

PIANO PEDAGOGY IN MUSIC SCHOOL THROUGH THE LENS OF UKRAINIAN PRACTICE AND EUROPEAN APPROACHES

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SUMMARY. The article examines contemporary approaches to piano pedagogy in the context of the transformation of arts education. It analyzes the interaction between traditional individual teaching methods and new trends, including group teaching, the introduction of digital technologies, multicultural strategies, and interdisciplinary approaches. It summarizes contemporary scientific discussions on rethinking piano teaching methods and points to the risks of completely abandoning the individual approach. Methodologically, the study is based on a comparative analysis of the official programs of music schools and higher art institutions in Ukraine, Poland, Great Britain, and Austria. Particular attention is paid to issues of repertoire policy, class structure, the role of related disciplines, and the integration of national traditions into the educational process. The conclusions justify the importance of preserving individual teaching as a key form of professional competence development for pianists, complemented by innovative and collective forms of work. The article reveals the potential of contemporary piano education in combining traditions, technological solutions, and cultural diversity.

Keywords: piano pedagogy and performance, concertmaster activity, accompaniment, arts education, music education, means of performing expression, piano performance, piano pedagogy, classical music.

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Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, the piano remains one of the most popular instruments for home and concert music-making. With its unique melodic and dynamic capabilities, the instrument continues to “offer new perspectives and ways of expression in the performance of musical works”⁶. The emergence at the end of the 20th century of electronic instruments equipped with a keyboard similar to that of a piano and therefore requiring a similar or at least similar playing technique, has ensured an enduring interest in piano lessons among a wide range of music lovers.

At the turn of the century, electronic (digital) pianos became, to a certain extent, competitors to acoustic instruments, but on the other hand, they increased the demand for professional piano teachers. Thus, with high-quality sound provided by sample libraries based on the sounds of acoustic pianos, digital pianos offer certain advantages that are important for ordinary users, such as lower weight and smaller size, additional collections of timbres, a built-in metronome, auto-accompaniment functions, and more. At the same time, thanks to the similarity of the keyboards, basic skills in playing an acoustic piano are sufficient for playing a digital instrument and vice versa, which adds versatility to the profession of piano teacher.

Piano pedagogy has a century-old history, including the development of the piano's predecessors, the harpsichord and clavichord, during which a large number of practical guides were written, reflecting the experience of leading musicians of the past who performed or wrote music for these instruments. With the development of a centralized system of music education in European countries, which intensified at the beginning of the 20th century and continues today, the issue of piano pedagogy, like art pedagogy in general, has become a subject of interest not only for individual musicians but also for state structures responsible for arts education. At the same time, the challenges of the modern era, in particular the development of computer technology and communications, the emergence of artificial intelligence, as well as the constant evolution of musical styles and, consequently, the evolution of requirements for pianists, highlight the need to study modern approaches to piano pedagogy.

⁶ Rakhimova, M. N. “Music Culture Importance of Piano Performance”, *International Journal of Pedagogics*, vol. 4, no. 10, 2024, pp. 31–34. <https://doi.org/10.37547/ijp/Volume04Issue10-06>

Literature review

Over the past few years, researchers have been attracted by attempts to revise approaches to piano teaching, both in terms of form and content. In particular, these attempts include introducing group lessons instead of individual lessons, shifting the focus from technical tasks to the overall development of the student, and introducing step-by-step teaching models.

Criticism of individual lessons began in Daniel's⁷ work. The author criticizes individual teaching not only "in the context of the higher education fiscal squeeze" but also "from the point of view of effective pedagogy, especially in light of the rapidly changing face of instrumental instruction at the tertiary level"⁸. Instead, the author considers the advantages of group learning to be "the development of ensemble awareness"⁹ and the possibility of "integration of technology, improvisation, and composition into the curriculum, which can serve to broaden the skills and perspectives of piano students"¹⁰. At the same time, appealing to the lack of "research evidence" on individual teaching, the author does not provide any evidence of the advantages of the proposed alternative forms.

