

# Integrated Piano Performance and Pedagogy Instruction for Sustainable Undergraduate Piano Education: A Conceptual Framework for Enhancing Performance Proficiency

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**Abstract:** *Traditional piano education for contemporary college students has long separated performance training from pedagogical preparation, potentially restricting the all-round development of piano majors. This Conceptual Paper offers a theoretical Foundation for exploring how combining Piano Performance and Teaching Methods can improve the extent to which students Master Classical Piano Playing Techniques. Based on constructivist learning theory, experiential learning theory and integrative pedagogy, this paper constructs a concept of pedagogical engagement as a learning path from the connection between teaching methods and student performance improvement. Based on the above-mentioned integrated instruction theory, it can be believed that in this process of experience reflection, concept mastery and hands-on operation, learners will demonstrate a significant improvement in practical application abilities. This study also discusses its implications for curriculum Design, studio Teaching methods, teacher Education, and institutional Policies in undergraduate piano education. The proposed framework provides a theoretical basis for subsequent empirical studies and supports the construction of integrated teaching models that conform to current professional requirements in higher music education.*

**Keywords:** Integrated Piano Performance and Pedagogy Instruction; Piano Performance Proficiency; Undergraduate Music Education; Classical Piano Education; SDG 4

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

In contemporary higher music education, piano instruction still focuses on technical mastery, stylistic accuracy, and interpretive development through performance-centered training, especially in the conservatory-style studio teaching tradition (López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2021; Mateos-Moreno, 2024). Although this traditional instructional method still dominates in conservatory-style education, recent research has shown that there is a risk of insufficient attention to the cultivation of students' sense of autonomy, reflective learning, and concept of music when teachers take a dominant role in the performance training process (Gaunt & Westerlund, 2021; López-Íñiguez & Bennett, 2021). Studies on professional preparation in music education also show that modern musicians are expected to cultivate diverse abilities that combine performance techniques, teaching and learning, and self-reflection (Gaunt et al., 2021).

In addition, with the increasing attention at home and abroad to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of the United Nations, which advocates inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all, the concept of curriculum construction in colleges and universities has also been transformed. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) emphasises that the goal of sustainable education is to cultivate learners who can take charge of their own learning, engage in deep thought, and master both theoretical knowledge and practical skills (UNESCO, 2020, 2021). Under the framework of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), high-quality education is not limited to the acquisition of technical skills; it also includes students' ability to cultivate transferable competencies, develop reflective Thinking and adaptive learning abilities, which support lifelong learning.

In the context of higher music education, integrated piano performance and teaching is in line with the sustainability orientation of this education by creating an all-round learning situation that encourages reflection, collaboration and concept-based music understanding. More interdisciplinary research and exploration into sustained Education show that it helps foster students' sense of direction and improves their ability for continuous learning in later stages after education; According to Zhao Qian et al., 2021, cross-subject research shows that learners have stronger professional adaptation skills and continuous study capacities under interdisciplinary backgrounds or learner-oriented instructional models. By combining pedagogical engagement in performance instruction, undergraduate piano education can help achieve SDG 4 through improved teaching quality, self-regulated learning promotion, and the development of adaptable musicians.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Although there is a growing sense of the connection between performing and teaching skills, undergraduate piano courses still often treat performance and pedagogy as two separate instruction areas. Research indicates that this arrangement is not conducive to students' comprehension of music knowledge and application of interpretive reasoning in performances (Solomonova et al., 2023). In addition, although contemporary music education literature has recognised the value of student-centred and collaborative learning, theoretical explanations for how pedagogical engagement promotes the development of performance abilities are still lacking (Gaunt, 2022).

## **1.3 Research Question**

How can integrated piano performance and pedagogy instruction theory improve the Classical Piano Performance Proficiency of undergraduate students?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Traditional Piano Performance Instruction**

Traditionally, the apprenticeship model in performance education for the piano focuses primarily on teacher demonstration, student imitation and repeated technique training. Modern research has confirmed that these methods are still effective for building a basic structure and interpretive performance (Mateos-Moreno 2024). However, some new research shows that performance proficiency not only includes the mastery of motor skills but also encompasses cognitive cognition of musical structure, style and expression purpose (Schmidt & Lee, 2025). Therefore, performance-oriented instruction may be less likely to promote deep participation in music interpretation when there is a deficiency in reflective and analytical learning.

