Constructing the Piano Sight-Reading Training Course for Music Major Students at Jiaozuo Normal College, China

Meng Yu and Parinya Panyanan
Bangkokthonburi University, Thailand
Corresponding Author, E-mail: nicha.musiced@gmail.com

****

Abstract

Sight-reading is an integral part of piano teaching and a crucial aspect of music learning and performance. Literally understood, sight-reading can be defined as the ability to quickly convert musical notation into music and perform it in real-time. Cultivating strong sight-reading skills not only enhances students' musical literacy but also strengthens their understanding and analytical abilities in music. It is also a necessary skill for participating in music competitions and examinations. The level of sight-reading ability directly influences the potential for development in piano learners and has a profound impact on their learning outcomes. Therefore, every music student aspires to possess excellent piano sight-reading skills. However, achieving this goal often faces numerous difficulties and challenges.

Keywords: Constructing; Piano; Sight-Reading; Training Course; Jiaozuo Normal College; China

Introduction

In the context of rapid development in the 21st century, with a focus on modernization and equal development and inheritance of diverse cultures, the field of arts emphasizes the integration and dissemination of multiculturalism. In higher education music programs, cultivating well-rounded music students with comprehensive qualities has become an important educational goal, requiring them to possess extensive professional knowledge, high-level musical literacy, and overall competence.

Firstly, students need to have outstanding singing and instrumental skills, enabling them to accurately express the emotions and techniques of musical works. Through extensive practice and guidance, they should continuously improve their singing and instrumental abilities to showcase high-level musical performances on stage.

Additionally, students should also possess strong sight-reading and accompaniment skills. They need to be able to read sheet music accurately and collaborate with other instruments or vocalists in ensemble performances. This ability enhances their understanding of musical structure and harmony, enabling them to actively engage in music composition and performance.

Moreover, students need to develop improvisational skills. They should be capable of adapting to various periods, styles, genres, and forms of music, freely engaging in improvisation and performance. This requires a broad knowledge of music and an understanding of different musical styles, which they can flexibly apply in their performances.

* Received: July 11 2024; Revised: July 30 2024; Accepted: August 1 2024

In addition to musical skills, students also need to develop their overall competence. This includes teaching, organizational, communication, and leadership abilities. Students need to learn effective teaching methods and techniques to impart music knowledge and skills to others in the future. They should also develop organizational and managerial skills for coordinating music events, such as organizing concerts or participating in musical ensembles. Moreover, students should be able to communicate effectively with others and take on leadership roles when necessary within a team (Zhang, 2015).

One of the main reasons why most people progress slowly in sight-reading is a lack of proper methods. They often read note by note, starting with the right hand, then shifting to the left hand, and afterward paying attention to elements such as rhythm, melodic patterns, articulation, tempo, dynamics, among others. This step-by-step reading approach leads to low efficiency and can easily generate fear or resistance towards sight-reading. Additionally, exceptional sight-reading requires not only accurate, fluent, and complete rendition of the music but also the ability to fully express its emotions and characteristics. This requires performers to have a solid technical foundation, a profound understanding of music, and the ability to process information quickly. Whether students' major focus is piano or non-piano, piano sight-reading remains a challenging technical hurdle that is difficult to overcome.

In most colleges and universities in China, piano teachers typically focus on developing students' performance and expressive abilities in different periods and genres of music, while rarely placing sight-reading as a separate training component. As a result, students' sight-reading skills usually only accumulate and improve spontaneously through extensive practice of professional repertoire. This approach is somewhat understandable since students in piano studies must master various techniques and theoretical knowledge while also facing the demands of learning and performing a large number of musical pieces. However, neglecting sight-reading training may impose certain limitations on students' overall development. The lack of sight-reading ability can hinder students' ability to quickly and accurately comprehend musical scores when facing new pieces, thus affecting their learning efficiency and performance abilities. Although students can accumulate some sight-reading experience through regular practice of professional repertoire, relying solely on this approach often falls short of achieving a high level of sight-reading proficiency. Therefore, it is encouraged for schools and teachers to recognize sight-reading as an independent training component and provide sufficient attention and guidance. This will positively contribute to students' development and overall enhancement of their abilities (Wang, 2022).

