# Piano Pedagogy in Portugal: a discursive analysis from the perspective of Higher Education teachers

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https://doi.org/10.1590/SciELOPreprints.15321

Submitted on: 2026-03-06
Posted on: 2026-03-09 (version 1)
(YYYY-MM-DD)

eISSN 2317-6377

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# Piano Pedagogy in Portugal: a discursive analysis from the perspective of Higher Education teachers

## O ensino de piano em Portugal: uma análise de discurso a partir da perspectiva dos professores de Ensino Superior

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**ABSTRACT:** This research focuses on the collection of oral/written documents related to piano in the context of higher education institutions in Portugal, with the aim of analysing contexts, trends, and contemporary practices connected with piano pedagogy. The findings are based on interviews conducted with 14 teachers who currently teach or have taught at institutions such as the Universities of Aveiro, Braga, and Évora, and the Polytechnic Institutes of Porto, Castelo Branco, and Lisbon. Content analysis followed Bardin's model (2016), enabling the identification of patterns and paradigm shifts in teaching/performance practices over time. Recurring topics include curricular plans, pedagogical practices, democratisation of piano education, social recognition of piano teachers, the role of the 'stage', and the integration of scientific research into professional's daily lives. The results facilitated the construction of interinstitutional and intercontinental dialogues on piano education, providing a robust structural framework on procedures, ideologies, and practices in the Portuguese context.

**KEYWORDS**: piano pedagogy, higher music institutions, teaching-learning methodologies, narrative accounts, portuguese context

**RESUMO**: O presente trabalho de investigação incide na coleta de documentos orais/escritos relacionados ao ensino superior de piano em Portugal, com o objetivo de verificar contextos, tendências e práticas contemporâneas associadas à pedagogia do instrumento. Os resultados baseiam-se em entrevistas realizadas com 14 professores que lecionam ou lecionaram em instituições como as Universidades de Aveiro, Braga e Évora, e os Institutos Politécnicos do Porto, Castelo Branco e Lisboa. A análise de conteúdo seguiu o modelo de Bardin (2016), permitindo a identificação de padrões e mudanças de paradigmas nas práticas de ensino/performance ao longo do tempo. Entre as temáticas estão os currículos, as práticas pedagógicas, a democratização do ensino do piano, a validação social da profissão, e, por fim, a investigação científica na vida dos docentes de piano. Tais linhas possibilitaram a construção de diálogos interinstitucionais e intercontinentais fornecendo um sólido corpo estrutural sobre procedimentos, ideologias e práticas associadas ao contexto português.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE**: ensino de piano, instituições musicais de ensino superior, metodologias de ensino-aprendizagem, histórias de vida, contexto português

# 1. Introduction

Music education in Portugal underwent significant remodelling in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. In this context, authors such as Mota (2014), Carvalho & Paz (2021), and Ribeiro & Vieira (2016) have highlighted the pathways that have been adopted in music education and specialised arts education in the country since then.

According to Mota (2014, 44, 46), the panorama of music education and its integration into the Portuguese education system reflect a history of contradictions and innovations linked to the establishment of undergraduate degrees through Decree-Law Nº 310/1983 (1 July 1983). Mota suggests a possible relationship between the renewal of primary and secondary education levels and teacher training and the significant number of children attending specialised music education courses. At the same time, Ribeiro and Vieira (2016) describe the complex trajectory of aligning "specialised music education" with the "general" Portuguese education system. The authors highlight its incorporation through Decree-Law Nº 310/83, as well as the clear will of the country's education authorities to harmonise the systems to ensure their articulation. This effort is evident in the subsequent decree-laws and regulations after 1983, like Law 46/1986 and others, which have continuously modified the reality of Portugal's integrated education system, with the aim of improving it and allowing more democratic and equitable access to vocational opportunities.[1]

The "winds of change," however, began before the structuring of specialised arts education and the establishment of undergraduate (*licenciatura*) degrees (1983). As early as 1971, specialised education provided by conservatoires had been placed under a "Pedagogical Experimentation Regime." Under this regime, besides the eventual attempted an approximation between the school levels of general schools and the school levels of specialised schools, study plans and programmes were reorganized.

This broader context influenced the trajectory of specialised education in Portugal, particularly in relation to piano practices. These changes not only reshaped the structure of conservatoires, but also affected private music schools, which began to adopt pedagogical parallelism. As a result, "music schools" expanded with public support, and many of these institutions later became public educational establishments.[2] This unique aspect of the Portuguese context—having such a strong growth of publicly subsidized private music schools—emerged during this transformative period and ends with Decree-Law nº152/2013 of 04 November. It reflects an era of endeavor to change, progressively addressing a landscape that had hitherto been too sparse to meet the population's demand, and to make music education a less elitist activity.

In 1973, Portugal had not yet experienced a democratic revolution. However, the then Minister of Education, José Veiga Simão, by Decree-Law No. 402/73 (11 August 1973), established the creation of the Universities

[1] Within this debate, the ideas of "vocation" and "talent" are enshrined in Portuguese law, which seems anachronistic.

[2] Decree-Law 310/83 (1 July 1983) states that "in recent years, some of these schools have been transformed into public educational institutions—the Porto Music Conservatoire, the Calouste Gulbenkian Music School of Braga, the Madeira Music Conservatoire, the Gregorian Institute of Lisbon, and the Regional Conservatoires of Ponta Delgada and Angra do Heroísmo (the latter under the auspices of the Regional Government of the Azores)."

of Aveiro and Minho,[3] Nova University Lisbon, and the Institute of Évora. The latter was dissolved in 1979, giving rise to the University of Évora. The creation of these universities marked a profound shift in the Portuguese higher education landscape, increasing the availability of higher education options in contrast to the previous scenario, which included four institutions: the Universities of Porto, Coimbra, and Lisbon, and the Technical University of Lisbon.

This restructuring of higher education, with the creation of new universities and the reform of pedagogical approaches that began in 1971, generated high expectations among conservatoires, music schools, and their faculty and students, who awaited decisions from central authorities regarding their status. However, it was not until the late 1970s that significant action was taken. Decree-Law No. 513-T/79 (26 December 1979) established the Polytechnic Institutes of Castelo Branco, Lisbon, and Porto, which would eventually become the host institutions for the Higher Education Schools of Music. Initially, these higher education schools offered foundation (bacharelado) degrees, and over time, they began to offer honours (licenciatura) degrees. This progression created a significant disparity with the universities, which already offered honours degrees. This discrepancy led to considerable tensions between the two models of higher education institutions (polytechnics and universities), a debate that continues today, as will be discussed later.[4] Despite the legal framework being established, music programmes in the higher education music schools only began operating in 1986 (with the piano programme being launched in 1987[5]).

Alongside the public commitment to raise educational standards and the context of profound reform, Portugal joined the Bologna Process on 19 June 1999. The commitment outlined in the Bologna Declaration was towards a "more complete and far-reaching Europe", which required a significant overhaul of the education system. In order to align Portuguese academic degrees with the international context, particularly within the European Community and the OECD,[6]initiatives were introduced to promote the mobility of teachers and students, fostering “cooperation in the development and strengthening of stable, peaceful and democratic societies” (Bologna, 1999). Key changes within higher education institutions followed. In addition to the introduction of a three-cycle degree structure—1st cycle: undergraduate, 2nd cycle: master's, and 3rd cycle: doctorate/PhD programmes—there was a notable shift in the requirements for music teacher training. A master's degree became mandatory for educators in these fields, marking a significant elevation in the pedagogical qualifications required in music and piano pedagogy – despite a reduction of two years in the undergraduate program, which changed from 5 to 3 years in duration under the Bologna process.

Together with questions of structure, course duration, professional equivalence, and other issues that Portugal has been grappling with since the early 1970s, it is impossible to discuss music education without addressing the alternative teaching methods that have developed during this process. These alternatives

[3] The creation of the University of Minho is considered to have occurred with the appointment of its Founding Committee on 17 February 1974.

[4] In 2023, through Law No. 16/2023 (10 April), which "enhances polytechnic education by amending the Basic Law of the Education System and the legal framework of Higher Education Institutions", polytechnic institutes gained the ability to offer doctoral programmes, adopting the designation of Polytechnic University as a strategy for internationalisation.

[5] Decree-Law No. 513-T/79 (26 December 1979) established founding committees for two educational institutions, in Porto and Lisbon, which "together with the Head of the Secretariat of the Porto Conservatoire of Music form the Coordinating Committee for Conversion" (Portugal, 1979).