The advantages of group learning are explored by Zakaria and Mahzai¹¹. The authors investigate the effectiveness of group piano teaching among non-musician students. A survey conducted by researchers showed that 95% of respondents found the classes interactive and useful. According to the author, the positive effect concerns "students' knowledge and skills; music reading; performing/composing/teaching skills and interpersonal / social skills through findings of this study"¹².

The position of previous authors is continued by Çağlak Eker¹³, who criticizes the model of individual lessons for focusing exclusively on the technical performance of pieces and neglecting emotional and artistic expression. The author considers such lessons "very dry and dull because of their rigor and theoretical, systematic approach"¹⁴ and calls for a focus on creativity and

⁷ Daniel, R. J. *Alternative strategies for the tertiary teaching of piano*. James Cook University, 2002.

⁸ Daniel, R. J., 2002. *Id.* p. 26.

⁹ Daniel, R. J., 2002. *Id.* p. 30.

¹⁰ Daniel, R. J., 2002. *Id.* p. 34.

¹¹ Zakaria, J. and Mahzair, A. M. *The effectiveness of group piano instruction for non-piano music majors*. In: *International Music and Performing Arts Conference (IMPAC 2018)*. Tanjung Malim, 2018. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/366005555>

¹² Zakaria, J. and Mahzair, A. M., 2018. *Id.* p. 11.

¹³ Çağlak Eker, T. "ZeneZen, Creative Piano Pedagogy", *International Education Studies*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2022, pp. 9–16. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v15n4p9>

¹⁴ Çağlak Eker, T., 2022. *Id.* p.14.

emotional expression in group piano lessons. The author proposes a model of group lessons called “ZeneZen”, which involves 1.5-hour-long weekly classes during the school year [...], the creativity, cohesive force, and trust fostered by such classes”^{15, 16}.

A number of studies leave the right to individual piano education open but criticize traditional systems from a philosophical and aesthetic standpoint.

Thompson¹⁷ focuses on philosophical, psychological, and educational research. The author calls for a departure from traditional mechanistic and one-dimensional methods, emphasizing a humanistic and holistic approach to learning. According to the author, “The traditional focus on technical proficiency alone often neglects the development of the student’s musical identity and expressive capabilities”¹⁸. In contrast, the author proposes the concept of “multiple ownership”, which “allows students to develop a broader understanding of how their practice impacts their accomplishments”¹⁹.

Zhang and Daoruang²⁰, drawing on approaches such as the Suzuki piano pedagogy, Leschetizky piano pedagogy, and Xin Di Applied Piano Pedagogy, attempt to develop a new teaching model for piano pedagogy courses. The authors criticize traditional teaching models, which, in their opinion, “are often applied without considering the unique aspects of music teaching. This approach neglects the emotional and artistic aspects of piano performance, focusing excessively on technical proficiency”²¹. Another reason for the authors’ criticism is the dominance of Western repertoire without due attention to local cultural traditions.

Lu²² analyzes contemporary trends in piano teaching in the context of multicultural education and environmental awareness. The author attempts to apply Multiple Intelligences Theory in piano teaching and adapt piano pedagogy to a multicultural environment, considering the diversity of musical styles, cultural traditions, and educational needs of students. According to

¹⁵ Çağlak Eker, T., 2022. *Id.* p.14.

¹⁶ Tóth-Vajna, Z. M. *ZeneZen: Creative Piano Pedagogy*. Liszt Academy of Music, 2022. <https://zeneakademia.hu/uploads/media/6331baceacfa2/zenezen-creative-piano-pedagogy.pdf>

¹⁷ Thompson, M. B. *Fundamentals of piano pedagogy: Fuelling authentic student musicians from the beginning*. Springer, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65533-8>

¹⁸ Thompson, M. B., 2018. *Id.* p. 61.

¹⁹ Thompson, M. B., 2018. *Id.* p. 10.

