

ENHANCING PIANO PROFICIENCY: INFLUENTIAL FACTORS FOR SUCCESS IN THE PIANISM AND WORLDWIDE PROJECTION PROGRAM AT THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF COSTA RICA

MEJORANDO LA PROFICIENCIA EN EL PIANO: FACTORES INFLUYENTES PARA EL ÉXITO EN EL PROGRAMA PIANISMO Y PROYECCIÓN MUNDIAL EN LA UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE COSTA RICA

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ABSTRACT

The following study approaches factors that can influence the process and progress of piano learning. To do this, a questionnaire was administered to 11 students from the Worldwide Pianism and Projection program at the National University of Costa Rica to know their opinions regarding the determining factors that strengthen piano proficiency. The results show that attention to factors such as learning environment, discipline, motivation, and the teacher-student relationship strengthen piano pedagogy in favor of improving and achieving objectives. In addition, it raises the need to select work strategies that enhance the pianistic progress of students concerning the methodological work in the classroom.

Keywords

learning factors; pedagogical strategies; piano instruction; piano proficiency

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RESUMEN

El siguiente estudio presenta una aproximación a factores que pueden influir en el proceso de aprendizaje del piano. Para ello se administró un cuestionario a 11 estudiantes del programa Pianismo y Proyección Mundial en la Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica con el objetivo de conocer su opinión en relación a los factores determinantes que fortalecen la proficiencia pianística. Los resultados muestran que la atención a factores como ambiente de aprendizaje, disciplina, motivación, y la relación maestro-alumno fortalecen la enseñanza del piano a favor de la mejora y consecución de objetivos. Además, plantea la necesidad de seleccionar estrategias de trabajo que potencien el progreso pianístico de los estudiantes desde el trabajo metodológico del aula.

Palabras clave

enseñanza del piano; estrategias pedagógicas; factores de aprendizaje; proficiencia pianística

Introduction

When delving into the art of piano playing, it becomes evident that the teaching and learning process encompasses a complex interplay of elements of diverse nature. This kind of instruction must be viewed as a dynamic art-science that demands dedication, collaboration, communication, creativity, and flexibility from teachers and students. Teachers and students need to adopt a disciplined approach towards the art of teaching and playing the piano to meet the demanding requirements linked to it. Piano instruction demands reflection, regular practice, research, and methods and techniques of experimentation to ensure progression and achievement. Piano teachers can favor their instruction by identifying influential factors from their teaching context to better understand the mechanisms to maximize learners' potential and, at the same time, address emerging challenges within a context of diverse talents, needs, and conditions. In the role of a coach, the instructor should teach students how to play and offer them pedagogical strategies to overcome challenges and difficulties that block their progress. A teacher should be effective enough to reverse lack of motivation, insufficient practice time, poor practice, stress, anxiety, frustration, blockage, teachers' self-

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expectations, unrealistic goals, the environment, and other issues. These conditions seem to affect piano students' performance and outcomes and should be pointed out explicitly and attended to by both the teacher and the student. The piano's particular mysterious nature invites the teacher not to neglect a fundamental premise: Just as every individual is different, so is every piano learner. Teaching students how to play the piano requires teachers to get to know and listen to their students to use or adapt teaching strategies based on their individual characteristics, talents, and preferences. To recognize and respect this uniqueness, teachers must be conscious of their role in the process and use suitable strategies to foster piano learners' musical interests and proficiency. The success in achieving such an objective depends on several factors that should be visualized and addressed accordingly.

Therefore, this paper explores some of the factors and elements that seem to influence the process of teaching and learning the piano to determine to what extent these factors impact the development of pianistic skills and proficiency in the context of the Worldwide Pianism and Projection course offered at the National University of Costa Rica. By combining theoretical perspectives with empirical data collected from piano students' learning perspectives, this paper intends to examine certain factors such as environment and learning strategies, discipline and motivation, the teacher-student relationship, autonomy, and self-control to identify strengths and weaknesses to improve the process of teaching and learning the piano. Ultimately, insights gained contribute to the ongoing discussion on piano pedagogy, emphasizing the importance and significance of generating new knowledge on the field in favor of better piano pedagogy and piano proficiency.

Piano Instruction: Key Elements to Piano Mastery

Since Bartolommeo Cristofori conceived the hammer reaction mechanism (Kochevitsky, 1967), piano development and precision have required many years of evolution. As a complex and popular instrument, the piano has delighted and compelled composers, pianists, mentors, and learners to master it, requiring years of training,

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conscious practice, and effective teachers. To succeed in attaining pianistic goals, teachers and learners must work in synchrony. The student should be willing to comply with a series of requirements, and a modern piano teacher should be open-minded, informed, creative, empathetic, and proficient.