There is a prominent issue in piano teaching at the Music College of Jiaozuo Normal College, which is the neglect of sight-reading instruction. Music major students lack sufficient training in this aspect and typically rely on repeated practice of sheet music until they can play it proficiently. However, they face significant difficulties in sight-reading sections of competitions or exams, as well as in rehearsing new pieces without preparation time. Even relatively simple scores can pose stumbling blocks during sight-reading, hindering their ability to express the music effectively and emotionally. Furthermore, the lack of sight-reading skills affects students' efficiency in practicing new professional repertoire. Inefficient sight-reading hampers the improvement of piano performance techniques and slows down learning progress, potentially undermining students' confidence in learning new music. This deficiency in sight-reading ability may also limit students' future career development. Overall, the problems arising from the lack of sight-reading instruction encompass several aspects (Wu & Li, 2017).

The overall level of piano teaching is affected. Students are unable to receive systematic training in piano sight-reading, depriving them of opportunities to develop their sight-reading skills. Sight-reading plays a crucial role in piano performance as it helps students better understand the notation and the essence of musical compositions. The lack of sight-reading cultivation limits students' technical proficiency and expressive abilities in their performances, preventing them from fully developing their musical skills and potential, thus impacting the overall level of piano teaching.

It imposes limitations on the development of music education majors. As an essential skill in music education, sight-reading is particularly important for future music teachers. The inability to receive systematic sight-reading instruction may hinder students' development in the field of music education, preventing them from acquiring comprehensive teaching techniques and resources, thereby affecting their future teaching abilities. This limitation may also hinder the overall educational level of the school's music education program (Liu, 2015).

It fails to meet the diverse needs of the music industry. With the diversified development of the music industry, sight-reading skills are increasingly required in various fields such as piano accompaniment, ensemble performance, and recording production. If students cannot receive systematic sight-reading training, they may face challenges when entering the music industry and be unable to meet the professional requirements and market demands. This deficiency will have a detrimental impact on students' employment prospects and career development.

Insufficient availability of teaching resources within the school. The lack of piano sight-reading instruction implies that the school has not provided relevant teaching resources such as sight-reading materials, practice repertoire, and instructional materials. This makes it difficult for students to engage in independent learning and practice, preventing them from achieving systematic and comprehensive improvement. In the long run, the inadequate availability of teaching resources within the school will hinder the improvement of the school's teaching level and the sustainable development of education (Li, 2018).

As can be seen, Jiaozuo Normal College faces a challenging task of how to train and improve students' piano sight-reading abilities. Currently, scholars both domestically and internationally have conducted extensive research on piano sight-reading abilities and have proposed various viewpoints and training methods. However, these methods are scattered and general, and may not necessarily be suitable for the specific needs and circumstances of music majors at Jiaozuo Normal College. Therefore, in order to effectively enhance students' piano sight-reading abilities, it is necessary to develop a scientific and practical training course tailored to this specific student group through in-depth research and customization. Through systematic and targeted sight-reading training, students can better grasp piano sight-reading techniques, thereby improving their abilities and competitiveness in the field of music.

Research Objectives

1. To study piano sight-reading technique from the key informants
2. To construct the Piano Sight-Reading Training Course for music major students at Jiaozuo Normal College
3. To experiment the Piano Sight-Reading Training Course for music major students at Jiaozuo Normal College
4. To evaluate the Piano Sight-Reading Training Course for music major students at Jiaozuo Normal College

Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed research methodology combining qualitative research and experimental research.

