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# Proceedings of the Twenty-Fourth International Seminar on Research in Music Education

**Thessaloniki, Greece  
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# How Do Young People Sing in Everyday Life and at School?

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### Abstract

The present study aims to provide theoretically grounded accounts of the relationship between young people's singing activities in everyday life and at school. *The* questionnaire was designed to gather information about the style and attitude of singing by questioning where they sing, who they sing with, what they sing, why they sing and how they sing. A total of 185 university students from Portugal and Japan volunteered for the study. The participants were asked to answer their singing behavior/attitude at the time when participants were in secondary school (Portugal: 12 to 15; Japan: 10 to 15 years-old). The questionnaire was organized in three parts. The content of Part 1 and 2 was the same. However, the questions of Part 1 were asking participants' singing behavior/attitude which occurred in everyday life (outside school) and the questions of Part 2 were asking participants' singing behavior/attitude which occurred during their secondary school life (in school). The questions of Part 3 are general questions, in which participants' positive and negative singing episodes were asked. In the present study, positive attitudes towards singing were observed both in everyday life and at school. It has become evident that many participants in both countries actively engaged in singing in and out of school. However, it has to be noted that singing activities were not always enjoyable for young people. Many young people were sensitive about showing their singing performance in public, which may lead to the negative experiences as well as positive experiences for singing.

### Keywords

singing activities, everyday life, school, karaoke, music education

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In modern society, music forms an essential part of young people's lives (Behne, 1997; Fitzgerald, Joseph, Hayes and O'Reagan, 1995; Garton and Pratt, 1991; Larson, 1995; Larson, Kubey and Colletti, 1989; Zillman and Gan, 1997). A growing body of studies has revealed that young people are deeply involved in musical activities, and that pop music listened to in daily life plays a central role in their lifestyle (Boal-Palheiros & Hargreaves, 2001; North, Hargreaves, and O'Neill, 2000; Tarrant, North, and Hargreaves, 2000).

As has been pointed out in many studies, the enrichment of everyday life through musical activity is underpinned by the rapid technological developments in listening equipment, such as CDs and iPods. The spread of portable and low-priced musical devices enables young people to listen to music everywhere. Studies that have investigated listening experiences in daily life have shown that people spend much of their time listening to music in various places and forms (North, Hargreaves and Hargreaves, 2004; Sloboda, O'Neil and Ivaldi, 2001). It can be said that music has become a ubiquitous presence in their lives.

Although the characteristics of daily musical activities have been investigated through people's listening experience, there have been few attempts to specify the characteristics of singing behavior in everyday life. It has been recognized that, in modern society, involvement in musical performance was not popular as compared with listening to music. In Japan, Masuda and Taniguchi (2005) have explained the

dominance of listening in daily musical life as a result of the fact that, in contemporary society, the balance of listening and performing has changed due to the development of recording technology, so that digitally recorded music produces vast numbers of copies, and enables people to listen to music everywhere. Barthes (1986) also pointed out that engagement in musical performance has declined in contemporary European society, in spite of a culture in the 19th century in which amateurs enjoyed performing music.

In these twenty years, however, the participation in musical performance has become popular among the majority of young people thanks to the popularity of karaoke. The enrichment of current technological development has large influence not only on listening devices but also on karaoke machines. For example, as a result of the popularization of i-mode (a mobile phone Internet access system), karaoke can be enjoyed with various kinds of mobile systems and has become portable and ubiquitous. This opens up karaoke to new users such as primary and secondary school students, who could not easily go to karaoke-boxes and bars.

The contribution of such development is that the majority of people can enjoy singing everywhere all the time in their lives with luxurious accompaniments. Although there was previously a performing culture among young people such as the garage band boom and folk music boom before the emergence of karaoke, the population for such activities was still limited. One of the

most important aspects of karaoke culture is that engagement in musical performance has become popular among the majority of young people.

In Japan, a variety of demographic data shows that many young people go to karaoke. In a survey by the Statistics Bureau (2002), the participation rate is shown for each generation separately, and this indicates that the rate for the young generation was 62.4% for ages 15-19 and 70.7% for ages 20-24, in contrast to the older generation, with 41.8 % for ages 40-44. Niimi (1992) investigated the karaoke behavior of college students, which showed that almost all participants had experienced karaoke at some stage in their lives. The popularity of karaoke is not limited to Japan. Although the demographic data for karaoke participation for young generation is still limited in western countries, there have been considerable studies which reported that many people living in western countries are also absorbed in karaoke singing (Xun and Tarocco, 2007).

