



## The Development of Articulation Techniques in the Song “*Kepada Siapa Aku Harus Takut*” Performed by the Choir of SMK Negeri 1 Pagaran

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to develop articulation techniques in the song “Kepada Siapa Aku Harus Takut” performed by the choir of SMK Negeri 1 Pagaran. The primary issue identified was the lack of clarity in lyric pronunciation, particularly in sections with fast tempos and dense consonant clusters, which hindered the effective delivery of the song’s message. The research employed a qualitative approach using observation, interviews, and documentation methods conducted over five rehearsal sessions. The development focused on diaphragmatic breathing, vowel formation, variations in articulation techniques (legato, non-legato, détaché, tenuto), and the integration of articulation with dynamics and expression. The findings indicate a significant improvement in the choir members’ articulation skills, demonstrated by clearer pronunciation of vowels and consonants, more stable breathing, and greater sound uniformity among members. Although challenges remained in faster tempo sections, the articulation training generally proved effective in enhancing the overall quality of the choir’s performance. This study underscores the importance of structured articulation exercises as a fundamental aspect of vocal training in school choirs.*

**Keywords:** *Articulation, Vocal, Choir.*

### INTRODUCTION

Choral singing represents one of the most sophisticated and disciplined forms of collective musical expression. It demands not only harmonic precision and tonal balance but also exceptional clarity in textual delivery. Within the context of choral performance, *articulation*-defined as the clarity and precision with which words, syllables, and consonants are pronounced during singing-plays a vital role in ensuring that the message of the song is effectively communicated to the audience (Miller, 2004). A choir’s ability to articulate text clearly determines how well listeners can comprehend the lyrical meaning, emotional tone, and theological intent of a musical work. This aspect of performance becomes even more crucial when the repertoire involves sacred or message-driven texts, as is often the case in Indonesian choral practice. In educational contexts, school choirs face unique challenges in developing articulation skills, especially when choir members

are students without formal vocal training. These singers often struggle to balance their academic workload with rehearsal commitments, resulting in limited time for focused vocal development. SMK Negeri 1 Pagaran, a vocational high school in North Sumatra, Indonesia, provides an excellent case study of this dynamic. The school's choir program actively participates in various cultural and religious events, performing repertoire that ranges from patriotic songs to Christian hymns. During the preparation of the song "*Kepada Siapa Aku Harus Takut*" (*To Whom Should I Fear*), a contemporary Indonesian Christian hymn, several articulation issues emerged. These articulation deficiencies significantly compromised the intelligibility of the lyrics and diminished the song's emotional and spiritual impact.

The problems became particularly evident in sections characterized by rapid tempo changes and consonant-dense text. In such passages, words often became blurred, and the collective sound of the choir lost precision and coherence. The lack of clarity resulted not only in aesthetic shortcomings but also in the failure to convey the intended theological message of faith and trust in God-central to the meaning of the hymn. As Smith and Sataloff (2006) note, articulation serves as the primary vehicle through which textual meaning is transmitted to the listener. In choral works that rely heavily on sacred or poetic texts, the role of articulation transcends technical execution; it becomes the medium of communication between performer and audience. When diction and pronunciation falter, the performance loses its interpretative depth and becomes an exercise in sound production rather than an act of expressive communication. Preliminary observations during the choir's initial rehearsals of "*Kepada Siapa Aku Harus Takut*" identified several recurring articulation problems. First, there was a noticeable inconsistency in vowel formation across different sections. The sopranos tended to produce bright and spread vowel sounds, while the altos favored darker, more covered tones. This disparity disrupted the timbral balance of the ensemble and prevented the choir from achieving a cohesive vocal blend. Such inconsistency is a common challenge in school choirs, where singers of varying vocal maturity and training attempt to unify sound without a standardized approach to vowel modification. Second, consonant articulation was often indistinct or exaggerated. In phrases containing complex consonant clusters such as "str," "spr," and "kl," the singers either blurred the consonants together or overemphasized them, disrupting rhythmic flow. Effective consonant articulation requires both precision and subtlety-qualities that must be cultivated through deliberate training. In the case of SMK Negeri 1 Pagaran, these shortcomings were linked to limited understanding of phonetic articulation and insufficient rehearsal time devoted to diction exercises. Third, the singers' breathing technique contributed to the overall problem. Many members relied on shallow, clavicular breathing rather than diaphragmatic control, resulting in unstable airflow and premature exhaustion. As a result, singers frequently interrupted phrases to take additional breaths, fragmenting the lyrical flow and reducing textual intelligibility. Proper breath support is essential not only for sustaining long musical phrases but also for maintaining vocal resonance and stability in articulation (McKinney, 1994). These issues were especially pronounced in the climactic sections of the hymn, where the combination of fortissimo dynamics, faster tempo, and dense text placed significant technical demands on the singers. The lack of sufficient breath control and articulatory precision led to a muddy overall sound and compromised diction at

