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Importance of Scales in Piano Education in Turkey

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Abstract

Practicing scales has important place in piano education to improve students' technique and dexterity, also improve timing and help the ear training. This research is qualitative research was made by interviewing six piano teachers who is working in Piano Education Departments in Turkey with semi-structured questions. It was indentify how has given the scales education in these schools. According to findings it shows that there is not any standardization in the curriculums of Music Educations Department Piano Education in Turkey and also there is same lacks as in same universities don't play all scales like triple scales and students don't practice convenient. Piano teachers gave advises to practice the scales more efficient like start from the major keys by separate the hands and gradually use metronome, practice regularly . The aim of this study is to improve the scale education. It is important because practicing scales is starting at the beginning of piano education and even you get profession practicing scales never finish.

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Keywords: Scales, Piano Education, Music Education Department, Turkey;

Introduction:

Music education is divided into three types in Turkey: (1) general music education; (2) amateur music education; and (3) professional music education. General music education begins in preschool, and during the first eight years of schooling, it is a mandatory subject of the curriculum. The goal of music education at this level is to develop basic musical behaviors. Amateur music education is usually used in out-side-of-school activities at private organizations, private music schools, libraries, public education houses or for local festivals.

Professional music education is given to individuals who want to be trained as professional musicians. At the university level, professional music education is provided in the following main areas: (1) to train composers or performers at conservatories; (2) to train same types of musicians as in conservatories and music scholars (e.g., musicologists) at schools of fine arts; (3) to train musical instrument makers at conservatories and at music teacher training schools; and (4) to train military band musicians at Ankara State Conservatory and at Military Music School in Ankara. In Turkey, there are currently 24 conservatories, 23 colleges of fine arts (at the university level) and 23 music teacher training schools. Music teacher training schools train music teachers for public schools. Music teachers are individuals who are the musician-educators teaching students general music and musical knowledge at

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public schools (Akbulut Demirci Ş., 2011).

Music education was first offered at schools in the 13th century (during the Ottoman Empire period) at “Tabilhanne”, where military music instruction was provided. In time, “Mehterhane” took place for military music education and “Enderun” (school at the palace) became the place for music instruction at the palace. Later, such instruction continued at Muzika-i Humayun (the music school of the palace) and Giuseppe Donizetti was assigned as the director during the 18th century. Also, the first school of art was opened in Istanbul, called “Sanayı-i Nefise Mektebi” in 1883. Other than visual arts, musical training (to train performers) was also offered at this school. The name of this school was changed into “Academy of Fine Arts” in 1927, during the Republic period. As another music institution, “Dar-ül Elhan” was also formed in 1917, and western music education was first offered in 1924. The same year, “Musiki Muallim Mektebi” (Music Teacher Training School) was opened in Ankara, the new capital of the Republic of Turkey. At this school, not only music teachers but professional players for Turkey’s first symphony orchestra “Riyaset-i Cumhur Musiki Heyeti” were also trained. The year 1936 was important because of the foundation of “Ankara State Conservatory”, where only want-to-be professional musicians began attending. In 1937, “Musiki Muallim Mektebi” was renamed as “Gazi Terbiye Enstitüsü”. In time, more music teacher training schools followed “Gazi Terbiye Enstitüsü”. Currently, 23 music teacher training schools exist in Turkey. Centralized curriculum prepared and approved by YÖK (Yükseköğretim Kurulu) (Higher Education Council) is used at these institutions.

Piano, as a part of this curriculum, is offered for seven semesters, and the course Piano Pedagogy is available for the eighth semester. According to the curriculum, each course is taught for one hour per week, and it is one credit hour; however, the hours and the content of these courses vary in different schools based on the curriculum prepared by YÖK. The main reasons for the different applications of the centralized curriculum in different music teacher training schools are the student body, number of piano faculty and facilities (Akbulut Demirci Ş., 2011).

At piano curricula students are not only responsible of playing polyphonic pieces, pieces at sonata form, etudes and other pieces of piano literatures but also they have technical studies. Practicing scales are one of them and has important place in piano education to improve students’ technique and dexterity, also improve timing and help the ear training which mirroring their success in performing.

