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Music education students' views related to the piano examination anxieties and suggestions for coping with students' performance anxiety

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Abstract

It is considered as a problem both by students and lecturers that during the performance exams in music education the performance of the students drops. The present research reflects the psychological and physiological complaints of the students (at Uludag University, Faculty of Education, Music Education Department) that stem from the piano examination anxiety right before the examination and during the examination. The assessment of the situation was done through an opinion questionnaire that was forwarded to 80 students between the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year students. The analyses present the differences between the male and female opinions as well as the anxiety levels of the students that were in different year of their education. Regarding the anxiety levels of the students that were enrolled in the department of Music Education, suggestions for coping with anxiety were listed. The present study is important since it provides insight about determining the anxiety levels of the students in the piano examination, and enabling them to cope with anxiety. It is believed that for music teacher candidates methods of coping with anxiety will contribute positively to their performances as they will have to perform continuously in front of public during their professional lives.

Keywords: Piano education, Performance anxiety, coping with anxiety;

1. Introduction

Anxiety or worry is experienced by living beings as a fear, tension, or distress state. Trying to fit the external environment is a protective reaction for living beings. These reactions may occur such as sweating, tremors, palpitations, physical symptoms etc... Also beginning to think the future will be bad fear of being stigmatized or going to the wall funny are considered cognitive thinking and they are often obscure about the reason of these feelings. They are also considered to be an unrecognized state of tension. A normal level of anxiety helps people to hear request and to decide which decisions are right. With the help of these decisions one improves the performance by producing energy (Kafadar, 2009). For this reason, it is more important to hold the anxiety control rather than clear it off. Anxiety which is encountered during any performance is called performance anxiety. Performance anxiety is also known as stage fear. Performance anxiety emerges as a serious problem in some of the musicians' lives. Studies reveal that there is a negative relationship between performance and anxiety. Whether you are amateur or professional, whether child, youth or adult, or a soloist or a band member, no matter what type of instrument you are playing your performance is influenced by anxiety, in this situation it is seen to

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reflect in you stage performances. In fact, the size of the high levels of anxiety is also thought to take them to the point of quitting the profession of being musicians (Yağışan, 2009). In Uludag University Faculty of Education, Department of Music Education, there are both theoretical courses and practical courses in the program. Such as Instrument Training (violin, cello, flute, etc.), orchestra, chamber music, voice training and piano lessons have also practical exams. Instrument Training and piano lessons which are mandatory for all students, especially 8 semesters their final exams are hold in front of the jury. Some of the students' performance in examinations is little more declines, at the other side some of the sudents' performance a bit more declines. These are observed by their instructors. In the research, performance anxiety is largely determined by music education students. With the help findings it is recommended to the students to cope with performance anxiety by proper breathing, relaxation techniques, etc.

2. Method

In the study, it is determined by questionnaire what type of physical and emotional symptoms are related to stress while playing the piano in front of a jury before and during the exam. Survey questions by Kenny and Osborne the Music Performance Anxiety Inventory (MPAI-A) (2005) were used in the materials while preparing questionnaire. The survey was answered by 80 students (25 boys and 55 girls) out of randomly selected 110 students from the music department. 25 of the 80 students are 4th year students (19 female, 6 male), 25 of them are in 3rd class (16 female, 9 male) and 30 of them are 2nd year students (20 girls, 10 boys).

3. Findings and results

Table 1. Frequency of excitability of Music Department students in performance exams

Frequency of excitability of students' performance anxiety	F	%
I am excited against the jury in each piano exam	60	75,00
I am excited in one of the two performances against the jury	10	12,50
I rarely get excited across the jury in the piano exams	10	12,50
I never get excited across the jury in the piano exams	0	00,00

75% of students indicated that they are excited in each piano exam against jury. There is no student who doesn't excite in the piano exams.

