

HOW CAN PRIMARY SCHOOL-AGED BOYS BE MOTIVATED TO JOIN A CHOIR? WHAT BARRIERS MAY THEY FACE, AND WHAT STRATEGIES CAN BE USED TO ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION?



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Module No. BMPF7010

Module Title: Work Based Research Project (Extended)

INTRODUCTION AND JUSTIFICATION

Positive early experiences of singing are crucial in encouraging a life-long love of singing (Lamont et al., 2012)

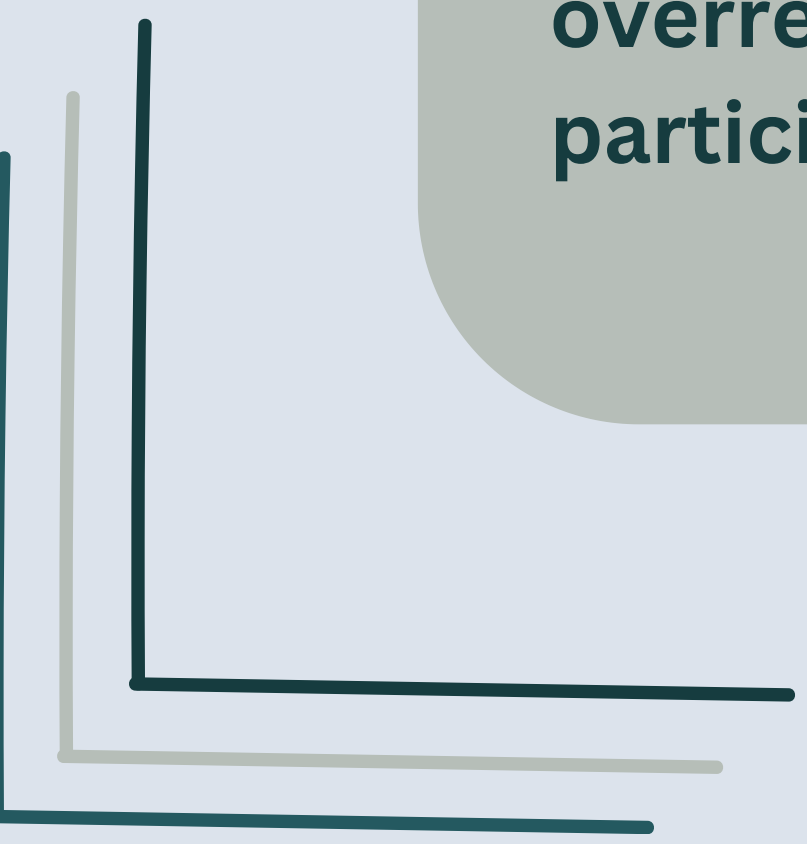
Singing within a choir is an accessible, cost-effective way to improve physical and mental health, combat loneliness and increase self-esteem (Davies et al., 2023; Ferrer et al., 2017; Gutiérrez Cisneros et al., 2023)

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- Through conducting and organising massed primary school choir events I noted a significant lack of boys performing compared to girls.
 - Primary School Music Coordinators asked for advice on how to encourage boys to join their choirs.
 - Lack of research available on primary school aged boys singing.



Significant adverse change in boys' attitudes towards singing by age 6-8, indicating that further research on encouraging participation before negative perceptions occur may be beneficial (Wryler,2021).

Data from the U.K. Music Education hubs also shows girls are overrepresented compared to boys in overall musical participation across all ages(Arts Council, 2018).



AIM OF STUDY

To deepen the understanding of boys' perceptions of singing and to encourage their participation in choirs in my area of work.

OBJECTIVES

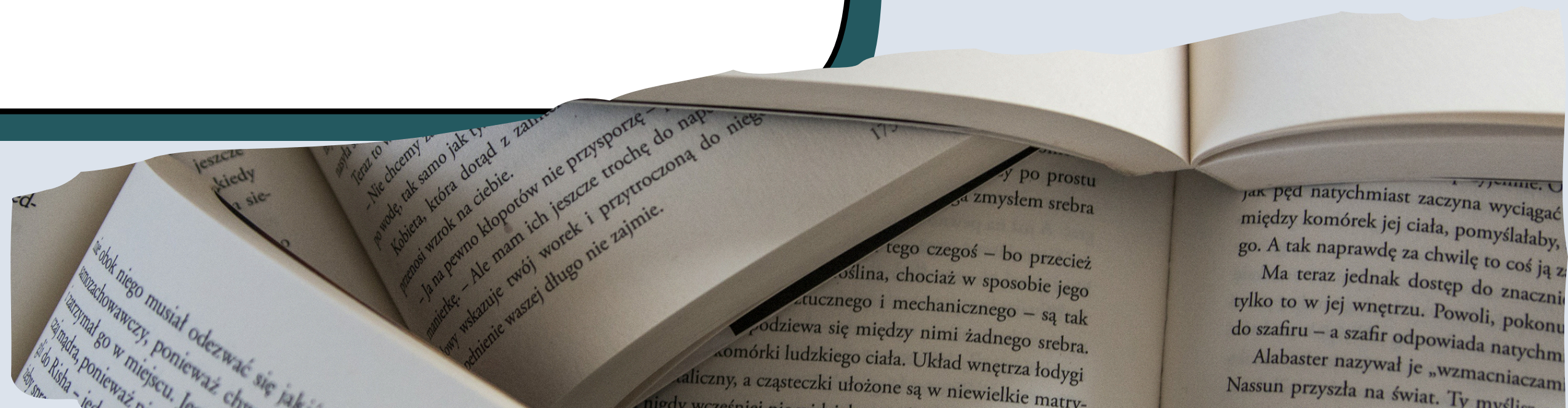
- 1.The consolidation of the current literature available through the completion of a literature review.
2. The recording and analysis of participants' experiences through focus groups, interviews and online questionnaires.
- 3.The collection and analysis of quantitative data through online questionnaires to provide an overview of boys singing participation.



LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY

Questions explored

1. Are fewer boys singing and why?
2. Why should boys sing?
3. How can we encourage boys to sing?



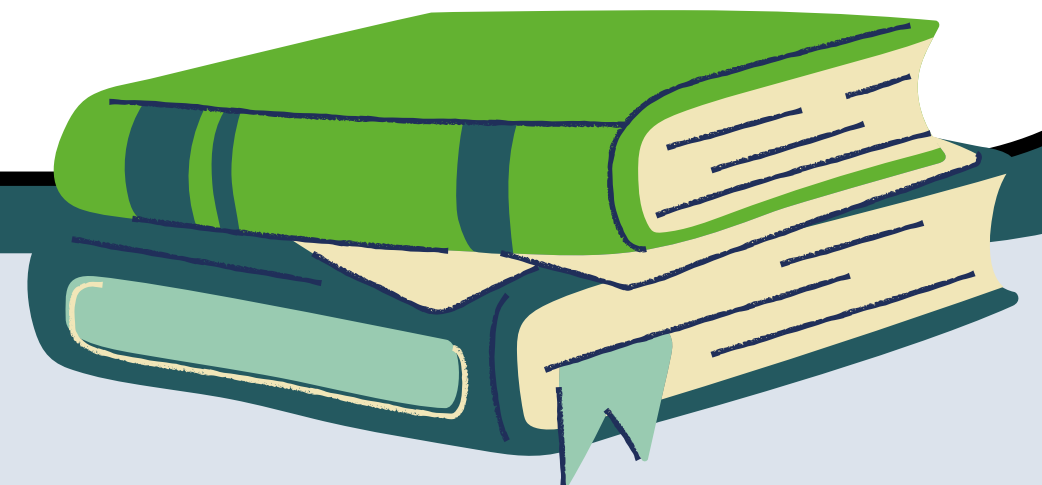
LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY

Why are less boys singing than girls?