precisely the moments when clarity was most essential for delivering the song's message of divine confidence and faith.

The findings of this research contribute to the growing discourse on choral pedagogy, particularly in non-professional educational settings in Southeast Asia. In such contexts, Western vocal techniques intersect with local linguistic and musical traditions, creating unique pedagogical challenges. The success of the SMK Negeri 1 Pagaran program underscores the potential for structured, context-sensitive articulation training to elevate the performance quality of student choirs. This study reaffirms that attention to basic vocal technique—especially breathing, vowel formation, and diction—forms the foundation of all advanced choral artistry. By prioritizing articulation as both a technical and expressive skill, choral educators can nurture singers who not only produce beautiful sound but also convey meaning with clarity and conviction. Ultimately, the research illustrates that disciplined vocal pedagogy, even in resource-limited educational environments, can transform a school choir into a more unified, expressive, and communicative musical ensemble.

## METHODS

This study aims to develop articulation techniques in the song "*Kepada Siapa Aku Harus Takut*" performed by the choir of SMK Negeri 1 Pagaran. The primary issue identified in this research was the lack of clarity in lyric pronunciation, particularly in sections with fast tempos and dense consonant clusters, which hindered the effective communication of the song's message. A qualitative approach was employed, using observation, interviews, and documentation conducted over five rehearsal sessions. The development program focused on diaphragmatic breathing, vowel formation, variations in articulation techniques such as *legato*, *non-legato*, *détaché*, and *tenuto*, and the integration of articulation with dynamics and expressive interpretation. The findings revealed significant improvement in the choir members' articulation skills, demonstrated by clearer pronunciation of vowels and consonants, more stable breathing, and greater uniformity of tone among members. Although challenges persisted in faster tempo sections, the articulation training effectively enhanced the overall quality of the choir's performance. This study underscores the importance of structured articulation exercises as a fundamental component of vocal training in school choirs.

In the Indonesian linguistic context, articulation presents unique challenges and opportunities. Indonesian's relatively straightforward phonetic system and syllabic regularity facilitate uniform pronunciation (Sneddon, 2003). However, specific phonemes—such as the trilled "r" and variations of the vowel "e"—require careful management to maintain both clarity and blend. While most choral pedagogy in Indonesia draws from Western traditions, adaptation to Indonesian phonology remains essential to ensure linguistic and musical authenticity. This research adopted a qualitative case study design, allowing for in-depth analysis of the articulation development process within the bounded context of the SMK Negeri 1 Pagaran choir. The study involved 32 choir members aged 15 to 18, divided into four voice sections (soprano, alto, tenor, and bass), all native speakers of Indonesian. Over five rehearsal sessions, data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, including audio recordings of pre- and post-training performances. The intervention emphasized diaphragmatic breathing,

