



SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING AND SELF-TRAINING PRACTICES IN MUSIC EDUCATION WITH APPLICATIONS TO VIOLIN STUDY

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Abstract

Self-directed learning has become an essential paradigm in modern music education, emphasizing learner autonomy, motivation, and reflection. This article explores the concepts and practices of self-directed learning and self-training, drawing from theoretical foundations and applying them to violin study. Key elements include the development of intrinsic motivation, the ability to set learning goals, plan and monitor progress, and the use of self-assessment for continuous improvement. In practical applications, self-directed learning in music is demonstrated through strategies such as breaking down complex repertoire into manageable tasks, using self-reflection to refine technical skills, and integrating extracurricular activities like performance analysis and peer exchanges. Digital resources, including instructional texts, online platforms, and interactive applications, expand opportunities for independent study and enrich musical understanding. The article further examines self-training methods for elderly violin beginners, highlighting approaches such as observation and imitation, systematic progression, problem-based learning, practical training, combined

audio-visual practice, and sight-singing with ear training. These methods account for physical adaptability, cognitive characteristics, and motivational needs, ensuring inclusivity in lifelong music education. By situating self-directed learning within the context of violin study, this research highlights its potential to foster independent musicianship, lifelong learning, and a deeper engagement with music across age groups.

Keywords: Self-Directed Learning; Self-Training Practices; Music Education; Violin Study

Introduction

The shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered education has positioned self-directed learning as a cornerstone of modern pedagogy. Unlike traditional rote methods, self-directed learning empowers students to set goals, design study plans, monitor their progress, and reflect on outcomes. Grounded in theories such as Knowles' concept of andragogy, this approach emphasizes learner autonomy, motivation, and active engagement. In the field of music education, self-directed learning aligns closely with the artistic and personal nature of musical practice, where individual expression and self-regulation play vital roles.

In the Chinese context, scholars have expanded the understanding of autonomous learning as a cyclical process: preparation and planning before study, monitoring and reflection during study, and self-assessment and problem-solving after study. This process mirrors the psychological principles of self-regulation, whereby learners continually evaluate and adjust their behaviors and strategies. Applied to music, this model empowers students to approach their practice not merely as repetition, but as a deliberate, reflective, and evolving process (Wei, 2019).

Violin study provides an effective framework for exploring these concepts, given the instrument's technical demands and expressive depth. Beginners and advanced learners alike benefit from structured self-training, goal-setting, and reflective practice. Moreover, the accessibility of digital resources and online learning communities expands opportunities for self-directed study,

offering guidance beyond the traditional classroom. For elderly learners, self-training methods tailored to physical and cognitive needs provide both educational and therapeutic value, fostering motivation and enhancing quality of life (Zhao, 2020).

This article examines self-directed learning and self-training practices in music education, with a focus on violin study. It integrates theoretical foundations with practical strategies, highlighting both the challenges and the opportunities of cultivating independent learning in diverse educational contexts.

Self-Training and Self-Directed Learning in Music Education

Concepts and theories of self-directed learning: Autonomous learning is a modern approach to education that places students at the center of their learning process, in contrast to traditional rote learning. Autonomous learning involves students setting clear goals, planning, and preparing before starting their studies. During the learning process, they monitor, reflect on, and adjust their progress and methods. After completing their studies, they self-assess, summarize, evaluate, and address any issues. From a psychological perspective, this process involves learners monitoring, evaluating, and adjusting their own learning and behavior. For example, students can set clear goals based on their current situation, such as mastering a specific violin piece within a month. They can also create detailed study plans, such as dedicating specific times each week to practicing finger techniques and bowing. While studying, students actively record their progress, analyze their performance in areas like rhythm control and pitch accuracy, identify strengths and weaknesses, and adjust their learning strategies accordingly. When faced with challenges, they proactively seek help from others or research materials, continuously motivating themselves to complete their learning tasks (Wei, 2019).

Autonomous learning encompasses several key elements. Intrinsic motivation serves as the driving force behind autonomous learning. In the context of music, learners are motivated by their love and curiosity for music, rather than external pressures. Self-directed learning involves learners choosing their own content, such as selecting violin pieces in classical, popular, or ethnic styles they enjoy; planning their learning paths, deciding whether to start with basic

techniques or tackle a specific type of piece first. Self-management involves effectively managing study time, balancing practice of fundamental skills with performance pieces; monitoring progress, and regularly assessing whether the expected learning outcomes have been achieved. Active learning requires learners to actively explore, such as analyzing the emotional expression and musical structure of pieces.