## **2.2 Constructivist Learning in Music Education**

Constructivist Learning Theory, proposed by Piaget (1952), Vygotsky (1978) and other scholars; According to this theory, individuals actively build their own understanding of the world through reflective experience, social interaction and practical activity. In recent years, some music colleges and universities have conducted research on the "student-oriented" teaching model; this kind of learning environment effectively promotes interpretive thinking and analytical judgment in music learners (Gaunt & Westerlund, 2021). Collaborative learning and peer teaching have been shown to help students engage more deeply with music by expressing and reorganizing the implicit performance knowledge in an articulated manner (Triantafyllaki & Anagnostopoulou, 2022).

## **2.3 Experiential Learning and Reflective Practice**

Experiential learning theory was formalized by Kolb (1984), who conceptualized learning as a cyclical process involving experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation. According to the analysis of the structure of musical works, these structures include but are not limited to melody changes within one work; The order in which several different ideas combine is called combination. Reflecting as a tool for reflective musicians to help them establish a sense of professional identity and improve their work autonomy (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2021).

## **2.4 Integrative Pedagogy in Higher Music Education**

The concept of integrative education was first introduced by Tynjälä (2008), aiming to make the connection between theory and practice in professional education closer and facilitate students' thought-provoking. According to some recent research findings, the Integrated Instructional model can improve Teachers' professional versatility and enhance the connection between theoretical knowledge and practical applications in authentic Performance or teaching scenarios (Carey et al., 2022). Such Methods are in line with the Competency-Based Education Model, focusing on the adaptability and lifelong Learning of Professional Musicians.

## **3. Theoretical Integration**

Although existing literature has shown that constructivist learning theory, experiential learning theory and integrative pedagogy play roles in music education separately, no integrated system has been established to provide a comprehensive explanation for the development of performance in Piano Education. Although each theory focuses on various aspects of learning, combined with the other explanations, they can offer an all-round interpretation of why integrating piano performance and teaching has improved performance abilities.

Constructivist learning theory holds that knowledge is actively constructed by individuals in the process of cognition, social interaction, and reflection on experience. In higher music education, constructivist methods encourage learners to express their own musical thoughts and explore ways of performing through analysis; At the same time, participate in collaborative problem-solving activities and learn together. Recent research in music education shows that, based on constructivist ideas, when students are the subjects of learning, their interpretive understanding and analytical thinking in music can be effectively improved (Gaunt & Westerlund, 2021). By prompting the learners to describe their selection of technologies and expressions in teaching participation, it converts the learner's implicit performance knowledge into explicit conceptual understanding, thereby helping the performer achieve cognitive control of music interpretation.

Reflective Learning Theory cannot alone clarify the path of improvement in practical work after Reflective Learning. Experiential learning theory provides a useful supplement to other theories of learning, which considers that the process of learning is a cycle consisting of four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. In performance-based subjects like Piano teaching, this learning cycle is in line with the repeated practice and preparation for performances. At present, some research results show that structured reflective practice can help musicians improve their ability to refine technical details and ensure interpretative consistency after multiple rounds of performance reviews and corrections (Sha, 2024). When pedagogical engagement is integrated into performance instruction, students are motivated to engage repeatedly in the experience of learning cycles, thus enhancing their skills and adaptability in performances.

