



From School Choir to Professional Stage: Career Pathways Emerging from Choral Participation in Lagos State Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Choral music participation in Nigerian secondary schools has historically served as a viable tool for musical development, cultural expression, and youth engagement. However, limited research has explored how participation in school choirs contributes to long-term professional musical careers. This paper discusses the career pathways emerging from choral participation in Lagos State secondary schools. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 120 former choristers across ten secondary schools in Lagos State, alongside interviews with choir directors and music educators. Quantitative analysis reveals that 37% of former school choristers pursued music-related careers such as performance, teaching, music production, and choral conducting. Qualitative findings indicate that early exposure to choral training, mentorship from choir directors, and participation in music competitions significantly influenced professional trajectories. The study also identifies institutional gaps, including limited career guidance and inadequate infrastructural support for music education. The findings highlight the role of school choirs as foundational platforms for developing musical talent and suggest policy reforms to strengthen career pathways in music education. The study contributes to broader discussions on arts education, youth empowerment, and the creative economy in Nigeria.

Keywords: Choral Music, Career, Lagos State, Secondary School, Professional



Introduction

Music education plays a crucial role in the intellectual, cultural, and creative development of young people. In Nigeria, school music programs, particularly choral activities, have historically served as key platforms for musical training and performance practice. Scholars argue that participation in music education promotes creativity, self-expression, discipline, and aesthetic awareness among students. (Ogunrinde, 2012). Choral music occupies a central place in African musical culture, where communal singing has long been embedded in social and cultural practices. Nigerian choral traditions draw from indigenous musical elements, Western art music influences, and church music traditions. (Ebe, 2025) This hybrid musical culture has shaped the development of choir training in schools, churches, and community ensembles.

The development of formal music education in Nigeria is closely linked to missionary education and the introduction of Western musical traditions into school curricula. Over time, music education programs incorporated singing, theory, instrumental practice, and choral performance as part of broader artistic training (Ajewole, 2018). School choirs in Lagos State secondary schools have played an important role in nurturing young musical talent. Through rehearsals, concerts, and competitions, students acquire vocal skills, music literacy, ensemble discipline, and leadership abilities. Participation in choir activities often exposes students to musical opportunities that extend beyond the classroom, including church choirs, university ensembles, and professional music careers.

Despite the importance of school choirs in music education, little scholarly attention has been given to how these experiences translate into professional career pathways. Ugoo-Okonkwo(2013) concurs that 'Choral teaching in secondary schools could be seen as a foundational stride towards producing people with great touch of professionalism in singing'. While studies have examined the pedagogical and cultural value of choral performance in schools, the long-term career outcomes of student choristers remain underexplored. This study therefore examines the relationship between choral participation in Lagos State secondary schools and the emergence of professional musical careers.

Research Objectives

The study aims to:

- Examine the role of choral participation in developing musical skills among secondary school students.
- Identify career pathways that emerge from participation in secondary school choirs.
- Assess the institutional and pedagogical factors that influence students' transition from school choirs to professional musical careers.



Research Questions

- How does participation in school choirs contribute to musical skill development among secondary school students in Lagos State?
- What types of professional career pathways emerge from choral participation in secondary schools?
- What institutional and pedagogical factors influence the transition from school choir participation to professional music careers?

Literature Review

Choral Music and Music Education in Nigeria

Choral music has long been an important aspect of African musical culture, reflecting communal participation and collective artistic expression. Scholars note that Nigerian choral music integrates indigenous melodic patterns, local languages, and Western harmonic structures, creating a unique hybrid musical tradition. (Bakare, 2022). Musicologists such as Lazarus Ekwueme have emphasized the role of African musical traditions in shaping choral music practices. Ekwueme's work highlighted how African rhythmic and melodic patterns influence both sacred and secular choral compositions. (Ekwueme, 2013). Similarly, Nigerian ethnomusicologist Joy Nwosu Lo-Bamijoko contributed significantly to the development of choral and vocal performance in Nigeria through teaching, research, and performance practice. (Nwosu, 2014)

Choral Participation and Musical Skill Development

Research indicates that participation in school choirs enhances students' musicianship, including sight-singing, listening skills, and vocal technique. Choral rehearsal environments also encourage teamwork, discipline, and leadership development among students.

