

## CREATIVE INTERACTION

BETWEEN ACCOMPANIST AND CHOIR CONDUCTOR IN A CHILDREN'S CHOIR: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MUSICAL ASPECTS

### INTERACCIÓN CREATIVA ENTRE ACOMPAÑANTE Y DIRECTOR DE CORO EN UN CORO INFANTIL: ASPECTOS PSICOLÓGICOS Y MUSICALES

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#### ABSTRACT

This article examines the specifics of professional interaction between the accompanist and the choir conductor in a children's choral ensemble, with particular attention to psychological aspects. The research problem lies in the insufficient scholarly development of the accompanist's role as an active participant in the pedagogical, psychological, and musical processes within a children's choir. The aim of the study is to identify key aspects of the creative and emotional involvement of educators working with children's choirs in shaping both the artistic outcome and the educational atmosphere of the choral ensemble. The methodological basis of the research is a qualitative interpretative approach grounded in case study analysis. Empirical data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of audio and video recordings of rehearsals and concerts involving both educators and parents. As a result, the study identifies the accompanist's key functions: rhythmic and intonational support, emotional stabilization, adaptation to performance challenges, and the creation of a trusting and creative environment. The research highlights the accompanist's importance as a professional educator within the musical-pedagogical process, rather than as a secondary accompanist. The findings may be useful for practicing educators and specialists in music education seeking to enhance the effectiveness of choral work with children.

**Keywords:** Children's choir, Creative ensemble, Interpretation, Creative partnership, Choral performance.

#### RESUMEN

Este artículo examina las particularidades de la interacción profesional entre el acompañante y el director de coro en un coro infantil, con especial atención a los aspectos psicológicos. El problema de la investigación radica en el insuficiente desarrollo académico del rol del acompañante como participante activo en los procesos pedagógicos, psicológicos y musicales dentro de un coro infantil. El objetivo del estudio es identificar aspectos clave de la participación creativa y emocional de los educadores que trabajan con coros infantiles en la configuración tanto del resultado artístico como del ambiente educativo del coro. La base metodológica de la investigación es un enfoque interpretativo cualitativo basado en el análisis de estudios de caso. Los datos empíricos se recopilaron mediante observación, entrevistas semiestructuradas y análisis de grabaciones de audio y video de ensayos y conciertos en los que participaron tanto educadores como padres. Como resultado, el estudio identifica las funciones clave del acompañante: apoyo rítmico y entonacional, estabilización emocional, adaptación a los desafíos de la interpretación y creación de un entorno creativo y de confianza. La investigación destaca la importancia del acompañante como educador profesional

dentro del proceso musical-pedagógico, más que como un acompañante secundario. Los hallazgos pueden ser útiles para educadores en ejercicio y especialistas en educación musical que buscan mejorar la eficacia del trabajo coral con niños.

**Palabras clave:** Coro infantil, Conjunto creativo, Interpretación, Colaboración creativa, Actuación coral.

## INTRODUCTION

Among the many forms of children's artistic creativity, choral performance is one of the most accessible and appealing (Jafarov, 2022). Choral art represents not only a form of artistic expression but also a national cultural tradition of the Russian people, which has been passed down through generations and continues to hold a central place in the country's cultural heritage. In contemporary society, preserving these traditions (Babina & Utusikov, 2024) and introducing them to younger generations (Nikolaeva et al., 2023) has become a priority for educational institutions engaged in the field of culture and arts education (Golubtsova et al., 2025; Zhukova et al., 2024). The integration of choral activities into educational programs reflects a broader societal objective of fostering cultural continuity, moral development, and social cohesion among children, while simultaneously cultivating their artistic skills and creative potential.

In this context, choral departments are increasingly being established in children's music schools and schools of the arts. These programs are designed not only to teach children the technical foundations of conducting and choral singing but also to nurture an enduring interest in choral music and a love for collective artistic expression. Sparking children's interest in choral music, instilling in them a love for choral culture, and developing their vocal-choral skills are the primary goals for both the choir conductor and the accompanist. The success and quality of a children's vocal-choral ensemble largely depend on the creative partnership between these two professionals (Akhmetshin et al., 2025; Kryucheva & Tolstoukhova, 2023). This collaboration is essential in shaping the ensemble's performance culture and in translating the artistic vision into a cohesive musical experience that is accessible to both performers and audiences.