²⁰ Zhang, X. and Daoruang, K. “The development of piano teaching for piano pedagogy course”, *Journal of Ecohumanism*, vol. 3, no. 8, 2024, pp. 1788–1808. <https://doi.org/10.62754/joe.v3i8.5689>

²¹ Zhang, X. and Daoruang, K., 2024. *Id.*

²² Lu, Y. “The innovative trend of piano teaching in music education in multicultural education under ecological environment”, *Journal of Environmental and Public Health*, vol. 2022, no. 1, 2022, pp. 7044904. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/7044904>

the researcher, "The multicultural approach should be integrated into piano teaching by incorporating diverse musical styles and cultural elements into the curriculum, allowing students to experience and understand music from various cultural backgrounds, thereby enriching their musical expression and cultural awareness"²³.

Some studies also address issues of an interdisciplinary approach to the musical and performing arts training of future teachers²⁴, issues of a comprehensive system of universal knowledge, skills, abilities, experience of independent activity, and personal responsibility of future specialists²⁵, and the peculiarities of the formation of integrative thinking²⁶. A significant achievement was the monograph by Szmidt²⁷, which reveals the importance of general music education as an important component in the formation of creative abilities and its role in the development of creativity and self-expression in students.

Methods

Given that the object of the study is the music education system, which covers educational institutions of various levels, the study is based on the analysis of official documents regulating education in art schools and higher education institutions. Since the analysis of the literature revealed significant criticism of the individual form of classes and insufficient attention to the comprehensive development of students, the analysis of the documentation is aimed at revealing the following issues:

- whether educational institutions can maintain individual forms of teaching, how many lessons are planned.
- whether there are guidelines on the teaching repertoire and technical requirements for students.

²³ Lu, Y., 2022. *Id.* p. 7.

²⁴ Kotsan, O. "Interdisciplinary context of the music- performing and pedagogical training of the future piano teachers", *Humanities Science Current Issues*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2021, pp. 133–136. <https://doi.org/10.24919/2308-4863/45-2-22>

²⁵ Shcherbinina, O. M. "Piano Training in Art Higher Education Institutions: Modern Situation and Perspectives of Modernization", *Topical questions of artistic pedagogics*, vol. 5, 2016, pp. 124–128.

²⁶ Zghurska, N. "Features of forming integrative students 'thinking in higher art institutions in the area of piano performance", *Scientific Journal: Theory and Methodology of Arts Education*, vol. 32, 2024, pp. 13–19. Publisher: Dragomanov Ukrainian State University. <https://doi.org/10.31392/UDU-nc.series14.2024.32.02>

²⁷ Szmidt, K. J. *Dilemmas of creativity pedagogy*. University of Lodz Publishing House, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.18778/8331-522-5>

– the study of related aspects, such as the study of related disciplines, requirements for the general development of students, etc.

To answer these questions, we used comparative analysis, generalization, and content analysis of official curricula. Comparing the content of educational documents helps us spot common trends and differences in how music education is organized depending on the level of the institution, national context, and educational tradition. This approach allows us to form an objective picture of the current state of individual teaching in piano education and its role in shaping the professional competence of musicians.

Results

The analysis shows that a significant part of the educational documentation is available on the Internet, which allows for comparative analysis. Let us compare the education systems in Ukraine, Poland, and the United Kingdom based on the following programs (Table 1):

1. Standard curriculum for the academic discipline “musical instrument piano” elementary level of primary arts education of the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine²⁸ and Standard educational program for elementary level of primary arts education in music, instrumental²⁹; these programs are fundamental for the practical activities of music schools in Ukraine.
2. The curriculum of the Paderewski Music School in Krakow³⁰ was taken as an example of the curriculum of Polish music schools.
3. Syllabi of schools in the United Kingdom – London College of Music Examinations³¹, Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music³².