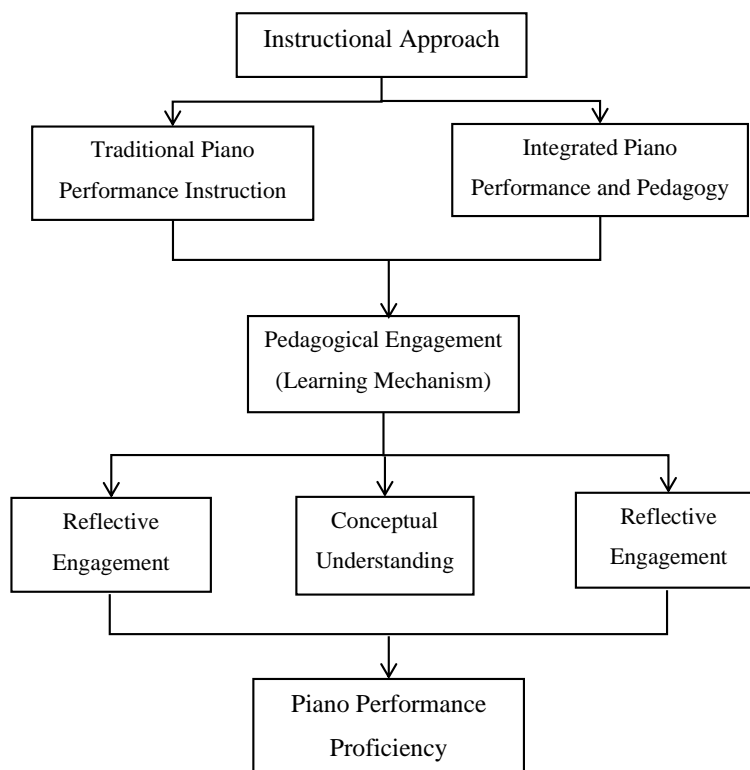
Constructivism and experiential learning theory both offer explanations for the cognitive process and procedural learning; Integrative pedagogy is broader in scope, covering not only theoretical knowledge but also practical performance skills, and a high level of professional ability can be attained through it. Integrative pedagogy advocates that, in the professional education environment, at the same time of concept comprehension, practical skills should also be learned and reflection should be conducted. In recent years, research in higher music education has indicated that integrated instructional methods help improve the professional versatility of students through the application of theoretical knowledge in real performance and teaching scenarios (Ruijuan et al., 2023). In piano education, integrative pedagogy proposes that the learning effect of performance is better when students perform, analyse and explain music simultaneously.

By integrating these three theoretical viewpoints, the all-round explanation for educational engagement serving as a process of learning in enhancing performance can be achieved. Constructivist theory explains how educational activities help to deepen the understanding of music content. Based on the Theory of Experiential Learning, reflection and application help enhance one's abilities in terms of performance. Integrative pedagogy in professional musicians' education aims to connect the training of performance skills with the development of teaching skills.

Together, these theoretical bases indicate that the combination of integrated piano performance and pedagogy is likely to improve performance skills through cognitive awareness, reflective learning and concept formation. Viewing pedagogical engagement as an independent instructional result is no longer considered here; instead, it is regarded as a link for students to achieve the mastery of music knowledge and the improvement of performance skills. Based on the synthesis of constructivism, experience, and integration, this study offers a theoretical basis for exploring how the integrated model can promote both art and profession in undergraduate piano education.

#### **4. Conceptual Framework Development**

Based on the theoretical integration mentioned in the previous section, this study proposes a conceptual model that demonstrates how combined instruction of integrated piano performance and pedagogy can enhance learners' piano performance abilities. In the frame, pedagogical involvement serves as the primary component of the Learning Mechanism that connects Teaching Means with Students' Improvements, which is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Conceptual framework**

Based on the above analysis, an expanded framework for piano performance teaching has been proposed in this paper; pedagogical engagement is considered to be a fundamental way that the instructional mode affects learners' improvement in piano skills. The traditional performance-based instruction model focuses on actors' technical implementation and interpretive fidelity; While the proposed framework defines performance development as a multi-dimensional learning process centred around reflective practice, conceptual grasping and proactive discovery. The three related learning processes together explain how integrated piano performance and pedagogy teaching promotes in-depth performance learning.