As a qualitative type of study, descriptive analysis method was used in the current research. Qualitative research is in-depth analysis of the data (Yıldırım, A., & Şimşek, H. 2003). In the current study, the data was collected via individual interviews, and a mixture of semi-structured and unstructured interview techniques were used. Interview technique is the shortest way used to learn individuals’ knowledge, ideas, attitude and behavior and the reasons behind these actions (Karasar, N. 2003). This research is qualitative research was made by interviewing six piano teachers who is working in Piano Education Departments in Turkey with semi-structured questions. The interview questions were prepared based on the literature survey in the area. For the data collection, a total of six piano professors from different universities in Turkey were randomly selected. Questions based on these six opinions: 1. What is the scales contribution to piano students, 2. What is the place of these scales in the curriculum of your department, 3. Difficulties of teaching scales, 4. Do you think the curriculum should be developed, 5. How teachers can teach the scales more effective, 6. What is your suggestions. These piano professors who were also serving in administrative level were prioritized as the interviewees because of their both pianist/pedagogue sides and administrative skills. These selected participants were contacted to be informed about the topic and to determine the dates of the meetings. The researcher contacted with them through the phone to talk more about the responses. All recorded answers were transcribed carefully, written down and analyzed through content analysis. During this process, QSR (Qualitative Research Software) Nvivo 8.0 computer program was used.

Based on the review it showed that there is no article or thesis on the subject.

The aim of this study is to improve the scale education. It seen to be important because practicing scales is starting at the beginning of piano education and even you get profession practicing scales never finish.

1. Findings Related to Interviews

The data that were drawn from interviews with six randomly-selected piano professors (P = Participant) were divided into four sections and each section were examined with content analysis.

1.1. The Place of the Scales in Curricula:

Universities	1 st Semester	2 nd Semester	3 rd Semester	4 th Semester	5 th Semester	6 th Semester	7 th Semester	8 th Semester
18Mart U.	C and G Major (2 Octaves)	Do Major A Minor G Major E Minor	D Major B Minor F Major D Minor	A Major F# Minor E Major C # Minor	B Major G# Minor, E bemol Major C Minor	B bemol Major, G Minor, A bemol Major, F Minor	D bemol Major, B bemol Minor, G bemol Major, E bemol Minor	Chromatic Scale
Balıkesir U.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
İnönü U.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Muğla U.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Uludağ U.	C Major G Major A Minor (2 Octaves) C Major Contrary- Motion Scales	D Major B Minor F Major D Minor (2 Octaves) Chromatic Scale	B Bemol Major, G Minor, Mi Bemol Major, C Minor, (2 Octaves) Contrary- Motion Scales	E Major, C# Minor, A major, F# Minor, (3 Octaves) E Major Contrary- Motion Scales	A Bemol Major, F Minor, (3 Octaves) Chromatic Contrary- Motion Scales Starting from Scales D and A bemol	B Major, G# Minor, (4 Octaves) C Major Parallel 3 rd with separate hands	D Bemol Major, Si Bemol Major, (4 Octaves), G major and E Minor Parallels 3 rd	F# Major Re# Major (4 Octaves)
Gazi Osman Paşa U.	C Major G Major A Minor (2 Octaves) Contrary- Motion Scales Modal Scales	D Major A Major D Minor E Minor (2 Octaves)	F Major, B bemol Maj. G Minor C Minor (2 Octaves) Contrary- Motion Scales, Chromatic Scale	E Major B Major A bemol Major, F Minor (2 Octaves) Contrary- Motion Scales, Chromatic Scale	B Major G# Minor C# Minor (3 Octaves) Chromatic Contrary- Motion Scales Starting from Scales D and A bemol	E bemol Minor, B bemol Minor, (4 Octaves) Chromatic Chromatic Scale (stating form each key)	All scales where been taught	Diatonic Scales

Figure 1. Scales in Curricula.

According to the data in Figure 1 in three university scales are determined in curricula and the students are studying according this curricula. In the other three universities the professors determine the scales by their own according students' development, ability, hardworking and level at playing.

P1 stated that professor is teaching all major keys first and then all minor keys (harmonic, melodic) later according to their success at piano. Also students are playing the scales with 3rd, 6th and 10th. There is no standardization between students according to curriculum. Successful student studying six scales per every semester. But only %30 of them is capable of this. The teacher has same strategies at teaching which is shown in 2nd Figures

different rhythm patterns by playing in four octaves. At the end of their education they finished practising all the scales. The teacher also advised students to play exercises from Hanon's Book.