Empirical data shows that such popularity of karaoke has been reflected in the singing behavior of young people. Mito (2010) investigated the singing behavior in everyday life using the diary method, in which the frequency for the occurrence of singing behavior was counted. The results showed that 70% of all participants reported a singing episode at least once a week, with an average frequency of 2.5 a week.

It can be concluded that in the modern society young people are deeply involved in singing as well as listening activities on a regular basis, which means

that many young people have an opportunity to sing outside school as well as at school music lessons. The enrichment of the singing activities in everyday life might have a large influence on music education at school.

One of the most crucial problems of music education has been the lack of relationship between music activities outside school and those at school. Especially in secondary school, it has long been reported that the positive attitudes towards music at school declines (Ross, 1995). While many studies showed that interest in music in general grows at the age of adolescence, interest in school music in particular declines at secondary school. It seems that the degree of interest in music at school seems to be in inverse proportion to that of music outside school (Boal-Palheiros & Hargreaves, 2001).

Although there has been considerable research that investigated the cause of such phenomenon, few studies focused on addressing this problem through the investigation of singing activities in and out of school. As has been discussed, there is a broad range of singing experiences in everyday lives open to young people, and these can have both positive and negative effects on the way that young people approach music at school. However, it is still unclear how singing activities in these two venues have influenced each other. Given that singing forms the central part of music education in school, the characteristics of singing behavior in everyday life and at school have to be investigated.

## Method

The present study aims to provide theoretically grounded accounts of the relationship between singing activities in everyday life and at school. The questionnaire method was employed. The questionnaire was designed to gather information about young people's style and attitude of singing by questioning where they sing, who they sing with, what they sing, why they sing and how they sing. On top of these questions, general questions for singing activities were asked, which included questions about the most positive and negative singing experience of the participants' lives.

The present study was also intended to reveal singing behavior and attitudes through the investigation of singing experiences in different cultures. Although singing activities in everyday life seem to have gained popularity in a broad range of countries, the degree of participation and the style of singing may differ across countries. For example, the literatures that describes the karaoke singing style clearly shows a difference in singing style among different countries.

In Japan, singing in karaoke facilities (karaoke box, karaoke bar) is concentrated on the activities of singing itself, in contrast to western countries, where participants often enjoy karaoke as part of socializing (Mito, 2007). Karaoke singing has been distilled in pure form – karaoke for karaoke's sake – in karaoke-boxes and like venues' (Kelly, 1997, p. 242). In Japan, solo performance is one of

the most important karaoke singing styles, in contrast to other countries, where karaoke is often conducted in the form of group singing (Kelly, 1997). In the UK and the USA, karaoke is often conducted in the form of a show, and all the participants often sing a famous song together at the end of a ceremony (Kelly, 1997, 1998; Noguchi, 2005). In contrast, karaoke in Japan is not conducted in the form of a show, and group singing rarely happens.

The main purpose of the present study is not to compare the singing activities between Asian and Western countries, but rather to illustrate singing behavior through the investigation of singing behavior/attitude in different cultures. In the present study, participants from Portugal and Japan were recruited.

## Participants

A total of 185 university students from Portugal and Japan volunteered for the study. 82 non-musician students in Porto and 103 non-musician students in Tokyo participated in the research.

## Questionnaire

The questionnaire has questions about the participants' singing behavior and attitude (Table 1). The participants' were asked to answer questions about their singing behavior/attitude at the time when they were in secondary school (Portugal: 12 to 15; Japan: 10 to 15 years-old). The questionnaire was organized in three parts. The content of Part 1 and 2 is the same. However, the questions of Part 1 were asking participants'

singing behavior/attitude which occurred in everyday life (outside school) and the questions of Part 2 were asking participants' singing behavior/attitude which occurred

during their secondary school life (in school). The questions of Part 3 are general questions, asking about participants' positive and negative singing episodes.

**Table 1.** Questionnaire

<b>Questions for Part 1 and 2</b>	
1	How often did you sing?
2	Where did you usually sing?
3	How did you sing? (e.g. with CD, with instruments, with Karaoke, no accompaniments)
4	How much did you like singing? Please indicate your response on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much)
5	Why did you sing?
6	What kind of music did you sing?
7	With whom did you sing?
8a	Did you prefer to sing on your own or with somebody?
8b	Why did you think so?
9	When you sing what did you feel?
10a	Did you practice a song (e.g. for memorizing the new songs, prepare for karaoke singing, etc.)
10b	If yes, for what purpose did you practice a song?
11a	Did you think you were a good singer?
11b	What kind of person did you think is a good singer?
<b>Questions for Part 3 (general questions)</b>	
1a	What was the most positive singing experience in your life?
1b	How and why it was positive?
2a	What was the most negative singing experience in your life?
2b	How and why it was negative?