The existing piano instruction literature points to Heinrich Neuhaus as an influential piano pedagogue. His book “The Art of the Piano” provides valuable instruction insights and strategies that have guided piano teachers for decades. Neuhaus’ approach aims at cultivating artists with the ability to play a piano composition with technical, emotional, and intellectual mastery while exhibiting accurately the understanding and articulation of the various elements in a musical piece. This influential pedagogue approaches the teaching phenomenon from a scientific perspective, stressing the importance of recognizing that a pianist is a source of exploration (Neuhaus, 1973) from where the roots of the teaching art sustain. His teaching style can be perceived as simple, structured, and effective. He suggests that to construct a cohesive execution, interpretation, emotional expression, and comprehensive understanding (score and style) in piano performance, attention, and mastery of the musical problem or the “dialectic triad” is critical (Breazeale, 1993, p.63). According to Neuhaus (1973), the triad is composed of the music (thesis), the instrument (antithesis), and the performance (synthesis). Each of these factors must be meticulously comprehended and sculpted to reach mastery.

In this line, piano instruction requires a structured methodology or guidance to assist learners in developing an early mental musical approach to study and comprehend a musical piece carefully. The mental construction of the score is a solid foundation in musicianship (Kochevitsky, 1967; Lhévinne, 1972; Neuhaus, 1973). Similarly, Stravinsky (1947) believes that is of utter importance to accurately comprehend, interiorize, and exteriorize the musical score, pondering the duality of music, “the potential music” notated on paper or retained in memory, and the “actual music” performed at the instrument (p.121). Stravinsky highlights that the composer’s indications depend on the performer’s talent, mastery, experience, and intuition to exist. To respect the composer’s will, the pianist must

submerge in the theoretical aspects of the composition: “Before playing a composition, the pianist has to become familiar with its form, harmonic and polyphonic structure, metrical-rhythmic relationships, melodic design, phrasing, articulation, quality of desired sonority and dynamic shading” (Kochevitsky, 1967, p.50). The work of the mental construction of the music at the beginning of the pianistic learning process must be rational and conscious.

Piano learning is a progressive process that requires a series of factors and cognitive stages to develop the skills needed (thesis, antithesis, synthesis) to grow as a pianist. Learners need to develop an artistic image, and a profound understanding and mastery of their psychological and physical capacities to achieve emotional control and confidence (Neuhaus, 1973; Fraser, 2003) which are elemental to determining a pianist’s success and proficiency.

Playing the piano is certainly a demanding art that requires the adoption of theoretical concepts and proper strategies. A student must be offered varied learning opportunities to actively experience the music, the instrument and the performance within an environment that demands reading, listening, studying, feeling, and analyzing a piece. In this respect, teachers’ major task is to effectively develop, direct, and strengthen pupils’ talents, skills, technique, and autonomy. This is not an easy task; many elements and factors should be considered when teaching students, the art of playing the piano.

Piano Pedagogy: Influential Factors

The following paragraphs briefly describe some influential factors that play a role in learning the piano.

- Class Environment and Learning Strategies

A piano teacher should consider various factors and elements to guide students to achieve skills and proficiency effectively. As many scholars suggest, class environment and learning strategies are important in facilitating an effective learning experience. Rusticus et al. (2023) found that high-quality class environments are associated with students’ positive outcomes. Some piano teaching studies have identified the need to improve instruction by selecting appropriate

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teaching materials, cultivating national music, using effective teaching practices, and developing students' creative and perceptive abilities (Hu, 2018). These results imply that a personalized, suitable, and structured piano environment and effective strategies can benefit learners' progression and help them achieve pianistic objectives.

- Discipline and Motivation

The mastery of any skill or competence is intertwined with discipline and motivation. Piano learning is no different, it requires regular practice and discipline. The term "discipline" is traced back to the Latin word "disciplina," which means "instruction" or "teaching." In a broader sense, discipline refers to an individual's ability to adhere to a set of rules, principles, or practices intended to achieve goals.

Discipline is a self-improvement practice and has historically been recognized as a positive trait of the human condition involving the capacity to sustain concentration, perseverance, and agency to exhibit desired behaviors. In the piano context, discipline is a desired trait that can be deterministic to the level of success and skill development students may achieve. It is perhaps one of the most crucial elements involved in the art of playing the piano to a proficient level.

In addition, motivation is regarded as another important factor in any learning experience. The concept is closely related to needs fulfillment (Maslow, 1954). It has also been described as a primary driving force to carry out any human activity, especially the challenging ones. Cook and Artino (2016) assert that motivation compels individuals to initiate, conduct and sustain goal-directed tasks to reach a target (Cheng & Southcott, 2016; Onuray & Engür, 2017).

In the field of piano teaching and learning, motivation is vitally important to maintain learners on the path to becoming acquainted with piano requirements (discipline, time, and constant practice). On this basis, some studies imply that teachers are responsible for boosting motivation by attending to students' interests, preferences, and musical learning styles (Chmurzynska, 2012).