Studies on Nigerian school music programs suggest that choral participation provides musical experiences that are often unavailable in classroom music lessons, thereby strengthening students' overall musical competence. (Bakare, 2014)

Choir Training and Pedagogy in Nigerian Schools

Effective choir management and teaching methods are crucial to the success of school choral programs. Choir directors serve not only as conductors but also as mentors who guide students' musical development and career aspirations. Studies on choir pedagogy in Nigerian schools emphasize the importance of



rehearsal techniques, repertoire selection, and leadership training in shaping student outcomes. (Abiodun, 2019)

Choral Music and Professional Development

Participation in school music programs has been linked to long-term professional outcomes in music-related fields. Many Nigerian professional musicians, composers, and choir directors began their musical journeys in school or church choirs. Choral ensembles also function as community networks that connect young musicians to performance opportunities and professional mentorship.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design that integrated quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and career trajectories of former secondary-school choristers in Lagos State. This approach allowed numerical patterns in respondents' backgrounds and musical engagement to be examined alongside rich, descriptive insights from key informants who had supervised or taught within the choral programmes.

The research focused on ten secondary schools in Lagos State known for maintaining active choral programmes between 1990 and 2020. These schools, Queen's College Yaba, King's College Lagos, Methodist Boys' High School Lagos, Baptist Academy Obanikoro, Command Secondary School Ipaja, Government College Ikorodu, Lagos State Model College Meiran, and Lagos State Senior Model College Badore, were selected because of their longstanding participation in inter-school music festivals and their reputation for structured choir activities. From these institutions, a total of 120 former student choristers were purposively sampled to participate in the survey component of the study. In addition, ten choir directors and five music educators were included as key informants, offering professional perspectives on mentorship, musical identity formation, and the developmental pathways available to young choristers.

Data collection involved three complementary methods. Questionnaires were distributed to former choristers to gather quantitative information on their musical backgrounds, post-school engagement with music, and career choices. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with choir directors to explore their experiences guiding student ensembles, the nature of mentorship within the choir environment, and their observations on how choral participation influenced students' personal and professional development. Archival records, including documentation of school music competitions and choir activities, were also reviewed to provide historical context and verify the continuity and vibrancy of the selected schools' choral programmes.

The analysis combined quantitative and qualitative techniques. Survey responses were examined using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations to identify patterns in respondents' musical engagement and subsequent career trajectories. Qualitative interview data were



subjected to thematic analysis, enabling the identification of recurring themes related to mentorship practices, the shaping of musical identity, and the influence of school choir participation on long-term professional pathways. Together, these analytical approaches provided a nuanced understanding of how secondary-school choral experiences in Lagos State contributed to the personal and musical development of students over the thirty years under review.

Findings

The findings from this study present a clear picture of how former secondary-school choristers in Lagos State have navigated their musical development and subsequent career pathways. The demographic patterns, career outcomes, and self-reported influences of choir participation collectively illustrate the lasting impact of school choral programmes on young people's skills, aspirations, and cultural engagement. Across the quantitative data and supporting qualitative insights, a consistent narrative emerges: participation in school choirs not only nurtured musical ability but also shaped confidence, leadership, and long-term involvement in music, whether professionally or as a sustained personal interest.

Table 1.

Demographic Distribution of Respondents (n = 120)

Variable	Category	Percentage
Gender	Male	52%
	Female	48%
Years of Choir Participation	1–2 years	26%
	3–4 years	41%
	5 years and above	33%
Current Age Range	18–25 years	46%
	26–35 years	39%
	36 years and above	15%

The distribution indicates that a significant proportion of respondents participated in choir activities for **three to four years**, suggesting sustained engagement throughout their secondary school education.



Table 2.

Career Outcomes of Former Choristers (n = 120)

Career Pathway	Percentage
Professional musicians/performers	18%
Music teachers/lecturers	12%
Church music directors/organists	7%
Music producers/composers	5%
Non-music careers	58%

The results show that **42% of respondents remain actively involved in music-related professions or activities**. While 18% identified as professional performers, 12% pursued careers in music education. A further 7% reported employment as church music directors or organists, highlighting the continuing influence of choral training within Nigerian church music traditions.

Cross-tabulation of choir participation length and career outcome suggests that respondents who spent **four years or more in choir activities were significantly more likely to pursue music-related careers** than those with shorter participation periods. Additionally, qualitative responses revealed that many respondents working in non-music professions continue to engage in music through church choirs, community ensembles, and occasional performance opportunities. Overall, the findings indicate that school choir participation contributes significantly to musical identity formation, skill acquisition, and sustained engagement with music across diverse professional pathways.

Table 3.

