

Exploring the Capability of Elementary School Teachers as Musical Conductors in Formal School Activities

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Abstract

Leading a choir at official school events is one of the skills that a school teacher should have. School events attended by students or fellow teachers usually begin with singing songs together, such as in national ceremonies or other formal school activities. However, it turns out that not all teachers are confident and capable of being conductors when their role is needed. Teachers at Sekolah Dasar Negeri (SDN) Cicayur 1, a state-owned elementary school in Cisauk District, Tangerang Regency, have such experience. A community service activity has been carried out for three months, attended by all fifteen teachers at the school, including the principal, to explore and train the skills to become conductors for the teachers. Activity began with the preparation stage, coordinating with the school for smooth implementation. At the implementation stage, activities were carried out using lecture, demonstration, practice, and assignment methods. At the evaluation stage, the assignment result was reviewed from seven videos containing the teacher's performance while leading a song at a formal event as a conductor. The videos show that teachers still need more practice to do better, especially in terms of song expressivity, accuracy of song tempo, stability of song tempo, and tempo matching with music score. If teachers' abilities as conductors can be improved, in the future, it is expected that teachers will be able to teach students how to become professional conductors, and the school can consider organizing extracurricular activities for choirs.

Keywords: elementary school teacher, leadership, musical conductor, non-verbal communication, sign language, teacher's competency

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Introduction

The teaching profession cannot be separated from the activities of communicating, interacting, and building relationships with students, colleagues, and parents. In verbal teaching, teachers also use body language to clarify, convince, and increase students' understanding of the teaching material. Apart from teaching in class, teachers are also involved in various activities inside and outside school. One of the important roles of teachers in every school activity is to lead singing together or be a musical conductor.

Conductor means leader or trainer. The conductor's job is to lead and train a group of musicians or choir to play a piece of music at a certain time and place as good as possible. For example, musical instruments like keyboard or piano often accompany choirs (Kartika et al., 2019). However, in the school context, the conductor not only leads the choir but also leads the singing of songs for all students in school ceremonies or other school activities. Singing in these events is usually not accompanied by musical instruments.

Conducting is a skill that can be learned. The conductor uses cues as non-verbal communication because the conductor arranges the beats in rhythmizing the song; each beat, the rise and fall of the tone, is conveyed through a swing of the hand, which contains a special message. A conductor's skills are needed to affirm sign language conveyed through hand, arm, and facial movements. A conductor at least likes music art, has good hearing, and can distinguish between high notes, low notes, and medium notes (Sukohardi, 2012). Likewise, a group of singers must have the same musical knowledge as the conductor and be able to read musical notation (Destiannisa, 2012). Concentration, cooperation, and understanding sign language are important factors in building solidarity between the conductor and the singers (choir members) and with other musicians, if any.

The conductor in the choir leads a number of singers and musicians. A conductor's arrangement combines many voices with different pitches (soprano, alto, tenor, and bass) to produce a harmonious sound. Therefore, the conductor should pay attention to combining the words in the song with the music so that the music and song do not work independently (Destiannisa, 2012). Apart from that, keeping body posture (not tense), keeping the gaze focused on the choir members, and balancing the song and movements so they are in rhythm are the main factors the conductor needs to master. Mastery of music theory (such as rhythm, melody, and harmony

analysis), basic vocal technique, and musical appraisal are absolutely necessary for a conductor (Karthika & Dharmawanputra, 2016).

The importance of the conductor in leading a group of singers is so essential that several schools have opened extracurricular activities for choirs. The existence of choir extracurriculars is useful for developing students' interests and talents in the arts. Schools can also take part in competitions to provide experience for students and institutions. (Muskitta et al., 2020). Choirs train vocal unity, cooperation, and discipline. However, not all schools have choirs extracurricular. One reason is that there are no suitable teachers. However, conductors are needed for Monday school ceremonies, national holiday ceremonies, and student graduation events.

