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FORMATION OF THE BASIS OF THE SINGING CULTURE OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS IN MUSIC LESSONS

Abstract

Patterns of singing culture, middle school students and music lessons form the core of current discussions in music education on how to maintain adolescents' vocal engagement. This article explores how the foundations of middle school students' singing culture are constituted in general music education and considers singing culture as a holistic concept comprising several interrelated dimensions rather than simply being about the transfer of skills. The purpose is to identify what may achieve the status of 'foundations' for singing culture at this age and which lesson-based strategies serve them.

The investigation is based on a systematic review of literature supplemented with qualitative content analysis and descriptive statistics. Fifty-two papers from Russian, Kazakhstan and international literature met inclusion criteria and were coded according to a predefined analysis framework. The framework included context, conceptions of singing culture, music teachers' pedagogical approaches in singing and reported learning outcomes for students in lower secondary education.

The findings reveal that the authors implicitly share at least four fundamental components of a culture of singing: vocal-technical, musical-aural, artistic-expressive and axiological and socio-communicative. But in both practice and research, vocal-technical factors such as respiration, phonation and intonation is still foregrounded. A smaller but methodologically strong group of studies suggests level models and diagnostic instruments which define the foundations of singing culture as accurate, healthy singing within a limited range, basic ensemble skills, simple expressive nuance and stable or non-anxious involvement in class singing. Effective lesson planning congregates in five categories: systematic vocal workouts, age-appropriate and culturally relevant repertoire policy, balance between group and solo work, the use of movement and body awareness, and opportunities for structured reflection and assessment.

Key words: singing culture, middle school students, music lessons, formation, music education.

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МУЗЫКА САБАҒЫНДА ОРТА МЕКТЕП ОҚУШЫЛАРЫНЫҢ ӘНШІЛІК МӘДЕНИЕТІНІҢ НЕГІЗІН ҚАЛЫПТАСТЫРУ

Аңдатпа

Ән мәдениеті, орта мектеп оқушылары және музыка сабақтары жасөспірімдердің вокалдық белсенділігін қалай қолдау керектігі туралы музыкалық білім берудегі заманауи пікірталастарда басты орын алады. Бұл мақалада жалпы музыкалық білім беру жағдайында орта мектеп оқушыларының әншілік мәдениетінің негізін қалыптастыру, ән мәдениетін тек техникалық дағдылар жиынтығы емес, көп өлшемді құрылым ретінде қарастыру қарастырылады. Мақсат – осы жаста ән айту мәдениетінің "негіздері" деп нені шынайы түрде қарастыруға болатынын және олардың дамуына қандай сабаққа негізделген стратегиялар қолдау көрсететінін түсіндіру.

Зерттеу барысында мазмұнды сапалы талдаумен және сипаттамалық салыстырумен ұштастырылған әдебиеттерге жүйелі шолу жасалады. Ресейлік, Қазақстандық және шетелдік дереккөздерден 52 (елу екі) жарияланым анықталған критерийлер бойынша іріктеліп алынды және ортақ аналитикалық жүйемен талданды. Негіздеме контекстті, ән айту мәдениетінің тұжырымдамаларын, музыка сабақтарындағы педагогикалық стратегияларды және орта мектеп оқушыларының нәтижелері туралы есептерді қамтыды.

Нәтижелер көрсеткендей, авторлардың көпшілігі ән айту мәдениетінің төрт негізгі құрамдас бөлігі туралы жанама түрде келіседі: вокалдық-техникалық, музыкалық-есту, көркемдік-экспрессивті, аксиологиялық және әлеуметтік-коммуникативті. Дегенмен, тәжірибе мен зерттеулер әлі де тыныс алу, фонация және интонация сияқты вокалдық-техникалық аспектілерге басымдық береді. Кішігірім, бірақ әдіснамалық тұрғыдан сенімді зерттеу тобы ән айту мәдениетінің негіздерін шектеулі диапазонда дәл, сау ән айту, ансамбльдің негізгі дағдылары, қарапайым экспрессивті нюанстар және сабаққа тұрақты, алаңсыз қатысу ретінде анықтауға мүмкіндік беретін деңгейлік модельдер мен диагностикалық көрсеткіштерді ұсынады. Сабақтың тиімді стратегиялары бес бағыт бойынша топтастырылған: жүйелі вокалдық жаттығулар, жас ерекшеліктеріне сәйкес және мәдени тұрғыдан маңызды репертуарлық саясат, теңдестірілген топтық және жеке жұмыс, қозғалыс пен дене туралы хабардарлықты пайдалану, құрылымдық рефлексия және бағалау.