Figure 2. Scales Teaching Strategies of P1.

P2 stated that professor is not teaching scales at the beginning if the student has just start to play piano. This university doesn't have any request at their piano curriculum. The professor gave scales according to the other pieces' keys which student studying during the semester. Also this professor giving exercises from Hanon's Book.

P3 has a standard rules and studies at their curriculum. They spent %35 of their time for technical studies at lesson. They not only teaching minor and major key but also students are expected to learn and play modal, chromatic, diatonic scales and contrary-motion scales of major and minor keys and chromatic scales. P3 stated that the most important strategy of teaching the scales is to study preparatory works and advised Theodor Leschetitzky's Studies and Exercises. At last semester at "Piano and Teaching" all studies are summarize again.

According to P4 they teach 2 octaves scales at 1st and 2nd semesters, 4 octaves at other semesters. The teacher uses Hanon Scales Exercises. Also students are studying the scales with 3rd, 6th and 10th. But they couldn't practice and teach scales with five sharps and bemols.

P5 stated that they have a standard rules and studies at their curriculum which is thought is very effective for teaching. The professor gave the teaching strategies as seen in Figure 3 and advised student to study regularly and make preparatory exercises. In summary all scales, chromatic scales, contrary-motion scales, scales with 3rd intervals also were studying in the institution.



Figure 3. Scales Teaching Strategies of P5.

According to P6 interview there is not any request about scales at curriculum. The successful students are playing the scales with four bemols and sharps.

According the all findings in P1, P2, P6 they don't have scales in the curriculum, when P3, P4, P5 have scales in the curriculum. P3 and P4 find the curriculum very effective and studying all.

1.2. Contributions to the Piano Education:

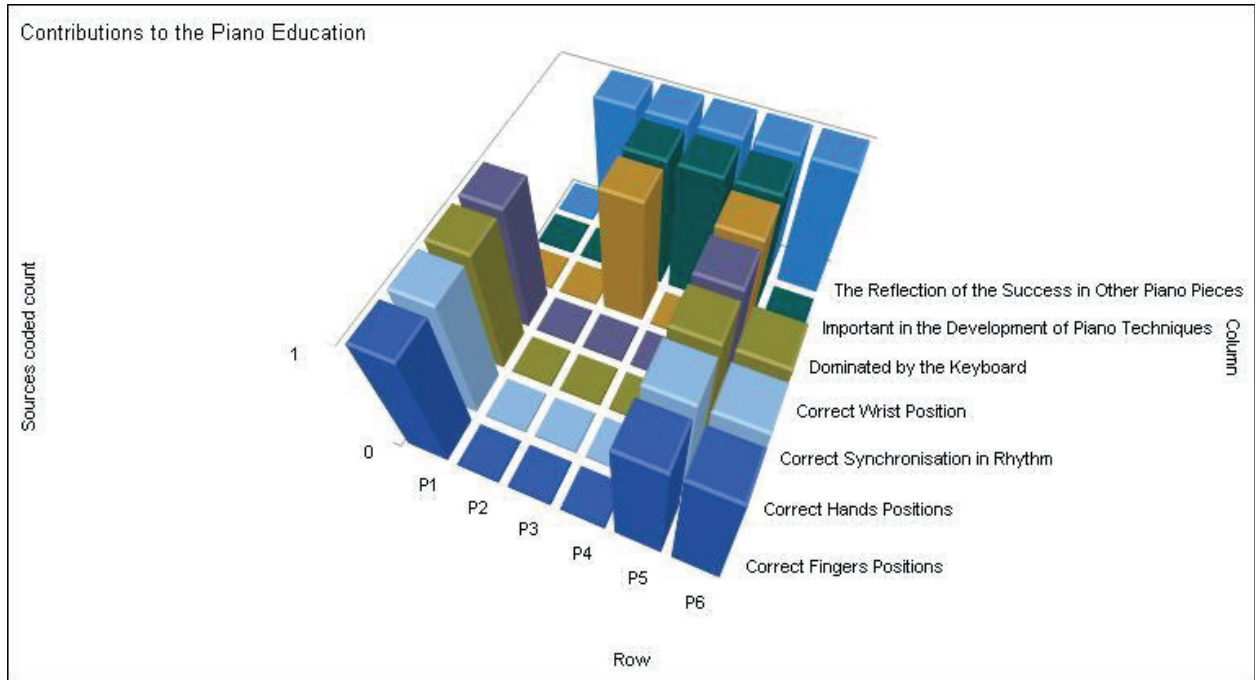


Figure 4. Contributions to the Piano Education.