## Results

The participants' answers for each question were divided into 2 to 7 categories, except for the question 4 in which the participants were asked to express their preference for singing on a 5 point scale, ranging from not at all [1] to very much [5]. The categorisation system was devised by the researchers on the basis of the responses of all the participants. Table 2 shows the

percentage of each category, which was calculated by dividing the number of responses for each category by the total number of participants. Since some participants gave plural answers for one question, one participant's answer for one question was sometimes categorized into several categories. Therefore the percentage of each category does not always add up to 100%.

**Table 2.** Percentage of Responses to Each Category

Part 1 and 2			Category						
Q1	P	OS	everyday	several times a week	several times a month	several times a year	rarely/not at all	others/did not answer	
		IS	50.0%	18.3%	13.4%	3.7%	12.2%	2.4%	
	J	OS	15.9%	29.3%	9.8%	8.5%	25.6%	11.0%	
		IS	37.9%	26.2%	13.6%	4.9%	15.5%	1.9%	
		IS	19.4%	71.8%	2.9%	0.0%	2.9%	0.0%	
Q2	P	OS	Karaoke	at home	outside	music room	class room	other place in the school	others/did not answer
		IS	4.9%	75.6%	30.5%	7.3%	14.6%	0.0%	28.0%
	J	OS	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	39.0%	18.3%	29.3%	34.1%
		IS	59.2%	62.1%	13.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
		IS	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	90.3%	19.4%	16.5%	0.0%
Q3	P	OS	with karaoke	with CD, iPod, TV	with instrument	no accompaniment	others/did not answer		
		IS	20.7%	61.0%	18.3%	51.2%	18.3%		
	J	OS	4.9%	35.4%	40.2%	40.2%	24.4%		
		IS	57.3%	47.6%	7.8%	24.3%	2.9%		
		IS	1.9%	42.7%	76.7%	14.6%	4.9%		
Q4	P	OS	1	2	3	4	5	others/did not answer	
		IS	6.1%	1.2%	20.7%	31.7%	32.9%	7.3%	
	J	OS	12.2%	2.4%	23.2%	18.3%	26.8%	17.1%	
		IS	4.9%	11.7%	21.4%	20.4%	41.7%	0.0%	
		IS	4.9%	10.7%	30.1%	23.3%	31.1%	0.0%	
Q5	P	OS	enjoyable	relieved stress	like music /singing	obligation	social relations	no reason	others/did not answer
		IS	31.7%	25.6%	35.4%	7.3%	3.7%	9.8%	14.6%
	J	OS	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	47.6%	6.1%	0.0%	48.8%
		IS	19.4%	17.5%	13.6%	0.0%	1.9%	25.2%	15.5%
		IS	9.7%	0.0%	6.8%	72.8%	0.0%	1.0%	5.8%
Q6	P	OS	J- pop or P-pop	rock	foreign pop	classic	school text books	choir	others/did not answer
		IS	36.6%	18.3%	37.8%	1.2%	4.9%	1.2%	73.2%
	J	OS	19.5%	2.4%	19.5%	2.4%	20.7%	0.0%	67.1%
		IS	89.3%	11.7%	9.7%	2.9%	0.0%	9.7%	8.7%
		IS	21.4%	1.9%	1.9%	2.9%	19.4%	52.4%	7.8%
Q7	P	OS	alone	with somebody	both	others/did not answer			
		IS	41.5%	20.7%	18.3%	41.5%			
	J	OS	6.1%	84.1%	0.0%	31.7%			
		IS	29.1%	42.7%	26.2%	0.0%			
		IS	1.0%	96.1%	1.9%	0.0%			