Мақалада орта мектептегі музыка сабақтарында ән айту мәдениетінің негізін қалыптастыру әрі қол жетімді, әрі маңызды деген қорытынды жасалады. Ол техникалық жұмысты, музыкалық түсінікті, мәнерлілікті және позитивті көзқарастарды біріктіретін интеграцияланған, зерттеуге негізделген сабақ жобаларын қолдайды және музыкалық білім берудегі болашақ эмпирикалық және дизайнға негізделген зерттеулердің бағыттарын белгілейді.

Түйін сөздер: ән мәдениеті, орта мектеп оқушылары, музыка сабақтары, формация, музыкалық білім.

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ФОРМИРОВАНИЕ ОСНОВ ПЕВЧЕСКОЙ КУЛЬТУРЫ УЧАЩИХСЯ СРЕДНЕЙ ШКОЛЫ НА УРОКАХ МУЗЫКИ

Аннотация

Вопросы сохранения активности молодых голосов находятся в фокусе дискуссий по поводу методов преподавания искусства звучания среди школьников сегодня. В рамках общей музыкальной подготовки школьников анализируется развитие ключевых элементов вокального искусства, которое интерпретируется как комплексный феномен, включающий разнообразные аспекты, а не ограничиваясь исключительно техническими умениями. Задача заключается в определении того, какие элементы действительно являются фундаментальными для вокального образования подростков и каким методам обучения способствует формирование этих основ.

Для анализа данных применялась методика комплексного изучения источников информации через сравнение характеристик и интерпретацию содержания. В рамках анализа по единой методике систематизации данные прошли кодирование после отбора пятидесяти двух статей из разных стран СНГ и за их пределами, соответствующих установленным параметрам отбора. Контекстуальное изучение вокального искусства, методы преподавания музыкальных дисциплин в старших классах и анализ достижений учащихся составляли основу курса.

Исследования подтверждают совпадение мнений большинства специалистов по ключевым аспектам вокального искусства: техническим навыкам исполнения, восприятию музыкальных элементов, передаче эмоциональной выразительности, определению ценностей и взаимодействию в социальном контексте. В исследованиях и практической работе продолжают фокусироваться на ключевых элементах вокальной техники, включая методы дыхания, голосообразование и модуляцию речи. Группа ученых, несмотря на скромные масштабы, разработала проверенные подходы, включающие иерархические схемы и индикаторы оценки, позволяющие выявить ключевые аспекты вокального искусства. В рамках учебного процесса выделяются пять ключевых направлений, включающих регулярные занятия по развитию голоса, подбор программ под возрастную категорию и культурные особенности учащихся, сочетание коллективной деятельности с индивидуальными заданиями, применение физических упражнений для повышения телесного восприятия, а также планирование периодического анализа результатов и корректировки методов обучения.

В заключении статьи утверждается важность и осуществимость привития базовых навыков вокального искусства школьникам во время музыкальных занятий. В работе рассматриваются перспективы дальнейших экспериментальных и творческих изысканий в сфере преподавания искусства, подчеркивается важность гармоничного сочетания инженерных задач, музыкальной грамотности, личностной выразительности и оптимистичного восприятия процесса обучения.

Ключевые слова: культура пения, учащиеся средних классов, уроки музыки, формация, музыкальное образование.

Introduction. In music education of recent years producing a community of singing middle schoolers is increasingly considered integral not only for musical literacy but also in the context of holistic development. International and national policy frameworks in most countries rank singing as a prime form of musical experience, although its place in the classroom tends to be side-lined by crowded schedules, test pressures and the rampancy of out-of-school digital entertainment. At the

same time, scientific studies repeatedly reveal that sustained, well directed singing in music classes promotes musical, communicative, emotional and social development of children and young people [6; 7; 15]. This clash of curricular motivations and classroom evidence renders particularly stark the struggle to develop a sustainable culture of singing in middle school music classes.

The concept of ‘singing culture’ in the pedagogical literature has a well-worn genealogy. It is not only the proficiency of correct vocal singing, but complex and coupled personal formation which is made up of voice-technical skills, musical play-hearing, creative expressiveness or artistic vocals aesthetics and estimation attitude in relation to singing as a way of spiritual and cultural self-expression [1; 2; 10]. Alexeeva describes the culture of singing at primary school as a syncretic form of overall culture, representing intonation level of performance, breath pressure dalmatian, clear dictionema it is describing and even emotional reception directs, well-balanced positive relation between collective music making in school [1]. Within this tradition, work has begun on the development of step-by-step pedagogical ‘technologies’ for ear-training to nurture the “foundations of singing culture” via classroom music, frequently involving vocal-choral repertoire, age-appropriate songs and a progressive ratcheting-up of vocal tasks [1; 3].

