Developing A Choral Singing Project To Enhance Psychological Well-Being In Thai Elderly

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ABSTRACT

A researcher initiated a study on the psychological well-being of elderly participants in the choral singing project in 2020. Researchers found that the six aspects of Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing correlate with skills in choral singing activities. The researcher employed the findings to establish a choral singing project aimed at examining the relationship between psychological well-being and singing among Thai elderly people once more in 2024. This research seeks to create a choral singing program for the elderly, emphasizing skills that enhance psychological well-being. Findings suggested that the psychological well-being of elderly people who engaged in choral singing for at least four months, as per the project specifications, improved. The choral singing project is structured around six aspects of psychological well-being, including (a) Autonomy: Self-directed learning and evaluation conducted via Google Forms; (b) Environmental mastery: Recording your understanding of reading musical notation and the approach for vocalizing songs using symbols and language during practice sessions; (c) Personal growth: Accountability for training to improve vocal skills until mastery of the songs is attained; (d) Positive relations with others: The ability to engage in collaborative singing practice within the same vocal group, providing mutual support. (e) Purpose in life: The commitment to personal growth for effective teamwork; and (f) Self-acceptance: Recognizing personal errors and exhibiting openness to advice from the conductor and fellow singers for self-enhancement. Prior data indicates that understanding the relationship between musical activities and psychological well-being facilitates the creation and implementation of musical projects for the long-term advantage of individuals in society.

Keywords: choral singing, choral singing in elderly, psychological well-being

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The project to promote the psychological well-being of the elderly is a public policy that is organized in the current society, and it is organized widely around the world, including in Thailand. The project aims to improve the quality of life and the psychological well-being of elderly people nationwide without limiting any particular group. Music to promote psychological well-being in the elderly is one of the widely accepted projects, because music can help to improve mood and help the elderly feel more self-worth after participating in musical activities. Therefore, most psychomusicology scholars and researchers focus on studying the effects of music on the psychological well-being of the elderly. For example, Laukkana (2007) presented research results stating that "listening to music is a leisure activity and a source of positive emotions that often occurs among elderly people." Gridley et al. (2011) presented research findings indicating that the questionnaire results rated music and singing activities as providing greater happiness than working or shopping, while community group singing activities made participants feel safe and included in the community. Creech et al. (2013) presented the research results that "the increased psychological well-being was found in the group of music activity participants who had more developed musical skills, creative expression, freedom in participating in musical activities, social acceptance, pride, and opportunities for positive reinforcement," etc.

The author conducted the first choir project for the elderly in June 2019. The author found that the choir project had a positive impact on the elderly. The author then conducted

research on the psychological well-being of the elderly in the second choir project, between November 2019 - August 2020. The research topic is "Trends in the psychological well-being of participants in choir activities for the elderly." The research found that skills in choir activities, which include basic practice of choral singing, interpretation and expression for singing, choral singing in Thai popular songs and international songs, and planning and working together for stage performances, had a positive impact on the psychological well-being of elderly participants. The mean psychological well-being of the elderly after they participated in the overall project increased and was at a high level (before: mean = 4.70, S.D. = 1.04, and after: mean = 4.93, S.D. = 0.94). The item with the highest mean score was 'personal growth,' with a high mean score (before: mean = 5.04, S.D. = 1.05 and after: mean = 5.30, S.D. = 0.99). The item with the lowest mean score was 'autonomy,' with a medium to fairly high mean score (pre: mean = 4.17, S.D. = 1.01 and post: mean = 4.17, S.D. = 1.03). (Inkhong & Romphochuen, 2563; Ruangchante et al., 2022, pp. 127-142)

Because psychological well-being is important for elderly people, it creates a positive perspective on life, a strong body, the ability to help themselves and others, optimism, the readiness to always develop themselves, the ability to manage problems or control difficult situations, and new goals in life. (Chaisang et al., 2020, pp. 306-318; Ruangchante et al., 2022, pp. 127-142) In addition, data from the psychological well-being test can be analyzed to plan for improving psychological well-being in the elderly. (Ryff, 2014, pp. 10-28) The author therefore uses the research results from 2020 as a guideline for the development of a choral singing project to enhance psychological well-being among Thai elderly people in 2024. This project is part of the research titled "Level of Singing Accuracy to Lead Improving Long-Term Memory in the Elderly: An Electroencephalogram Study." Thailand Science Research and Innovation provided funding for this research. The research results indicated that elderly participants who engaged in the choral program for at least four months as scheduled experienced an increase in average psychological well-being, which was consistent with the development of improved choral skills.

