

# The Analysis and Comparison of Pre-Service Music Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Piano Lesson and Their Sight-Reading Skills in Terms of Certain Variables

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## Abstract

This study seeks to analyze pre-service music teachers' attitudes towards the piano lesson and their piano sight-reading skills in terms of academic achievement in the piano lesson, year of study, and gender and reveal the relationship between their attitudes towards the piano lesson and piano sight-reading skills. Descriptive model and correlational research model are employed. The study group consists of 50 randomly-selected students from the 2nd and 3rd years taking the piano lesson during the 2016-2017 academic year in Uludağ University Faculty of Education Department of Fine Arts Music Education Program in Turkey. "Piano Lesson Attitude Scale" was used to collect data regarding the piano students' attitudes towards piano lesson. In addition, the piano students were asked to play two sight-reading pieces selected by experts before and internationally accepted for sight-reading, to detect their sight-reading skills. The students were video-recorded, and their sight-reading levels were measured via an observation form prepared by the teaching staff specialized in their field. The collected attitude and sight-reading scores were analyzed via t-test based on the variables of gender and year of study. The correlations between the attitude, piano score, and sight-reading score variables were calculated by Pearson and Spearman correlation coefficients. At the end of the study, a significant relationship was detected between the students' attitudes towards the piano lesson and their sight-reading skills. The piano students' attitudes towards the piano lesson have a medium level correlation with their piano lesson academic achievement and sight-reading skills. The female students have better attitudes towards the piano lesson compared to the male students. Also, the 2nd year students have better attitudes towards the piano lesson compared to the 3rd year students. The study results indicate a medium level correlation between the students' sight-reading skills and their piano lesson academic achievement. The female students have better sight-reading skills than the male students. Lastly, the 2nd year students have sight-reading scores close to those of the 3rd year students. This study is significant as it shows the relationship between pre-service music teachers' attitudes towards the piano lesson and their piano sight-reading skills.

**Keywords:** Piano lesson, sight-reading skills, attitude

## 1. Introduction

In Turkey, piano education is given to all pre-service music teachers in every institution training music teachers. Equipping pre-service teachers with piano playing behaviors covers a process during which one develops musical behaviors and acquisitions required by the profession (as cited in Yokuş, 2009). According to Kasap (as cited in Küpana, 2012), pre-service music teachers acquire piano playing skills both as part of the music knowledge they get during their music education and for professional music teaching. "As in the education of other musical instruments, the purpose of piano education is also to enable pre-service teachers' to improve their musical thinking and perceptions, see music education as a whole with all the branches, and acquire cognitive, affective, and psychomotor behaviors" (Otacıoğlu, 2005).

In Council of Higher Education of Turkey (YÖK) central curriculum dated 1998, the relevant definition states that piano education and training constitutes the basis of music education (YÖK, 1998, p. 80). Though there are certain differences in music education programs of some universities in Turkey, pre-service music teachers learn to play piano for eight terms in most programs (Demirtaş & Eğilmez, 2015). At the end of this process, music teachers are expected to be equipped with basic behaviors and techniques in relation to playing piano and to make use of this piano training in their profession (Otacıoğlu, 2005). Realizing these expectations at the intended level depends on various elements. To İnceoğlu (cited in Tufan & Güdek, 2008), piano students' attitudes (i.e. a person's tendency to judge an object, symbol, or an event either positively or negatively) towards the piano lesson is one of such elements, and it plays an important role in determining the level of realizing the objectives set for piano education.

Tufan and Güdek (2008) argue that individuals' interests, attitudes, and tendencies, which make up the affective domain, are not taken into account thoroughly in piano education. However, determining pre-service music teachers' attitudes towards the piano lesson is of great importance in that it both reveals whether the piano education program yields the intended success and improves students' success in the piano lesson (Tufan & Güdek, 2008, p. 81). Özen (cited in Tufan & Güdek, 2008) believes that pre-service music teachers' attitudes towards the piano lesson are directly associated with the level of readiness, motivation, piano playing conditions,

trainers, self-efficacy, etc. Sight-reading skill level is also considered to be one of the elements influencing students' attitudes towards the piano lesson.

According to Fenmen (1947, p. 81), sight-reading refers to performing a piece of music on the piano at the first sight without any preparation. Performing a musical work on the first encounter without any errors is very hard to achieve. However, a good pianist can play a piece at almost a good level without prior acquaintance (Fenmen, 1947). Sight-reading is a skill to be given to students from the beginning of piano education (Çimen, 2001). The purpose of sight-reading is to allow students to read a work rapidly, fluently, and accurately and to minimize the period needed for playing the piece. Moreover, a student needs to be equipped with regular sight-reading habits (Türkmen, 2008). Though sight-reading depends on students' intelligence, skills, and musicianship, it is a skill that can be improved with a training program prepared under the guidance of a teacher and systematic exercise (Çimen, 2001).

