



Vocal Technique-Based Choir Training Model in Choral Sound Formation: A Study at Soegijapranata Catholic University Choir, Semarang

✉ Brigita Prilinggar Kinanti,
Hafid Zuhdan Bahtiar

Departement of Drama, Dance, Music, Universitas Negeri Semarang
brigitalinggarr@students.unnes.ac.id

Departement of Drama, Dance, Music, Universitas Negeri Semarang
hafidpsdtm@mail.unnes.ac.id

Article Info

Abstract

Received : April, 2026

Approved: May, 2026

Published : June, 2026

Keywords:

Choir,
Sound,
Technique,
Blending, Balancing

Choral
Vocal

This study examines the training model of choir vocal techniques in forming choral sound in the Gratia Choir of Universitas Katolik Soegijapranata. This research uses a descriptive qualitative, with data collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The research subjects included the conductor, the executive board, and members of each voice section. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study indicate that the training procedures at the Gratia Choir are structured, gradual, and continuous, beginning with initial selection, the New Comers Concert (NCC), recitals, regular rehearsals, and culminating in competitions. Training focuses on classical vocal techniques and mastery of basic singing techniques. Achieving blending and balancing is accomplished through the practice of listening to one another and aligning perceptions of sound under the conductor's guidance. The success of this process is supported by the conductor's role, the quality of human resources, and the arrangement of formations that support sound balance.

INTRODUCTION

According to Banoe (2003) as cited in Nugrahu (2022), a choir is a combination of several voice types that blend into a single, harmonious sound with a balanced interplay among each voice type. Meanwhile, according to Siahaan in Lahagu & Kristanto (2022), a choir is a group composed of men and women with different voice categories, namely soprano, alto, tenor, and bass (SATB).

Over time, choirs which originally served as formal activities or religious services have evolved into prestigious competitions ranging from the regional to the international level. International competitions such as the 43rd International Choir Competition Prof. Georgi Dimitrov in Varna, Bulgaria, are prime examples. These competitions emphasize judging based on international technical standards. One of the active and accomplished choirs is the Soegijapranata Catholic University Student Choir, or Gratia Choir, which was founded in 1991. This group has won various prestigious awards, including Grand Prix Winner at the 43rd International Choir Competition Prof. Georgi Dimitrov in Varna, Bulgaria, and Winner of Category A1 at the 4th Voices for Peace in Italy. The Gratia Choir's success in producing a cohesive (blending) and balanced (balancing) choral sound is supported by structured, regular rehearsals under the guidance of coach and conductor Alfonso Andika Wiratma.

Choral sound in a choir is defined as the vocal or sound produced by the choir itself, as stated by Setyo (2019), as cited by Putri (2023). Meanwhile, Siregar (2016) in the work of Putri and Gusanti (2023) explains that choral sound encompasses how choir members present the sounds they produce.

Good-quality choral sound is inseparable from various choral vocal technique factors such as intonation, articulation, phrasing,

breathing, and the use of head voice. Choirs often use head voice techniques to produce a majestic sound. However, fundamentally, aside from the conductor, the song to be performed also dictates the singing style of each choir. Widyawan (2020) explains that head voice has a more stable, rich volume and feels more cohesive; although light and not overly dense, the sensation of the sound resonates within the head.

A good choral sound also involves blending, balancing, and a consistent, harmonious timbre. Kansil (2022) notes that blending and balancing are influenced by vocal condition, acoustics, and compositional aspects. Meanwhile, Kanan Kirana & Purba (2024) emphasize the importance of structured practice techniques to achieve blended and balanced sound.

Kyfenko & Romanova (2020) describe in their publication that the formation of choral sound is a gradual process occurring through the phases of vocal sound development during choral rehearsal activities. Choral tone or choral sound in choral singing is created through the application of science-based vocal techniques, particularly an understanding of the relationship between the sound source and resonance. The integrity of the group's sound is not merely achieved by matching vocals, but through breath control, vocal cord function, and the formation of a proportional timbre to produce consistent blend and balance within the ensemble (Ford, 2023).

Several researchers have conducted studies on the Gratia Choir, such as Hapsara (2021), who focused on students' motivations for joining the organization, and Harjanto (2025), who highlighted the member selection process for international competitions. However, most previous research on the Gratia Choir has focused on non-musical aspects such as motivation and the membership process. No researcher has yet discussed musical aspects in depth, particularly regarding the formation of the Gratia Choir's choral sound characteristics.