Qualitative research is used to collect data on the student's profile, including the length of piano studies, current sight-reading level, and future career plans. Through interviews with piano teaching experts, learn their piano sight-reading techniques, teaching experiences and successful cases, as well as their suggestions for this training course. These valuable data primarily serve the purpose of establishing teaching objectives and content, designing the training course.

Furthermore, experimental research is employed to implement the training course using a finalized plan. Performance tests are conducted for both formative and summative evaluations, utilizing these data to assess students' performance and progress and gain insights into the effectiveness of the piano sight-reading training course implementation.

Conceptual Framework

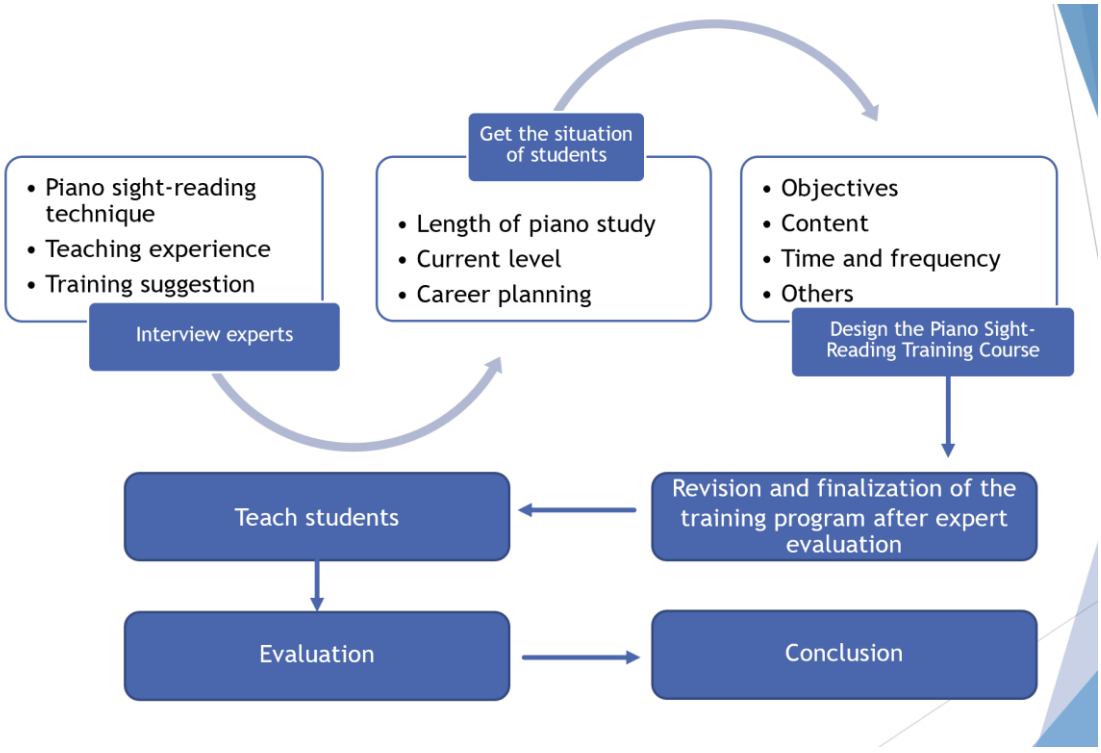


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Research Findings

1. **Studying piano sight-reading techniques from the key informants**

Through interviews with experts and literature search, researchers have mastered the ways and methods of piano sight-reading teaching and enriched the teaching experience. The researchers summarized the results of the expert interviews.

1) Master basic piano knowledge and skills before practicing sight reading, including pitch, rhythm, scales, arpeggios, chords, tonality, and musical structure.

2) Learn to recognize notes quickly by understanding the distance between different intervals, and use a metronome to improve your sense of rhythm.

3) Practice sight-reading, focusing on hand-eye coordination, reading music with your eyes in advance, and reducing reliance on the keyboard.