vowel consistency, and application of various articulation techniques. Each session built upon the previous one, progressing from foundational breathing and vowel work to the integration of articulation with expressive interpretation. Data analysis followed a constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), identifying emerging themes related to technical improvement, coordination, and expressive performance. The results demonstrated measurable enhancement in pronunciation clarity, breath control, and tonal uniformity. The singers exhibited more consistent vowels, precise consonant articulation, and improved endurance. Although some difficulty remained in maintaining clarity at high speeds, the overall performance reflected significant progress. This study confirms that systematic, structured articulation training can substantially elevate the performance quality of school choirs. Beyond its immediate pedagogical impact, it highlights the need for contextualized choral education that bridges global vocal techniques with local linguistic realities. By cultivating awareness of breathing, vowel formation, and diction, educators can foster ensembles capable of not only singing beautifully but also communicating meaning with precision and depth.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the Session 1 recording and initial observations revealed several consistent articulation deficiencies across the choir. Vowel production showed significant variation both within and across voice sections. Sopranos tended to produce bright, forward vowels with excessive nasality on high pitches, while altos and tenors demonstrated darker, more covered vowel colors that occasionally approached a hooted quality. This timbral inconsistency was particularly evident on sustained unison passages, where what should have been a blended sound instead revealed clear stratification between voice sections. Consonant articulation presented multiple challenges. Plosive consonants (p, t, k, b, d, g) were often either barely audible or over-emphasized to the point of creating rhythmic distortion. Fricative consonants (f, s, h) showed inconsistent duration, with some singers elongating these sounds while others reduced them to the point of inaudibility. The phrase "kepada siapa" proved especially problematic, as the consonant cluster "pd" in "kepada" was either elided into a single sound or separated by an unintended vowel insertion, and the final "a" vowels showed marked variation in color and duration. Breathing patterns revealed widespread use of clavicular breathing, characterized by visible shoulder elevation and chest expansion with minimal engagement of the lower ribcage or abdominal region. This shallow breathing forced singers to take frequent breaths, often at musically inappropriate moments, fragmenting phrases and disrupting textual continuity. Several singers demonstrated audible inhalation, creating unwanted percussive sounds between phrases. The inadequate breath support also contributed to pitch instability, particularly at phrase endings where diminishing air pressure caused pitches to flatten.

### ***Development of Breathing Technique***

The breathing exercises introduced in Session 1 and reinforced throughout the study period produced observable improvements in respiratory support. By Session 3, approximately 75% of choir members demonstrated visible lower rib expansion during inhalation, with significantly reduced shoulder elevation. The sustained exhalation

exercises (gradually extending from 15 to 30 seconds over the study period) developed singers' awareness of breath management and their ability to control airflow release. Interview data confirmed these observational findings. One soprano participant (S1) reported: "At first, breathing felt very unnatural-I was used to breathing in my chest. But after practicing the rib expansion every day, I started to feel more air and my voice felt more stable." A tenor (T2) noted: "The biggest difference was being able to sing longer phrases without running out of air. Before, I would get to the end of a phrase and feel desperate for breath, but now I can plan where to breathe." Some participants continued to struggle with maintaining diaphragmatic breathing under performance conditions. When challenged by faster tempos or higher dynamics, several singers reverted to habitual shallow breathing patterns. This regression was particularly evident in the choir's allegro sections, suggesting that breathing technique must be over-learned to the point of automaticity before it can be reliably maintained under cognitive and physical stress.

### ***Vowel Unification Progress***

The vowel formation exercises yielded substantial improvements in timbral consistency. By Session 4, the choir achieved notably greater vowel uniformity on sustained passages, with reduced discrepancy between voice sections. The concept of vowel modification-particularly the tendency to open vowels slightly as pitch ascends and dynamics increase-was successfully integrated by approximately 60% of participants, as evidenced by more balanced tone production on climactic high notes. The application of "purest vowel" concepts to Indonesian language proved particularly effective. The Indonesian language's relatively pure vowel sounds align well with classical singing technique, and participants quickly grasped how to produce consistent vowel colors on common Indonesian phonemes. The distinction between open "e" (as in "enak") and closed "e" (as in "emosi"), which had initially created vowel confusion, was successfully standardized through specific exercises isolating these sounds. Some vowel inconsistencies persisted. The vowel "i" remained problematic for several altos and basses, who tended toward a spread, overly bright production that disrupted blend. Additionally, diphthongs (vowel combinations within single syllables) continued to present challenges, with singers frequently giving equal stress to both vowel components rather than sustaining the primary vowel and rapidly transitioning to the secondary vowel just before the next consonant.