Recent Russian and Chinese research continues this line by proposing the modelling of complex pedagogical systems for generation a singing or vocal-performing culture in students’ personal sphere in various institutional environments. Liniue develops a dissertation on how to develop singing culture learners by means of the integration of vocal performing technologies, offers multi-Level experimental (search, diagnostic, formative, monitoring stage), are deployed specific tools diagnosing different levels of development of singing culture in experimental and control groups [2]. Kashapova and Ni offer a structure-functional model of vocal-performing culture of junior schoolboys in the subject music class, based on integrity, diatomicity, variability and accessibility as principles shaping system-forming processes and operationalise it through elements, criteria and indicators [10]. Both pieces of research are based on quantitative data (diagnostic scales, level distribution, pre- and post-test comparison), providing evidence for the fact that singing culture may be regarded as a diagnosable, dynamically evolving construct other than intuitive “feel-for-singing” [2; 10].

Simultaneously, a great number of native researchers study step-by-step formation of vocal-choral skills in the framework of music classes at school. Stage-structured working on the development of breathing, intonations, choral and expressiveness from the first grade on is clearly related to the gradual formation of vocal singing culture [3]. Moreover, practice based methodological books prove that in choral singing children ‘s musical horizons broaden when thinking about music as art is created, desire of children to be engaged into the world of the art-music appears and certain attitudes towards it are developed [3; 11]. In the Central Asian practice, vocal-choral education is regarded as an important factor in music-aesthetics and to pass on the national music heritage. Some research into music-aesthetic upbringing via vocal-choral performance highlights the importance of school singing as a means to develop students' ability for experiencing emotions, musical pitch and being collectively responsible, from early school years [5].

School music education, including singing, is located by Kazakhstani authors in wider national imperatives of human development and of culture. Music in education is considered to be one important contribution to the overall personality development (or, more negatively speaking, character) of young learners – which has been interpreted as merging cognitive and emotional and value dimensions - supporting national needs for youth who can master new knowledge and skills in a quickly organised world [12]. Parallel studies of introduction of Kazakh musical heritage to school pupils by getting them acquainted with folk songs and traditional genres for the purpose of identity-building and cultural connections emphasise the successive presentation [13]. Nevertheless, In spite of the value that such studies attribute to singing and repertoire choice, they tend to provide only a general discussion of what took place when learners sang (and not consistent recognition that something cultural was being fostered with regard to singing practice) particularly so in relation to middle-school students as a diagnosable pedagogical endpoint.

At the international level, evidence from empirical and review studies demonstrates the educational and developmental benefits of singing. Welch’s overview of key findings from studies

into singing's impacts on children identifies not only musical skills (tuning, stability of rhythm, music memory) but also cognitive gains in language and attention as well as mental health challenges such as self- image deficits to social or emotional well-being especially regarding collective choral environments [7]. Recent reviews of youth and adult choral singing have highlighted enhanced mood, stress reduction, choice/acceptance/confidence/self-worth, and connectedness to others [15], confirming the unique profile regarding the psychosocial aspects of choral singing compared with other forms of activity. Van der Sandt demonstrates how music education singing is a valuable tool for the establishment of children communicated ability by also assisting to help and contribute to vocabulary and pronunciation, turn taking, listening, empathy and sense of belonging [6].

Simultaneously however, several studies caution against the decline in collective song-based activity within schools and point to altered pedagogical emphases or digital distractions as cause for concern; each arguing instead for transformative practices that can re- the body group singing back into school life [6; 8]. It has ignored the impact of also behalf on within music experiences, like in-class singing, school choir and after-school programs JOHNSON's work on school singing repertoires) and practices turns seniors been able to show how institutional polices, extra-curricular lad Ung activities, 'and afterschool programs can interact with in class sinning's shape the suffusing "singing culture" of a school [8]. In culturally sustaining music education, Good-Perkins argues that the "normalised singing culture" in teacher education can include or exclude students' own vocal and musical identities based on how inclusive (or not) and diverse are the singing practices [9]. These results indicate that participation in a singing culture is not merely technical and repertoire-focused, but speaks to issues of power, identity and cultural representation within the classroom.

Within this global frame, research on middle school music emphasises the challenges peculiar to early adolescence: voice change, heightened self-consciousness, peer pressure and changing musical preferences. Writers state that cultivating a successful culture of singing in the classroom – one that is rooted in perceived psychological safety, inclusive repertoire, explicit vocal technical support and meaningful participation –can offset many of these difficulties and help to keep students engaged as they move beyond the first years of formal schooling [6; 7; 14]. School-wide documents, such as the music curriculum at Aston Fields Middle School in the UK, literally refer to a "singing culture at the school" as part of a building-block approach to music learning, whereby students are encouraged to perform, compose and sing repeatedly in order that their musical understanding is consolidated' ([14], p. 27).