[6] Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

have posed significant challenges in reconciling long-established practices that have been consolidated over time by society and by a system (of conservatoires) focused primarily on training performing musicians. Studying the various settings in which Portuguese piano music education has taken place (and continues to take place) is crucial to understanding the contexts that have shaped institutional models. It is equally important to examine the teaching models adopted by piano teachers, reflected in their pedagogical practices and performance approaches, which have been updated to align with the new contexts. In this sense, the analysis presented in this research constitutes a concise sample designed to understand and document the internal functioning of specialized higher education institutions in music (piano) in Portugal, based on teachers' discourse; thereby fostering the understanding, recording, and dissemination of contexts, trends, and contemporary practices related to piano pedagogy.

## 2. Theoretical concepts

Among the concepts that guided our analysis during the development of this research, we highlight the notions of reconstruction and historical construction as proposed by Hobsbawm (1998) and Saviani (2007). We also consider the ideas of permanence, systematicity, norm, and normativity discussed by Magalhães (2004, p. 57) when addressing institutions, in association with Saviani's (2007, p. 4) concept of a material structure of a permanent nature, constituted to meet human demands. In addition to the conceptual approaches to institutions and their frameworks, Magalhães (1998, 55 and 63) offers valuable insights into educational subjects. He points out, for example, the role of students in shaping the relationship between the institution and the community—thus contributing to the materialization of a pedagogical and instructional ideal—and the role of teachers in constructing both the symbolic and material dimensions of educational practice, which result in professional representation. In this project, our focus is to examine the material structure of the selected institutions (macrostructure), which encompasses their normative and curricular context, and more importantly, their internal operations shaped by teaching practices (microstructure), bearing in mind that these teachers were once students themselves. There is, in general, a gap between the idealization of an institution and the educational practices established in the everyday experiences of teachers. This study, therefore, emphasizes the "history of the present time," aiming to recognize the role of specialised higher education within this context—its operational structure, curricula, teaching methodologies, and the pedagogical and performance practices developed by piano teachers in Portuguese higher education institutions. In this regard, all collected materials—oral accounts and official written documents—will be analyzed through the lens proposed by Le Goff (1994), who argues for the nonexistence of a "true document." Every document, regardless of its nature, contains both truth and falsehood and must, therefore, be interpreted in multiple ways. That said, we acknowledge that the collection of written documents (such as laws, decrees, and others) allows for the identification of institutional operating standards. However, in this research, such documents will be used as supporting elements. They will serve to support the narratives—that is, to substantiate the accounts provided by teaching agents, either by confirming or challenging their statements, as well as the subjectivities and multifaceted nature of musical practice. The central focus of this research is the interviews with piano teachers—the educational subjects— their didactic-methodological practices, performance experiences, impressions of the Portuguese music education context, perceptions of the current university student profile, challenges faced, and other guiding questions explored during the interviews.

## 3. Methods and preliminary findings

In the context of this research, six public higher education institutions offering specialised piano education were selected. Primary data collection was then based on interviews with piano teachers. An initial mapping identified eight institutions offering specific piano training. Of these, the public institutions are the Aveiro, Minho, and Évora Universities, and the Polytechnic Institutes of Porto (ESMAE), Castelo Branco (ESART), and Lisbon (ESML). The two private institutions—Catholic University of Portugal and Metropolitan University— were not included in this study, as they are non-state institutions.

Out of a total of 23 teachers, 14 responded positively to the request to participate in the research. The interviews were conducted either in person or via Zoom chat, depending on the availability of the interviewee and the financial resources available for the research. Based on the use of an oral history approach, "from the microcosm, through the figure of the teacher, and their relationships, convergence/divergence, with the macrostructure" (Camacho, 2013, 34), the institutions that each of the interviewees attended during their formative process and in their role as educators served as the guiding thread for the development of an interview guide.

Thus, we decided to give a degree of direction to the research by adopting what oral history theorists call a semi-structured interview, or what Bardin (2016, 47) refers to as "semi-directive," retaining some quirks of speech in the transcriptions that represent and signal emotional states or intentions that are often left unspoken. Although an interview guide was developed to serve as a basis for the interviews, it allowed the researcher to follow a freer narrative, respecting the timing of the interlocutor and the subjectivity of each teacher.

The interview guide was developed around three systematic axes, which were supported by the approaches described above. Thus, the formative context and the educator's context were maintained throughout all the interviews, with internal variations depending on the context of each interviewee. The guide addressed three main questions:

(1) **What is your musical education context?** (Including institutions, teachers, methods, and other aspects);

(2) **What is your background as a teacher and pianist?** (Covering teaching methodologies, institutions, musical and educational practices, among other topics);

(3) **What is your opinion of specialised music education institutions in Portugal?** (Encompassing positive/negative aspects in the social, institutional, and personal spheres, comparing current/past situations).

The next step in the research was the transcription of the interviews, for which we used software that allowed the conversion of audio to text.[7] With all the transcribed interviews printed out, we proceeded with the pre-analysis, using the content analysis tools proposed by Bardin (2016). After reading each interview, we grouped the topics based on the research objectives and their representativeness, highlighting and

[7] The Transkriptor software uses cutting-edge AI, but the transcriptions were nevertheless reviewed and corrected where necessary (including the addition of associated expressive intentions).

separating the subjects discussed by each teacher using a colour-coded system. The main categories emerging from the interviews were: institutions, teachers, methodologies (pedagogical practices), performance practices, and the professional context.

These categories emerged from the grouping of smaller categories that initially appeared. For example, we can point to "institutions", which derives from units such as conservatories, music schools, and universities; or "teachers" which arises from units such as research professors, piano teachers, and private tutors; "methodologies", which emerges from imitative learning, methods, pedagogical practices, and methodological approaches; and "performance practices", which originate from pianists, the stage, stage fright, vocation and talent. All of these categories are aligned with the initial mains goals of the research.

The category "professional context", however, emerged unexpectedly, from the need to include a unit addressing current problems mentioned by the interviewees - such as the present educational profile, and the social demands linked to the democratisation of both teaching and performance (e.g., the 'stage', which for many interviewees appears to be a place of limited access). This includes professional pathways in an oversaturated market[8], the massification of music education and the pressing need to connect institutions with active professional life beyond outside their walls. The inclusion of music research, associated with methodological innovations and the improvement of teacher training, also emerged as a prominent theme. In fact, the main current challenges faced by professors were identified, and the category described above reflects these issues.

We understand that although the entire educational framework (and specifically piano education) resulted from sociocultural demands as well as public education policies implemented at both national and international levels, it is essential to consider the individual strength of each teacher within their respective context. Therefore, it is evident from the accounts (in addition to certain social habits of the pianist/teacher) that there are methods, teaching and performance practices that are specific to each period. Each historical period therefore contains information that must be accessed in order to form a cohesive body for analysis. However, it is not only time that determines the peculiarities of each generation; it is also important to observe the sense of belonging of the teachers interviewed. In this respect, the identification of their familial and social contexts helped to understand why certain decisions were made and the individual directions taken in each teacher's musical career.

Finally, the interviews analysed presented life trajectories characterised by a recurrence of behaviours and institutions that corresponded to the age range of each teacher interviewed. The historical period of participation was a reliable axis of analysis, although permeated by various nuances.

The teachers interviewed were divided into three age groups: Group A—six interviewees aged between 63 and 73 (born between 1951 and 1961): (1) Fausto Neves, (2) Álvaro Teixeira Lopes, (3) Francisco Monteiro, (4) Jorge Moyano, (5) Luís Pipa, and (6) Madalena Soveral; Group B—three interviewees aged between 54 and 62 (born between 1962 and 1970): (1) Sofia Lourenço, (2) Pedro Burmester, and (3) Constantin Sandu;

[8] The market is oversaturated for several reasons, including insufficient and unstable vacancies in public institutions, and numerous offers in the private sector with precarious contracts.

and Group C—five interviewees aged between 45 and 53 (born between 1971 and 1989): (1) Miguel Borges Coelho, (2) Luísa Tender, (3) Ana Telles, (4) Paulo Oliveira, ad (5) Paulo Pacheco.

The next step involved an analysis of the responses of each group, focusing on the emphasis given by each interviewee to each unit of analysis established in the pre-analysis (Bardin, 2016). Preliminary findings revealed that teachers in Group A began their musical and piano training primarily in private tuition, either at their teacher's home, in private music schools, or in denominational institutions.[9] Their progression to higher education took place in music conservatoires. Specifically, higher education was concentrated in the following institutions: the Porto Conservatoire of Music, the Lisbon National Conservatoire, and the Calouste Gulbenkian Music Conservatoire in Braga.

