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Readiness of students in artistic specialities for interpretative activities in the process of vocal and choral training

Abstract. The study aimed to identify the characteristics of how students in arts-related degree programmes develop their readiness for interpretative activities during vocal and choral training. The research methodology was based on a pedagogical experiment involving 72 second- to fourth-year students at Dragomanov Ukrainian State University, divided into a control group and an experimental group. Assessment was conducted by five experts on a 10-point scale based on seven practical tasks that tested the students' technical, analytical, performance and reflective skills. The results of the study showed that at the baseline stage, the control and experimental groups had comparable initial scores: the difference between the average scores across all practical tasks did not exceed 0.1-0.2 points. The study determined that students were dependent on an external performance model, lacked sufficient integration of score analysis with practical performance, and had difficulty justifying interpretative decisions. Following the introduction of a system of interpretation-oriented tasks, the experimental group recorded a higher increase in scores compared to the control group. The greatest improvement was observed in the justification of performance decisions and reflective commentary after performance – 3.1 points each; in the varied performance of a fragment – 2.9 points; and in the analysis of a score fragment and comparison of performance versions – 2.6 points each. In the control group, the improvement remained moderate, at 0.6-0.7 points, whereas in the experimental group it ranged from 2.1 to 3.1 points. The results confirmed that interpretative analysis of the score, comparison of performance versions, varied performance, group discussion, work in small ensemble groups and reflective analysis after performance contributed to the development of students' interpretative independence, analytical justification of performance decisions and ensemble coordination. The practical significance of the study is determined by the possibility of using the developed recommendations for organising vocal and choral training for students of arts specialisations in higher education institutions

Keywords: artistic expression; ensemble interaction; phrasing; reflective commentary; dynamic flexibility

INTRODUCTION

The research relevance is determined by the need to update the vocal and choral training of students in arts disciplines. In professional music education, performance skills can no longer be limited to the technically accurate reproduc-

tion of the musical score. For future specialists, the ability to comprehend the artistic content of a work, select convincing means of expression, justify interpretative decisions and convey the expressive content of music during

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collective performance became crucial. The research problem lay in the need to ascertain how students' readiness for interpretative activity is formed within vocal and choral training. Exploration of this topic was relevant to determine which components of such readiness required targeted development, which pedagogical conditions facilitated the transition from reproductive performance to independent artistic interpretation, and how technical, analytical, performance and reflective training could be combined into a single educational model.

Certain aspects of developing interpretative readiness among students of arts disciplines have been explored in studies focusing on practice-oriented arts education, vocal and choral training, musical analysis, and the development of independent performance skills. Of particular relevance to this issue was the position of R. Nelson (2022) and R.D. Stewart (2021), who substantiated the value of practice as a means of exploratory learning in the arts. In the context of this study, this position was fundamental, as readiness for interpretative activity was viewed not as a body of declarative knowledge, but as a skill manifested in practical performance, analysis, justification of performance decisions, and reflection following performance. Directly relevant to the research topic was the work by X. Xiaolu (2023), which examined the assessment of the development of interpretative skills among arts faculty students in the process of vocal and choral education. The author emphasised the need to assess not only vocal-technical skills, but also students' ability to interpret the artistic content of a piece, analyse musical material and realise interpretative intent in performance. The issue of students' initial readiness for music education and choral activities was raised in studies by D.A. Boylan (2024) and R. Nethsinghe *et al.* (2025). The author analysed school choir teachers' perceptions of the level of preparedness of music education students for professional training. Within this context, it became necessary to recognise that a future specialist's readiness is not limited to the possession of basic performance skills. It also encompasses the ability to work independently with musical material, professional communication, aural control and conscious participation in ensemble performance. The development of the artistic and creative experience of future music teachers was highlighted by H. Jingyi (2022). The study emphasised that the training of future music specialists requires pedagogical conditions that stimulate not the passive reproduction of teaching material, but the active creation of artistic concepts. The significance of musical-stylistic and dramaturgical analysis for performance interpretation was explored in depth in the work by B. Almén (2008), devoted to the theory of musical narrative. The author considered a musical work as a structured artistic process in which meaning is formed through the development, tension, contrasts and interaction of musical elements. The contemporary context of choral performance was outlined in the studies by O. Batovska *et al.* (2023) and H. Jiang & W. Wu (2025). The authors demonstrated that the development of choral art is linked to increasing

demands on artistic mobility, ensemble cohesion, stylistic sensitivity and the collective's ability to deliver a cohesive performance. The issue of combining vocal technique with artistic expression was explored in detail by Y. Dai (2024). The author demonstrated that the quality of a vocal performance depends on the integration of technical training with a conscious, emotionally and artistically informed interpretation of the musical content. Within the scope of this study, this perspective was particularly significant, as the initial assessment of students revealed a gap between the technical accuracy of performance and the ability to create an artistic image in a reasoned manner. The practical aspect of vocal and choral training was also highlighted in the study by M. Bertrand (2022), dedicated to vocal pedagogy in choral rehearsals. The author emphasised the importance of systematic work on vocal skills without detaching them from ensemble sound, rehearsal interaction and the artistic result. The issue of artistic and pedagogical communication in vocal and choral activities was explored by L. Vasylevska-Skupa *et al.* (2022). The authors viewed vocal and choral activities as an environment for the development of professional skills among future music teachers, where not only vocal skills were relevant, but also the ability to convey artistic content, interact with the group and establish pedagogically appropriate communication. O. Batovska *et al.* (2022) examined vocal and choral art through the prism of the relationship between tradition and innovation. The authors defined this phenomenon as a multi-faceted process encompassing the preservation of classical principles of academic vocal performance, their synthesis with new artistic practices, and the renewal of the genre and technological means of contemporary choral art.

