

CHAPTER SEVEN

STUDENTS' DISPOSITION TOWARDS LEARNING AND PERFORMING VOICE PIECES AS A COMPULSORY COMPONENT OF INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE STUDIES (IPS)

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Abstract

Voice alternatively referred to as singing is an aspect of Individual Performance Studies(IPS), a course of study in the music department of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Singing is an integral part of the music as a discipline that many attribute good voice or good singing to brilliance/excellence in music. The status of voice piece learning by students was explored concerning the actual practices and attitudes being exhibited by the students. The analytical tools applied were frequency, percentage and chi-square (χ^2 statistical inference technique. The population was about one hundred and ninety of second, third and final year students of the department, while the actual sample used was sixty of the students' population. The analysis was done using tables for the research questions and responses to the questionnaire. The findings showed that voice/singing was considered a necessary skill to acquire by all music students but some students have a disposition to the fact that it should not be necessarily made compulsory for all. It is recommended that students should be encouraged to show more interest and commitment towards the learning and performing of their voice pieces since they are expected to be well acquainted with singing as music undergraduates. Also because singing forms a part of their course of studies throughout their study years and as such, they will be evaluated on it.

Keywords: Singing, Individual Performance Studies(IPS), voice pieces, IPS voice teacher, IPS voice student, Accompanist, Evaluation.

Introduction

The human voice is an instrument of musical expression whose potentials are limitless. The uniqueness of voice as a natural musical instrument that supersedes other man-made musical instruments cannot be over-emphasized. Voice as an aspect of Individual Performance Studies (IPS) refers to singing. Singing is a vocal projection of sound accompanied by lyrics which is differentiated from vocal sound in speaking or talking. Singing is a vocal aspect of music as contrasted to instrumental. Singing for some people is synonymous with music. To sing according to Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2003) is to make musical sounds with the voice, usually a tune with words. Singing can be enhanced by the conscious use of some distinct gestures to capture a flowing phrase, by reaching high notes, by creating particular voice texture or by getting some rhythmic patterns intensively raised. Individual Performance Studies(IPS) is one of the practical courses offered in the department of music, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The IPS courses cut across all levels of study in the department from the first year to the final year in both the first and second semesters in each level. From the course description, students are supposed to have progressive individual lessons on their instruments of choice and then a voice. They are required to have no less than one hour of private practice each day. The emphasis is on both African and Classical pieces/songs. The essence of this supposed intense everyday individual practice is geared towards making the students have a good grasp of

the pieces they should render for their IPS examinations and progressive improvement also in their voice(s) as an instrument of musical expression. The following are the IPS courses offered in the department of music, NnamdiAzikiwe University as stipulated in the Departmental Handbook (2022) edition.

Table 1: Individual Performance Studies (IPS) Courses.

Course Code	Course Title	Course Description	Credit load
Mus 143	Individual performance studies I	Progressive individual lessons on primary instruments- keyboard and voice. No less than one hour of private practice each day is required of the student. Emphasis is on African and Western classical pieces, contemporary songs, exercises for instruments of choice and voice.	2 credit
Mus 144	Individual performance studies II	Progressive individual lessons on primary instruments- keyboard and voice. No less than one hour of private practice each day is required of the student. Emphasis is on African and Western classical pieces, contemporary songs, exercises for instruments of choice and voice.	2 credit
Mus 243	Individual performance studies III	Progressive individual lessons on primary instruments- keyboard and voice. No less than one hour of private practice each day is required of the student. Emphasis is on African and Western classical pieces, contemporary songs, exercises for instruments of choice and voice.	2 credit
Mus 244	Individual performance studies IV	Progressive individual lessons on primary instruments- keyboard and voice. No less than one hour of private practice each day is required of the student. Emphasis is on African and Western classical pieces, contemporary songs, exercises for instruments of choice and voice.	2 credit
Mus 343	Individual performance studies V	Progressive individual lessons on primary instruments- keyboard and voice. No less than one hour of private practice each day is required of the student. Emphasis is on African and Western classical pieces, contemporary songs, exercises for instruments of choice and voice.	2 credit
Mus 344	Individual performance studies VI	Progressive individual lessons on primary instruments- keyboard and voice. No less than one hour of private practice each day is required of the student. Emphasis is on African and Western classical pieces, contemporary songs, exercises for instruments of choice and voice.	2 credit
Mus 443	Individual performance studies VII	Progressive individual lessons on primary instruments- keyboard and voice. No less than one hour of private practice each day is required of the student. Emphasis is on African and Western classical pieces, contemporary songs, exercises for instruments of choice and voice.	2 credit
Mus 444	Individual performance studies VIII	Progressive individual lessons on primary instruments- keyboard and voice. No less than one hour of private practice each day is required of the student. Emphasis is on African and Western classical pieces, contemporary songs, exercises for instruments of choice and voice.	2 credit