The teachers in Group B share the same characteristics of music initiation as Group A, with the only difference being the absence of music education in religious schools.[10] In this group, studies continued predominantly at the Porto Conservatoire of Music, with the exception of the Romanian teacher (Interviewee 3), who attended the George Enescu Music High School, where integrated education already existed at the time, and the Bucharest Conservatoire of Music.[11]

A characteristic that shows strong signs of continuity in later generations emerges in Group C, namely access to specialised music education for a less elitist part of the population. This is probably due to the major structural changes implemented in education in Portugal, aimed at giving the population greater access to specialised music education. Among the five teachers analysed in Group C, two began their music and piano education in institutions that offered free education, such as the informal village music school that functioned within the church premises in Vila do Conde parish (where Interviewee 4 was a scholarship holder) or the Ponta Delgada General Conservatoire, where Interviewee 5 secured a place through the "friendly intervention" of a teacher who facilitated his entry, which had previously been inaccessible. In this way, the elitist pattern of piano education present in the interviews analysed earlier is replaced by a scenario of late introduction to the instrument and free access to education. In this context, these two teachers began their higher music education at ESML—Lisbon Higher Education School of Music—at a time when conservatoires no longer offered diplomas at higher education level.

In summary, the pattern of access to piano teaching within the population studied reflects a social pattern of access to specialised music education that was limited to a wealthier segment of the population. Of the 14 teachers interviewed, 11 began their piano studies in private settings, often with two or even three lessons per week with different teachers. On the other hand, there was a delay in the age of initiation to piano as the generations progressed. Thus, Group A has the youngest age range for beginning piano tuition, between 3 and 5 years old—within this group, only one teacher (Interviewee 5) started their piano education at 13 years old, when already at the conservatoire, an exception in the group due to their non elitist social background. In Group B, the starting age remains between 5 and 7 years old. In Group C, it

[9] For example, the Espinho Academy of Music, the Amigos das Crianças Musical Foundation (Lisbon), and the Nossa Senhora da Paz School (Dorothean order, Porto).

[10] Among the private schools mentioned are the Parnaso Music School, the Juventude Musical Portuguesa School, and the Hélia Soveral School (all located in Porto), as well as a private music school in Romania (there was no reference to its name).

[11] This data was presented but was not considered in the analysis, as it does not pertain to the Portuguese context.

ranges from 4 to 15 years old, making this group the least homogenous in terms of the age at which they started piano tuition.

A striking feature, which seems to be peculiar to the time of the interviewees in Groups A and B, is the practice of taking lessons from two teachers simultaneously, a fact reported by five teachers in Group A and two teachers in Group B. This habit, repeated over two generations, was mainly due to the presence of strong personalities in the local context who influenced entire generations. In Portugal, the teacher and pianist Helena Moreira de Sá e Costa (1913–2006) occupied this role for decades as an irreplaceable figure.

This characteristic is also a fact that repeats itself in the education systems of other places, such as Brazil or Romania, as reported by Interviewee 3 from Group B, Constantin Sandu (2014):

> My first teacher (Sonia Ratescu) was a student of Florica Musicescu, who was a reference in piano teaching. She was also a teacher of Dinu Lipatti, and later of Radu Lupu, when he was young. She was a student of Cortot in Paris. And she was a figure similar to Helena Sá e Costa here in Porto. In Bucharest, she was a figure of preference. (Sandu 2024)

In particular, the presence of the teacher and pianist Helena Sá e Costa appears in the accounts of 10 out of the 14 teachers interviewed, who mention her name as a reference in teaching, either as a private teacher or even associating her with their artistic development and career guidance. The four accounts in which her name does not appear come from the teachers in Group C, who, due to timing, did not have the chance to meet her. "Dona"[12] Helena appears in the memories of piano lessons, but the most vivid recollections are those that describe the environment she created in her home, which allowed for a connection with culture and the development of her students' musical talent. Another important issue discussed by the teachers is the influence she had in guiding and directing their international careers. She facilitated contacts with renowned teachers and helped her students to continue their education abroad, as well as their careers as teachers.

Such a fact seems important to consider in this context of change, since the figure of this kind of tutor, who guided an entire generation of great professionals and teachers, no longer seems to exist in subsequent generations. We can infer this shift in social behaviour and the role of the piano teacher from the last generation analysed. In the Group C generation, this "almost untouchable" figure of the teacher disappears from the artistic scene, and the community-oriented behaviours, such as the gatherings at Helena Sá e Costa's house, the lessons, and the soirées, which many of the interviewees recall with a sense of nostalgia as a happy time, have been replaced by other, more individualised learning methods that contrast with those of the past.

## 4. Dialogues on piano teaching in the Portuguese context

For this article we chose to present cross-cutting thematic discussion axes on "dialogue" of piano teaching in the Portuguese context with regard to Groups A, B, and C, which will be presented in the following sections: higher education in music conservatoires; higher education in polytechnic institutes and

[12] "Madam" Helena was how Helena de Sá e Costa was usually called by her students and colleagues.

universities; and an overview of the pedagogical practices associated with piano. These topics are primarily represented within the categories of institutions and methodologies.

## 4.1. Higher education in music conservatoires

Until the end of the 1980s, conservatoire courses were the only option for music higher education in Portugal. The conservatoire was an institution that offered formal specialised music education, (from the 1st to the 3rd year) basic courses, (from the 4th to the 6th year) general courses, and higher education courses (from the 7th to the 9th year). The programme lasted nine years, and music education was separate from other subjects such as mathematics, Portuguese, etc., in most specialised schools in the country.

In the accounts of earlier periods, such as those of interviewees 1, 2, and 3 from Group A, the existence of "kindergartens" that offered the introductory music course still persisted. Examples include the Porto Conservatoire of Music and the Espinho Academy of Music, where regular subjects and music education were taught. Additionally, there were the denominational schools[13] that offered music education with tuition fees for those who wished to attend.

Thus, musical education coexisted in denominational schools (private), conservatoires, and other private music schools, as mentioned by the interviewees from groups A and B: Amigos das Crianças Musical Foundation in Lisbon; Hélia Soveral Music School, Parnaso Music School, Silva Monteiro Music Course, and Jeunesse Musical (or Juventude Musical Portuguesa) in Porto.

Private teaching was also a common practice, but in Porto particularly an unusual phenomenon occurred, as described by three teachers from Group A and two from Group B. Their narratives describe a system of taking private lessons with two piano teachers at the same time. In these cases, each interviewee had lessons with the teachers of the schools they attended, as well as private lessons with the pianist Helena Sá e Costa. This type of teaching somewhat defined their generation and was a model experienced by all the teachers of that time. Below are some testimonies to support this idea:

> Therefore, I would go once a month, more or less, to Dona Helena's, and every day... every day I had lessons with her (referring to Madre Aguiar). (Monteiro 2024)

> I studied with Isabel Rocha, who was a pianist and teacher, a student of Helena Sá Costa, and from the age of 15, or maybe 14, I also began taking lessons with Helena Sá Costa, who was a great pianist and Portuguese teacher. (Lopes 2024)

> My mother was simultaneously a student of both Dona Helena Costa and Dona Hélia Soveral, who was also a teacher at the conservatoire. (Neves 2024)

> So, I began studying…I had lessons at the conservatoire once a week and every two weeks with Helena Moreira de Sá e Costa in a private setting. (Lourenço 2023)

Despite attending a music education institution, much of the interviewees' musical training was individualised and took place within a private system centred on Helena Sá e Costa. Therefore, although

[13] Refers to religious schools or confessional schools.

most of them completed their higher education at the institution, their learning was supplemented by private lessons.