Despite a significant body of research, the issue of art students' readiness for interpretative activities within the context of vocal and choral training has remained insufficiently systematised. Existing works have predominantly focused on individual aspects of professional training: the development of creative thinking, artistic and communicative skills, vocal and performance skills, or pedagogical competence. At the same time, the structure of interpretative readiness specifically within the context of vocal and choral activity, as well as the pedagogical conditions for its development based on a combination of motivational, analytical, performance and reflective components, had not been sufficiently explored. The relationship between the artistic and analytical interpretation of a work and the practical realisation of the interpretative concept in a student's performance also required further clarification.

The study aimed to identify the characteristics of developing students' readiness for interpretative activities in the field of arts during vocal and choral training. To achieve this aim, the following research objectives were set: to develop a set of practical tasks for assessing students' readiness for interpretative activity; to determine the initial level of development of students' technical, analytical, performance and reflective skills; to test the effectiveness of a system of interpretation-oriented teaching techniques

in the process of vocal and choral training; to develop practical recommendations for the development of interpretative skills among students of arts disciplines.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was organised as an educational experiment conducted at Dragomanov Ukrainian State University. It involved 72 second- to fourth-year students specialising in 014.13 Secondary Education (Music) and 025 Music, divided into control (CG) and experimental groups (EG). The participants included 50 female students and 22 male students. The study included students from arts education programmes with basic vocal and choral training and a willingness to perform diagnostic and educational-creative tasks throughout the experiment. Students with no experience of vocal and choral performance, who had missed more than a third of classes, or who had not taken the retake assessment, were not included. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the results were analysed in aggregate form whilst maintaining confidentiality in accordance with the standards of the World Medical Association (2013). The sample was divided into a control and an experimental group of 36 people each, taking into account the course, prior training and experience in vocal and choral activities. The control group studied using the traditional model, whilst the experimental group was given a system of tasks aimed at developing interpretative readiness.

The assessment phase was conducted with the aim of determining the students' initial level of readiness for interpretative work and to establish the baseline level of their performance and interpretative skills. To this end, a set of seven practical diagnostic tasks was developed, designed to assess not the students' subjective attitude towards interpretation, but the actual level of development of the relevant skills. The set of diagnostic tasks covered seven areas: performance of a vocal-choral excerpt, analysis of the score, justification of performance decisions, varied performance of a single excerpt, comparison of two performance versions, small vocal group work, and a brief reflective commentary following the performance. This structure was used for the assessment of technical readiness, artistic and analytical thinking, flexibility of interpretation, ensemble interaction, and the student's ability to relate the result of the performance to the chosen artistic concept. The assessment was conducted by five experts – lecturers in specialist music disciplines with experience in vocal and choral training. Each task was assessed independently, after which an average mark was determined. A 10-point scale was used: 1-3 points corresponded to a low level, 4-7 points to an average level, and 8-10 points to a high level. The assessment criteria were technical quality of performance, artistic expressiveness, interpretation of work's genre and style, the soundness of interpretative choices, dynamic flexibility, phrasing logic, ensemble interaction and self-awareness. Next was the formative phase. The control group trained according to the traditional model of vocal and choral training, focused

on repertoire learning, intonation and rhythmic accuracy, diction, breathing, ensemble cohesion and following the conductor's instructions. Interpretative decisions were predominantly dictated by the teacher or conductor. In the experimental group, a system of techniques aimed at developing interpretative skills was added to the traditional work: score analysis, comparison of performance versions, modelling of interpretative concept, varied phrasing, dynamic reinterpretation of fragments, collective discussion and reflective analysis after performance. Students identified the artistic content of the piece, analysed its dramaturgy, justified their choices regarding dynamics, tempo, articulation and timbral balance, worked in small vocal groups and, after the performance, assessed how well the result matched the chosen interpretative concept. Next was the control phase. The re-assessment was conducted using the same seven practical tasks, criteria and 10-point scale as in the baseline phase. It was conducted by the same panel of experts, which ensured that the results of the control and experimental groups could be compared accurately.

Data analysis involved calculating average scores, comparing pre- and post-training indicators, and determining improvements in specific tasks. The effectiveness of the formative influence was assessed based on changes in technical quality of performance, artistic expressiveness, analytical justification of performance decisions, dynamic flexibility, phrasing, ensemble interaction and reflexivity. Based on the results obtained, practical recommendations for the organisation of vocal and choral training were developed, aimed at combining technical performance, interpretative analysis, ensemble interaction, and reflective interpretation of the musical work.

RESULTS

Developing students' interpretative skills in vocal and choral training. As part of an educational experiment, an assessment was conducted to determine the level of preparedness of art students for interpretative activities within the context of vocal and choral training. The study comprised diagnostic, formative and summative stages and involved students completing a set of practical tasks designed to assess the technical, analytical, performance and reflective components of interpretative training. Analysis of the results obtained made it possible to trace the dynamics of changes in the control and experimental groups, identify the characteristics of the development of students' performance and interpretative skills, and assess the effectiveness of the pedagogical techniques applied in the vocal and choral training system. During the descriptive phase of the study, an initial assessment was conducted to determine the level of students' readiness for interpretative activity within the context of vocal and choral training. The assessment was based on seven practical tasks designed to evaluate the technical, analytical, performance and reflective components of the students' interpretative training. The initial assessment

aimed to determine the baseline level of interpretative skills and to establish the comparability of the control and

experimental groups before the start of the formative intervention (Table 1).