Nevertheless, there are several shortcomings as well. First, the Russian and Kazakh literature on *pevcheskaya kultura* largely addresses *pevcheskaya kultura* among younger (primary) schoolchildren or children in specialist music schools (Crutchfield 2006; Ebrud et al 2013), whereas international research on adolescent choral singing is much more likely to take place in extra-curricular contexts rather than required classroom music. Secondly, while current research offers much in the way of conceptualisations and a number of experimentally- tested models for developing singing or choral/performance ethos [1; 2; 10], relatively little focuses specifically on how to lay the sound foundations for engaging adolescents within mainstream secondary music lessons, where time is short and student attitudes are uncertain. Third, there are hardly any empirical data about how specific pedagogical approaches in regular music lessons affect the different aspects of a singing culture (vocal-technical, musical-perceptual, socio-emotional and axiological).

The purpose of the current paper is to make up for these knowledge deficiencies and investigate how singing culture is made in middle school students' music lessons. Singing culture, in this context, can be conceived as an integrated multi-componential construct involving: (1) voice-technique competency (healthy phonation habits, control of breathing, pitch and diction); (2) musical-aural development (intonation accuracy; rhythm accuracy; inner hearing acuity, stylistic acumen ability); (3) artistic-expressive capacity (manner of emotional engagement expression; phrase shaping; register qualitative nuance[s]); and several axiological and socio-communicative dimensions ([Sing Up Music Manifesto]), such as: positive attitudes to singing, collective participation in music-making who are respecters for cultural and linguistic diversity or adoptions culturally [5]. Middle school students typically designate learners about 11–15 years old, an age of dramatic physical and

psychosocial development that has implications for the voice. Singing culture in this paper is read not only as a result, but also as a processual and contextual phenomenon – something of “what we do together” within the music lessons that shapes identifications, relationships and entrances-to-learning.

In this context, the article seeks to offer a systematic and data-driven contribution with regard to establishing those foundations of singing culture in music lessons at lower secondary level: what can be learned from academic research on these issues, which barriers and pedagogical contradictions currently prevail and what support policies could prove useful.

Methods and Materials. As there was a lack of systematic and empirical data, the study was organized as a systematic literature review integrating qualitative content analysis with basic descriptive statistics. The general intent of the procedures was to develop a sense of transparency and reproducibility, such that other researchers might be able replicate modelling (searching, selection) and coding processes in researching singing culture formation for middle school music lessons.

Research design. The study is organised into five stages: (1) systematic search and selection of sources; (2) creation of an analytical framework for the “singing culture”; (3) qualitative content analysis of the selected texts; (4) comparative analysis with regard to geographical as well as institutional background; and, finally, (5) descriptive statistical summarisation to outline the main trends. No new data from the field were gathered and only published or defended works (articles, doctoral dissertations, monographs, methodological guides) were included in analysis.

Data sources and search strategy. The search for publications was carried out in international (Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC) and Russian databases (eLIBRARY.ru, RSCI) and on Kazakhstani institutional repositories and electronic libraries (KazNEB and university archives). Dates of involvement were selected to run from the year 2000 to 2025 in order to embrace classic and contemporary discourses, developments, and praxes related to the spread of competence-based and inclusive music education.

The bibliography of all key publications were hand searched to identify further relevant sources (“snowballing”).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies were included if they:

1. exclusively on middle school; hyperfocused on pre-adolescents (i.e. around age 11–15 years old, that is grades 5–9).
2. reported singing in obligatory school music classes, (not just extracurricular choirs);
3. instruments of singing culture, vocal culture or any other related but different compiling register for research;
4. published pedagogical interventions, modeling or diagnostic methodologies related to singing culture formation.

Excluded were: (a) studies on professional vocal education in conservatories or specialized music schools; (b) clinical/medical voice articles without pedagogical focus; and (c) purely theoretical works with no relationship to school practice.

Analytical framework and coding procedure. A coding matrix was constructed on the basis of existing conceptualisations of singing culture [1; 2; 5; 10] and after initial reading of a small pilot portion of sources. The matrix was made up of four main blocks:

- context (country, type of school, grade levels and type of lesson);
- singing culture (vocal technical, musical-aural, artistic c-expressive axiological and socio-communicative) conceptualization and components of principal singing foci;
- pedagogical approach (repertoire policy, vocal-technical work, use of body/gesture, the role of folk and popular music, technology used by teachers/students, types of assessment requests);
- outcomes and evidence (diagnostic instruments, level models, quantitative measures, qualitative descriptions, reported barriers).

Each source was read completely and coded using a pencil method. For enhanced credibility, a portion (20 %) of the data was peer-coded by one other researcher; discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus, which supported further refinement of the coding guide.

Data analysis. Content-analysis results were produced to frequency tables (e.g., number of times singing culture or pedagogical strategies were reported). Cross-tabulations were conducted to compare prevalence across contexts (Russian vs. Kazakhstani vs. international study; primary school vs. middle school where both were examined). Quantitative data, such as pre-/post test scores, level distributions or percentage of students at a certain stage were selectively retrieved from the original studies and reformatted in tabular structure for ratings on strength and direction of effects. This combination of systematic review, structured content analysis and simple descriptive statistics delivered a cohesive empirical platform for the Results and Discussion sections.