Q8a	P	OS	alone	with somebody	both	others/did not answer			
		IS	31.7%	42.7%	15.9%	9.8%			
	J	OS	7.3%	59.8%	8.5%	24.4%			
		IS	39.8%	42.7%	26.2%	0.0%			
		IS	4.9%	88.3%	1.9%	0.0%			
Q8b (participants who answered „alone“)	P	OS	enjoyable	sing as I like	not confident	concentrate	listen to my own voice	comfortable	others/did not answer
		IS	2.4%	7.3%	14.6%	2.4%	1.2%	8.5%	2.4%
	J	OS	0.0%	1.2%	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	2.4%
		IS	1.9%	16.5%	8.7%	1.9%	1.9%	1.9%	9.7%
		IS	0.0%	4.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Q8b (participants who answered „with somebody“)	P	OS	enjoyable	excite	not confident	sing harmony	don't want to sing alone	others/did not answer	
		IS	18.3%	6.1%	15.9%	2.4%	1.2%	1.2%	
	J	OS	18.3%	2.4%	26.8%	1.2%	4.9%	7.3%	
		IS	12.6%	4.9%	7.8%	10.7%	2.9%	3.9%	
		IS	14.6%	0.0%	25.2%	28.2%	10.7%	12.6%	
Q8b (participants who answered „both“)	P	OS	enjoyable	excite	not confident	sing harmony	others/did not answer		
		IS	3.7%	1.2%	0.0%	1.2%	12.2%		
	J	OS	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	8.5%		
		IS	5.8%	1.0%	0.0%	1.0%	8.7%		
		IS	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	2.9%		
Q9	P	OS	enjoyable	relieved stress	emotion	pleasant	uncomfortable	no feeling	others/did not answer
		IS	17.1%	11.0%	12.2%	39.0%	1.2%	6.1%	30.5%
	J	OS	11.0%	9.8%	8.5%	34.1%	6.1%	4.9%	34.1%
		IS	47.6%	5.8%	7.8%	21.4%	3.9%	7.8%	5.8%
		IS	41.7%	0.0%	2.9%	18.4%	11.7%	5.8%	17.5%
Q10a	P	OS	yes	no	others/did not answer				
		IS	41.5%	52.4%	6.1%				
	J	OS	43.9%	35.4%	20.7%				
		IS	56.3%	42.7%	0.0%				
		IS	74.8%	23.3%	0.0%				
Q10b	P	OS	karaoke party	school choir competition	memorize new songs	master the songs	enjoy further	improve singing skill	others/did not answer
		IS	0.0%	0.0%	19.5%	9.8%	4.9%	0.0%	11.0%
	J	OS	0.0%	0.0%	14.6%	18.3%	2.4%	0.0%	14.6%
		IS	23.3%	2.9%	19.4%	4.9%	2.9%	9.7%	6.8%
		IS	0.0%	57.3%	2.9%	0.0%	0.0%	5.8%	9.7%
Q11a	P	OS	yes	no	normal	others/did not answer			
		IS	13.4%	64.6%	18.3%	3.7%			
	J	OS	12.2%	53.7%	11.0%	23.2%			
		IS	11.7%	67.0%	21.4%	0.0%			
		IS	11.7%	65.0%	21.4%	0.0%			
Q11b	P	OS	singing skill	good voice	musical expression	karaoke	emotion	attractive	others/did not answer
		IS	58.5%	23.2%	3.7%	2.4%	22.0%	9.8%	19.5%
	J	OS	48.8%	17.1%	1.2%	0.0%	8.5%	2.4%	40.2%
		IS	67.0%	22.3%	16.5%	1.0%	2.9%	7.8%	15.5%
		IS	60.2%	27.2%	13.6%	0.0%	1.9%	4.9%	19.4%

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Part 3								
Q1a		choral competition	ceremony at school	sing with friends	karaoke	garage band	did not have	others/did not answer
	P	0.0%	4.9%	12.2%	12.2%	0.0%	25.6%	50.0%
	J	61.2%	11.7%	1.0%	8.7%	6.8%	7.8%	4.9%
Q1b		enjoyable	good relationship	won the price	lyrics, music	could sing in public	could sing well	others/did not answer
	P	31.7%	19.5%	0.0%	1.2%	1.2%	6.1%	53.7%
	J	2.9%	39.8%	22.3%	2.9%	4.9%	13.6%	13.6%
Q2a		choral competition	ceremony at school	singing examination	karaoke	music lesson	did not have	others/did not answer
	P	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	1.2%	3.7%	50.0%	43.9%
	J	19.4%	5.8%	18.4%	10.7%	4.9%	35.0%	1.9%
Q2b		bad relationship	humiliated	forced to sing alone	could not sing well	don't want to sing in public	lyrics, music	others/did not answer
	P	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.1%	0.0%	0.0%	93.9%
	J	16.5%	13.6%	14.6%	16.5%	11.7%	2.9%	3.9%

P: Portugal J: Japan OS: outside school IS: inside school  
P-pop: Portuguese pop song J-pop: Japanese pop song

The results were divided into five categories: degree of preference and participation, reasons for singing, skill development, confidence, and others.