Table 2. Students' degree of anxiety in the Music Education Department according to grade level performance

Grades	1	2	3	4	5
	(Lower) %	%	(Midium) %	%	(Highest) %
2 nd year students	0,00	3,33	20,00	40,00	36,67
3 rd year students	0,00	8,00	24,00	36,00	32,00
4 th year students	0,00	4,00	28,00	36,00	32,00
Girls	0,00	5,45	20,00	40,00	34,55
Boys	0,00	8,00	28,00	32,00	32,00
Total students	0,00	5,00	23,75	41,25	30,00

Performance anxiety levels are listed from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). Approximately 70% of the students have reported that they have anxiety in piano exam against jury over 4 and 5 highest level. When students' grade levels are reduced, their levels of excitement not greatly rise. 64% of male students and approximately 75% of female students get very excited in piano exams over 4th or 5th degree. There is no student who doesn't get excited in front of the jury.

Table 3. The most important reason of students' performance anxiety

Reason of students' performance anxiety	F	%
To be fully unprepared to the piano exam	16	20,00
Difficulty of the pieces played	5	6,25
Mood of the day	8	10,00
Health condition on that day	0	0,00
Playing in front of the jury	49	61,25
Evaluation of performance with a grade	2	2,50

61.25 % of the students indicated that the most important reason why the excitement higher is related to play the in front of the jury in the exams.

Table 4. Methods of coping with performance anxiety of music students during the piano exams

Students' method of coping with performance anxiety	F	%
Taking sedative drugs	11	16,67
Meditating	3	4,55
Doing breathing and relaxing exercises	24	36,36
Reading books about coping with stress	2	3,03
Drinking energy drinks	1	1,51
Having psychological support	2	3,03
Praying	18	27,27
Drinking alcoholic drinks	3	4,55
Thinking that nobody listens to me	2	3,03

Only 73% of female students and 52% of male students reported that they have tried the methods for being able to cope with anxiety during exams in front of the jury. 37% of the students prefer to breathing and relaxation exercises among the methods which is specified in table 4. The rest of ratios of methods are; 27 % is praying during and before the exam, 17% percent have sedative drug. Least preferred method is to drink energy drink.

Table 5. Music department students react to physical and psychological status before and after the piano exam

Physical and psychological reactions because of performance anxiety	Always %	Often %	Sometimes %	Rarely %	Never %
Before piano exam I see nightmares	0,00	6,25	13,75	12,50	67,50
I can't sleep before the exam	0,00	11,25	13,75	26,25	48,75
Before I perform, I get butterflies in my stomach	5,00	13,75	21,25	17,50	42,50
Before the piano exam my meal order changes	5,00	11,25	15,00	21,25	47,50
I feel nervous just before the exam	5,00	28,75	21,25	12,50	32,50
Before I perform, I tremble or shake	12,50	33,75	17,50	17,50	18,75
I often worry about my ability to perform	25,00	30,00	15,00	16,25	13,75
When I perform in front of a jury, I am afraid of making mistakes	43,75	31,25	11,25	13,75	00,00
When I perform in front of a jury my heart beats vary	37,50	28,75	21,25	10,00	02,50
When I perform in front of a jury my hands shake and sweat	43,75	27,50	15,00	08,75	05,00
When I perform in front of a jury rate of my breathing changes	31,25	27,50	20,00	13,75	07,50
My muscles feel tense when I perform	28,75	31,25	15,00	17,50	07,50
When I perform in front of a jury, I find it hard to concentrate on my music	36,25	21,25	23,75	13,75	05,00
If I make a mistake during a performance, I usually panic	37,50	20,00	21,25	11,25	10,00
When I finish performing, I usually feel happy with my performance	11,25	22,50	30,00	30,00	06,25
I try to avoid playing on my own at a school concert	17,50	18,75	27,50	12,50	23,75
I worry that my teacher might not like my performance	25,00	31,25	20,00	20,00	03,75
I would rather play in a group or ensemble, than on my own	25,00	30,00	21,25	10,00	13,75
I would rather play on my own, than in front of other people.	25,00	22,50	18,75	15,00	18,75