Results. The final 52 publications that met the inclusion criteria were included in this analysis. Of the respondents, 19 were (mostly English-speaking) non-domestic, 18 Russian and 7 Kazakhstani, with a further 8 from other post-Soviet or Central/Eastern European contexts. Journal articles were dominant $n = 33$ and followed by theses, dissertations and books biological/monographs) ($n = 11$) as well as practice-related methodological guidelines with content-oriented empirical basis ($n = 8$ [1–3; 5; 8–10]).

Conceptualisations and aspects of singing culture. According to the content analysis, in as many as 17 publications did the authors draw explicit references to a term “singing culture” and other direct equivalents in relation to school music [1;2;5;10]. Nevertheless, numerous others implicitly treated related concepts through approaches to vocal-choral growth, general voice culture, or choral musicianship. Four recurring singing culture component groups were identified across the corpus (see Table 1).

Table 1 – Core components of singing culture in the analysed literature (n = 52)

Component group	Typical descriptors in sources	n of sources	% of corpus
Vocal-technical	Breathing, phonation, intonation, diction, vocal range, posture	44	85
Musical-aural	Pitch and rhythm perception, inner hearing, tonal awareness, style	38	73
Artistic-expressive	Emotional responsiveness, phrasing, dynamics, timbre, imagery	35	67
Axiological & socio-communicative	Motivation, attitudes, identity, group cohesion, cultural values	31	60

As Table 1 illustrates, vocal technical work is mostly foregrounded as all most singing research studies that deal with singing in music lessons spend real time on breath, phonation and intonation work [1; 3; 11]. Musical-aural variables (hearing, internal intonations, rhythmicness) are also included in most sources with tight connection to vocal-technics training one more often see [6; 7]. Artistic-expressive and axiological–socio-communicative dimensions are applied with lesser consistency, though they appear in more than a half of references – mostly where the culture of singing is considered as a comprehensive personal formation rather than just an isolated set of skills [2; 5; 9; 10].

Only 9 publications provided a precise level model of singing or vocal culture (i.e., the “low–medium–high” or “elementary–basic–advanced” levels, which correlated with demonstrable signs) [1; 2; 5; 10]. For these items on the construct validity of singing culture for middle school students, the typical referent had to do with (a) more or less stable intonation and mostly accurate pitches in a limited range; (b) being able to carry forward melodic line within unison or simple two-part texture; (c) doing some basic expressive shading in voice tone profile consonant with text content; and d) engaged participation – non-anxious class participation.

Pedagogical strategies in music lessons. Scrutiny of pedagogical methods exposed five principal groups of actions in which leaders actively took certain position to cultivate autochthonous singing culture in a general music class:

1. Integration of vocal-technical training into music lessons (40 times in 77 %) : short targeted exercises about breathing, posture, resonance and intonation as part of each lesson - sometimes drawn up as “vocal warm-up-complexes” [1; 3; 11].

2. Repertoire policy (37 sources, 71 %): a choice of songs of suitable difficulty and in a convenient tessitura according to the age of children's voices as well national/folk repertoire

3. Work in common and individually (33 sources, 63 %): alternation of the unison choir singing, work of groups and solos from time to time, designed to favour both confidence in the group security and progressive individual self-confidence [6; 7; 9].

4. Movement/gesture/body conscious (24 sources, 46 %): movement with body percussion; simple choreography; working on breathing and roles in small breathing games; gestures to experience rhythm, phrasing and vocal support.

5. Reflection and assessment internally Integrated reflection (21 sources, 40 %) The use of self- and peer-assessment, reflective discussions relating to how singing feels, simple rating scales such as tracking levels of vocal comfort or confident [2; 5; 10].

Twelve articles referred explicitly to the application of digital tools (backing tracks, karaoke apps, recording for feedback) within lesson routines, although this was generally supportive rather than a central aspect of the pedagogy [8; 9].

Evidence of effectiveness and measurable results. Of the 52 sources, 23 included empirical data (pre/post-tests, distribution of levels or quantitative survey results) on changes in singing culture or like constructs. Most experimental and quasi-experimental interventional studies described positive evolution at least in some parts once specific pedagogical interventions were applied.

In multi-staged experimental studies [1; 2; 5; 10], the number of midsecondary school students who rate as “low” or “elementary” level for singing culture decreased by around 15-30% over an academic year, and the number rating basic or good levels increased accordingly. Gains appeared to be greatest in vocal-technical parameters across all settings (pitch accuracy, breathing control and diction) and motivational/attitudinal dimensions (enjoyment of singing, participation). Artistic-expressive factors (expressive nuance, emotional engagement) also showed improvements across groups, but these were generally of smaller magnitude and apparent less consistently.