#### 4.1 Reflective Engagement

Reflective participation constitutes the basic pathway of the aforementioned system. Reflection has been widely recognised as an essential part of professional development in music education, helping students assess their performance strategies, identify technical problems, and make adjustments to their interpretations. Recently, it was found through research that organised reflection activities are more prone to helping musicians develop metacognition; so as to be able to make more flexible adjustments to their practice strategies during interpretation (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2021), and consequently. During pedagogical activities, when students are explaining musical concepts or assessing their peers' performance, they need to externalise the implicit musical knowledge in their minds and strengthen the cognitive processing of performance materials.

In integrated performance and pedagogy instruction, reflective engagement is included in the activities of guided discussion, verbal explanation of performance strategies, and peer teaching exercises. These activities stimulate students' thinking on what kind of results they will get from their own choices in a competitive situation, and no answer from the teacher is needed. In research on reflection in higher music education, it has been proposed that musicians who regularly engage in reflective learning are more likely to feel a sense of control and adaptability

when preparing for performances (Gaunt, 2022). Through reflective practices, one's playing level will naturally rise; At the same time, such an increase is built upon a more significant sense of reflection while learning.

#### **4.2 Conceptual Understanding**

The second mechanism, in terms of cognitive knowledge's effect on performance development through conceptual understanding. Piano performance not only needs to master techniques but also have an understanding of the structural organisation and stylistic norms of music, as well as the ability to interpret. Research currently indicates that over the past few years, conceptual knowledge has been gradually acknowledged as a factor affecting performance interpretation and expression clarity (Harrison & Grant, 2023). If there is no scientific theory as a guide, the performers will mostly use imitation learning; at this time, their interpretive freedom and space for creative expression will be restricted.

Combined performance and pedagogical teaching can help students understand music better through analysis of musical forms, articulation rules, style features, etc., when performing works. Pedagogical activities that explain theoretical knowledge to each other require students to organise musical knowledge in a structured way and explain it, thereby enhancing their cognitive organisation of performance skills. Studies on collaborative learning in music education show that, after participating in peer teaching, students have improved their ability to analyse and understand music more profoundly (Triantafyllaki & Anagnostopoulou, 2022). Therefore, conceptual understanding helps the development of performance skills through improved interpretive reasoning and sensitivity to style in performing.

#### **4.3 Active Experimentation**

Active Experimentation is the third mechanism to promote the improvement of work performance. In the process of performance learning, experiments refer to attempts made in practice to test different technical routes, interpretive selections, and expressive forms. Based on the research of experiential learning, it can be known that active experimentation can help learners apply concept knowledge to practical performance situations, thus improving skill acquisition and generalisation (Pozo, Bautista & Torrado, 2021). Musicians who engage in experimental practice have stronger adaptability and problem-solving abilities to deal with performance problems.

The combined instructional model helps create an open exploration Environment, prompting students to try repeatedly and explore various interpretations of Paths and methods. Pedagogical engagement helps students try different ways of performing and explains or demonstrates musical ideas to others. This process strengthens the cycles of experiential learning and continuously refines performance techniques. Research in music performance education indicates that, through experiments, it is possible to maintain the growth of performers' technical skills; at this time, adaptive technical methods and expressive approaches need to be adopted according to various musical pieces (Carey et al., 2022).

#### **4.4 Interrelationship of Learning Mechanisms**

Reflective engagement, conceptual understanding and active experimentation are presented as different mechanisms, but in the performance learning process, these mechanisms work together. Reflection can deepen the understanding of ideas through analysis of music materials; At this time, these consolidated concepts are applied in practice to guide an experiential-learning process that drives effective performance decisions. Active Experimentation, on the other hand, offers a new way of performance experience that can be reflected upon to drive

concept improvement. This cyclic action corresponds to current models of professional development in higher music education that highlight repeated learning.

To sum up, based on the above framework, Integrated Performance and Teaching of Piano Learning can improve students' performance skills to a certain extent through multiple forms of cognition and experience at the same time. By integrating pedagogical participation for performance guidance, students can enhance their understanding of music; They will develop the habit of thinking during the learning process and gain some flexible Performance techniques. Therefore, the proposed framework provides a theoretical basis for future empirical research to examine the effect of integrated Instructional Models on piano teaching in primary schools.

