xiques, 2014).

**Gradual Skill Development and Adaptability:** Recognizing the diverse learning needs of choristers, the guidebook encourages gradual skill development. The recommendation for adaptability ensures the guidebook can cater to a range of skill levels and learning paces. This flexibility acknowledges the uniqueness of each chorister's musical journey.

**Integration of Rhythm and Tonal Solfege:** The endorsement of rhythm and tonal solfege systems provides a consistent and effective vocabulary for independent music making. By aligning with established pedagogical methodologies, the guidebook ensures that choristers understand and interpret music based on how it sounds, fostering a deeper connection to the art.

**Comprehensive Skill Building Sequence Model:** The meticulously designed Skill Building Sequence Model serves as a comprehensive pedagogical framework. Covering Mind and Body Warm-Up, Literature Learning Schema, and Rhythm and Tonal Rating Scales, this model contributes to the holistic development of choristers. It ensures a well-rounded and engaging learning experience.

**Future Implications and Continuous Improvement:** Ongoing evaluation and feedback will be pivotal for continuous improvement. Insights from teachers and choristers will contribute to the evolution and refinement of the guidebook, ensuring its adaptability and relevance. This iterative process positions the guidebook as a dynamic and responsive resource.

**Overall Impact on Children's Choral Education:** In conclusion, the construction of the teaching guidebook signifies a transformative step in children's choral education. By integrating innovative pedagogical approaches, fostering cultural diversity, and promoting independence in musical literacy, the guidebook has the potential to elevate the quality of choral learning experiences. Its impact extends beyond the rehearsal room, empowering young choristers to become musically confident, expressive, and independent individuals. The success of this endeavor will be measured not only by immediate outcomes but also by its potential to inspire positive changes in children's choral education practices globally. The guidebook stands as a testament to the dedication and vision invested in enhancing the educational journey of young choristers.

## **Recommendation**

### **1. Practical Recommendations**

#### **Cultural Context Sensitivity**

To mitigate potential biases from key informants with foreign choral education backgrounds, it is imperative to carefully contextualize and adapt theoretical findings to the specific musical literacy and singing skills of The Mastery Iris Blue Choir's children. Recognizing variations in music education across countries, localizing approaches ensures alignment with diverse educational backgrounds, enhancing the teaching guidebook's effectiveness.

### **Age-Specific Considerations**

In recognizing the absence of discussion on the vocal changes associated with the 8-15 age range, especially among male participants, future research and practical implementation should incorporate considerations for the vocal challenges arising during the voice-changing period. Developing specialized strategies for this age group contributes to a more comprehensive and effective teaching approach, addressing specific needs and concerns associated with vocal development.

### **2. Recommendation for future research**

#### **Longitudinal Studies on Skill Development**

To deepen our understanding of the sustained impact of the teaching guidebook, future research should prioritize conducting longitudinal studies. These studies would involve tracking the skill development of children engaged in the choir over an extended period, providing valuable insights into the enduring effects on their musical abilities and overall development. This longitudinal approach will unveil nuanced patterns and trends, offering a more comprehensive assessment of the guidebook's long-term efficacy.

#### **Comparative Analysis with Different Choirs**

To enhance the generalizability of findings, extending the research through a comparative analysis across diverse children's choirs is recommended. Investigating the effectiveness of the teaching guidebook in choirs with varying cultural backgrounds and educational settings will illuminate its adaptability and universality. By identifying commonalities and variations in outcomes, this comparative approach will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how the guidebook can cater to diverse populations, enriching the applicability of its methods.

#### **Voice Addressing Changes in Male Adolescents**

A specific area for targeted research involves addressing the challenges and effective teaching strategies during the voice-changing period for male adolescents (8-15 years old). A focused exploration into the unique needs of this age group can yield tailored recommendations for adapting choral education. Understanding how the teaching guidebook can be optimized to accommodate the vocal transitions of male adolescents will provide practical insights for educators working with children in this critical developmental stage.

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