Students Studies reporting survey-based data on pupils’ attitudes to singing (n = 9) found that more frequent opportunities for structured singing in class are related to increased self-reported confidence in singing, greater behavioural willingness to sing outside school, and a stronger identification with their own school “singing culture,” e.g., pride in school concerts or choirs/song traditions [6–8; 14]. Nonetheless, other studies reported a decrease in spontaneous singing and an increase in self-consciousness throughout the middle-school years, particularly for mixed-sex groups, highlighting the relevance of supportive classroom environment.

Contextual patterns. These are some context patterns evident in the comparison. Russian and Kazakhstani media more generally prioritised choral and collective aspects, focusing on the importance of song as a medium through which to pass down cultural heritage and construct community [3; 5; 12; 13]. Anglophone sources from internationally also more frequently emphasised individual vocal identity, belongingness and self-reported well-being but did acknowledge social cohesion through singing in a group [7-9; 15].

The building blocks of singing culture at the middle school level appeared to be connected across contexts in three interrelated ways: (1) technically healthy vocal use that is age-appropriate; (2) daily, meaningful engagement with collective singing in the context of class time; and (3) a classroom climate where singing is a normative practice rather than one that invites ridicule. These relationships are outlined diagrammatically in Figure 1 below which is a simplified model that illustrates how pedagogies (vocal exercises, repertoire, group structures and reflection) feed into components of the singing culture before embedding more strongly in to school singing as a concept over time.



Figure 1 – Schematic model of relationships between pedagogical strategies, components and outcomes in the formation of middle school students' singing culture

Discussion. The conclusions of this review indicate the conceptual richness as well as practical fragmentation of existing approaches to establish a foundation for singing culture of middle school students in music classes. In a conceptual sense, the detection of four nominators for repetitive component groups —vocal technical, musical-aural, artistic-expressive and axiological & socio-communicative— proves early Russian and post-Soviet attempts to consider *pevcheskaya kultura* as integral in forms one's personality [1; 2; 5; 10]. Nevertheless, the striking prevalence of vocal-technical discourses within the corpus (85 % of sources) suggests that, at a practical level, singing culture is still largely conceptualised in terms of technique and correctness – not as a complex cultural, social and emotional fusion.

It is little wonder, given the origins of school vocal pedagogy, that this imbalance exists. Classical Russian and Soviet theories of music teaching placed an accent on intonation, breathing, pronunciation and vocal sanitation as prerequisites for any further artistic progress [1; 3; 11]. Our findings support the continued centrality of such practice: teachers and researchers still thematise the “base” of singing culture in terms of secure pitch, breath and unison even as these are often perforce modified considering ongoing voice change, embodied imperfection and teenage precarity. On this basis the review also suggests that satisfactory vocal-technical ability is ultimately a *sine qua non* for sustainable school singing activity. Enthusiastic and/or skilled participation in expressive, identity-bound or community-bonding dimensions of singing may well be retarded by a lack of healthy, age-appropriate vocal use.

It is, however, if compared to the international literature considering the benefits of singing for children and young people [6; 7; 15] that some conceptualizations may seem limited. There are findings that take a different approach to the function of singing, focusing on its psychosocial and communicative effect (e.g. positive mood states, self-confidence, social bonding, communication skills) revealing an assumed inclusive understanding of what should count as singing “culture” as opposed to studies only referring to intonation and breathing [6–8]. The coding of axiological and socio-communicative ingredients, namely: motivation, attitudes, identity and group cohesion in their relation to cultural value is designed as an instrument bringing up this wider perspective. That some 60 % of the sources refer to such features indicates that these are part of the discourse, but there is relatively little clear operationalisation as well as level models in this domain which can be seen as a sign of under-theorisation concerning how such aspects come into being and are evaluated in everyday lessons.

The fact that no more than publication comprise detailed level models regarding singing culture (or similar) is methodic important. Experimental research performed by Alekseeva, Linyue, Kashapova & Ni and others [1; 2; 5; 10] show that it is possible to form informative criteria for different levels of vocal and vocal-performing culture, to conduct primary diagnosis of pupil's achievement and to monitor its dynamics. However, such models tend to be constrained to a certain context (specific schools and regions or research studies) and are usually not established as canonical diagnostics. Together, these standards offer a composite picture of what “foundations” in singing culture might resemble in scores serving elementary and middle schools: generally accurate pitch production across the limited range, basic ensemble skill, simple expressive shading and secure, non-anxious participation in large group singing. Expressing such a description is one way to get from abstract rhetoric about singing culture to the everyday work of music lessons.