Therefore, this article presents the concept of developing a choral singing project aimed at enhancing psychological well-being among elderly individuals in Thailand. The concept shows the connection of three pieces of data: the concept of psychological well-being (Ryff, 2014, pp. 10-28), the specific skills required for the choral singing and the musical skills, and the behavioral and cognitive data of the choral singing participants from the research on "Trends in the change of the psychological well-being of the choral singing participants for the elderly." (Inkhong & Romphochuen, 2020; Ruangchante et al., 2022, pp. 127-142). Furthermore, this article supports the idea that choral singing projects are one of the most popular musical practices for elderly communities in today's society. Choral singing is a musical activity that elderly individuals can easily access and practice, allowing them to clearly see the positive impact on their psychological well-being.

METHODOLOGY

The choral singing project for Thai elderly in 2024 is part of the research titled "Level of Singing Accuracy to Lead Improving Long-Term Memory in the Elderly: An Electroencephalogram Study." The Human Research Ethics Committee of the School of Liberal Arts at Metharath University approved this research, as evidenced by the exemption review form and certificate number 2023016. The research used a mixed-methods approach grounded in psychology and musicology. One objective of this research was to analyze the relationship between the development of choral singing skills and the psychological well-being of the elderly. The participants in the research project were 40 elderly people aged 55 years and over who participated in the research project between March and June 2024. This project is divided into two parts: (1) group practice sessions at a prepared venue; the number

of practice sessions is 15; each session lasts 2 hours; and (2) self-practice with video clips of exercises via Google Forms at the participants' homes. The researcher assigned participants to practice daily. The practice took approximately 15 minutes. After participants practiced, they had to self-assess. Skills of choral singing are divided into four parts: (1) understanding the rhythm of the music, (2) breathing and articulation for singing, (3) pronouncing the words correctly and clearly, and (4) singing the song. The project was created based on the idea of improving psychological well-being by combining the specific skills needed for choral singing with the musical abilities and the thoughts and behaviors of the participants from the study on how choral singing affects the psychological well-being of older adults. Data collection consisted of (1) a pre- and post-project psychological well-being test; (2) self-assessment data via Google Forms; and (3) in-depth interviews with 10 research participants. The researchers then synthesized the data to assess the relationship between psychological well-being and the development of choral singing skills, in order to evaluate how effectively choral singing enhances psychological well-being in the Thai elderly project.

RESULTS

Developing a choral singing project to enhance psychological well-being in Thai elderly

In 2024, researchers began developing a choral singing project aimed at enhancing the psychological well-being of elderly individuals in Thailand by synthesizing three pieces of data to identify their connections. The data consists of three parts: the concept of psychological well-being, the necessary skills specific to choral singing and musical abilities, and the behaviors and thoughts of participants from the research titled “Trends of Change in the Psychological Well-Being of Choral Singing for Elderly Participants.” The details are as follows:

Psychological well-being refers to a positive mental state in life related to life events or experiences (Ryff, 1989, pp. 1069-1081). Psychological well-being, according to Ryff's 42-item PWB scale, is divided into 6 dimensions: (1) Autonomy: The ability to direct one's own thinking and behavior, to evaluate oneself according to personal standards, and to be free from societal pressures; (2) Environmental mastery: The ability to deal with difficult matters in a way that suits one's own needs and values and to effectively take advantage of the opportunities around oneself; (3) Personal growth: People who know, realize, and continually develop their own behaviors and potential with an open attitude to new experiences. Until these behaviors and thoughts lead to changes that reflect greater self-knowledge and effectiveness, (4) Positive relations with others: People who have trust, love, compassion, intimacy, and understanding in giving and receiving good and satisfying relationships with themselves and others; (5) Purpose in life: who has a clear sense and understanding of past and present goals and values in life and who is able to set goals and purposes for his or her life; and (6) Self-acceptance: who has a positive attitude toward himself or herself, can recognize and accept both his or her strengths and weaknesses, and feels good about his or her life (Ryff, 2014, pp. 10-28; Ryff’s Psychological Well-Being Scales (PWB), 42 Item version., n.d.; Dierendonck et al., 2007, pp. 473-479).