### ***Consonant Articulation Enhancement***

Consonant precision showed marked improvement across the study period. The exercises isolating challenging consonant clusters proved particularly effective, with the phrase "Kepada Siapa" demonstrating notably clearer articulation by Session 5. The establishment of consistent timing conventions for final consonants eliminated much of the temporal smearing that had characterized the initial performance, creating crisper phrase endings with greater rhythmic definition. The distinction between voiced and unvoiced consonants became more consistently observed. Initially, many singers had produced the voiceless "k" in "kepada" with a harsh, explosive quality, while others had under-articulated it to the point of inaudibility. By the study's conclusion, the choir achieved greater consistency in plosive articulation, with consonants articulated clearly but without excessive force that would disrupt vocal line. Fricative consonants also

showed improvement, though challenges remained. The consonant "s" in "siapa" was produced with more uniform duration and placement, reducing the previously evident sibilance variation across sections. However, the consonant "h," particularly in the phrase "harus," remained inconsistent, with some singers producing an audible, aspirated sound while others barely articulated it. This inconsistency reflects the phonetic complexity of "h" in Indonesian, which varies somewhat depending on regional accent and speaking style.

### ***Application of Articulation Techniques***

The introduction of varied articulation techniques (*legato*, *non-legato*, *détaché*, *tenuto*) expanded the choir's expressive palette and improved their understanding of how articulation shapes musical character. The *legato* sections of "Kepada Siapa Aku Harus Takut," particularly the opening phrase, demonstrated improved smoothness and phrase continuity by Session 5. Consonants were articulated with sufficient clarity for textual intelligibility while maintaining seamless vocal line, a balance that had eluded the choir in initial sessions. *Non-legato* articulation proved most successful in moderato tempo sections, where slight note separation enhanced textual clarity without sacrificing melodic flow. The choir developed facility in producing gentle, breath-supported separation between syllables, avoiding both the excessive connection that obscured text and the excessive separation that fragmented musical line. *Détaché* articulation presented greater challenges, particularly in faster passages where the combination of crisp consonant attacks and rhythmic precision exceeded some singers' technical capacity. While approximately 70% of choir members successfully executed *détaché* articulation in moderato sections, performance deteriorated noticeably when tempo increased. This suggests that *détaché* technique requires more extensive practice to develop the rapid coordination between breath impulse and articulatory gesture necessary for fast passages. *Tenuto* articulation was effectively applied to climactic sections, where the deliberate, weighted quality of this technique enhanced the emotional intensity of the text. Singers demonstrated understanding of how slight stress on each note, combined with full note value and sustained vowel, could create gravitas appropriate to the song's spiritual content.

### ***Integration with Dynamics and Expression***

One of the study's most significant achievements was the integration of improved articulation with dynamic variation and expressive interpretation. Initially, many choir members demonstrated a persistent challenge in choral singing: the tendency for articulation clarity to deteriorate as dynamics increase. At forte and fortissimo levels, vowels became distorted, consonants overly forceful, and timbral consistency compromised as singers unconsciously tightened throat muscles and altered vocal production.

The training program explicitly addressed this challenge through exercises that practiced articulation at various dynamic levels. By Session 4, the choir showed improved ability to maintain vowel purity and consonant precision even at fortissimo dynamic, though some deterioration remained at the most intense climactic moments. One alto participant (A2) reflected: "Before, when we sang loud, everything just became shouting. Now I understand that loud doesn't mean tense—you can be loud but still keep the same vowel

shape and clear words." The choir also developed more sophisticated understanding of how articulation choices contribute to expressive interpretation. In the song's contrasting sections—from the questioning, vulnerable opening to the triumphant, declarative conclusion—different articulation approaches were employed to enhance emotional trajectory. The opening phrase utilized legato articulation with gentle consonants to create intimacy and introspection, while the climactic section employed more assertive consonant articulation and tenuto technique to convey confidence and spiritual certainty.