There is one important factor to highlight in relation to piano education: whether as a matter of local custom or for some other reason that we are unable to ascertain, it seems that students only began to attend the conservatoire in earnest when they entered the final three years of training, in the institution's higher education course. Almost all the reports indicated that training was carried out in private tuition (as described above). Students took exams as external candidates until they entered the higher education course, at which point they began attending the institution in person, as it was not permitted to take exams as an external student at that level[14]. Many teachers participated in this education system. They were external students at the conservatoire, attending only to take exams, whilst maintaining their tuition in a private teaching system, and when they started the higher education course, they started attending classes at the conservatoire (while continuing with the private system). We can exemplify this movement with the following statements:

> At the time, the higher education course…was six years of the general course plus three years of higher education. To take the higher education course, it was mandatory to be enrolled at the conservatoire. I spent those six years as an external student. So, I was just going there to do the exams. After graduating from college, I entered the conservatoire, so I went to a teacher recommended by the lady, Dona Helena, who had been a student there, Fernando Jorge de Azevedo. (Monteiro 2024)

> When I got to the higher education course, at that time, at the conservatoire, there was a general course, which was three years…sorry… a basic course, which was three years… later, a general course, which was a sixth year, another three, then a higher education course, which was three years, so the higher education course could not be done as an external course. And I took my exams as an external exam, so in higher education I was a student at the conservatoire of Professor Fernando Jorge Azevedo (who was also a student of Dona Helena Costa), who passed away recently and was one of the great accompanists. (Neves 2024)

On the other hand, among the autobiographical narratives, the most expressive ones focus on the troubled transition from the higher education system of the conservatoires to the higher education music schools within the polytechnic institutions. In general, the Education Reform—consolidated at the end of 1989 and the beginning of the 1990s—mandated the establishment of higher education music degrees within
universities and within the Polytechnic Institutes (of Porto and Lisbon at the beginning), with part of the faculty of the conservatoires being transferred to the polytechnics. The education provided in the conservatoires, which encompassed the entire vertical education system, began to be offered only up to the secondary school level. This transition became somewhat

chaotic, as there were many disagreements over the selection of the staff who would teach in the new higher education music schools. In general,

[14] Although cases of external students were generally explained by the fact that they resided in other cities, the study revealed that 8 out of 10 interviewees who had undertaken higher education at the institution "conservatorie" lived in Porto, the same city in which the institution - the Porto Music Conservatoire - was located. The report clearly indicates that 10 out of 14 interviewees had chosen to take private lessons with Helena Sá e Costa for personal reasons during them formation.

everyone wanted a place in the new school, but only were selected, those who were "in touch" in terms of renewing teaching practices, since many of those in the conservatoire's higher education programmes were still using techniques that were deemed as "outdated."

A break with the conservatoire system was thus attempted, both in terms of the faculty and in terms of creating a more demanding and higher quality curriculum, which was the main criticism of music conservatoire training. Tania Achot (in Lisbon), Fausto Neves and Pedro Burmester (in Porto) were involved in shaping the piano programme in its early stages, and one of the key aspects of the change was, according to Fausto Neves:

> (...) In the conservatoire programme, which was based on Viana da Mota's curriculum, the cultural aspect was immediately removed by the government of the time, Salazar. A musician only needed to play. There was no need to know anything else... On the other hand, there was some aging of the faculty. (Neves 2024)

There was a need for renewal and expansion of theoretical and specific music knowledge, which had not been implemented during the Estado Novo regime.

The founding committee was made up of musicians with impeccable and unquestionable credentials (in the sense of being upright, trustworthy, and responsible), such as Helena Sá e Costa (president), Teresa Macedo, Luís Felipe Pires, and Fernando Jorge Azevedo in Porto, and Jorge Moyano, among others, in Lisbon. Together with the presidents of the polytechnic institutes, they discussed the specifics of the field and shaped the beginnings of the school with the particular characteristics of individual music education. Thus:

> (…) The School of Music (in Porto) forced the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education to change the ratios... To open this course, it had to have X students per class. However, a music course is impossible... and the music courses started to have smaller ratios because they finally realised that there was individual teaching... so, there were things they managed to achieve. (Neves 2024)

The committee, therefore, had the power to modify the guidelines from the top down, which, according to Neves (2024), seems to be a reality that no longer exists, as he states: "today, I see everyone just obeying, and they have to follow, and they have to do it." On the other hand, Neves emphasises that when the conservatoires housed the higher education programme, there was a clear direction aimed at stimulating the tradition of performance. Today, the impression is that there is no longer any concern for this practice, even at the higher education level, and this is clearly evident in the way in which the conservation and renovation of instruments is handled, which for him seems to have been forgotten, along with other practical factors (such as room(s) being turned into storage spaces for practice equipment).

An interesting fact emerges in the development of the new models of music education that were consolidated after the creation of higher education institutions, universities, and the structural renovation of conservatoire programmes. Apparently, there is a close relationship between the current music education in conservatoires, which offer specialised education at secondary level, and the programmes of the old music conservatoires. In a way, according to Monteiro (2024), the practices "remain reasonably rigid... an education, in my view, very focused on the soloist musician's practice... and within classical music... very focused on that traditional repertoire." For him, the only difference is a certain autonomy to

approach pieces outside the traditional piano canon. On the other hand, many schools offer music education even at secondary level, and the number of students is huge. Portugal has a network of music schools such as public and private conservatoires, publicly subsidized private academies and other private music schools, publicly subsidized professional music schools and totally private schools[15] which were consolidated under pedagogical parallelism. This system lasted until 2013, when, under with the previously mentioned Decree-Law nº152/2013 of 4 November, it was abolished and private teaching was required to become autonomous and self-sufficient (Silva and Vieira, 2024, 16). A revolution has taken place in the last 40 years, with music education shifting from an elitist system to being "the education of many people. Today, there are far more people playing, and playing well! In other words, back then, there were one, two, three, four, or five good piano teachers in the country" (Burmester, 2024). The democratisation of music education is improving in Portugal, despite the numerous aspects or challenges that arise from this new phase.

There is a consensus among the interviewees regarding the profile of today's students, and the existence of better students than before. The discourse is also unified in relation to the challenges posed by new technologies and the professional prospects of such a large number of pianists and music professionals of excellence. The data indicate a perception that democratisation is closely connected with the massification of education, raising concerns about whether there is enough room for everyone. There seems to be a contradiction between the quality of existing institutions and the quality of education, since the overall qualitative average of students is still considered to be lower than in the past. On the other hand, secondary education and all training preceding higher education appear to be more significant for students, who enter higher education with their learning already consolidated. Due to its short duration of three years, higher education is not the main route for piano training. While some students continue to study abroad, this trend seems to be influenced by multiple factors, including increased accessibility due to the Bologna Process and international mobility, as well as opportunities to specialise with particular teachers. It should not be interpreted as evidence of declining educational quality in Portuguese institutions, but with the appearance that the general qualitative average of students is lower than in the past [16].

Another factor that poses a challenge to the quality of musical training is the fact that the wider access to music education has led to adaptations in collective learning methods. Since 2004, music education has been developed using the Gordon method,[17] which prioritises listening and auditory stimulation without

[15] (Silva and Vieira, 2024, 29) organized the general typology of schools in Portugal in two main natures: public and private. In Public school network we can handle with 2 general types: Public music specialised education schools (publics conservatories, conservatories' teaching centres, conservatories integrated into integrated basic school or basic and secondary school) and

general education schools grouping and ungrouped schools that offer specialised music courses. In Private school network we can handle with 3 general types: private and cooperative schools of specialised music education and them teaching centers, professional music schools, private and cooperative schools that offer specialised courses or professional music courses.
[16] Other factors influence the decision of talented students to leave Portugal even before entering higher education, such as scholarships offered by major institutions in other countries, and the housing and economic crisis that the country is experiencing in terms of cost-benefit considerations. [17] Learning theory based on the ideas of Gordon (2000). See more in Edwin Gordon – Teoria de aprendizagem musical: competências, conteúdos e padrões; published by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (Portugal).

the practical component. The absence of "abdominal"[18] exercises in rhythmic sight-reading, melodic sightreading, and melodic and polyphonic listening leads to certain deficiencies in the training of students who arrive at higher education without the necessary preparation. Thus, students leave secondary education with this gap: little practice in vertical listening (especially in wind and string instruments) and a lack of technical foundation on their instrument. Pacheco (2024) identifies the likely cause of the lack of muscular training as the fact that students have less time to study their instruments.

Although no research was found grounding Pacheco's ideas, it seems relevant to consider its implication in relation to a younger generation approach. On the other hand, at least two American piano methods incorporate certain principles of Gordon's approach: study strategies based on mental processes can be found in the works of Alys Terrien Queen (1998) and Julie Lieberman (1991). It appears that mental strategies have become an important focus in this century, as they help to prevent muscular injuries (less repetition in training) and other problems commonly experienced by pianists. While we acknowledge the importance of professor Pacheco's experience, it seems that these results related by him arise more from a misapplication of Gordon's principles than from the methodology itself. In this context, Gordon should not be the only figure considered. Other factors must also be taken into account, such as the influence of social media and the internet, the accelerated rhythm of contemporary life, and, more broadly, what Bauman (2001) refers to as 'liquid modernity'. The social context has changed, and students' training practices have inevitably been affected by these transformations.

In this way, attempts at educational inclusion result in adaptations of music teaching methods that seemingly fail to provide a foundation for excellence. However, it is felt that progress is being made as the system adapts to the local situation in order to be inclusive, in contrast to the old conservatoire system, which was responsible for excluding the less able students.

Another peculiar aspect of the old conservatoire system was the lack of individualisation in teaching,[19] meaning that the student was not seen as a growing potential, but rather as someone who was either "vocational" or not "vocational."[20] Thus, they either fit into the system or they were discarded. There was no great concern with the development of musical skills, teaching methods, or stage practice activities. Another important issue is that once the conservatoire's higher education programme was completed, few were prepared to be teachers; they were not trained to teach, and this is one of the turning points for the

[18] A term used by Pacheco (2024) when discussing the differences between the teaching of the former conservatoire and the current one.