One of the mandatory sessions in school ceremonies is singing the national anthem, "Indonesia Raya" in unison by all teachers and students at the school field. To sing the song, a conductor will appear standing near the flagpole to lead the singing. The conductor will give the signal to start and end the singing. When singing, the focus of students' attention will be on the conductor. Students will follow the rhythm of the conductor's hand movements in singing. The students' eyes were fixed on the conductor, and the conductor's eyes swept across all the students while encouraging him to sing.

To become a conductor, one needs knowledge and skills about musical concepts and theories, sound harmonization, vocal training, basic conducting techniques, and choir management (Deliana & Suprayitno, 2020). Apart from music theory skills, the conductor must have a leadership spirit. In order to learn to be a conductor, it is very appropriate to use the demonstration method (Rasdiana et al., 2016). To assess the success of a conductor, indicators of body posture, how to start (cue) and end, tempo stability, equalizing the rhythm of the song and movement, and expression according to the song (serious or cheerful) are important to note (Rasdiana et al., 2016).

From the initial survey result, it was found that 79% of the teachers at SDN Cicayur 1 in Cisauk District, Tangerang Regency, had no experience as conductors (Figure 1). This result was confirmed through a discussion in June 2022 with the chairman of the Kelompok Kerja Guru (KKG, a teacher workgroup), Gugus XI, who is also a teacher at the school. Not all of the

teachers at SDN Cicayur 1 could lead group singing at every school event because they did not have sufficient knowledge, insight, and skills. So far, teachers have learned through YouTube channels or through their observations of a conductor who appears at an event they have attended. Teachers admit that they need to study musical conducting to be able to perform at routine events, such as school ceremonies, KKG meetings, or meetings of the *Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia*, a national teachers association.

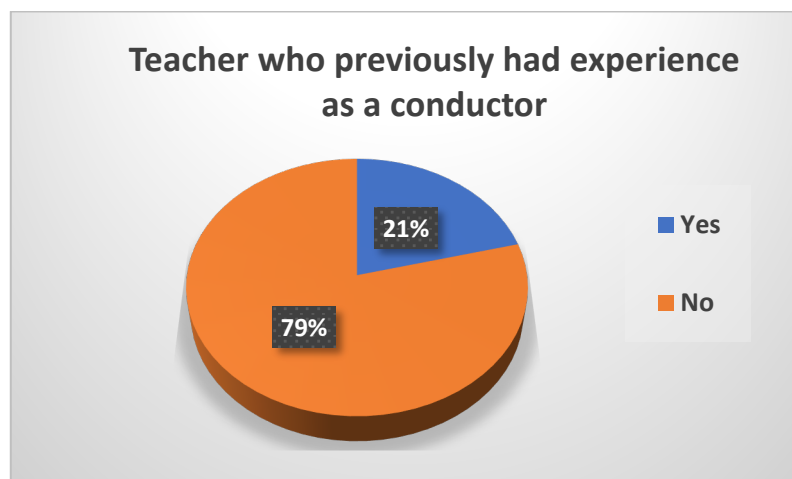


Fig. 1. Experience as a conductor

The teacher's ability to lead singing performances for school purposes or other teacher activities is a necessity. This ability can increase the teacher's professional competency, while the teacher can also train students to motivate the courage to perform and show their creativity in leading group singing. Thus, this community service activity aims to explore the teacher's capability to perform as a conductor, especially at formal events held by the school.

Methods

Community service in the form of training was held at SDN Cicayur 1 with a total of fifteen teachers, including the school principal, for approximately three months (August to October 2022). Before training is held, the first stage is preparation. In the preparation stage, the team prepared modules, coordinated with the school regarding technical issues, and determined the implementation schedule. The implementation takes the form of a one-day training on August 10, 2022. The training techniques used were demonstrations, lectures, and practice. When practicing, participants were given direct feedback from both the community service team and other more experienced fellow teachers.

In order to assess the teacher's capabilities after the training session, the teacher was tasked with practicing to lead a musical performance as a conductor at any event at school from August 17 to October 17, 2022. During this period, the teacher documented the events attended while he/she was a conductor and uploaded video documentation to an online drive (Google Drive) link for competition. Conductor assessment indicators include understanding the song and music score, accuracy of the song tempo, stability of the song tempo, suitability of the tempo to the music score, body posture, clarity of hand movements, accuracy of hand movements with the tempo/time, and expressivity of the song. In the final stage, an evaluation was carried out on the videos produced by the teacher. Four best performances get awards.