Application of self-learning in music practice: In the realm of music practice, self-study plays a crucial role throughout all stages of learning. For instance, in violin studies, learners can familiarize themselves with the composer's life and background before formally studying a piece. This helps deepen their understanding of the work's essence. When studying Bach's violin compositions, knowing the characteristics of Baroque music and Bach's style allows for a more accurate grasp of the piece's spirit during performance. During the learning process, breaking down tasks into smaller, manageable parts is an effective strategy. A complex violin piece can be broken down into several smaller tasks. Focus on mastering a specific section of the fingering, practicing it for half an hour each day until you are proficient, then move on to the next section. During practice, focus on reinforcing your knowledge by reviewing the day's content after each session, identifying issues and areas for improvement, and refining, playing techniques. For example, if you find that a certain vibrato is not handled well, concentrate on this part the next day until you achieve satisfactory results. Extracurricular activities are also essential for self-study. Learners can watch videos of virtuoso performances online, carefully observing the performers' techniques, body language, and emotional expression, and comparing these with their own performances to learn from them. They can also join online music forums to exchange insights with other enthusiasts, share difficulties and solutions encountered during learning, broaden their perspectives, and gain more resources and advice (Sun, 2015).

Self-Training Tools and Digital Resources for Violin Beginners

For beginners in violin, suitable self-study tools and digital resources are crucial for embarking on a musical journey. A high-quality beginner violin is essential, as its tone, pitch, and feel are vital for beginners. Additionally, a high-quality bow ensures smooth playing, while rosin enhances the friction between the bow hair and the strings, producing a clear and rich sound. The shoulder rest helps beginners maintain the correct posture, reducing shoulder strain and improving practice comfort and efficiency.

The abundance of digital resources provides a vast space for self-study. “Newly Compiled 100 Days of Beginner Violin” is a highly acclaimed textbook that offers a comprehensive teaching system, covering everything from holding the violin to playing techniques. It follows a three-part learning structure, combining scales, exercises, and pieces, and includes demonstration video resources. Learners can scan codes to access close-up shots of the left hand and slow breakdown demonstrations, making it easier to learn each movement in detail. Online video platforms like Bilibili offer a wide range of violin teaching videos, ranging from basic holding postures and finger techniques to advanced piece analyses. Some music learning apps, such as Chongchong Piano, primarily focus on piano scores but also include some violin score resources, with features like marking and saving, which help learners manage their scores more effectively. Additionally, there are specialized violin learning apps that provide courses, practice guidance, and community interaction, helping beginners overcome challenges and grow together with other learners.

Self-teaching violin learning methods for the elderly, should consider the physical adaptability of the elderly, psychological needs, learning interest and motivation to maintain, as well as the cognitive ability of the beginner and the choice of learning resources, focusing on the personalisation and relevance of the method, in order to help them to better overcome the difficulties in learning and enjoy the learning process.

Observation and Imitation Method: As a skillful instrument, the violin is often difficult for beginners to fully understand the details of its playing posture, bow movement and fingering through text or verbal description. Older people usually have strong visual observation ability, can intuitively feel the visual information, and quickly capture the details and rhythm of the action. When observing, older violin beginners should first select appropriate learning resources. Priority should be given to teaching videos or performance clips with a soothing rhythm and clear movements, avoiding complex techniques and fast performance content to reduce the pressure of receiving information. The observation process should focus on the core points in stages: in the early stage of self-study, focus on the posture of holding the instrument, the bow grip and the relaxation of all parts of the body, to ensure that fatigue or injuries due to incorrect posture are avoided at the source; in the middle stage of self-study, observe the correlation between the direction of the bow, the change of the bow speed and the pitch and tone, as well as the position and strength of the left hand's string press, to establish a correspondence between the movement and the sound effect of the cognition; in the late stage of self-study, focus on the processing of phrases, rhythm and emotional expression, and understand the movement. In the later stages of self-study, they focus on phrase processing, rhythm grasping and emotional expression, and understand the influence of details on the overall effect of the performance. Through this hierarchical observation, older adults can form a clear image of the movement and sound template in their minds, leaving a deep first impression for subsequent imitation (Tang, 2017).

Based on thorough observation, imitation becomes the key to transforming visual information into actual playing ability. Elderly violin beginners can use segmented practice method when imitating. Pause the teaching video sentence by sentence, section by section, first watch a demonstration (such as bowing or pressing the strings), immediately after the pause to imitate and learn, and then play back the video to compare their own movements with the demonstration of the differences, to make targeted adjustments. At the same time, you can observe your own movements with the help of a mirror or record a video of yourself playing and comparing it with the demonstration, so that you can more objectively find the deviation in posture and rhythm, and ensure the accuracy of imitation.