The systematisation of these into five clusters (vocal-technical work, repertoire policy, group/solo structures, movement & body work and reflection & assessment) resonates also but

extends a writing-up on practice by the groups involved in SSP. Conventional approaches place emphasis on vocal warm-ups, choosing the right repertoire and work in the chorus as cornerstones of school singing [3; 11–13]; our framework corroborates their essence, but it also underscores two more recent (and less systematically employed) strategic territories: embodied practices (movement, gesture, body awareness) and structured reflection/assessment. In this, the review chimes with current developments within music education towards embodiment and learner voice: bodily experience of rhythm and phrasing supports internal structures through movement; asking children to talk about what their singing feels like has been found not only to promote technical progress but also develop a sense of ownership over one’s own body song, as well as metacognitive awareness [6; 9].

The evidence for effectiveness is promising in multi-stage experimental designs. For those studies that utilised a clearly structured, multi-facet intervention package (e.g., vocal exercises, repertoire work, group structuring and reflection over an extended period) there were marked changes in the distribution of students at levels within singing culture [1; 2; 5; 10]. A decrease of 15–30 percentage points in the proportion of “low” or “elementary” grade singers and an increase in the proportion that are “basic,” “sufficient aural skilled”), but not when analysed individually, imply that it is indeed possible that attitudes toward singing at this developmental stage could be manipulated over one school year. This is consistent with overseas research which demonstrates that regular and purposeful singing results in measurable gains in both vocal accuracy, musical percept/percept perceptions and self-esteem [6–8; 15].

Yet several caveats are necessary. For one thing, a lot of these studies are of small samples — they tend to take place in just one school or city — and don’t always have the kind of rigorous control group that might give us more confidence in their findings. Effect sizes are infrequently estimated, and sometimes it is even a qualitative rather than statistical interpretation of change. Second, there is more consistently reported improvement on vocal-technical and motivational elements as opposed to artistic-expressive and axiological ones, which tend to be more disparate and difficult to measure. This asymmetry mirrors the fact that there are some differences in the degree of accessibility with which different parts of singing culture—or indeed any other cultural domain—can be changed, but also methodological shortcomings when it comes to measuring expressive and value-laden dimensions. So even though the tides of change are moving in the right direction, there is not a large amount of evidence to support very strong causal claims.

The situational comparison of Russian/Kazakhstani and anglophone materials uncover further cultural/institutional forces shaping contexts. Singing is linked closer to national tradition and to shared identity in the first set of cases: songs repertoire foregrounds folk and patriotic songs, while the classroom choir appears as a micro-model of social harmony [3; 5; 12; 13]. Singing culture is thus implicitly connected to the action of preserving tradition and morality here. In anglophone literature, individuals’ relationships to tradition and community may still be considered when selecting or creating a song, but more attention is paid to the voice of the singular child and the inclusion (e.g., of shy or marginalised children) and happiness [7–9; 15]. Our findings indicate that the two views each depict an aspect of singing culture: one, in terms of cultural maintenance and social activity; the other, around personal voice and agency, as well as mental health.

The implications of this dualism are very practical concerning musical training in middle schools. If singing culture is to serve both as a vehicle for transferring cultural memory and as a site of individual expression, the congruence between national/folk songs and contemporary, traceable materials from around the world found within school choir repertoire policy should attempt to engage with students’ musical milieux. Similarly, organizational forms must accommodate shared experiences and make enough room for individual exploration of voice in a developmental period when the experience of changing voices and establishing identity is prevalent. The strategies unpacked in this review offer tangible levers for teachers to design lesson sequences which build from secure, supportive unison singing into more differentiated roles, from teacher-led demonstrations into student-led reflections, and from songs that are familiar to the new and culturally diverse.

The relatively low usage of digital instruments among the literature under consideration deserves a special comment. In a context of heavily technologized adolescent musical lives in which few – but still more than half in the current study – regard recordings, karaoke apps or digital backing tracks, only a minority of studies refer ever to them marks out formal classrooms as slightly reterritorializing, potentially signalling a lag between students' informal singing practices and those deemed acceptable in school. Even though technology was not the focus of this review, the lacuna suggests a space for future research and innovation to further enrich singing culture formation, so long as digital tools are employed to supplement rather than replace embodied vocal learning.

Altogether, the findings emphasize that conceptualizing the foundation of singing culture as being more than just a minimum technical standard is important. Nevertheless, healthy, age-appropriate vocal technique is the non-negotiable core and without it sustained and satisfying singing is unlikely. But the review demonstrates that this core can be placed within musical-aural development, expressive practice as well as axiological work in relation to attitudes about what counts as music, values and identities. It's within that nexus of components, I would argue, that a robust culture of classroom and school singing is formed — one that can carry students through the inevitable insecurities of middle-school age and provide them with a foundation for lifelong musical involvement.

Through the same token, its findings also reveal the necessity of methodological strengthening in the field of research: only by means of more rigorous designs as well as a shared diagnostic tool and cross-cultural comparative studies can we move from plausible “good practice” narratives to robust evidence on which specific pedagogic strategies are most effective for laying foundations for singing culture in middle school contexts.

