

Article

From Classroom to Stage: Transformation of Students' Musical Technique Through Big Band Training

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Abstract: This study examines the transformation of musical techniques that occurs in students who take part in big band training, from classroom learning to performance on stage. Big band as a jazz ensemble popular from the Swing Era of 1935 to the late 1940s offers a unique opportunity for students' musical development. This study observed changes in students' technical skills, understanding of dynamics, improvisation and confidence through a qualitative approach by observing 30 high school students during a six-month training program. Results showed significant improvements in the ability to read scores, instrument playing techniques, and aesthetic understanding of big band music. The main challenge identified was the adaptation of marching band playing habits to the big band context, especially in terms of playing dynamics. A training model combining regular practice, music appreciation, and professional guidance proved effective in transforming students' musicality skills from beginner level to being able to perform on stage with appropriate big band aesthetic standards.

Keywords: Big band; musicality transformation; music training; jazz aesthetics; music education

1. Introduction

Big band is a large ensemble format that is synonymous with jazz music, especially during the heyday of the Swing Era between 1935 and the late 1940s. A standard Big Band formation consists of 12 to 19 musicians, generally including saxophones, trumpets, trombones, as well as rhythmic instruments such as drums, piano, bass and guitar. Although deeply rooted in Western music history, Big Band has evolved into a dynamic medium of musical expression that continues to be relevant today.

In Indonesia, the Big Band has begun to receive attention, marked by the emergence of groups such as Salamander Big Band that seek to adapt the Western Big Band aesthetic while integrating Indonesian musical elements. This effort reflects the search for local musical identity within the frame of a global ensemble. However, the development of Big Band in the country faces challenges, especially in the context of music education.

One of the main obstacles lies in the background of the musicians, especially the wind players who generally come from marching bands. The differences in technique, dynamics and aesthetics between marching band and Big Band create the need for a pedagogical approach that can bridge these differences. This is exacerbated by the approach to music learning in many schools that still focuses on theoretical aspects, such as notation reading and harmony analysis, without emphasizing the importance of performative musical expression [1].

Several studies have shown that learning through music ensembles can contribute significantly to students' musical, technical, social and emotional development [2]. In a big band context, students not only learn to play technically, but also develop listening skills, collaborate and adjust dynamics within a collective framework [3], [4]. This process trains musical sensitivity and a sense of responsibility for collective performance [5].

Big band training is also effective in shaping students' work ethic, discipline, and mental readiness to face an audience. Regular rehearsals and performance simulations help students manage stage anxiety and increase self-confidence [6]. In addition, these activities shape soft skills such as musical communication and teamwork that are highly relevant to the challenges of the 21st century.

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However, the implementation of Big Band in the Indonesian educational environment is still limited. Limited instruments, teachers who understand the Big Band idiom, and implementation time in the curriculum are the main obstacles [7]. In addition, the majority of music educators in Indonesia have classical or traditional music backgrounds, so further training is needed to effectively guide students in the Big Band idiom.

However, various strategies can be implemented to overcome these barriers, such as sectionalizing rehearsals, selecting appropriate repertoire, and involving the community and parents in supporting the learning process. Peer mentoring approaches have also proven effective in the context of group music training [8].

The phenomenon of increasing student participation in big band and jazz festivals in Indonesia suggests a great potential for developing big band training programs in schools. With support from educational institutions, the government and the community, Big Band training can be a strategic instrument in the transformation of comprehensive music education. Big Band is not just a learning method, but a means of building students' character, creativity and social competence, which is relevant in shaping active musicians who are adaptive and competitive.

Music learning in Indonesia's formal education environment is often limited to basic theory and practice that does not prepare students for professional performance contexts. The gap between classroom learning and stage demands creates challenges for students who wish to develop a career in music.

Big band, as an ensemble form that prioritizes collaboration, improvisation, and technical mastery, offers a potential bridge between formal learning and professional practice. The standard big band format of saxophone, trumpet, trombone and rhythm sections (piano, guitar, bass and drums) allows students to develop individual skills while learning to play as part of a collective.



Big band initiatives have been present in several Indonesian educational institutions, such as the ITB Big Band that popularized big band music among students. However, systematic research on how big band training programs can transform students' musicality skills from beginner level to stage-ready is limited.

