

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The objective of the research is to compose exercises to improve the sight reading skill of students. In order to achieve this objective, the researcher has reviewed literatures related to sight reading and the development of sight reading that can improve pianists' sight reading skill. Additionally, several teaching methods that can be used to improve sight reading skills will be reviewed and discussed in this chapter.

In Western music, there are required skills for musicians such as ear training, improvisation and sight reading. One of the most essential skills for pianists is sight reading. It is usually the first skill used when learning new pieces or inexperienced pieces. According to Hardy, 1998's poll, 221 nationally certified teachers of Music Teachers National Association (MTNA) were asked to rate the importance of sight reading for pianist on a five-point scale; most important pianistic skill at the piano, highly important, fairly important, somewhat important and insignificant. All polls were replied. There were 13 percent of respondents rated sight reading as the most important pianistic skill, 73 percent rated as highly important and the rest rated as fairly important, while none rated as somewhat important.

Being skillful in sight reading depends on knowledge base and experience. The more performers understand musical concepts such as harmony and musical form, the more they have the capability to identify notes throughout the process of

sight reading. There is various usefulness of having a good skill in sight reading. Good sight readers learn new music quicker than poor sight readers. Hardy (1998) states that “fluency facilitates the learning of new pieces; it allows access to a wide variety of music and a more thorough knowledge of specific composers and style characteristics; it builds tactile, aural, and kinetic memory, which increases the player’s confidence; and it provides training for many professions in music.” Not only can good sight readers learn new pieces faster but also have more progressive as well as regressive fixations of playing music than poor sight readers (Young, 1971).

2.1 Characteristics of Capable Sight Readers

Many researchers mentioned about the characteristics of good sight readers. Skillful sight readers seem to ignore a score’s miswritten notes when the piece does not sound like what they think (Sloboda, 1984: 232 and Wolf, 1976: 168). Moreover, skilled sight readers do not need to look at the instrument while playing because they have good tactile skills which direct themselves on the instrument (Lehmann and McArthur, 2002: 140). Several researchers stated that moving eyes and head while sight reading was detrimental since these may discontinue ocular contact with the score (Lannert and Ullman, 1945: 97, 99 and Sloboda, 1976). According to one study by Sloboda (1974) “reading ability was estimated by counting the number of performance mistakes in a large corpus of sight-reading performances. People who made many mistakes had lower eye-hand span (3-4 notes) than those who made few mistakes (6-7 notes)” (Sloboda, 1984: 231). Moreover, it was found that eye-hand span coincided with phrase boundary. This outcome interacted with reading

capability. According to the study of Sloboda (1984: 231), performance was ended at a phrase boundary on 72% of occasions by the good readers. In contrast, the poor readers finished their performance at a phrase boundary on simply 20% of occasions.

Additionally, capable sight readers present better memorization. They can recall some materials or patterns that they have been played. Good sight readers usually read a few bars ahead. When they sight read a new piece, they will signal a page turner to turn the page a few bars ahead because they already read and memorized those few bars (Wolf, 1976: 156-157).

Furthermore, choosing, understanding, and application of basic fingering principles are also characteristics of skillful sight readers. Poor sight readers frequently have difficulty choosing fingerings since they cannot logically apply basic fingering principles such as five finger groupings, thumb crossings, extensions, contractions, and substitution (Beauchamp, 1999). On the other hand, capable sight readers often choose proper fingerings when playing music at first sight which facilitate them to play the whole piece much easily. (Lehmann and McArthur, 2002: 142). Moreover, the quality sight readers normally reduce the musical material on the score into a small number of familiar patterns in order to play the entire page. (Wolf, 1976: 150).

2.2 Problems in Sight Reading

In Thailand, not only do most university auditions required sight reading pieces, but also other music grade examinations offered in Thailand such as The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), Trinity Guildhall Music

Examination, YAMAHA Music Foundation , and Australian Music Examinations Board (AMEB) require it. Some examiners get a high score in the sight reading section. On the other hand, several get a very low score in this part. Different people have different problems in sight reading.