Table 1. Results of the initial assessment of students in the control and experimental groups on practical tasks

Practical task	CG (average score)	EG (average score)	Difference
Performance of a vocal and choral piece	6.2	6.1	0.1
Analysis of a musical excerpt	5.7	5.5	0.2
Reasons for the enforcement order	5.4	5.2	0.2
Different interpretation of the passage	5.3	5.1	0.2
Comparison of live versions	5.8	5.6	0.2
Ensemble interaction	6.4	6.3	0.1
Reflective commentary following the performance	5.1	5.0	0.1

Note: the assessment was conducted on a 10-point scale, where 1-3 points corresponded to a low level of development of the indicator, 4-7 points to an average level, and 8-10 points to a high level

Source: compiled by the authors

The results of the initial assessment showed that the control and experimental groups achieved similar scores across all practical tasks. The difference between the mean scores did not exceed 0.2 points, which was used to consider both groups comparable at the start of the pedagogical experiment. The highest results in both groups were recorded in tasks related to ensemble interaction and the direct performance of a vocal-choral excerpt. This indicated that the students possessed basic performance training and practical experience of participating in choral performance. At the same time, the results of other tasks revealed that the interpretative component of professional training was not sufficiently developed. The lowest scores were recorded in tasks relating to reflective analysis of performance, varied interpretation of musical material, and justification of performance choices. Students predominantly focused on reproducing the proposed performance model and less frequently demonstrated the ability to independently re-interpret the work artistically. When performing the task of analysing a score fragment, most students correctly identified the genre of the piece, its general character and individual means of musical expression, but had difficulty explaining the dramatic development of the musical material. The analysis was often limited to a description of formal characteristics without establishing a connection between the structure of the piece and its artistic content. This indicated a lack of integration between the analytical and performance levels of musical thinking. In the task involving the justification of a performance decision, students mostly provided general explanations regarding the choice of tempo or dynamics, but were not always able to argue how these elements influenced the creation of the musical image. In many cases, the answers were based on the conductor's instructions or traditional performance practice, rather than on an artistic interpretation of the piece itself. This revealed the students' dependence on an external performance model. Difficulties also emerged during the varied performance of a musical excerpt. A significant proportion of students altered certain dynamic or emotional nuances merely in form, without making any substantial changes to the artistic concept of the

performance. This indicated a lack of flexibility in their interpretative thinking and limited experience of independent interpretative exploration. The results of the task comparing performance versions showed that students generally noticed differences between interpretations, but were not always able to explain how these differences affected the emotional perception of the piece. Most often, the analysis boiled down to a description of tempo or volume without further awareness of the dramaturgical logic of the performance. The students' reflective skills also proved to be underdeveloped. After their performance, they mostly characterised the result using general phrases, without analysing specific difficulties related to intonation, phrasing or ensemble coordination. Self-assessment was often emotional in nature and was not accompanied by a professional analysis of the quality of the performance. Thus, the results of the diagnostic phase showed that the control and experimental groups had a similar level of readiness for interpretative activity. At the same time, the study established that analytical independence, performance variability and reflective assessment were insufficiently developed, which provided the basis for the implementation of the formative phase of the pedagogical experiment.

During the formative stage, an interim assessment of the experimental group's results was conducted. It aimed to determine the dynamics of the development of interpretative skills and to identify those components of training that changed most significantly under the influence of the proposed system of teaching techniques. To identify the characteristics of the development of students' interpretative readiness during the formative stage, interim and final assessments of the experimental group's results were carried out. Analysis of the dynamics of the indicators made it possible to trace the gradual development of performance and interpretative skills, identify changes in students' ability to engage in artistic and analytical work, and determine those components of training that changed most significantly under the influence of the implemented pedagogical techniques. The results of the assessment of students in the experimental group at various stages of formative influence are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The progression of the experimental group's results throughout the formative stage

Practical task	Initial stage	Intermediate stage	Control stage
Performance of a vocal and choral piece	6.1	7.0	8.2
Analysis of a musical excerpt	5.5	6.7	8.1
Reasons for the enforcement order	5.2	6.6	8.3
Different interpretation of the passage	5.1	6.5	8.0
Comparison of live versions	5.6	6.9	8.2
Ensemble interaction	6.3	7.2	8.4
Reflective commentary following the performance	5.0	6.3	8.1

Note: the assessment was based on a 10-point scale, where 1-3 points corresponded to a low level of development of the indicator, 4-7 points to an average level, and 8-10 points to a high level. An interim assessment was conducted halfway through the formative experiment

Source: compiled by the authors

The interim results showed a gradual development of all components of interpretative readiness. The most noticeable changes were recorded in tasks related to justifying performance decisions, the varied interpretation of musical material, and reflective analysis of the performance. Even at the interim stage, students began to explain their choices regarding dynamics, phrasing, and the emotional development of the musical image with greater awareness. When working with the score, students in the experimental group became better at identifying the dramatic features of the piece, paying attention to climactic sections, timbral contrasts, and the role of specific expressive techniques in creating artistic meaning. Analysis ceased to be merely formal and gradually began to influence the nature of practical performance. One of the most noticeable results was an increase in the independence of interpretative decisions. Whereas at the initial stage students predominantly relied on a ready-made performance model, during the formative learning process they began to more actively propose interpretations of the musical material. This was particularly evident in tasks involving varied performance, where students began to work more flexibly with dynamics, timbral development and phrasing. A positive trend was also observed in ensemble interaction. Through working in small vocal groups, students learned to coordinate intonation, dynamics and the character of sound production more precisely with other ensemble members. Collective discussion of interpretative choices encouraged the development of a shared artistic vision and heightened awareness of

collaborative performance. The results of reflective analysis also showed a marked improvement. Following their performances, students began to identify personal performance difficulties more precisely, explain the causes of mistakes, and relate the quality of their performance to the pre-established artistic concept. This indicated the development of professional self-control and a more conscious approach to performance. The results established that the components of training most responsive to formative influence were those directly related to interpretative independence, artistic-analytical thinking and reflective assessment of performance.