- Teacher-Student Relationships

In their significant role in the learning process, teachers need to evaluate their instruction practices, strategies, mediation, and the kind of relationship they create with students. In the words of Neuhaus (1973), “the fullest possible understanding between teacher and pupils is one of the most important conditions for fruitful teaching” (p.170). Studies conducted in educational settings support that positive relationships between teachers and students tend to create a conducive learning environment that favors students’ performance, attitude, motivation, and achievements (Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2012; Ang, Panebianco & Odendaal, 2019; Yescas-Chávez & Chong, 2020; Chmurzynska, 2012).

Thus, a positive teacher-student relationship can potentially support students’ perceptions, expectations, and autonomy, which is relevant for facing and overcoming challenges (Gallo et al., 2022; Tatar & Horenczyk, 2003). Students who perceive genuine interest and attention from teachers tend to engage and work more to meet their teachers’ expectations and requirements (Allen et al., 2011; Quin, 2016). Teaching is certainly a humanistic endeavor (Schiff, 2020). In the field of music, the human element places the teacher as instrumental, leading learners to seek, discover, and adopt artistic autonomy and skill development.

Method: Context and Participants

Worldwide Pianism and Projection Program

The Pianist and Worldwide Projection program was created in 1997 due to a collaborative effort between the National University of Costa Rica and the Superior Institute of Arts. The program’s objective is to offer an instructional platform to prepare pianists to meet the highest international piano standards while supporting students who want to pursue piano studies at the National University (UNA). Alexandr Skliutovski, head of the Piano Chair at UNA, states that the pedagogy within the program is based on the Neuhaus School. Students in the program take two 45-minute lessons per week mediated under an individualized approach that considers each student’s specific needs and skills, seeking proficiency and

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excellence. The program's methodology relies on rhythm, fingering and dynamic. Mastering these elements is fundamental for the learner to perform a composition accurately. The program has proven effective in fostering excellence and ensuring pianists' ability to compete successfully on a global stage. (A. Skliutovski, personal communication, July 8, 2023).

This empirical study takes a descriptive analysis and explores quantitative and qualitative data to examine students' perspectives on the factors that influence piano progression. To determine to what extent the identified factors influence piano progression, a survey was conducted among 11 students of the program. The instrument's objective is to study students' perspectives on some factors linked to their piano learning experience. The survey was applied as a Likert scale divided into four areas – environment/learning strategies, discipline and motivation, teacher-student relationship, and self-control and autonomy – each consisting of 10 items. Students were instructed to report on a scale from 1 to 5 their level of agreement with each of the statements.

Results

A description of mean score results is detailed below. These results provide relevant information about the level of agreement on the factors students consider influential to piano proficiency.

Table 1 shows the items and variations in the responses to each of the categories/factors and items explored.

Piano Influential Factors

Items	Means
Environment & Learning Strategies	
1.The classes are professional, friendly, and respectful.	4.6
2.The piano teacher proposes creative methods to overcome my challenges.	4.2
3.The teacher promotes a functional/ strict environment	4.4
4.The teacher provides clear and efficient strategies to enhance my progress	4.2

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5.Precise explanations improve my technique and musical understanding	4.3
6.Weekly assignments proposed are crucial to achieve my piano goals	4.6
7.Feedback, constructive guidance provided promote my progress	4.4
8.I appreciate my piano teacher 's skills, experience, and knowledge	4.5
9.Piano strategies demand constant practice which favor my piano skills	4.5
10.Home environment and family support significantly impact my progress.	4.1
Discipline & Motivation	
11.The teacher emphasizes the importance of discipline and motivation	4.5
12.The teacher's piano mastery increases my motivation/discipline.	4.4
13.The teacher's enthusiasm during classes motivates me to give my best	4.4
14.The teacher maintains my motivation and interest	4.2
15.The teacher promotes teamwork which boosts my motivation/discipline.	4.2
16.The classwork is enjoyable/disciplined which supports my perseverance.	4.6
17.I stay motivated, focused, and dedicated during my piano sessions	3.9
18.I maintain a consistent and disciplined practice routine to refine my skills.	4.3
19.I make disciplined efforts to improve my piano technique	4.5
20.The teacher's positive attitude towards my progress motivates me	4.3
Teacher & Student Relationship	
21.My relationship with the teacher is beneficial to my advancement	4.3
22.The teacher's assertiveness strengthens my attitude towards the piano.	4.3
23.I maintain an open and respectful communication with my teacher	4.1
24.I value the individualized attention provided during my piano sessions.	4.8
25.The way the teacher listens and communicates strengthens my confidence	4.6
26.The learning relationship gives me confidence to address my weaknesses	4.4

27.I appreciate my teacher's stories which enrich my music appreciation	4.8
28.I feel that my teacher cares about my emotional well-being	4.3
29.I appreciate my teacher's support to overcome my piano challenges.	4.5
30.The teacher suggests a study schedule to achieve my piano goals.	4.3
Autonomy & Self-Control	
31.The teacher proposes methods that foster my autonomy and self-control.	4.3
32.The teacher promotes independent learning on a weekly basis.	4.1
33.The teacher's guidance enhances my self-confidence and autonomy	4.3
34.I am aware of my strengths and weaknesses in piano	4.3
35.I am responsible for my own piano progression	4.5
36.I develop my own musical interpretation and express my piano style	4.6
37.I make informed decisions about my repertoire and musical approach	4.6
38.The recital is addressed in class which regulates my self-control.	3.9
39.The teacher's strategies help me master my emotions during the recital	3.7
40.The teacher emphasizes the importance of physical/emotional health	4.3

Table 1. Mean scores (Source: Own elaboration).