According to the data in Figure 4, Contributions to the piano education is as follows:

- 1.2.1. *Correct Fingers Positions*: Scales are very important at solving finger position problems. With scales students can check their positions focus on their fingers without thinking their arms and hands. There are many students who came with finger position problems and studying scales is seen to be good solutions for them (P1, P5, P6).
- 1.2.2. *Correct Hand Positions*: Also the same problems like finger position, hands position problems can solved with regular and correct studying scales (P1, P5, P6).
- 1.2.3. *Correct Synchronization in Rhythm*: When student play the scales they should be very careful playing in rhythm and this has good effect on their playing and their synchronization of two hands is very improving (P1, P5, P6).
- 1.2.4. *Correct Wrist Position*: The problem of wrist is to hold it in unnatural position too high or too low. But when you study the scale you should solve this problem (P1, P5).
- 1.2.5. *Dominated by the Keyboard*: You studying four octaves and it are one of the main issues to be dominated by the keyboard (P2, P5).
- 1.2.6. *Important in the Development of Piano Techniques*: Every semester students gradually developed their techniques by studying scales (P3, P4, and P5).
- 1.2.7. *The Reflection of the Success in Other Piano Pieces*: Even if the student examined with scales or not examined their success of playing scales mirroring their success in piano literature (P2, P3, P4, and P5).