[19] As will be seen later, one of the distinctive features of Helena Sá e Costa, which was mentioned by all the interviewees, and which is therefore a unified discourse, was that her teaching method considered the individualisation of the student.

[20] The term "vocational" or "vocational education" attributed to specialised music education is widely used in Portuguese legislation. This idea seems to persist in the system to this day and strongly associates the concepts of vocation and talent with pedagogical innatism. Such a characteristic reinforces spontaneous pedagogical practices and reflects the roots of prevailing thinking in both pedagogical practices and legislation, especially in conservatoires and higher education institutions. According to Vieira (2014, 66), since the Decree-Law nº344/90 of 2 November, the designation “specialised education” has appeared, and with the Ordinance Nº691/2009, of 25 June, the concept of “specialised art education” was introduced and has recently prevailed in the Portuguese music education system. For further discussion of the concepts of vocational education, specialized music education, and the Portuguese education system see Vieira (2014).

generation interviewed in this research. In short, the new generation of teachers feels a strong need to include and adapt methods to the abilities of the students entering the institution, a quality that becomes a key issue in accessing piano education.

Finally, beyond these internal structural issues, the secondary conservatoire programmes continue to be socially devalued, just as the higher conservatoire programmes used to be, in the sense that a secondary level diploma is not required for students to enter higher education[21].Moreover, the conservatoire’s higher education programme provided a diploma that was not socially or professionally validated, probably because there was no statute governing it. This was a determining factor for 100% of interviewees who went through the training system in place at that time—a total of 10 piano teachers out of 14 interviewed— to complete their higher education abroad. A career in piano was not seen as a professional option. Burmester (2024) states that “People didn't think of music in terms of a career, in terms of a profession. Very few thought about it. In fact, if you look at my generation and the older generation, you can count on one hand the number of people who made a career out of it” (Burmester, 2024).

Today, the issue of professional validation of higher education programmes in Portugal is settled; what remains is to revisit the role that music conservatoires play in society, the legacy they have left, and to reconsider the role of this institution in terms of its diplomas. An important factor related to piano education is that, according to Oliveira (2024), 95% or more of students complete their education at music conservatoires, since "in piano, it's hard to find shortcuts." The non-requirement of a secondary diploma from conservatoires for entry into higher education weakens the institution, and for many interviewees, it is an unfair point in the legislation.

## 4.2. Higher education in polytechnic institutes and universities

There is a vast gap between the higher education provided by the music conservatoires in the past, and the higher education that is going on into the universities and higher education music schools at the polytechnics institutes, which began to operate following the Education Reform of 1983. The change in status, in which the conservatoires and similar institutions became responsible for basic and secondary

education only, and higher music education was transferred to the universities and higher music schools, led to profound changes in the structure of these institutions and, fundamentally, in their internal practices.

Lopes (2024) recalls that it was a significant shift when one had to constantly change teachers, and the training became more comprehensive. According to Teixeira Lopes, "a musician is not just someone who plays an instrument... they have a broad, much broader general culture. This did not happen in the past... general education was somewhat neglected." For him, there were individuals who possessed this broad culture, such as Helena Sá e Costa, but it is important to note that there was a great deal of self-taught

[21] Although a secondary level diploma is not formally required for access to higher education in music, this admission policy must be understood within its specific context. Entry examinations are highly demanding, to the extent that only students who have completed at least eight years in a conservatory or specialised school are usually able to pass them. Thus, in practice, access remains restricted to candidates with extensive prior training.

music education, and the major turning point in this structure began when the state assumed responsibility for this education.

It was evident which direction the music institutions would take, since, from a social point of view, the course lacked validation. Moyano (2024) emphasises that the conservatoire was no longer sufficient because it did not align with the status of higher education, "it really did not correspond to anything." The teacher recounts an episode from his life that reflects this scenario, when he had to study engineering to avoid military service. It was evident that there was a need to create a higher music school that would provide the conditions required by society for better training and validation. However, for this to happen, other conditions were necessary, such as logistics. According to Moyano (2024), "at that point, the state needed to spend more money, and that part was complicated." Thus, the Lisbon Higher Education Music School, for example, began operating within the conservatoire building. Later, they rented a space and

> (…) then those rooms were no longer enough, so we rented another space, I don't know where, but it just wasn't... until it reached a point where neither of these spaces were sufficient. And then it was possible... sometimes, things depend a little on who is in charge, who the minister is at the time, or who has the decision-making power at that moment. Eventually, we managed to convince someone that it was really necessary to build a new facility for the school. (Moyano 2024)

Alongside the whole context of the establishment of the higher education music schools, the University of Aveiro emerged. It is in this chapter of history that we find rich testimonies that refer to the role of the two types of music institutions that appeared during this period, and which seemed to oppose each other for a time. One of the first clashes between the two institutional models, mentioned in the teacher's accounts, concerns the fact that the University of Aveiro programme was not created with the classification of a music course. The DeCA (Department of Communication and Art) is an art department, and this was initially seen as a disadvantage compared to the higher education music schools. On the other hand, polytechnics could not, in theory, offer doctoral degrees.[22] Initially, they were seen as institutions more focused on artistic practice, whereas universities were considered to be more centred on research. Historically, the perception of universities was one of education more oriented towards the theoretical and universal and less towards professional practice,

while polytechnics were created to offer more practice-oriented education. For Monteiro (2024), however, there were no such differences.

Teixeira Lopes (2024), on the other hand, states that in the early days, this was indeed the case, but the work of the professors and the direction given by the institution's leadership changed this context. In general, in his opinion, the students who entered the University of Aveiro had a lower level of instrumental skills because the best students sought training in the higher education music schools; there was a tradition in this regard. For him, the University of Aveiro showed intelligence in seeking out great professionals and musicians for its faculty. Additionally, the fact that it began its activity by offering honours (licenciatura) degrees created added value, which, in a way, led to a difficult situation for the higher education music

[22] As we have seen in the previous chapters, this is no longer the case. With the passing of Law nº. 16/2023 (10 April 2023), which amends the Basic Law of the Education System and the legal framework of higher education institutions, polytechnics are now offering doctoral programmes and adopting the designation of Polytechnic University as a strategy for internationalisation.

schools of polytechnics, which initially only offered a foundation (bacharelado) degree and later went on to offer honours (licenciatura) degrees.

Thus, by definition, the best musicians went to the polytechnics, while those with lesser abilities went to the universities. This is evident in the analysis of the training profile of the teachers in Group C: of the five interviewed, one completed the higher education programme in the last class of the conservatoires, one completed their training at the Porto Higher Education School of Music (ESMAE),[23] and three at the Lisbon Higher Education School of Music (ESML), meaning that none of them chose the university model. Portuguese teacher trainers working in higher education form a generation that comes from the system of music conservatoires and higher education music schools (when they offered foundation degrees), which in turn originated in the music conservatoires. In this study, no profiles were found of piano teachers working in higher education whose training came from the university system[24], which is an interesting point and should be investigated more closely, as it seems to be a significant piece of data regarding the way of thinking and the tradition of piano education in Portugal, which presupposes a deep connection with musical practice. Future generations should be studied to see if this profile changes in the coming years.

According to two of the interviewees, during the first time, people who used to attend the University of Aveiro had a major focus on general theoretical music knowledge to the detriment of playing an instrument. This profile was an institution reality in the beginnings and changed because the direction ability to look for great musicians to teach at the University (Lopes, 2024). Thus, we find some issues that arose early on with the operation of the University of Aveiro, such as the strange idea that those who teach need not be performers. Neves (2024) comments on this:

> This is a criminal thing. Fortunately, this was put aside... musicians have been accustomed for centuries to having to perform two roles: the teaching role and the pianist or instrumentalist role, which is already incredibly difficult to achieve! Now, with higher education, this new trend imposes a third role on us, which is that of researcher. We have to do research, even if sometimes we don't know exactly what that means, but we have to do it... Fine. But for

> research we need time, right? Especially if we don't want to just play around... badly. Then we already have the problem of the study time we need... to teach classes, to stay in shape to play for the students, or whatever else. We have to teach classes. And well, right? And I love teaching, that's no problem. And now we also have to do research. Which isn't easy, is it? It's not easy in terms of time management. (Neves 2024)

Neves addresses another central issue in the university model, which is the requirement that faculty members be engaged in the production of scientific research. In this sense, such a model is ahead of the others in adapting to social demands and globalisation. The role of the research teacher initially meets the

[23] The Porto School of Music (Escola Superior do Porto) now incorporates other arts and has changed its name to School of Music and Performing Arts of Porto (Escola Superior de Música e Artes do Espetáculo do Porto).