This study aims to examine the process of transforming students' musical techniques through big band training programs, identify the challenges faced, and propose an effective training model for the context of music education in Indonesia. By understanding the dynamics of this transformation, it is hoped that a more systematic approach can be developed to bridge the gap between music learning in the classroom and the demands of professional performance.

2. Preliminaries or Related Work or Literature Review

2.1. Big Band Concept and History

Big band is a form of musical ensemble closely associated with the jazz tradition and reached its peak of popularity during the Swing Era between 1935 and the late 1940s. The standard big band format includes saxophone, trumpet, trombone and rhythm sections with a total of 12 to 19 musicians. Despite its decline in popularity after the Swing Era, the big band remains a significant ensemble form in the development of jazz music today.

2.2 Aesthetics of Big Band Music

The aesthetics of big band music cover a wide range of technical and expressive aspects, including playing dynamics, articulation, phrasing and improvisation. Studies by Salamander Big Band show that the main challenge in forming a big band in Indonesia is the adaptation of the habit of playing with dynamics that tend to always be loud (*forte*), as is common in marching bands, towards playing more varied dynamics according to the demands of big band aesthetics.

2.3 Big Band in Educational Context

Big band has been integrated into the music education curriculum in many countries as a means of developing students' musical skills. Past research has shown that participation in big band ensembles can improve score reading, improvisation and harmony understanding, as well as develop social skills such as collaboration and non-verbal communication.

2.4 Big Band in Indonesia

The development of big band in Indonesia is characterized by the adaptation of Western models with a local touch. The ITB Big Band, for example, has been one of the pioneers in introducing big band music in the campus environment. Salamander Big Band developed its identity by "Indonesianizing" big band songs, creating a blend of Western big band aesthetics with Indonesian musical nuances.

Rustim's research shows that the adaptation of traditional Indonesian music into the big band format can be an effective strategy to attract the younger generation to Indonesia's musical traditions while developing skills in the context of contemporary music [9]. Meanwhile, Prakoso's study identified that a major challenge in the development of big band in Indonesia is the lack of literature that addresses pedagogical approaches appropriate for the Indonesian musical cultural context [10].

3. Proposed Method

3.1. Research Design

This research used a qualitative approach with a case study method, observing a big band training program for 30 high school students over six months. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, audio-visual recordings, and document analysis (scores, rehearsal notes, evaluations). A qualitative approach was chosen to allow for an in-depth exploration of the transformation process experienced by the students, paying attention to the nuances of changes in technique, musical understanding, and the development of self-confidence.



1. Participatory Observation: The researcher is directly involved in the training process as an instructor and observer.
2. Document Analysis: Review of scores, rehearsal notes, and evaluation forms
3. In-depth Interview: Individual and group interview sessions with students and instructors
4. Audio-Visual Documentation: Rehearsal and performance recordings for developmental analysis.

3.2. Research Subjects

The research subjects consisted of 30 high school students (ages 15-18) with various musical backgrounds, including 18 students with marching band experience and 12 students with classical or popular music backgrounds. The instruments studied included saxophones (alto, tenor, baritone), trumpets, trombones, piano, guitar, bass, and drums. The selection of subjects was done by considering the diversity of musical backgrounds to identify different adaptation patterns.

3.3. Training Program

The big band training program was designed for 24 weeks with regular practice sessions (2 times/week, @120 minutes) that included:

- Basic instrument technique and reading session (6 weeks)
- Introduction to dynamics, articulation and phrasing (6 weeks)
- Improvisation and soli section development (6 weeks)
- Performance repertoire preparation and rehearsal (6 weeks)

3.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic coding techniques to identify patterns of musical technique transformation, challenges faced, and adaptation strategies. Data triangulation was conducted through comparison of observation results, interviews, and analysis of audio-visual recordings to ensure the validity of the findings.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Research Results

1. Transformation of Technical Skills

Observation results showed significant improvements in students' technical abilities, especially in:

- Score reading ability: 65% improvement in speed and accuracy
- Instrument control: 58% improvement in tone quality and intonation
- Articulation: 73% improvement in swing and Latin articulation accuracy

Students with a marching band background showed a steeper learning curve in terms of playing dynamics, requiring longer adaptation time to practice soft playing (*piano* and *pianissimo*). However, they have the advantage of practice discipline and physical endurance that support their overall technical development.