## **5. Implications for Piano Education**

The proposed concept framework provides some essential reference for undergraduate piano teaching, especially regarding curriculum Design, studio Teaching practice, teacher Cultivation and training, as well as institutional construction. By placing pedagogical participation in the Learning mechanism to improve Performance ability, this approach questions traditional Performance-oriented teaching models and explores new pathways for building all-round piano education systems.

### **5.1 Curriculum Design in Undergraduate Piano Programs**

One significant meaning of the proposed framework is that it can be used as a reference for integrating curriculum in undergraduate Piano teaching programs. Traditional curricula frequently separate the training of performance courses and pedagogy courses, considering them different parts of education. Currently, research on high music education in China has focused on interdisciplinary and integrated learning, allowing students to put theory into practice (Carey, Harrison & Dwyer 2022). Based on the proposed framework, integrating pedagogical engagement into the performance course should be able to improve students' abilities to integrate technical skills with conceptual comprehension and interpretive reasoning.

Combining performance and pedagogy in the curriculum may also better prepare students for the realities of professional life in current music education, where performers often need to take on teaching duties. Research shows that the integrated learning environment can enhance professional adaptability and help the cultivation of communication ability, reflective thinking ability, and collaborative problem-solving ability, which belong to transferable skills, etc. (Triantafyllaki & Anagnostopoulou, 2022) Therefore, curriculum reform that promotes the combination of performance and pedagogy can help both performance improvement and professional preparation.

### **5.2 Studio Teaching and Instructional Practices**

The conceptual framework also provides important references for the studio Teaching practice of Piano Education. Traditional studio teaching is generally carried out by the teacher demonstrating and correcting, limiting students' reflective learning and group exploration opportunities. Recently, some scholars have emphasised that, in classroom teaching, teachers should adopt more student-centred methods to stimulate students' desire to learn actively and guide them into deep reflection on their own learning experiences (Gaunt, 2022). Add some educational activities, such as peer teaching, guided discussion, and reflective explanation, to the studio Teaching mode so that the studio environment itself becomes an interactive space; this will help the students to understand deeply what they have performed.

In addition, adding the element of participation from teachers to this studio Teaching mode will assist Students in strengthening metacognition and self-regulation as they learn. Research shows that reflective and Collaborative learning of Musicians helps them form better Practice strategies And interpret more independently (Bennett & Bridgstock, 2021). By inspiring students to share their performance techniques and analyse the music, integrated teaching methods can help improve students' self-management skills in their own performance development.

### **5.3 Teacher Education and Professional Development**

Another meaning is to provide education and training for piano teachers. The concept of a piano lesson being conducted by the teacher in an enabling and reflective capacity, rather than simply demonstrating, needs to be established. In contemporary studies on music teacher education, it is pointed out that teachers' flexibility in using teaching methods and their ability to reflect on teaching practice are essential factors that influence student learning (Harrison & Grant, 2023).

Teacher education programs may thus be able to prepare piano teachers to implement integrated teaching methods that combine performance training with pedagogical participation. Specialised development activities that promote collaborative learning, peer teaching and reflection among teachers may be able to provide greater support for meeting diverse learning needs of all students. Moreover, combining performance and pedagogy may prompt teachers to adopt more integrated teaching methods that support the all-round development of students in art and profession.

### **5.4 Institutional and Policy Level Considerations**

In terms of institutions, the proposed framework also provides strong support for promoting more widespread competency-based and student-centred music education. (Carey et al., 2022) (CAREY, et all, 2022). Integrated performance and pedagogy instruction is in line with the institutional orientation of multiple competency cultivation at once.

In addition, the framework is also consistent with other international educational objectives: For example, the 4th United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for Quality Basic Education. By promoting instructional Models that enhance students' learning interest and effects, integrated piano education helps advance overall educational quality improvement. Therefore, institutions may need to support the development of integrated curricula, interdisciplinary cooperative Teaching and innovative evaluation methods that embody the goals of integrated learning.