[24] Even though not all higher music education piano teachers took part in this research, we invited only those who are, or have been, members of the permanent staff of the mapped institutions. This simply means that the group of teachers studied belongs to a specific period within a certain historical timeframe and does not represent a permanent profile of piano education in Portugal.

needs of the university institution, which has science as the foundation of its activities, while the honours (licenciatura) degrees addressed the need to train teachers. Since 2014, however, with Law-Decree Nº79/2014 the honours degrees are for training musicians and the Master´s degree is training teachers and offering pedagogical courses and a practicum. The model adapts by incorporating artistic practice, thus reinventing itself in response to social demand.

At the same time, within this context, higher education music schools are undergoing a countermovement of resistance, in order to safeguard their artistic particularities. Lourenço (2023) offers an insight into the internal context of the music school where she works (ESMAE) and points out that there is a close connection between the arts and science. For her, a potential link between these areas, artistic practice and creativity, would allow for a possible and feasible dialogue between the arts and scientific research:

> (...) Science has an object of study and a methodology of study. It is a science. Art does not have that... art, at most, has a theory of art, right? It has a theory, but it does not have an object of study or a method, so it is not science... Well, there is one thing in which art and science, I am absolutely sure, have always met and will continue to meet. And for me, that is the great misunderstanding of much artistic Higher Education, which is creativity. (Lourenço 2023)

It is therefore possible to consider potential solutions in terms of connecting the fields of arts and science, even in the context of higher education music schools. What for a long time seemed unthinkable for this type of institution is now becoming a more feasible idea. In this sense, the schools are being remodelled to meet the demand for teaching qualifications, forcing them to shift from offering foundation (bacharelado) degrees to offering honours degrees (licenciatura). Meanwhile, increasingly undermined in terms of public funding policies, polytechnics institutes, which originally offered primarily practical courses with no emphasis on research, have started to include research through the recent creation of polytechnic universities. In this sense, there is a path that points towards a stronger unification of models, between higher music schools and universities. However, we believe that this process needs to

be revisited, as standardisation could lead to a loss of identity, diversity, and educational quality.[25] Lourenço (2023) addresses several factors that led to the changes in the polytechnics institutes over the last decade. Among them, aspects of teacher training are highlighted:

> (...)The problem with the polytechnic is that it didn't have... the legislation had just been changed, doctoral courses... with serious flaws, why? And what is the flaw? It's that the recruitment of faculty for the polytechnic institute assumes a doctorate, assumes a curriculum at the highest level, assumes research, assumes everything that a university professor is supposed to have. (Lourenço 2023)

With regard to this situation, it should be noted that of the 14 teachers interviewed, only two do not have training at the third-cycle level (doctoral). On the other hand, five indicated that they do not combine

[25] We believe that the high demands for funding and international ranking positions are due to standardisation, which seems to be in urgent need of discussion in order to preserve the distinctive characteristics of each institutional model, as this can only benefit society. Conversely, standardisation tends to impoverish educational provision. However, this is a separate discussion that requires further exploration regarding the permanence and survival of institutional models.

research with their teaching practice. Telles highlights an important aspect in her account, in which she points to the great difficulty she faces, as a manager of the unit where she works (University of Évora), in promoting and raising awareness of the need for a new approach to teaching in which scientific research is present. She states that "these two subsystems of higher education have been converging, right? So, at the moment, they have many points of contact, and many people question whether it still makes sense to have two subsystems of higher education in Portugal" (Telles 2024).

Another crucial point in this context is the relationship between Portuguese higher education institutions and professional life. For Teixeira Lopes (2024), this is a factor that distinguishes the University of Aveiro as an institution of excellence. In this regard, Teixeira Lopes (2024) states: "for the university to thrive, it needs to be oriented outward; people must be out there, not here inside." Therefore, the teacher cannot have a singular focus and should establish connections, including with secondary institutions and other schools, forming partnerships with the outside world. This whole context brings a new approach to teaching, one that is more globalised and connected to the world. The outward-looking perspective seems to be a significant differentiating factor and a quality marker for institutions and teachers, as many students actually seek out the institution because of these professionals.

In this respect, for Teixeira Lopes (2024), the higher education music schools often seem to live somewhat like "Don Quixote," detached from the reality of the market's demands for piano training and teaching. For him, the scenario is worrying: "I hear about 600/700 pianists a year... of those 700, I think 400 are exceptional pianists. And out of those 400, maybe two plays in public, three... that's 400 who practice eight hours a day." Thus, the overheated market, with an oversupply of skilled labour, seems to dictate changes and a new role for the higher education music schools in terms of adapting to the present. On the other hand, this updating of the model ends up merging with the university model itself. These binary markers, practice versus science, which were characteristic of each model, seem to dissolve and unify. Schools that did not do research begin to include it, while universities, in turn, begin to give more

practical meaning to their activities. Both are thus adapting for their own survival within an education system that is no longer limited to the local but has a global scope.

## 4.3. Pedagogical practices in piano teaching: an overview

Alongside the institutions that have been created and their trajectory towards adapting to the social and historical context, whilst also updating according to new guidelines and perspectives, there is an important internal factor in the field of educational practices that marked the emergence of a new model of instrumental teaching. This model is being introduced by the generation of piano teachers trained at the higher education music schools, where each teacher remodels what they have learnt, perpetuating teaching methods that reflect a more democratic school culture and greater access for all.

In this regard, it can be seen that among the teachers of groups A and B, who received their higher education at music conservatoires, the old way of reproducing knowledge—the tradition of instrumental teaching by imitation—seems to persist with minor modifications. Only three of the nine professors referred to rational methodologies in their speeches. On the other hand, all five teachers in Group C, who were trained in higher education music schools, adopt pedagogical practices that involve methods and systems in which there is an

attempt to implement new concepts and approaches when dealing with students entering the system,[26] as well as incorporating research and its results into their teaching practices. In this group, the vocational concept seems to lose its significance, and a more humanised approach becomes unanimous and a point of reference. Many report the trauma and difficulties they faced as students dealing with an exclusionary system focused on the profile of a "talented student."

Thus, new learning alternatives are consolidated and begin to be reproduced within the system. We can highlight an attempt to find a balance between the more restrained practices of the conservatoire model, which are effective in training for a highly technical activity like playing the piano, and an attempt to incorporate new pedagogical practices, countless strategies, and methods that exist and are applied according to the profiles of students entering higher education. There is also a strong movement towards engaging in pedagogical activities aimed at achieving excellence in performance and topics related to the stage of a pianist's life.

The methodological resources used by the piano teachers interviewed are highly innovative and connected to the present time. Some examples include the analysis of recordings, slow-motion video analysis of pianistic movements, watching documentaries, reading the history of prominent pianists, reading authors who discuss piano pedagogy and technique, using musical analysis tools that can be applied to the creation of musical ideas, incorporating body awareness techniques in the context of piano playing, and studying techniques for approaching contemporary repertoire, among others.

Below are some of the predominant methods raised in the teacher's interviews, reflecting the current scenario as a result of the past. We have chosen some teacher accounts that synthesise the main practices that were part of the teacher's training, as well as presenting some techniques and new practices adopted by the current Portuguese piano teachers. Among the practices used by the former teachers, and now reproduced and remodelled by the current ones, are:

(1) Providing students with an effective musical environment;

(2) Practising listening and silence in music;

(3) Individualising lessons according to the student's profile and abilities (each case is unique);

(4) Detailed and thorough teaching of piano technique (including analysis of the structure of works and understanding the relationship between the motor system and the mind);

(5) Work on piano technique with a focus on greater mental and physical awareness. Technique is understood as the act of making music;

(6) Reconditioning musculoskeletal reflexes;

(7) Working to release all body tension (relaxation) and mastering the movements of the fingers, hand, wrist, arm, and overall biomechanics of the pianist's body;

[26] It is important to add that only one teacher from Group C, the youngest, holds a master's degree in music education. All those who attended the Higher Education School of Music did so when it still offered foundation degrees.

(8) Principles of musical idea construction.

One of the most discussed issues regarding the teaching system developed by Helena Sá e Costa was the musical environment that surrounded and distinguished her. According to Neves (2024), people tend to underestimate the musical environment, attitude, and artistry. He recalls that his musical experience with the aforementioned teacher lasted until three weeks before her death:

> I used to say: Dona Helena... in a fantastic room, with her two pianos, two Bechsteins, and it was filled with paintings by Edwing Fisher, William Kempf, all autographed for her... so I always said, whoever enters that room, stays there for five minutes, leaves... and they leave different... they leave playing better. (Neves 2024)

The musical environment, therefore, seems to be a factor that the 'old guard' knew better than anyone else how to cultivate, in lessons, in nightly music-making gatherings, and in meetings to listen to music. Silence is missed, and its absence creates problems in the development of musical listening in today's students, not to mention the distorted models of musical listening influenced by platforms such as YouTube. Low-quality auditory references, therefore, are distorting the ears of beginner students.

