Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH) (e-ISSN : 2504-8562)
2023, Volume 8, Issue 11, e002598
DOI: https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v8i11.2598

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Phenomenological Study of the Learning Issues and Teaching Strategies in Piano Teaching in China

Chengying Zou[1*], Ita Wang[2]

[1]Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Malaya (UM), 50603, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
Email: 17222015@siswa.um.edu.my
[2]Department of Music, Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Malaya (UM), 50603, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
Email: wangita@um.edu.my

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR (*):
Chengying Zou
(17222015@siswa.um.edu.my)

KEYWORDS:
Learning Issues
Teaching Strategies
Piano Teaching
Graded Music Examination
China

CITATION:
Chengying Zou & Ita Wang. (2023). A Phenomenological Study of the Learning Issues and Teaching Strategies in Piano Teaching in China. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH), 8*(11), e002598. https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v8i11.2598

ABSTRACT

In China, many young piano learners below the pre-college level would take graded examinations to validate their learning outcomes, however, scholars and pedagogues acknowledge there is an existing discrepancy between grade achievement and actual playing abilities. The current study scrutinizes the learning issues of the students in this context and the teaching strategies applied by the teachers. This study employed a qualitative approach, and a semi-structured interview was conducted with twelve piano teachers, and lesson observations were conducted during their lessons with one of their students. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was carried out based on the interview data and the content analysis was conducted towards the observation data. The findings demonstrated that the students suffered from five aspects of learning issues, namely music reading, skill acquisition, memorization, interpretation, and performance anxiety. To resolve those issues, the teacher participants addressed 13 common teaching strategies. However, after the data triangulation it was found that there was inconsistency in monitoring of students' learning progress in accordance with the strategies presented by the teachers; under the context of the graded examination preparation, memorization, interpretation, and performance anxiety were among the critical issues.

Contribution/Originality: The current study contributes to the limited literature pertaining to the aspects of memorization, interpretation, and performance anxiety in the context of private one-to-one piano tuition in China. It informs the pervasive issues and strategies in piano teaching and offers insights in amateur piano education in China and beyond.

1. Introduction

The piano examination has been found to serve as a motivational factor, drive sustainer, and potential source of self-confidence for the student (Davidson & Scutt, 1999). In

© 2023 by the authors. Published by Secholian Publication. This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

China, the Amateur Piano Graded Examination (APGE) has emerged as a renowned and equitable examination system in response to the increasing demand for piano education and appreciation for music among the general public (Lou, 2012). The APGE has gained popularity in recent years as a means for students to showcase their learning outcomes. The increased number of piano learners, examinees, and their parents has made the APGE the primary choice to verify the learning outcomes and teaching effectiveness (Xiong, 2019). In addition to serving as an assessment tool, the music examination serves as a performance platform, giving children the opportunity to demonstrate the abilities they have acquired and to perform a musical composition for an audience (Ryan et al., 2022). Therefore, the present study situates its investigation within the context of the graded examination system.

The social phenomenon of the piano graded examinations has played a significant role in promoting and standardizing piano education in China. It has evolved with innovations in examination materials and the acceleration of the piano culture industry (Liu, 2010; Zhang, 1999). However, the focus on achieving high grades in the examinations has been criticized for overshadowing the importance of building a strong foundation in piano playing (Cai, 2005). In some cases, the graded examination has become a major motivation for learning piano, leading to a potential negative impact on students' interest and constructive development in playing fundamentals (Yang, 2016; Yin & Tang, 2018). Research has highlighted a discrepancy between the grade level awarded and the actual playing level of students, with the latter often falling short of the expected standard (Dai, 2010; Li, 2002; Liu, 2004; Wu, 2012; Xu, 2011; Yang, 2005; Yang, 2012; Zhang, 2012; Zhou, 1996).

The topic of piano graded examinations has been the subject of numerous studies examining the factors contributing to its impact on students' learning outcomes. Scholars have analyzed the roles of parents, teachers, and the general social environment in this regard. Zhang (2011) contends that successful piano learning requires the concerted efforts of teachers, parents, and students, as well as the proper attitudes and concepts towards graded piano examinations. Gao (2016) and Xiao (2016) have identified several issues related to graded piano examinations, including the premature involvement of young children in exams without adequate instruction, the superficial pursuit of higher grade levels, and the influence of the commercialization of graded piano examinations on parents and teachers. Huang (2018) also notes that some piano teachers prioritize teaching exam materials over promoting long-term development, resulting in a focus of rote learning and assessment rather than developing musical creativity and expression. However, while these external factors may impact learning outcomes, it is the internal factors within the realm of piano teaching and learning that have the most significant impact on sustained learning (Davidson & Scutt, 1999). The present study seeks to investigate the learning issues faced by amateur piano students and the teaching strategies employed by piano teachers to address these challenges.