Coşkun (cited in Özer & Yiğit, 2011) argues that sight-reading is critically important for piano education; yet, students do not care about it much. Generally, students wish to vocalize the works that are high-level in terms of technique and prestigious and spend most of their time on technical works. Hence, there are many students who are advanced players with poor sight-reading skills.

Özer and Yiğit (2011) tried to reveal the influence of regular exercises of the piano on sight-reading skills. The study results indicate that regular exercises positively influence sight-reading skills.

Köse (2013) also evaluated the influence of rapid sight-reading on piano education. He made observations on various sight-reading methods and techniques in relation to their influence on piano education. In addition, he revealed that rapid sight-reading techniques have positive influences on achieving the objectives of piano education.

Other previous studies (Kurtuldu, 2014; Kurtuldu, 2015; Küpana, 2012; Özer & Yiğit, 2011) indicate an association between students' sight-reading skills and their attitudes towards the piano lesson and academic achievement. It is seen that students' piano sight-reading levels playing influence their attitudes towards the piano lesson and their academic achievement. In this sense, the present study seeks to reveal the relationship between the attitudes of the students studying in Uludağ University Faculty of Education Music Education Program towards the piano lesson and their piano sight-reading levels. To this end, the piano students' sight-reading skills and their attitudes towards the piano lesson are analyzed in terms of certain variables.

### *1.1 Problem Statement*

What are pre-service music teachers' sight-reading skills and their attitudes towards the piano lesson in terms of certain variables (i.e. gender, year of study, and final grades for piano lesson), and what is the level of relationship between piano students' sight-reading skills and their attitudes towards the piano lesson?

### *1.2 Research Questions*

The questions below are tried to be answered based on the problem statement.

1. Is there a significant relationship between pre-service music teachers' piano sight-reading skills and their attitudes towards the piano lesson?
2. Is there a significant relationship between pre-service music teachers' attitudes towards the piano lesson and their success in this lesson?
3. Is there a significant relationship between pre-service music teachers' piano sight-reading skills and their success in the piano lesson?
4. Do pre-service music teachers' attitudes towards the piano lesson change depending on gender?
5. Do pre-service music teachers' piano sight-reading skills change depending on gender?
6. Do pre-service music teachers' attitudes towards the piano lesson change depending on the year of study?
7. Do pre-service music teachers' piano sight-reading skills change depending on the year of study?

### *1.3 Purpose of the Study*

This study seeks to analyze the attitudes of the students studying in Music Education Department at Uludağ University towards the piano lesson and their piano sight-reading skills in terms of certain variables and to reveal the relationship between the students' attitudes towards the piano lesson and their piano sight-reading skills.

### *1.4 Significance of the Study*

This study is significant because it attempts to detect the influence of pre-service music teachers' attitudes towards the piano lesson on their piano sight-reading skills. In addition, this study will provide an insight to piano educators and all the piano trainers for assessing the piano lessons they give as it aims to detect the students' sight-reading skill levels and attitudes towards the piano lesson.

### 1.5 Limitations

This study is limited to the students studying in Uludağ University Faculty of Education Department of Fine Arts Education Music Education Program.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research Model

Descriptive and correlational research models are employed in this study. Correlational research model, one of the quantitative models, is used to estimate the level of relationship between two or more variables statistically and predict the possible results (Metin, 2014).

### 2.2 Population and Sample

The population of this study covers the piano students studying in Uludağ University Faculty of Education Department of Fine Arts Education Music Education Program.

The sample group of the study covers randomly-selected 50 students studying in aforementioned program.

These students are either 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year students. 34 students are female, while 16 are male.

### 2.3 Data Collection Tools

#### 2.3.1 Data Collection Tool for Attitudes Towards the Piano Lesson.

To reveal the students' attitudes towards the piano lesson, a questionnaire whose first section deals with personal details (gender, year of study, piano academic achievement grade) and the second section includes a scale form measuring the attitude towards the piano lesson was administered to the students.

Piano Lesson Attitude Scale (Tufan and Güdek, 2008) includes 30 items 18 of which are positive while 12 are negative statements. The items are graded based on 5-point Likert-type rating from "I strongly agree" to "I strongly disagree", with the scoring ranging as 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1. The sub-dimension of "satisfaction" includes 18 items, whereas the sub-dimension of "value" includes 12 items.