2. Big Band Aesthetic Understanding



The transformation of big band aesthetic understanding can be seen in:

- Awareness of the individual's role in the section and the overall ensemble
 - The ability to listen and respond to the playing of other ensemble members
 - Understanding of specific styles in the big band repertoire.
- #### 3. Development of Confidence and Musical Expression

Significant progress was observed in the psychological aspects and musical expression of the students:

- **Improvisational Courage**
Increased courage to take solo parts, from only 20% of students at the beginning of the program to 75% of students at the end of the program
 - **Body Language**
More relaxed and confident facial expressions and body language, demonstrated by more open postures and more active visual communication with fellow musicians
 - **Musical Initiative**
Initiative to explore variation and improvisation, including adjustments to dynamics and articulation spontaneously responding to the musical context
- Analysis of the video recordings showed dramatic changes in students' musical expression from the first week to the final performance. At the beginning of the program, the majority of students showed a tendency to focus strictly on the score with tense facial expressions and rigid postures. Towards the end of the program, the videos showed an increase in body movements in sync with the music, eye contact between performers, and facial expressions that reflected an understanding and appreciation of the musical flow.

4.2. Challenges And Adaptation

1. Transition from Marching Band to Big Band

The main challenge identified was the adaptation from marching band playing habits to the big band context, especially:

- The habit of playing with forte dynamics had to be adapted to the demands of a variety of big band dynamics
- Different postures and breathing techniques, from an upright and rigid posture in marching band to a more relaxed one in big band
- Adjustment of embouchure (mouth shape) to produce a tone that fits the big band aesthetic.

Interviews with students revealed that this transition was a "journey of changing musical identity" that required a willingness to let go of old habits and develop new approaches to the same instrument.

A trumpet student expressed: "I felt like I was learning a new instrument even though I had already played trumpet for three years in marching band."

2. Differences in Musical Backgrounds

The diversity of students' musical backgrounds creates challenges:

- Common terminology and musical understanding
- Adjustment of learning approaches (classical students tend to rely on sheet music, while popular students are more comfortable with aural approaches)
- Integration of different understandings of harmony

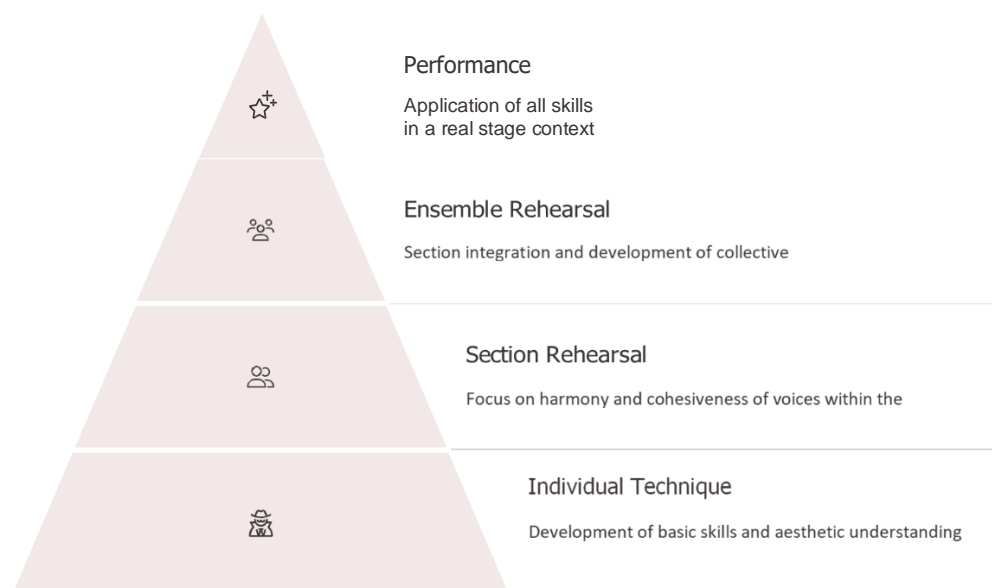
These challenges require a flexible approach from the instructor, combining visual (sheet music), aural (demonstration), and verbal (explanation) methods to accommodate different learning styles. The use of audio recordings and reference videos from professional big bands proved effective in bridging the understanding gap among students with different backgrounds.

3. Adaptation Strategies

- To overcome the challenges, several adaptation strategies were implemented:
- **Dynamics Exercises:** Specialized practice of playing dynamics, from pianissimo to fortissimo.
- **Music Appreciation:** Music appreciation sessions in the form of professional big band audio and video.
- **Masterclass:** Collaboration with professional big band musicians for masterclass.
- **Section Rehearsal:** Formation of section groups to build sound cohesiveness.