Rucsanda (2020) emphasizes that the conductor of a children's choir must possess a multifaceted personality, acting simultaneously as a musician, educator, psychologist, and leader with strong psychosocial skills. The interaction between the conductor and the choir members is essential for achieving effective communication. To enhance this relationship, the study proposes applying the

Johari Window model, which facilitates clear and constructive communication within the choir. This approach promotes mutual understanding and a more cohesive group dynamic, which are crucial for achieving high-quality artistic performance and fostering both musical and social development among young singers.

The creative interaction between the accompanist and the children's choir is a complex, multifaceted process that demands a high level of professionalism, mutual understanding, and sensitivity from all participants (Adykulov, 2025; Mavrodina & Kurganskaya, 2023). The nature of this interaction is shaped by multiple factors, including the age and experience of the children, the style and repertoire of the choir, and the interpersonal rapport between the accompanist and the choir conductor (Mavrodina & Kurganskaya, 2024). Achieving artistic excellence in this setting requires that accompanists not only possess technical proficiency but also the ability to anticipate and respond to the expressive intentions of both the conductor and the young singers.

Several key aspects define the accompanist's work, including musical, pedagogical, psychological, stage-directorial, and creative components. The musical component is central to the accompanist's role, as it involves actively supporting the choir during rehearsals and performances (Ahmadov, 2024). This role goes far beyond simply providing accompaniment; the accompanist serves as a structural foundation for the choir. In collaboration with the choir conductor, the accompanist contributes to the realization of the artistic image of each piece, often offering a nuanced interpretation that enhances the ensemble's overall performance.

As Starchikova (2018) notes, "the artistic concept and imagery of the piece are often revealed in the accompaniment no less vividly than in the choir itself. The accompanist also participates in the creation of the artistic image, just as the choir does" (p. 67). Moreover, the collaborative creativity among the choir conductor, the children's choir, and the accompanist encompasses several crucial dimensions, including rhythmic foundation, harmonic support, intonational reinforcement, emotional impact, dynamic flexibility, and the creation of a creative atmosphere. Each of these elements contributes to a unified performance that not only conveys the composer's intent but also engages the young performers in a meaningful artistic experience.

Therefore, understanding the professional aspects of the accompanist's and choir conductor's work is essential, as these roles are pivotal to the success of the educational process and the cultivation of children's artistic potential.

Furthermore, the pedagogical component of the accompanist's role entails providing guidance and constructive feedback, fostering an environment where children feel confident to explore their vocal abilities and develop musical independence. Psychological aspects are also critical; accompanists must maintain a supportive and motivating presence, helping children manage performance anxiety, develop focus, and build resilience. The stage-directorial component involves coordinating entrances, cut-offs, and tempo changes, ensuring that the ensemble functions as a cohesive unit. Finally, the creative component emphasizes interpretation and expressiveness, enabling accompanists to contribute meaningfully to the ensemble's artistic vision. By integrating these multiple dimensions, accompanists help shape a comprehensive choral education that balances technical mastery, emotional expression, and collaborative engagement (Nikolaeva et al., 2023; Zhukova et al., 2024).

In sum, this study focuses on the intricate professional interaction between accompanists and choir conductors in children's choral settings. Their partnership is not only fundamental to achieving high-quality performance outcomes but also plays a crucial role in transmitting cultural traditions, nurturing artistic growth, and fostering a lifelong appreciation for music among young learners (Babina & Utusikov, 2024; Golubtsova et al., 2025; Jafarov, 2022).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is based on a qualitative interpretative approach aimed at identifying and describing the specific features of creative interaction between the accompanist, the choir conductor, and the children's choral ensemble. The research was conducted in 2024 within the case study paradigm, with a focus on the contextual understanding of pedagogical and musical practices.

A single children's choir (consisting of 20 children aged 8–12) based at a supplementary education institution in Belgorod, Russia, was selected as the case. The choir conductor and accompanist also took part in the study. The sample was selected using purposeful sampling based on the criterion of professional experience and the participants' active engagement in creative work.

