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CHILDREN'S SINGING: REFLECTIONS ON A VOCAL TEACHING IN LITHUANIA AND TAIWAN

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Abstract

The research is concerned with the aim of comparing children's singing and vocal teaching development in Lithuania and Taiwan. Singing is the most noticeable feature of musical culture of the nation. Seeking the continuity of traditions of teaching singing, the nurturance of children's singing in various countries is considered to be one of the key objectives of music

education. Therefore, the research teams from Lithuania and Taiwan have decided that the importance of the development of a child's voice requires more attention. In total 150 6-8 year-old children took part in the research (testing): 75 children in each age group were tested in Lithuania and Taiwan. The methodology for "Children's Singing Voice Measure" (CSVm) was used in the research. The conducted research highlighted the tendencies of expression of 6-8 year-old children's singing voice skills in musical education classes in Lithuania and Taiwan. It was revealed that the ability of 6-8 year-old children to control the singing voice range is developed insufficiently. The article was written implementing the international tripartite research project "Coordination between Musical Hearing and Vocal Apparatus of 6-8 Year-Old Children during the Process of Singing: Comparative Study in Latvia, Lithuania and Taiwan" (TAP-LLT-14-016).

Keywords

Children's Singing Voice, Vocal Teaching, Testing, Lithuania, Taiwan, Comparative Study

1. Introduction

Successful teaching and learning of singing is predetermined by children's singing skills, which are obtained in the process of education. The attention to singing is understood not only as an essential form of children's music education but also as a relevant aspect of the tradition of musical culture of each country (Hsieh, 2010; Schippers, 2010). The development of a child's voice requires the greatest attention at the age of 6-8, because singing is a way of developing and improving the quality of voice. Moreover, beautiful and perfect voice is of great importance in music because music begins with singing and the first instrument is a human voice. Thus, in the world of music sounds, a singing voice has been given a prominent place (Hedden, 2012). However, children's voice is an extremely sensitive "instrument". Even possessing a beautiful voice, it is necessary to learn to appropriately train and improve it.

While teaching children to sing, the attention of music teachers has to be allotted to child's natural voice and its training to enable each learner to acquire an own (individual) sense of correct posture, breathing, vocal making, diction and articulation (Chuang, 2011). Moreover, voice timbre and physiological qualities like range, strength, volition, patience, endurance, ability to concentrate and memorise music formations are significant in teaching and learning to sing. While teaching children to sing, each teacher has to know the level of their singing skills to

be able to select appropriate materials and teaching methods (Rauduvaite & Lasauskiene, 2015). The singing skills among the same age children are significantly different (Seckuviene, 2004). Therefore, even a teacher with extensive experience may be mistaken while identifying the level of child's mastery of singing voice. Disregard of specific peculiarities of child's singing may lead to undermining of his or her musical development. Furthermore it could result in the suppression of child's interest in music and music performing which is of high relevance in the pre-primary and junior school stage of music education.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Over the past years, numerous studies have investigated topics related to the child's singing voice and its development (Rutkowski, 2010; Salvador, 2010). The terminology used to describe the various stages of development of the child voice and (or) the types of problem singers, however, has been inconsistent (Chuang, 2010). This new consistency would enable teachers and researchers to more accurately measure and describe the use a child has of his or her singing voice.

It will also aid to find out the disparities of children singing and development of vocal teaching influenced by cultural differences among the countries (Hebert et al., 2017; Sepp & Ruokonen, 2013; Juvonen, Ruismaki & Lehtonen, 2012). The musical educational system developed in Lithuania is mature and original for improving the development of children's musical abilities (Vitkauskas et al., 2012). Over the last years the intercultural educational dialogue has been gradually intensifying between the countries in Europe and Eastern Asia (Anderson, Campbell, 2010; Iwai, 2003; Takizawa, 1992); therefore, it is relevant to highlight the tendencies, similarities and differences in development of children's singing and development of vocal teaching in Lithuania and Taiwan.

1.2 Research Questions

The attempts are made to provide answers to the following questions: what tendencies of children's singing and development of vocal teaching are in Lithuania and Taiwan; what possibilities of development of children's singing skills are created in contemporary music lessons; and what are the most important priorities in development of vocal teaching in Lithuania and Taiwan. The aforementioned questions determine the general problems analysed in the research.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to highlight the tendencies of children's singing and vocal teaching development in Lithuania and Taiwan.