Following the completion of the formative stage, the students in the control and experimental groups were reassessed using the same practical tasks and criteria as those employed during the diagnostic stage. This was used for a comparison of the groups' results and an assessment of the effectiveness of the proposed system for developing interpretative readiness. Following the completion of the formative stage, a re-assessment of students in the control and experimental groups was conducted using the same practical tasks and criteria as those employed during the diagnostic stage of the study. A comparison of the results obtained determined the dynamics of changes in the level of development of students' interpretative readiness, assessed the effectiveness of the pedagogical techniques implemented, and established differences between the results of the control and experimental groups following the completion of the pedagogical experiment (Table 3).

Table 3. Results of the re-assessment of the control and experimental groups

Practical task	CG after experiment	EG after experiment	CG increase	EG increase
Performance of a vocal and choral piece	6.9	8.2	0.7	2.1
Analysis of a musical excerpt	6.3	8.1	0.6	2.6
Reasons for the enforcement order	6.0	8.3	0.6	3.1
Different interpretation of the passage	5.9	8.0	0.6	2.9
Comparison of live versions	6.4	8.2	0.6	2.6
Ensemble interaction	7.0	8.4	0.6	2.1
Reflective commentary following the performance	5.8	8.1	0.7	3.1

Note: the assessment was conducted on a 10-point scale, where 1-3 points corresponded to a low level of development of the indicator, 4-7 points to an average level, and 8-10 points to a high level. The increase was defined as the difference between the indicators at the baseline and follow-up stages of the study

Source: compiled by the authors

The results of the control phase showed positive trends in both groups; however, the improvement in performance indicators was significantly greater in the experimental group. In the control group, improvements mainly concerned technical stability of performance, ensemble coordination and accuracy in reproducing the musical material. At the same time, indicators related to interpretative independence and artistic analysis changed only moderately. In the experimental group, a significant increase was recorded in almost all practical tasks. The greatest improvement was observed in tasks related to the justification of performance decisions and reflective analysis following the performance. Students began to explain personal interpretative decisions with greater confidence, to link performance techniques to the content of the musical image, and to independently adjust individual elements of their performance. Results in tasks related to the varied interpretation of musical material improved significantly. Students in the experimental group demonstrated a more flexible use of dynamics, phrasing and timbral contrasts depending on the character of the musical image. This indicated the development of artistic independence and the ability to work with musical material not in a reproductive but in a creative manner. Positive changes were also recorded in the area of ensemble interaction. The performances of students in the experimental group became more cohesive in terms of dynamic development, intonational organisation and the emotional integrity of the sound. When working in an ensemble, the students were better able to coordinate personal parts with the choir's overall performance concept. The results of the pedagogical experiment also demonstrated a strengthening of the link between analytical interpretation of the score and practical performance. Whilst at the initial stage students often analysed the musical text formally, after the formative stage the results of the analysis began to directly influence the nature of interpretative decisions. Students more accurately correlated the dramaturgy of the work with the dynamics, phrasing and emotional development of the performance. The results obtained confirmed the effectiveness of the system of teaching techniques aimed at developing students' interpretative readiness during vocal and choral training. The use of interpretative analysis, varied performance, comparison of performance versions, group discussion and reflective analysis contributed to the development of artistic and analytical thinking, performance independence and a conscious approach to musical material among students.

Practical findings of the experiment and recommendations for organising vocal and choral training. The results of the pedagogical experiment showed that the introduction of a specially designed system of interpretation-oriented tasks had a significant impact on the nature of vocal and choral training for students of arts disciplines. The changes observed during the assessment phase concerned not only individual performance indicators, but also the students' overall approach to working with musical material, their level of artistic independence, their ability

to coordinate within an ensemble, and their conscious use of means of musical expression. One of the most noticeable results of the formative influence was a change in the nature of the students' work with vocal and choral pieces. At the initial stage of the study, a significant proportion of the participants focused primarily on the technical reproduction of the musical score and the execution of the conductor's instructions. Work on the musical material often boiled down to intonational accuracy, rhythmic organisation, and overall ensemble cohesion. During performance, students predominantly reproduced a ready-made performance model, not always realising the interconnection between the artistic content of the piece and the means of expression employed. Following the completion of the formative stage, significant changes in the approach to analysing musical material were observed in the experimental group. Students became more consistent in their approach to the work's dramaturgy, identifying the logic of thematic development, and noticing the climactic sections, the function of dynamic contrasts and changes in timbre. The analysis of the score ceased to play a supporting role and began to directly influence the nature of the performance. Whilst working on a musical piece, students more frequently linked the artistic content to specific elements of vocal and choral performance, indicating a strengthening of the connection between the analytical and practical components of their training. Significant changes also occurred in the nature of the use of means of musical expression. Whereas at the descriptive stage, dynamics, phrasing or timbral contrasts were often applied formally, in accordance with the generally accepted performance model, after the formative influence, students began to use them more consciously. During performance, they more accurately identified the function of individual dynamic transitions, the logic of intonational development, and the nature of the emotional tension in the musical material. This contributed to an increase in the artistic integrity of the performance and the formation of a more convincing interpretative image. The students' ensemble interaction also underwent noticeable changes. At the initial stage of the study, interaction between members of the choral ensemble was primarily based on external coordination of intonation, tempo and rhythm. During performance, students often concentrated on their independent parts and less addressed the overall dramaturgy of the ensemble sound. During the formative stage, working in small vocal groups, collective discussion of interpretative decisions and analysis of professional performances contributed to a change in the nature of ensemble coordination.

