

Piano Students' Motivation: a Cross-cultural Comparison between North American and the People's Republic of China

Anyone who has taught piano to Asian students has undoubtedly noticed their marked success in this area: they continue with their studies for a long time, and they achieve very good results in examinations and competitions. It has been suggested that there must be some link between this success and the motivation levels in these students. Motivation has been extensively studied in various educational settings, and cross-cultural differences have also been investigated, but not with young music students. This study is designed to measure and compare the motivational level of private piano students in North America and in the People's Republic of China (PRC) using the Survey of Musical Interest (SMI). The SMI is a measurement scale based on Deci & Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (2000) and was developed by researchers at the Piano Pedagogy Research Laboratory (Desrochers, Comeau, Jardaneh, and Green-Demers, 2006) at the University of Ottawa. Deci & Ryan identified three main levels of motivation: extrinsic, intrinsic, and a motivation. Extrinsic motivation is subdivided into four categories: external, introjected, identified, and integrated. Participants of this study consist of 100 Caucasian North American piano students between the ages of 7 and 16 and 60 Chinese piano students in the same age range living in the PRC. Additional information was collected from parents and piano teachers in two complementary questionnaires. According to the results, Caucasian and Chinese students differ from each other in every category. The Chinese students were more externally motivated than the Caucasian students; this external motivation may have come from parents and teachers. In terms of introjected motivation, there was not much difference between Caucasian and Chinese students, but they did respond differently to external stimuli. With regard to identified motivation, there was greater agreement among the Chinese students and more variability in the Caucasian students' responses, which might be a result of the different cultural values. Chinese students also showed a higher level of integrated motivation than Caucasian students, which might result from parental influences. Both Caucasian and Chinese students expressed surprisingly high levels of intrinsic motivation; the corollary to this was a low level of a motivation, which is affected by the nature of the participants (currently-learning piano students). This study shows that cultural difference has a strong impact on piano learning. Be aware and understand those influences would help piano teachers to better assist their students world widely.