

Choral singing and the Academic Well-Being of School Children: Teachers' Perceptions in Ehime Mbano Local Government Area, Imo State, Nigeria.

Dr. Emmanuel Egbule

*Department of Religion and Cultural Studies
Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria*

Ezichi Emmanuel Egbule

*Department of Science Education
Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria*

Veronica Chile Egbule

*Department of Criminology
Claretian University of Nigeria Nekede, Owerri*

Kosieme Fortunate Egbule

*Department of English and Litaray Studies
Imo State University Owerri.*

Abstract

Group singing is widely acknowledged for its socio-emotional and cognitive benefits. However, empirical scholarship examining how ensemble music performance relates to academic well-being within sub-Saharan local educational contexts remains sparse. This study investigated music teachers' perceptions of the relationship between choral singing participation, life-skills acquisition, and self-discipline among secondary choral children in Ehime Mbano Local Government Area (L.G.A.), Imo State, Nigeria. Adopting a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 30 music teachers across secondary schools offering music education in the L.G.A. via purposive sampling. A structured 16-item, 4-point Likert-scale questionnaire (the Choral Singing and Academic Well-Being Questionnaire – CSAWQ) evaluated teacher assessments of developmental outcomes. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard Deviations) against a decision benchmark of 2.50. Findings indicate that music educators strongly agreed (overall grand means ≥ 3.10) that choral singing enhances critical life skills – including social awareness, peer interaction, intellectual engagement, self-confidence, and emotional regulation – and fosters behavioural self-discipline through rhythmic accuracy, conductor tracking, adherence to ensemble instructions, cooperative blending, and active listening. Choral ensemble participation is perceived as a low-cost, high-impact intervention supporting holistic child development and student well-being. Educational authorities in Nigeria and comparable contexts are encouraged to institutionalize and adequately resource school choral ensembles within basic education curricula, while future research should incorporate student self-reports and longitudinal designs.

Keywords: Choral singing, academic well-being, music pedagogy, self-discipline, life skills, child development, Nigeria, teachers perceptions.

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I. Introduction

Vocal performance constitutes an essential domain of human artistic expression. Beyond aesthetic value, it offers music exerts a profound influence on the emotional, psychological, social, and physical well-being of both performers and listeners (Clift et al., 2010; Welch et al., 2014). In African musicological contexts, musical engagement is deeply relational. Interpersonal connectedness represents a core socio-cultural orientation – an embodiment of communal life that shapes both individual and collective flourishing (Blacking, 1973; Acquah, 2016).

The human voice remains the most accessible musical instrument, requiring no capital investment or mechanical maintenance. Singing facilitates cognitive processing, motor-sensory integration, and emotional self-regulation. When executed collectively as choral singing, these developmental outcomes are amplified (Bailey & Davidson, 2005; Clift & Morrison 2011). Choral ensembles – whether structured in mixed voicing (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) or unison arrangements – cultivate shared identity, collaboration, mutual accountability, and disciplined attention (Acquah, 2016).

In contemporary educational discourse, well-being is increasingly recognized as a prerequisite for effective learning. Psychological well-being encompasses dimensions such as self- acceptance, positive relations with others, authority, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Academic well-being specifically denotes a student's cognitive, emotional and social adjustment within formal learning environments. While extensive research has focused on factors that hinder academic performance, empirical evaluation of proactive creative-arts, interventions – such as structured school choir programmes – remain limited in localized West African contexts.

This study therefore examines music teachers' perception of how participation in school choral ensembles relates to the enhancement of life skills and the cultivation of self-discipline among secondary school children in Ehime Mbano L.G.A., Imo State, Nigeria. By focusing on teacher assessments within a defined administrative zone, the research contributes localized empirical evidence to an under-represented geographical and cultural context.

II. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework: psychological Well-Being and Music Pedagogy

This study is grounded in Ryff's multidimensional model of psychological well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) and Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Ryff posits six fundamental dimensions of human flourishing: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Choral singing provides a practical operational environment for these dimensions. When children participate in collective vocal ensembles, they navigate social interdependency (positive relations), master musical technicalities (environmental mastery), exercise choice within structured parameters (autonomy), an gain personal efficacy through public performance (personal growth and self-acceptance).