1.1. Research Objectives

This study aims to investigate the current status of learning issues in the context of preparing for a graded piano examination, namely APGE in China, and to identify effective teaching strategies to address them.

© 2023 by the authors. Published by Secholian Publication. This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

1.2. Research Questions

In this study, there are two specific research questions:

i. What are the learning issues and teaching strategies in piano learning from the teachers' perspective?
ii. What are the learning issues observed and teaching strategies implemented during the preparation of a graded examination?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Issues in the Graded Piano Examinations in China

The current state of piano graded examinations in China presents several notable issues. Firstly, the primary goal of learning piano can be overshadowed by parents' and organizations' ulterior motives for participating in graded piano examinations, with the latter being primarily profit-driven. This shift in focus from long-term learning to short-term outcomes can lead to a lack of intrinsic motivation and a diminished emphasis on the fundamental skills required for playing the piano. Secondly, the quality of instruction varies significantly among teachers, with a lack of professional skills and teaching experience often addressed as primary concerns. Finally, the content and rules of the graded piano examinations may limit the breadth and depth of learning. These issues have been identified in various studies, including Dong (2018), Mou (2008), Sun (2013), Yan, Li, and Liu (2021), Yang (2019), Zeng and Xie (2013), Zhang and Huang (2003), and Zhou (2003). However, to date, there has been limited research focused specifically on the challenges related to piano learning and teaching in the context of graded piano examination.

In addition, Zhao (2009), a respected composer, pianist, music theorist, and educator in China, and a professor at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, identified four negative issues that merit attention and discussion. It was noted that examinees often only learn the content required for the graded examinations, sometimes skipping grades when their skills are not fully developed, not receiving adequate training in the early learning stages, and performing at a superficial level without considering or understanding theoretical aspects such as harmony, rhythm, phrasing, or formal structure. As suggested by Zhao (2009), to remedy these issues require a standardized and practical teacher training system. However, Zhao's (2009) suggestions have not been empirically explored.

2.2. Scholarly Perspectives on the Essential Skills in Piano Learning

The following texts describe and sum up the common learning issues and a few training suggestions from global perspectives based on scholarly treatises and empirical studies.

2.2.1. Reading Skills

With extensive experience and skill development, pianists can achieve desired performance outcomes through careful attention to musical details and the corresponding actions required to bring them to life (Wristen, 2005). In particular, the ability to read music plays a crucial role in the development of a pianist's skills. Gudmundsdottir (2010) suggests that the music reading skill is easier to train and develop among children, although this area is often neglected in regular lesson planning

© 2023 by the authors. Published by Secholian Publication. This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

(Lehmann & McArthur, 2002). Furthermore, Zhukov (2014) observes that, during sight-reading exercises, students tend to focus primarily on pitch and rhythm, while neglecting other important details in the score.

2.2.2. Playing Skills

In contemporary piano pedagogy, improving students' piano playing skills is a critical teaching objective. In pursuit of this goal, teachers provide targeted strategies to facilitate this improvement, with Babacan (2014) proposing that students should be instructed on the proper application of these strategies. Kilic (2016) underscores the importance of integrating both technique and musicality in piano playing skills. To cultivate technique, students must develop discipline and patience, while musicality necessitates creativity and critical thinking to achieve musical interpretation. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the teacher to impart these essential skills in the instructions and have better integration in the piano lessons. The resulting musical development can be seen as an organic process of holistic learning and serves as an exemplar of how effective instruction can positively impact the student's learning experience.

Fraser and Ardan (2003) have defined technique as a physical capacity of piano playing that encompasses the movement, strength, and function of the hands, fingers, forearms, and arms. The mastery of technique is vital to achieve an ideal performance by comprehensively realizing the music cognition. In addition, the note values, rhetoric expression, voicing, balancing of parts, control of melodic line, and other factors must be executed specifically for the rhythm, phrasing, and orchestration conceptualization, which are the three general aspects of a music work. Regarding musicality, interpreting a musical work is based on understanding the work's compositional background and its inherent expression in a storytelling manner.

Gieseking and Leimer (2013) emphasized the importance of incorporating various musical performing elements, such as rhythmic characteristics, dynamics, pedals, and related issues, in piano learning. Scale playing was identified as a critical fundamental for training temporal evenness, a basic element of piano technique (Jabusch et al., 2004). Furthermore, Jabusch et al. (2007) utilized standardized scale playing to evaluate the motor skills of children. Additionally, it was found that mastering the skill of hand positioning in various ways is crucial for pianists (Kim et al., 2021).

According to Brown (2014), the aim of developing piano technique is to enhance musical expression in young learners. However, traditional one-on-one piano instruction in Western music education has tended to prioritize technical proficiency over musicality (Holmgren, 2020; Holmgren, 2022). As Hamond (2013) noted, a significant issue in piano performance is the lack of effective communication between the performer and the audience. To cultivate musicality, Sisterhen (2005) proposed proactive engagement in active listening and singing.