The IPS Voice Teacher

No student has the prerogative to choose his/her IPS voice teacher; the teachers are assigned to the students without consideration to the gender of both the teacher and the student. It is required of a voice teacher to first and foremost possess a sharp musical ear to understand good sound production in singing. Depending on the teacher's ability, there should be teaching on vocal techniques and vocal exercises which will progressively help the students in developing good singing techniques. Ovcharenko, *et al*(2020) write that:

in the process of vocal training, future music teachers have the opportunity to master various singing techniques using modern ones aimed at using special effects with changes in timbre characteristics, reverberation, amplification of high and low frequencies based on the use of sound amplification equipment (p.121).

The IPS voice teacher must not be a voice expert or a professional vocal coach but he/she should possess some basic knowledge of voice and how it works. He/she should also have the basic knowledge of rudiments and theory of music which will be of immense benefit in the interpretation of the voice pieces to be taken by the students. The teacher should focus on coaching the student and listening to his/her song. Singing along with the student will not be of much help to the student or having to illustrate every single tune to be sung by the student. Even an excellent pianist voice teacher should not also have the habit of playing away from the accompaniment on the keyboard thereby paying little attention to the sound being projected/ produced by the student.

It is the function of the IPS/Voice to provide the student with accompaniment/accompanist after the student must have learnt his/her voice pieces. The voice teacher has to provide feedback to the students as the teaching and learning process go on. Such information or practice helps the students to be aware of the progress they are making which will immensely contribute to the speed of their learning or to speed up interest in continuous learning. On the essence of feedback, Durrant (2018) concurs thus:

The responsibility of teachers and conductors is not only to provide a positive environment in which learning can take place but also provide feedback. Singers can improve individually and collectively when they have some way of knowing what has been done well through immediate feedback; the brain then builds and stores a program to report this behaviour (p. 81).

The voice teacher has the responsibility and the challenge of helping the students/the singers develop their voices to their fullest potential for quality self-expression in singing. The students also need to be made to understand or grasp the fact that each voice is unique and develops uniquely too.

The IPS voice student

Vocal music studies can enhance students' musicianship. Every single student of the Department of Music, NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka is a candidate for voice/singing. This is by the virtue of the compulsory component of voice as an aspect of IPS which runs through the first year to the final year in both first and second semesters respectively. Since voice takes up eight (8) courses of study for a four-year Bachelor's degree programme in music, it becomes very necessary for students to be serious-minded about it and put in their best in the practice and learning of their voice pieces. Students should have or build interest in developing a consistent practice attitude as a veritable tool for their musical advancement. Possessing a positive or a negative attitude towards the issue of singing will coincidentally impart and affect students' learning experiences. There should not be reluctance on the part of the students to adopt healthy practices that will aid their learning. A student

of voice in the IPS course has the responsibility of interpreting both the music and the words of the voice scores. A good self-image is required on the part of the student of voice as it can affect his/her performance. Good self-image can also be referred to as confidence without which failure is inevitable.

The Role of an Accompanist/Accompaniment in IPS Courses

Ideally, there should be practice room/rooms for IPS practices. The practice room should be as soundproof as possible with good acoustics for the singer/singing not to disturb other people in the environment and for noise from the environment not to disturb the singer as well. All the voice pieces both African and Western include accompaniments, therefore the role of the accompanist cannot be taken for granted. A good rapport should be built between the student of voice and the accompanist. The accompanist can enhance or detract from a singer (Henderson, 1979:40). Any voice student who did not make out time to practise well with his/her accompanist is bound to falter during the actual performance of the pieces, particularly during the examination. Therefore, the role of an accompanist or a good practice with an accompanist should be taken seriously by the student.