Specific skills required for choral singing and the musical skills: Good singing comes from specific essential singing skills and musical skills that meet accepted assessment criteria (Jorden, 2014). The essential skills specific to choral singing include (1) The fundamental singing skills, including breathing, vocal positioning, and correct pronunciation; (2) Pitches and intonation, including pitch matching, enhancing intonation skills, and the ability to blend voices; (3) Sight-reading is the reading of notes when given a new piece of music. If a practitioner can read notes, it makes learning and performing new music much faster; (4) Rhythmic accuracy is the relationship between note proportions and consistent

beats; (5) Musical expression is the presentation of different emotions in a piece of music to communicate its musicality and artistry, including the skills of orchestration and collaboration; (6) Blending and balance is the mixing and balancing of sounds, which are important skills of choral singing; (7) Listening skills are hearing and responding to different sounds, including listening to other singers while they are singing; (8) Teamwork is working together among singers to achieve a shared musical success; and (9) Confidence and stage performance are singing on stage with a sense of comfort and giving your all on stage. (Williams, 2023; MusicPandit, 2023(a); MusicPadit, 2023(b); Archibeque, n.d.; Butts, 2018; Schreyer, 2014) Conversely, musical skills encompass both theoretical and practical abilities governed by the musical system and its rules, which include playing musical instruments, analyzing musical structures, distinguishing musical sounds, and participating in music; these competencies can be categorized into rhythm, basic movement, melody, and harmony. Additionally, musical skills must encompass both musical perception (NAEP, Vanneman, 1998) and listening skills (Jorden, 2014), while soft skills should include personal skills, social skills, communication skills, international skills, and process skills (Knaus et al., 2020). These are the essential skills that lead to excellent choral singing.

The behaviors and thoughts of the choral singing participants are part of the results of the research on "Trends in the change of the psychological well-being of the choral singing participants for the elderly." They reflect the relationship with the psychological well-being of the elderly, which is divided into 6 dimensions as follows:

Table 1 The relationship between the psychological well-being of elderly and the behaviors and thoughts of research participants (Inkhong & Romphochuen, 2020; Ruangchante et al., 2022, pp. 127-142)

Items	PWB for Elderly	Behaviors and thoughts of research participants
1.	Autonomy	- Practice on your own to be able to sing correctly and in unison with others.
2.	Environmental mastery	- Adapting and trying to use technology during the COVID-19 situation, such as using the Zoom application to practice singing, using a mobile phone to record singing practice videos, sending homework video clips via the LINE application, etc. - Controlling feelings of excitement and anxiety during stage performances - Trying to memorize lyrics in a foreign language by writing them in Thai spelling.
3.	Personal growth	- Developing pronunciation skills by practicing singing with the piano for accuracy - The success of a stage performance depends on preparation of one's singing skills, physical condition, and mental condition. - Pride, self-worth, and self-esteem after participating in a committed choral activity
4.	Positive relations with others	- Tolerance to group work with a positive attitude - Accepting the opinions of others - Communicating with a smiling face and compassion - Mutual encouragement - Sharing audio files and video clips during practice in LINE groups - Sharing a petition printed in large letters

		- Sharing drinks and snacks
5.	Purpose in life	- Planning self-directed training to develop personal skills - Preparing for the stage performance
6.	Self-acceptance	- Evaluating and improving your singing voice during self-practice training - Evaluating your singing voice and adjusting your voice to blend with the others' voices while singing together.