2.2.3. Memorization

Wilson et al. (2022) underscored the significance of memorization in piano performance based on semi-structured interviews with ten piano students. Despite of performance anxiety, most students preferred to perform by memory which can induce confidence and enhance musical interpretation. The authors suggested strategies for enhancing

© 2023 by the authors. Published by Secholian Publication. This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

memorization, including practicing hands separately, repetition, singing the melodies, and listening to recordings.

Memorization plays a crucial role in piano performance and is underpinned by four types of memory: kinesthetic, visual, auditory, and analytical. Chen (2016) and Hallam (1997) suggest that to facilitate students' mastery of these memory types, it is necessary for teachers to possess a comprehensive understanding of the associated approaches. Vieira and Eduarda's (2021) experimental study with 24 participants proved that the efficacy of memorization can be enhanced by using performance cues. However, this method requires guidance from the teacher during lessons, especially at the outset of instruction. This research emphasizes the importance of effective memorization strategies in piano performance and emphasizes the role of teachers in developing their students' musical abilities.

2.2.4. Negative Emotion Handling

Contemporary literature on piano learning highlights the significance of emotional and mental factors. Liu (2016) has demonstrated that anxiety and tension can impair psychological well-being and piano performance. Similarly, Cao (2020) argues that negative emotions resulting from a lack of interest, excessive study pressure, and inadequate teaching strategies can hinder piano learning. These findings emphasize the need to address the emotional and mental well-being of piano students in addition to technical proficiency to ensure a successful and fulfilling music education experience.

In the study of Wilson and Roland (2002), performance anxiety constitutes a form of social phobia that elicits feelings of apprehension and unease when performing before an audience, commonly known as stage fright. While a certain level of psychological tension may impact performance, excessive tension can prove deleterious to its quality and the performer's self-efficacy. Moreover, Yoshie et al. (2009) contend that negative emotion and mental stress also engender tension, which in turn can affect the caliber of the performance and the kinesthetic movements of pianists. Their findings further highlight the impact of tension in high-stress scenarios such as competitions, relative to lower-stress situations such as rehearsals.

Various methods have been suggested to help music students and musicians manage performance anxiety. Imagining a relaxed state or anticipating the situation of emerging issues prior to a performance can be effective (Finch & Moscovitch, 2016). Mental rehearsal of imagining a perfect performance, is a commonly used technique in mental training that can increase self-esteem and confidence (Weinberg & Gould, 2003). In addition, mock audition, which re-enacts the audition process, has been found to be effective for musical performance anxiety (Spahn, Walther, & Nusseck, 2016).

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Design

This qualitative study conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 piano teachers and observed their lessons with 12 student participants preparing for a graded piano examination. The teachers who met the selection criteria were invited to the study. The findings of the interviews were to answer the first research question. The three-lesson observations with teacher-student pairs were to examine learning issues observed and

© 2023 by the authors. Published by Secholian Publication. This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

teaching strategies implemented during the lessons in preparation of graded examinations, which was to answer the second research question. The use of triangulation and multiple data sources enhances the validity and reliability of the findings.

3.2. Participants Sampling and Recruitment Procedure

This study employed a rigorous sampling method to select 12 piano teachers who met the criteria of possessing a minimum of five years of teaching experience and holding at least a bachelor's degree. The teachers were identified and contacted through referrals, and communication was conducted via social media or email. In order to ensure that the teachers had sufficient experience in preparing students for graded piano examinations, the sampling criteria stipulated that each teacher had at least three students who had registered for the examination in either 2021 or 2022.

Following the semi-structured interviews with the teachers, and with the consent of the teacher participants, three lessons (before the examinations) of one student from each teacher's studio was selected for observation. These students registered for the graded piano examination in 2022.

3.3. Data Collection

All interviews conducted in this study were recorded and transcribed verbatim, with member checking employed to ensure accuracy of data. Flexibility in addressing issues raised by interviewees was afforded to the researchers during the interviews, utilizing the interview guide as a framework. Interview sessions, which were either online or offline, lasted between 30 to 50 minutes.

Observations of piano lessons were carried out with video recording equipment, in order to capture authentic behavior and interactions without the presence of the researcher. Each lesson observation was limited to a maximum duration of fifty minutes.

3.4. Data Analysis

This study utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to analyze the interview data. IPA is a qualitative analysis method that is suitable to exploring personal experiences and meanings behind them (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). The analysis involved coding the data and generating themes supported by participant quotes. For the observation data, a checklist was constructed based on emergent themes from the interviews and the data was analyzed using content analysis, a method for analyzing visual data to supplement participants' experiences (Harwood & Garry, 2003). Finally, the data from the interviews and observations were triangulated to enhance the validity of the findings.