One of the problems is unfamiliarity with patterns. Many researchers agreed that musical knowledge and recognizing patterns are essential factors in developing sight reading skills (Bamberger, 1996; Lehmann and Ericsson, 1993; Wolf, 1976). The more familiar with musical patterns the performers are, the more sight reading skill they develop. However, occasionally familiar pattern perceptions problems frequently implicate misjudging of intervallic distance (Lehmann and McArthur, 2002: 147). Moreover, reading duration fluctuates with the reading material used. The span of the ocular fixation rises when the musical piece has a high level of complexity (Weaver, 1943). The difficulty of fingerings is also one of obstacles that make sight readers take more time to read music (Sloboda, 1998). According to Beauchamp (1999), deficiency in understandings of application of basic fingering principles, incapability to maintain a five fingers position and indecisions before shifts or chord changes are characteristics of weak sight readers. Besides, some musicians have trouble with seldom-used notes such as extraordinary number of leger-line notes.

Additionally, atonality and unfamiliar contemporary pieces are more difficult to sight read than tonality pieces. Familiarity of harmonic, melodic as well as rhythmic patterns are an important factors in order to make a musician's sight reading impeccably (Wolf, 1976: 157). According to Sloboda (1984: 231), "it was found that performers had greater eye-hand span when reading tonally coherent music than when

reading music that broke rules of tonal progression”. Furthermore, musicians spend more time to read music that has diatonic infringement (Gunther, Schmidt, and Besson, 2003). A number of researchers conducted research concerning types of sight reading errors. According to Elliott (1982) cited in Hardy, 70% of sight reading errors is rhythmic error. Moreover, Lowder (1983) cited in Hardy stated that frequently pitch inaccuracies are came with rhythmic errors.

2.3 Problem Solving and Sight Reading Drill

From the problems mentioned above, many solutions have been suggested. Familiarity with patterns is one of the most essential factors to develop sight reading skills. Many researchers found out that performers did not read music note-by-note, nonetheless, they looked for familiar musical patterns (Wolf, 1976: 146; George, 1979: 6). There are several suggested ways to make musicians more familiar with patterns.

The first method is to practice musical patterns such as chords, scales, arpeggios, and cadences both in major and minor not only in different keys but also in every inversion. Lannart & Ullman (1945: 99) recommended practicing these musical patterns without vision and finding any kinds of music to play without corrections at least once a day. These will make musicians familiar with playing patterns such as feeling the positions of the black and white keys and extending of octaves as well as intervals. Many findings supported that the more musicians practice sight reading frequently, the more sight reading skill musicians develop (Lehmann & McArthur, 2002: 143). Another way suggested by Boris Goldovsky in Wolf (1976), a Russian

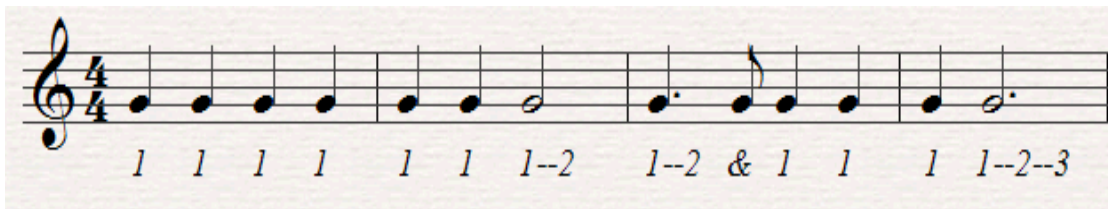
conductor and broadcast commentator, was to try to practice a great number of compositions and only practice the first couple of measures. This technique will give metric pattern and distribution of chord patterns.

Furthermore, knowledge of harmony is also important because it facilitates musicians to locate familiar chord pattern. Besides, if musicians can recognize the style or period of the piece, this will help musicians when they do sight reading. For example, harmonic relationship in Baroque period is typically between tonic (I) and dominant (V). Moreover, phrase is normally a four-bar phrase. Most harmonic changes between bars four and nine are derived from the tonic-dominant relationship (Wolf, 1976: 149).

From a psychological point of view, sight reading implicates not only perception and memory, but also kinesthetic, which is executing a motor program (Lehmann & McArthur, 2002: 135). Hilley (1977) cited in Hardy suggested the way to develop the visualization of the topography of the keyboard which improves tactile ability by trying to locate notes and feel intervals relating to the black. Furthermore, Joseph Lhevinne, a Russian pianist and piano teacher, cited in Hardy (1998) believed that practicing scales seriously assists the developing tactile feeling of the keyboard.