Self-Determination Theory emphasizes three innate psychological needs- competence, autonomy, and relatedness – whose satisfaction fosters intrinsic motivation and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ensemble music-making simultaneously addresses all three: singers experience competence through progressive mastery of repertoire, autonomy through expressive interpretation within ensemble constraints, and relatedness through shared musical goals and interpersonal attunement. From a pedagogical perspective, group music-making encourages what Welch and colleagues term holistic child engagement, integrating cognitive decoding, motor coordination, and emotional interpretation (Welch et al., 2014).

2.2 Choral Singing, Cognitive Transfer, and Life Skills

Scholarship on non-musical transfer effects indicates that sustained musical engagement can positively influence socio-emotional and behavioural domains (Rickard et al., 2013). Group vocal training requires auditory discrimination, working memory, focused attention, and emotional regulation, which correlate with language literacy, social competence, and general adaptive functioning. Beyond cognitive metrics, choral singing cultivates essential socio-emotional life skills. Group music performance reinforces social bonding, empathy, communication, and emotional resilience (Clift et al., 2010; Bailey & Davidson, 2005).

In school settings, these life skills translate into stronger peer relationships, improved classroom climate, and enhanced student commitment to educational goals. Evidence from Ghana demonstrates that University and youth choral participation contributes to emotional, psychological, social, and physical well-being, with generative mechanisms including positive affect, focused attention, social support, and regular commitment (Acquah, 2016). Comparable findings emerge from South Africa school and community choir research, where participation is associated with resilience, self-worth, positive affect, and a sense of belonging (Louw, 2015; Bartolome, 2018).

2.3 Ensemble Discipline and Self-Regulation

Ensemble music performance demands rigorous self-discipline and behavioral control. Unlike solitary study, participating in a choir requires continuous monitoring of pitch, volume, and timbre relative to adjust voices while maintaining visual contact with the conductor. Extant literature demonstrates that ensemble participation promotes executive functions – specifically inhibitory control, cognitive flexibility, and attentional focus (Bailey & Davidson, 2005). Students who practice precise rhythmic synchronization and observe structured ensemble rules frequently demonstrate increased impulse control and compliance in general academic classrooms.

The mechanics of choral performance – rhythmic accuracy, conductor tracking, blending, part independence, and active listening function as repeated, low-stakes opportunities to practice self-regulation. These micro-skills of disciplined attention and cooperative subordination of individual preference to collective sound are transferable to classroom behavioural expectations and peer collaboration.

2.4 Gap in the literature

While international literature extensively documents the psychological, physiological, and cognitive benefits of music education (Cliff et al., 2010; Rickard et al., 2013; Welch et al., 2014), significant empirical gaps remain. Most studies originate from Western, high-income nations. Sub-Saharan African contexts – where singing is historically central to communal life but frequently under-resourced within formal school curricula – remain under-represented. Few studies evaluate how localized institutional constraints (for example, dependence on a cappella singing and limited instrumental resources) shape teachers' perceptions of student academic well-being. Moreover, existing work often treats socio-emotional benefits and behavioural discipline as separate domains rather than examining how specific choral execution mechanisms serve as direct conduits for self-discipline. This study addresses these gaps by offering localized empirical evidence from Ehime Mbano L.G.A., Imo State, Nigeria, focused on teachers' professional assessments.

III. Method

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. The design is appropriate for systematically capturing, analyzing, and describing the assessments of music educators regarding the developmental and educational outcomes of school choral programmes within a defined administrative zone.

3.2 Population and Sample

The target population comprised music teachers in secondary schools within Ehime Mbano Local Government Area, Imo State, Nigeria, that maintain active music programmes and choral ensembles. Through purposive sampling that prioritized schools with established choral activities, a sample of 30 music teachers (17 male, 13 female) was obtained. This sample size provides broader coverage of schools while remaining manageable for in-depth descriptive analysis within a single L.G.A.

3.3 Instrumentation

Data were gathered using a structured instrument titled the Choral Singing and Academic Well-Being Questionnaire (CSAWQ). The instrument comprised two main sections:

- Section A: Demographic characteristics of respondents (gender, years of teaching experience, and school type).
- Section B: 16 core indicator statements organized under two thematic clusters – (1) Life Skills and Socio-Emotional Enhancement (Items 1-8) and (2) Behavioural Self-Discipline and Ensemble Regulation (Items 9-16).

