

Piano teachers' use of music memorisation in one-to-one piano lessons: A preliminary study

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Disciplinary background A. Background in music performance and education.

Despite the standard expectation of audiences and many competitions/auditions committees that performers should be able to perform extensive musical works from memory, there is a dearth of systematic research on music memorisation pedagogy, and a lack of consensus amongst music teachers on the most effective methods of teaching music memorisation.

Disciplinary background B. Background in music psychology.

Music psychologists have examined such topics as performance cues, mental practice, and expert memory (Chaffin et. al, 2009, 2016; Bernardi et. al, 2013; Mishra, 2017). Such research has primarily focused on strategies used by expert performers and university students, with limited insights on how memorisation is taught to beginner/intermediate students.

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the extent to which music memorisation is taught to children and adolescents in one-to-one piano lessons and to explore the diversity of strategies used for teaching memorisation.

Participants were provided with an online questionnaire comprising 44 items in total, including demographic questions, rating scales probing different types of memorisation strategies, and open-ended questions. The primary focus of the present study is on 3 of the open-ended questions, specifically: 1) Give a brief description of music memorisation, 2) How would you teach memorisation in Kabalevsky's Galop? (participants were provided with the score) 3) How do you memorise as a performer? Participants were recruited via online advertisements and international local schools in the UAE. In total 70 participants completed the survey, however only the data of 37 participants who completed 75% or more of the survey were used in the current study. These 37 participants had a mean age of 43.65 years (range = 25-81, SD = 12.74), with the sample comprising 32 females and 5 males.

Results indicate that music memorisation is perceived by the participants as a skill that develops through practice rather than a natural talent. Reported strategies for teaching memorisation fell into four categories: aural, visual, kinaesthetic, and analytical, which aligns with previous theoretical conceptualisations of musical memorisation. Recurring mentions of muscle memory/repetition practice and music theory knowledge suggest that kinaesthetic and analytical memorisation methods are dominant when teaching music memorisation to children learning the piano. In particular, thematic analysis across all the three qualitative questions shows that kinaesthetic and analytical memorisation methods were dominant when compared to aural and visual methods which received a smaller number of responses.

Interdisciplinary implications. This research shows how a study into the teaching of music memorisation will impact not only the ways instrumental teachers in general teach music

memorisation, but also assist younger students to understand and master music memorisation through an informed systematic method. This project focuses exclusively on how piano teachers teach students under the age of 18 and combines insights from music pedagogy and psychology in a novel way to develop practical insights of use to teachers and students. The central theoretical contribution of this study is the extended examination of piano memorisation and its implications on piano pedagogy: the first of its kind.

References

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