1.3. Problems Encountered in Teaching Scales:

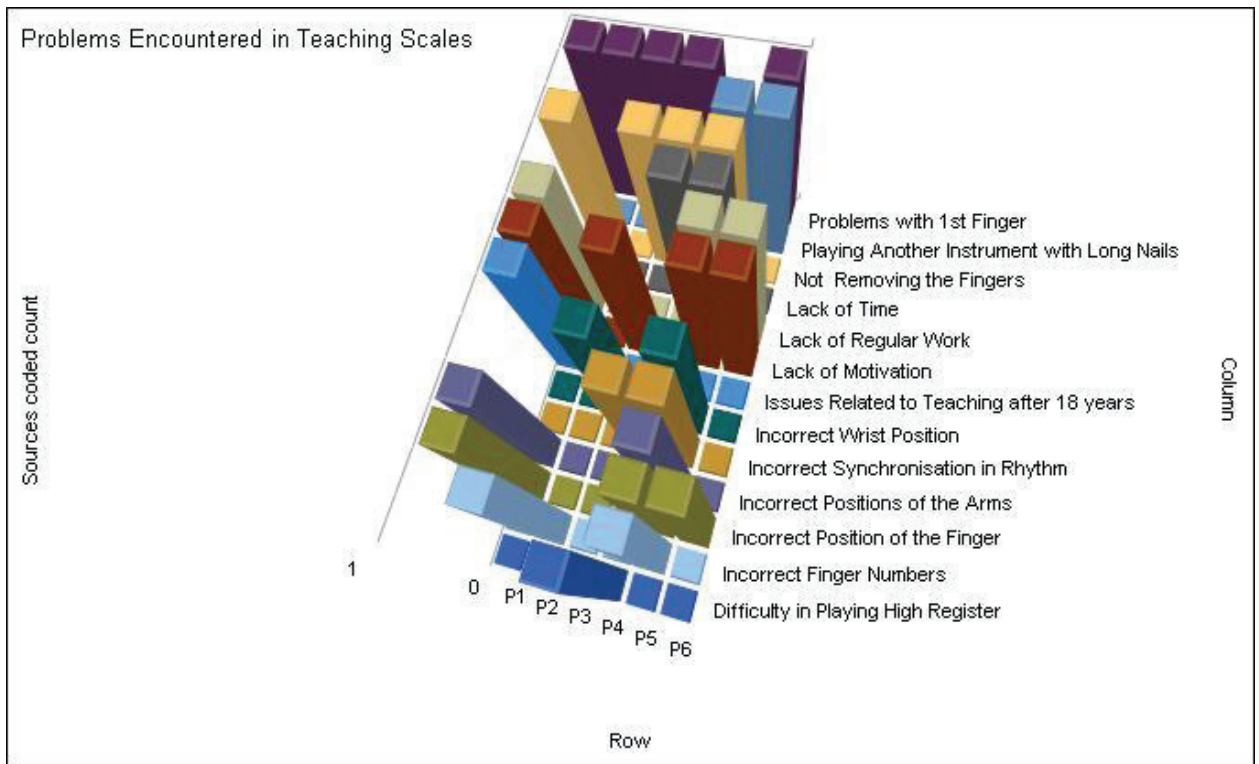


Figure 5. Problems Encountered in Teaching Scales

- 1.3.1. *Problems with 1st Finger*: One of the biggest problems is when the student changes the position at scales they cannot use their 1st finger correctly. When making changes of the position the first finger should be turned without changing the hand, finger, and arm or wrist position and without *Playing Another Instrument with Long Nails*: Some students are playing both guitar and piano but with long nails even if they study and practice scales they cannot play with correct finger position and solve their problems (P5, P6).
- 1.3.2. Making any ascent (P1, P2, P3, P4, and P6).
- 1.3.3. *Not Removing the Finger*: This column has high frequency. Because students don't remove their finger after they play with the next finger. It means that the fingers are not working separately. Working without removing the fingers, have no use (P1, P3, P4, P5)
- 1.3.4. *Lack of Time*: The participants specified that working on the piano repertoire is taking too much time and because the scales are not examined at final exams students focus on their exams repertoire first (P4, P5).
- 1.3.5. *Lack of Motivation*: The lack of motivation has these reasons. First they hate playing and studying scales. Second the scales are not examined at exams. They don't become conscious of the scales and don't want to be a good performer. Finally studying scales is work that needs patience and needs to be diligent (P1, P5, P6).

- 1.3.6. *Issues Related to Teaching after 18 years:* Music educations are the schools at university level and most students came after 18 years old and after this age it is hard to change the habits (P1, P3, P5,P6).
- 1.3.7. *Incorrect Wrist Position:* Some students used to shake their wrist down and up (P1).
- 1.3.8. *Incorrect Synchronization in Rhythm:* It is hard to synchronization in rhythm. Usually it is very hard and need to special effort to equalize the finger motion (P3, P5).
- 1.3.9. *Incorrect Position of the Arms:* Students are locking their arms with unnatural positions and lifting their shoulders. Playing at this position is impossible. For solve this problem, it is more effective to practice scales with paying big attention on arms and shoulder position (P4, P5).
- 1.3.10. *Incorrect Position of the Finger:* One of the other big problems is breaking the finger in place of the joint. To solve this problem, students should study with separate hands by controlling all fingers one by one (P1, P5).
- 1.3.11. *Incorrect Finger Numbers:* Finger number is changing at scales so that students are confused them (P2, P5).
- 1.3.12. *Difficulty in Playing High Register:* When playing at high or down register student should change their position without change their sitting position. They should move their arms and if need lean a little though the high or down registers only (P3).

1.4. Teachers' Suggestions:

- 1.4.1. *Teaching Correct Wrist Position:* When practicing scales students should have relaxing wrist with natural position (P2, P5).
- 1.4.2. *Relaxing Hands:* The hands should be very relaxed if not hands and all fingers will be locked and fingers don't work separately (P1, P5, P6).
- 1.4.3. *Relaxing Arms:* If students don't have relaxing hand it will take time to solve the problem by practicing separate hands (P1, P5, P6).
- 1.4.4. *Regular Course Work:* The scales should not only study regularly at lessons also students should practice the scales regularly before starting to practice their repertoire (P4, P5).
- 1.4.5. *Preparatory Works for Scales:* The Professors' advised to make preparatory works before practicing and teaching scales like Hanon's exercises Theodor Leschetizky's exercises for scales (P3, P5).
- 1.4.6. *Practicing with Separate Hands:* When problems are not solved and the students have wrong habits studying with separated hands is the very effective solution (P2, P4).
- 1.4.7. *Natural Position of the Fingers and Arms:* The biggest problem is that the students have unnatural positions of finger, hands, shoulders and wrist natural position should been emphasized every time (P1, P5, P6).
- 1.4.8. *Listen the Timbre:* For equality of fingers students always should listening the timbre (P5, P6).
- 1.4.9. *Correct Synchronization in Rhythm:* Synchronization is also very important for equality (P1, P5, P6).
- 1.4.10. *Complete the Theoretical Knowledge:* If there is some lack of music theories the students cannot be successful at scales (P1, P2).