Therefore, this study focuses on understanding the process of choral sound formation, ranging from vocal techniques, blending, balancing, and timbre to the conductor's role. Based on this background, this study aims to identify, describe, and analyze how the choral technique training procedures of the Gratia Choir at Soegijapranata Catholic University are conducted to produce a high-quality choral sound.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach, specifically a descriptive qualitative research design. According to Patton in Waruwu (2024), qualitative research is conducted to examine a situation within a specific context, emphasizing its unique characteristics to understand the environmental conditions, participants' activities, and the experiences they undergo. According to Sugiyono (2013), qualitative research methods are a post-positivist approach to studying objects in their natural setting, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument, employing triangulation in data collection, inductive analysis, and emphasizing meaning over generalization.

The research location was on the 3rd floor of the Albertus Building at Soegijapranata Catholic University, Semarang, with data collection taking place from January 29 to February 11, 2026. The research subjects were the Gratia Choir student organization, consisting of the conductor, board members, and members representing the soprano, alto, tenor, and bass voice types to ensure reliable data.

Data collection techniques employed triangulation, including observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The researcher served as the key instrument for collecting data in the form of words and images, in accordance with Moleong's principles as cited in Wahyuningsih (2024). The focus of data

collection was directed toward vocal technique training procedures, where, according to Putri (2017) in Sinaga (2023), vocal techniques encompass aspects of articulation, intonation, phrasing, breathing, resonance, and expression. Additionally, observations were focused on achieving blend and balance, which, according to Kansil (2022), are influenced by vocal condition, acoustics, and compositional aspects.

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive model comprising the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Fadli (2021) qualitative research emphasizes understanding social issues within complex and detailed natural settings. Data validity was tested through triangulation of methods, sources, and time to ensure the validity of the findings. The research procedure was carried out in four main stages in accordance with the steps outlined by Moleong in Sinaga (2023), namely the pre-research stage, the field stage, the data analysis stage, and the research report stage.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Choir Vocal Technique Training at Gratia Choir

Vocal Technique Training for the Gratia Choir Gratia Choir is one of the Student Activity Units (UKM) at Soegijapranata Catholic University, founded in 1991. The coach of Gratia Choir is Alfonso Andika Wiratma, who serves as both coach and conductor leading the choir. He is a graduate and alumnus of Soegijapranata Catholic University and acts as an external coach for this choir.

Choir training at the Gratia Choir is a structured, step-by-step, and continuous system designed to build members' musical readiness in stages. This process focuses not only on the final result but also on developing vocal character from the early stages of membership through a rigorous selection system.



Figure 1. New Comers Concert
(Source: Gratia Choir Archive, 2025)

The training process begins with a basic musical aptitude test and an interview. The test is designed to assess basic vocal ability, while the interview is conducted to evaluate the readiness and commitment of prospective members.

This is followed by the New Comers Concert (NCC), which serves as an introduction to rehearsal routines and basic singing techniques for new members. The New Comers Concert (NCC) serves as the initial process for new members to familiarize themselves with rehearsal routines and basic singing techniques. Members are not yet expected to achieve the standard choral sound of the Gratia Choir, but are guided by coaches, staff, and senior members to understand and follow instructions, as well as to develop the ability to listen and adjust their voices. For members not yet accustomed to the techniques used by the Gratia Choir, the NCC serves as an adaptation period to develop control and harmony in vocal production. Although the final standard has not yet been reached, the NCC functions as a crucial foundation in shaping the Gratia Choir's choral sound.

After completing the NCC, members participate in regular rehearsals and can join internal campus activities such as graduation choir performances, Mass, and worship services. However, to participate in off-campus activities such as external events and competitions, members must undergo the recital phase an advanced audition conducted individually, where they perform a serious or classical piece under the guidance of a mentor or external coach whose vocal style aligns with Gratia Choir's standards. Only after passing the recital phase can members participate in off-campus activities and competition selections.

Regular practice emphasize classical vocal technique as the primary foundation. In other words, before learning these techniques, Gratia Choir members must already understand the fundamentals of vocal technique. Training materials include stable diaphragmatic breathing control, vocal placement, resonance enhancement, intonation accuracy, and articulation clarity. These stages demonstrate that Gratia Choir applies systematic vocal pedagogical principles, where each member is technically prepared to meet uniform quality standards before participating in more complex activities such as international competitions.