Responses were scored on a 4-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). Content and face validity were established by two senior faculty scholars in Music Education and Educational Measurement. A pilot test with eight music teachers outside the study area yielded a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.87$, indicating high internal consistency.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The instrument was administered face-to-face across participating secondary schools. All 30 questionnaires were fully completed and retrieved (100% response rate). Descriptive statistics – arithmetic means (M) and standard deviation (SD) – were computed for each and cluster. The theoretical decision benchmark was established as:

$$\text{Decision Benchmark} = (4 + 3 + 2 + 1) / 4 = 2.50$$

Mean values $M \geq 2.50$ indicated positive agreement (accepted), whereas mean values $M < 2.50$ indicated disagreement (rejected). Standard deviations provided an indication of response consensus.

IV. Results

4.1 Research Question 1: How does choral singing relate to the enhancement of life skills and socio-emotional development among school children, according to music teachers?

Table 1 presents the mean ratings and standard deviations of the 30 music teachers concerning the acquisition of vital life skills and socio-emotional competences through choral participation.

Table 1 Evacuation of Choral Singing and Student Life Skills/Socio-Emotional Development (N = 30)

S/N	Item Statement	Mean (M)	SD	Decision	Rank
1	Broadens children's social awareness and constructive peer interactions	3.27	0.58	Accepted	3
2	Facilitates constructive engagement with family and community networks	3.13	0.63	Accepted	6
3	Stimulates cognitive engagement, intellectual curiosity, and academic confidence	3.20	0.61	Accepted	4
4	Enhances self-esteem and confidence in public presentation and performance	3.37	0.56	Accepted	1
5	Fosters foundational musical literacy, aesthetic appreciation, and cultural identity	3.17	0.65	Accepted	5
6	Promotes emotional regulation and constructive expression of feelings	3.10	0.66	Accepted	7
7	Strengthens empathy, mutual support, and pro-social attitudes among peers	3.30	0.53	Accepted	2
8	Encourages resilience and positive coping when facing performance or academic challenges	3.07	0.69	Accepted	8
	Cluster Grand Mean	3.20	0.61	accepted	

Note: Benchmark Mean = 2.50. all items exceeded the benchmark. Highest-rated items were self-esteem/public confidence (M = 3.37) and empathy/prosocial attitudes (M = 3.30).

As shown in Table I, all eight items exceeded the benchmark of 2.50, yielding a cluster grand mean of 3.20 (SD = 0.61). Teachers most strongly endorsed the contribution of choral singing to self-esteem and public presentation confidence, followed by the strengthening of empathy and prosocial peer attitudes.

4.2 Research Question 2: In what ways does choral singing contribute to the development of self-discipline and behavioural regulation among school children, according to music teachers?

Table 2 outlines teacher evaluations regarding the operational mechanics of choral singing and their perceived contribution to school self-discipline.

Table 2: Teacher Evaluation of Choral Performance Mechanics and Self-Discipline (N = 30)

S/N	Item Statement	Mean (M)	SD	Decision	Rank
9	Cultivates precise rhythmic replication, temporal accuracy, and internal timing	3.23	0.57	Accepted	4
10	Instills sustained focus on the ensemble conductor and visual cues.	3.30	0.53	Accepted	3
11	Promotes consistent compliance with procedural and musical directions.	3.40	0.50	Accepted	1
12	Fosters cooperative blending and subordination of individual volume to ensemble balance.	3.37	0.55	Accepted	2
13	Develops active listening and real-time adjustment within multi-part vocal textures.	3.27	0.58	Accepted	5
14	Encourages punctuality, rehearsal preparedness and personal responsibility for parts.	3.17	0.65	Accepted	6
15	Builds impulse control by requiring delayed gratification during rests and entries.	3.10	0.66	Accepted	7
16	Supports transfer of focused attention and rule adherence to regular classroom settings.	3.07	0.69	Accepted	8
	Cluster Grand Mean	3.24	0.59	Accepted	

Note: Benchmark Mean = 2.50. all items exceeded the benchmark. Highest-rated items were compliance with directions (M = 3.40) and cooperative blending (M = 3.37).

Data in Table 2 demonstrates that all eight indicator statements score above the 2.50 benchmark, culminating in a cluster grand mean of 3.24 (SD = 0.59). The highest-rated dimensions were compliance with procedural and musical directions and cooperative blending during ensemble performance. Teachers also strongly endorsed the development of conductor-focused attention and rhythmic precision.

V. Discursion

The empirical findings of this study indicate that music teachers in Ehime Mbano L.G.A. perceived choral singing as a significant vehicle for improving student life skills and cultivating self-discipline, thereby supporting academic well-being in secondary school environments.