Students' Disposition Towards Learning Of Voice Pieces

Disposition towards learning, whether positive or negative to a large extent influences output in whatever areas of learning one are involved in, voice inclusive. Individual students have different attitudes towards the learning of their voice pieces. Some are positively minded about it, thereby taking their learning very seriously while some develop a wrong and negative attitude about it which in turn affects their speed and performance. When students are interested in singing and are conscious of the fact that it will form part of their examination, it will affect the seriousness with which they pursue the learning. Green and Gallwey(1987) pointed out in support of the view of developing mastery in learning that to gain maximum benefits from anything we do, there should be aware of:

- The quality of our experience while we do it
- What we are learning as we do it
- How close we are coming to achieving our goals.

Some music students are not given to singing. Their interest lies mainly in instrumental music or other specialty areas of music other than singing. To such students, the voice should not be made compulsory in their examinations, so they think. With such mind and attitude come the issue of laxity, poor learning habits and poor performance by the students.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to guide the study:

1. What is the position of voice in Individual Performance studies in the Music Department of NnamdiAzikiwe University?
2. How do the student's practice/learn their voice pieces?
3. What factors affect the students' learning and performance?

Methodology

A survey research method was adopted for this research as it was intended to identify the position of and the disposition of music students towards voice/singing as a compulsory component of Individual Performance Studies in the Music Department of NnamdiAzikiweUniversity Awka. Survey design is very appropriate for this study as it is a technique in quantitative research in which investigators administer a survey instrument to a sample or to the entire population of people to define the attitudes, opinions, behaviour or characteristics of the population, Creswell in Obadara and Alake (2013).

The respondents for this study were drawn from the total population of music students in the

Department of music, NnamdiAzikiwe University Awka in year two, year three and final year amounting to about two hundred and ten (210) students. Then the sample of the study was twenty students each from the different education levels totaling sixty (60) students. The instrument for the data collection was a structured questionnaire that was administered to the students, which they filled and were all collected back for the analysis.

For the analysis, both chi-square (χ^2) and simple percentages were applied in the study. There were four alternative responses as provided in the questionnaire for categorizing the opinion of the students' response against each item as applicable to the Music Department of NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka. It was against that background that the χ^2 test was applied to test whether or not a significant difference existed between the observed and expected frequencies (number of responses) falling independently into the four categories against each test item. Thus, wherever the categorical distributions of the responses were found significant, the category which polled the greatest number of responses was used as an indicator for predicting the category of randomly sampled opinion which could be applied inferentially to the population.

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(F_o - F_e)^2}{F_e}$$

Where: F_o = the observed number of responses in a given category

F_e = the expected number of responses in that category.

Σ = directs to sum this ratio over all the categories.

Having 60 student respondents and 4 response categories, F_e in each category is $\frac{60}{4} = 15$

The level of significance (α) is taken to be 0.05. With the above information, the critical value of χ^2 shows that a value of 5.991 or more is required for significance to occur. Thus, where the χ^2 of a given distribution of the responses was found significant, it was interpreted that the distribution did not occur by chance. Besides, there was also a supplementary application of percentage analysis of the number of responses in each category to quantify and rank the polled number of responses.

Result and Discussion

The results of the respondents to the questionnaire are presented in Tables 2 – 4 where

Table 2: Results of Research Question 1 Test Items ($F_e = 15, \chi^2=5.991$)

S/N	TEST ITEM	A (%)	S (%)	R (%)	N (%)	Total	χ^2
						100%	
1	Voice is beneficial to every	42 (70.0)	16 (26.7)	0 (0.0)	2 (3.3)	60 (100)	74.933
2	Having a good voice gives you an edge over another individual who cannot sing well	32 (53.3)	20 (33.3)	4 (6.7)	4 (6.7)	60 (100)	37.067
3	Every music student must not be a voice student	22 (39.3)	24 (42.9)	8 (14.3)	2 (3.6)	60 (100)	23.200
4	Singing is a very necessary aspect of individual performance studies	42 (70.0)	14 (23.3)	2 (3.3)	2 (3.3)	60 (100)	71.200

In Table 2, the study used 4 test items to determine the position of voice in Individual Performance studies in the Department of Music, NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka as perceived by the students. Interestingly, all four test items were significant. That identification was based on the ground that the difference between the expected and corresponding observed frequency distribution did not occur by chance. On further analysis of the result, it was noted that the ones that have majority polls tilted in the direction that shows that voice in music study is very important. Specifically, test items 1, 2, and 4 polled the majority responses (for Always - A) of 70%, 53.3% and 70%, respectively while the majority response of test item 3 of 42.9% (i.e. Sometimes - S). These results collaborated with a study by Ugoo-Okonkwo (2013) who stated that Voice is a prime source of music. In table 3, 6 test items were used to find out how students practised / learn the voice pieces.