The main objectives of the research are the following:

- 1) To characterize 6-8 year-old children's singing and vocal teaching development in Lithuania and Taiwan;
- 2) To reveal the peculiarities of 6-8 year-old children's (girls and boys) singing voice in musical education classes;
- 3) To compare children's singing voice development in Lithuania and Taiwan.

2. The Tendencies of Children's Singing and Vocal Teaching Development in Various Countries: Review of Literature

The systems of musical development (Dalcroze, Orff, Suzuki, Kodaly, Gordon), which are well known in various countries, do not directly speak about the problem of development of children's musical aptitudes (Seckuviene, 2004). These systems aim at developing a child's musicality by choosing one main musical activity; for instance, rhythmic, playing, singing a cappella or listening to music. The Kodály Method (1974) emphasizes the benefits of physical instruction and response to music. The main musical activity that helps a child to experience the feelings aroused by music is singing. According to Z. Kodály, singing a cappella is a real and serious musical talent's school education, allowing developing the child's ear for music. Although Z. Kodály's musical education system is only limited to solfeggio and singing training, still not enough attention is paid to the emotional experiencing of the music, which provides an essential basis for music pedagogy in many countries.

2.1 Children's Singing and Vocal Teaching Development in Lithuania

Many Lithuanian musical pedagogues (Abramauskiene et al., 2006) are different from practitioners and theorists of most countries, because they base musical development on the principle of complexity. According to them, children in the music lessons have to be involved in versatile musical activities like singing, listening to music and evaluation, knowledge of musical notation, instrumental performance of music, etc. Nevertheless, the main musical activity in pre-school and junior school ages is interpretation of music while singing.

In Lithuania thorough and extensive research of children's musical education in pre-school institutions was conducted by A. Katiniene (1998). She carried out some research into

singing and the development of a child's musical cultural development in a kindergarten on the basis of ethnic music. Moreover, H. Seckuviene (2004) examined pre-school age children's main musical abilities classes of music schools. In addition, R. Girdzijauskiene (2004) analyzed the development of junior school children's creativity through music activity considering music interpretation, arrangement and evaluation). V. Krakauskaite (2010) has created an original system in teaching music, which is based on relative solmisation and on the elements from C. Orff's musical development system.

The institutions, more precisely kindergartens and primary schools, provide children with two music lessons a week. Only the duration of the particular music classes is different. Children in kindergarten and pre-school groups are practicing music for 30-35 minutes whereas children in primary school have 2 music lessons per week, 45 minutes each. Music lessons are conducted by professional music teachers. It is essential that a music education teacher in a pre-primary and primary school has all the necessary competences (Juceviciute-Bartkeviciene, 2013) like developed music and vocal hearing, ability to accompany with at least one instrument, ability to read notes and knowledge of music history. Over the last twenty years pre-primary and primary (self-) education in Lithuania have been modeled grounding the attitude towards childhood and child's (self-) education on changing philosophy of (self-) education (Lithuanian Programme of Pre-primary Education, 2014; Primary and basic (lower secondary) education general syllabi, 2008). Essentially, pre-primary and primary musical education is based on a rich heritage of the Lithuanian folk music. However, vocal teaching strategies necessary for the successful children's musical activities remain an open question.

2.2 Children's Singing and Vocal Teaching Development in Taiwan

While comparing the state of musical education of Asian countries such as Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan *etc.* to other countries, it can be seen that there is a fairly unified (state-wide) musical education system, with a multi-faceted curriculum and methods, and intensive teaching process (Iwai, 2003; Takizawa, 1992). As a result all musical performance techniques including singing, playing instruments, creation of music, listening to music are closely linked. In addition, the most prominent of world-wide recognized musical development systems and US methodologies are studied (Kodály, Orff, Suzuki, Dalcroze). It is essential to emphasize that the learner and his/ her needs are in the center of attention when music is taught. Although, a

considerable attention is given to singing, the textbooks often lack the methodological material on children's vocal education issues.

The reform of the Grades 1-9 Curriculum in Taiwan was initiated in 1996 (Ling-I, 2014). One of the most challenging areas of the reform initiative was the Arts and Humanities curricular grouping, which includes music, visual arts, and performing arts. The Arts and Humanities field in Grades 1-9 Curriculum now requires in-service music teachers to integrate visual arts, performing arts, such as drama, theatre, and dance into the music class. This marks a drastic departure from the requirements of the earlier system. In traditional Taiwanese culture, teaching is considered not only as an occupation, but also a conscientious endeavor to preserve the national culture from generation to generation. The improvement of the quality of teacher education has always been one of the main governmental policies in Taiwan (The Ministry of Education in Taiwan, 2011).