4) Examine the melody line and harmony of the music, pay attention to changes in rhythm and intensity, and correctly grasp the style of the music.

5) Focus on the process rather than the outcome, cultivate positive self-talk, and don't get frustrated or nervous about mistakes, but focus and maintain a calm mind.

6) Training memory skills, such as chord progressions and specific melodic passages, will help you better predict and remember the next note while sight-reading.

7) Control the timbre by using wrist, arm, and waist strength, and express emotions through different force and speed.

8) Encourage group learning and promote group members to help each other and make progress together.

9) Provide ensemble and competition opportunities to exercise psychological quality and increase performance experience.

10) Combine music and games to enhance interest and enthusiasm and improve sight-reading skills more efficiently.

2. **Constructing the Piano Sight-Reading Training Course for music major students at Jiaozuo Normal College**

1) Based on the students' basic situation and future career planning, the researcher developed a piano sight-reading training program.

2) The program mainly includes four aspects: training objectives, training plans, teaching methods and training management requirements.

3) Piano sight-reading training plan by three piano education experts were evaluated. Experts believe that the program has clear objectives, comprehensive content, effective teaching methods, and the training course conforms to the principles of comprehensiveness and practicality, flexibility and enjoyment, competitive and evaluative, and the final evaluation of the program can be implemented.

3. **Experimenting the Piano Sight-Reading Training Course for music major students at Jiaozuo Normal College**

1) The implementation of piano sight-reading training course provides students with a specific teaching environment and atmosphere to help students learn systematically and improve their sight-reading ability.

2) Through the targeted course and teaching method, students receive professional guidance and feedback that accelerates their learning process.

3) The sight-reading training course provide plenty of practice materials and game opportunities to help students practice and consolidate their sight-reading skills.

4) This training teaches students the skills of analyzing musical scores, understanding musical structure, and expressing musicality, enabling them to understand and interpret music more fully.

5) The training was divided into 4 stages. Teachers and students worked together to complete the training tasks in each stage step by step.

4. Evaluating the Piano Sight-Reading Training Course for music major students at Jiaozuo Normal College

1) The implementation of this training course has achieved good results. The whole implementation process is smooth and rigorous. The teachers showed high professionalism and dedication, and the students had a good learning attitude and great enthusiasm for learning. The whole training was carried out smoothly and finally completed on schedule.

2) Three experienced music experts from our school rated the implementation of this training course, with an average score of 48.33 (total score 50). The students' average sight-reading score increased from an initial 77.65 to 81.5, further improved to 83.85, and finally reached 85.7 (out of 100).

3) The implementation effect of this training course is good, and the students' sight-reading ability has been improved to a certain extent.

4) In the long run, the sight-reading training course provides students with a positive, encouraging and challenging learning environment, stimulate their passion for music, improve their self-confidence and competence, and enhance students' competitiveness in future employment.

5) The construction and implementation of this training course has a positive significance for students' music education.

Discussion

The learning of all skills requires constant updating of teaching methods. The updating and development of teaching methods is to better meet the needs of learners and adapt to the changes of The Times. As technology continues to advance and society continues to evolve, so does our environment and the way we learn. Therefore, teachers need to actively incorporate new teaching methods and introduce more interactive, personalized and practical teaching methods to help students better understand and apply what they have learned. In this way, the learning process becomes more diversified, flexible and autonomous, and it also promotes the improvement of teaching effect (Lu, 2022).

Piano sight-reading is a complex and comprehensive skill that requires students to train and develop from many aspects. Teachers should first master correct and systematic methods to help students improve their learning efficiency. Therefore, before the implementation of this training, researchers interviewed piano education experts with rich experience and in-depth professional knowledge. First, experts understand the nature and development process of sight-reading skills, and they are able to identify the difficulties and challenges faced by learners and provide corresponding teaching strategies (Deng, 2017). At the same time, it can help identify the basic skills and concepts that learners need to master at different stages, as well as music and practice materials suitable for student development. Secondly, experts are familiar with various teaching methods and techniques, and can choose appropriate teaching methods according to the characteristics and needs of learners. They know how to develop

learners' attention, concentration, and practice habits, as well as how to improve learners' sight reading through skills such as analyzing musical scores, understanding musical structure, and expressing musicality (Ma, 2015).