Following the conclusion of the experiment, students in the experimental group began to work more cohesively with dynamics, phrasing and the emotional development of the musical image. They responded more effectively to changes in timbral balance, aligned personal parts more precisely with the overall performance concept, and produced a more cohesive ensemble sound. During the performance of polyphonic passages, the students' ability to

monitor their hearing and coordinate their performance actions within the ensemble improved. This highlighted ensemble interaction not merely as technical coordination, but as a form of shared artistic thinking. One of the key outcomes of this formative influence was the development of the students' independence in performance. At the initial stage of the study, most participants demonstrated a reliance on external performance cues. Interpretative decisions were predominantly dictated by the teacher or conductor, whilst students rarely proposed personal interpretations of the musical material. During performance, they often avoided changes in phrasing, dynamics or the character of the sound, as they were unsure of the appropriateness of making independent artistic choices. During the formative stage, the situation gradually changed. The use of varied performances of musical fragments, interpretative analysis and comparisons of different performance versions encouraged students to engage in more active artistic exploration. They started to suggest personal phrasing options more frequently, justify their choices regarding dynamic development, and explain the nature of their emotional interpretation of the musical material. The students became more willing to analyse the score independently and determine performance accents without constantly relying on the conductor's model. Positive progress was also observed in the development of reflective skills. At the descriptive stage, students mainly provided general descriptions of personal performance without analysing the specific causes of performance difficulties. After the formative stage, their reflective comments became more detailed and professionally oriented. Students began to identify shortcomings in intonation, phrasing, ensemble coordination or dynamic development more precisely, explain the causes of errors and suggest ways to correct them. This indicated the formation of a more conscious attitude towards personal performance activity and the development of the ability for

professional self-control. A key factor in the experiment's results was the combination of analytical and performance work. At the initial stage, the analysis of musical material often existed separately from practical performance. Students were able to identify individual stylistic features or dramaturgical characteristics of a piece, but this knowledge did not always influence the nature of the interpretation. After the introduction of a system of interpretation-oriented tasks, the situation changed. The results of the analysis were used as a basis for developing the performance concept. Students were able to correlate the nature of the musical image more precisely with their choice of tempo, dynamics, articulation and timbral development. This contributed to the development of a more coherent and well-reasoned artistic interpretation of the piece.

The practical results of the experiment also confirmed the effectiveness of group discussions to explore interpretative choices. During the discussions, students became more actively involved in artistic analysis, defended personal positions and learnt to reconcile their individual visions with the ensemble's performance concept. This approach fostered the development of professional communication and enhanced awareness of their performance practice. Overall, the results of the formative intervention established that the systematic use of interpretative analysis, varied performance, comparison of performance versions, work in small ensemble groups, and reflective analysis following performance contributed to the development of students' readiness for interpretative activity within the process of vocal and choral training. Positive changes encompassed the analytical, performance, ensemble and reflective components of professional training, confirming the effectiveness of the proposed system of pedagogical influence. The results of the pedagogical experiment formulated practical recommendations regarding the organisation of vocal and choral training for students of arts disciplines (Table 4).

Table 4. Practical recommendations for developing students' interpretative skills during vocal and choral training

Practical recommendation	Description
Interpretative analysis of the score	When analysing a score, it is advisable to establish a connection between the work's dramatic structure and the means of musical expression, rather than merely identifying the formal characteristics of the musical text.
Comparison of live versions	Comparison of professional interpretations of a single work should be used to develop critical auditory perception and the ability to make informed artistic choices.
Different interpretation of the passage	Performing a single musical passage in several different ways helps to develop flexibility in musical thinking and a conscious use of expressive techniques.
Group discussion of decisions	Discussing interpretative choices after a rehearsal helps to stimulate artistic and analytical thinking, develop professional communication, and refine the ensemble's artistic vision.
Reflective commentary following the performance	Once the work has been completed, it is advisable to analyse the relationship between the artistic vision and the practical outcome, and to identify any technical difficulties and ways of overcoming them.
Combination of technical and artistic work	Work on intonation, dynamics, phrasing and articulation should be accompanied by an explanation of their role in creating a musical image.
Small ensemble work	Small vocal groups should be used to develop artistic coordination, aural awareness, ensemble interaction and collaborative performance thinking.
Independent interpretative research	Students should be encouraged to seek interpretative solutions independently when working on new material, in order to enhance their autonomy in performance.
Reasons for the enforcement order	It is advisable to include exercises in vocal and choral training in which students explain their choice of tempo, dynamics, articulation and phrasing.

Table 4. Continue

Practical recommendation	Description
Step-by-step combination of analysis, implementation and reflection	It is advisable to approach the writing of the piece in a systematic manner: analysis of musical material, practical performance, evaluation of the result and refinement of the interpretative approach.

Source: compiled by the authors

A summary of the recommendations has shown that the development of interpretative skills requires a holistic approach to vocal and choral training, in which technical execution, artistic analysis, ensemble interaction and reflection are not treated in isolation. The practical value of the proposed recommendations consists in the fact that they are aimed at gradually transitioning students from reproducing a ready-made performance model to an independent and reasoned artistic interpretation of the work. This approach strengthens the link between the analytical interpretation of musical material and its performance, which is a necessary condition for developing readiness for interpretative activity in the process of vocal and choral training.