On the grounds of the results obtained by the scientists' research and due to the experience obtained by the best music teachers an original musical system was created which, therefore, is successfully functioning in Lithuania and Taiwan. It is difficult to resist the fact that the content of education is based on folk music, while the pedagogical process is based on the systematic musical whole, derived from the concept of art and musical education purpose.

3. Organization of the Study

3.1 Sample

In total 150 6-8 year-old children took part in the research (testing): 75 children in each age group were tested in Lithuania and Taiwan. The researchers randomly selected one class (group) from the pre-primary groups, first and second forms. The number of children in each form was equal to 25 in every country. The number of the participants (boys and girls) from Taiwan was almost the same (38 girls and 37 boys). The girls comprised the majority of the participants from Lithuania (62.2 %). The school learners of junior school age were selected randomly from Taichung Li Ren Elementary School (Taiwan, Republic of China) and Abraomas Kulvietis Classical Gymnasium, located in Vilnius, Lithuania. Twenty-five six-year-old children, who attended pre-primary educational institutions (kindergartens) also in Vilnius (Lithuania) took part in the research.

3.2 Research Instrument

Seeking to establish the level and peculiarities of 6-8 year-old children’s skills to control their singing voice, the testing was carried out to compare the specifics of mastering of singing voice in Lithuania and Taiwan following the criteria for assessment of the singing voice. Taking into account individual differences in singing among children in this age group and its uneven level, the individual research was applied. The methodology for “Children’s Singing Voice Measure Scale” (CSVM) (Chuang, 2010) was used in the research. CSVM includes the Children’s Singing Voice Measure Criterion Song and the Children’s Singing Voice Measure Scale (Rauduvaite, Lasauskiene, Abramauskiene, Davidova & Chuang, 2016). Moreover, “Pitch Analyser” was used to examine children’s voices. The song “Loo Song” was chosen for the comparison of children’s performance both in Lithuania and Taiwan.

Table 1: *Children’s Singing Voice Measure Scale (Chuang, 2010)*

Scale Point	Singing Voice Categories	Characteristics
1	Pre-singer	The child does not sing but chants the song text.
2	Inconsistent Speaking Range Singer	1. Vocal range: a-c ¹ 2. Sometimes chants, sometimes sustains tones and exhibits some sensitivity to pitch but remains in the speaking voice range
3	Speaking Range Singer	1. Vocal range: a-c ¹ 2. Sustains tones and exhibits some sensitivity to pitch but remains in the speaking voice range.

4	Inconsistent Limited Range Singer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Vocal range: a¹-f¹(usually up to f¹) 2. Wavers between speaking and singing voice and uses a limited range when in singing voice.
5	Limited Range Singer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Vocal range: d¹-f¹ 2. Exhibits consistent use of limited singing range
6	Inconsistent Initial Range singer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Vocal range: d¹-a¹ 2. Sometimes only exhibits use of limited singing range, but other times exhibits use of initial singing range
7	Initial Range Singer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Vocal range: d¹-a¹ 2. Exhibits consistent use of initial singing range
8	Inconsistent Singer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Vocal range: sings beyond the register lift (b¹-flat) and above 2. Sometimes only exhibits use of initial singing range, but other times exhibits use of extended singing range
9	Singer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sings beyond the register lift (b¹-flat) and above 2. Exhibits use of consistent extended singing range
10	Inconsistently Accurate Singer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Vocal range: b¹ flat-d² 2. Consistently exhibits use of extended singing range
11	Accurate Singer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sings beyond b¹ flat-d² and above 2. Consistently exhibits use of extended singing range

The following *test administration* was applied to the examination of children's performance. Firstly, the children were introduced with the song and the stages of test administration. Secondly, all children were taught to sing the chosen song. Afterwards, children were tested individually. Finally, each child's voice was tape recorded in accordance with CSVMS patterns.

Rating. If a child's singing voice is classified into the Category 1 (Pre-singer) of the Children's Singing Voice Measure Scale (CSVMS), the rater gives 1 point to the child. An average of the two raters' points will be the final data point of the child. If the average of a child is 2.5, the point will be classified into category 3 (Speaking Range Singer). The generalisation of the data was conducted applying mathematical statistics. The testing in Lithuania and Taiwan was carried out in September 2015.