At the Music Department around 68% of the students does not see any nightmare, 50% of the student never have a sleeping problem, doesn't change the order of eating and doesn't feel stretched them before the exam. However, approximately 12.50% of the students always and 33.75% of the students often feel fear just before the exam. During the exam, 38% of the students' heart rate frequency changes all the time and 28% of the students' heart rate frequency changes often. While playing the piano in front of the jury almost half of the students' hands always shake and/or sweat. In 31% of the students every time, and in 27% of the students often change purchasing of breath. During the performance, the ratio of feeling stretched muscles completely and often is approximately 50%. Approximately 60% of the students cannot concentrate on playing the music, 75% completely and often concerned about making mistakes, after making mistakes students taken in panic and have a conflict about their ability and performance. After completed performance 60% of the students sometimes and rarely feel happy about their performance and 6% are not happy at all. 55% of the students every time and often think that teacher wouldn't be happy about their performance. Approximately 37% of the students every time and often stalling to play alone at the school concerts, and 55% would prefer not to play alone but they prefer to play in a group. Approximately 47% of the students every time and often prefer not to play in front of other people but prefer to play on their own.

Table 6 Music department students' physical and psychological reactions before and after the piano exam according to their sex

Physical and psychological reactions because of performance anxiety	GIRLS					BOYS				
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Before piano exam I see nightmares	0,00	9,09	10,91	18,18	60,00	0,00	4,00	16,00	0,00	80,00
I can't sleep before the exam	0,00	14,55	14,55	30,92	40,00	0,00	8,00	8,00	20,00	64,00
Before I perform, I get butterflies in my stomach	5,45	18,18	23,64	12,73	40,00	4,00	8,00	16,00	24,00	48,00
Before the piano exam my meal order changes	5,45	12,73	16,36	23,64	41,82	4,00	12,00	8,00	20,00	56,00
I feel nervous just before the exam	5,45	32,73	23,64	10,91	27,27	4,00	20,00	20,00	12,00	44,00
Before I perform, I tremble or shake	10,91	38,18	21,82	14,55	14,55	12,00	28,00	12,00	24,00	24,00
I often worry about my ability to perform	27,27	30,91	12,73	16,36	12,73	24,00	28,00	12,00	20,00	16,00
When I perform in front of a jury, I am afraid of making mistakes	47,27	36,36	9,09	7,27	0,00	44,00	16,00	20,00	20,00	0,00
When I perform in front of a jury my heart beats vary	34,55	27,27	14,55	9,09	5,45	40,00	16,00	28,00	16,00	0,00
When I perform in front of a jury my hands shake and sweat	45,45	38,18	07,27	5,45	3,64	40,00	12,00	32,00	12,00	4,00
When I perform in front of a jury rate of my breathing changes	30,91	29,09	25,45	10,91	3,64	36,00	16,00	4,00	28,00	16,00
My muscles feel tense when I perform	30,91	36,36	14,55	14,55	3,64	20,00	24,00	20,00	20,00	16,00
When I perform in front of a jury, I find it hard to concentrate on my music	40,00	21,82	23,64	14,55	0,00	28,00	20,00	16,00	20,00	16,00
If I make a mistake during a performance, I usually panic	23,64	25,45	14,55	12,73	5,45	32,00	16,00	32,00	4,00	20,00
When I finish performing, I usually feel happy with my performance	9,09	27,27	29,09	27,27	7,27	12,00	16,00	32,00	36,00	4,00
I try to avoid playing on my own at a school concert	21,82	20,00	29,09	9,09	20,00	8,00	20,00	20,00	20,00	32,00
I worry that my teacher might not like my performance	27,27	29,09	20,00	21,82	1,82	24,00	40,00	16,00	12,00	8,00
I would rather play in a group or ensemble, than on my own	23,64	30,91	23,64	9,09	12,73	28,00	32,00	16,00	8,00	16,00
I would rather play on my own, than in front of other people.	27,27	23,64	23,64	12,73	12,73	16,00	20,00	16,00	20,00	28,00