At the end of the factor analysis that was performed to reveal the construct validity of the scale, KMO sampling adequacy was found to be .97. The varimax orthogonal rotation showed that the loadings of both factors range from .53 to .79. Corrected item-total correlations were found to range from .60 to .83 for the sub-dimension of "satisfaction" whereas from .48 to .78 for the sub-dimension of "value". The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the whole scale is .97, while it is .97 for the sub-dimension of "satisfaction" and .91 for the sub-dimension of "value" (Tufan and Güdek, 2008). For the present study, Cronbach's alpha values are .98 for the sub-dimension of "satisfaction", .86 for the sub-dimension of "value", and .97 for the whole scale.

#### 2.3.2. Data Collection Regarding Sight-Reading Skills.

To reveal the students' sight-reading levels, sight-reading pieces were determined. By consulting the expert teachers' views, two medium-level pieces based on various criteria were selected among ABSRM Grade 4 and 5 sight-reading pieces. They were used after some arrangements. Two sight-reading pieces were played by 50 randomly-selected piano students, and they were video recorded. Sight-reading pieces played by the students were scored by three piano teachers specialized in their field via an observation form prepared with the assistance of experts.

Kendall W was calculated to measure the agreement of the three raters. It was calculated to be  $w = 0.89$   $p < 0.01$  for the first piano piece and  $w = 0.77$   $p < 0.01$  for the second piano piece.

### 2.4 Data Analysis

Shapiro-Wilk test result indicated that the scores from the Piano Lesson Attitude Scale (PLAS) and its sub-dimensions (i.e. "satisfaction" and "value") as well as the sight-reading scores met the assumption of normality on the basis of the variables of gender (male-female) and year of study (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> years). The Levene's test results showed the scores to have equal variances in all levels of gender and year of the study variables. Accordingly, t-test was employed to analyze the scores from the Piano Lesson Attitude Scale (PLAS) and its sub-dimensions as well as sight-reading scores based on gender and year of study.

Pearson and Spearman correlation coefficients were calculated while analyzing the correlations between the scores from PLAS and its sub-dimensions and the variables of piano lesson academic achievement and sight-reading scores. As the piano score variable was measured on an ordinal scale, Spearman correlation coefficient was used to report the correlation in any pair of variables involving this variable, while Pearson correlation coefficient was used in comparisons in other pairs of variables. The interpretation of the correlation coefficients is based on the following proposition of Guilford (1956): 0.00-0.20 refers to a very weak correlation; 0.20 to 0.40 a weak correlation; 0.40-0.70 a medium level correlation; 0.70-0.90 a high correlation; and over 0.90 a very high correlation.

### 3. Results

**Table 1. The Correlations Between PLAS and Its Sub-Dimensions and Piano and Sight-Reading Scores**

		Satisfaction	Value	PLAS	Piano Score	Sight-Reading Score
Satisfaction	$r$	—	0.849**	0.985**	0.378*	0.426*
	$r_s$	—	0.872**	0.985**	0.483**	0.499**
Value	$r$		—	0.927**	0.461**	0.474**
	$r_s$		—	0.931**	0.517**	0.521**
PLAS	$r$			—	0.418*	0.456**
	$r_s$			—	0.510**	0.511**
Piano Score	$r$				—	0.535**
	$r_s$				—	0.588**
Sight-Reading Score	$r$					—
	$r_s$					—

\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.001$

PLAS = Piano Lesson Attitude Scale.

Table 1 shows that there are medium level correlations between satisfaction and piano score ( $r_s = 0.483$ ), between satisfaction and sight-reading score ( $r = 0.426$ ), between value and piano score ( $r_s = 0.517$ ), and between value and sight-reading score ( $r = 0.521$ ). As to the total attitude scores, there are medium level correlations between PLAS and piano scores ( $r_s = 0.510$ ) and between PLAS and sight-reading scores ( $r = 0.456$ ). As for the total piano and sight-reading scores, the correlation between them is ( $r_s = 0.588$ ), referring to a medium level correlation.

**Table 2. Comparison of PLAS and Its Sub-Dimensions and Sight-Reading Scores Based on Gender Variable**

		$M$	$t$	$df$	$p$	Cohen's $d$
Satisfaction	Female	3.306	2.774	48	<b>0.008</b>	0.841
	Male	2.514				
Value	Female	3.953	2.649	48	<b>0.011</b>	0.803
	Male	3.438				
PLAS	Female	3.565	2.843	48	<b>0.007</b>	0.862
	Male	2.883				
Sight-Reading Score	Female	2.950	1.793	48	0.079	0.544
	Male	2.630				

PLAS = Piano Lesson Attitude Scale.

Table 2 shows that satisfaction ( $t = 2.774, p = 0.008$ ), value ( $t = 2.649, p = 0.011$ ), and PLAS ( $t = 2.843, p = 0.007$ ) scores indicate significant difference on behalf of the female students. In addition, the calculated effect sizes regarding these scores (Cohen's  $d$ ) indicate that gender has considerable influence on the aforementioned scores. As for the sight-reading scores, though there is no significant difference ( $t = 1.793, p = 0.079$ ), the female students got higher scores ( $d = 0.544$ ).

