

# Effective Factors in the Correct Teaching of Music

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## INTRODUCTION

Today, specialists in every field of arts practice and pedagogy are engaged in analyzing ways of improving the quality of teaching methods and outcomes. Clearly, examining approaches to music teaching can be counted among these research priorities. The aim of this paper is to review, on the basis of the author's own experiences, the elements involved in effective music teaching in Iran.

Before turning to the main point of discussion of this paper, however, it is worthwhile recalling an experience that the author had during a conversation with Hassan Kassai<sup>1</sup>.

One day in autumn of 1995, by chance, I saw Kassai walking down a street in Esfahan. I approached him excitedly, and asked if I could accompany him, which he agreed to. As we walked, he spoke about music, and I anxiously asked him many questions that I had on my mind. At one point I asked: "Master, I hope you do not become upset at my question, but why do you think a second 'Hassan Kassai' has not been born?" Kassai replied: "If another person was born in Esfahan and grew up in a family exactly like mine—a person with the same shaped face and mouth and tongue and style of ney-playing—someone who studied with the same teachers as me and had the same experiences ... perhaps he could be like me..."

As an eager student, this perspective concerning the teaching of music was certainly enlightening.

## Abstract

In this paper, the author assesses effective elements involved in music education through a case study of music instruction in Iran.

## Keywords

Education; music teaching instruction; music students; teaching environments; student living environments

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<sup>1</sup> . Hassan Kassai (1928-2012) was one of the most famous ney player in Iran who lived in Esfahan.

The general and specific factors involved in effective music teaching could be arranged into the following categories:

1. Factors related to the music teachers
2. Factors related to the music students
3. Factors related to the learning environments
4. Factors related to the students' living circumstances

## **1. MUSIC TEACHERS**

- Age and gender of instructors
- Teaching history
- Style of instruction
- Social beliefs and artistic attitude

### **Age and gender of instructors**

The age and gender of music instructors are important factors for several reasons. Age-gaps between music teachers and students can sometimes cause problems in teaching situations. In the author's own experience teaching music, it is better that the age difference between a teacher and a student not to be too great. For example, an age gap of forty or fifty years between a student and teacher can make it difficult for student to build an effective relationship with their instructor. This problem is also related to the cultural practices of shame, modesty and embarrassment that are common in Eastern countries such as Iran. For example, many music students in Iran often find it difficult to raise questions with their instructors when the age-gap between them is significant, and it is often the case that the parents of music students raise such questions with music teachers.

Certainly, it is usually acknowledged that older instructors have greater experience and ability; but it is perhaps better that younger students at first pursue their studies with younger teachers before later taking steps to study with older and more experienced instructors. It is also common for established instructors to suggest that a new student commence their studies with a younger teacher.

Regarding the gender issue, students may prefer to have their classes with the teachers of their same or opposite gender based on several reasons including society, culture, family, training circumstances and etc. It seems that this is one of the most important factors in which parents must take the preference of their children into consideration for that could truly affect the procedure of the music learning.

### **Teaching history**

It is important to choose a music teacher based on their artistic backgrounds and record of teaching, and parents and music students should do research to gain proper information about music instructors. Sometimes teachers at music training institutions do not have acceptable records of teaching, and because of this, students set out on the wrong path of learning.

### **Style of instruction**

A music teacher's method and style of instruction is also an important and noteworthy matter. The starting point and the end goal of an instructor's program of teaching are very important factors in music teaching, and it is good to explain about them simply during a student's very first lesson. The sequences of lessons, teaching content and details of each lesson have a great influence on the quality of learning outcomes. The style and method of delivering this instruction is also very important. It is often said that a musician, whether a composer, orchestra leader or player, is not necessarily going to be a good instructor. Certainly this is true; however, today music education is a recognized field in world universities, and anyone who pursues music teaching will also become acquainted with pedagogical, psychological and other issues related to music teaching methods and approaches.

### **Social beliefs and artistic attitude**

The social beliefs of a music teacher must always fit the perspective of students and their parents because students, intentionally or unintentionally, will follow their teachers' patterns of behavior, even if these patterns include illogical or unacceptable social behavior. Likewise, the attitude of teachers towards students is very important and noteworthy. Composure and kindness, tolerance, and paying attention to students' questions, giving encouragement, and when necessary, appropriate punishment, along with many other

aspects of music teachers' attitudes and behavior, are important and should always be scrutinized by students and their parents.

## **2. MUSIC STUDENTS**

- Age
- Gender
- Interest
- Talent/skill
- Style of practice
- Relationship between field of study and music
- Creativity
- Choosing the correct instrument

### **Age**

The age at which a student commences learning music is an important point, and may confidently be said to be the most significant factor determining the quality of his or her learning. In recent years, it has been proven that the best age to begin learning an instrument is seven years. Before seven years, students should be acquainted with elements in music such as rhythm, meter and melody, through special methods of childhood music instruction. Some students that begin to learn an instrument at a later age than seven necessarily follow a more difficult path.

### **Gender**

A student's gender also plays a role in the process of instruction. In developed societies, this factor may be less important; however, in Eastern societies, and especially in Iran, girls often encounter more limitations. Girls are often forced to feel shame and show special modesty in pursuing their studies, all of which can have a negative effect on their learning experiences. Parents with both boy and girl children in music classes often witness this difference, and boys and girls are often held to different standards. For example, boys usually feel more comfortable about asking their instructors questions; however, they are less likely to be forgiven for being 'lazy' with their practice or 'giving excuses'.

## **Interest**

Level of interest, enthusiasm, ambition and perseverance are important factors influencing students' learning outcomes. (Sometimes parents take their children to classes simply because they want to see their children achieve what they themselves aspired to, but failed to achieve as children!) If a student's interest and taste in music is ignored, certainly, he or she will become distant from music.

