

PEDAGOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF IMPROVING PIANO PERFORMANCE TECHNIQUE IN THE PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF FUTURE MUSIC TEACHERS

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Theory and History of Pedagogical Doctrines

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Abstract: This article explores the pedagogical foundations for developing technical skills in piano performance. The importance of tempo, rhythmic accuracy, dynamic expression, and sound quality in the process of enhancing technical mastery is justified. The methodological views of renowned pedagogues such as E. Liberman and G. G. Neygauz are analyzed, and their practical significance in shaping performance technique is demonstrated. The article highlights the importance of correct posture, conscious practice, point-based methods, and other methodological approaches, providing recommendations for students to effectively develop their performance technique.

Keywords: piano, performance technique, music pedagogy, posture, conscious practice, technical mastery.

A music teacher is not only a knowledge provider but also a mentor who nurtures the moral and artistic development of young people and shapes their aesthetic worldview. Therefore, in training future music teachers, the development of piano performance technique holds a special place. The piano is the foundation of musical education and the most essential tool for both the performer and the pedagogue. This instrument is widely used not only in solo practice but also in vocal and ensemble training. A future music teacher must perform several key tasks in their work: demonstrating musical pieces on the piano to students based on the principle of visual demonstration; using the piano to reinforce musical literacy during lessons; and extensively employing the instrument in leading ensemble and choir sessions, accompanying singing. Consequently, the level of mastery in piano performance technique is one of the crucial criteria defining a teacher's professional competence.

Technical mastery in music performance plays a critical role, particularly in piano performance, where achieving a flawless rendition requires not only creative interpretation but also solid technical preparation. Hence, in the field of music pedagogy, the development of performance technique remains a constantly relevant issue. It is well-known that technical perfection cannot be achieved in a short time; this process requires consistent practice, determination, patience, and well-designed pedagogical approaches. Technical mastery refers to a performer's ability to control tempo, rhythmic precision, dynamic expression, and sound quality to a high standard.

Only when these elements are harmoniously integrated can the artistic content of a piece be fully conveyed. Pedagogical experience shows that a performer with weak technical skills cannot deliver a piece convincingly. Naturally, improving performance technique does not happen instantly—it requires time and effort. Therefore, in music pedagogy, selecting a piece that matches the performer's capabilities is recommended. Only then can the work be executed at a near-perfect level. Correct piece selection, along with an accurate assessment of the performer's abilities, is essential in demonstrating technical mastery. Developing piano performance technique is a complex and continuous process. It demands effort, patience, and discipline from the performer, while the pedagogue must choose appropriate methodological approaches. Advancing technical mastery contributes not only to refining technical skills but also to the deep artistic interpretation of a musical piece. In this context, the scientific and literary contributions of E. Liberman and G. G. Neygauz hold particular importance. Liberman emphasizes posture and hand position as the starting point for technical development, while Neygauz highlights the necessity of combining expressive sound production with technical perfection during performance.

The process of developing piano performance technique in future music teachers requires the integration of psychomotor, musical, and pedagogical components. Piano technique is a complex psychomotor activity in which the brain, muscles, auditory perception, and finger movements function in an interrelated manner. Therefore, performing exercises consciously—directing attention to finger movements, sound quality, and notation—is an essential condition for technical improvement. Incorrect or purely mechanical practice significantly reduces effectiveness. Technical training is a long-term and systematic process that includes the following stages:

Initial preparatory stage – Correct posture. The anatomically comfortable positioning of the hands, fingers, body, and feet forms the foundation for technical development. As E. Liberman notes, incorrect posture leads to rhythmic inconsistency, poor sound quality, and muscle fatigue. Correct posture is typically developed during the beginner phase when the performer is first becoming acquainted with the instrument. However, even students who already possess certain piano-playing skills may demonstrate improper posture. Without correcting such issues, improvement in performance technique is nearly impossible, as incorrect posture hinders progress regardless of practice duration. Although adjusting the posture of a performer with existing habits may be challenging, consistent self-monitoring of hand, body, and foot alignment can yield positive outcomes. Maintaining relaxed hands is also crucial, as tension in the shoulders and arms inhibits technical growth. There are specific exercises designed to promote free movement of the hands and body over the keyboard. Practicing these exercises daily for 15–20 minutes can help the performer achieve relaxed, unrestricted movement. These exercises are also beneficial after practice sessions when significant fatigue in the hands is experienced.