4. Results

As a result, the identified learning issues and corresponding teaching strategies were systematically coded and categorized into five overarching themes derived from the data obtained from both the interviews and observations.

© 2023 by the authors. Published by Secholian Publication. This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

4.1. The Results from the Interviews

Drawing on the perspectives of experienced piano teachers, this study identified five common issues that piano students typically encounter when preparing for graded examinations. These issues include music reading, skill acquisition, memorization, interpretation, and performance anxiety, which were noted by participating teachers exacerbated under the pressure of graded examinations. Furthermore, the teachers provided valuable insights into the root causes of these issues, attributing them to the students' inadequate skills in the aforementioned areas. To address these issues, the teachers expounded on a range of strategies they commonly employ to instruct their students. These are presented below along with supporting quotes extracted from the interview data.

4.1.1. Theme One: "Music Reading"

The pedagogical experiences of teachers in guiding piano students revealed several concerns. Jiang (2019) identified three critical issues that impede music reading skills among Chinese students: a slow learning process, poor accuracy in note reading and rhythm, ignorance of articulation and expression marks, and over-dependence on physical repetition without recalling lesson instructions. The interview quotes reflected the same phenomena. Table 1 presents an illustrative example of how interview data on music reading was organized and analyzed in tabular form based on the literature. To mitigate these issues, teacher participants suggested various training strategies, such as hand-separate practice, singing and tapping, sight-reading tests, and student video recordings.

Table 1: An Example of Interview Data about Theme One "Music Reading"

Aspect of "Music Reading"	**Statements from Teachers**
Issues	Many students often practiced at liberty, resulting in wrong notes, inaccurate rhythm, disordered tempo, and so on. (Teacher 8)
Ability	Most students have reading problems because of a lack of reading ability besides being carelessness. They have not developed careful and strict habits in score reading since young. (Teacher 9)
Strategies	When students had trouble with notes and rhythm, especially at the beginning of learning a new piece, hand-separate practice should be a good choice. (Teacher 5)
	I usually ask my students tapping the rhythm by foot and singing the melody part when they are playing. (Teacher 11)
	Some students are slow readers which affects their learning process, so I have to let them do a quick sight-reading test at the end of each lesson. (Teacher 3)
	I have students often ignore the details I acquired when they practice at home, if such situation happened more frequently, I would like them to record themselves and send the recordings back to me for guidance. (Teacher 7)

© 2023 by the authors. Published by Secholian Publication. This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

4.1.2. Theme Two: "Skill Acquisition"

Drawing from Drake and Palmer's (2000) findings, the acquisition of skill in piano performance can be proved by the performance of fluency, speed, and accuracy. The proficient performance involves the ability to execute correct actions effortlessly at the required tempo. In light of the interviews, it was found that most students struggled to attain fluency and failed to develop speed and accuracy. Consequently, the second theme of "skill acquisition" and the five training strategies were generated from the data, namely, hand-separate practice, practicing with a metronome, finger exercises, chunking, and repetition with rhythmic variation.

Upon analyzing the data collected from the 12 teacher participants and relevant literature, five themes emerged: music reading, skill acquisition, memorization, interpretation, and performance anxiety. These themes correspond to five learning issues, and a total of thirteen strategies were proposed to address them. A summary of these findings is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Learning Issues and Specific Strategies from the Interviews

Themes (Issues)	Strategies
Music reading	Strategy 1. Hand-separate practice
	Strategy 2. Singing and tapping
	Strategy 3. Sight-reading test
	Strategy 4. Students video recording
Skill acquisition	Strategy 1. Hand-separate practice
	Strategy 5. Practicing with metronome
	Strategy 6. Finger exercises
	Strategy 7. Chunking
	Strategy 8. Repetition and rhythmic variation
Memorization	Strategy 7. Chunking
	Strategy 8. Repetition and rhythmic variation
	Strategy 9. Structure analysis
Interpretation	Strategy 4: Student video recording
	Strategy 10. Modeling of professional pianists
	Strategy 11. Imagination
Performance anxiety	Strategy 12. Mock performance
	Strategy 13. Positive thinking

4.2. The Results from the Observations

According to the data from observations, the learning issues reported by the teacher participants in the previous interviews were evident during the lessons with the student participants. Moreover, many strategies proposed by the teachers were employed during the lessons.

As shown in Table 3, the occurrence rate of learning issues among student participants was analyzed. The data derived from lesson observations revealed that most students demonstrated acceptable levels of mastery in the aspects of music reading and skill acquisition. However, as the examination approached, issues related to memorization, interpretation, and performance anxiety still manifested, which became the main concerns of the teachers.