This strategy works best when applied consistently with a phased approach, starting with a focus on individual skills, then moving on to harmonization within sections, and finally integration in a full ensemble context. The use of recordings for self-evaluation has also proven effective in helping students identify areas for improvement.

4.3. Effective Big Band Training Model



1. Core Components of the Training Model

Based on the research findings, an effective big band training model for the transformation of students' musical techniques includes:

- Regular practice with a progressive structure (basic technique * section * ensemble * performance).
- Music appreciation through analysis of professional big band audio-visual recordings.
- Special exercises in jazz dynamics and articulation.
- Mentoring by professional musicians and alumni.

The model is cyclical, with evaluation and reflection after each performance which then becomes the basis for individualized technique development in the next cycle. This approach allows for a continuous progression that deepens students' understanding of big band aesthetics as their technical skills improve.

2. Pedagogical Approaches

Pedagogical approaches that have proven effective include:

- A combination of directive (for basic technique) and exploratory (for improvisation) methods.
- Peer-to-peer learning via section leaders.
- Regular reflection through recording and evaluation.
- Application of repertoire with graded levels of difficulty.

3. Evaluation and Impact

Evaluation of the training model showed:

- Measurable improvement in technical and musical skills.
- Development of social competence and self-confidence.
- Transformation of students' musical identity from novice to performer.

4.4. Implications For Music Education

1. Curriculum Development

The research findings have implications for music curriculum development in schools:

- Integration of ensemble-based learning approaches that emphasize collaboration and contextual learning
- Expansion of repertoire to include a range of styles within the big band tradition, from classical to contemporary
- Balancing technical and expressive development, giving room for creativity and improvisation

Curriculum development needs to consider continuity between learning in regular classes and extracurricular activities, so that students can apply theoretical knowledge in a practical context. Integration of technology such as music notation apps and online learning platforms can also enrich students' learning experience.

2. Teacher Capacity Building



The big band training program requires teacher capacity building in:

- Understanding of jazz/big band aesthetics and techniques.
- Improvisation teaching skills.
- Arranging skills for different student levels different student levels.

Continuous professional development through workshops, masterclasses, and collaboration with the jazz music community is important to ensure teachers have the necessary competencies. The establishment of a network of music teachers specializing in jazz/big band can also support the exchange of knowledge and best practices.

3. Collaboration with the Music Community

Research shows the importance of collaboration with:

- Professional Musicians: Engaging professional big band musicians as mentors and coaches to provide practical insights from the music industry.
- Music Institutions: Build partnerships with conservatories and college music programs for knowledge exchange and access to resources.
- Performance Venues: Establish partnerships with performance venues to provide authentic stage experiences for students.

Such collaborations can create a more comprehensive music education ecosystem, where formal learning in schools is enriched with practical real-world experience. This approach can also open up career opportunities for students through connections with the music industry and professional community.

5. Conclusions

The big band training program proved effective in transforming students' musical techniques from the classroom context to stage readiness. This transformation includes technical aspects of the instrument, aesthetic understanding, ability to work in an ensemble, and development of confidence as a performer. This research reveals that the transformation process is not just about developing technical skills, but also changing students' musical mindset and identity.

The main challenge in the transformation process is the adaptation of previously formed playing habits, especially for students with a marching band background who need to adjust their playing dynamics. A training model that combines systematic practice, music appreciation and professional guidance has shown positive results in overcoming this challenge. A gradual approach that pays attention to individual needs while building collective awareness allows students to develop skills in a comprehensive way.

Through big band training, students not only develop technical musical skills but also experience a transformation of identity from mere music students to stage-ready musicians. This experience provides a strong foundation not only for a musical career but also develops transferable skills such as teamwork, time management, and non-verbal communication that are valuable in a variety of professional contexts.

This research underscores the potential of big band as a bridge between formal music education and professional music practice. By adapting the training model to the local context and specific needs of students, big band can be an effective vehicle for transforming music education in Indonesia towards a more holistic and real-world oriented approach.

Further research is needed to explore the long-term impact of big band training programs on students' music careers, as well as the development of models suitable for different socio-cultural music contexts in Indonesia. Longitudinal studies of students' development after completing the training program would also provide valuable insights into the sustainability of the skills and musical identities formed.

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