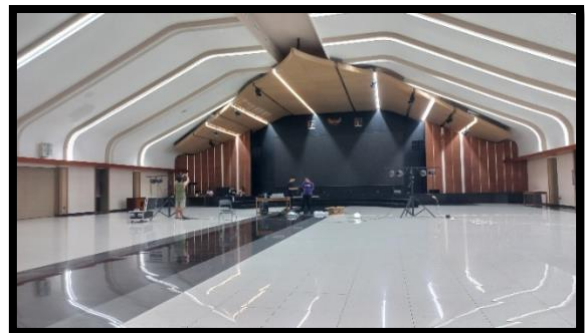


Figure 2. Regular Practice
(Source: Brigita, 2026)

The rehearsal system at Gratia Choir is carefully planned and flexible to support ongoing choral training. Gratia Choir holds two

main types of rehearsals: regular rehearsals and competition preparation rehearsals. Regular rehearsals are held twice a week, every Monday and Thursday from 18.00 – 20.00 WIB, to strengthen members' vocal technique and musicality, while competition preparation rehearsals are more intensive with a daily schedule aimed at refining musical interpretation and mental readiness. The schedule is determined by mutual agreement and generally takes place daily from 18.00 – 22.30 WIB, specifically from 20.15 – 20.45 WIB.



Figure 3. Competition Practice
(Source: Brigita, 2026)

The frequency and duration of rehearsals were increased to refine all elements of the choir, particularly the musical aspects, including the quality of the choral sound. Regular rehearsals were intensive, focusing on intonation, vocal balance, expression, and mental preparedness for performance. The official schedule, organized by the committee and coaches, ensured focused rehearsal management, while members conducted their own practice sessions flexibly.

The rigorous rehearsal schedule demands discipline and physical readiness, yet is supported by a structured timetable to ensure effective practice. This reflects well-planned competition preparation aimed at achieving optimal performance quality.

The Process of Gratia Choir's Choral Sound

The vocal techniques applied by the Gratia Choir in its efforts to shape the choral sound are, in principle, no different from the vocal techniques commonly used in choirs. However, in practice, the Gratia Choir places special emphasis on three main aspects considered the foundation of group sound quality, as the choir focuses on a sound approach rooted in classical technique for vocal quality development.

The key aspects emphasized by the Gratia Choir in shaping choral sound quality are placement, diaphragmatic support, and resonance. The first aspect involves vocal placement through technical processes to achieve optimal individual resonance. Members are guided to produce sound without throat tension, instead directing it toward an open and controlled resonant space. This consistent placement produces a more focused sound and facilitates the blending of vocal timbres among members because the source of sound production is in a relatively uniform position.

Furthermore, diaphragma support serves as the foundation for maintaining vocal stability through effective breath control. With proper airflow regulation, the voice does not waver easily or run out quickly, especially when singing long phrases. This breath support also plays a role in maintaining intonation accuracy while ensuring the consistency of the choral sound so it does not sound weak across various dynamic levels.

The third aspect involves managing the resonance chamber, which includes the pharyngeal cavity, mouth, and nasopharynx, all of which contribute to forming a round and full vocal timbre. This is achieved through the adjustment of mouth opening, tongue position, and the elevation of the soft palate to ensure a smooth airflow. The integration of vocal placement, diaphragma support, and the management of the resonant cavity collectively shapes the Gratia Choir's sound character clear, focused, and well defined.

The development of high-quality choral sound is the result of numerous processes. Gratia Choir began shaping a choral sound that meets their standards from the very beginning, through structured and continuous stages of practice and selection.

Furthermore, the training model for developing Gratia Choir's choral sound is closely tied to the methods employed by the conductor in training the choir. (1) Demonstration: the conductor provides a direct example; (2) Imitation: members replicate the conductor's example to align technique and vocal timbre; (3) Drill: repetition of specific sections of a song to reinforce technical consistency while building musical memory; (4) Sectional practice: practice by vocal part (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) aimed at strengthening mastery of notation, rhythm, and the stability of each voice before combining them in full choir rehearsals; (5) Independent Practice: members engage in individual practice using audio-visual references (performance videos) to independently understand and adapt to choral sound standards, (6) Full Choir Practice: all members practice together to achieve balance and vocal blend, as well as to cultivate sensitivity in listening to one another.

These training methods are used simultaneously during rehearsals, except for sectional and independent practice. Sectional practice is typically held when learning a new piece. Independent practice is conducted outside of group rehearsals.

The choral sound that defines Gratia Choir's identity is achieved through coordinated full-choir rehearsals that prioritize blend and balance. It relies not only on the uniformity of vocal production techniques but is also heavily influenced by members' ability to listen to one another and position themselves within the group's sound structure.

In every rehearsal session, the conductor uses imaginative instructions and metaphors to align singers' perceptions of sound. For

example, the term "warna biru" is used to describe the sound, helping singers harmonize so that individual voices do not stand out separately but blend into a single, homogeneous sound. This process of aligning perceptions is crucial because choral sound is not merely a collection of individual voices, but the result of a consciously and collectively managed unification of voices.

Additionally, formation or blocking strategies play a role in supporting sound balance. Member placement is not random but considers each individual's vocal character and strength to create optimal group resonance. New members are typically positioned near senior members so they can learn by imitating the already stable vocal production. The practice of listening to one another during full choir rehearsals, combined with drill methods, demonstrations, imitation, and sectional rehearsals, ensures that each vocal part (SATB) possesses strong technical skills.