This process not only helps the elderly to quickly master the basic skills, but also reduces learning anxiety and enhances learning confidence through the intuitive learning process.

Observation and imitation form a tightly interlinked closed loop in the process of self-teaching violin to the elderly, jointly promoting the improvement of skills. Observation provides an accurate 'blueprint' for imitation, ensuring that the direction of practice does not deviate; while problems found in imitation (such as poor movement, mismatch of tone, etc.) will, in turn, motivate older adults to re-focus on observing the details and deepen their understanding of the essentials of playing. For example, if the tone is not satisfactory when imitating the bow, the older adults will go back and observe the changes in bow speed and strength in the demonstration, and then adjust their own movements. This cycle of 'observation - imitation - re-observation - re-adjustment' makes full use of the sensory advantages of the elderly, and through the combination of practice and feedback, it makes the learning process more efficient and targeted, and it is a commonly used learning method in violin learning. It is a common learning method in violin learning.

Systematic Learning Method: The systematic learning method refers to the method of learning violin knowledge and skills step by step according to a certain logical sequence and progress plan, from simple to difficult, from single to complex, from basic to elementary to intermediate. Elderly people's learning ability and reaction speed may be relatively slow, systematic learning can help them from the beginning to raise the correct posture, reduce the risk of shoulder and neck strain, etc., but also allows self-study to follow the rules, do not have to blindly fumble, every step can see the progress, especially suited to the physical and psychological characteristics of the elderly.

For example, learn a short piece of music. Older adults can start by learning a one-octave A major scale, familiarizing themselves with the position of each note in this key. Then learn the musical basics of the dotted rhythm patterns that appear in the piece, and practice the clapping, beating, and chanting of the dotted rhythm patterns individually. Then bring it into the music in the work to sing until the basic mastery, and then learn the repertoire 'May Song'. By taking a planned step-by-step approach from a single basic technique to a complex piece of music, older beginners will not be frustrated by being exposed to overly

complex knowledge and techniques at the outset. This step-by-step approach enables them to gradually build up self-confidence in the learning process and is more acceptable to the elderly. The systematic learning method requires the formulation of a scientific learning plan. Older people can set a long-term learning goal according to their own situation. For example, set to learn a few simple pieces within half a year; within a year to be able to play some pieces with some kind of technique than (e.g., switching handles). Long-term planning can give older people more direction to their learning and avoid learning blindly, and it also helps them to organize their learning time and energy reasonably.

Problem-based learning method: Problem-based learning method is to take the problem as the starting point, start from the difficulties encountered in learning, actively think and try to solve the problems, or find solutions through consulting materials, watching teaching videos, etc., and verify and adjust in practice. After solving a problem, new problems will appear in subsequent learning, thus forming a cycle of ‘finding problems - solving problems - creating new problems - solving them again’ to promote the continuous improvement of learning effects. For example, when practicing the fragment of ‘Little Star’, you always feel that a certain tone is not in line with the standard tone, but you cannot hear the specific reason for the deviation. You can first use the tuner to compare tone by tone, and if you find that the position of the finger pressing the strings is on the high side, then look up the teaching video and learn the method of ‘using the knuckle as the pivot point when pressing the strings, and referring to the fingerboard markings’; after that, you can practice the slow speed specifically for that tone, and use the tuner to verify the sound while pulling it out, so that you can gradually adjust the finger position and build up the correct memory for finger pressing, and correct the sound. Gradually adjust the finger position, establish the correct memory of finger pressure, and correct the deviation of the tone. After solving the single pitch, the problem of unstable pitch during continuous string changes may be found, and the next problem-solving cycle is entered (Wang, 2014).

Self-teaching violin for older adults uses a problem-based learning approach, which centers on learning around specific problems encountered in actual practice, with a problem-solving orientation to gradually improve skills. This method allows the elderly to focus on their own weaknesses, in the process of solving problems more sense of purpose, but also according to their own pace to adjust the learning progress, more in line with the learning characteristics of the elderly, can reduce blindness, enhance the target and sense of achievement, suitable for self-study when used.

Practical Training Method: Practice refers to the practice method for older adults to learn playing skills and musical expression through the actual operation of the violin. In the process of learning by doing, older people are able to perceive various situations in their own playing, to analyze the correctness and proficiency of the practice content, and to make adjustments in time for the second practice session. For example, when the bowing technique is not properly applied, resulting in obscure or harsh articulation, they can immediately notice and adjust the strength, angle and speed of the bow. The technical learning of the violin is training, and the results of their violin learning are continuously accumulated and improved in the long-term persistent training day after day.