Teixeira Lopes (2024) recalls his journey in the search for proficiency, a large repertoire, being clear, and great stylistic variety. For him, Helena was an excellent teacher and pianist, she could play everything and was an inspiration in a special way, but because she was very gifted, she possibly did not fully grasp the mechanics and had difficulties explaining: "this is done this way because it's like this, like this, and like this... your fingers work this way, right?" Thus, her teaching mainly consisted of an imitative method, where she taught through her own performance example and the mental images she evoked in her students.

Monteiro (2024) points out a methodological characteristic of Helena Sá e Costa, which is also mentioned by other teachers: the individualisation of lessons. For him, today there seems to be a distancing from individualised methodological practices by the institution—the music school—at basic and secondary levels, which seems to want to control the various areas and levels, from repertoire to evaluation. In his view, school control leads to the massification and

standardisation of teaching.[27] On the other hand, Helena's lessons, probably due to the private teaching regime, remained autonomous and individualised. According to Francisco, she didn't talk about technique, she talked about music, and "maybe she taught different things to different people," but always maintained a musical vision and work ethic that endured for many years. Burmester (2024), when asked about Helena's methods, emphasises that she had a philosophy: "each student is a different case." For him, therefore, the student's personality, learning speed, physical characteristics, and relationship with the instrument would determine the teacher's different teaching methods. Thus, she didn't have one method, but several methods adapted to suit the individuals in front of her and their age, since she taught children as well as adults. Burmester (2024) uses this strategy in his piano lessons as a teacher.

Another teacher who stands out in the teacher's interviews is Sequeira Costa (1929–2019), who, although he did not teach several generations like Helena Sá e Costa and lived part of his life in the United States, had a significant influence on the pedagogical practices of many teachers working in higher education in Portugal. Among the main ideas that circulate about his teaching are that he was an excellent pianist, a great teacher

[27] For Monteiro, higher education seems to maintain a certain autonomy in this regard.

who focused on the more detailed aspects of musical practice, and a sharp critic of certain behaviour. Luís Pipa (2024) describes how Sequeira Costa adopted a very rigorous system, in which he required the student to control all parts of the music. He encouraged study with separate hands, was very detailed, and worked in such a way as to dissect the score, often spending an entire lesson on just one musical phrase, in search of detailed listening and the various aspects of the score, language, technique, and polyphony. Oliveira (2024) recounts his experience of the transition between the teaching he received during his undergraduate degree at ESML with Tânia Achot and his master's degree and doctorate in the United States with Sequeira Costa. Tânia and Sequeira had been married but had very different teaching methods. While for Achot everything revolved around structure and great melodic lines with the goal of creating musical moments, "with him, we could stay there, playing... Note... looking for sound and looking for timbre... looking for colours" (Oliveira, 2024). Lopes (2024), in turn, summarises that the main difference between these two great names, Helena Costa and Sequeira Costa, was that she induced playing through examples and other images, while he explained the details of things.

For a long time, the ability to explain and articulate how to play was regarded as an unusual practice in piano teaching. In this scenario, we highlight a curious exception, a teacher who also left a legacy of technical learning focused on the field of muscular and mental awareness. He is Noel do Carmo Flores (1935–2012), an Indian Portuguese from Goa, a pianist-pedagogue who taught at the Hochschule für Musik in Vienna. About him, Teixeira Lopes (2024) reports that:

> ... I felt, at that stage, that I needed someone to explain to me, to work with me on the details...and then Noel Flores was exceptional, he explained everything to me, right? And for a year, we just played slowly, discovering the process and just discovering... I was already 20...22 years old. I started completely from scratch, that is, he rewired my reflexes. Which is what I often do with my students. (Lopes 2024)

Asked if he could give details about his work with Noel Flores, Teixeira Lopes (2024) continues:

> I can. The basic process of Noel Flores is: remove the tension... from the body, the arm, etc. Strengthen the finger a lot, especially the tip of the finger. And it is essentially through the contact of the fingertip, the last joint with the piano, that we can control the dynamic part, the part, let's say, of the sound, and at the same time have the body completely relaxed in relation to the rest. Of course, it's not... it's not just that, right? Then there is the whole gesture, at the level of the wrist, at the level of the arm, etc. It has to be understood, it has to be worked on, and it has to be viewed through the musical sense, so there is a first stage almost physical, somewhat separate from the musical sense, just to ensure that this relaxation and finger control works, and then it moves on to a phase of trying to understand how the phrase exists, what the support points are, working the wrist and the arm with the connection to that context, well, it's a whole process. But that's the foundation, and it's that foundation that I still use today, with my students. (Lopes 2024)

Another method that seems important to describe in the formative context of the teachers interviewed is that of Vitaly Iosifovich Margulis (1928–2011). Margulis was a Russian pianist who spent many years travelling between Europe and the United States. He taught at the Hochschule für Musik Freiburg in Germany and later at the University of California in the USA, and held numerous masterclasses in Portugal, usually at

the improvement courses in Vila do Conde. Miguel Borges Coelho (2024) recounts his experiences in Germany, describing the teaching methods of the teachers he studied with, including Margulis. According to Coelho (2024), the instructions fluctuated and varied greatly, which left him confused because, often, they seemed to be contradictory:

> I was initially very lost... with this, today I understand what was happening... So, the technical solution for the pieces always passed through the musical understanding of the works, and, naturally, he reacted to what he was hearing, right? And so, he would make a proposal and give me the musical indications, and sometimes I would be stunned, thinking, I can't play that, and he was talking about musical aspects... Well, the thing is that the solution wasn't physical, it was a... musical solution... by understanding the music, the physical solution was discovered. It was a bit of that idea. That was a big shift for me... at the time, it wasn't very systematised by him, so that was how he functioned. But it took me time to understand how it worked, because my first reaction was... he's going to tell me different things. What do I do? Well, then I started to realise... over time... that he wanted an organic relationship with the score. Probably what was happening was that I would get an indication, and I would rigidly go in another direction. So, I would adjust the next time, going back the other way... I never did an exercise. Neither with him nor with Bashkirov... that was even more unthinkable. (Coelho 2024)

It is important to note in this description by Borges Coelho the central focus of Margulis's work, as well as that of other pianists who worked in world-renowned institutions: the question of the guiding musical idea or the construction of an a priori musical proposal. The guiding musical idea seems to be the central point of convergence in the discourse of the main internationally renowned teachers encountered. In general, this idea is based on a rational principle that focuses on the harmony and structure of the works. Therefore, various teaching strategies are adopted by higher education teachers, such as the one mentioned above by Miguel Borges

Coelho, to help students understand the interpretative evidence that the structural and harmonic axes of the works carry.

Luísa Tender (2024) reports other aspects of Margulis's approach. He became her main source of pedagogical inspiration after three years of close interaction during her time studying with him in the United States. Tender incorporated the method that Margulis used with her into her own teaching practice. In this sense, she highlights the valuable resources she has available to her as a teaching aid, since she audio-recorded her lessons with Margulis. These tapes still serve as a pedagogical reference for her lessons to this day. Margulis's pedagogical system consisted, in summary, of identifying the passage that wasn't executed well, diagnosing the nature of the problem, and applying a strategy to solve it (almost like a medical prescription). Margulis thus addressed a key aspect that seems to be the great pedagogical challenge for piano teachers in this millennium: explaining how to do things in practical terms.