²⁸ Ministry of Culture of Ukraine. *Typical educational program for the specialty “Piano” (initial level of artistic education, first (elementary) sub-level)*. State Scientific and Methodological Institution “Educational and Methodological Center for Cultural Education”, 2019. https://dnmckmo.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/NP_ELEMENT_FORTEPIANO.pdf

²⁹ Ministry of Culture of Ukraine. *“Typical educational program for art schools of the primary level of art education (instrumental classes)*. State Scientific and Methodological Center for Cultural and Artistic Education, 2020. https://www.dnmckmo.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/top_instrumentalni-klasy.pdf

³⁰ Jarguz, E. and Jadwiga, W. “I. J. Paderewski State Primary Music School Curriculum – piano”, 2020. <https://szkolapaderewski.krakow.pl/>

³¹ London College of Music Examinations. “Piano syllabus 2021–2024”, 2021. https://lcme.uwl.ac.uk/media/el4fzyxr/lcm_piano_syllabus_2021-2024_v12.pdf

³² Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. “Piano Syllabus 2021 & 2022 – Qualification Specification: Practical Music”, 2020. <https://www.readkong.com/page/piano-syllabus-2021-2022-qualification-specification-6397187>

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Table 1

Criterion	Ukraine	Poland	United Kingdom (LCM)
Number of hours	Minimum 2 academic hours (90 minutes/ week) for the main instrument.	Not specified directly in hours, but refers to weekly individual lessons	The number of hours is not fixed
Form of classes	Individual lessons	Individual lessons	Not specified – prepared by the teacher/school, but the program provides for individual performance.
Repertoire requirements	Available: etudes, polyphony, classical music, contemporary music.	Available: repertoire samples are provided for each year, technical exercises and forms are specified (etudes, sonatas, romantic pieces, etc.).	Available: at each level, 3 pieces from the approved list + technical exercises must be performed.
Play by memory / from sheet music	Some pieces must be memorized	Some pieces are to be memorized (especially solo performances), others are to be played from sheet music.	One of the three pieces must be performed from memory; the others can be performed from sheet music.
Use of copies of notes	No mention of original sheet music	It is specified that playing from pirated copies is prohibited; the original or a legal copy must be used.	Yes, it is prohibited to play from illegal copies; only copyrighted editions are permitted.
Instrument requirements	Not specified	An acoustic or digital piano with a dynamic keyboard is required.	An acoustic piano is required for exams; digital pianos are permitted only with prior permission.

**Comparison of piano training programs at music schools in
Ukraine, Poland, and the United Kingdom
Source: compiled by the author**

An analysis of these programs allows us to draw the following conclusions. Individual piano lessons remain the main form of instruction in Poland and Ukraine, as indicated in official documentation, while in the United Kingdom, the form of instruction is not specified in published documentation.

The repertoire of music schools is determined by guidelines covering musical works of different genres and different eras. In particular, the Baroque era is represented by the works of J.S. Bach, the Classical era by the works of J. Haydn, W.A. Mozart, and L. van Beethoven, and the Romantic era by the works of F. Schubert, F. Chopin, and R. Schumann. The repertoire of schools includes works by composers representing the relevant national school. In particular, the Polish program³³ provides a list of recommended works, including the works of Polish authors W. Lutosławski, J. Garścia, W. Markiewiczówna, J. Łuciuk, K. Sierocki, and others. The Ukrainian standard program provides recommended collections of works by V. Kosenko, I. Shcherbakov, L. Shukailo, V. Barvinsky, I. Berkovich, as well as individual anthologies published by Ukrainian publishers. A significant proportion of national sources in the educational repertoire is related to the fact that the musical culture of any country is based on the achievements of previous generations of musicians [...] whose work has gained recognition³⁴.

All educational institutions require students to play pieces from memory. However, this applies to solo performances, while ensemble pieces may be played from sheet music. British schools prohibit the use of sheet music copies, while Ukrainian schools do not have such requirements.

Both Ukrainian and Polish curricula stipulate that piano lessons are taught alongside general subjects such as solfeggio and music literature. These subjects are taught as group subjects and contribute to the comprehensive development of students. Some educational programs may also include ensemble playing or accompaniment. In particular, accompaniment is taught in the upper grades of Ukrainian music schools.