Technical skills development stage – Studies and complex exercises. At this stage, finger agility, speed, and hand flexibility are developed through études and advanced technical drills. As all pianists know, systematic work on scales contributes significantly to technical progress. It is essential to practice scales in various forms—natural, harmonic, melodic, in thirds, sixths, tenths, chords, arpeggios, chromatic patterns, as well as contrary-motion scales. Depending on the performer's ability, these forms should be introduced gradually. For example, a student who

has never played thirds or tenths should first learn them in parallel motion before attempting contrary motion. To achieve smooth, fast, and high-quality sound production, slow practice and the use of varied techniques are required. Thus, the first task is to play slowly, without haste, and without inaccurate notes. Afterwards, various methods may be applied. One such method is the use of “dotted rhythms,” which strengthen the fingers. However, practicing one method excessively may produce adverse effects. Alternating articulations—one hand playing legato and the other staccato, and then reversing—can also be useful. Another technique involves alternating slow and fast groups (e.g., four slow notes followed by four fast notes). These groups may also be organized in patterns of three, five, or other numbers. Additionally, “double-tap” exercises—striking the same key twice, with the first tone weak and short, and the second strong and long—help the fingers settle more firmly on the keys and strengthen weaker digits. However, the effectiveness of these exercises depends on their correct and appropriate application, as incorrect use may lead to no improvement or even deterioration.

Conscious practice. Exercises must be performed consciously rather than mechanically. Since brain activity and finger movement are closely interconnected, full concentration during practice increases efficiency. If a performer moves their fingers on the keyboard while mentally focusing on unrelated matters, the effectiveness of the exercises decreases. For instance, when practicing mixed dotted rhythms (e.g., long pauses on every fourth or sixth note), failing to concentrate on fingers, sound, and notation leads to confusion. Therefore, conscious engagement is essential for achieving meaningful and positive results. **Creative application stage – Applying technical skills in repertoire.** At this stage, acquired technical methods are applied to artistic pieces, with deeper focus on expressiveness, dynamics, tempo, and articulation. It is highly effective for students to listen to and observe their own performance. Recording and reviewing video performances enables them to identify errors more accurately. For example, a performer may believe they are playing the piano section softly enough, but upon listening to the recording, they may realize the dynamic is insufficient and work to improve it. Students with rhythmic difficulties can also identify their inconsistencies through this method.

Motivation and discipline. High achievement is possible only when the performer’s intrinsic motivation and diligence align with the teacher’s guidance. Self-confidence also plays an important role. As future music teachers are expected to perform in front of entire classes, excessive anxiety or low confidence may lead to performance errors. Therefore, along with academic training at higher education institutions, learning to overcome anxiety and develop self-confidence is considered one of the essential components of professional preparation. Encouraging creative activity is one of the most essential components of the educational process, as it fosters students’ personal initiative, independent thinking, and full expression of their creative potential. The stimulation of creative activity is primarily associated with the development of intrinsic motivation. When a student is able to internalize a musical piece—integrating it with their inner world, emotions, and sensations—the process of performance naturally transforms into a creative act. In this regard, a positive psychological climate, opportunities for free thinking, and an individualized approach play a crucial role. One of the most effective means of stimulating creativity is the use of improvisation and creative assignments. For example, tasks such as creating a short improvisational passage based on the studied piece, altering the melody, or expressing it in different styles activate creative thinking.

Through such tasks, the student not only listens to the music but also “feels it creatively,” enriching their personal artistic experience. Another effective method of motivation is the constructive organization of external stimuli—including competitions, concerts, contests, praise, and positive evaluations. However, these provide only temporary motivation. The primary goal is to strengthen the student’s intrinsic creative drive, enabling them to derive personal satisfaction from musical creativity. Therefore, in the pedagogical environment, external motivation must be harmonized with internal needs. Modern digital tools also hold great significance in stimulating creative activity. Music software, virtual piano platforms, and audio analysis applications provide students with opportunities to listen to, analyze, and improve their performance. This contributes to self-evaluation, critical listening, and sustained creative growth. As a result, the student becomes an active participant in the self-development of their own creative abilities. Communicative competence plays an important role in the creative and social development of students. This competence encompasses the ability to express one’s thoughts freely, establish effective communication with others, and work collaboratively in a group. Particularly in ensemble and choral activities, the development of communicative competence occupies a special place, as these forms of musical training foster creative interaction, enhance musical thinking, and strengthen collective responsibility. Ensemble and choral rehearsals are inherently collaborative creative processes. Each participant must not only perform their part correctly but also listen attentively to others and achieve harmonic unity. In this process, students acquire essential communicative skills such as mutual listening, exchanging musical ideas, coordinating tempo and rhythm, and jointly selecting expressive tools. These skills ensure not only a higher quality of performance but also support the psychological cohesion of the musical group. Here, the instructor’s leadership and ability to establish a positive emotional environment are of decisive importance. A warm, respectful atmosphere encourages students to express their opinions freely, receive criticism constructively, and offer creative suggestions. Thus, ensemble and choral activities nurture communicative culture, mutual respect, collective thinking, and collaborative creativity—skills that serve as a vital socio-cultural foundation for students’ future careers as teachers, performers, or leaders.

To summarize, improving piano performance technique in future music teachers plays a crucial role in their professional formation. Piano lessons serve not only as a means of developing technical skills but also contribute to the cultivation of pedagogical mastery, creativity, and aesthetic taste. From a pedagogical perspective, this process must rely on learner-centered approaches, gradual complication, stimulation of creative activity, and principles of motivation. In this way, future music teachers will be able to use the piano effectively in their professional practice and play a significant role in the musical education of the younger generation.

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