Regarding the first category, “*Learning environment, strategies and piano progression*,” students favor items 1 and 6. Both scored a mean of 4.6, the highest mean score in this category. Data shows that a professional, friendly, and respectful learning environment infused with weekly homework is crucial to students' proficiency. Regular assignments seem to play an important role in any learning environment. Supportive, smart, and proper homework can be a valuable learning component to strengthen students' skill development (Cubero, 2014).

The second most favored item is 8, “*I appreciate my piano teacher's skills, experience, knowledge, and proficiency*,” and item 9, “*Class strategies demand constant practice which favors my piano*”

skills development,” reported a mean score of 4.5. These results pinpoint the importance of facilitating a structured piano pedagogy to maximize students’ pianistic development, abilities, technique, and interpretation. The lowest mean, 4.1, is noted in item 10, “*Home environment and family support significantly impact my progress.*” Students’ responses to this item varied across the levels of agreement but indicated that to most students, family support and a positive home environment are important to their piano advancement.

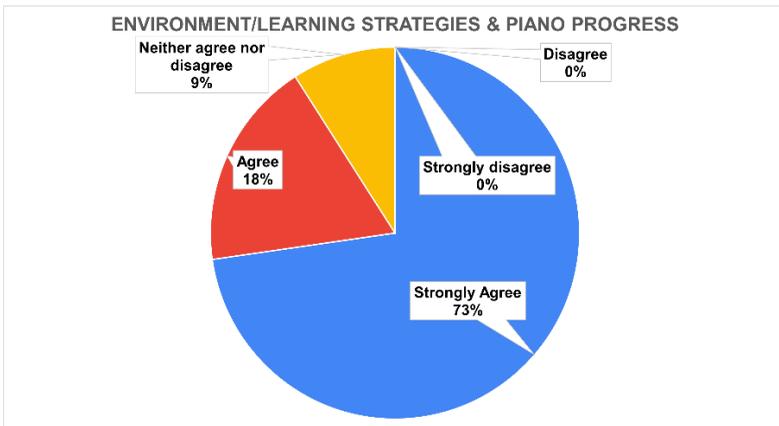


Figure 1. Learning Environment and Strategies. (Source: Own elaboration).

Figure 1 illustrates the overall level of agreement noted in students’ responses concerning category 1. As reported in the graph, 73% of the participants strongly agree with most of the indicators explored in this category. Data identifies that selecting effective teaching strategies is a relevant factor in piano instruction. These results indicate a high level of agreement regarding the learning environment and the strategies that have been used in the program.

Concerning “Discipline and Motivation,” the highest score for any statement was 16, “*The classwork is enjoyable/disciplined, which supports my perseverance,*” suggesting the value that a pleasant yet disciplined class environment has on students’ piano learning and

progression. The second most affected items were 11 and 19. These scores indicate that participants greatly appreciate a teacher who promotes and emphasizes the importance of discipline and motivation in the art of playing the piano.

Statements with lower scores, 14 and 17, denote that some participants may not believe that the teacher uses a creative and efficient methodology to maintain their motivation and interest in the instruction. Additionally, results reveal that some participants face challenges in maintaining focus and dedication. These findings stress the need to improve teaching strategies to enhance motivation and engagement to address certain difficulties students may encounter during the lessons.

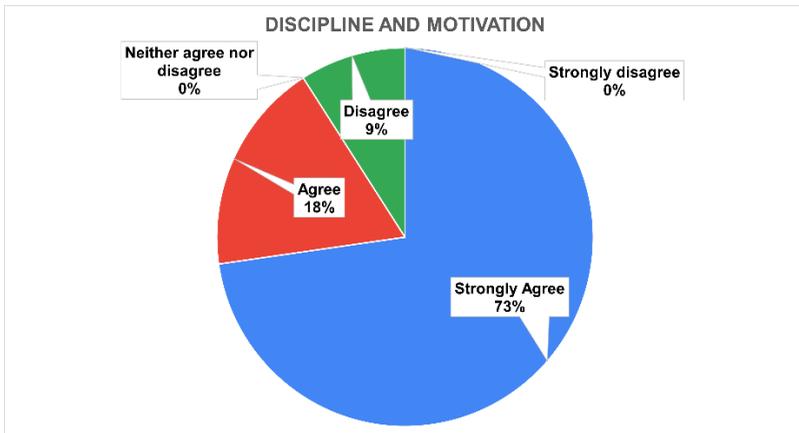


Figure 2. Discipline and Motivation. (Source: Own elaboration).