4. Research Findings

Summarizing the results of the research, initial quantitative data collected during the testing (Rauduvaite, Lasauskiene, Abramauskiene, Davidova & Chuang, 2016) were transferred to the ordinal scales (1–4). Figure 1 presents the summarized results of 6-8 year-old children's ability to master the singing voice by the highest expression level:

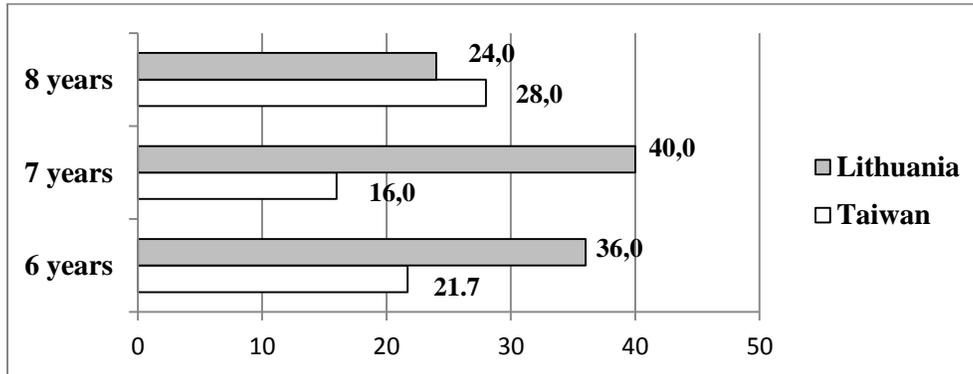


Figure 1: 6-8 years-old Children's Ability to Control the Singing Voice Range of Lithuania and Taiwan (highest ratings distribution, %)

It was revealed that the ability of 6-8 year-old children to control the singing voice range is developed insufficiently, *i.e.* more than one third of six-year-old children from Lithuania (36%) demonstrated the highest level of control of the singing voice range, whereas there were slightly more than one fifth of such children in Taiwan (21.7%). The highest level was typical even of 40% of the Lithuanian seven-year-old participants and only more than one sixth of such children in Taiwan (16%). However, the highest level was typical of one third of the Taiwanese (28%) and Lithuanian (24%) eight-year-old investigated children.

The research showed that in the research group of Lithuanian participants a big difference between the highest level of six and seven-year-old children's evaluations has not been found (the highest level is characteristic to more than one third of the investigated children). This supports the argument that singing skills are developed while the child grows, while the quality of singing ascends during the process of musical education. Furthermore, children's singing skills are trained, when the training techniques, repertoire meets child's capabilities like physiological development, thinking, perceptual features and so on. The least subjects with the highest evaluation were found in Lithuanian (nearly one-fourth of the investigated children) eight-year-old group. These data confirm the statement that the ability level of managing the

vocal range differs among the children of different age. Meanwhile, a more even distribution by the highest rated evaluation was observed in the Taiwanese test group. A similar (nearly one-fifth of the investigated children) possessing very high level abilities of mastering singing voice numbers in the groups of children aged six, seven and eight was found. These results confirm some researchers' proposition (Liao & Davidson, 2016; Nichols & Wang, 2016) that the majority of children belong to the level of average musical aptitude. In addition, only a small number of participants receive both very high and low estimates.

Following the acquired data, attempts were made to identify 6-8 year-old children's ability to control the singing voice range in regard to children's gender (see: Figure 2).

More than 40% of six-year-old girls from Lithuania demonstrated the highest level of control of the singing voice range, whereas there were slightly more than one-tenth of such children in Taiwan (8.3%). The highest level was typical of 50% of the Lithuanian seven-year-old participants and none of such children in Taiwan. However, the highest level was typical of one-fourth of the Taiwanese (25%) and Lithuanian (23%) eight-year-old investigated children.