In short, based on the above ideas, introducing pedagogical engagement into piano performance teaching helps build a stronger, student-centered and professional piano Education Model. In response to the alignment needs of current educational research and teacher requirements, a combined performance and teaching method can be expected to take on an essential role in driving the future direction of undergraduate piano education.

## **6. Future Research Directions**

While this study's proposed concepts provide a theoretical reference for how Integrated Piano Performance and Teaching improve performance skills, it is necessary to extend research in future studies to achieve an even better understanding of the subject. First, some empirical studies should be carried out to examine the theoretical relationships in the framework.

Quantitative tests comparing the results of combining instructional strategies with traditional performance-based Teaching methods can offer evidence for whether or not teaching Interaction impacts students' learning outcomes. This kind of study may also explore how three different ways, i.e., reflective thinking, concept understanding and active practice, affect performance skills in terms of technical details, style presentation and expression.

Second, in the future, research can be conducted to explore the application scope of integrated performance and pedagogy instruction across different musical repertoires and style traditions. Although the current framework primarily focuses on traditional piano education, there may be differences in the process of learning performance for other music genres that need to interpret and express in distinct ways technically. Comparative research on integrated instructional models in contemporary, jazz or cross-cultural piano repertoire may also offer some reference for the adaptability of integrated pedagogy in broader music education.

Thirdly, a long-term effect study on the continuous influence of integrated teaching models in music training on professionals' development is required. Higher music education increasingly emphasises career versatility, and integrated performance and pedagogy instruction may affect not only performance proficiency but also the formation of professional identity and career sustainability. Long-term tracking studies on graduates' performance development, teaching ability and professional identity may provide more in-depth information about the educational effect of integrated instruction model.

Finally, the application of new technologies in music education provides more opportunities for extending integrated performance and pedagogy instruction. Digital learning platforms, online collaborative Learning Environment and artificial intelligence-assisted practice tools have been shown to be conducive to reflective and interactive learning process in music Education. In the future, research can be conducted to explore how technology-enhanced learning environments support pedagogical engagement and further improve the learning outcomes of performance learning in piano education.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study put forward a conceptual framework to illustrate how the integrated piano performance and pedagogy course can help enhance undergraduate students' classical piano performance by means of teaching involvement. Instead of treating performance and pedagogy as two separate fields of study, this framework shows that there is a relationship between them; therefore, more all-round performance education has been enabled through reflective, conceptual, and experiential learning paths.

In the future, the above framework will continue to inspire research in various fields of education and promote the development of education. Empirical research should be carried out to explore the effects of integrated performance and teaching instructional models on students' mastery of different repertoires, learning environment, and diverse student groups. Longitudinal research can further explore how integrated instructional methods help students enhance their professional adaptability in the future, maintain a sustained development of their careers and promote lifelong learning; In an ever-changing environment of music education.

In terms of education, the framework also implies that there is a need to rethink the traditional curriculum system in higher music education. In the future, curriculum innovation may focus on creating an interdisciplinary learning environment to integrate performance training,

pedagogical cultivation, and cooperative learning experience. This type of curricular transformation is more prone to cultivate numerous flexible musical talents, capable of changing quickly when the practical demand situation for the times changes endlessly every day; at this time, their practical capabilities are not only manifested in performance, but also reflected in education.

In addition, the application of emerging digital technologies offers new possibilities for extending integrated performance and pedagogy instruction. Technology-enhanced learning platforms, virtual collaborative Learning environments and AI-assisted practice tools may provide new approaches to support reflective Learning and Pedagogical engagement in Piano Education. In the future, research may focus on how to integrate digital learning environments into integrated instructional models to improve performance-learning results and access in music education.

In general, integrated piano performance and pedagogy teaching is a form of sustainable and student-centred music education that focuses on cultivating all-round competence. Through cultivating reflective learning, conceptual understanding and adaptive performance skills, integrated instructional approaches have the potential to promote the continuous development of undergraduate piano education and contribute to the overall advancement of high-quality and sustainable music education in contemporary higher education.

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### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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