Table 3: Results of Research Question 2 Test Items ($F_e = 15, c^2=5.991$)

S/N	TEST ITEM	A (%)	S (%)	R (%)	N (%)	Total	c^2
						100%	
5	I learn my voice pieces well before the examination	42 (70.0)	10 (16.7)	8 (13.3)	0 (0.0)	60 (100)	68.533
6	I practice my voice pieces well before the examination	44 (73.3)	10 (16.7)	6 (10.0)	0 (0.0)	60 (100)	78.133
7	My IPS teacher/lecturer teaches me my voice pieces	4 (6.7)	26 (43.3)	22 (36.7)	8 (13.3)	60 (100)	22.667
8	I learn my voice pieces myself	34 (56.7)	24 (40.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (3.3)	60 (100)	55.733
9	My IPS teacher follows my progress in my voice learning	24 (40.0)	20 (33.3)	10 (16.7)	6 (10.0)	60 (100)	14.133
10	I learn by rote from other students	14 (23.3)	22 (36.7)	20 (33.3)	20 (33.3)	60 (100)	13.067

All the test items were significant. In ranked order of relative significance of the test items are items 6, 5, 8, 7, 9, 10, having values of 78.133, 68.533, 55.733, 22.667, 14.133 and 13.067, respectively. Reading meaning into the contents of the test items and the corresponding majority response given by the respondents, generally shows that the students prepare their voice pieces well. Specifically, the majority of the students submitted in test items 5 and 6 that they always learn and practice their voice pieces well before the examination having polled 42% and 44% majority polls, respectively. Test item 7 which has to do with the IPS teacher/lecturer teaching them the voice pieces, the highest response category was 'Sometimes - S' scoring 43.3% but the score was quickly followed by a score of 36.7% which is 'Rarely - R'. The responses clearly show that there is a need for the teachers to give more time to the students as it concerns the IPS voice teaching. In support of this Onyiuke (2003) submitted that within the music class, the teacher should make adequate effort to establish a favourable musical knowledge, understanding, and responsiveness. The teacher should provide both a stimulating and challenging environment where the child [the learner] can explore to achieve his/her objectives. To buttress the above, Ugoo-Okonkwo (2013) observed that establishing an interest in your students will make them

come out of their shells and be themselves and also learn well. Therefore, more efforts are required by the teachers.

The results of the respondents as they pertain to factors that affect students' learning and performance is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Results of Research Question 3 Test Items ($F_e = 15, c^2=5.991$)

S/N	TEST ITEM	A	S	R	N	Total	C ²
		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	100%	
11	I do not have enough time to seriously learn my voice pieces	6 (10.0)	30 (50.0)	16 (26.7)	8	60 (100)	23.733
12	I suffer from stage fright during the performance of my voice pieces in the examination	10 (16.7)	28 (46.7)	10 (16.7)	12 (20.0)	60 (100)	15.200
13	I rehearse very well with an accompanist before the	24 (40.0)	30 (50.0)	4 (6.7)	2 (3.3)	60 (100)	39.733

In each of the frequency distributions corresponding to each of the 3 test items in Table 4, the differences in the opinions expressed by the respondents were all significant. On closer reasoning on the contents of the test items in line with the majority opinion of the respondents were the second category (i.e. Sometimes – S) which polled 50%, 46.7% and 50% for test items 11, 12 and 13, respectively. Students from the responses expressed some constraints to learning their voice pieces ranging from time constraints, stage fright during examinations and insufficient rehearsals with accompanists. Since the course requirement stipulated that there should be at least one hour of daily practice on the instruments (voice included), students should learn to manage their time well and do what is required of them instead of making room for laxity under the blanket excuse of insufficient time. Granted, there are other courses of study facing the students, but practical courses require more devotion if anyone should aim at mastery. Sufficient practice and mastery can also to a great extent handle the issue of stage fright.

Conclusion

Voice/vocal music/singing remains an inherent attribute of music. Zhang et al (2020) concur penning that as far as vocal music classroom education is concerned, it has the intrinsic value attribute of music, that is to say, it reflects the essential attribute, functional purpose and other basic propositions of music education through teaching music. Evaluation for voice/singing in Individual Performance Studies comes chiefly through the students' performance during the semester examinations. The student should have imbibed and mastered musical independence in the course of the learning of his/her voice pieces to exhibit courage and competence during the actual performance of the pieces.

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