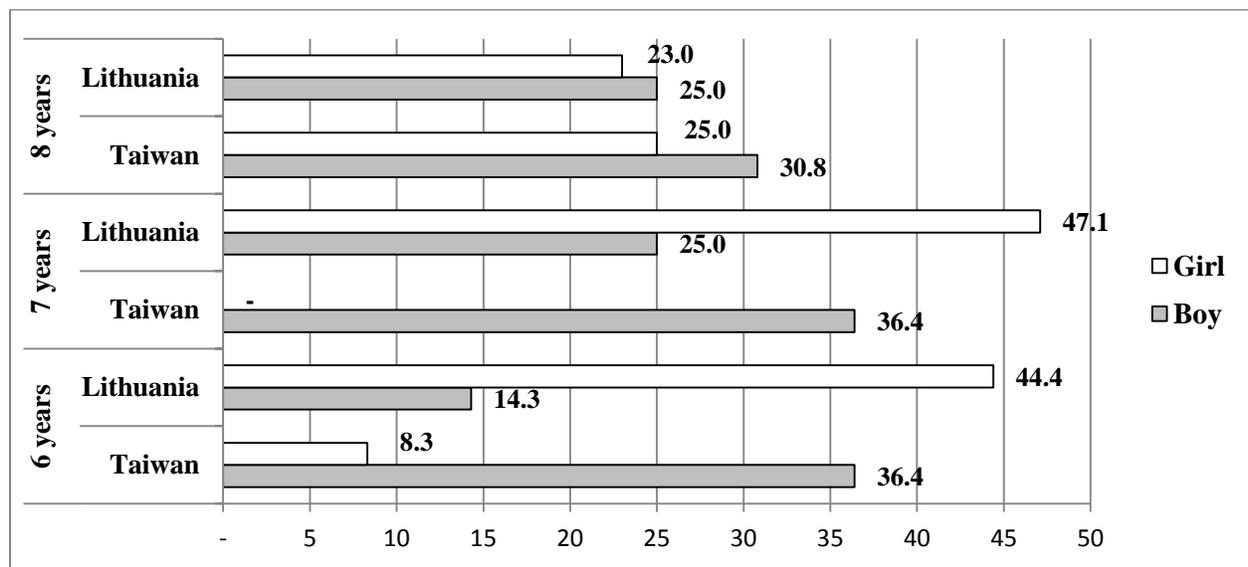


Figure 2: 6-8 years-old Children's Ability to Control the Singing Voice Range Based on Gender (highest rating distribution, %)

The comparative analysis of both genders' (girls and boys) singing voice mastery level showed that Lithuanian girls possess higher level of mastery of their singing voice. It was found that six and seven-year-old girls outclass boys almost twice or even three times more in terms of

very high singing voice mastery level. However, the greater difference between the genders in the eight-year-old age group was not disclosed as far as children's singing voice mastery levels are concerned. On the contrary, the comparison of the highest level of mastery of singing voice between six and seven-year-old Taiwanese children, including both genders revealed that boys prevail the girls more than three times. When both genders of eight-year-old age groups are taken into consideration, it should be noticed that the results were almost the same. These data would seem to confirm the stereotypical opinions about boys and girls qualities' differences; however, the reason of such differences remains unclear as the research (testing) does not answer these questions.

5. Reflection of Findings

The article presents one part of comparative study (research project No. TAP-LLT-14-016), which aimed to identify the factors determining the coordination between musical hearing and vocal apparatus of 6-8 year-old children during the process of singing by project coordinators: M.-J. Chuang, J. Davidova & A. Rauduvaite. Generalizing the results of the testing, it can be stated, that the ability of pre-primary and junior school age children to control their singing voice range is not of high level (see: Table 2).

Table 2: *Comparison of Children's Use of Singing Voice Improvement Needed in Lithuania, and Taiwan (%)*

Country	Age 6	Age 7	Age 8	Singing Voice Categories
Lithuania	64.00	60.00	76.00	3-8
Taiwan	78.26	84.00	72.00	2-8

The results of this investigation are in accordance with the statistical data presented by other scientists (Girdzijauskiene, 2004; Seckuviene, 2004); moreover, they confirm that the majority of children are born with average musical abilities.

Common singing problems of children age 6-8 in Lithuania and Taiwan were identified: problems related to articulators, intonation, posture, breathing, pitch matching, voice clarity, expressiveness and power of the sound, uncomfortable registry, harsh vocal quality, whispery, breathy, puny voice, or the loud, phrasing, increasing vocal range, dynamic and tempo variation,

agility, meaning and mood, pitch concentration. Many intermediate-age children may hear, but not be able to coordinate the vocal mechanism to produce pitch accurately due to the lack of breathing energy, vocal freedom and accuracy.