## **Talent/skill**

A student's level of talent or aptitude is usually apparent from the very first lesson. This talent is sometimes innate, sometimes predetermined, and sometimes blossoms during the course of instruction. The musical aptitude of students has a direct connection to listening practice and rhythmic comprehension. If a student does not have good listening skills or rhythmic comprehension, usually, this will be recognized by music instructors. In the author's view, through his many years' music teaching experience, the vast majority of students show talent or potential; but the level of talent differs from one student to another.

## **Style of practice**

A regular program of practice is very important for music students. Students who do not follow a regular schedule and only practice the day before lessons will certainly not achieve good results in their course of instruction. Likewise, in addition to practice discipline, the style and quality of daily practice should be a point of consideration for families and teachers.

## **Relation between field of studies and music**

Students studying in the field of music are certainly more successful than those who, in addition to playing an instrument, pursue other fields of study. For the first group, most of their focus is on music and, as such, they will more easily arrive at their desired goals, while the second group is required to spend more time on non-musical studies, and only focus on these when they have time.

## **Creativity**

Creativity is one of the most important factors determining students' progress, as it helps them to approach their studies and practice innovatively. Moreover, creativity is a skill that educational experts believe is teachable and can be acquired. Such instruction begins from the time of childhood and continues to take shape and blossom throughout students' musical training.

### **Choosing the correct instrument**

Choosing the correct instrument is always a point of question and uncertainty for families. Some believe that this choice should be made on the basis of a student's perspective and taste; however, the others note that younger students change their minds often about which instrument they want to play. Meanwhile, some experts recommend that a child's physiology (the form of his or her fingers, mouth, etc) and other factors should determine the correct choice instrument. But it seems better to respect children's ideas and wishes, allowing them to become familiar with different instruments and attend classes to see how they are taught so that after listening to (and even testing) different instruments, they can later choose their favorite one based on their experience and preference.

## **3. ENVIRONMENT OF INSTRUCTION**

- Kind of learning institution
- Facilities of the learning institution
- Learning program of an institution
- History of success of the institution
- Institution tuition fees

### **Kind of institution**

Music classes may be held in different locations—privately (in the home or office of a music teacher), at private music institutions, or in government institutions (universities and colleges). The type of learning institution a student attends can be counted among the important factors in his or her musical education. This is because variable factors such as practice schedules, tuition fees, teaching facilities and the record and reputation of an institution have a direct relationship with the kind of place of instruction.

### **Facilities**

Facilities offered by a learning institution (such as distinguished and elite instructors, learning aid materials, a clean environment and the proximity of an institution to where a student lives) are important in terms of the quality of learning outcomes. Imagine an institution with good teachers and rich educational resources (such as a library, film and music archives, recording facilities, sound-proof practice rooms, classrooms equipped with teaching resources such as music stands, tuners, metronomes, amplification equipment, video projectors and so on); a student that attends such an institution will certainly be more encouraged and focused in his or her musical education.

### **Learning program of an institution**

A disciplined program of classes, whether at a private or government institution, is a very important factor in music education. Many good teachers, because of lack of discipline in their instruction, are unable to produce good students. Instructors who take too many breaks during classes or who do not observe the agreed time of classes, and other such problems, are always a cause of annoyance and discouragement for students, and this may lead to their non-attendance at classes.

### **Successful record of the institution**

The record and history of a teaching institution should always be a point of consideration for music students and their parents. Music institutions with an outstanding record of teaching are an excellent guarantee of the quality of education that a music student will receive.

### **Tuition fees**

Tuition fees are an important concern for families when choosing an institution for their children. Institutions and teachers must always pay attention to the fact that tuition fees should be equal to other common expenditures in society, and that setting high fees for instruction deprives many potential students of the opportunity to receive musical training in a professional setting. It is recommended that institutions consider offering discounted fees or special enrolment conditions in some cases for students that cannot afford tuition expenses.

## 4. LIVING ENVIRONMENT OF STUDENTS

- Student's place of residence
- Artistic background of student's family
- Student's relationship with their family
- Student's educational opportunities and facilities

### **Student's place of residence**

The city in which a student lives may in many cases be a determining factor in his or her musical education. The number of good teachers that can be found nearby where a student lives can be a source of encouragement for learning music because he or she will not be required to travel from one town to another in order to attend classes, which usually involves significant costs—whether financial or emotional or in terms of time spent travelling. Also, living in a cultural city with historical buildings, museums, cinemas, theatres and art centers can all be effective in motivating a student to learn music.

### **Artistic background of student's family**

There are many individuals who have reached a high degree of musical ability despite coming from families without any background in art. However, in general, if a member of the family has studied or is familiar with music, this can have a real effect on a student's enthusiasm of learning music. The effect of singing to a child while it is in the womb up until the time they begin music classes is undeniable today.

### **Student's relationship with their family**

It is important for students to have a good relationship with their parents, because it allows them to share their needs, educational problems and even feelings—whether positive or negative. The kind of encouragement and motivation (or lack thereof) that parents show towards their children is important and can have a positive or negative impact on a student's musical education.

### **Student's educational opportunities and facilities**

The opportunities and facilities a student has access to (such as a good and standard instrument, educational resources, books and listening materials) are important for their musical education. Moreover, being surrounded by an atmosphere of music within the home is necessary for students to become motivated to pursue learning music.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the process of teaching music involves many considerations and details for students, teachers and parents alike, as this paper has examined. In general, arriving at a certain standard of instruction requires much time, research, and analysis of the process of learning and the correct style of teaching. Many distinguished universities teaching programs in the field of music have high rankings because of the efforts of instructors and students' achievements, and it is clear that any changes in the factors mentioned in this paper will affect those rankings—whether positively or negatively.