The success of the training model at Gratia Choir relies heavily on the central role of the conductor as the musical director and the standard-setter for vocal quality. The conductor actively listens to the collective sound and provides immediate formative feedback on inaccuracies in intonation, dynamics, or vocal timbre. The conductor also plays a role in translating musical terminology so it can be understood by members with diverse backgrounds.

The findings of this study indicate that the success of choral sound formation in the Gratia Choir lies not only in a structured training system but also in the consistency of the sound concept developed throughout the rehearsal process. Each member does not merely follow technical instructions but is able to adapt their vocal production to the group's needs. Thus, the resulting choral sound is the accumulation of a rehearsal process emphasizing collective musical awareness, not an instant outcome. The progressive training stages further strengthen

members' readiness to handle more complex musical demands, ensuring the process of developing sound quality proceeds continuously.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of choral sound formation is also influenced by interactions among members during the repetitive and purposeful rehearsal process. Rehearsals serve not only to master musical material but also as a space for members to adapt their individual vocal characteristics to the group's tonal needs. This process requires auditory sensitivity and an awareness of the voice's position within the harmonic structure, so that each member is able to position themselves appropriately within the overall sound of the choir. Thus, the formation of choral sound can be understood as a process involving a balance between individual ability and mutual awareness among singers.

Evaluation in Gratia Choir rehearsals is not conducted at the end of the session but is formative, taking place directly during the rehearsal process. The conductor provides immediate corrections regarding intonation, articulation, dynamics, vocal balance, and various other aspects of the piece to help members understand the necessary improvements. The method involves repeating sections of the piece that the conductor deems unstable or incorrect.

On the other hand, the dynamics of the rehearsal process, including supporting and hindering factors, also influence the quality of the results achieved. The quality of human resources, rehearsal discipline, and consistent attendance are crucial factors in maintaining the stability of musical achievements. This indicates that although the training system has been systematically designed, achieving a choral sound still requires a continuous adaptation process tailored to the characteristics of the participating members.

The results of this study reinforce the view that the quality of a choir is greatly influenced

by a systematic and focused rehearsal process, particularly in achieving sound unity (blend) and balance. However, this study also shows that interpretive aspects, such as aligning perceptions of sound and the use of imaginative approaches by the conductor, are important elements in the process of forming choral sound. Thus, the formation of choral sound in the context of the Gratia Choir is not merely technical but also involves artistic and communicative dimensions that develop through interaction among members and the conductor's guidance.

Supporting and Hindering Factors

The Gratia Choir's success in achieving a high-quality choral sound is supported by the quality of human resources, the conductor's competence, a structured rehearsal system, consistent practice, members' commitment, and the selection of a repertoire aligned with the established technical direction. The conductor plays a central role as the director. The support of human resources possessing good basic vocal potential the result of a rigorous selection process facilitates the formation of the group's sound character due to the minimal presence of fundamental technical obstacles such as intonation issues (off-key singing) or unhealthy vocal quality. Members' commitment to attending rehearsals serves as a strong foundation for establishing consistent musical standards in every performance.

However, in practice, this training process is not without various obstacles that affect the efficiency of achieving musical goals. The identified barriers include the fact that not all members have equivalent choral experience or the ability to read musical notation. These differences in understanding make the process of aligning technical concepts take longer, especially during the initial stages of learning new repertoire. Additionally, differences in natural vocal characteristics present a unique challenge. Disciplinary issues related to

member attendance also have an impact, resulting in reduced effective rehearsal time and hindering the process of vocal and musical synchronization. Members' busy schedules often create obstacles in coordinating schedules, particularly during intensive rehearsal periods leading up to competitions.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the choral training model at Gratia Choir is a structured, step-by-step, and continuous system. The quality of the choral sound produced does not emerge instantly but through careful planning that begins with the initial selection stage, the New Comers Concert (NCC) as an introduction to basic techniques, the recital stage for deepening individual techniques through mentor guidance, and consistent regular practice. The focus of vocal training centers on classical vocal techniques, encompassing mastery of fundamental skills such as diaphragmatic breathing, placement, resonance, intonation, and articulation. Optimal blend and balance are achieved by training members to listen to one another and align their perception of sound under the guidance of an imaginative conductor.

The success of this model is significantly supported by the coach's role in maintaining the concept of color tone, the quality of human resources from the selection stage, and the arrangement of formations (blocking) that support the group's sound balance. Overall, this systematic training model has successfully built a unified, balanced, and controlled vocal identity as the primary foundation of Gratia Choir's musical quality.

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