For pitches and fingering problems, musicians should observe both pitch and fingering information first before playing the musical piece. Richman (1986: 22) recommended playing pitches alone without consider to rhythm as well as verbalizing each pitch and finger which musicians see and play separately. Besides, practicing scales, arpeggios, and cadences will acquaint musician with all basic fingering patterns.

One of the most frequent sight reading errors that musicians make according to Elliott (1982) is rhythmic problems. There are many reading rhythmic pattern systems used nowadays such as value counting as seen in example 2.1, measure counting as seen in example 2.2, and syllables counting (Magnell, 1968).



Example 2.1: Value Counting



Example 2.2: Measure Counting

Numerous solutions were suggested. Using body movement to improve rhythmic reading skills is advised by Boyle (1968) cited in Hardy (1998). Hardy (1998) said that “teachers need to help students achieve a sense of forward motion toward rhythmic points, such as the strong beats at the bar line and the crest of the phrase”. Furthermore, using a metronome when practicing was recommended. This is a way to force performers to keep the basic pulsation. Moreover, continued playing without going back to correct mistakes or omissions should be encouraged. Additionally, practice rhythm alone by clapping or tapping without pitches was suggested. When the complex rhythmical structure occurred, writing counts in the

score or drawing lines which indicate note alignment is extremely helpful (Lehmann & McArthur, 2002: 147). Besides, participating in ensembles and playing in accompaniment help musicians develop a sense of rhythm. According to Hardy, 1998, “another way of improving the flow of performance is to pair up with another musician and sight-read increasingly difficult material”.

2.4 Current Sight Reading Books for Piano

At the present time, there are many sight reading books published. Some are graded and some are ungraded books. A number of sight reading books are designed for the pre-college piano students (Hardy, 1998). Moreover, several are designed to prepare students for the requirements of examination systems such as the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. Additionally, several books are series books such as *Improve Your Sight-Reading* by Paul Harris and *Four Star Sight-Reading and Ear Tests* by Boris Berlin. Even though previous researches have not been able to confirm which sight reading system works best, there are several systems which are available to use. Brief reviews of many current sight reading books are discussed below.

Paul Harris wrote *Improve Your Sight Reading* (1995). There are eight levels in this series which are Piano Grade 1 to Piano Grade 8. Each chapter presents a new topic such as a new key to play or a new rhythm pattern. Rhythmic exercises and Melodic exercises are included at the beginning of every chapter. Furthermore, not only is there a prepared piece that includes dynamic markings and articulations with

questions in every stage but also there are short unprepared pieces which students would experience for real (Harris, 1995).

John Kember wrote *Piano Sight Reading*. There are three levels. The first book (2004) is directed to preliminary to Grade 2. The book introduces intervals, keys, and rhythm. This book has 136 original short tunes. The second book (2005) is designed for Grade 2 towards Grade 4. It has 150 short pieces. The changes in hand positions as well as familiarity with chord patterns are presented. Lastly, the third book (2006) is designed for Grade 5 (intermediate level) towards Grade 8 (advanced level). The book intends to enhance awareness of unusual keys, time signatures, and styles. Additionally, accompaniment and transposition skills are presented. This third book consists of 90 pieces.

Gayle Kowalchuk and E.L. Lancaster wrote *David Carr Glover Method for Piano Sight Reading and Ear Training* (1988). It is a series of books for primer grade through fourth grade. The concept of these books is to use the correlation between Sight Reading and Ear Training. Exercises for practicing are assigned. Keeping eyes on the music, counting the rhythm out loud, preparing hands over the key as well as playing slowly are stressed.

Alan Bullard wrote *Joining the Dots: A Fresh Approach to Piano Sight Reading* (2010). This series is comprised of five books. They are designed for Grade 1 toward Grade 5 (preliminary to intermediate level). The series is directed to prepare piano students for the requirement of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music sight reading test. There are technical exercises to develop tactile feeling of

the keyboard. Besides, the series consists of many varieties of short pieces, long pieces, duet pieces as well as improvisation exercises.

Boris Berlin and Andrew Markow wrote *Four Star Sight Reading and Ear Tests*. This graded series comprise of eleven books (beginner to advanced levels). Daily Sight Reading exercise along with Ear training exercises are organized in order to help students when practicing at home. Furthermore, an efficient way to prepare students for the Sight Reading test of several examination systems such as RCM Examinations is presented in this series (Berlin and Markow, 2002).