© 2023 by the authors. Published by Secholian Publication. This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

Table 3: The Occurrence Rate of Learning Issues in Lesson Observations

The Occurrence Rate among Student Participants	A	B	C	D	E
First Lesson	7/12	8/12	10/12	12/12	12/12
Second Lesson	4/12	3/12	7/12	8/12	10/12
Third Lesson	2/12	1/12	5/12	6/12	5/12

Note. A is "Music Reading"; B is "Skill Acquisition"; C is "Memorization"; D is "Interpretation"; E is "Performance anxiety".

The utilization of strategies by teachers during piano lessons was analyzed in Table 4. By comparing the frequency of the strategies mentioned by teachers in the interviews with their actual implementation in the lessons, three conditions were identified. Firstly, the strategies for music reading were less frequently utilized during examination preparation, and the performance outcomes of the students depended more on the accumulation of skills developed through regular lessons and practices. Secondly, when using strategies Chunking (S7) and Repetition and rhythmic variation (S8) which were proposed for solving both issues (as mentioned in Table 2), teachers prioritized the training of skill acquisition despite being aware that memorization posed a greater obstacle during graded examinations. Finally, during the examination period, strategies such as Repetition and rhythmic variation (S8) and Mock performance (S12) were most frequently suggested and implemented by teachers to address the issues of memorization, interpretation, and performance anxiety.

Table 4: The Comparison of the Strategies Using Frequency between Mentioned in the Interviews and Observed in Lessons

Strategies	The Frequency Mentioned in the Interviews among Teacher Participants	The Frequency of Practical Use during the Lessons
S1. Hand-separate practice	12/12	2/12
S2. Singing and tapping	7/12	2/12
S3. Sight-reading test	3/12	0/12
S4. Students video recording	5/12	6/12
S5. Practicing with metronome	12/12	6/12
S6. Finger exercises	6/12	5/12
S7. Chunking	8/12	4/12
S8. Repetition and rhythmic variation	5/12	9/12
S9. Structure analysis	10/12	2/12
S10. Modeling of professional pianists	12/12	3/12
S11. Imagination	5 /12	7/12
S12. Mock performance	12/12	12/12
S13. Positive thinking	2/12	2/12

Note. S is an abbreviation for strategy.

In addition to the aforementioned 13 strategies, two additional techniques were identified during the observed lessons. The first strategy, referred to as "Performing with the eyes closed" (S14), was observed being used by teacher 5 and teacher 12 (student 5 and student 12) to address issues related to performance anxiety. During the

© 2023 by the authors. Published by Secholian Publication. This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

lessons, student 5 and student 12 were observed closing their eyes slightly and tilting their heads, resulting in improved playing outcomes. The second strategy, "Breaking down the music into small sections and imagining how the tricky parts are executed" (S15), was used by teacher 5, teacher 8, and teacher 12 to address memory and interpretation problems, as well as skill acquisition issues in the case of teacher 4 and her student.

5. Conclusion

Findings from both interviews and observations suggest that during the early and intermediate stages of piano learning, the focus of teacher participants was more on music reading and skill acquisition. While during the examination preparation phase, the emphasis shifted toward memorization, interpretation, and performance anxiety. It indicates that the preparation strategies used during the different stages of graded examinations had some differences from those used in general piano learning situations. Even though students' learning issues and the priorities of teachers centered around memorization, interpretation, and performance anxiety during the final period of examination preparation. Nevertheless, the number of strategies used for these three issues was fewer than those two (as shown in Table 5). Notably, the final outcomes of the examination may be more reliant on the quality of instruction during the earlier stages of learning, rather than on the preparation during the late stage and examination preparation.

Table 5: The Numbers of Strategies Used for Each Issue

Issues	How Many Strategies Used for Solving the Issues
Music reading	Four: S1, S2, S3, S4
Skill acquisition	Six: S1, S5, S6, S7, S8, S15
Memorization	Three: S7, S8, S9
Interpretation	Three: S4, S10, S11
Performance anxiety	Three: S12, S13, S14

Note. S is an abbreviation for strategy.

An additional finding of this study was the identification of thirteen specific strategies used by teachers in piano teaching and learning. In the late stage of examination preparation, only two strategies (S8: repetition and rhythmic variation, and S12: mock performance) were frequently applied during lessons, while other strategies were conditionally applied depending on student performance.

In summary, the study highlights the underemphasized aspects of memorization, interpretation, and performance anxiety during piano teaching and learning in China. The prevalent issues of these aspects among amateur piano students suggest a need for greater attention to them during daily lessons, rather than during exam preparation. The cultivation of these skills requires teachers to provide specific strategies for students to apply during their own practice, with clear instructions and feedback on their implementation.