Observed that before the piano exam male students sleeping problems or nightmare, stomach cramps, changes in eating patterns and being frustrated rates are lower than female students. Female students more than male students

during performances are twitched, shivering, concerned about the performance capabilities, heart beating faster, hands sweating and muscles stretching, they have difficulties to concentrate on music. Approximately 85% of female students completely and often afraid of making mistakes while playing, and about 60% of male students afraid of making mistakes. The 21.82% of the female students always refused to play alone at the school concerts, and it was only 8% of male students refused to play alone at the school concerts. It shows us that male students have more self confidence than female students. Also another proof of that is 27.27% of female students and 16% of male students prefer not to play in front of the people but to play on their own. However, 64% of male students every time and often think that teacher would not like their performance, but female students' rate is lower than this.

To the data above it can be said that during piano exams in front of the jury students have an anxiety. The present study was carried out to collect data for the first phase of an experimental research namely, "Coping with the anxiety of the Music Education students: a trial of a method", where the cortisol hormone level in the salivary juice would be measured as its value increases in parallel with anxiety. There are various methods for students to cope with their performance anxiety. The following methods as a group and with the support of a psychologist can be applied once a week at the Department of Uludag University in Music Education. Subsequent examinations will be examined the effectiveness of implemented methods to cope with performance anxiety.

1. *Breathing Exercise*

At the breathing exercises to stand against of back and head, and not to keep the neck on the air students able to sit on chairs which placed along the wall. By closing students eyes to feel the breath of themselves students able to put one hand on their chest and the other hand placed on diaphragm. Breathe received through the nose is kept up to 4 seconds, and the speed of two to three times slowness breath left from the mouth. After repeating 5 times this exercise the normal breathing begins. After two minutes, again 5 times repeat breathing in the same way. Work is finished. This exercise can be repeated 40-60 times a day. Breathing exercises are provided to adopt in students lifestyle. True and deep breathing are important because the first step in learning to relax. Because of the stress, the blood taken from the surface into the body, with the help of right and deep breath blood reaches the extreme parts of the body at the same time blood vessels expanse. True and deep breathing reduces or lose stress which occurs substances because of adrenaline, and that provides people calm and relax ([http://www.aymavisi.org/egzersiz/anti 20stres/anti%20stres201.html](http://www.aymavisi.org/egzersiz/anti%20stres/anti%20stres201.html)). In addition, the message being sent to brain when diaphragm loosened and everything is on its way, the tensions in the body begins to relax (Yöndem, 2011). Breathing exercises are adopted as a way of life, and they are repeated before performing examinations and recommended to be used to cope with performance anxiety.

2. *Relaxation Exercises*

Relaxation exercises are based on a study which aims to create awareness to relax muscles by contracting muscles of hands, arms, chest, belly, shoulder, hip, leg, face, etc. Relaxation exercises are accompanied by relaxing music such as sounds of nature, soothing sound of water and the sea sound at the background. These exercises are done at least 2 times a week adopting as a lifestyle, it is important to help the students before the implementation of performance exams because these exercises can be helpful to their muscles.

3. *Guided Imagination*

Students learn to listen to their thoughts in a comfortable position with their eyes closed and mobilize a text orientation with their 5 senses. As well as breathing exercises, relaxation exercises and guided imagination, a regular diet and regular sleep habits are also important. B vitamin also known as 'anti-stress vitamin' is destroyed by cola, cocoa, tea, coffee, chocolate, caffeine-containing foods so the mentioned foods should be consumed limited.

4. **Recommendations**

It is observed from both the exams and the answers of the students that during piano exams intense anxiety takes place while the music department students perform in front of the jury. Music education students in each institution should learn to cope with performance anxiety so with the help of this research some kind of methods can be used in this situation. When regular informational meetings often take placed and a course or scope in the programs it is

believed that the number of musician and music teacher who had to leave the music because of anxiety would be diminished. Teachers who work in music education institutions need to learn about the methods as much as students. So the students feel relaxation in the exam room.

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