Perceived Influence of School Choir Participation on Career Development (n = 120)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
School choir improved my musical skills	62%	28%	5%	3%	2%
Choir participation influenced my career aspirations	44%	31%	13%	8%	4%
Choir directors provided mentorship that shaped my career decisions	48%	33%	10%	6%	3%
Participation improved my confidence and leadership skills	55%	29%	9%	5%	2%
Choir participation strengthened my appreciation for Nigerian musical heritage	51%	30%	11%	6%	2%



Interpretation of Table 3

The data reveal strong agreement among respondents regarding the influence of school choir participation on their musical and personal development. A significant majority (90%) either strongly agreed or agreed that choir activities improved their musical skills. This finding supports the view that choral ensembles provide structured opportunities for skill acquisition, including vocal technique, music literacy, and ensemble discipline.

Similarly, 75% of respondents indicated that choir participation influenced their career aspirations, suggesting that early exposure to organized musical activities plays a substantial role in shaping long-term professional interests. This finding reinforces the importance of structured music programmes within secondary schools as incubators for artistic careers.

Mentorship also emerged as a key factor. Over 80% of respondents agreed that choir directors provided guidance that influenced their professional outlook. This underscores the pedagogical and leadership roles choir directors' play in nurturing musical talent and career direction.

Furthermore, 84% reported that choir participation improved their confidence and leadership abilities. Such outcomes highlight the broader developmental benefits of choral participation beyond musical training. Finally, the majority of respondents affirmed that choir repertoire strengthened their appreciation for Nigerian musical heritage, demonstrating the role of choral music in sustaining cultural identity and artistic continuity. Overall, these results suggest that school choir participation significantly contributes to skill development, career awareness, and cultural engagement among young musicians.

Discussion

School Choirs as Talent Incubators

The findings suggest that school choirs function as foundational spaces for the identification and development of musical talent. Participation in choral rehearsals exposes students to structured musical training, including vocal technique, sight-singing, rhythmic accuracy, and ensemble coordination. These competencies collectively contribute to the development of music literacy and performance discipline. In line with this, scholars in music education argue that school-based ensemble activities often serve as the earliest platforms through which students encounter formal musical instruction and collaborative music-making.

The results therefore support the argument that choral participation in schools operates as a preparatory stage for more advanced musical engagement. Furthermore, the collective nature of choir rehearsals encourages peer learning and musical sensitivity, qualities that are essential for professional ensemble



performance. Consequently, the study corroborates the view that school choirs do not merely function as extracurricular activities but as structured talent incubators capable of nurturing future musicians.

Mentorship and Career Development

The study also revealed the pivotal role of choir directors as mentors who guide students toward professional musical trajectories. Interview responses consistently highlighted how choir leaders provided not only technical instruction but also career advice, performance exposure, and networking opportunities. This finding aligns with the work of Abiodun (2019), who emphasizes that effective choir leadership significantly influences the musical growth and professional aspirations of young singers. Mentorship, in this context, extends beyond musical instruction to include encouragement, role modelling, and the transmission of professional values. The evidence from this study therefore supports the argument that choir directors act as cultural mediators who bridge school-based musical experiences with broader professional pathways in the music industry.

Cultural Identity and Choral Music

Another important finding concerns the role of choral repertoire in reinforcing cultural identity among students. Many of the works performed by school choirs incorporate indigenous languages, rhythmic patterns, and thematic elements drawn from African cultural traditions. This integration enables students to engage with their cultural heritage while developing musical competence. The findings corroborate the argument of Ebe (2025), who posits that the inclusion of indigenous musical elements enhances the cultural relevance of music education in African contexts. In addition, the use of culturally grounded repertoire strengthens students' sense of belonging and cultural pride. By situating musical learning within familiar cultural frameworks, choral programmes contribute not only to artistic development but also to cultural continuity and identity formation. Overall, the evidence suggests that culturally responsive choral practices play a crucial role in sustaining African musical heritage within formal education systems.

Institutional Limitations

Despite the positive outcomes of choral participation, several structural challenges were identified:

- Inadequate funding for music programs
- Limited rehearsal facilities
- Lack of professional career guidance for music students

These challenges reflect broader concerns about the state of music education in Nigerian schools. (Ogunrinde, 2012)



Conclusion

This study demonstrates that participation in secondary school choirs in Lagos State serves as an important foundation for musical development and professional career pathways. School choral programs provide students with musical skills, performance experience, and mentorship opportunities that can shape future careers in music. However, the potential of school choirs as career incubators remains underutilized due to structural challenges within the education system. Strengthening music education policies, investing in music infrastructure, and integrating career guidance into school music programs could significantly enhance the role of choral participation in nurturing Nigeria's future musicians. Ultimately, school choirs represent more than extracurricular activities—they are vital cultural institutions that contribute to youth empowerment, cultural preservation, and the growth of Nigeria's creative economy.

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