Figure 2 shows the percentages obtained in the discipline and motivation category. Results indicate that 73% of the participants completely agree with the statements within the category, indicating a strong consensus about the crucial role of discipline and motivation in piano learning. The 18% who agree and the 9% who neither agree nor disagree may imply concerns or minor disagreements with certain statements. It is possible that they recognize the value of discipline

and motivation but may not fully align with the regular practice hours that discipline and motivation entitle.

When analyzing the “teacher-student relationship” statements, it is evident that the highest scores were those linked to the teacher’s time and individualized attention and the practice of exchanging stories and music anecdotes. The highest mean score of 4.8 occurred with items 24 and 27, “*I value the individualized attention provided during my piano sessions*” and “*I appreciate my teacher’s stories which enrich my music appreciation,*” respectively. These results stress the critical role of a thoughtful, positive, and communicative teacher-student relationship in developing piano competence. Robinson (2018) highlights factors such as the teacher’s personality, passion for the subject, relational approach towards students, and creativity can influence classroom inspiration.

The lowest score, 4.1, is found in item 23, “*I maintain an open and respectful communication with my teacher,*” which may imply the need to improve communication channels between the teacher and the student when sharing concerns and goals. This information advocates for an effective communication and teacher-student relationships to create a friendly environment where students feel comfortable, heard, and supported.

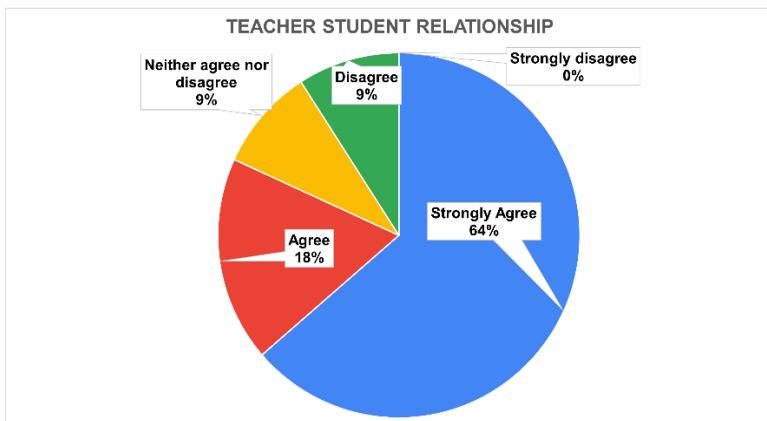


Figure 3. Teacher-Student Relationship. (Source: Own elaboration).

The fact that 64% of participants completely agree with the statements in the “Teacher-student relationship” category indicates a strong level of agreement towards the teacher-student relationship. A significant majority of participants perceive that their relationship with their piano teachers is favorable and functional, which contributes to a conducive learning environment. The 18% of participants who agree indicate a slightly less enthusiastic response, and the 9% of participants who neither agree nor disagree may have some concerns concerning the teacher-student relationship traits. Therefore, understanding their perspectives and gathering feedback can help identify potential areas for instruction improvement.

The “Autonomy and self-control” category noted the highest scores in items 36 and 37, “*I develop my own musical interpretation and express my piano style*” and “*make informed decisions about my repertoire and musical approach,*” both with a 4.6 mean score. It can be interpreted that participants feel empowered to develop their own musical interpretation and make informed decisions about the musical repertoire they are interested in playing. Thus, piano students embrace freedom and autonomy to take control of their piano learning process, realizing they are effectively trained, guided, and supported.

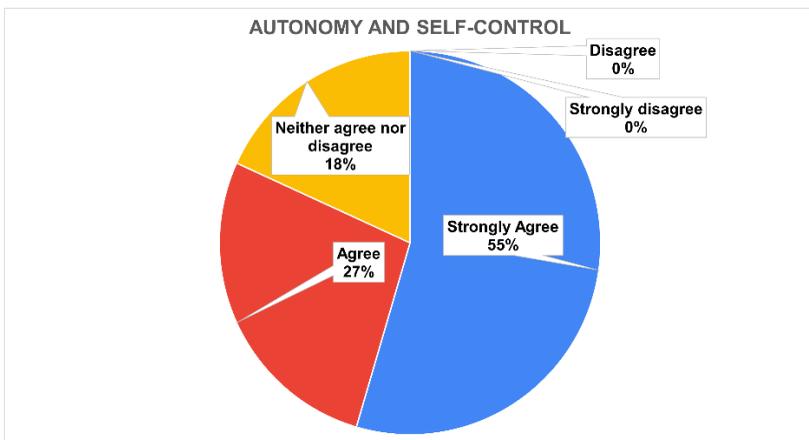


Figure 4. Autonomy and Self-Control. (Source: Own elaboration).