In the field of higher education, a comparison of programs was conducted for the following institutions (Table 2):

- 1) Ukrainian National Tchaikovsky Academy of Music³⁵.
- 2) Fryderyk Chopin University of Music in Warsaw³⁶.
- 3) University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna³⁷.

³³ Jarguz, E. and Jadwiga, W., 2020. *Id.*

³⁴ Teteriuk-Kinch, Y. "Music Education in Slovakia through the Eyes of a Teacher from Ukraine", In: *Horizonty umenia 7*. Banská Bystrica: Faculty of Music Arts, Academy of Arts, 2020.

³⁵ Ukrainian National Tchaikovsky Academy of Music. *Educational program for Piano specialty*, 2023. <https://knmau.com.ua/wp-content/uploads/OPP-Fortepiano-2023.pdf>

³⁶ Fryderyk Chopin University of Music in Warsaw. "Instrumental studies – piano playing. Study programme for first year of studies", 2024.

https://chopin.edu.pl/uploaded_files/1728678551_lp_1728628869_ins-for-1-rok-i-st.pdf

³⁷ MDW – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (Austria). "Piano preparatory course", 2022. <https://www.mdw.ac.at/klavier>

Table 2

Characteristics	Ukrainian National Tchaikovsky Academy of Music (Ukraine)	F. Chopin National School of Music (Poland)	MDW – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (Austria)
Teaching method	Individual	Individual	Individual
Improvisation	Mostly absent	Included in the course (depending on specialization)	Mandatory for some specializations
Solfeggio, theory included in the course	Studied separately	Studied separately	Studied, “designed to complement the instrumental lessons”
Accompaniment class, chamber ensemble	Yes	Yes	Yes
Repertoire	Classical (Western European canon)	Classical + contemporary Polish music	Classical + contemporary + improvisation
Technologies (ICT, video, e-learning)	To a limited extent	Use of online resources and electronic platforms	Moodle, e-learning, video lessons
Individualized learning	Yes (depending on the teacher and program)	Yes (individual study plans tailored to the student’s level)	Yes (individual learning paths)
Assessment	Individual exam before a commission	Individual exam before a commission	Includes colloquiums, self-presentations, peer review

Comparison of piano study programs at higher education institutions in Ukraine, Poland, and the United Kingdom
Source: compiled by the author

The study shows that individual piano lessons remain relevant for all music institutions whose information was analyzed. There are certain differences: while the program at the Tchaikovsky National Music Academy focuses on classical repertoire, the Warsaw and Vienna institutions pay more attention to contemporary and improvisational music, as well as the study of

information technologies. At the same time, pianists take group classes in solfeggio, harmony, and musical form analysis, but at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna, these disciplines are “designed to complement the instrumental lessons”³⁸.

An important component is the accompaniment class, which “ensures the acquisition of accompaniment skills, ensemble playing, and mastery of the role of accompanist”³⁹. This discipline seems particularly important given that a significant proportion of pianists (if not the majority) find employment in real life as accompanists in educational institutions, theatres and philharmonic societies. For this discipline, the staffing table of Ukrainian educational institutions provides for the position of illustrator, whose duties include illustrating musical material to the accompaniment of students. However, no such position is listed in the staffing tables of the Warsaw and Vienna conservatories.

Discussion

Studying the current state of piano education in European music institutions encourages a critical attitude toward proposals for its reform, primarily the introduction of group lessons instead of individual lessons, as presented in the work of Daniel⁴⁰ and other authors.

To justify our position, we will describe the essence of individual piano lessons. Individual lessons are conducted one-on-one (although other students may be present in the classroom and observe), involving solo (individual) performance of musical works by the student and the focused attention of the teacher, who observes the student and adjusts their playing. An important condition for effective lessons is to ensure that the student can monitor their own hearing, which requires “the concentration of musical ear, attention, will, aimed at critical assessment and correction of one’s own performance of a musical work in accordance with the presented auditory standard and planned performing interpretation”⁴¹.