Results and Discussions

Learning to be a conductor directly from experienced individuals is the right way. In this activity, community service team members are used to leading choirs, so they can transfer knowledge to the training participants. In order to gain complete insight from this training, it is important to convey the basic knowledge of being a conductor. In Figure 2, before the training session started, the team invited the teachers to relax for a moment with an ice-breaking session.



Fig. 2. Ice-breaking session

The material presented in the training includes music notation, number notation and how to read it, music key sign names on musical notes, and tempo markings (fast, medium, slow). Notation is a symbol representing a tone with several forms, from numbers to note blocks (Paat, 1981). Each note has its own beat value that assembles the notes into a song (Figure 3). The beat is important to forming a song (Paat, 1981). The conductor must have mastery of the beats to lead the singers in singing the song according to the wishes of the songwriter. This basic music theory is a provision for teachers to start or increase their knowledge and information on how to become a good conductor.













Notation	Form	Rest sign	Value
Whole note			4 beats
1/2 note			2 beats
1/4 note			1 beat
1/8 note			1/2 beat
1/16 note			1/4 beat
1/32 note			1/8 beat

Fig. 3. Music note and the beat value

The notation and number of beats were demonstrated in front of the teachers. In between presenting the material, the teacher spontaneously followed the hand movements of one of the team members who was presenting the conducting technique (Figure 4). The implementation of the activities seemed informal and interactive, with many teachers asking questions and self-practicing, swinging their hands without being instructed.



Fig. 4. Teachers swinging their arms following the instructor

Two teachers took the initiative to appear in front of other teacher participants to practice conducting, respectively leading the national anthem "Indonesia Raya" and "Tanah Airku" (Figure 5). Along with the conductor's performance, other teacher participants played the role of singers. After finishing leading the song, each teacher got feedback on body posture, concentration on the beat and song, and important hand swings adjustment to the rhythm of the song when starting and ending performance. By learning directly in practice and being given input like that, teachers gain direct experience so that teachers become more skilled and remembered more easily.



Fig. 5. Practice as conductor

In this activity, each teacher freely asked questions and commented, sharing their experiences and singing happily. This shows that teachers had great curiosity and were very interested in trying to practice and learning more. Many things are not known or have not been paid attention to, such as how to signal to start and end a song (Figure 6).



Fig. 6. Question and answer session

Apart from knowledge about musical symbols, one important thing to convey during training is how to carry oneself. When performing as a conductor, paying attention to body posture is very important. Posture concerns body gestures, hand positions, starting movements, and how to end the song. It is through body, hands, head, and eye movements that the conductor translates the message (Sukohardi, 2012).

The standing posture of a conductor must be straight, relaxed, and concentrated. The distance between the feet is shoulder width apart. One leg is positioned slightly forward. The head is not stiff, has a comprehensive view, and is sympathetic and dignified. Tension needs to be avoided because it can hinder self-expression. The conductor's eyes are always looking at, guarding, and encouraging the singers. By looking at the singers more often, the conductor will also be seen by the singers more often. A conductor must try to attract the choir's attention and guide them to produce the best singing sounds. Therefore, the conductor should not be tied to the text but memorize the symbols. Kartika, Mering, and Sanulita said that the conductor must

be at least experienced and knowledgeable in music, have a good personality, and have the attitude to direct or motivate the singers to be more creative and achievers (Kartika et al., 2019).

While conducting, the conductor uses both hands, with flexible and light fingers. The upmost position of the hand is parallel to the eyes, the bottom limit position of the hand is parallel to the stomach, and the middle position of the hand is in front of the chest. The position of the hands should not be too high or too low because it can disturb one's concentration. The conductor can bend and move forward slightly during the crescendo (slowly getting stronger) and back slightly during the decrescendo (slowly getting softer). The hand posture is adjusted to where the conductor is standing, the expression of the song being led, and the tempo of the song.