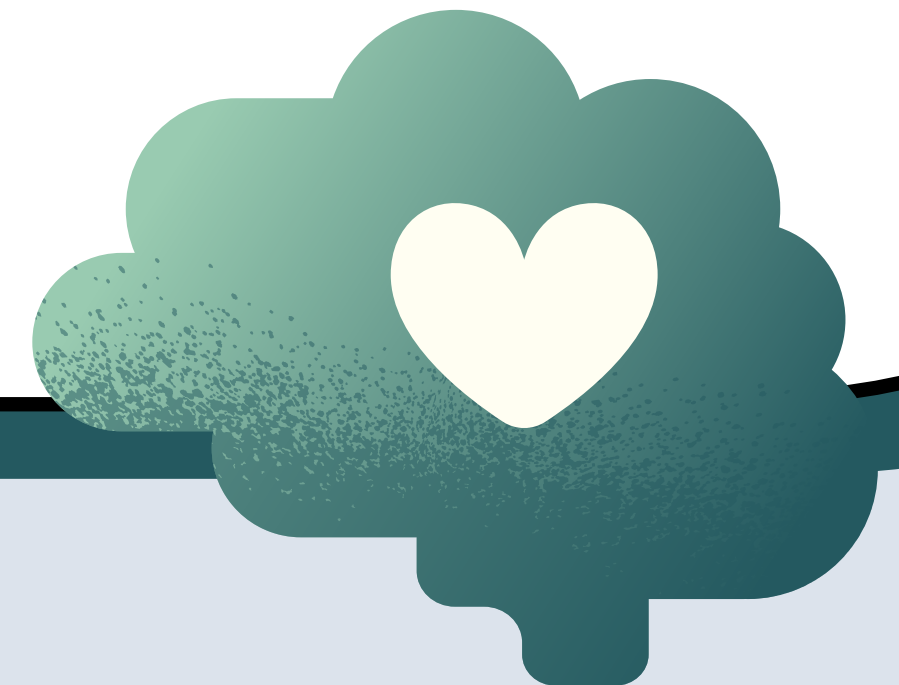
- Less boys are singing in choirs potentially due to a more secular society leading to less group singing (Heywood & Beynon, 2013).
- A hegemonic view of masculinity being in contrast to expressive art forms (Freer, 2010).

Why should boys sing?

- Singing is the most accessible form of musical expression and supports academic, social, and psychological development. (Gutiérrez Cisneros et al., 2023).
- By the end of primary school, 56% of boys, compared to 63% of girls, are meeting standards and are twice as likely to be excluded from school (Hall, 2005; Roberts et al., 2024; Pearson, 2020; Houtte, 2010).
- Singing can support language and communication development and lead to enhanced academic achievement and less disruptive behaviour (Welch, 2021; Jaschke et al., 2018; Gutiérrez Cisneros et al., 2023)

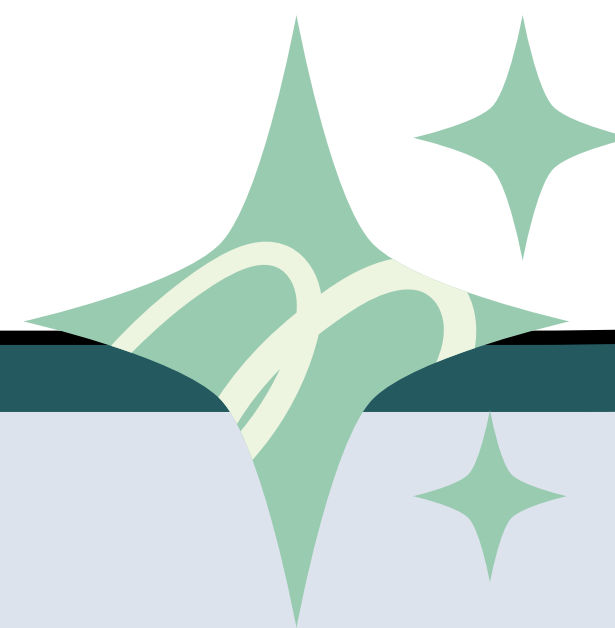


- Men and boys can be affected by toxic hegemonic masculinity, which can see emotional expression and discussing mental health as a weakness (Pearson, 2020; NCPCC, 2022).
- Singing can boost confidence and foster personal identity, giving boys a safe outlet to express emotions (Welch, 2012)
- In a survey by SingUp, 90% of schools stated that singing improved their pupils' self-esteem, and 81% stated that singing increased their students' concentration in other lessons (Barberia, 2011)

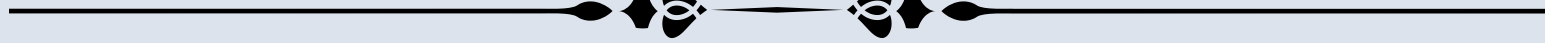


How to encourage boys to sing

- **Peer Role Models:** Seeing other boys and male role models sing can break down the perception that singing is only for girls (Demorest, 2000).
- **Repertoire Choices:** Choosing music that appeals to boys can increase engagement (Spraggs, 2022).
- **Ks1 Choirs:** Introducing boys to choirs earlier can normalise the activity and increase singing self-efficacy (Spraggs, 2022).
- **Informing of benefits of singing:** Informing students and caregivers about the significant academic, social, and mental health benefits of singing (Mizener, 1993; Ferrer et al., 2017; Hall, 2007)
- **Culture of acceptance:** creating a culture where multiple versions of masculinity are celebrated and boys can sing without fear of embarrassment or ridicule (McBride, 2016).



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



Pragmatism - adheres to educational and mixed methods research due to its focus on practical outcomes and on understanding complex social phenomena (Pabel et al., 2021).

Mixed methods research
Provided a comprehensive picture of participation (Glogowska, 2011; Morgan, 2014).

DATA ANALYSIS

- A grounded theory approach to data analysis.
 1. **Open coding stage** - Data was transcribed and read several times with important words labelled and identified (Tie et al., 2019).
 2. **Axial coding stage** - Data re-read, noting differences and similarities to create theoretical categories (Tie et al., 2019; Charmaz, 1990)
 3. **Advanced coding stage** - A core concept which described the relationship between theoretical categories across all data sources was created (Charmaz, 1990)



DATA ANALYSIS

- **Theoretical sampling** allowed the pursuit of additional information through additional participants which revealed further insight (Tie et al., 2019)
- **Analytical memo writing** helped move from description to deeper analysis (Charmaz & Tweed, 2012)
- **Quantitative data** was analysed using descriptive statistics



RESEARCH METHODS

Online questionnaires

- Sent to all primary school music coordinators
- Multiple-choice, dichotomous and numerical questions provided quantitative data. .
- Open questions allowed respondents to elaborate on their personal experiences.



RESEARCH METHODS

Focus Groups

- Two schools selected for focus groups.
- Each school consisting of 1 group of 6-9 children from Ks1 and 1 group of 6-9 children from Ks2.
- Provided open discussions and further exploration of questionnaire findings.
- Beneficial for exploratory research (Freer, 2010; Lambert, 2019).



RESEARCH METHODS

Teacher semi-structured Interviews

- Music co-ordinators from two of the schools from the online questionnaire to further explore effectiveness of boys only singing events in encouraging boys to sing
- One in-person and another online.