The collected data (Table 1) were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the method of Braun & Clarke (2006), which included the following stages:

- Reading and initial coding of field notes and interview transcripts;
- Identifying key themes corresponding to the focus areas stated in the article: rhythmic and intonational support, emotional interaction, dynamic flexibility, and pedagogical adaptation;
- Creating code matrices for each interaction episode (rehearsal/performance/interview);
- Comparing themes and subcategories across different data sources (triangulation method: observation ↔ interview ↔ audiovisual material);
- Generating generalized analytical conclusions based on recurring behavioral patterns and speech strategies.

Table 1. Data Collection Methods.

Method	Description
Observation of rehearsals and concert performances	6 sessions: 4 rehearsals and 2 performances
Semi-structured interviews	Conducted with the accompanist, choir conductor, and a group of parents
Audio and video recordings of musical interactions with subsequent transcription of verbal and non-verbal behavior	Recorded elements included tempo, facial expressions, conducting gestures, and timbral emphases

Source: own work

To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, methods of analytical memo-writing (documenting the researcher's subjective observations and hypotheses) and member checking (validation of interpretations through participant feedback) were employed.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants and their legal guardians prior to the study. The principles of anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly observed.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Observation of rehearsals and concert performances, as well as audio and video recordings of Musical interactions with subsequent transcription of verbal and non-verbal behavior allow us to draw several important conclusions about the pedagogical and artistic role of the accompanist in children's choral ensembles. The rhythmic foundation of a choral piece depends largely on the performers' professional level. A precise and clear rhythm sets the overall character and pacing of the work, and the accompanist carefully follows the conductor's gestures, helping the children's choir maintain synchronization and temporal accuracy. In rhythmically complex sections, the accompanist emphasizes accents and dynamic cues to ensure that the choir enters correctly, maintaining cohesion even under performance pressure.

The accompanist demonstrates heightened sensitivity to pedagogical shifts, often anticipating potential tempo deviations before they occur. Nevertheless, there are situations where tempo fluctuations are not explicitly indicated in the score but are caused by performance anxiety, technical challenges, or difficulties with diction. In such cases, accompanists respond with patience, ingenuity, and a readiness to support the performers, demonstrating not only technical proficiency but also emotional and psychological awareness (Akhmetshin et al., 2025).

During performance, the accompanist's playing serves as the harmonic backbone of the choir's intonation. In passages involving unusual harmonies, modulations, or chromatic deviations, key chords are highlighted to help singers stay oriented within the musical framework. This function is particularly critical in complex moments, such as chromatic lines, altered chords, or unconventional intervals, where the accompanist's role becomes integral to the choir's ability to maintain pitch accuracy. In unison sections, accentuating the melodic line ensures clarity and facilitates precise vocal reproduction.

In technically challenging episodes, including polyphonic textures, rapid runs, triplets, and dotted rhythms, accompanists accentuate critical notes and chords, aiding the choir in navigating difficulties and enhancing performance manageability. Fermatas and strategic pauses require special attention, particularly in ensembles of beginner singers, where the accompanist may adapt the accompaniment to the choir's skill level to maintain musical coherence.

The pedagogical importance of these functions has been highlighted by multiple researchers, who emphasize that the accompanist's role is frequently underestimated. Rather than serving merely as a background figure, the

accompanist actively contributes to musical thinking, rhythmic stability, ensemble cohesion, and stage confidence in children (Himonides, 2012). Interaction with a skilled accompanist has been shown to affect students' emotional states, perception of musical material, and overall engagement, transforming the accompanist into a key educational agent rather than a passive participant.

Semi-structured interviews with educators further underscore the importance of the accompanist's emotional support. Both the conductor and the accompanist play a vital role in inspiring the choir, fostering motivation, and enhancing performance quality. In this sense, the accompanist is responsible not only for conveying musical character and mood but also for creating a psychologically safe environment that enables children to fully immerse themselves in the artistic process. Maintaining a sensitive response to dynamic changes while balancing volume and tone ensures that the accompaniment neither overpowers the choir nor recedes into the background.

Instrumental accompaniment also enhances the ensemble's emotional expression in lyrical or dramatic passages, facilitating more expressive interpretation. When mistakes or inaccuracies arise, accompanists adapt instantly, providing stability and reassurance to the young singers. Interviews with accompanists reveal that they perceive their role as encompassing musical, technical, creative, and educational dimensions (Akhmetshin et al., 2025).

