

THE RELEVANCE OF DEVELOPING STUDENTS' AURAL SKILLS IN VOCAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

This article analyzes the relevance of developing students' aural skills in the process of vocal education from a scientific and pedagogical perspective. Musical hearing is a core component of vocal performance, crucial for intonation accuracy, timbre differentiation, rhythm perception, and the proper formation of vocal technique. The article also discusses effective approaches for working with students whose aural skills are underdeveloped.

Keywords

vocal education, musical hearing ability, vocal technique, practical exercises, vocal pedagogy.

Musical hearing is one of the main components of vocal education, serving as a fundamental skill for students to work on their voice, develop intonational accuracy, perceive timbral differences, and improve their sense of rhythm. In modern vocal pedagogy, the development of aural skills is a theoretically grounded issue and an integral part of practical training. This is because a student's ability to sing correctly, control the voice, and interpret musical text expressively is closely linked to the level of their aural skills. In recent years, the use of methodological materials aligned with international standards, digital technologies, interactive exercises, and audio-analytical programs in music education has provided new opportunities to effectively develop students' aural skills in the vocal training process. At the same time, some students entering vocal training for the first time may have insufficiently developed aural skills and weak intonational stability. This requires the teacher to apply specialized pedagogical approaches, individual training systems, and step-by-step development methodologies.

A student with underdeveloped aural skills cannot fully master the main elements of vocal technique (breathing, resonance, articulation, intonation), which significantly limits their creative potential. Therefore, in vocal education, studying aural skills in depth, introducing new pedagogical technologies for their

development, and creating effective methodological recommendations are among the key contemporary scientific and practical tasks.

Musical hearing ability can be divided into absolute, relative, and inner hearing. Absolute hearing is the ability to identify the exact pitch of musical sounds without comparing them to reference tones (such as a tuning fork). However, not all musicians possess this ability. There is also “adjusted” hearing (as termed by B. Teplov), which is the technical skill to detect even minimal changes in pitch (up to 2 cents). Relative or interval hearing is the ability to perceive, identify, and reproduce the pitch relationships of notes, intervals, and chords. To perform relative hearing, a person must have a clear notion of at least one pitch or chord from which to identify or reproduce others. Sometimes strong relative hearing is referred to as “pseudo-absolute hearing.” The person remembers the lowest or highest tone of their voice or the tuning fork and uses it as a reference to identify other sounds.

Inner hearing is the ability to mentally imagine the complete musical structure (based on notation or memory). Psychologically, musical hearing is a unique mechanism for analyzing and synthesizing externally presented musical information and expressing its emotional evaluation. Associated with this are different types of hearing: rhythm, mode, melody, polyphony, timbre perception, and others. Another important component of musical hearing is overall musicality, which is expressed through the emotional response to music and musical experiences. Musical hearing ability develops throughout the process of musical activity, with the exception of absolute hearing, which cannot be fully perfected through exercises. Indirectly, “pseudo-absolute” hearing (as termed by B. Teplov) can be developed, helping to identify pitch through timbre or other reference points. To develop musical hearing, specialized training lessons such as solfeggio have been designed.

The development of students’ vocal-aural skills at the current stage represents one of the pressing issues in music education. The process of modernizing the music education system and the emergence of new tasks encourage students to assimilate educational knowledge and skills including the foundational vocal-aural skills in a more conscious and responsible manner. The aspiration to provide a scientific basis for vocal-pedagogical practice arose as early as the period of the old Italian vocal school. However, most existing methodological works on vocal training do not present a coherent, scientifically grounded theory of vocal art. Today, considerable attention from music educators and researchers is focused on the development and training of vocal students and the improvement of their performance skills. Despite existing challenges, music pedagogy has achieved certain positive results in studying this issue.

To develop students' inner hearing, it is necessary to teach them conscious intonation. Methods such as solmization, singing from notation, and singing without instrumental accompaniment help achieve this. The training of musician-educators, conducted in pedagogical higher education institutions, has its own specific characteristics. Students entering the "Music" program vary in their general musical preparation and musical abilities, and importantly, also differ in the physiological maturity of their vocal organs. The educational process for students in the "Music" program is based on the principle of individualized instruction, with particular emphasis on independent student work. The implementation of the educational process takes into account students' individual abilities, the use of effective teaching forms and methods, new technologies, and the development of personalized study plans and programs. According to V. Razhnikov, the most important factor in organizing the educational process for music students is individualized forms of instruction, which are effective for developing students' musical and personal abilities, as well as their artistic and vocal potential.