RESEARCH ETHICS

Consent

- Consent forms to parents and guardians
- Verbal consent confirmed
- Initial consent page on questionnaires
- Informed of benefits and risks

GDPR

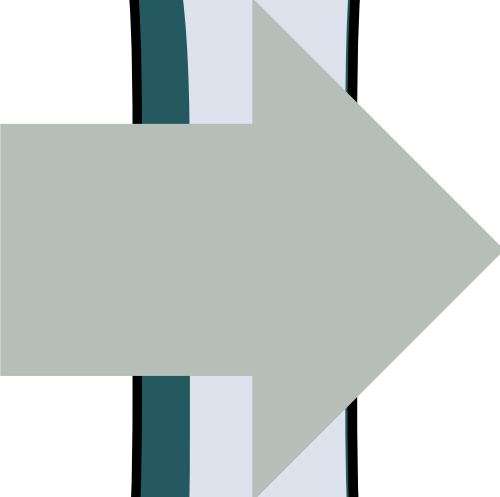
- Guidelines strictly followed
- Names anonymised
- Data stored securely and checked for accuracy
- Consent forms destroyed following moderation



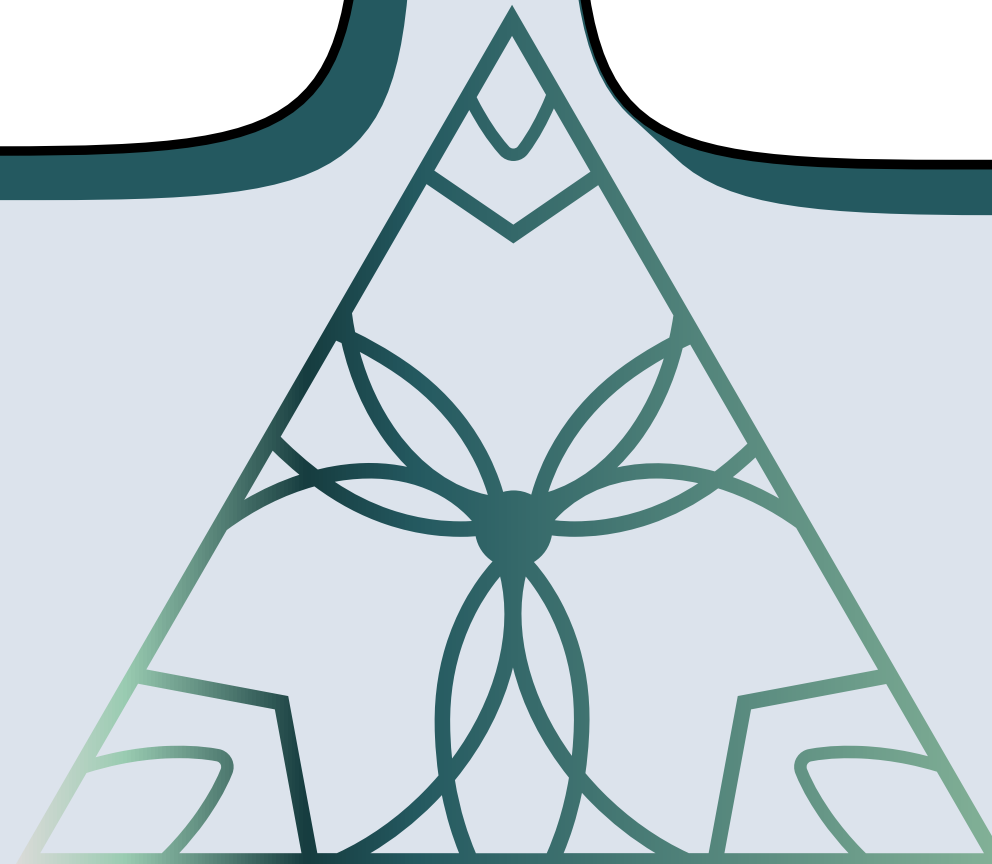
INSIDER RESEARCH



Teachers and children may have attended vocal events I have organised



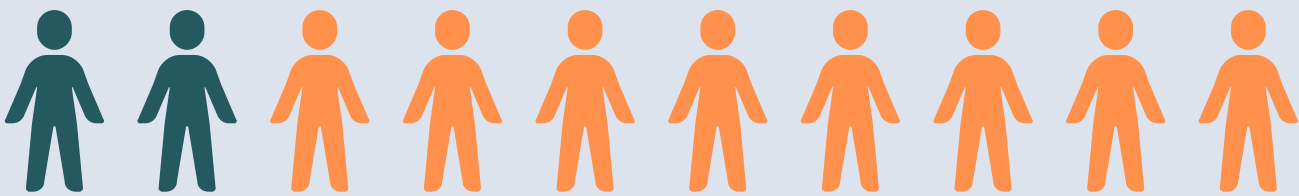
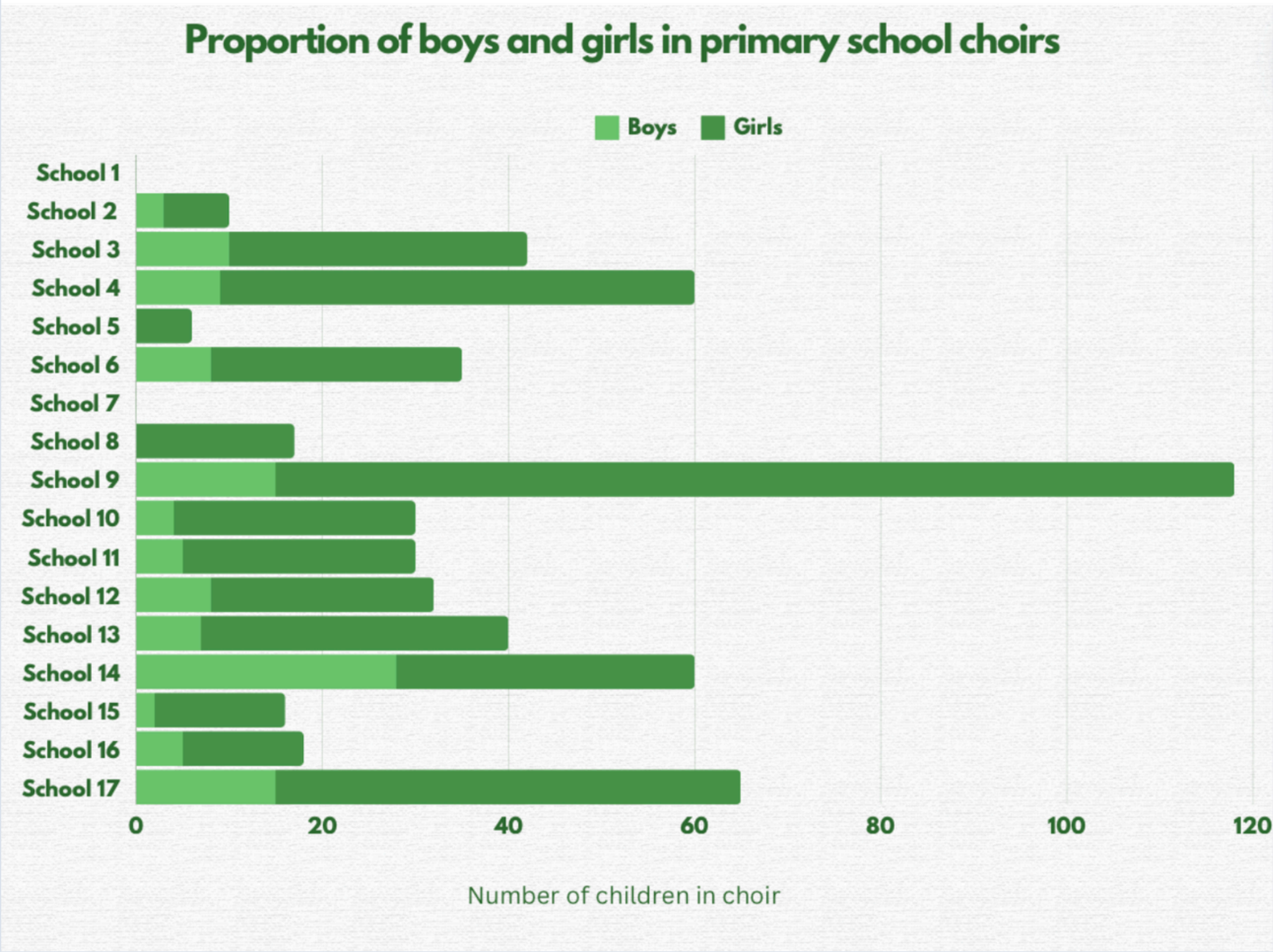
- Reflection to reduce bias
- Research ethics followed
- Emphasis on accurate interpretation of data.
- Varied data sources provided triangulation
- Employer consent



