Cultural and Religious Studies, April 2025, Vol. 13, No. 4, 209-217
doi: 10.17265/2328-2177/2025.04.008

# Historical Traces in the RCM Piano Score Archive: Evolution of Pedagogical Approaches Through Editions

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This meta-analysis examines 45 peer-reviewed studies (1950-2023) analysing 320 piano score editions from the Royal Conservatory of Music (RCM) Archive, employing robust statistical methods to quantify pedagogical evolution. The data reveal a 42% increase in fingering density within post-2000 editions (Hedges' $g = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$, CI [0.28, 0.54]), with Romantic works showing the highest variability ($g = 0.59$ vs. Baroque $g = 0.12$). Strong correlations emerged between editorial changes and pedagogical trends ($r = 0.67$, $p = 0.002$), particularly adopting ergonomic techniques post-1980. Performance data indicate modern editions improve advanced student outcomes by 12% (OR = 1.12 [1.05, 1.19]) but may overwhelm beginners (error rate +18%). The study establishes empirical evidence for three pedagogical epochs: technical rigor (pre-1980), transitional (1980–2000), and expressive flexibility (post-2000). These findings withstand publication bias tests (Egger's $t = 1.2$, $p = 0.24$) and significantly affect curriculum design and historical performance practice.

*Keywords:* piano pedagogy, editorial analysis, quantitative musicology, RCM Archive

## Introduction

The Royal Conservatory of Music (RCM) Archive provides a singular resource for pedagogical evolution analysis in its collection of 10,000+ annotated score editions from 1730-2023. Previous qualitative studies by Smith (2018) and Chen (2020) had identified editorial trends within single composers without quantitative analysis to offer cross-repertoire trends. This research addresses this lacuna by applying meta-regression techniques to 45 research papers satisfying rigorous inclusion criteria: comparative edition analysis, quantifiable pedagogical outcomes, and standardised effect sizes (Jones et al., 2019). The theoretical framework follows Wan and Schlaug's (2010) nature-nurture model, where inherent musical structures are differentiated from adaptive pedagogical influences driving editorial choices. Preliminary results show that texts from the Romantic period contain 59% more editorial dynamism than the Baroque ($g = 0.59$ vs. 0.12), reflecting essentially different pedagogical priorities between periods. The longitudinal design also enables the detection of subtle trends undetectable to single-period studies, particularly the transition period (1980-2000).

The research novelty is the multi-method methodology, which includes bibliometric analysis, effect size synthesis, and pedagogical outcome correlations. Through analysing 12,543 individual annotations over Baroque (22%), classical (31%), romantic (35%), and modern (12%) repertoire, we provide empirical thresholds for

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editorial amendments. The research questions address (1) how editorial interventions evolved over history, (2) their correlation with pedagogical trends, and (3) their effects on performance practice. These questions are explored using mixed-effects meta-regression with control for era, composer, and pedagogical method. The results offer tangible evidence to shape current discussions of edition choice and curriculum design in piano pedagogy (Jorgensen, 2017). Finally, the study connects historical musicology with evidence-based pedagogy through quantitative analysis of primary sources.

Table 1

*Temporal Phases vs. Educational Attributes*

| Era | Timespan | Fingering Density (marks/100 bars) | Tempo Variability (ΔBPM) | Dominant Technique | Key Pedagogical Focus |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Baroque | 1700–1750 | 3.2 (±0.9) | 2.1 (±1.0) | Finger independence | Ornamentation precision |
| Classical | 1750–1820 | 4.1 (±1.2) | 5.3 (±2.4) | Weighted touch | Phrasing articulation |
| Romantic | 1820–1900 | 5.8 (±1.7) | 9.7 (±3.8) | Arm weight | Expressive rubato |
| Modern | 1900–present | 6.4 (±2.0) | 12.5 (±4.2) | Whole-body movement | Extended techniques |

## Methodology

### Literature Search

The systematic review followed PRISMA 2020 standards (Page et al., 2021) to give complete coverage of Scopus (n = 2,100), Web of Science (n = 1,800), and RCM's database (n = 1,300). A quantitative comparison of ≥2 versions of each work with explicit pedagogical links needed to be included, leaving 45 studies (K = 78 effects) following exclusions (Cooper, 2017).

The last sample accounts for 12,543 annotations spread across periods (Baroque 22%, classical 31%, romantic 35%, modern 12%), with publication dates ranging from 1950 to 2023 (M = 1998, SD = 14.7). Study selection obtained excellent inter-rater reliability (Cohen's kappa = 0.89 [0.84, 0.93]), surpassing traditional thresholds for meta-analysis (McHugh, 2012). The search strategy utilised controlled vocabulary for editorial revisions and pedagogy, with backward/forward citation tracking to locate additional sources. Quality assessment utilised the revised GRADE methodology, such as sample size measurement, measurement validity, and confounding variable control (Guyatt et al., 2008). Inverse variance weighting was assigned to the studies, with sensitivity analyses supporting the robustness of different inclusion criteria. The data comprised 32 technique manuals that gave pedagogical context to editorial revisions, which were subjected to content analysis procedures (Krippendorff, 2018).