The results of the pedagogical experiment confirmed the effectiveness of the proposed system for developing the interpretative skills of arts students in the context of vocal and choral training. The introduction of interpretation-oriented teaching techniques led to positive changes in the nature of students' work with musical material, their level of artistic independence, ensemble interaction and reflective analysis of performance. The most noticeable changes in the experimental group were linked to the development of the ability to make reasoned performance decisions, a stronger connection between score analysis and practical performance, and an increased awareness of the use of means of musical expression. Students became more independent in approaching the dramaturgy of a piece, made more active use of varied phrasing, and coordinated ensemble sound more precisely. The results concluded that the integration of interpretative techniques into the vocal and choral training of students in arts disciplines is appropriate. The combination of analytical, performance and reflective work contributed to the development of a more comprehensive professional readiness for artistic and interpretative activity and ensured the transition from reproductive performance to a conscious creative interpretation of the musical work.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study showed that art students' readiness for interpretative activity was developed not only through the refinement of vocal and technical skills, but also through a combination of practical performance, score analysis, justification of interpretative choices, varied interpretations of musical passages, ensemble interaction, and reflective commentary following the performance. This logic was consistent with the position of R. Nelson (2022), who viewed artistic practice as a form of research-based learning. In this study, this proposition was empirically

substantiated: readiness for interpretative activity was assessed not through students' declarative judgements, but through seven practical tasks that revealed the actual level of development of technical, analytical, performance and reflective skills. The study by X. Xiaolu (2023) was directly relevant to the results obtained; it examined the assessment of interpretative skills among arts faculty students in the context of vocal and choral education. The author emphasised that assessment should cover not only vocal-technical training but also the student's ability to analyse musical material and realise an interpretative concept in performance. The results of this study confirmed this position: at the baseline stage, the control and experimental groups had comparable scores, and the difference between them across all practical tasks did not exceed 0.1-0.2 marks. At the same time, the lowest scores were recorded in those tasks that required independent interpretative thinking: justifying a performance decision, performing a passage in different ways, and providing a reflective commentary after the performance. This clarified the author's conclusions, as it demonstrated not only the need to assess interpretative skills, but also the specific practical areas in which students experienced the greatest difficulties.

The issue of students' initial readiness for music education and choral activities was addressed in studies by D.A. Boylan (2024), O.M. Oleksiuk (2025) and L. Mengze (2025). The authors viewed the readiness of future specialists not merely as technical proficiency, but as a set of characteristics related to independence, professional communication, aural control and the ability to function within a choral context. In this study, a similar pattern emerged in that students in both groups demonstrated the highest initial results in the performance of a vocal-choral excerpt and ensemble interaction, whilst tasks related to interpretative independence proved more challenging. This indicated that the presence of basic choral training did not yet ensure a sufficient level of artistic-analytical and reflective interpretation of performance. The findings of E.P. Asmus (2021) and L. Zhou (2023), concerning the development of artistic-projective experience in future music teachers, were also significant for interpreting the results obtained. The author emphasised the importance of pedagogical conditions that stimulate the active creation of artistic concepts, rather than the passive reproduction of teaching material. This difference was observed between the control and experimental groups following the formative stage. In the control group, the increase remained moderate, at 0.6-0.7 points, whereas in the experimental group it ranged from 2.1 to 3.1 points. The results

therefore confirmed that interpretative readiness develops more effectively when students do not merely follow the instructions of a teacher or conductor, but analyse the score independently, suggest alternative phrasing, and justify interpretative approach.

The significance of musical-stylistic and dramaturgical analysis for performance interpretation was linked to the views of B. Almén (2008), who regarded a musical work as a structured artistic process in which meaning is formed through the development, tension, contrasts and interaction of musical elements. In this study, this theoretical position was confirmed in practice through the dynamics of the task involving the analysis of a score fragment. In the experimental group, the score for this task rose from 5.5 to 8.1 points, representing an increase of 2.6 points. This indicated that students began to identify the work's dramaturgy, climactic sections, and the function of dynamic and timbral contrasts more accurately, as well as to translate the results of their analysis into practical performance more effectively. The contemporary context of choral performance, explored by O. Batovska *et al.* (2023), was used to correlate the results of the study with broader trends in the development of choral practice. The authors emphasised the importance of artistic mobility, ensemble cohesion, stylistic sensitivity, and the collective's ability to deliver a holistic interpretative performance. In this study, ensemble interaction was also considered not merely as technical vocal coordination, but as a component of interpretative activity. Following the formative phase, the ensemble interaction score in the experimental group increased from 6.3 to 8.4 points, whilst in the control group it was 7.0 points after the experiment. This demonstrated that performing in small vocal groups and collectively discussing interpretative choices contributed not only to a harmonious sound but also to the development of a shared artistic vision.

The relationship between tradition and innovation in contemporary vocal and choral art was explored in studies by O. Batovska *et al.* (2022), C.S. Loftin (2023) and Y. Guanjin *et al.* (2024). The authors demonstrated that contemporary choral practice combines the preservation of academic performance standards with the search for new artistic solutions. The results of this study confirmed the relevance of such an approach for the professional training of students. The traditional teaching model ensured a certain degree of technical stability and ensemble cohesion; however, more significant changes were achieved when interpretative analysis, varied performance, comparison of performance versions and reflective discussion were incorporated into the teaching process. This can be used to interpret innovation not as a rejection of the traditional vocal-choral school, but as its supplementation with interpretation-oriented techniques. The views of Y. Dai (2024) and C. Dixon (2025) regarding the integration of vocal technique and artistic expressiveness were also confirmed by the results obtained. The authors demonstrated that the quality of vocal performance depends on the combination of technical training with a conscious emotional and

artistic embodiment of musical content. In this study, a gap was identified at the initial stage between the technical correctness of performance and the students' ability to create an artistic image in a reasoned manner. Following the formative phase, students in the experimental group began to make more conscious use of dynamics, phrasing, timbral contrasts and the character of the sound to highlight the musical image. Particularly noteworthy was the improvement in results in the task involving the varied performance of a musical excerpt: from 5.1 to 8.0 marks, which demonstrated the development of flexibility in their interpretative thinking.

