



**FACULTY OF MUSIC  
UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA**

**Bachelor of Music Performance (Hons)  
(MU 222)**

**RESEARCH PROJECT  
(MUF 655)**

**Sight-Singing Abilities Among Vocal Students**

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Sight-reading involved higher level of thinking process initiated by conceptual knowledge (Lehmann & McArthur, 2002, p. 135). Studies had shown that multiple cognitive and perceptive processes engaged simultaneously when performers read music by sight (Grutzmacher, 1987; Waters, Townsend, & Underwood, 1998; Wolf, 1976). According to Wristen (2005), some cognitive and perceptual studies had proved that brain carries more processing works, and more thinking modes involved during music sight-reading. In addition, sight-reading is not a particular musical skill but rather a combination of multiple cognitive abilities that shall be developed simultaneously, which are perception, kinesthetic, memory, and problem solving skills (Lehmann & Ericsson, 1993, 1996; Waters, Townsend, & Underwood, 1998; Lehmann & Arthur, 2002). Also, sight-reading associated with high demand of on-the-spot working memory (Humphreys, 2013; Kopiez & Lee, 2008). In order to improve sight-reading ability, these cognitive and perceptive abilities in sight-reading skills had to be exercised and promoted to a higher level (Eisner, 2002).

Previous research has identified difficulty levels for both pitch skills (Henry, 2001, 2003) and rhythm skills (Henry, 2009). In developing an assessment tool for vocal sight-reading—the Vocal Sight-Reading Inventory (VSRI)—I (Henry, 2001) identified 28 discretepitch skills, including scalar patterns; tonic, dominant, and subdominant triad combinations cadential patterns; chromatic patterns; and modulatory patterns. Each of the 28 skills appeared within melodies containing a rhythmic framework. Rhythmic figures were almost exclusively quarter notes, with a sparse number of eighth notes. Rhythm accuracy was not assessed in the study. Previous sight-reading studies have stratified participants in high-, middle-, and low-achieving groups (Boyle & Lucas, 1990; Killian, 1991; Killian & Henry, 2005). Boyle and Lucas (1994) tested university-level participants from beginning, intermediate, and advanced ear training classes on their ability to sight-sing melodies in two different contexts—with and without a harmonic framework provided.

### 1.2 Problem Statement

Sight-singing is the ability to read and sing music at first sight, also referred to as vocal sight-reading. Sight-singing not only help to improve our sight-reading skills (the ability

to read sheet music), but it will also make us work on our pitch accuracy and rhythmical skills. Vocal students must know how to sight-sing when they are given a new repertoire. The criteria in published method books assumed the vocal student beginners have the ability to interpret the pitch or melodic by themselves.

The challenges for vocal students in sight-singing is how to sing the melody with the accurate pitch and also rhythm. The more challenging for vocal students when they have to sing challenging intervals. Intervals is defined as the distance in pitch between two tones. It is labeled by its numerical value and its quality. The numerical value indicates the number of tones of the diatonic scale it includes. Intervals are a fundamental part of musical structures, and therefore a central part of ear training. All harmonies or melodies can be considered as a sequence or layering of intervals. As a beginner we should therefore begin with intervals and later continue with, for example, melodic dictation to identify a sequence of intervals, or chord identification to identify harmonies with more than two tones.

In addition, some of vocal students are not comfortable with the solfeggio that are given in score sheet. Vocal students should be able to label the basic solfeggio of simplistic sheet music. Assuming “Do” is given, vocal students must be able to recognize basic skips versus stepwise motion in both directions. The speed that it takes students to label is the speed at which they will be able to read, assuming they overcome the previous issues that were described. Solfege is the application of the sol-fa syllables to a musical scale or to a melody. It is also a singing exercise especially using sol-fa syllables.

The purpose of this study was to determine the sight singing abilities among vocal students during studio exam, particularly when the pitch and rhythm skills represent a wide spectrum of difficulty levels.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The purpose of this research is to investigate the sight-singing abilities among vocal students during studio exams. This research is focused on these objectives:

1. To determine vocal students perceive their ability to sight-sing during studio exams.
2. To know how vocal students practice or prepare for sight-singing test during studio exams.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. How do vocal students perceive their sight-singing ability during studio exams?
2. How do vocal students practice or prepare for their sight-singing test during studio exam?

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

In this research the focus is on preparation for sight singing during studio exams. Preparation is very important to vocal student to sight singing in studio exams. With the enough preparation, they will be more ready for the sight singing component of the studio exam.

Perhaps it also will make them realize that using better techniques and have enough practice in sight-singing can help them to sing the accurate pitch and also the rhythm provided. It is also can make them recognize some challenging intervals that have interpret in the score such as the first note given is 'lower C' and the next note is 'octave C'. Example, if some vocal students do not know how the intervals changed, they will do not know how to sing that note.

This study also will be significance to the vocal lecturers of UiTM Shah Alam, Faculty of Music, so that lecturers will stress on the importance of their students preparation for studio exams.

#### **1.6 Scope of the Study**

The study involved music students from Music Education Department, Music Performance Department, Music Composition Department and Music Diploma Department. There a few causes that should be measured while conducting this study. Total of respondents who are involved in this study is 61 respondents. This study conducted at UiTM Shah Alam, Faculty of Music.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

We as a vocal major know that sight-singing is very important to us. Sight-singing is the ability how to read and how to sing music at first sight. Sight-singing not only help you to improve your sight-reading skills, but it will also make you improve your pitch accuracy and also rhythmic skills. It is quite hard for us as a vocal major to practice with different kind of melodies in different keys with also rhythmic variations.

According to Earmaster (2013), in order to vocalize the notes you read at the correct pitch, it is necessary to make use of what is called Inner Hearing. Mastering your inner hearing skills means that you are able to picture how notes sound without actually hearing them. Once your aural skills are trained enough with the help of proper ear training, sight-singing at the correct pitch will become much more natural"- Earmaster (2013).

#### 2.2 Rhythm

In music, the rhythm is the pattern of the regular or irregular pulse as the most basic thing, you are struggling in music. Written music made it easy to interpret other composer words and produce the kind of rhythm. The time value of notes determine what kind of rhythm the resulting piece of music. Rhythm refer to a complex reality in which several variable afused. Rhythm and flow does not accur through the intervention of the regular movement of waves. Basically, rhythm means form of music. It literally point a particular way of flowing.

Rhythm is very important because it keeps the fun and good beat of song. It also makes a pattern in the song. You also can not make a good song without rhythm. It is very good to have a lot of different rhythm because then you get a lot of different songs which you do not get bored of which is great. Rhythm is basically what keeps the song together. As you can see rhythm in music is really great and you need it to make a good song. Without rhythm a song would be all jumbled up, I do not even think it would be called a song. Without rhythm there probably would be no songs.- Hana(2013).