The degree of participation in singing activities was high in everyday life. Both in Portugal and Japan, more than 70% of the participants reported that they sang songs more than once a month, and 50% of the Portuguese participants sang every day. These results were consistent with the results of the preference for singing, in which more than 60% of the Portuguese and Japanese participants indicated positive attitude towards singing, with 41.7% of the Japanese participants answered 'very much'. In school, the degree of participation was also high, where more than 90% of the Japanese participants sang songs several times a week. Their attitude towards singing at school was not negative. Although preference for singing at school was slightly lower than those outside schools, more than 40% of the participants in both countries showed positive attitudes towards singing in school.

The reasons for singing outside school were similar between the two countries. Many participants gave reasons

such as 'enjoyable', 'relieve stress', and 'like music/singing'. However, in Japan, some participants did not indicate particular reasons for singing, saying 'no reason, just want to sing'.

In Japan, the participants' singing activities outside school were closely connected to karaoke singing. About 60% of the participants reported that they sang songs at karaoke facilities, and most of the participants (90%) sang J-pop (Japanese pop) songs, which are the most popular songs for karaoke. In contrast, the participation in karaoke of the Portuguese participants was lower than that of the Japanese participants. Only 4.9% of the participants reported that they went to karaoke for singing. As for the reasons for singing at school, many participants reported that they sang the songs because it was their obligation (Portugal: 47.6, Japan: 72.8). Given that most of the singing activities in school were conducted as music classes, this result seemed to be reasonable.

It became clear that many participants had clear intentions to develop their singing skills. Interestingly, many participants in both countries answered that

they practiced singing not only at school but also outside school. Especially in Japan, more than half of the participants (56.3%) reported that they practiced singing in everyday life, and their reasons for practicing singing seem to be closely connected to karaoke singing, such as prepare for karaoke party', remember new songs', master new songs' and improve singing skill'.

Although the participants in both countries positively engaged in singing activities, many participants were not confident about their singing ability. Both in everyday life and at school, more than half of the participants did not think they were a good singer. Furthermore, it became clear that, both in Japan and Portugal, the reasons for singing alone' or with somebody' were often based on their confidence of singing ability. For example, many participants gave the reason for singing alone such as I want to sing alone and don't want my singing listened to by somebody else. I am not confident about my singing'. Interestingly, the reasons for singing with somebody also related to confidence about singing. Many participants answered that I want to sing with somebody because I am not confident singing alone'. The lack of the confidence was also reflected in the answers for negative singing experiences. 18.4% of the Japanese participants gave singing examination' as the most negative singing experience, in which they reported that they were humiliated because of insufficient singing ability.

In the general questions (Part 3), the most positive and negative singing experiences were asked. Surprisingly, in Japan, positive experiences were concentrated on choral competition. 61% of the participants considered that their most positive singing experience was a choral competition', which is the most important school ceremony in Japan.

## Discussion

Although the style of singing, the purpose of singing and the genre of songs were different between in and out of school, the degree of participation in singing activities and the preference for singing were high both in and out of school. Furthermore, it has become evident that, even in everyday life, singing was conducted not only for recreational purposes but also for productive purposes. In everyday life, although singing seems to be conducted as a leisure activity, there were many comments that the participants in both countries practice singing for widening their singing repertoires and improve their singing skill.

Another interesting finding of the present study is that the participants are sensitive about their performance level, both in everyday life and at school. For example, many participants gave lack of confidence as the reason for singing alone' or singing with somebody'. Some participants preferred to sing alone because they did not want to perform in public, since (they thought) they did not sing adequately. Others preferred to sing with others because they want to rely on someone to make up for their insufficient skill. Lack of confidence was also reflected in the Japanese participants' reports of negative singing experience, where participants reported feeling humiliated when they were forced to sing alone in public.

In the present study, positive attitudes towards singing were observed both in everyday life and at school. It has become evident that many participants actively engage in singing, and that, especially in Japan, karaoke has a large influence on the young people's singing activities, even for students as young as secondary school age. However, it has to be noted that singing activities were not always enjoyable activities for young people. Many young people were sensitive about singing in public, which may

lead to negative outcomes instead of positive ones.

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