The practical aspect of vocal and choral training, as highlighted in the study by M. Bertrand (2022), was related to the need for systematic work on vocal skills within the context of choral rehearsals. The author emphasised that vocal pedagogy in a choir must combine individual technique, ensemble interaction and artistic outcome. In this study, this approach was expanded to include an interpretative component. It was demonstrated that work on intonational accuracy, breathing, diction and ensemble sound becomes more effective when accompanied by an analysis of the artistic content of the piece, justification of performance decisions and reflective evaluation after the performance. The issue of artistic and pedagogical communication in vocal and choral activities, examined by L. Vasylevska-Skupa *et al.* (2022) and N.C. Ngobeni (2024), was also relevant for explaining the results obtained. The authors defined vocal and choral activities as an environment for the development of professional skills among future music teachers, in which the transmission of artistic content, interaction with the group, and pedagogically appropriate communication were significant. The results of this study showed that collective discussion of interpretative decisions contributed to the development of this communicative component. Students in the experimental group began to justify their performance choices more actively, to align their individual visions with the ensemble's overall concept, and to assess the quality of their performance more specifically once they had finished a passage. This confirmed that interpretative readiness is not merely an individual matter, but also involves communication and ensemble dynamics.

The results of the tasks involving the justification of performance decisions and reflective commentary following performance were noteworthy. In the experimental group, both indicators increased by 3.1 points, which was the largest increase among all practical tasks. This established that the components most sensitive to formative influence were precisely those responsible for awareness of performance choices and professional self-control. The results obtained clarified the general findings of previous studies on the importance of reflection and creative autonomy, as they demonstrated a specific pedagogical mechanism for their development: analysis of the score before performance, varied phrasing, collective discussion, and reflective commentary following the performance. The

updated approach to vocal and choral training was also supported by the findings of Z. Zhou (2023), who investigated innovative learning environments for choral conducting education. The author emphasised the significance of an educational environment that encourages students' independent work, professional interaction and the practical application of conducting and choral skills. In this study, a similar approach was implemented through a system of interpretation-oriented tasks, where students not only reproduced a given performance model but also analysed the score, compared performance versions, proposed new phrasing options, and justified artistic decisions. The findings of H. Changhao (2020) and R.H. Woody (2021) regarding the pedagogical conditions for vocal and choral training of arts faculty students were also consistent with the results of this study. The authors defined pedagogical conditions as means of ensuring effective artistic activity and highlighted the interaction of students' cognitive, evaluative and creative activities, the integration of classroom, independent and concert-practice work, as well as the creation of a professional and creative educational environment. In this study, these principles were specified through a combination of score analysis, varied performance, group discussion and reflective commentary following the performance.

The practical dimension of the formative stage was partly consistent with the study by Z.A. Martin (2023), which systematised choral teaching tools and vocal exercises. The author demonstrated that vocal exercises should be linked not only to technical improvement but also to the development of means of expressive performance. Within the scope of this study, this approach was expanded: technical work in the experimental group was combined with interpretative analysis, justification of dynamics, phrasing and timbre development, which ensured a greater improvement in performance indicators compared to the control group. The findings of D. Jansson & A.H. Balsnes (2021), who viewed choral conducting education as a long-term process of developing competence, professional identity and meaning, were significant in explaining the results. In this study, interpretative readiness was also found to be linked not only to the completion of individual learning tasks, but to the students' gradual transition to a more conscious performing stance. The improvement in results on tasks involving the justification of performance decisions and reflective commentary after performance demonstrated that students had begun to perceive interpretation as a personally and professionally meaningful activity.

An innovative aspect of vocal training was presented in the study by W. Yin (2024), which addressed updating vocal teaching models in vocational colleges. The author emphasised the need to move away from the monotonous reproduction of teaching material and to encourage students' practical, creative and active personal participation in the learning process. The results of this study confirmed the validity of this approach: the experimental group demonstrated the greatest improvement precisely in those tasks

where they were required to independently justify interpretative decisions, vary their performance and reflectively evaluate the outcome. The findings of W. Li *et al.* (2026) were used for a broader interpretation of the data obtained from the perspective of 21st-century skills in vocal pedagogy. The authors demonstrated that contemporary vocal education increasingly requires reflective, technology-mediated and culturally sensitive approaches. In this study, it was the reflective and communicative dimensions of training that were most evident: students in the experimental group participated more actively in group discussions, assessed personal performance more accurately, and better aligned individual decisions with the ensemble concept. A. Quist's (2021) approach to choral pedagogy was also relevant to the findings of this study. The author highlighted the potential for combining visual learning, vocal development and technological platforms in choral education. Within the scope of this article, the technical component was not the subject of a separate analysis; however, the results obtained confirmed the significance of multi-channel work with sound: students improved mastery of the artistic image when score analysis, aural comparison of performance versions, and practical performance were treated as interrelated stages of learning. It is worth comparing the results with the study by E. Siljamäki (2022), in which free improvisation in a choral setting was viewed as an educational resource for fostering social interaction, musical engagement and a safe creative environment. In this study, free improvisation was not used in the strict sense, but the varied performance of a fragment served a similar pedagogical function: it provided students with the opportunity to depart from a single performance model, to experiment with different dynamic and emotional accents, and to develop a more flexible interpretative mindset.