Figure 4 illustrates percentages regarding the overall results of the autonomy and self-control factors. It is observed that 55% of the participants strongly agree with the statements, 27% seem to agree while 18% neither agree nor disagree. Although most participants consider having gained autonomy and control in their piano learning experience through the teacher's methods and strategies, piano teachers can provide more time and opportunities for students to cultivate an independent sense of work focused on strengthening confidence and self-agency.

Open- Ended Questions

To better understand piano learners' perspectives on the factors that influence pianistic proficiency, three open-ended questions were incorporated into the questionnaire. Triangulation was carried out to underline relevant findings around the issue explored.

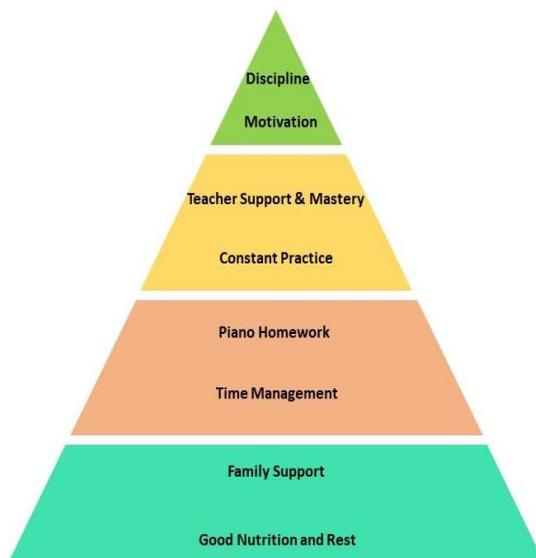


Figure 5. Influential factors to progression. (Source: Own elaboration).

Figure 5 shows piano students' perspectives about what they consider the most important factors linked to their learning experience. They ponder discipline as the most important element, recognizing that constant effort, practice, and piano routines are crucial to guarantee progress. Students also imply the significance of motivation as a driving force to sustain enthusiasm and passion for piano learning, development, and progress. Another key factor the students mention is teacher support and guidance. Students value their teacher's professionalism, excellence, knowledge, guidance, and support as beneficial elements to their growth as pianists.

The pyramid also ranks continual practice, piano homework, time management, and family support as requirements for advancement. Students recognize the need for effective time management to balance their piano studies with other commitments while acknowledging the challenge of allocating sufficient time for regular and consistent practice amid university, work, and personal responsibilities. In the lower latter, students view family support, good nutrition, and rest as supportive factors to piano progression. Students express gratitude for the support and encouragement they receive from their families and believe that a supportive family creates a nurturing environment for their piano development. Additionally, students state that good nutrition, rest, and physical and mental well-being directly impact their ability to focus and perform at their best.



Figure 6. Recital emotional preparation. (Source: Own elaboration).

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Upon analyzing data regarding their emotional preparation for a recital, several key factors stand out. For example, the role that self-confidence plays in performing a piece effectively. Students report employing strategies to bolster their confidence and cultivate a sense of self-belief and empowerment by reminding themselves of their capabilities and talents, instilling a positive mindset before and during the piano performance. Students have developed agencies by using self-motivating techniques, including positive self-talk, visualization, praying, breathing, and concentration techniques to regulate their emotions. Such practices help them stay focused, motivated, mentally prepared, and fully engaged during their recital performance.

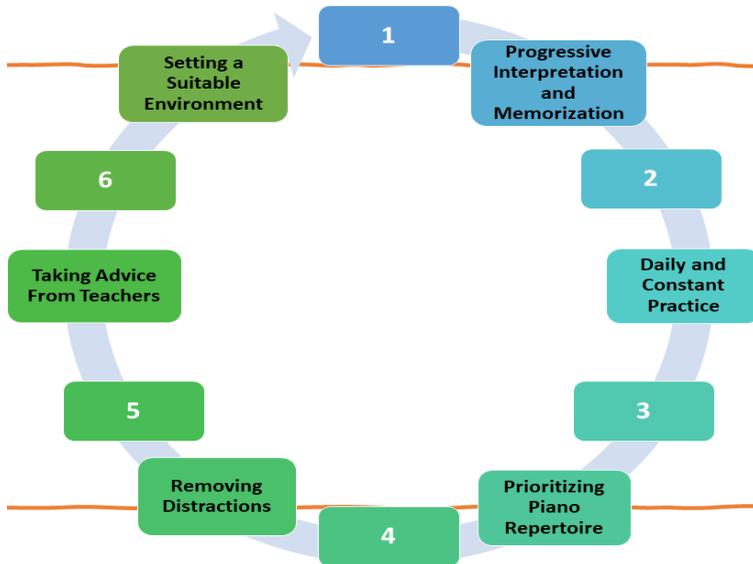


Figure 7. Piano study process. (Source: Own elaboration).