Specialized subjects in the "Music" program are characterized by individualized instruction. Practical experience shows that the content of these classes is not limited only to acquiring specific knowledge, skills, and competencies (performance, interpretation, improvisation, technical skills). The foundation for developing vocal-aural skills lies in working on creating an inner auditory image, which forms the student's understanding of the sound that needs to be sung. The connection between the movements that produce sound and the mental representation of that sound forms the foundation of vocal hearing. This concept also involves other sensations, such as vibrational, resonatory, and subcutaneous tactile feelings. Vocal hearing is understood not only as the ability to perceive the proper qualities of a singer's tone and distinguish them from incorrect ones, but also as the ability to sense the workings of the vocal apparatus and feel, in the muscles, what another singer is doing with a particular tone. It is not enough to merely listen to the voice; a singer and a teacher must be able to clearly imagine how the voice functions during singing, and sense what is happening in the vocal apparatus – this constitutes true vocal hearing. Vocal hearing develops gradually as one masters vocal technique. Beginners typically lack this awareness. A novice singer neither perceives in sensations nor understands with the muscles how a particular tone is produced.

Gradually, as the singer works based on listening, multiple connections form between auditory perception and its muscular reflection. On this basis, the ability to imagine and sense the work of the vocal apparatus during singing develops.

Thus, the formation of vocal hearing occurs during the process of developing vocal skills. "A person capable of singing knows in advance before the moment the sound is produced how to engage all the muscles to produce a predetermined musical tone; they can even 'sing with the muscles,' using the voice for their own mental representation. During lessons, the vocal teacher analyzes the student's technique: the student imagines the functioning of the vocal apparatus in their muscles."

When students develop their auditory skills, their vocal technique, timbre, and musical expression improve significantly. A student with a strong sense of hearing:

- Performs notes accurately and fluently;
- Understands elements of harmony and polyphony;
- Perfectly conveys the emotional and dramatic expression of musical phrases.

Through vocal hearing, we understand the ability to perceive musical-vocal sounds sufficiently, analyze their qualities subtly, and select the correct sounds while rejecting unsuitable singing sounds. Only as a result of extensive auditory experience does a criterion of beauty in performance emerge. If the ideal of beauty in singing has not yet formed in the singer's mind, it would be in vain to expect correct, expressive performance and beautiful vocal tone from them. This shows that in training a singer, it is first necessary to develop vocal and musical hearing, listen deeply to music, and understand how performers and voices work. Unfortunately, in pedagogical practice, this important factor is not always given sufficient attention, yet it is a determining factor in the successful development of a student's vocal abilities.

All organs involved in sound production together form the so-called vocal apparatus. This includes the oral and nasal cavities, auxiliary cavities, pharynx, larynx with vocal cords, trachea, bronchi, lungs, the thoracic cage with respiratory muscles and diaphragm, and the abdominal muscles. However, this is not all. The nervous system is also actively involved: corresponding nerve centers in the brain, with motor and sensory nerves connecting these centers to all the organs mentioned above. Commands are sent from the brain to these organs via motor nerves (efferent connection). The organs involved in voice production are essentially technical performers executing commands from the central nervous system.

It is necessary to consider the functioning of the voice-producing organs in connection with the central nervous system, as it organizes their functions into a single, coherent vocal process. This process is a complex psycho-physiological act. The great Russian physiologist I.P. Pavlov was the first to view the human body as a single system, whose activity is controlled, organized, and coordinated by the

central nervous system. The functions of individual organs, including those involved in voice production, are interconnected with each other and with the psychological activity of the person. At the basis of all mental processes lie conditioned reflexes.

In vocal education, auditory ability plays a fundamental role in the musical and vocal development of students. Through hearing, a student can distinguish between correct and incorrect sounds, understand musical structures, and improve performance skills. Moreover, auditory ability ensures the coordinated work of the central nervous system and the vocal apparatus, allowing for the management of complex psycho-physiological processes. By forming an internal musical image, students develop their creative and individual vocal expression, enabling them to feel and interpret musical works deeply. Therefore, vocal hearing is not only a technical skill but also the most important pedagogical tool for a student's musical thinking, creative potential, and performance quality. Developing auditory ability should be considered one of the primary tasks of vocal education. Developing students' auditory skills in vocal education is an integral part of forming performance mastery and musical literacy. Insufficiently developed hearing negatively affects a student's vocal technique, intonational accuracy, and the artistic quality of performance. For this reason, special pedagogical methods, acoustic-analytical technologies, hearing exercises, and interactive programs should be effectively employed in vocal lessons. Establishing stable musical hearing in students contributes to improving the quality of the vocal training process, preparing professional performers, and fostering the development of musical culture.

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