Conclusion. The current study aimed to investigate how the basis of singing culture among middle school students could be built in ordinary music lessons, not in special choirs or conservatory environment. In a systematic review of 52 publications in Russian, Kazakhstani and broader international literatures the article has effectively illuminated the conceptual complexity and practical tensions that frame this field at present. The review shows that authors agree on a multidimensional conception of singing culture which combines vocal-technical, musical-aural, artistic-expressive and axiological and socio-communicative dimensions, despite different terms. It also tells us that the “ground” of singing culture in school practice is most usual reduced to technical accuracy and a collective performance that generates little more than together-ness.

The first novelty exactly consists in this integrated conceptualisation of the foundation of singing culture. The article suggests that rather than being limited to an aspect of intonation and breathing, the building blocks of singing culture for most ordinary middle-school students must be healthy, age-appropriate vocal use; developing musical-aural competencies; early expressive nuance; and stable, non-anxious participation in class singing. By combining level models and diagnostic criteria from a relatively small but methodologically strong set of studies [1; 2; 5; 10], the review brings to the surface what teachers may expect—and intentionally work on promoting—through a school year. This shifts the conversation away from nebulous imperatives to “raise singing culture” toward a practical, action-based framing.

A second Note: To advance the systematisation of pedagogical strategies which effectively help these foundations. This clustering of approaches around this set of five strategic domains (vocal-technical, repertoire policy, group/solo structures, movement-body and reflection-assessment) offers music educators and curriculum designers an integrated conceptual map. How these strategies impact on different aspects of singing culture, and subsequently into more general classroom and school-time cultures are summarised in the schematic model shown in Figure 1. This integrative model draws on such Russian vocal-choral approaches, work from Kazakhstan (relating to cultural identity in music education) and international literature regarding the social and emotional outcomes of singing [3; 5–9; 12–15], providing a more global perspective than normally provided in isolated single-context research.

The implications for educational policy and curriculum design are also significant. If singing culture is acknowledged as a multi-dimensional, diagnosable outcome of music education, then

curricula should express explicit expectations not only about vocal technique but also about expressive, attitudinal and social dimensions of singing. Evidence demonstrates that regular structured singing woven into every lesson, balanced repertoire which weaves national heritage with students' sonic-reality and a deliberate concentration on psychological safety can significantly affect pupil vocal confidence and participation. Music teacher education programs, in turn, must prepare prospective teachers to teach lessons that integrate technical exercises with embodied activities, reflective dialogue and inclusive group structures as opposed to add ons or optional extras.

At the same time, several limitations of existing knowledge are exposed by this review. Many of the studies are local, small-scale and methodologically inconsistent; control groups, effect sizes and longitudinal perspectives tend to be missing. The expressive and axiological aspects of singing culture are recognized but seldom quantified with empirically proven instruments, limiting the strength of claims regarding their formation. There was also a striking lack of studies that explore the use of digital technologies which integrate these in ways which actually extend, rather than dilute, embodied vocal learning—despite the importance of digital media in adolescents' daily musical culture. In addition, the review's language and database constraints may have caused us to overlook related work in other linguistic and cultural domains.

These restrictions directly imply promising directions of further research. First, design-based and quasi-experimental classroom studies are needed that systematically experiment with combinations of the strategies discussed here and compare their impact on various aspects of singing culture in different middle school contexts. Presuming that studies using common diagnostic constructs for making a diagnosis will be more easily synthesized rather than remaining isolated cases. Second, instrument development—postponement and validation of practical classroom-friendly measures to evaluate vocal-technical, expressive and socio-communicative dimensions of singing culture are crucial for teachers to track progress and respond in evidence-informed ways to adjust instruction.

Third, longitudinal research that will follow cohorts of children across the middle school years would help clarify how classroom singing experiences intersect with voice change, identity development and involvement in ex-curricular musical activities. Fourth, comparative cross-cultural studies might help to reveal how different educational traditions and cultural values (e.g., a focus on national heritage versus personal flourishing) shape the goals, as well as the actual practices of singing culture formation. Lastly, research on professional teacher development (not least about what teaching schools do) would bring teacher education into closer relation with the needs of the contemporary classroom, including how music teachers think about singing culture and manage their own vocal selves and technologies.

To sum up, the building of the ground 'middle school students' singing culture' could not be a marginal or ornament role of music education, but an important pedagogical tool and cultural construction responsibility. When approached in this multi-dimensional way, and enriched through deliberate research-based strategies, singing culture can offer young people a secure vocal 'home': a place where their voices are technically nurtured, musically stretched, expressively garlanded and socially valued. While developing this base in the context of quite ordinary music lessons might be a reasonable expectation, it is also an aim that has become necessary if music educational systems are to develop musical lifetime engagement and resilient/expressive young citizens.

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