FINDINGS

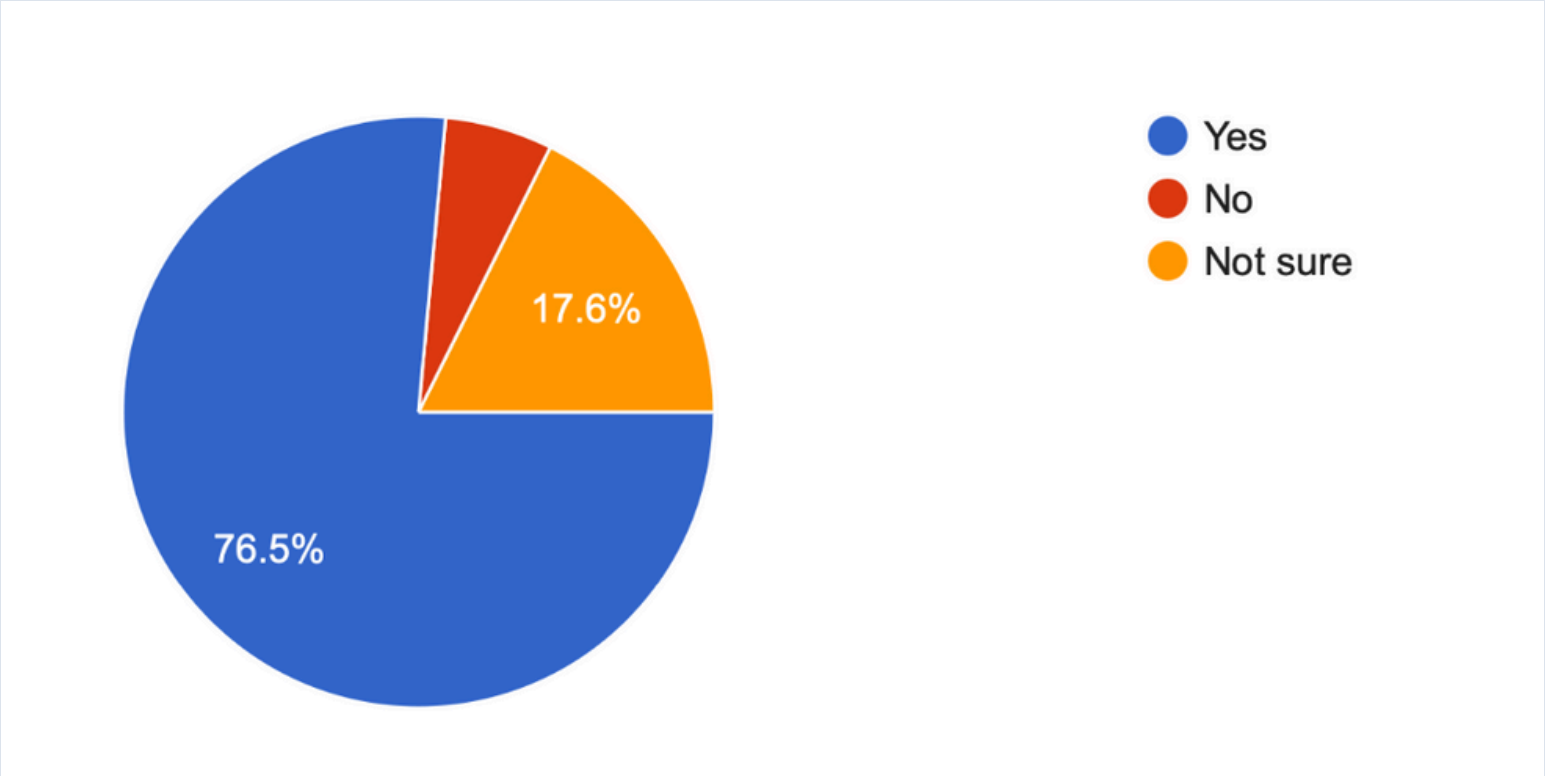


ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRES

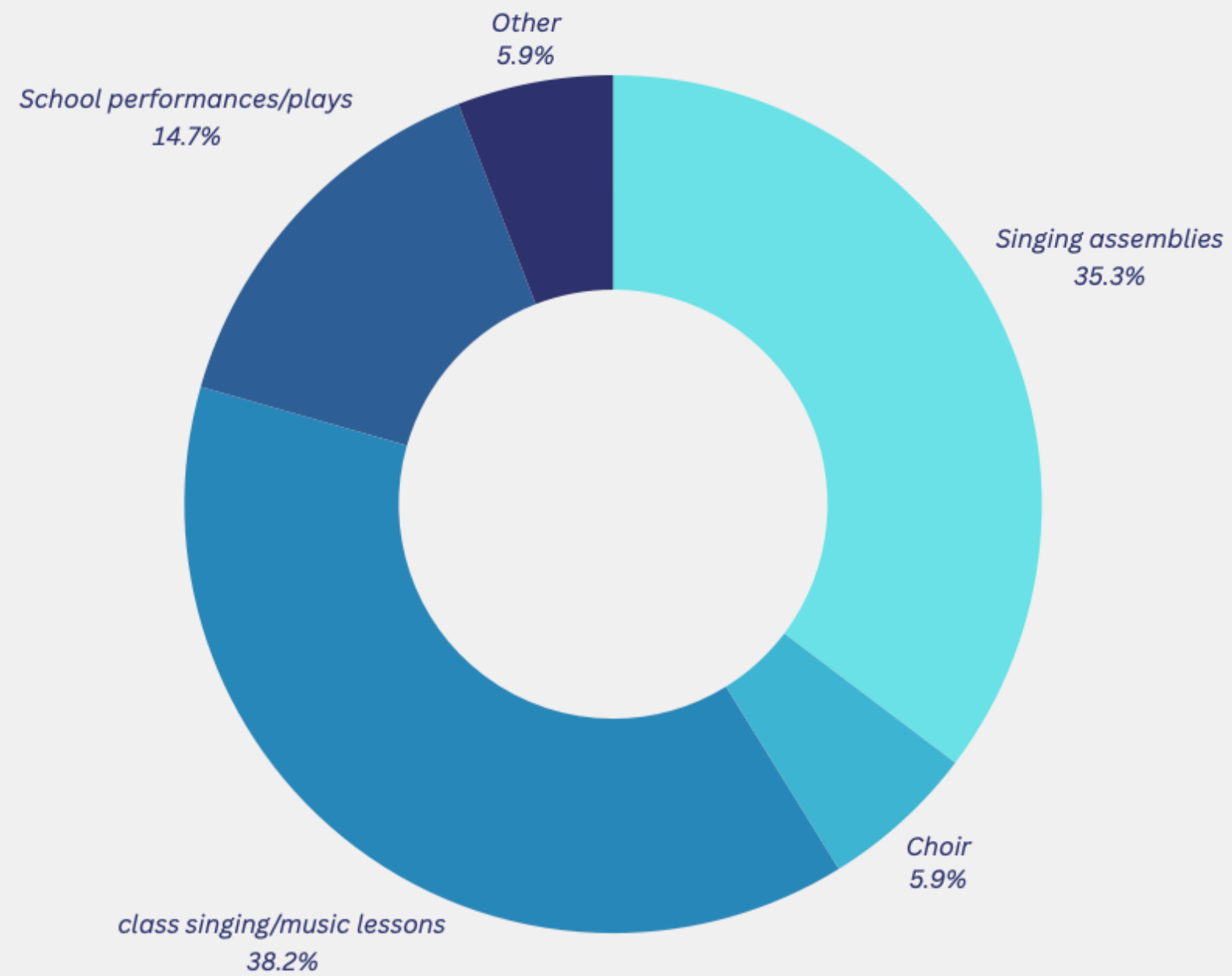


Average male choir participation of 21%

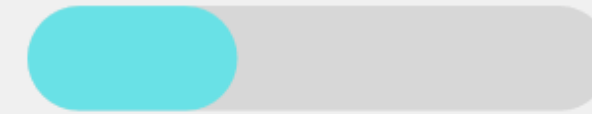
13 out of 17 music coordinators reported that boys' participation was lower than girls



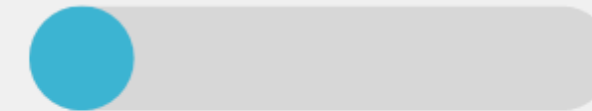
WHERE DO BOYS SING MOST IN SCHOOL?