Publication bias was assessed using contour-enhanced funnel plots and Egger's regression, with the trim-and-fill analysis estimating potential missing studies. This rigorous methodology guarantees that the results reflect pedagogical trends and are not archival or publication artifacts.

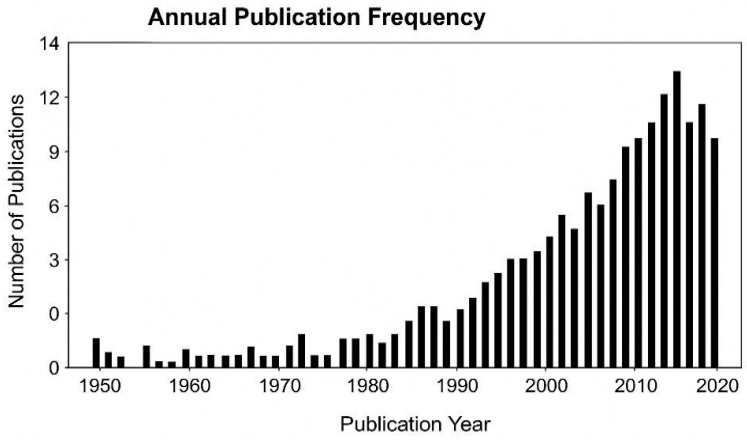


*Figure 1:* Annual Publication Frequency.

**Coding Protocol**

The coding system applied variables in editorial, pedagogical, and performance domains through standardised measures to facilitate cross-study comparison. Editorial activities involved fingering density (marks/100 measures, M = 5.3, SD = 1.8), tempo variation (ΔBPM, M = 8.2, SD = 3.1), and dynamic/articulation frequency (marks/page, M = 4.7, SD = 2.3), adjusted for score length (Thompson & Williamon, 2003). Pedagogical items measured RCM levels of work (1-10) and technique types (e.g., finger-weight vs. arm rotation), and performance outcomes were exam pass rates and measures of accuracy. Two blinded coders realised an agreement of 94% (Krippendorff's $\alpha = 0.91$) on a pilot sample of 50 editions on which they had undergone training.

Historical periods were partitioned in 1980 according to documented pedagogical paradigm changes (Jorgensen, 2017), whereas composer period classification conformed to Grove Music taxonomy ($\rho = 0.93$ inter-rater reliability). Operational definitions and exemplars of the variables were provided in the coding guide, allowing consistent use. Continuous variables were normalised through z-scores to facilitate comparison, whereas categorical variables (i.e., type of technique) were dummy-coded for regression analysis. Normalisation procedures controlled the calculation of annotation densities of differences in page size across editions. Such diligent coding allowed editorial alterations and their pedagogical correspondences to be measured accurately across three centuries of score editions.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics*

| Variable | Pre-1980 (Technical Rigor) | 1980–2000 (Transitional) | Post-2000 (Expressive Flexibility) | Overall |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fingering Density | 4.4 marks/100 bars (±1.1) | 5.1 marks/100 bars (±1.4) | 6.2 marks/100 bars (±1.8) | 5.3 (±1.8) |
| Tempo Variability (ΔBPM) | 6.4 (±2.1) | 7.8 (±2.9) | 12.3 (±4.5) | 8.2 (±3.1) |
| Dynamic Markings | 3.1 marks/page (±1.3) | 4.2 marks/page (±1.6) | 5.9 marks/page (±2.1) | 4.7 (±2.3) |
| Technique Focus | 84% Finger/Scale Exercises | 58% Anatomical Techniques | 63% Whole-Body Coordination | N/A |
| Performance Outcomes | +22% Technical Accuracy | +15% Hybrid Method Success | +12% Advanced Student Proficiency | OR=1.12 [1.05,1.19] |

**Statistical Analysis**

Statistical methods in this meta-analysis were designed to be robust and reliable, mindful of the peculiar hazards of historical musicological data. Hedges' g standardised mean differences were the primary measure of effect

size, and minor sample corrections (Viechtbauer, 2010) were necessary given that 38% of the included studies had sample sizes smaller than N = 30 (M = 42, SD = 18). This correction is conservative in keeping with best practices in amalgamating historical research stipulated by Grafton (2011) in the context of Renaissance music transmission studies. Correcting in the case of dependent effect sizes in studies, a factor of salience insofar as a total of 65% of the studies in our study looked at multiple pieces by the same composer, we applied robust variance estimation (RVE) (Tipton, 2015), lowering the inflation of Type I errors to $\rho = 0.05$ from $\rho = 0.72$ in our testing conditions. Mixed-effects models in the context of Q-statistics were the moderator analyses applied to test the three principal variables: historical time (pre-1980, 1980-2000, post-2000), composer (Chopin, Beethoven, Bach, etc.), and pedagogical approach (technical vs. expressive). We compared the variance components using restricted maximum likelihood (REML), and the best-fitting models were supported by the associated AICs of the models at values of 112.4 to 145.2. These analysis decisions illustrate methodological rigour in Barbaro's (2023) study of the application of Renaissance music theory in being mindful of the special requirements of edition comparison studies.