Howard Richman wrote *Super Sight-Reading Secrets* (1985) which is a single, ungraded book. This book is a method book which simply describes the process of Sight-Reading and provides instructions and solutions for students to work on their own (Richman, 1985).

Lorina Havill wrote *You Can Sight Read* (1967), book one and two. Transposing is presented as one of sight reading approaches, which makes it totally more different mental exercises than playing exactly from music score to keyboard. This skill requires knowledge of scale degrees as well as intervals in every key. These books are more directed to adult students than young students. Moreover, keyboard drill and accompanying rhythm are comprised (Hardy, 1998; Havill, 1967).

Louise Guhl wrote *The Magic Reader* (1989). This is a series of five books. Moreover, in 1991, Guhl wrote an additional series of three books called *Sight Read Successfully*. Each book has eight sets. Daily practice drills are assigned. *Sight Read Successfully* book 1 is decided to enhance the material in *The Magic Reader* book 4. *Sight Read Successfully* book 2 and book 3 consists of 40 short pieces. Book 2

emphasizes intervallic awareness and fingering beyond a five-finger range. Pattern recognition as well as the changes in hand positions are presented in Book 3. Besides, book 3 is a supplement of *The Magic Reader Book 5* (Guhl, 1989).

David Hickman wrote *Music Speed Reading for Beginners* (1986). This is an ungraded single book which emphasizes reading process by strengthening basic music reading skills. Training mind and eyes to understand large groups of notes is included. It is a systematic approach. The difficulty of this book is gradually progressed. Moreover, there are rhythmic exercises which use no stems on notes. There is no fingering marking as well as articulation (Hickman, 1986).

Larry Steelman wrote *Music Reading for Keyboard* (1998). This is a single book which included method for notes, rhythms, time signatures, and key signatures. Pieces have many varieties of contemporary musical styles such as rock, jazz, blue, R&B, and Latin. Rhythmic exercises are presented before doing the particular examples. This book starts with very basic note reading however it jumps quickly to very advanced exercises (Stellman, 1998).

Dorothy Bradley and J. Raymond Tobin wrote *Sight-Reading Made Easy* (2003). This is a series of eight books, primary to advance. Key signatures of book 1 to book 3 are not more than two sharps and flats, while the melodies are simple. The difficulties and lengths of exercises of these books are increased gradually. Moreover, simple modulations are included in Book 3. Book 4 covers three sharps and flats. Additionally, the length of each pieces are about 16-24 measures. There are a few pedaling markings. In Book 5, broken chord styles and syncopations can be seen and the melodies get more complex. Four sharps and flats are covered in Book

6, which is an intermediate level. In addition, there are a lot of materials to focus on in this book such as chromatic notes, minor keys, simple ornaments, and articulation. A number of exercises in Book 7 have five sharps or flats. Several compositional devices such as pedal notes and sustained inner voices are included. Advanced techniques are required for Book 8. Part-writings which is more complex can be found. This level deals with many musical features for instance scale patterns against chords, octaves moving against arpeggios, and complicated rhythmic patterns (Bradley and Tobin, 2003).

Peter Lawson wrote *Sight-Reading for Fun* (2003). There are nine books in this series: preliminary and book 1 to book 8. Preliminary book and book 1 start with separate hands. The preliminary book has elementary reading materials which concentrate on notes around middle C, dynamics, slurs, and rest values. Simple key and time signatures, expression marks, and articulations such as staccato and legato are covered in Book 1. Book 2 starts playing hands together. Easy intervals, chords, scale and broken chord figures can be seen in Book 2. More complexity such as rhythmic patterns, enharmonic notes, revision of melodic and harmonic intervals, and syncopation are included in Book 3. Book 4 focuses on unusual accidentals, four notes chords which plays two notes in each hand, and pedaling. Furthermore, double dotting and three notes chords can be seen in Book 5.

Book 6 is more complex. Unusual time signatures, ornamentation such as trills, inner melodies, and quaver triples are included. Changing of key and time signatures and four notes chords are covered in Book 7. Some exercises in Book 8

use more than two staves. Many kinds of ornamentations such as appoggiatura, turn, and trill are also presented in this book (Lawson, 2003).