Singing assemblies



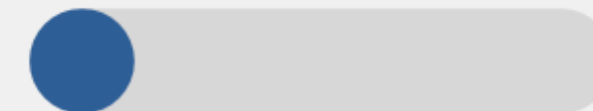
Choir



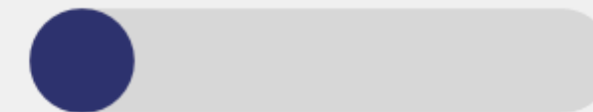
Class singing/music lessons



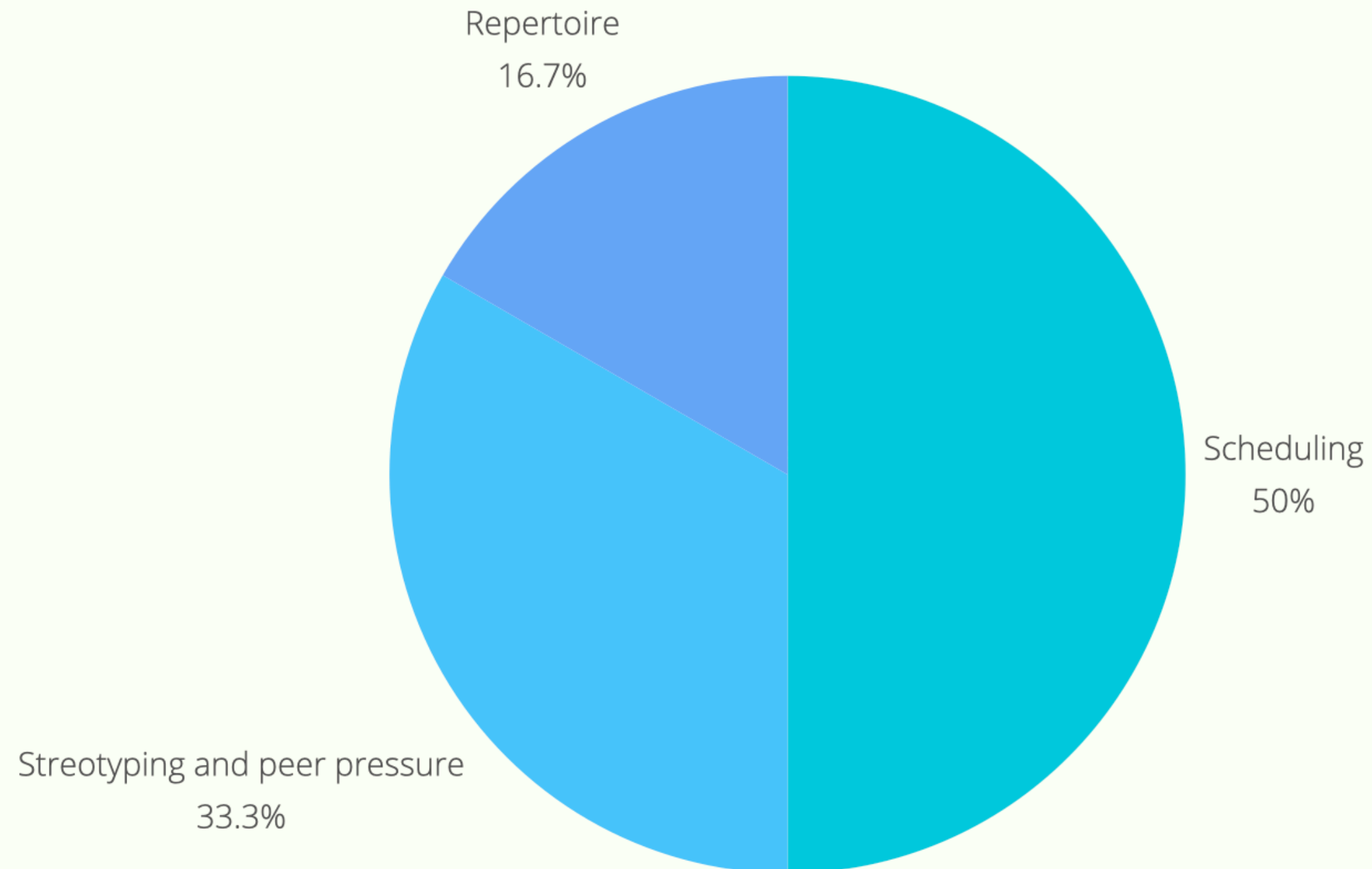
School performances/Plays



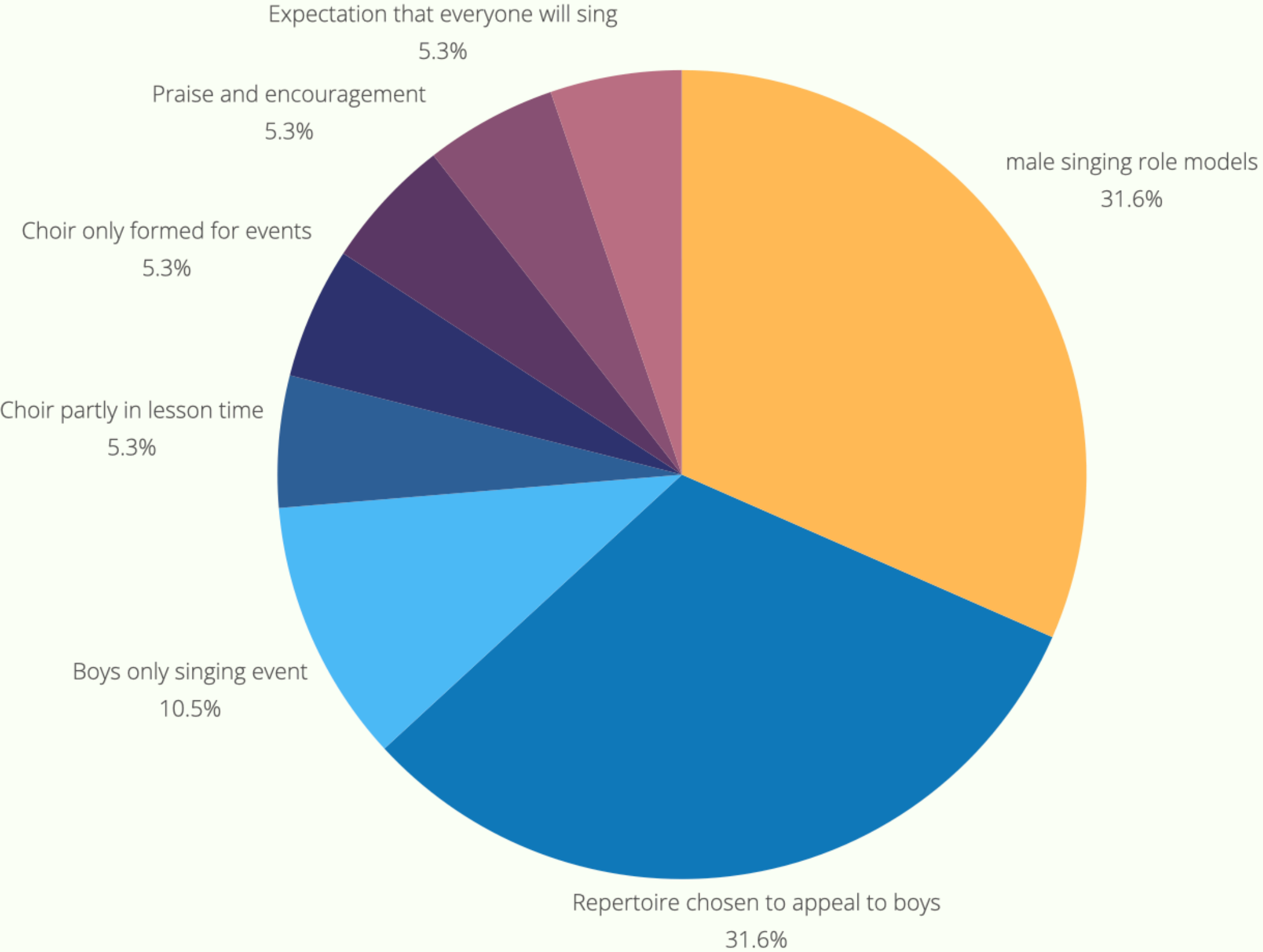
Other



**If encouraging boys to sing is challenging in your school,
what do you feel are the reasons why?**



Do you use some motivational strategies
to encourage boys' participation?



School	Total number in choir	Number of boys	% of boys in choir	Motivational strategies	Would they be useful?	Is boys participation an issue in your school?
1	0	0	0	No	Not sure	Yes
2	10	3	30%	No	Yes	Yes
3	42	10	24%	No	Yes	Yes
4	60	9	15%	Boys given solos/singing sections of songs	Yes	Yes
5	6	0	0	Didn't answer	Yes	Yes
6	35	8	29%	Boys only taster sessions	Yes	Yes
7	0	0	0	No	Not sure	Not sure
8	17	0	0	Yes	Yes	Not sure
9	118	15	13%	No - isn't a priority	Not sure	Yes
