



## Teaching Methods Used in the Education of Traditional Turkish Music Instruments

**Alper Akdeniz**

[yorgobacanos@gmail.com](mailto:yorgobacanos@gmail.com)

Selcuk University (Turkey)

### 1. Introduction

Education is a process that adds value and meaning to human life (Can, 2009). During this process, changes are expected to happen in human behaviour. In a brief and concise definition, education can be defined as a change of behaviour in human life in a pre-determined direction. As this situation is valid in all fields of human life, it also holds true in the field of music. The act of teaching in the field of music teaching is an approach that is developed on the basis of “students’ learning”. The goal here is to put knowledge into practice and have them use their skills so long as their capacity allows. Classical Turkish music has existed in our country for long periods and the history of our instruments dates back to the time of Farabî (870-950) (Aksungur, 2010)."

The history of institutions of Turkish music that have educated musicians in an institutional and professional sense can be said to have begun with the “Tabilhaneler” in the 13th century, which offered military music education. (Say, 1998, p.227) The term ‘Tabilhane’ was used in place of “Mehter” in the Selcuk Period before the Ottoman era (Gazimihal, 1955). Tabilhane was also a name given to an institution that taught and performed military music in the Ottoman era in the 16th century besides ‘Mehterhane’ (Yenal, 1996) with which it had similar meaning. Here, teaching of instruments of Turkish Music was offered. Mehter (military) songs occupy a significant place in the repertoire of Turkish music. However, Ottoman Sultan Mahmoud 2nd removed Mehterhane, or school of mehter, in 1826 as part of the Westernisation efforts and replaced it with ‘Muzika-i Hümayun’, Royal Music School. This institution was affiliated directly to the person of the Sultan and the Palace and included departments of Western music and Turkish music. The first Turks who learned both Music types were graduates of this institution (Ak, 2002)".

The history of formal music education in Turkey dates far back to a time before the Republican era. Major institutions of formal civilian institutions of education in the educational system of the Imperial era consisted of Sibyan Okulları, or Children’s Schools, Madrasahs and Enderun Schools (Uçan, 1997).

It is known that in Children’s Schools and Madrasahs, importance was attached to the reciting of ezan, or prayer call, the Koran and hymns according to a maqam or music, using melodic patterns, obeying certain rules and with a fine voice. In this respect, it can be suggested that not a direct but an indirect “religious music education” was offered in these schools whose programmes did not include a separate “music” course (Uçan, 1997). In Enderun schools, on the other hand, it is known that both religious and non-religious music education was offered. Music lessons were held in halls called “meshkhane”, or performance room, in these schools. Young people with a flair for music were determined and apprenticed to a master to be a singer or an instrument player. These students learned all the subtlety of music and mastered it. Education offered here was similar to that given in a university (Özalp, 2000).

Until seventy to eighty years ago, the teaching and transfer of traditional Ottoman/Turkish music was based totally on the method called “meshk. Both learning to use the voice and play an instrument and students’ acquiring a repertoire of songs took place through meshk (Behar, 1998). While practicing (meshk) music, students did not only learn about music, an instrument, a technique or their teacher’s style, performance or interpretation. While they were practicing, students learned the songs themselves, that is existing music repertoire. Another name for meshk or practicing was literally “passing a work”, or performing a piece. It meant passing on the songs over to the student, i.e. transferring the songs and the repertoire. Meshk is actually a very easy method to implement. The teacher sings the song to the student keeping a beat in the meantime and the student is asked to repeat. The teacher has the song repeated until the student’s hesitations and errors disappear (Behar, 1992). It can be said that this method dominated until the early years of the Republic and has continued its existence until the present time though not as important as it was. This



is a qualitative study which intends to investigate the present state of how students have been taught to play classical Turkish music instruments, and merits and drawbacks of traditional method of teaching, that is meshk, and methodological approach.

## **2. Material and Method**

The qualitative data that are included in the study have been obtained through questionnaire forms administered to the teaching staff. The questionnaire form consists of two sections. The first section of the questionnaire contains questions intended to obtain personal information whereas the second section includes questions aimed at determining the state of the art.

This is a qualitative study and it will determine the teaching methods that have been used to teach traditional Turkish music from past to present and reveal current methods of teaching that are in use today. Interview method will be used in the study. The study sample consists of teaching staff who teach Turkish music instruments at Selcuk University Dilek Sabanci State Conservatory Department of Traditional Turkish Music and Selcuk University Education Faculty Fine Arts Teaching Department of Music Education.

## **3. Findings and Comments**

In this section, a questionnaire was administered to the teaching staff to determine teaching methods used in the teaching of traditional Turkish music instruments. The results obtained from the questionnaires that were administered were explained and interpreted.