### **Persistent Challenges**

Despite substantial overall improvement, several articulation challenges remained incompletely resolved by the study's conclusion. Fast tempo passages continued to present difficulties for approximately 40% of choir members, who struggled to coordinate rapid text delivery with maintained vowel quality and precise consonant timing. The allegro section containing the phrase "kepada siapa aku harus takut" at increased tempo showed notably less textual clarity than the same material at moderate tempo, suggesting that technical facility at faster speeds requires more extensive training than the five-session period provided. Some individual singers continued to exhibit articulation issues despite group improvement. Three participants demonstrated persistent shallow breathing that limited their phrase length and vocal stability. Two soprano singers maintained excessive nasality on upper register pitches despite individualized correction, indicating possible need for private vocal instruction to address these specific technical issues. The challenge of maintaining articulation quality under performance stress conditions remained uncertain. While rehearsal conditions showed clear improvement, the actual performance context—with its attendant anxiety, adrenaline, and heightened emotional engagement—often produces technical regression. The study's rehearsal-based methodology could not definitively assess whether articulation improvements would persist in actual performance situations.

The results of this study confirm that systematic articulation training can produce measurable improvements in choral sound quality even within a relatively brief intervention period. The observed enhancements in vowel consistency, consonant precision, breathing stability, and timbral uniformity demonstrate that articulation technique is indeed trainable through structured pedagogical approaches. These findings align with broader literature on vocal pedagogy that emphasizes the importance of conscious technical work in developing singing skill (Miller, 2004; Chapman, 2006). The particular effectiveness of breathing exercises merits emphasis. The marked improvement in diaphragmatic breathing and its cascading positive effects on phrase sustainability, pitch stability, and articulation clarity underscore the foundational role of proper breathing technique. This finding supports the pedagogical principle, articulated by numerous vocal pedagogues, that breath is the "fuel" of singing, and that articulation problems frequently trace back to inadequate respiratory support (McKinney, 2005). Choral directors working with student ensembles should therefore prioritize breathing training as the necessary foundation upon which other articulation skills can be developed. The study also reveals the hierarchical nature of articulation challenges, with different techniques requiring different levels of skill and practice for mastery. *Legato* articulation proved most readily achievable, likely because it demands primarily vowel consistency—a single technical element. *Non-legato* and *tenuto* techniques, requiring

coordination of vowel quality with controlled note separation or stress, demonstrated intermediate difficulty. *Détaché* articulation, demanding rapid consonant precision coordinated with breath impulse and rhythmic accuracy, proved most challenging. This hierarchy suggests a developmentally appropriate sequence for introducing articulation techniques, beginning with legato and progressively advancing to more complex coordination demands. Several factors complicated the articulation development process and merit consideration for future interventions. First, the heterogeneity of skill levels within the choir created pedagogical challenges. Singers with prior musical training generally progressed more rapidly through articulation exercises than those without such background, creating widening disparities that occasionally frustrated both more and less advanced participants. Differentiated instruction approaches, including sectional rehearsals focused on specific technical needs, might better accommodate this diversity. Second, the limited rehearsal time available in a school context constrained the depth and duration of articulation training. Dedicating 20-25 minutes of each 90-minute rehearsal to technical exercises represented a significant time investment that necessarily reduced time available for musical repertoire preparation. Some choir members expressed frustration with this trade-off, preferring to spend more time singing music rather than practicing exercises. However, the director noted that the technical work ultimately enhanced musical results and improved overall rehearsal efficiency by reducing time spent on constant correction of recurring articulation problems. Third, the transfer of articulation skills from isolated exercises to integrated musical performance proved less automatic than anticipated. Singers often executed vowel unification exercises successfully but reverted to inconsistent vowels when singing actual repertoire. This observation aligns with motor learning research indicating that skills practiced in simplified conditions may not spontaneously transfer to more complex performance contexts without explicit practice of that transfer (Schmidt & Lee, 2011). Future training programs should incorporate more intermediate steps that bridge isolated technical exercises and full musical performance. The Indonesian language context of this study presents both advantages and challenges for articulation development. Indonesian's relatively consistent phonetic spelling eliminates the pronunciation ambiguity common in languages like English, where spelling provides limited guidance for vocal production. Additionally, Indonesian's simple syllable structure, typically consisting of consonant-vowel combinations with fewer consonant clusters than languages like English or German, generally facilitates clearer articulation.