10	30	4	13%	Current songs - Rap	Yes	Yes
11	35	7	20%	Choir leader male role model, choir partly in lesson time, earn rewards	Yes	Yes
12	32	8	25%	No	Yes	Yes
13	40	7	17%	Didn't answer	Yes	Yes
14	60	28	47%	Boys sing solos, praise, beat-boxing, peer role models	Yes	Not sure
15	16	2	12%	Expectation, Boys only singing event, male role models - all staff join in, repertoire choices	Yes	No
16	18	5	28%	Children help choice repertoire	Yes	Yes
17	65	15	23%	Boys sing solos, make it exciting	Yes	Yes

“Yes. During assemblies and performances, we have boys sing solos. We choose current songs, provide lots of praise and encouragement, and include simple beatboxing. We have choir leaders at the front of the hall, ensuring an equal number of boys and girls.”

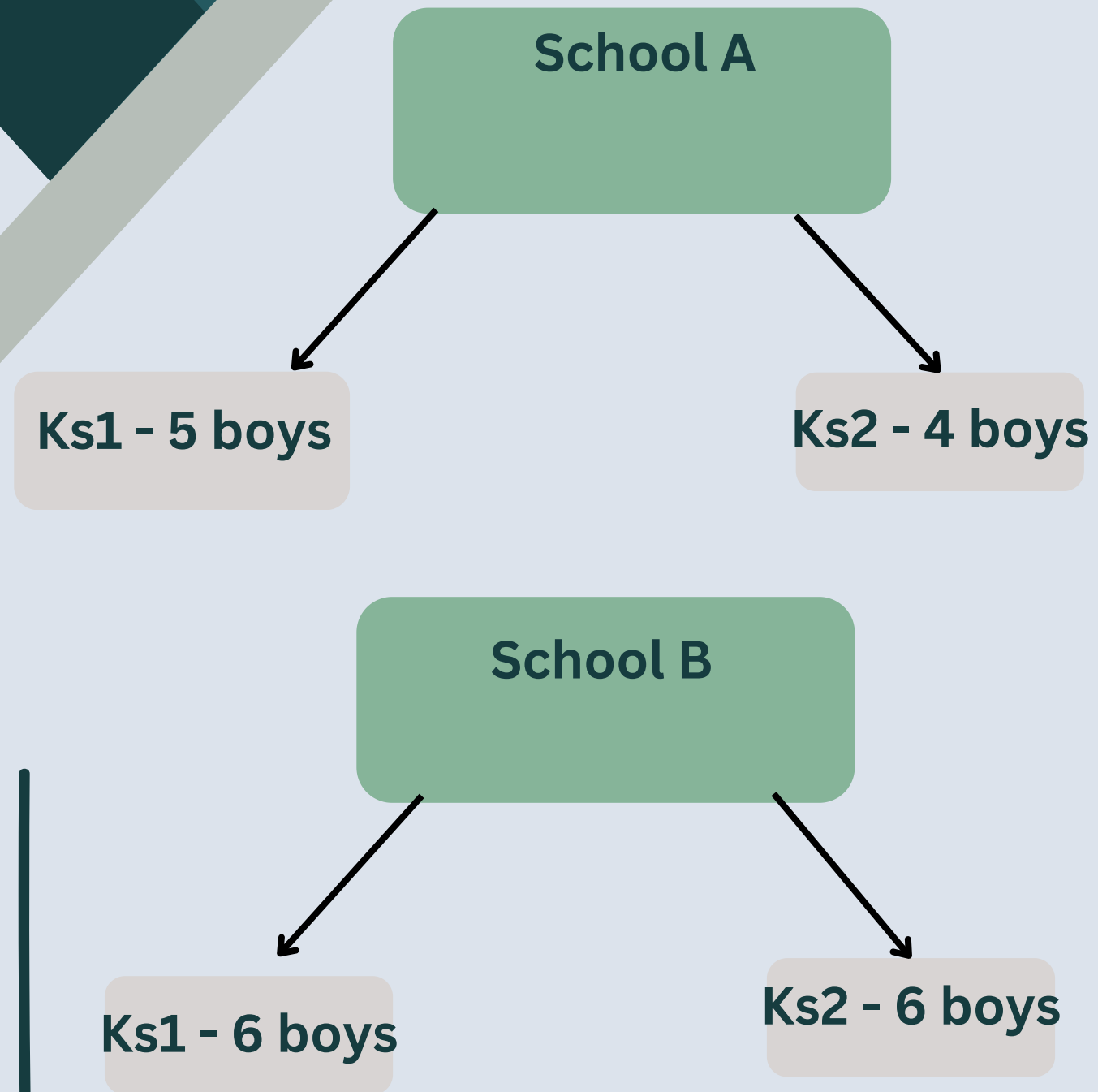
14 schools answered yes when asked if additional motivational strategies would be beneficial and 3 were unsure.