**Table 3. Comparison of PLAS and Its Sub-Dimensions and Sight-Reading Scores Based on Year of Study**

		$M$	$t$	$df$	$p$	Cohen's $d$
Satisfaction	2	3.282	1.649	48	0.106	0.466
	3	2.822				
Value	2	4.007	2.372	48	<b>0.022</b>	0.671
	3	3.570				
PLAS	2	3.572	1.936	48	0.059	0.548
	3	3.121				
Sight-Reading Score	2	2.927	0.926	48	0.359	0.262
	3	2.769				

PLAS = Piano Lesson Attitude Scale.

Table 3 shows that satisfaction scores do not have a significant difference based on year of study ( $t = 1.649, p = 0.106$ ). It is seen that value scores of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year students are higher than those of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year students ( $t = 2.372, p = 0.022$ ). Considering the total attitude scores, the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students have higher scores ( $d = 0.548$ ), though there is no significant difference ( $t = 1.936, p = 0.059$ ). Both grades are close to each other in terms of sight-reading scores ( $t = 0.926, p = 0.359$ ).

### 4. Conclusion

The study results show that there is a significant relationship between the students' piano lesson achievement

and their attitudes towards the piano lesson. The students having high attitudes towards the piano lesson are also successful in this lesson. Also, the students who are satisfied with the piano lesson and attach the necessary value to this lesson have better academic achievement in this lesson.

When the students' attitudes towards the piano lesson and their piano sight-reading scores are compared, a significant difference is observed, with the students having high piano sight-reading scores possessing a high attitude towards the piano lesson. To sum up, it is possible to say that the students with better sight-reading skills are more satisfied with the piano lesson and attach the necessary value to this lesson. Küpana (2012) conducted a study analyzing the influence of piano sight-reading program on the attitudes towards the piano lesson. The results of that study are consistent with the results of the present study. It shows that having good piano sight-reading skills positively influences the attitude towards the piano lesson.

The present study also demonstrates that the students with good sight-reading skills have better academic achievement in piano. This is supported by Kurtuldu's (2014) study entitled 'A Comparison on Sight-Reading Grades and Piano Achievements of the Students'. Kurtuldu (2014) states that the students with good sight-reading skills are also successful in playing piano. In another study, Kurtuldu (2015) compared sight-reading scores and piano lesson final grades and revealed a positive relationship between the two variables.

As to the students' attitudes towards the piano lesson based on gender, the female students have higher attitudes towards the piano lesson compared to the male students, which is also true for the sub-dimensions of "satisfaction" and "value". Çevik and Güven (2011) revealed a significant difference between the attitude scores towards the piano lesson based on gender, with female students having higher scores than male students. Elmas and Köse (2013) obtained a similar result in their study. They determined that female students' attitude scores are higher than male students'. According to the findings of the present study, though there is no significant difference between the sight-reading scores of the students based on gender, the female students have higher scores than the male students.

Despite there is no significant difference between the students' attitudes towards the piano lesson based on year of study, the 2<sup>nd</sup> year students have higher attitudes towards the piano lesson than the 3<sup>rd</sup> year students. This may be because as the year of study goes higher, the load of lessons increases, and piano piece levels get harder in piano lessons, which may lead students to be less interested in the piano lesson. Therefore, students' attitudes may be influenced negatively. As to the sight-reading scores, the sight-reading levels of both grades are close to each other.

## 5. Recommendations

The study implies that attitudes towards the piano lesson influence piano sight-reading skills and the academic achievement in the lesson. Hence, efforts need to be put forth to positively influence and improve students' attitudes towards the piano lesson.

The students with good piano sight-reading skills have good final grades, according to the results of the study. Thus, regular sight-reading exercises need to be made within the scope of the piano lesson to improve the students' final grades. Sight-reading should be conducted under the guidance of piano instructors throughout the classes. To enhance students' sight-reading skills, such exercises need to be made every day, even if they last for a short period of time. Getting to know new works and accompanying another instrument or a singing person will be beneficial as well.

Piano instructors should attach importance to sight-reading exercises within the scope of the piano lesson. In addition, events such as seminars and conferences should be organized to explain the importance of sight-reading for piano playing.

The study findings point out that female students have better attitudes towards the piano lesson and better sight-reading skills compared to male students. Accordingly, the factors influencing male students' attitudes negatively should be studied. Furthermore, studies may be conducted to better their attitudes.

We believe that similar studies need to be conducted on larger groups to attain more comprehensive and concrete data.

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