The existing literature has shown that various external factors such as societal and parental factors have a significant influence on the process of piano learning in the context of piano graded examinations in China. However, this study has taken a different approach by examining the internal factors within the realm of piano learning and teaching. Future empirical research can explore the relationship between specific

© 2023 by the authors. Published by Secholian Publication. This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

strategies and their effectiveness in achieving mastery, which can guide piano teachers in addressing learning issues and developing corresponding strategies. Furthermore, this study has provided insight into the aspects of abilities that teachers should cultivate during daily lessons and highlighted the importance of shifting the focus of amateur piano learning from an examination-oriented approach to a progressive one. Such research can inform best practices for addressing these pervasive issues and enhancing the overall quality of amateur piano instruction in China, and beyond.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This research project received ethical approval from the Universiti Malaya Research Ethics Committee (UMREC) with the reference number UM.TNC2/UMREC_2314. Participants provided consent to participate in the study and their identities were kept confidential in accordance with ethical guidelines.

Acknowledgement

Part of this article is taken from a Research Project for a PhD's Programme.

Funding

This study received no funding.

Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

References

Babacan, E. (2014). Aday müzik öğretmenlerinin piyano eğitimi sürecindeki bireysel çalişma yöntemlerinin değerlendirilmesi. *Sanat Eğitimi Dergisi*, *2*(1), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.7816/sed-02-01-01

Brown, A. R. (2014). *Music technology and education: Amplifying musicality*. Routledge.

Cai, J. N. (2005). Gangqin Kaoji zhong Cunzai de Wenti ji Fansi [Problems and reflections in piano grading test]. *Journal of Changji College,2005*(01),90-91.

Cao, X. (2020). Negative emotions and psychological problems of piano learners and countermeasures. *Revista Argentina de Clínica Psicológica*, *29*(1), 887.

Chen, R. (2016). Memorization of piano music: a challenge for Chinese piano students. *Asian Social Science*, *12*(3), 112.

Dai, Y. J. (2010). Gangqin Jiaoxue zhong Cunzai de Wenti ji Duice [Problems and Countermeasures in Piano Teaching]. *Education Exploration* (05), 72-73.

Davidson, J., & Scutt, S. (1999). Instrumental learning with exams in mind: a case study investigating teacher, student and parent interactions before, during and after a music examination. *British Journal of Music Education*, *16*(1), 79-95. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051799000169

Dong, L. (2018). *Gangqin Kaoji Xianzhuang de Diaocha Yanjiu [Investigation and Research on the status of the piano examination——Make the piano examination more and*

© 2023 by the authors. Published by Secholian Publication. This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

more Chinese characteristics] [Master's thesis, China Conservatory of Music]. CNKI. https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD201901&filename=1018169148.nh

Drake, C., & Palmer, C. (2000). Skill acquisition in music performance: relations between planning and temporal control. *Cognition*, *74*(1), 1-32. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0010-0277(99)00061-X

Finch, K., & Moscovitch, D. A. (2016). Imagery-based interventions for music performance anxiety: an integrative review. *Medical problems of performing artists*, *31*(4), 222-231. https://doi.org/10.21091/mppa.2016.4040

Fraser, A., & Ardan, S. (2003). *The craft of piano playing: A new approach to piano technique*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Gao, H. (2016). Guanyu Gangqin Yeyu Kaoji de Jidian Sikao [Some thoughts on the Amateur Piano Grade Test]. *Northern Music,36*(20),185.

Gieseking, W., & Leimer, K. (2013). *Piano technique*. Courier Corporation.

Gudmundsdottir, H. R. (2010). Advances in music-reading research. *Music Education Research*, *12*(4), 331-338. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2010.504809

Hallam, S. (1997). The development of memorisation strategies in musicians: Implications for education. *British Journal of Music Education*, *14*(1), 87-97. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051700003466

Hamond, L. (2013, August). Feedback on elements of piano performance: Two case studies in higher education studio. In *Proceedings of International Symposium of the Performance Science (ISPS 2013), University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna, Austria/Brussels, Belgium: European Association of Conservatoires (AEC)* (pp. 33-38).

Harwood, T. G., & Garry, T. (2003). An overview of content analysis. *The marketing review*, *3*(4), 479-498. https://doi.org/10.1362/146934703771910080

Holmgren, C. (2020). The conditions for learning musical interpretation in one-to-one piano tuition in higher music education. *Nordic Research in Music Education*, *1*(1), 103-131. https://doi.org/10.23865/nrme.v1.2635

Holmgren, C. (2022). Empowering piano students of Western classical music: challenging teaching and learning of musical interpretation in higher education. *Music Education Research*, 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2022.2101632

Huang, Y. M. (2018). Requirements and significance for the piano grading test by Chinese Musicians Association. *Journal of Heihe University* (01), 182-183.

Jabusch, H. C., Vauth, H., & Altenmüller, E. (2004). Quantification of focal dystonia in pianists using scale analysis. *Movement disorders: official journal of the Movement Disorder Society*, *19*(2), 171-180. https://doi.org/10.1002/mds.10671

Jabusch, H. C., Yong, R., & Altenmüller, E. (2007, November). Biographical predictors of music-related motor skills in children pianists. In *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Performance Science* (pp. 363-368).