Figure 7 illustrates the process students undertake to study the piano. The first step identified by the students is progressive interpretation and memorization. Students emphasize the significance

of gradually analyzing, understanding, and internalizing a musical piece. The second step is daily and constant practice. Students highlight the need for dedication, discipline, and regular practice to improve their technical skills, musicality, and overall performance. Then, learners prioritize the piano repertoire. They prefer selecting and ordering specific pieces that require attention and work. They appear to appreciate freedom and agency to direct their piano learning process. The fourth step concerns the avoidance of distractions, noise, and electronic devices to maintain concentration and a quiet environment. The next stated step is taking advice from teachers. Students value and seek feedback, suggestions, and technical direction to improve their piano playing and interpretation. Finally, students believe that a comfortable environment (lighting, seating, and a quiet atmosphere) is conducive to quality practice and advancement.

Discussion and Conclusion

In a broader context, there have been some efforts to study and explore some deterministic factors in the field of piano learning and performance addressing the issue from different angles ranging from the teaching system, the techniques, the learner's talent, and learning styles and even the psychophysiological factors associated with piano proficiency (Zhang, 2019; Lammers, 2006; Novosiadla, 2023). Some of the most significant findings pinpoint the fact that the development of pianistic skills requires certain conditions to be consciously mastered. For example, Zhang (2019) believes that a well-trained teacher should approach the musical phenomenon through the theory of systematic thinking, psychology, and pedagogy to promote strategies, innovation, and heuristic methods towards the promotion of learners' autonomy, creativity, experience, perception, and musical understanding. Interestingly, a factor that seems to be central in the field posits strategies, innovation, and the teacher as fundamental factors to lead learners towards a desired level of proficiency and pianistic skills. Additional influential factors identified in the literature relate to the learner's intrapersonal factors, placing importance on self-control, self-regulation, quality practice, positive attitude, and family's involvement (Novosiadla, 2023; Spector et

al.,2014). It is believed that attention to these factors provides a pedagogical framework to outline effective piano instruction.

Findings in this study provide valuable insights into some of the explored factors that seem to influence the learning process and progress within the Pianist and Worldwide Projection program which serve as pedagogical indicators for teachers, learners, and parents. In specific, the factor with the highest mean scores is acknowledged in the teacher-student relationship category. It is fundamental to recognize the impact that a positive relationship has on the student's learning process, performance, attitudes, motivation, and achievements (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Urdan & Schoenfelder, 2006; Muñoz-Hurtado,2018; Thijssen et al., 2022;). Results provide evidence that an effective teacher-student relationship impacts students' progression, motivation, and autonomy, fostering a sense of teamwork and collaboration between the teacher and the learner. Transforming, in this way, the demanding efforts attached to the art of playing the piano into a meaningful learning experience.

Participants value the teacher's individualized attention, time, and the exchange of music-related stories or anecdotes to better understand, appreciate and build a music image. A functional, supportive, and relational teacher-student interaction enhances the piano learning experience since piano learners can share goals and concerns, helping them overcome challenges confidently, which is crucial to attaining proficiency.

The relationship between the teacher and the student is of utmost importance in the musical education process where the teacher should act as a mentor rather than simply a technical instructor to boost students' engagement and alignment to piano objectives.

These findings cannot be regarded as surprising since, as human beings, students and teachers are continually seeking meaning, connection, and purpose. Teachers are the ones who can guide, advise, reassure, and elevate students' abilities and talents, allowing them to spark their curiosity while offering a diverse musical experience to cultivate a sense of joy and engagement in their musical journey. Nonetheless, results also highlight the need for further attention to open and respectful communication between the teacher and the pupil when sharing concerns and goals. As communication

entails negotiation both parts should be willing to listen, but the piano instructor must learn to deliver the intended message as clearly as possible. This level of clarity would allow the student to understand and map a route towards progression.

Hence, students ponder a positive learning scenario and independent learning as crucial elements that support their piano progression. The learning environment and strategies are important conducive factors to their pianistic progression. There is an emphasis on the significance of receiving guidance from experienced and proficient piano teachers. Effective learning outcomes are linked to the quality of strategies and a professional, friendly environment. Hence, the combination of traditional methods with new practices is required to improve training and meet students' learning styles. Gaining insight into the students' choices, preferences, and motivation is also crucial to articulate a personalized, engaging, and interesting piano training to encourage progression (Onuray, 2012; Lee & Leung, 2020; Du, 2022). In this light, results illustrate that participants value a professional and friendly atmosphere and the utilization of creative teaching methods and strategies.