Combined audio-visual training method: Combined audio-visual refers to a method of violin learning through watching violin performance videos, listening to violin performance audio, and combining with music scores. For example, the elderly can watch some violin teaching videos, which usually show the correct bow holding posture, fingering and other details, and are accompanied by explanatory sounds. At the same time, they can also listen to classic violin pieces, such as 'Liang Zhu' and 'Chen Si', to feel the melody, rhythm and emotional expression of the music. Elderly people's sensory abilities may change with age, and the audio-visual learning method can mobilize their visual and auditory senses at the same time. Watching a video allows them to see the player's movements, and this visual information helps them to better understand the techniques of violin playing. Listening to the audio allows their ears to become familiar with the tone of the violin and the melody of the music. This multi-sensory stimulation helps older adults build up musical images in their minds and deepen their memories. Rely on memory to help correct their deficiencies during

training. This training method can greatly reduce the trainer's eye, brain, ear and hand incoordination during training (Wang, 2017).

Sight-singing and Ear-training Method: Sight-singing is to look at the music sheet (simple or five-line score) and sing the pitch and rhythm of the melody with the voice, which helps to familiarize with the correspondence between the notes and the actual pitch, and at the same time strengthens the grasp of the rhythm pattern. Ear training, on the other hand, trains the ear to be sensitive to pitch and rhythm by listening to standard tones, melodic fragments, rhythmic patterns, etc., and to be able to hear deviations in one's own playing. Sight-singing and ear training is an important basic training for self-taught violin, which can help to improve the perception of pitch, rhythm, melody, so that the playing is more in line with the music itself. The training needs to be combined with the instrument, such as listening to the standard sound and then find the corresponding sound on the instrument, or playing the original song to listen to the differences, so that 'singing', "listening", 'playing' to form a linkage. For the elderly, the sight-singing ear training does not have to pursue professional-level accuracy, the focus is on gradual training, to establish the 'listening' and 'playing' connection, to reduce the performance of the pitch, rhythm errors (Wang, 2014).

New Knowledges

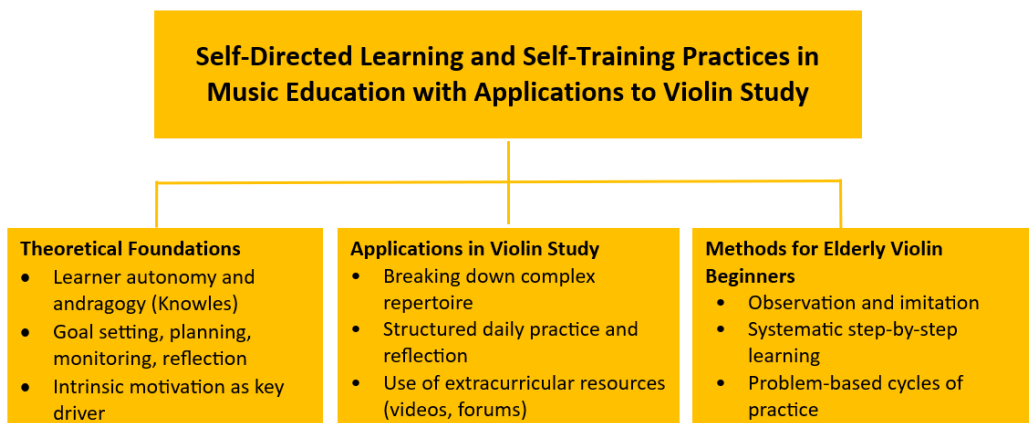


Figure 1: New Knowledges Diagram of Self-Directed Learning and Self-Training Practices in Music Education with Applications to Violin Study.

Conclusions

Self-directed learning represents a transformative model in music education, enabling learners to take ownership of their studies through goal-setting, motivation, and reflection. When applied to violin practice, this model not only improves technical mastery but also nurtures creativity, problem-solving, and lifelong engagement with music. Digital resources and self-training tools provide learners with accessible pathways to refine skills, observe professional performance models, and collaborate with peers in global learning communities. For elderly learners, customized approaches such as systematic learning, observation and imitation, and problem-based methods demonstrate the adaptability of self-directed learning across different life stages. These practices not only support technical development but also enhance confidence, enjoyment, and cultural participation. Ultimately, self-directed learning and self-training practices strengthen the role of music education as a lifelong endeavor. They highlight the potential for learners of all ages to cultivate independence, resilience, and artistic expression, ensuring that music remains both a personal journey and a cultural heritage to be continuously enriched.

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