Through exchanges and learning with these piano education experts, researchers gain valuable insights and inspirations, and apply these knowledge in the design and implementation of training courses to ensure the effectiveness and feasibility of training courses.

Recommendations

Practical Recommendations

When designing training courses, it should be clear that short-term training only provides a learning phase for students, and continuous support and follow-up are needed to achieve lasting progress in sight-reading ability.

First, ongoing support includes providing students with additional resources and materials beyond their training sessions. This can include sheet music, sight-reading practice materials, music theory books, etc., giving students the opportunity to continue practicing and consolidating after class. At the same time, it can also help students maintain their interest in sight reading and conduct independent learning after the training course.

Second, regular follow-up evaluations are crucial. Teachers can schedule regular assessment activities, such as sight-reading tests, recitals, or group performances, to see how students are progressing. Through these assessments, teachers can identify students' problems and difficulties, and provide targeted guidance and support. At the same time, timely feedback can also motivate students, let them know that their efforts are recognized, but also point out areas for improvement, and motivate students to improve.

Recommendation for future research

First, future research could take into account differences among students of different ages. This study focuses on adult college students, while child learners or older enthusiasts may have different sight-reading needs and challenges. Therefore, further research could explore how to design effective sight-reading training courses for students of different ages.

Secondly, we can further explore the influence of non-traditional teaching methods on piano sight-reading training. The teaching method adopted in this study has achieved certain results in practice, but there are still other teaching methods worth studying. For example, the difference in effectiveness between traditional face-to-face and online teaching can be compared, and the possibility of using technology to assist teaching can be explored.

In addition, piano sight-reading training may vary in different cultural contexts. Further research can compare the piano sight-reading training methods and strategies in different cultures, and the influence of different cultures on the development of students' sight-reading ability. Such research can provide guidance for cross-cultural teaching and promote international exchange and cooperation in sight-reading training.

Finally, in addition to the training of students, we can further study how to train teachers. Because teachers play a vital role in training or daily teaching, their teaching methods and guidance directly affect the learning effect of students and the development of sight-reading skills. Through further research, providing guidance and support for future teacher training can not only effectively improve the learning effect of students, but also promote the progress and development of the whole field of piano sight-reading teaching.

References

Deng, M. (2017). Thinking and Practice on the construction of Training Room in Higher Vocational Colleges. *Contemporary educational practice and teaching research, 2017*(3), 45-48.

Li, M. (2018). Reform and practice of practical training for music majors in local transitional colleges -- A case study of Hunan University of Arts and Sciences. *A ginseng flower, 2018*(1), 179-180.

Liu, J. (2015). An analysis on the research-based learning mode of Piano Practice Training in Higher Art vocational colleges, *Northern Music, 2015*(2), 56-59.

Lu, J. (2022). Research on teaching methods of piano performance in universities in the new era. *Chinese literary and artistic scientist, 2022*(1), 75-77.

Ma, L. (2015). On the present situation and thinking of sight-reading teaching of piano course for music major in normal universities under the new situation. *Popular literature, 2015*(5), 23-25.

Wang, Y. (2022). On the cultivation of students' sight-reading ability in piano teaching in colleges and universities. *Journal of Liaoning Teachers College (Social Science Edition), 2022*(2), 131-135.

Wu, H., & Li, Y. (2017). Method of improving piano sight-reading ability for music majors. *Journal of Hubei University of Science and Technology, 2017*(2), 35-38.

Zhang, J. (2015). On the importance of sight reading in piano teaching in colleges and universities. *Music time and space, 2015*(3), 35-37.