Jiang, Y. (2019). Typical Problems of Piano Playing of Students Majoring in Music in Normal University. In *2019 3rd International Conference on Education, Management Science and Economics (ICEMSE 2019)* (pp. 284-287). Atlantis Press. DOI: 10.2991/icemse-19.2019.65

Kilic, D. B. Ç. (2016). Students and Instructors Opinions about Piano Instruction. *Educational Research and Reviews*, *11*(10), 966-974. ERIC. http://academicjournals.org/journal/ERR

Kim, S., Park, J. M., Rhyu, S., Nam, J., & Lee, K. (2021). Quantitative analysis of piano performance proficiency focusing on difference between hands. *PloS one*, *16*(5), e0250299. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0250299

© 2023 by the authors. Published by Secholian Publication. This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

Lehmann, A. C., & McArthur, V. (2002). Sight-reading. *The science and psychology of music performance*, 135-150.

Li, C. H. (2002). Guanyu Gangqin Kaoji "Luanbagao" Xianxiang de Jidian Jianyi [The suggestions of skipping upon the real level in the graded piano examination]. *Piano Artistry* (10), 55-61.

Liu, P. C. (2016). *Music performance anxiety among college piano majors in Taiwan* [Doctoral dissertation, Boston University]. OpenBU. https://hdl.handle.net/2144/19580

Liu, Q. G. (2004). Qianyi Gangqin Kaoji zhong de Changjian Wenti [Discussion on Common Problems in Graded Piano Examination]. *Journal of Social Science of Jiamusi University* (05), 123-124.

Liu, X. L. (2010). Zhongguo Gangqin Yishu Fazhan 60 nian (9) Xueqin Rechao zhongde Gangqin Kaoji [60 years of Chinese piano art development (9) Piano grading examination in the upsurge of piano learning]. *Piano Artistry,2010*(01), 26-28.

Lou, Y. (2012). Yinyue zhi Mei xu Changban Gangqin Kaoji—Yingguo Huangjia Yinyue Xueyuan Gangqin Kaoji de Qishi [The beauty of music must always accompany piano graded examinations——Enlightenment from the ABRSM piano examinations]. *Song of the Yellow River, 2012*(1), 113-114.

Mou, L. (2008). Shandongsheng Gangqin Kaoji Xianzhuang Diaocha jiqi Gaige Silu [A survey on piano grading tests in Shandong province: Actuality and reform ideas]. *Qilu Realm of Arts,2008*(5), 88-91.

Ryan, C., Boucher, H., & Ryan, G. (2022). Children's feelings about piano performances across a year of study. *International Journal of Music Education*, *40*(3), 392-406. doi: 10.1177/02557614211066342

Sisterhen, L. (2005). Teaching Musicality in Group Piano Classes. *Special Issue Pedagogy Articles*, *8*(1), 234.

Smith, J. A., & Fieldsend, M. (2021). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis*. American Psychological Association.

Spahn, C., Walther, J. C., & Nusseck, M. (2016). The effectiveness of a multimodal concept of audition training for music students in coping with music performance anxiety. *Psychology of Music*, *44*(4), 893-909. DOI: 10.1177/0305735615597484

Sun, Y. (2013, May). *Zhengzhou Yeyu Gangqin Jiaoyu de Diaocha yu Yanjiu [Investigation and Research of the Amateur Piano Education in Zhengzhou City]* [Master's thesis, Chinese National Academy of Arts]. CNKI. https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD201302&filename=1013180466.nh

Vieira, L., & Eduarda, M. (2021). *Using Performance Cues as a Memorization Strategy with Group Piano Students by Implementing Teacher and Student-Directed Learning Approaches*. [Doctoral Dissertations, Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College]. LSU. https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/5643

Weinberg, R. S., & Gould, D. (2003). *Foundations of sport and exercise psychology 3rd ed.* Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Wilson, E. L., Simanjuntak, S. E., Apalat, A. J. S., Beratio, N. R., De Gracia, K. R. F., De Dios, S. A. B., & Solidum, J. B. (2022). Perceptions and Memorization Strategies of Piano Students Toward Piano Performance: A Phenomenological Study. *8ISC Proceedings: Arts and Education*, 16-25. Retrieved from http://ejournal.unklab.ac.id/index.php/8iscared/article/view/612

Wilson, G. D., & Roland, D. (2002). Performance anxiety. *The science and psychology of music performance: Creative strategies for teaching and learning*, *47*. Oxford University Press.

© 2023 by the authors. Published by Secholian Publication. This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

Wristen, B. (2005). Cognition and motor execution in piano sight-reading: A review of literature. *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education*, *24*(1), 44-56.