After the researcher synthesized the connections between the above 3 data, the researcher designed activities for the choral singing project to promote the psychological well-being of Thai elderly in 2024 by using the skills of choral singing, which were defined as the important musical skill content of this project, as the basis of the design idea. Skills of choral singing include (1) understanding musical rhythm, (2) breathing and articulation for singing, (3) pronouncing words correctly and clearly, and (4) singing the song. Details of the activities are as follows:

Table 2 Activities for the choral singing project to promote the psychological well-being of Thai elderly in 2024

Items	PWB for Elderly	Activities
1.	Autonomy	**Self-learning and assessment via Google Forms** 1. The conductor designed a daily singing practice and self-assessment for the participants via a Google Form. The practice was divided into two parts: solfeggio practice in scales and songs and singing the lyrics of the songs. 2. Participants practice following the video clips and independently evaluate themselves.
2.	Environmental mastery	**Solfeggio singing** 1. The conductor uses the solfège system to practice pronunciation on the scales and melodies of the songs assigned to the project. 2. Participants understood and practiced solfeggio singing. However, since solfeggio singing was new to almost all participants, they recorded the note names of the melody in Thai or English spelling.
		Using symbols to guide the singing of melodies 1. The conductor introduced and gave examples of how to use symbols to guide the singing of the melody. 2. Participants learn to sing each pitch of the melody and identify their symbols to remind them of the correct way to pronounce the sound according to the conductor's direction. For instance, the conductor designates symbols for neumatic singing, which involves pronouncing two tones in a single syllable, melismatic singing, which involves pronouncing more than two tones in a single syllable, and rising/falling intonation, among others.

		Use Thai spelling to guide the pronunciation of lyrics according to pitch. 1. The conductor introduced and gave examples of using Thai spelling to guide the pronunciation of the lyrics according to the pitch. 2. Participants understand the pronunciation of each syllable in the request and independently determine the corresponding Thai spelling to help them pronounce the request according to the pitch. For example, writing Thai spelling in foreign songs, writing Thai spelling according to the tone that matches the pitch of the melody, which does not match the Thai words according to the grammar of writing.
3.	Personal growth	**Self-learning and assessment via Google Forms** (Details in autonomy)
		Memorizing lyrics and melodies is essential for performing on stage. 1. The conductor requires the participants to memorize the lyrics and melody without looking at the music notes while singing. 2. Participants try to memorize the lyrics and melody and be able to sing the song together with others without looking at the music notes while singing.
		Physical preparation for performing on stage 1. The conductor advised on maintaining physical fitness, controlling nervousness, and taking care of the vocal organs. 2. Participants follow the conductor's instructions and try to control themselves from becoming too anxious or excited.
4.	Positive relations with others	**Subgrouping for training** 1. The conductor divides the group into small groups for practice, including monophonic groups and small groups of 2-4 people. The group members are rotated so that the same person does not overlap. 2. Participants can practice singing with others in the same vocal group and in small groups of 2-4 people.
5.	Purpose in life	**Self-learning and assessment via Google Forms** (Details in autonomy)
		Memorizing lyrics and melodies is essential for performing on stage. (Details is personal growth)
		Physical preparation for performing on stage (Details is personal growth)
6.	Self-acceptance	**Self-learning and assessment via Google Forms** (Details in autonomy)
		The skill of listening to music and one's own voice

		1. The conductor guides you through the practice of listening to the melody, the accompaniment, and your voice while singing. 2. Participants practice listening to the melody, the accompaniment, and their own voice while singing to adjust their voice to match the music and blend with the others' voices.

CONCLUSION

The aforementioned activities pertain to the specific skills necessary for choral singing and musical proficiency. Thus, the project's activities are vital to showing the reasons and factors that lead to the development of skills related to choral singing activities that are important for increasing the positive impact on the psychological well-being of the research participants. The details are summarized as follows.