**3.1.** Almost all of the teaching staff first give information about the structure of the instrument in the beginning-preparatory stage of the instrument teaching.

**3.2.** A great majority of the teaching staff give information about the historical development of the instrument in the beginning-preparatory stage of the instrument teaching.

**3.3.** It is observed that more than half of the teaching staff give information about the prominent past and present players of the instrument in the beginning-preparatory stage of the instrument teaching.

**3.4.** It is observed that all of the teaching staff give information about the way the instrument is held and sitting positions in the beginning-preparatory stage of the instrument teaching.

**3.5.** It is seen that a sizeable portion of the teaching staff use the study documents that they themselves prepared in the instrument teaching stage.

**3.6.** It is seen that one-third of the teaching staff do not use the methods that have been published.

**3.7.** It is observed that almost all of the teaching staff use the composed pieces in the instrument training stage, which is in support of the fact that published methods are not used very often.

**3.8.** It is seen that about two-thirds of the teaching staff did not practice with a published method during their years as a student, which may indicate that teachers have some effect on teaching-training methods of today.

**3.9.** It is observed that more than half of the teaching staff used that study documents that their teachers prepared during their student years.

**3.10.** It is seen that almost all of the teaching staff practiced by singing composed pieces in the instrument teaching classes during their student years.

**3.11.** It is observed that two-thirds of the teaching staff offer instrument teaching by making use of the study documents that they obtained from their teachers.

**3.12.** Almost two-thirds of the teaching staff use the study documents that they themselves prepared in addition to the ones they obtained from their teachers.



**3.13.** While almost half of the teaching staff use pieces based on speed in the instrument teaching stage whereas the other half do this sometimes. Therefore, it can be said that speed-based pieces are preferred to replace technical studies and exercises that ensure mastery of the instrument.

**3.14.** It is observed that almost all of the teaching staff choose to teach slow and moderate pieces intended to obtain a clear voice in the instrument teaching stage. This indicates that slow and moderate pieces depending on fret sensitivity are more frequently used in the instrument teaching stage.

**3.15.** It is seen that almost all of the teaching staff prefer to teach pieces intended to improve technical ability in the instrument teaching stage. This indicates that music pieces are used to improve technical ability rather than study documents or methods.

**3.16.** It is observed that almost all of the teaching staff give students homework. It can be said that this is an appropriate approach that is intended to increase student's mastery of the instrument through homework such as study documents or music piece rehearsals.

**3.17.** It is seen that two-thirds of the teaching staff require that pieces be recited in the instrument teaching stage. It can be said that this is done to have the student focus all his or her attention on the piece and increase his or her mastery of the instrument and sensitivity to fret.

**3.18.** More than two-thirds of the teaching staff make use of sound recording of prominent singers/players. It can be said that the purpose here is to demonstrate differences in musicians' performance.

**3.19.** It is observed that in the instrument teaching stage, the rate of teaching staff's use of video recording of prominent musicians is lower in comparison to the rate and frequency of using audio recording. In this case, it can be said that samples of video recordings are fewer than audio recordings.

**3.20.** It is seen that in the instrument teaching stage one-third of the teaching staff use various technological tools and devices whereas the other two-thirds use them though not frequently. Therefore, it can be said that technological tools and devices are not adequately used today.

**3.21.** 15 academics participated in the study. 11 of them were instructors and 4 were assistant professors, but there were no lecturers, associate professors or professors.

**3.22.** As for term of service, 4 of the teaching staff who participated in the study had a term of service of 1 to 5 years, 3 of them had 6 to 10 years, 4 of them had 11 to 15, 1 had 16 to 20 years, and 3 had 21 to 25 years of service period. It is observed that service periods of the academics who participated in the survey varied mostly between 1-5 years and 11-15 years.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In this section, the following conclusions were reached in the light of the findings obtained to determine the teaching methods that are used in the teaching of instruments of traditional Turkish Music and the interpretations about them.

It turned out that in the beginning and preparatory stage of instrument teaching, first students were taught about the structure of the instrument, its historical development, positions of holding it and sitting.

It was observed that a significant portion of the teaching staff did not use published study documents and methods; on the contrary, they used the study documents that they prepared and focused more on performing composed pieces.

It was observed that the low frequency of academics' use of methods extended back to their student years and that the study documents that the teachers prepared and the studies that they made on composed pieces were reflected, to a great extent, on their Professional lives and teaching methods.

It turned out that teaching staff prefer slow and moderate pieces to speed-based pieces in the instrument teaching stage.

It was observed that methodological studies were not adequately included in the teaching of instruments of Turkish Music; instead, traditional teaching-training methods (meshk), that is the method learned from the master/teacher were repeated to a great extent.



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