Key Themes:

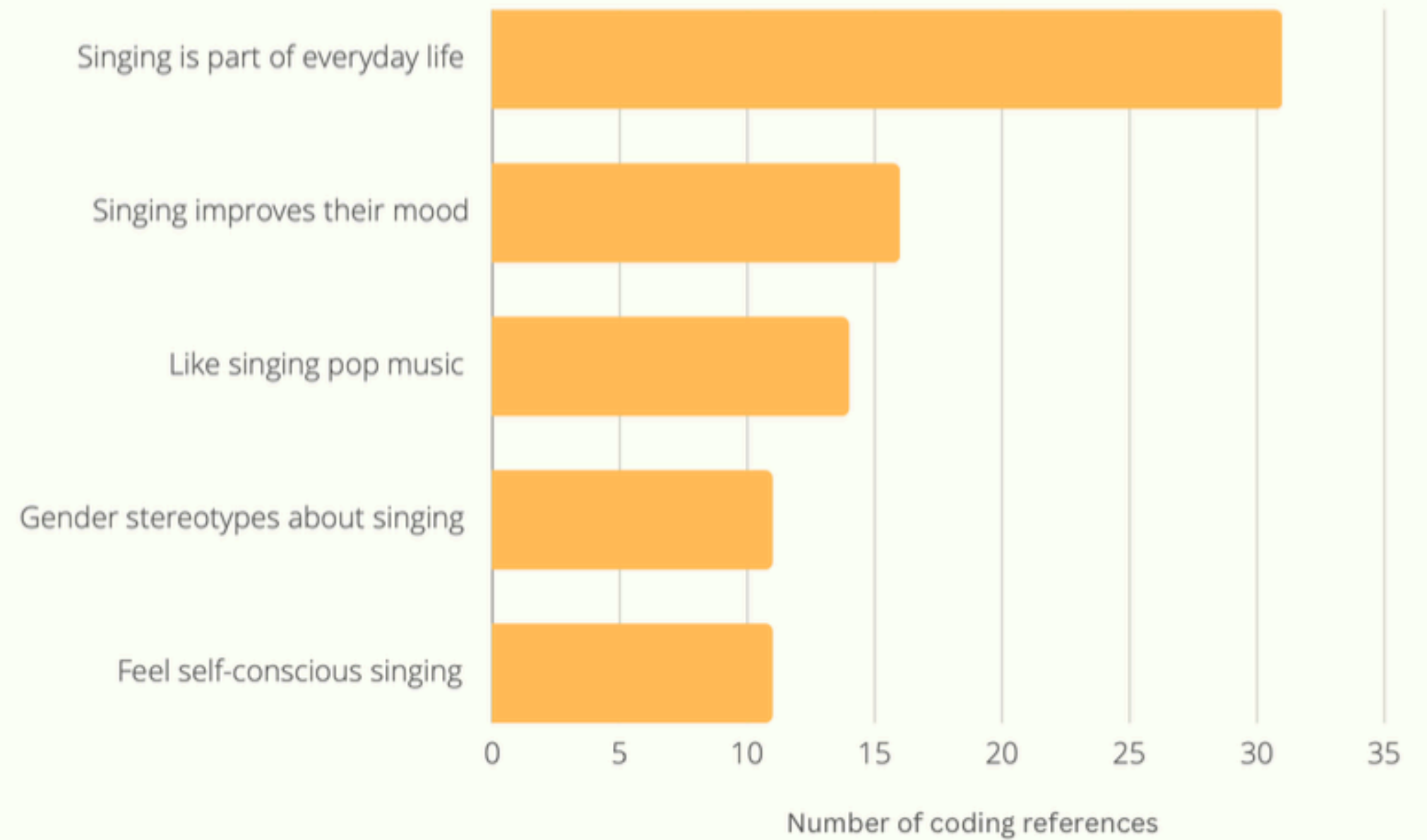
- Repertoire significantly affects participation
- Sports prioritised over choir
- Boys enjoy class/assembly singing but do not join choirs
- Boys see singing as a gendered activity for girls



FOCUS GROUPS



Main themes from focus groups



Improved mood:

“Gets rid of all the sharpness and the worries”

“It makes me feel proud”



Gender Stereotypes and self-consciousness:

“I probably don’t really want to sing in schools because everyone thinks that it’s sort of a girl thing”

“I feel like people are just going to think I’m being stupid”

“There should be separate choirs for boys and girls, then we can perform together.”

-

Enjoy familiar genres such as pop:

“If I knew the song, I’d stay in the choir.”

*“I tried out for the choir, quite a lot people in my class did. But
it’s just they didn’t
really like the songs because like the songs were very classical”*



Sport as a priority:

*“I think genuinely like boys do more like after school activities than the girls.
Most do like loads of sport”*

“Yeah. I was busy. I had football training straight after it”

Key Themes:

- Enjoy singing and recognise benefits
- Gender stereotypes hinder participation
- Preference for familiar genres
- Sports may be prioritised
- Feel self-conscious singing and prefer singing in large groups



TEACHER INTERVIEWS

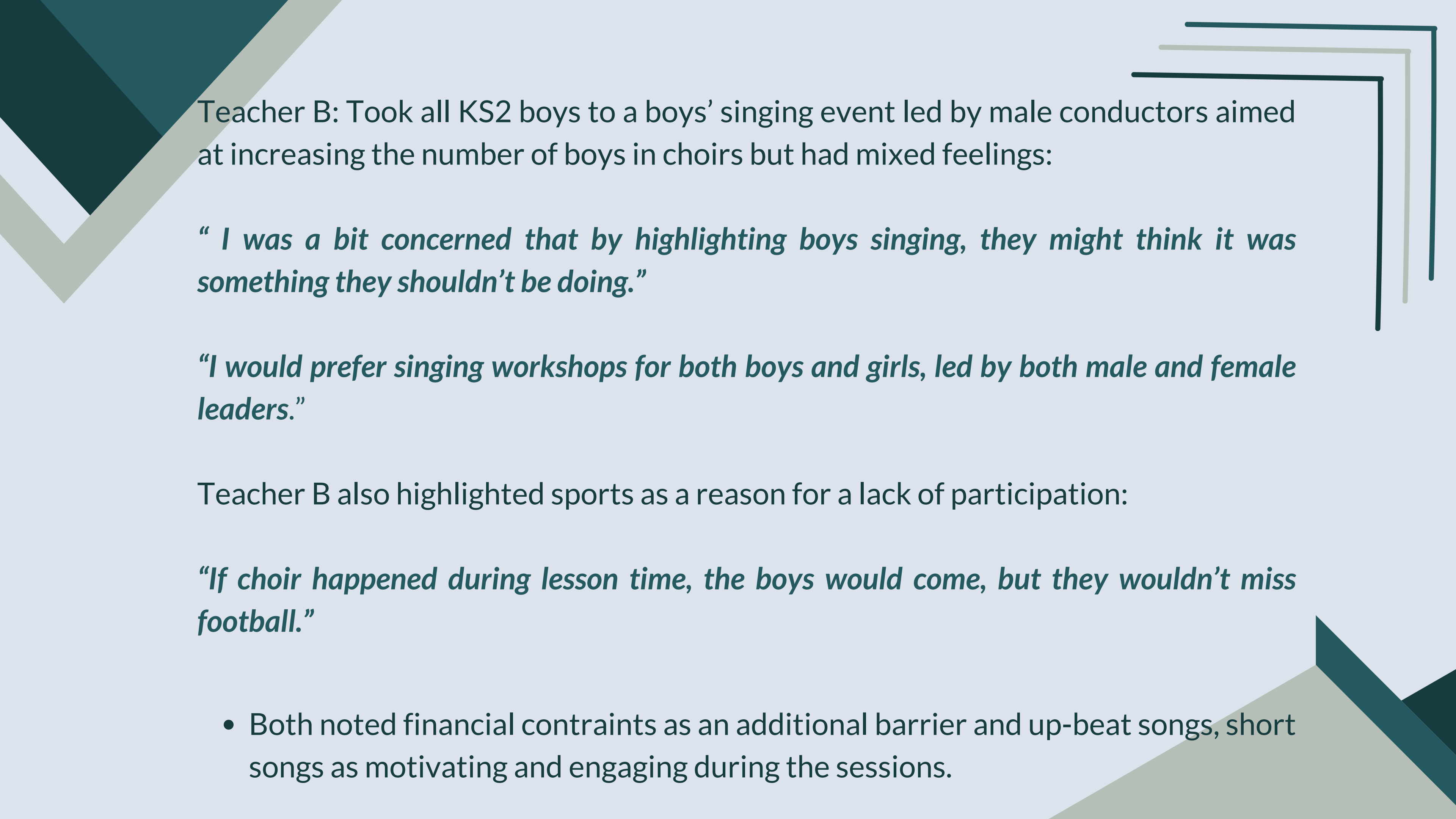
Teacher A held a boys-only choir taster session with 50 boys attending. Only 7 boys continued:

“I could keep them all going for 20 minutes, but after-school sessions were competing with other activities like sports.”

Supported boys-only events, believing that more boys would and did join the choir because of it and they would improve the sound.

“We really need boys' voices to add depth and make it sound better.”

“I think it's worked really well.”



Teacher B: Took all KS2 boys to a boys' singing event led by male conductors aimed at increasing the number of boys in choirs but had mixed feelings:

“ I was a bit concerned that by highlighting boys singing, they might think it was something they shouldn't be doing.”

“I would prefer singing workshops for both boys and girls, led by both male and female leaders.”

Teacher B also highlighted sports as a reason for a lack of participation:

“If choir happened during lesson time, the boys would come, but they wouldn't miss football.”

- Both noted financial constraints as an additional barrier and up-beat songs, short songs as motivating and engaging during the sessions.

CONCLUSION

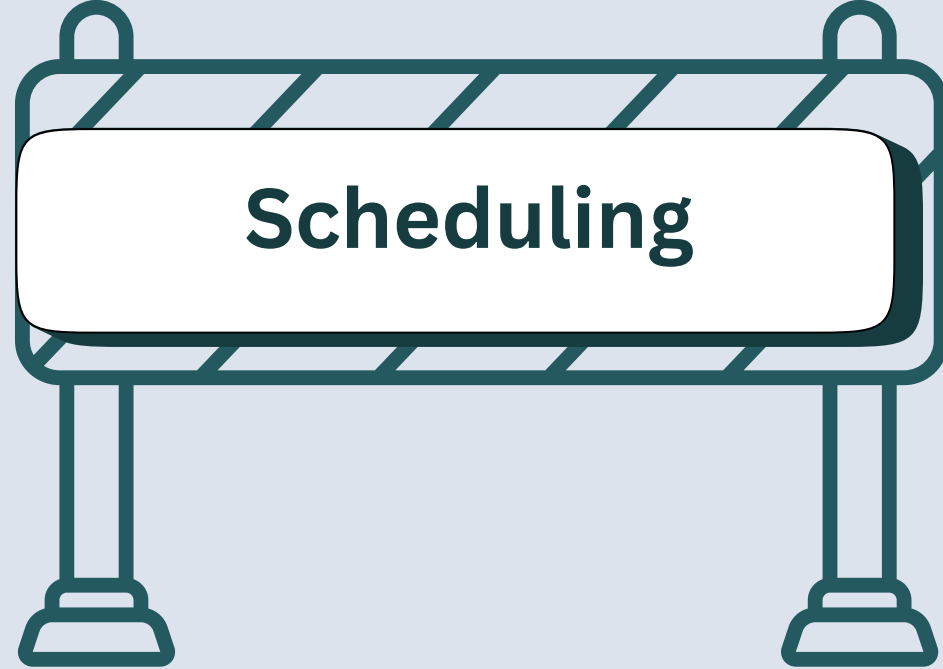
Barriers to boys' participation

The study aligns with current literature and revealed boys' enthusiasm for singing, along with the consistent barriers they face, such as:



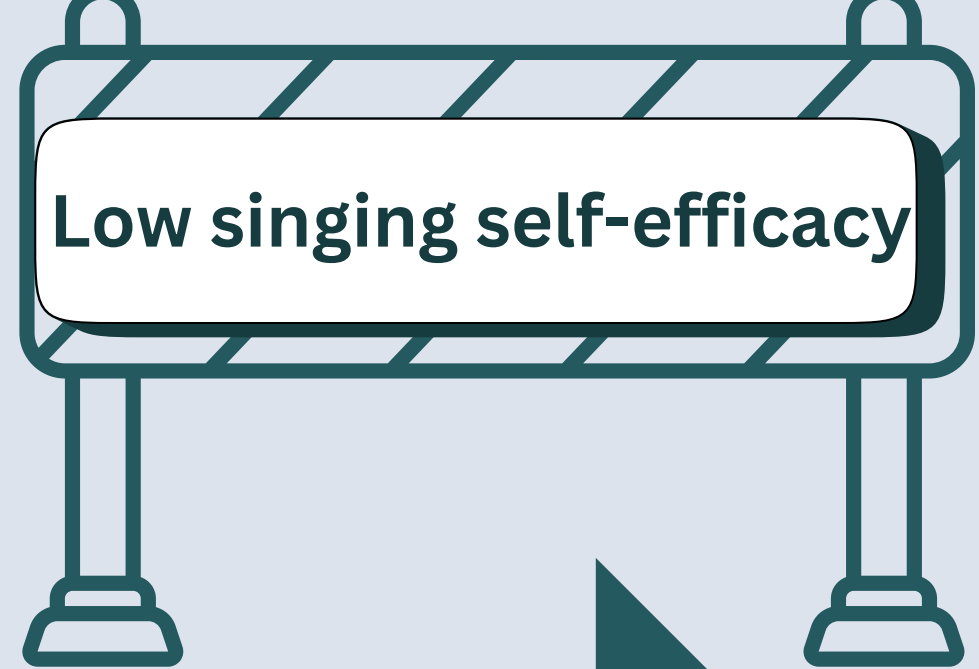
Gender Stereotyping

A blue and white striped barrier sign with a white center, supported by two blue legs. The sign is positioned on the left side of the slide.



Scheduling

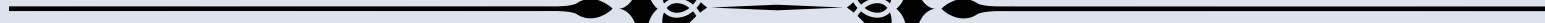
A blue and white striped barrier sign with a white center, supported by two blue legs. The sign is positioned in the middle of the slide.



Low singing self-efficacy

A blue and white striped barrier sign with a white center, supported by two blue legs. The sign is positioned on the right side of the slide.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS



1. Sample Size
2. Selection Bias
3. Geographical Scope
4. Teacher Roles
5. Engagement with Music Service
6. Group Dynamics

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

Future recommendations to encourage participation

Inclusive
repertoire

Flexible
Scheduling

Role Models

Support singing
self-efficacy

KS1 Choirs



THANK YOU



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