This routine outlined by Tender (2024) is also included in the lessons of Telles (2024). Although Telles did not study with Margulis, she uses the following steps: diagnosis, aspects of the problem, guidance, and planning the week's study. Another teacher who has also started adopting this same approach to teaching challenges, but in a different way from Tender and Telles, is the pianist Borges Coelho (2024), who explains how he works with this context:

> So, let's say it was like this. They gave us a goal, and we had to rebuild. As a teacher, I don't do exactly that... I started out not doing that at all, I tried to explain what the goal was, to explain all the processes... the ways to get there. And over time, I began to realise that this approach has its risks. So, I started to better understand what they were doing. Because when you explain the process too much, the risk is that the student becomes too focused on the process. They lose sight of the idea, and then the process doesn't work either. So... Nowadays, what I try to do... What I try to do differently from them, perhaps, is to explain the logic behind it, something they didn't do. I mean, they could give some hints, say a few scattered things, but there wasn't an overall logic... Harmony, which is another thing that was, for them, in fact, the foundation...I try to make them understand what the first harmonic reasons are... In other words, there's a theoretical knowledge, and then there's a greater or lesser intuition that works separately. (Coelho 2024)

Another point that can be intuitively perceived in the interviews is a certain air of traditionalism that surrounded teaching practices. Interestingly, according to Telles, there was a mentality at the ESML, for example, where teachers were upset when students attended masterclasses with other teachers or even performed concerts outside the institution. At the school, there were few performances or stimuli to encourage such practices. This context is confirmed by Oliveira (2024) and Pacheco (2024). The latter states that his current concern as a teacher is to foster such performance practices. This pedagogical goal is realised through a partnership with Rádio Antena 2, in a four-month project, in which his students perform live on a classical music programme that airs weekly on the radio. The aim of this initiative is to practise performance skills and strengthen the connection with the stage (audience). As Pacheco (2024) explains, "the performance is recorded, a critical spirit is developed about what was just been played, and then it goes back to rehearsal, back to class, and back to the stage. Rehearse, back to class...." He believes that this new approach will bring greater confidence and a spirit of critical analysis to the student body at ESML.

The lack of management of stage anxiety and other emotional factors during performance was something that was common in past institutions. There was little concern on the part of the faculty about these issues, which led to some discomfort, as described by Oliveira (2024) in his interview. In it, he recounts the drama of the first "blank" (mental block) he experienced as a student at the Escola Superior (ESML).

> I sought the stage, I felt...well, it was always a moment of pleasure and anxiety for me, but not the anxiety of becoming anxious…but I remember, during my undergraduate years, the stage gradually became less and less of that moment... the first memory lapse I had in my life, I was playing Les Adieux by Beethoven, the third movement, and suddenly…, in the third year, it happened, what had never happened to me before, what I had seen happen to others, which was normal, right?...And yes, because from that point on, I think something unlocked, and the stage was never the same again, or it was hardly ever that place I really wanted to go to.... (Oliveira 2024)

Experience, therefore, serves as an important marker for innovation in teaching strategies, which educators develop in their daily activities to address the shortcomings they faced as students. At the University of Évora, Telles develops projects that encourage her students to engage in research on the repertoire they are working on, as well as seminars dedicated to topics such as injury prevention for musicians, management of stage anxiety, reflections on piano technique, and other interdisciplinary themes. In terms of pedagogical

practice, Telles seeks to innovate by linking teaching practices with research. These areas are also addressed by Tender (2024) at ESART, particularly in the context of injuries or psychological issues associated with performance stress. The school collaborates with the Department of Physiotherapy, located next to the music building, and the institution's Department of Psychology. "Palco do Costume", for example, is an initiative based on stage training aimed at addressing psychological issues arising from stage fright. The goal is to "acquire a kind of immunity to the unpleasant sensations we all experience." The teacher's studio is open every Tuesday for an hour, and each student has the opportunity to go on stage and perform.

Finally, it is important to highlight a key element that seems to be seldom discussed in the teacher's discourse, but which Soveral (2024) addresses in detail. This is the issue of stimulating the intuitive aspect of performance, which she works on with her students in the following way:

> To stimulate this intuitive side, for example, there are certain exercises I ask them to do with romantic music. When we have small phrases in small musical sections, I ask them to try different versions. Respecting what is... the structure of the phrase in the composition, right? I mean, what is... what is the path? At first, I don't give any clues, I want to know to what extent they are not tied to a specific way of playing, a way of phrasing, and so on. I mean, you have to, because performance is also about this spontaneous side; a person has to adapt, sometimes they do things badly or well... So, I ask for one or two versions, not too many... because the person has a nervous system, a way of listening that differs from day to day. (Soveral 2024)

## 5. Final remarks

Piano pedagogical practice, the result of an instructional ideology centered on musical practice, has undergone profound transformations in this century in Portugal. The educational subjects themselves, piano teachers, reported in this study that when faced with the world of work and seeking to propagate the same teaching scenario they had access to as young students (in a system based on imitation), they observed that if they wanted to be assertive in their pedagogical practice they needed to recognize the profiles of the students who came to them clamoring for new pedagogical postures and access to piano culture and to have a more humanistic and democratic methodological approach.

This situation caused discomfort, which was reported by all of them: they had no training in the pedagogical sense and began to reproduce, in most cases, the practices that had been used on them when they were students. This fact, experienced by all the interviewees, encouraged them to develop new techniques, strategies and pedagogical approaches, even though, at the time, the institutions in which they studied did not train them or offer any course or discipline that would prepare for teaching. Essentially, the didactic repertoire they began to use was learned throughout their student careers and in the specializations undertook in artistic training abroad. We can infer that this movement ultimately culminated in the shift of certain instructional paradigms within the institutions themselves, following the post-Bologna reforms.

The deficiency in pedagogical training, therefore, was an element that helped to build new teaching perspectives in pedagogical practices within Higher Education Institutions. On the other hand, the institutional requirement for the practice of the profession of piano teacher ends up forcing the consolidation of a new teacher profile, which at first seems to be more connected with research, conscious

understanding of the instrumental practice and new piano pedagogical approaches that arises from this articulation. We particularly noted this dichotomy among the teachers in group C, who were trained to be pianists rather than teachers, and who are faced with teaching and the requirement of institutional training to qualify to practice teaching in specialised education. The generation of teachers interviewed is characterized by a high level of performers and by teachers connected with the social reality of their time although none of them have a master's degree in their training. Only one teacher from group C (the youngest), Paulo Oliveira, ended up completing the master's degree in teaching required for professional qualification to teach specialised music education in regular schools.

However, the impact of these new practices on the training of Portuguese teachers and pianists needs more time to be observed. The generation studied seems to be a generation of transition from educational models, from the conservatory model of higher music education (centered on practice) to that of training in higher education institutions, Polytechnic Institutes (centered on doing) and in universities (centered on research). In the beginnings, both in internal practices and legislation, the Polytechnic Institutes were considered “the most appropriate solution” to higher education in arts (see Decree- Law 310/83, item c). This delimitation, however, is not so clear; since the models often seem to be mixed, as we can observe during the research. This observation leads us to consider how these historical transitions are difficult moments to evaluate from the perspective of the present, thus, the distance in time, therefore, and new research with generations of teachers after those studied here, will bring a broader dimension of this historical moment.

The quality of teaching depends above all on the quality of its faculty and their involvement in the environment in which they live. In this sense, we found in the groups studied a change in

the teacher profile, who appears to be less inclined to follow fixed models, more reflective about their practice, and more proactive in their approach (in the sense of a teacher who is also researcher). In this sense, the future of Portuguese music education seems promising. However, it goes without saying that financial crises generate educational crises, and the global perspective of wars and ontological changes are manifest concerns about the future that awaits this large group of talented professionals that go out to job market. The job market seems to be scarce, there is not enough room for everyone, there are not enough stages for everyone, and in this regard, there is an urgent need to consider the necessary measures for potential solutions. Furthermore, most of talented professionals seek job opportunities and/or experiences abroad, leaving the country's pianistic profile seems to fall short of its true potential and what the educational and cultural system is genuinely capable of producing within. In this sense, the country loose talents (brain drain), by other hand, many of them returned with new perspectives, strengthening the local scenario.

## 7. Acknowledgments

This work is funded by the national funds through FCT—Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., under the Scientific Employment Stimulus—Individual Call— [CEEC Individual 2020 – 2020. 04287.CEECIND] https://doi.org/10.54499/2020.04287.CEECIND/CP1589/CT0003

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## Declaração de contribuição dos autores

| Vania Camacho 1 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| x | Conceptualização | x | Recursos |
| x | Curadoria de dados | | Software |
| x | Análise formal | | Supervisão |
| | Aquisição de financiamento | x | Validação |
| x | Investigação | x | Visualização |
| x | Metodologia | x | Escrita – manuscrito original |
| x | Administração do projeto | x | Redação–- revisão e edição |

| Alfonso Benetti 2 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| x | Conceptualização | x | Recursos |
| x | Curadoria de dados | | Software |
| | Análise formal | x | Supervisão |
| | Aquisição de financiamento | x | Validação |
| x | Investigação | x | Visualização |
| x | Metodologia | | Escrita – manuscrito original |
| x | Administração do projeto | x | Redação–- revisão e edição |

## Declaração de conflito de interesse

Os autores declaram que não há conflito de interesse.

## Declaração de disponibilidade de dados da pesquisa

Todo o conjunto de dados de apoio aos resultados deste estudo foi publicado no próprio artigo.

## Declaração do uso de IA

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