Learning to play the piano is acknowledged to be a complex art where subjective interpretation is interwoven with technical accuracy to achieve levels of excellence (Kim et al., 2021). Evaluating and recognizing this complex nature requires an alert, open and flexible piano teacher able to innovate in nontraditional terrains. Teachers should refresh teaching techniques to help students learn the theoretical knowledge and skills necessary in piano performance (Li, 2021). Structured piano pedagogy is essential to maximize students' potential skills (ear development, technique, interpretation) and face piano difficulties by strengthening and consolidating learned skills.

The lower score noted within the category is home environment and family support, suggesting the need to explore further the aspects that may influence students' progression outside the classroom. In this regard, parents and caregivers are to define clear expectations from the piano learning experience to promote a sense of commitment that involves all agents (parents, learners, teachers) to create a conducive and effective learning environment.

Most of the time parents find themselves lacking a clear understanding of the fundamental elements required to learn the piano, which isolates them from getting systematically involved in the process. Young learners need to understand that learning to play the piano requires regular practice and commitment. In the words of Guo et al. (2022) “Piano learning largely depends on how the students practice after class to consolidate classroom teaching content” (p.2). Consequently, to achieve an effective and progressive practice routine it is fundamental to capitalize on the supportive role of parents/caregivers within the process. Parents should make a consistent effort to stay well-informed on the minimum piano learning notions and requirements to adequately guide learners with appropriate support, time, space, and resources for their children to engage in regular and sufficient practice. (Margiotta,2011; Dell et al., ,2014). This would include among other things, not overcommitting their children to extracurricular activities and instilling a sense of prioritization towards achieving their musical goals.

As the empirical evidence implies, the pedagogy adopted by the teacher is critical not only to create a supportive and nurturing environment but also as a source of encouragement, discipline, and inspiration, instrumental for the student to achieve desired goals and develop their own artistic vision and interpretation of the music. Piano teachers need to motivate learners with a dose of positive attitude, enthusiasm, modeling playing, and other strategies that can build and sustain students’ motivation, interest (McPherson, 2005), discipline, and self-mastery as key elements to inspire successful learning and technique development (Claver et al., 2020; Gutiérrez & López, 2012).

Based on participants’ perspectives, the category of discipline and motivation displays interesting data. For instance, students find inspiration in teachers who demonstrate their piano proficiency by interpreting or modeling classical pieces. Students seem to make connections around the idea that discipline is nurtured through dedicated practice and that every advance serves as a motivational trigger. They also report that promoting piano work as a team effort stimulates motivation and discipline and that such consistent efforts help them navigate challenges effectively.

Participants also indicate the need for more creative and efficient methods to support motivation and interest in piano learning. This stresses the need to reflect and examine each teacher's instructional strategies and identify opportunities to incorporate more creative and effective techniques into their teaching methods to boost discipline and motivation in favor of piano skills development and proficiency.

Other relevant factors that can lead to piano progression are autonomy and self-control. These aspects are important assets to foster creativity, decision-making, confidence, and freedom during instruction to empower and enable them to engage actively in their musical growth and learning paths. According to Neuhaus (1973), "one of the main tasks of a teacher is to ensure as quickly and thoroughly as possible that he is no longer necessary to the pupil" (p.172). Learning the piano is deeply associated with developing learner's autonomy as learning piano relates to their interests (McInerney, 2019). In this respect, participants expressed a strong appreciation for the sense of freedom offered within the program to develop their own musical interpretation but seemed to express concerns about how to master their thoughts and emotions during recitals. This is the lowest percentage of all the categories, which invites teachers to seek specific strategies to support students' self-control and empower them to take more responsibility for their learning process and progress. This may involve implementing innovative strategies to make piano practice enjoyable and collaborative while addressing concerns about negative emotions, distractions, or obstacles during the sessions.

As Schiff (2020) states, piano students need to nurture their personality and musical identity to have the ability to develop "something individual out of it" (p.55). Students need to understand by themselves through their own artistic wisdom and their teachers' feedback the areas they need to improve and. Participants in this study acknowledge the importance of self-control and self-direction to strengthen the learning process and a positive attitude towards the piano. Students noted that self-regulation strategies used were beneficial to successfully perform at recitals, maintaining focus and concentration.

Some pedagogical implications for piano instruction point to the need for teachers to reflect on their role during lessons (Ang, Panebianco & Odendaal, 2019). Studies support the idea that to enhance proficiency the teacher should set clear and strategic goals. Teachers should establish clear strategies and realistic expectations for students' practice and progress (Yescas-Chávez & Chong, 2020). Students should commit to regular, efficient, and focused practice sessions, following the guidelines provided by their teachers to enhance their autonomy. Teachers are called to develop and explore teaching methodologies from multiple perspectives in favor of effective practice. Transparent communication and regular feedback among teachers, students, and parents is essential for promoting productive advancement.

Overall, this study intends to provide some insights into some of the factors that influence the piano learning process to optimize its instruction and maximize learners' progression and proficiency. The developmental process includes special attention to the teacher-student relationship, learning strategies, autonomy, discipline, and quality practice.

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