Additionally, educators emphasize that the choral sound and overall vocal timbre should inform the piano's color and density. The accompanist functions akin to a sound engineer, balancing the piano's resonance with the choir's voices. The accompaniment must not merely follow but interact organically with the choir, enhancing rather than replicating its musical texture (Starchikova, 2018).

Parents' observations reinforce these findings. They highlight the accompanist's psychological support as essential, particularly in managing stage anxiety and sustaining motivation. Children thrive in choirs where accompanists display authority, emotional stability, and trustworthiness, creating a positive, supportive musical environment. Educators' use of praise, encouragement, and humor fosters engagement, helping children internalize confidence and motivation to improve (Kryucheva & Tolstoukhova, 2024; Sheripova & Alieva, 2024).

Moreover, parents note the disciplined environment promoted by the conductor and accompanist, instilling a sense of individual responsibility for the ensemble's success. Understanding the emotional and narrative content of the music is essential for expressive performance: "Each of



them must understand that the content of the music and lyrics determines the character of the piece—whether heroic, cheerful, sad, or lyrical. A deep understanding of the work's meaning contributes to the expressiveness of its performance” (Sokolov, 2022, p. 136).

Thus, the accompanist's role is multifaceted, encompassing musical guidance, emotional support, technical adaptation, and pedagogical influence. Their work forms the foundation for the ensemble's success, transforming choral performance into an integrated educational and artistic experience that nurtures both musical skill and socio-emotional development in young performers.

The analysis of the accompanist's role in children's choral ensembles shows that their work is essential not only for musical performance but also for the educational and emotional development of young singers. The accompanist provides a rhythmic and harmonic foundation, ensuring synchronization, intonation accuracy, and interpretive cohesion, especially in rhythmically complex or harmonically challenging sections. Their technical skill directly influences the quality of the ensemble's performance, helping children navigate complex musical structures with confidence.

In addition to technical and musical support, the accompanist fulfills important pedagogical and psychological functions. They anticipate and adapt to performance difficulties, including stage anxiety and unexpected tempo changes, creating a supportive and stable environment conducive to learning and artistic growth. Their responsiveness to dynamic, emotional, and expressive elements of the score allows the choir to convey the intended artistic imagery and narrative content effectively.

The accompanist also plays a key role in motivating the children, maintaining discipline, and fostering positive emotional engagement. Their ability to balance authority with encouragement, to inspire trust, and to create a safe and enjoyable atmosphere helps children feel confident, engaged, and motivated to improve their skills. This role positions the accompanist as a model for both artistic and personal development.

Finally, the collaboration between the accompanist, the choir conductor, and the children's choir creates a dynamic process of musical creativity. This partnership enhances the educational experience, combining technical proficiency with artistic interpretation and emotional growth. The accompanist is thus a central participant in shaping the performance, educational outcomes, and overall experience of the choir.

The accompanist's multifaceted role encompassing musical, pedagogical, psychological, and creative aspects is crucial for the success of children's choirs. Their work ensures artistic quality, supports the emotional well-being of performers, and fosters a positive learning environment that nurtures both technical skill and expressive capacity in young singers.

## CONCLUSIONS

An important condition for the success of both the rehearsal process and the concert performance of a children's choir is the mutual alignment between the choir conductor and the accompanist in their interpretation of the musical works that make up the choir's repertoire. However, it is the ethical and psychological dimensions of their professional relationship that remain especially vital and valuable. The ability to connect with children, to inspire and support them, contributes significantly to creating a favorable environment for the creative growth and development of the choir. Only through joint efforts can a harmonious and supportive space be established for nurturing young singers. It is essential to show children that music is not only hard work but also a source of joy, inspiration, and self-expression.

This study has certain limitations that future researchers should consider. As a case study, it focuses on the interaction between the accompanist, choir conductor, and parents; the perspectives of the children themselves were not included in the comparative analysis. We view this research as pilot in nature—in addition to addressing the main research question, we aimed to test the methodology, procedures, and tools, and to identify potential challenges to refine the design and increase the effectiveness of the main study.

In future research, we plan to expand the sample, include the children's perspectives, employ mixed methods, and extend the observation period in order to obtain more representative and well-founded conclusions.

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