When the song starts, the conductor is ready and first takes a deep breath. Both hands are raised in front of the chest to form right angles and in the same direction. Full concentration intensifies over time. The conductor gives commands while looking at the singers and does not focus on the sheet music which is usually placed in front of the standing conductor. Then, the conductor gives one stroke before the music beat comes in while making an anticipatory body and hand posture. The first stroke really determines the fluency of the song. However, if the song begins with a musical intro, the initial movement is directed first at the accompanist or musical instrument players before the singers.

Every first stroke is always down, and every start of the bar is heavy or firm. The second stroke is lighter and rises from the bottom, imagining that both hands are tied with an elastic band. Hand movements can be large or small according to the tempo in effect. Fast tempos generally require small and energetic movements, while slow tempos require large and light movements. To end the song, the sign movement made by the conductor's hands must clearly close or clench the hands parallel to the chest and end to the side of the chest so that the singers can stop in unison. However, it often happens that when giving a signal, the hand movement is not straight (slanted), the top and bottom turning points are not curved but sharp, and the hands are too close to each other in front of the eyes.

Because of their important role in leading the presentation of music, as conductors, teachers should also have the spirit of leadership, responsibility, sensitivity, and patience and be able to work together. The conductor is the leader of the song performance from beginning to end. Singers will obey and be submissive to the conductor's instructions. The conductor also directs the singers to produce a unified sound. In addition, with sensitivity to the different sounds produced by the singer, a conductor can direct the singer to produce the desired sound according to the guidelines in the sheet music. The conductor must also be patient in training the singers. Likewise, he must be sensitive to the singer's condition if there are singers who cannot work together or find it difficult to produce the desired sound. The conductor has to work responsibly because it is on his shoulders that the song arrangements can amaze and entertain the audience. Thus, it can be said that learning to conduct is not only about learning the technicalities of conducting songs but also about inculcating positive character.



Fig. 7. Participant's performance in teacher's forum

The evaluation results of this activity were derived from the video documentation assignment, which presented the teacher's practice session as a conductor. The community service team assesses seven videos. The video assessment criteria agreed upon by the team include understanding the song and musical score, accuracy of the song tempo, stability of the song

tempo, suitability of the tempo and musical score, body posture, clarity of hand movements with the rhythm, and expressivity of the song. After review, the team awarded the four participant's best videos. One of them is a teacher leading a song at an official meeting of state elementary school teachers in Cisauk District (Figure 7).

From the evaluation of the videos collected, teachers are generally still lacking in song expressivity, accuracy of song tempo, stability of song tempo, and suitability of tempo to sheet music. Teachers still need to pay more attention to expressive facial appearances along with the songs they play, using body language more flexibly, not stiffly. Apart from that, in the videos that were assessed, there were still teachers who did not start singing correctly according to the tempo of the song; in other words, there was a beat delay between starting the lead and starting the song. Understanding of songs also needs to be improved. The conductor usually sings along silently to better appreciate the meaning of the song. If the conductor lacks concentration or focus, it will appear that the hand strokes and the song are not in sync. Body posture also needs to be maintained in an upright, dignified condition, and the legs are slightly spread, not closed. The hands do not need to be raised too high but parallel to the chest. This confirms the criteria for a professional conductor: paying attention to body posture, how to start and end, maintaining a stable tempo, matching the rhythm of the song and movements, and showing expression (Rasdiana et al., 2016).

After participating in this training, teachers still need more practice independently, considering that this training activity was only carried out for one day. Teachers need to try to self-practice being a conductor. For this reason, teachers can use school rooms and classrooms to practice and then teach it to students. The more hours they have in leading singing performances, the more skilled the teacher is in performing as a conductor.

Conclusion

This community service in the form of training benefits teachers at SDN Cicayur 1 in the form of new and increased knowledge and insight regarding music theory and musical conducting techniques. After attending the training session, teachers still need to practice a lot and have the courage to take the opportunity to become a conductor at any future event. Fellow teachers can continue to provide input to each other when one teacher appears as a conductor. In this

way, they can learn from each other and improve their skills to become professional conductors. Learning to be a conductor improves soft and hard skills, so it is also ideal to be introduced to the students in elementary school.

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