However, specific features of Indonesian phonology require particular pedagogical attention. The Indonesian "r," typically produced as an alveolar trill, can create timbral disruption if over-emphasized, yet insufficient articulation renders it indistinct from other consonants. The choir developed a convention of producing a brief, single-contact trill that provided clarity without excessive rolling. Additionally, the variation in "e" vowel pronunciation—open versus closed—required explicit standardization to prevent vowel inconsistency across sections. These findings suggest that articulation pedagogy must account for language-specific phonological features rather than simply applying generic Western European vocal techniques. Choral directors working with non-Western-language repertoire should analyze the specific phonemic characteristics of their performance language and adapt articulation training accordingly.

This study's results have practical implications for secondary school choral programs, particularly those working with singers who lack extensive formal vocal training. The demonstrated effectiveness of structured articulation training suggests that school choral directors should incorporate systematic technical work into regular rehearsal schedules rather than focusing exclusively on repertoire preparation. While students may initially resist technical exercises as less immediately gratifying than singing music, the observable improvement in performance quality can build appreciation for fundamental skill development. The study also highlights the value of multi-session training sequences that progressively develop technical skills. Single-session workshops or sporadic attention to articulation problems proved insufficient; meaningful improvement required consistent work across multiple rehearsals that allowed new techniques to be introduced, practiced, applied to repertoire, and refined. School choral directors should therefore plan long-term technical development sequences rather than expecting rapid transformation through brief interventions. Furthermore, the importance of explicit instruction and conceptual understanding emerged clearly from participant interviews. Singers who grasped the anatomical and acoustic principles underlying articulation techniques showed greater motivation and more rapid skill development than those who simply imitated demonstrated sounds without understanding their technical basis. This finding supports pedagogical approaches that combine demonstration with explanation, helping students develop intellectual understanding that enables independent problem-solving and self-correction.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research conducted on the development of articulation techniques in choral singing through the rehearsal of "*Kepada Siapa Aku Harus Takut*" by Bonar Gultom at SMK Negeri 1 Pagaran, it can be concluded that this study has provided significant learning experiences and benefits both for the students and for the researcher. The development of articulation techniques in singing is not merely about improving technical aspects—such as how to pronounce words clearly or how to position consonants and vowels correctly—but is also closely related to character formation, discipline, and the cultivation of students' musical sensitivity. Regular articulation exercises foster students' awareness that singing is not only about producing beautiful sounds but also about conveying the message and meaning contained in the song. Through clear articulation, listeners are better able to understand the song's content, allowing the message of faith and conviction expressed in "*Kepada Siapa Aku Harus Takut*" to be communicated more profoundly. Another important conclusion is that the teaching of vocal techniques—particularly articulation—is highly relevant for choral activities in schools. Choirs serve not only as a platform for artistic expression and musical talent but also as a medium for nurturing togetherness, cooperation, and a sense of responsibility. Through articulation training, students learn to unify their voices, balance dynamics, and listen attentively to one another. This makes the choir a holistic educational medium, as it develops not only artistic skills but also positive social attitudes. This study demonstrates that every rehearsal, no matter how simple, contributes meaningfully to improving students' singing quality. Vocal warm-ups, breathing exercises, vowel and consonant pronunciation drills, and the application of articulation techniques in song practice form an interrelated series

of activities that reinforce one another. With consistent practice, students become increasingly adept at controlling their voices, maintaining clarity of diction, and adjusting their vocal delivery according to musical demands. This finding emphasizes that the development of vocal skills cannot be achieved instantaneously; it requires a patient, repetitive, and structured process.

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