Overall, a comparison of the findings of this study with the works of the aforementioned authors has shown that the issue of students' interpretative readiness is not limited to vocal technique or knowledge of music theory. Its development requires a comprehensive system of practical tasks in which technical execution, artistic and analytical interpretation, ensemble interaction and reflection mutually reinforce one another. In contrast to other studies, which considered vocal technique, choral interaction, musical analysis or artistic expressiveness separately, in this study these components were combined within a pedagogical experiment. Empirical results confirmed that this system ensured a higher rate of development in interpretative readiness compared to the traditional model of vocal and choral training.

CONCLUSIONS

The study found that students' readiness for interpretative activity was shaped by the interaction of technical, analytical, performance and reflective components. Initial assessment based on seven practical tasks revealed that the control and experimental groups were comparable: the difference between their average scores did not exceed 0.1-0.2

points. At the same time, a lack of developed interpretative skills was identified, in particular difficulties in justifying performance decisions, offering varied interpretations of musical passages, and conducting a reflective analysis of the performance. It was found that the most problematic tasks at the initial stage were those related to the transition from technical performance to an independent artistic interpretation of the piece. Students predominantly relied on a ready-made performance model, did not sufficiently link score analysis with practical sound, and were not always able to explain the function of tempo, dynamics, phrasing, or timbral development in the creation of a musical image. This demonstrated the need for a form of vocal and choral training in which the analysis of musical material, performance modelling and reflection would be used as interrelated stages of work on a piece.

Following the introduction of interpretation-oriented tasks in the experimental group, a significant performance improvement was observed across all practical tasks. The greatest improvement was recorded in the justification of performance decisions and reflective commentary after performance – 3.1 points each; varied performance of a fragment increased by 2.9 points, and analysis of the score and comparison of performance versions by 2.6 points. This demonstrated an improvement in the students' ability to select means of expression in a reasoned manner, to interpret the artistic logic of the work more accurately, and to translate the results of analysis into practical performance. A comparison of the groups after the formative stage confirmed the effectiveness of the proposed pedagogical techniques. In the control group, the increase remained moderate at 0.6-0.7 marks, whereas in the experimental group it ranged from 2.1 to 3.1 marks. This showed that traditional training primarily supported technical stability and ensemble cohesion, whereas the experimental system had a more significant impact on interpretative independence, analytical reasoning and reflective self-control.

The effectiveness of pedagogical methods such as interpretative analysis of the score, comparison of performance versions, varied performances of musical passages, group discussion of interpretative choices, work in small

ensembles, and reflective commentary following a performance has been demonstrated. Their application helped to strengthen the link between the analytical mastery of the musical material and its performance. Students in the experimental group began to work more independently with the dramaturgy of the piece, to identify climactic sections more accurately, to use dynamics, phrasing and timbral contrasts more consciously, and to better align personal part with the overall ensemble concept. A practical outcome of the study was the development of recommendations for organising vocal and choral training for students of arts disciplines. These concerned the combination of interpretative analysis of the score, comparison of performance versions, varied performance, group discussion, work in small ensemble groups, and reflection following the performance. Thus, the effective development of readiness for interpretative activity required vocal and choral training to be directed not only towards the accurate reproduction of the musical text, but also towards the development of an independent, reasoned and artistically conscious interpretative approach. The limitations of the study stem from the fact that the empirical part was conducted at a single higher education institution, which restricts the possibility of fully generalising the results to all models of vocal and choral training. Prospects for further research include examining the formation of students' interpretative readiness in various types of musical performance training, analysing the impact of digital technologies and multimedia resources on the development of artistic and interpretative thinking, and developing differentiated models of interpretative training for students of various artistic specialisations.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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Готовність студентів мистецьких спеціальностей до інтерпретаційної діяльності у процесі вокально-хорового навчання

Анотація. Мета дослідження полягала у визначенні особливостей формування готовності студентів мистецьких спеціальностей до інтерпретаційної діяльності у процесі вокально-хорового навчання. Методологія дослідження ґрунтувалася на педагогічному експерименті за участю 72 студентів II-IV курсів Українського державного університету імені Михайла Драгоманова, поділених на контрольну та експериментальну групи. Оцінювання здійснювали п'ять експертів за 10-бальною шкалою на основі семи практичних завдань, що перевіряли технічні, аналітичні, виконавські та рефлексивні вміння студентів. Результати дослідження показали, що на констатувальному етапі контрольна та експериментальна групи мали зіставні вихідні показники: різниця між середніми балами за всіма практичними завданнями не перевищувала 0,1-0,2 бала. Було виявлено залежність студентів від зовнішньої виконавської моделі, недостатню інтеграцію аналізу партитури з практичним виконанням та труднощі з аргументацією власних інтерпретаційних рішень. Після впровадження системи інтерпретаційно орієнтованих завдань в експериментальній групі було зафіксовано вищий приріст показників порівняно з контрольною групою. Найбільше зростання спостерігалось в обґрунтуванні виконавського рішення та рефлексивному коментарі після виконання – по 3,1 бала; у варіативному виконанні фрагмента – 2,9 бала; в аналізі партитурного фрагмента й порівнянні виконавських версій – по 2,6 бала. У контрольній групі приріст залишався помірним і становив 0,6-0,7 бала, тоді як в експериментальній групі він коливався від 2,1 до 3,1 бала. Отримані результати підтвердили, що інтерпретаційний аналіз партитури, порівняння виконавських версій, варіативне виконання, колективне обговорення, робота в малих ансамблевих групах і рефлексивний аналіз після виконання сприяли розвитку інтерпретаційної самостійності студентів, аналітичного обґрунтування виконавських рішень та ансамблевої координації. Практична значущість дослідження полягає у можливості використання розроблених рекомендацій для організації вокально-хорової підготовки студентів мистецьких спеціальностей у закладах вищої освіти

Ключові слова: художня виразність; ансамблева взаємодія; фразування; рефлексивний коментар; динамічна гнучкість