Following the results of testing of psycho physical peculiarities of 6-8 year-old children's singing voices, the theoretical works and insights made by other researchers (Liao & Davidson, 2016; Nichols & Wang, 2016) are relevant for the research of the problem. In addition, the assessment criteria and indicators of the coordination development between musical hearing and the vocal apparatus for 6-8 year-old children during the process of singing were identified (see: Table 3).

Table 3: Children's Singing Assessment Criteria and Indicators

Criteria	Indicators
Intonation	1. Sense of mode 2. Pitch accuracy 3. Register: upper, middle and low
Breathing	1. Posture 2. High and deep breath 3. Diaphragm
Articulation	1. Diction 2. Ways of vocal making (legato, staccato) 3. Sense of rhythm
Expression	1. Facial expression; 2. Body expression 3. Emotional expression

Scientists, who research musical education regularities, highlight that many problems of musical education even now are not based on theoretical premises and scientific researches, but rely on subjective opinion or random, undirected explorations (Mark & Madera, 2014). Therefore, aims of introduced novelties and process, the scale of changes, priorities and consequences are not properly thought about. There is a lack of reflections on musical education process (Elliot, 2005).

Especially relevant is to regard teachers, because teachers in particular organise learners' musical activities, they are the main innovators. High-quality, effective teaching is one of the most important contributors to improving achievements of learners (Snyder, 2011; Suzuki, Howe, 2010). R. Girdzijauskiene (2004) writes that the most important role in organizing

children's musical activity has a teacher – direct creator of the education process that selects and plans schedule and curriculum according to the characteristics of children, contemplates the education strategy and specific tasks, creatively combines teaching methods and means, and provides the direction of entire educational process. Thus, on the teacher's personality and skills are highly dependent children's musical activities and development.

Another significant aspect, on which is dependent the realization success of pre-primary and junior school musical education content model, is music teachers' readiness to comprehend, accept (self-) education novelties, attitude and professional competencies (Young, Knestrict, 2012). On the one hand, scientific studies organised in recent years are aimed at evaluation of Lithuania's conceptual basics of musical education, educational directions, process, essential discussible questions, results and problems (Lasauskiene & Rauduvaite, 2013). While the issue of teacher quality concerns not only the western world, but all other nations as well, including Taiwan (Ling-I, 2014; Hsieh, 2010).

On the other hand, pre-primary and junior school musical education content's realization technologies are left not summarized. Thus, it is especially relevant to evaluate revealed by the empirical researches musical education contents of pre-primary and junior school implementation process as well as to determine and experimentally verify teaching strategies for the development of coordination between musical hearing and the vocal apparatus of 6-8 year-old children during the process of singing in Lithuania and Taiwan. In conclusion, the development of children's musical abilities in pre-primary and junior school music classes is not emphasized sufficiently.

Furthermore, the research opens the way for prospective initiatives of optimization of coordination between musical hearing and vocal apparatus of 6-8 year-old children, during the process of singing. It also draws the guidelines for further research: 1) to determine instructional goals of singing for 6-8-year-old children; 2) determine and experimentally verify teaching strategies for coordination development between musical hearing and the vocal apparatus of 6-8 year-old children during the process of singing in Lithuania and Taiwan.

5. Conclusions

The research highlights the tendencies of development of 6-8 year-old children's singing and vocal teaching development in musical education classes in Lithuania and Taiwan. It was

revealed that the ability of 6-8 year-old children to control the singing voice range is developed insufficiently. The level of pre-school and junior school age children's ability to control the range of the voice differs not only among the children of different age, but among the children of the same age as well. These differences are determined by the level of development of musical abilities (to intone precisely and the sensitivity to the mode, vocal range, etc.) and child's musical aptitude. Moreover, the girls from Lithuania as the Taiwanese boys, who took part in the research (testing), possess higher level of mastery of their singing voice. The results of this investigation confirm the statistical data presented by M.-J. Chuang (2011) and H. Seckuviene (2004) that the majority of children are born with average musical abilities.

In our research, the ability to control the singing voice range that meets the child's possibilities, just like the ability to accurately intone and the sensitivity to mode, breathing, articulation, as well as ability to express the mood of the music by various means of expression is ascribed to the main abilities for the development of coordination between musical hearing and the vocal apparatus of 6-8 year-old children.

In addition, the research opens the way for prospective initiatives of coordination between musical hearing and vocal apparatus of 6-8 year-old children during the process of singing and draws the guidelines for further research.

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