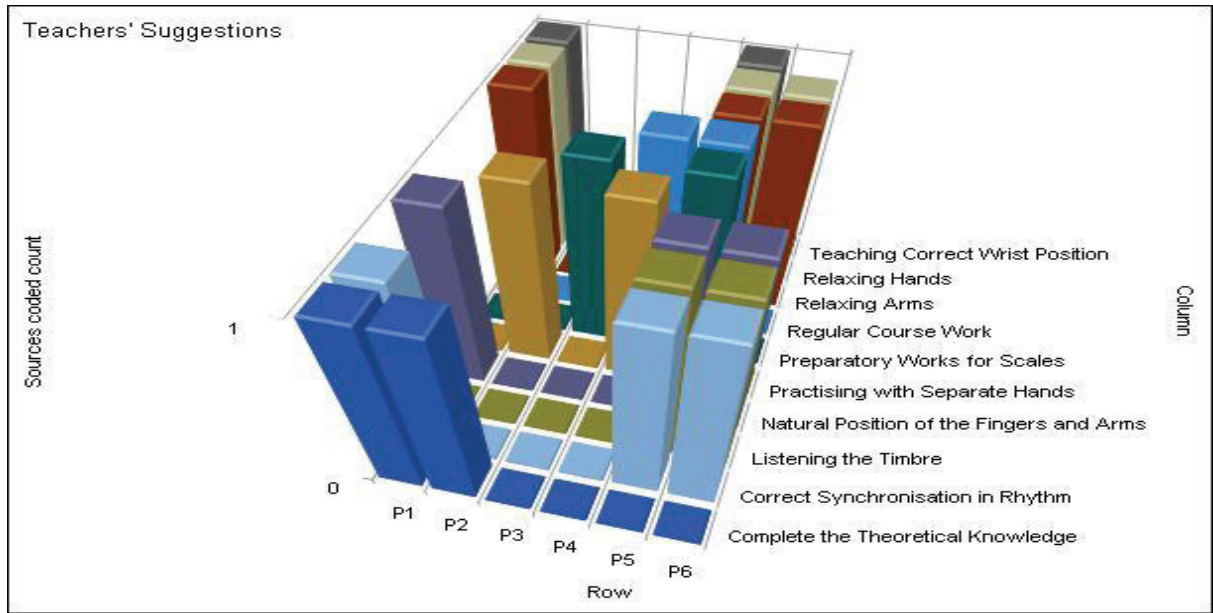


Figure 6. Teachers' Suggestions.

Conclusion

According to all findings in P1, P2, P6 they don't have scales in the curriculum, when P3, P4, P5 have scales in the curriculum. P3 and P4 find the curriculum very effective and studying all. In conclusion there is no any standardization in scale education at Music Education Departments.

In conclusion according to the findings of the contributions to the piano education "*the reflection of the success in other piano pieces*" has the highest frequency. Scales also contributed to correct fingers position, hands positions, wrist positions, synchronization in rhythm and make students being dominated by the keyboard and finally is very important in the development of piano techniques.

According to the findings of the problems encountered in teaching scales "*problem with 1st finger*" has highest frequency. Other problems are playing another instrument with long nails, not removing the fingers, lack of time, lack of regular work, lack of motivation, issues related to teaching after 18 years, incorrect wrist position, incorrect synchronization in rhythm, incorrect position of the arms, incorrect position of the finger, incorrect finger numbers, difficulty in playing high register.

In conclusion according to the findings of the teachers' suggestions "*relaxing hands*", "*relaxing arms*", "*natural position of the fingers and arms*" and "*correct synchronization in rhythm*" have equal high frequency. The teacher advised teaching correct wrist position, doing regular course work, making preparatory works for scales, practicing with separate hands and listen the timbre are the other suggestions. All suggestions are very important at teaching the scales and will developed students techniques and this will mirror their piano success.

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