Wu, X. (2012). "Gangqinre" Beijing xia Dangqian Ertong Gangqin Jiaoyu de Tantao [Discussion on current children's piano education under the background of "piano craze"]. Music Space (01), 57-58.

Xiao, Q. Y. (2016). Guanyu Gangqin Yeyu Kaoji de Jidian Sikao [Some thoughts on the Amateur Piano Grade Test]. *Appreciation,2016*(06),256-257.

Xiong, X. Y. (2019). Jiyu Fazhan Shijiaoxia dui Yinyue Kaoji de Sikao—Yi Zhongguo Yinyuejia Xiehui Gangqin Kaoji wei Li [Thoughts on music graded examination based on the perspective of development——Take the APGE of the Chinese Musicians Association as an example]. *Northern Music, 2019*(08),232-234.

Xu, J. X. (2011). You Gangqin Kaoji Bagao Tiaoji Yinfa de Sikao [Thinking caused by skip upon the real level in the graded piano examination]. *Yihai Journal* (02), 98-99.

Yan, C., Li, Y., & Liu, X. Z. (2021). Woguo Gangqin Kaoji de Xianzhuang Fanxi yu Sikao [Analysis and Reflection on the Current Situation of Piano Graded Examination in China]. *Home Drama* (17),88-89.

Yang, C. (2012). *Ertong "Yueqi Xuexire" Xianxiang de Shehui Chengyin ji Jiaoyu Wuqu [The social causes and educational misunderstandings of the phenomenon of children's "music instrumental learning boom"]* [Master's thesis, Nanjing Normal University]. CNKI. https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD201301&filename=1013105959.nh

Yang, H. (2005). Cong Dangqian "Gangqinre" Xianxiang Kan Ertong Gangqin Jiaoyu [Looking at children's piano education from the current "piano boom" phenomenon]. *Journal of Luohe Vocational Technology College (comprehensive version)* (04).

Yang, Y. (2016). Shilun Ertong Gangqin Kaojire ji Wuqu [On the fever of children's piano graded examination and its misunderstandings]. *Music Space,2016*(02),176-177.

Yang, Y. S. (2019, January). *Chengdu Gangqin Kaoji Yanjiu [Research on piano grade test in Chengdu]* [Master's thesis, Southwest Minzu University]. CNKI. https://kns.cnki.net/KCMS/detail/detail.aspx?dbname=CMFD202001&filename=1019685301.nh

Yin, J. Z., & Tang, Y. C. (2018). Shehui Gangqin Kaoji Jiaoxue de Libi Fenxi [An analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of social piano graded examination]. *Journal of Hunan University of Science and Engineering, 39*(11), 175-176.

Yoshie, M., Kudo, K., & Ohtsuki, T. (2009). Motor/autonomic stress responses in a competitive piano performance. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, *1169*(1), 368-371. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-6632.2009.04786.x

Zeng, J., & Xie, L. (2013). Jiangxisheng Yeyu Gangqin Kaoji de Xianzhuang Qianxi [A brief analysis of the status quo of Jiangxi Amateur Piano Grade Test]. *ShengZhou,2013*(34),257-258.

Zhang, H. (1999). Gangqin Kaoji Libi Tan [On the pros and cons of piano grade test]. *Chinese Music Education,1999*(03),25-26.

Zhang, J. (2012). Shenshi Gangqin Jiaoyu Jiaoxue Gaige Xianzhuang [Examining the Current Situation of Piano Education Reform]. *Art Education* (03),72-73.

Zhang, L., &Huang, Z. L. (2003). Guanyu Gangqin Kaoji de Jidian Zhiyi [Some Doubts about Piano Graded Examination]. *Piano Artistry* (12), 44-46.

Zhang, Y. (2011). Dui Gangqin Kaojire Xianxiang Yinfa de Sikao [Thoughts of the piano graded examination boom]. *Popular Literature,2011*(20), 268.

Zhao, X. S. (2009). Guanyu Gangqin Kaoji de Jidian Sikao [Some thoughts on piano grade test]. *Piano Artistry,2009*(12), 31.

© 2023 by the authors. Published by Secholian Publication. This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

Zhou, G. R. (1996). Zai Gangqin Puji Jiaoyu zhong ying Zhongshi de Jiaoxue Wenti [The emphasized teaching Problems in Popular Piano Education]. *Piano Artistry* (02)

Zhou, Q. X. (2003). Gangqin Kaoji zhong Chuxian de Wenti [Problems in Piano Graded Examination]. *Piano Artistry* (12), 42-43.

Zhukov, K. (2014). Exploring advanced piano students' approaches to sight-reading. *International Journal of Music Education*, *32*(4), 487-498. DOI: 10.1177/0255761413517038

© 2023 by the authors. Published by Secholian Publication. This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).