In group lessons, teachers face the dilemma of ensuring that several students are actively participating in the lesson at the same time. On the one hand, simultaneous playing of several students on an instrument, when each

³⁸ MDW – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (Austria), 2022. *Id.*

³⁹ Ukrainian National Tchaikovsky Academy of Music, 2023. *Id.*

⁴⁰ Daniel, R. J., 2002. *Id.*

⁴¹ Grinchenko, A., Desiatnykova, N., Mamykina, A. and Shafarchuk, T. “The Influence of Self-Control on the Artistic and Performing Quality of a Musician”, *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2020, p. 47. <http://dspace.pdpu.edu.ua/handle/123456789/11363>

student plays their own repertoire, greatly complicates both the auditory self-control of each student and the teacher's ability to control them, which sharply reduces the effectiveness of the lesson. On the other hand, ensemble performance usually involves no more than two performers (four hands or two instruments), while arrangements for a larger number of pianists are extremely rare. It is also impossible to imagine the synchronous performance of a single piece by several students – such a performance makes an individual approach by the teacher impossible and does not allow for individual interpretation by the student.

Group lessons in which only one student plays while the others listen passively should also not be considered a solution, because during such classes, the teacher can only correct the mistakes of the student who is playing but cannot be aware of the possible mistakes of other students, which may differ significantly depending on the individual development trajectory of each student.

Another topic of discussion is the feasibility and effectiveness of remote piano lessons. Remote lessons gained significant popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many countries (including Ukraine) banned in-person classes. However, recent studies have shown that remote learning is less effective for performing musicians than face-to-face lessons⁴². To some extent, the shortcomings of remote lessons can be compensated for by the introduction of video recordings with explanations from the teacher, accompanying labels, and other information (for example, using the technology developed by⁴³), but the preparation of such video recordings requires significant additional resources. Thus, in our opinion, the proposals made by some researchers to abandon individual classes in favor of group classes should be considered ineffective.

Conclusion

European art education systems have accumulated considerable experience in training pianists at both the initial stage and at the level of higher professional education. This experience is reflected in the introduction

⁴² Bondarenko, A., Humeniuk, T., Romanenko, A., Makarenko, L. and Lysenko, L. "The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Music Education in Ukraine", *Fontes Artis Musicae*, vol. 70, 2023, pp. 244–262. <https://doi.org/10.1353/fam.2023.a909191>

⁴³ Emond, B., Barfurth, M. A., Comeau, G. and Brooks, M. "Video annotation technologies and their applications in piano pedagogy", In: *Recherche en éducation musicale*. (pp. 49–60). National Research Council Canada, 2009. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/44047309>

of systematic individual lessons in piano performance, practical lessons in accompaniment, and the extensive use of group work in disciplines such as solfeggio, harmony, musical form analysis, music history, and other theoretical courses. This structure of education is aimed at forming a well-rounded musical personality capable of analytical understanding of the performance process.

The formation of a repertoire is an important component of the educational process and aims to ensure the artistic maturity and technical competence of the pianist. Educational programs include familiarization with works of various genres, styles, and eras – from Baroque to contemporary – which contributes to the universalization of performance skills and the expansion of aesthetic horizons. At the same time, there is a tendency towards the integration of the national component – Ukrainian and Polish institutions systematically present works by composers from their respective countries, which plays an important role in preserving and actualising the national musical heritage.

It is also worth noting the gradual introduction of digital tools into the educational process. Many institutions use electronic educational platforms (e.g., Moodle), elements of distance learning (e-learning), as well as disciplines related to the mastery of modern computer technologies in the context of musical performance and pedagogy. This demonstrates the focus of contemporary arts education on innovation, interdisciplinarity, and adaptability to the challenges of the times.

Thus, the European model of pianist training demonstrates integrity and balance between performance practice, theoretical training, and technological awareness, which allows for the effective training of competitive specialists in the field of musical arts.

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