(1) Autonomy: Self-learning and assessment via Google Forms every day for participants as part of activities leading to the success of choral singing practice. Self-assessment is a process that allows participants to assess their own strengths and weaknesses in order to promote and improve their singing accuracy and precision in pitch and melody. Self-assessment requires the use of listening skills and analysis of the harmony of the singing and music. This process is therefore part of developing the perception and understanding of musical pitch and rhythm (Vanneman, 1998, pp. 1-6; Persky et al., 1998), and compare the quality pronunciations (Knaus et al., n.d.). Thus, self-learning is a skill that demonstrates autonomy because the participant must control himself without being coerced by others (Ryff, 2014, p. 12).

(2) Environmental mastery: Participants understand and practice solfeggio singing by recording note names of melody in Thai or English spelling while practicing it. Participants can handle this tricky situation by defining their symbols to remind them how to pronounce the melody pitch correctly, as well as spelling Thai in foreign songs and pronouncing syllables in lyrics that do not match Thai grammar. They demonstrate an awareness that solfeggio singing is essential for memorizing the pitch of notes in the scale that appear in the song (Skoove, 2022). Because the solfège system affects the music auditory perceptions, especially pitch and melody training (Lin, 2015). In addition, the solfège system helps with pitch memory. It acts like text and integrates sound patterns into a certain level of memory (Reifinger, 2012, pp. 26-42). Thus, the participants' attempts to manage problems or obstacles during the singing practice demonstrate the ability to appropriately master the environmental needs for the benefit of effective choral singing skill development (Ryff, 2014, p. 12).

(3) Personal growth: Personal growth is reflected through efforts to develop pronunciation skills by practicing singing with the piano, self-learning and assessment via Google Forms, memorizing lyrics and melodies, and physical and mental preparation. Participants demonstrate their responsibility in practicing various aspects to develop their singing ability until they become proficient in performing songs. Ultimately, they gain a sense of pride, self-worth, and self-esteem after successfully participating in a choir activity. Self-growth is not only the continuous development of one's own behavior and potential but also reflects the participant's increasingly effective knowledge of themselves (Ryff, 2014, p. 12).

(4) Positive relations with others: Participants can practice singing with others in the same vocal group. Those who can sing the correct melody will guide others with intention and kindness. On the other hand, practitioners demonstrate determination and persistence in following instructions even though such practice requires a lot of time for success. Such activity changes the group members between being advisers and being followers. This change depends on each person's different understanding and skills. Such behaviors demonstrate

mutual support among participants through a process of trust, empathy, understanding of the give and take of positive relationships, and satisfaction between oneself and others (Ryff, 2014, p. 12).

(5) Purpose in life: Planning for rehearsals and preparing for stage performances by yourself demonstrates a commitment to self-development for effective collaboration. In choral singing, listening to each other is crucial for achieving blending and balance. Although all participants are elders, they all still have new goals in life, especially the desire to succeed in their choral performances on stage after deciding to join the choral activity. Thus, these behaviors reflect the identities of those who have a clear sense of purpose and values in life, and they are all able to set goals in their participation in activities (Ryff, 2014, p. 12).

(6) Self-acceptance: Participants train themselves to be able to accept their mistakes through self-learning and assessment via Google Forms. If they find that their singing skills are not as expected, they will rehearse until they self-assess and find that they can sing correctly. On the other side of the onsite practice, participants receive guidance from the conductor and other members. Their behavior shows that they are aware of and accept their own shortcomings, and they try to improve and develop their singing skills. These are the important processes of musical practice, which include listening skills and musical perception skills to evaluate and improve singing performance, combined with teamwork skills, social skills, and communication skills, etc. Therefore, those who can recognize and accept both their strengths and weaknesses will have a positive attitude and feel good about their lives (Ryff, 2014, p. 12).

Developing a choral singing project to enhance psychological well-being in Thai elderly is an approach to organizing musical activities for sustainable benefits for the elderly community. Because participating in the choir project is not only about practicing singing skills but also about promoting the psychological well-being of the elderly. In addition, if the elderly who participated in the project realized the relationship between the designed activities, the development of choral singing skills, and an increase in their psychological well-being, they would be able to use choral singing as a sustainable part of their lives.

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