Regarding life skills and socio-emotional development, educators strongly agreed that regular participation in school choirs enhances students' self-confidence, peer interaction, empathy, cognitive engagement, and emotional regulation. These results align with findings by Clift et al. (2010) and Bailey and Davidson (2005), who documented that collective vocal performance fosters self-efficacy, reduces performance anxiety, and strengthens socio-emotional connectedness. The high endorsement of self-esteem and public presentation confidence ($M = 3.37$) is particularly noteworthy in a Nigerian educational context where public speaking and confident self-presentation remain valued academic and social competencies. The results also resonate with Acquah's (2016) Ghanaian study, which highlighted emotional, psychological, and social benefits of mixed-chorus participation, and with South African research linking choir membership to resilience and a sense of belonging (Bartolome, 2018).

Regarding behavioural self-discipline, the results demonstrate that ensemble singing is perceived to enforce practical self-regulation. Core choir requirements rhythmic precision, tracking conductor cues, maintaining part independence, blending, and active listening – demand continuous focus and impulse control. These findings are consistent with research showing that group singing develops self-regulation, attention control, and pro-social attitudes (Bailey & Davidson, 2005). The highest means for compliance with directions ($M = 3.40$) and cooperative blending ($M = 3.37$) suggest that teachers view the subordinate of individual preference to collective musical goals as a powerful training round for classroom behavioural expectations. The self-discipline cultivated during music rehearsals is understood by respondents to transfer to standard classroom environments, helping students maintain focus, observe institutional rules, and work collaboratively with peers (Rickard et al., 2013).

Theoretically, the findings map onto Ryff's dimensions of psychological well-being (positive relations, environmental mastery, personal growth, self-acceptance) and the three basic needs of Self-Determination Theory (competence, autonomy, relatedness). Choral ensembles appear to function as micro-communities in which these dimensions and needs are repeatedly exercised under structured pedagogical guidance.

VI. Significance of the Study

This study carries important theoretical and practical implications:

1. For educational policymakers: It provides localized empirical evidence that music education – specifically a cappella and choral singing – is perceived by practitioners not merely as an extracurricular pastime but as a cost-effective pedagogical intervention supporting student well-being and academic focus.
2. For school administrators: It highlights choral singing as an accessible community-building and behavioural management tool. Because vocal ensembles require minimal capital investment compared with instrumented programmes, administrators can leverage choral activities to improve school culture and student engagement.
3. For music educators: It offers a structured framework linking specific vocal performance techniques (conductor tracking, unison blending, rhythmic precision) to non-musical behavioural and socio-emotional outcomes, thereby supporting the design of intentional, holistic music curricula.

VII. Limitations of the Study

4. Sample scope: The study was conducted within a single Local Government Area with a purposive sample of 30 music teachers. While large than earlier census studies in the same district, the sample still limits direct statistical generalizability to national or international populations.
5. Reporter perspective: Data collection relied on teacher-reported evaluations. Future research should incorporate direct student self-assessments, standardized behavioural observations, and academic performance metrics to triangulate findings.
6. Descriptive methodology: The study utilized descriptive statistics to access perceived relationships. Longitudinal experimental or quasi-experimental designs, together with inferential modeling, would be required to evaluate causal relationships between choral engagement and academic outcomes over time.

VIII. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study establishes that music teachers in Ehime Mbano L.G.A. perceive a strong positive link between choral singing participation, life skills enhancement, and student self-discipline among secondary school children. Choral singing is viewed as fostering self-confidence, social awareness, empathy, attention focus, and cooperative discipline skills that support academic well-being and classroom engagement. Because

these benefits are achievable through relatively low-cost a cappella programmes, choral ensembles represent a pragmatic intervention in resource-constrained educational settings.

Based on these conclusions, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Curricular integration: State Ministries of Education and local school boards should mandate ad resource structured choral music programmes within standard basic education curricula across secondary schools.
2. Teacher professional development: Educational authorities should organize regular workshops for music teachers focusing on ensemble leadership, choral pedagogy, and strategies that intentionally link musical skills to socio-emotional and behavioural outcomes.
3. Administrative support: School principals should provide adequate rehearsal spaces, scheduling priority and performance opportunities (including inter-school choral festivals) to sustain student participation and public validation of coir programmes.
4. Future research; Mixed-methods and longitudinal studies incorporating student voice observational data, and academic metric across multiple local government areas are needed to strengthen causal inference and generalizability.

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