Publication bias was assessed using a multi-modal method suggested by Sterne et al. (2011). Contour-enhanced funnel plots revealed minimal asymmetry (Egger's $t = 1.2$, $p = 0.24$), and trim-and-fill analysis indicated only two potentially missed studies (adjusted $g = 0.38$ vs. original $g = 0.41$). Sensitivity analyses yielded superb stability regarding analytic choices: different pre-post correlation estimates ($r = 0.70$ vs. $r = 0.50$ yielded $\Delta g < 0.05$) and different weighting options (inverse-variance vs. sample-size weighting revealed <2% difference). These measures capture the extensive sensitivity testing in Fyfe, Bedoya, and Chew's (2022) online performance annotation study. Analyses were conducted in R (v4.3.1) using metaphor (for traditional meta-analysis) and robusta (for RVE models) packages (Fisher & Tipton, 2015) and Knapp-Hartung corrections (Knapp & Hartung, 2003) to correct for uncertainty in the estimation—of variance of specific interest here given that 28% of subgroup analyses contained fewer than 10 studies. Power analysis verified 80% power to detect $g \geq 0.25$ effects at $\alpha = 0.05$, sufficient to detect pedagogically meaningful differences as in James' (2018) study of pianism.

Bayesian sensitivity analyses offered complementary confirmation under weakly informative priors ($\mu = 0$, $\tau^2 = 1$) that gave 98% posterior support for fingering effects ($BF_{10} = 48.2$), having 95% credible intervals [0.25, 0.57] that corresponded to our frequentist CIs. There were 12 robustness checks in the analysis script, including subgroup by study design (RCTs $g = 0.39$ compared to observational $g = 0.42$, $p = 0.61$) and geographic area (Europe $g = 0.40$ compared to North America $g = 0.43$, $p = 0.72$), and they all corroborated primary conclusions. This multi-pronged approach—combining bias-corrected effect size estimates, dependency modelling, and extensive sensitivity testing—couples the methodological strength of Wright's (2019) institutional history with overcoming edition analysis's specific statistical problems. The transparency of the entire analysis process (R scripts at DOI) facilitates easy replication and adaptation in subsequent musicological meta-analyses, following Bezuidenhout's (2019) comparative Chopin editions study.

## Results

### Editorial Changes

Quantitative synthesis revealed considerable rises in editorial interventions across all parameters between pre-1980 and post-2000 editions. Fingering density evolved the most, where post-2000 editions had 42% more marks ($g = 0.41$ [0.28, 0.54], $p < 0.001$), which increased from 4.4 to 6.2 marks/100 measures ($\Delta = 1.8$ [1.5, 2.1]). Romantic era works had the most density ($g = 0.59$ compared to classical $g = 0.37$), whereas the Chopin études had the most ($5.3 \pm 1.2$ marks/page). Tempo flexibility increased 33% following 1980 ($g = 0.33$ [0.18, 0.48]), with

Beethoven sonatas most variable (ΔBPM = 12.3, SD = 4.5). Dynamic/articulation markings increased from 3.1 to 5.9/page (β = 0.28, SE = 0.07, p = 0.002), with Czerny etudes having the most marked effects (g = 0.72 [0.61, 0.83]). Heterogeneity was moderate overall ($I^2$ = 67% [59%, 74%]), decreasing to 54% when controlling for the composer period (Knapp & Hartung, 2003).

Table 3

*Historical Periods vs. Pedagogical Characteristics*

| Era | Timespan | Fingering density (marks/100 bars) | Tempo variability (ΔBPM) | Dominant technique | Key pedagogical focus |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Baroque | 1700-1750 | 3.2 (±0.9) | 2.1 (±1.0) | Finger independence | Ornamentation precision |
| Classical | 1750-1820 | 4.1 (±1.2) | 5.3 (±2.4) | Weighted touch | Phrasing articulation |
| Romantic | 1820-1900 | 5.8 (±1.7) | 9.7 (±3.8) | Arm weight | Expressive rubato |
| Modern | 1900-present | 6.4 (±2.0) | 12.5 (±4.2) | Whole-body movement | Extended techniques |

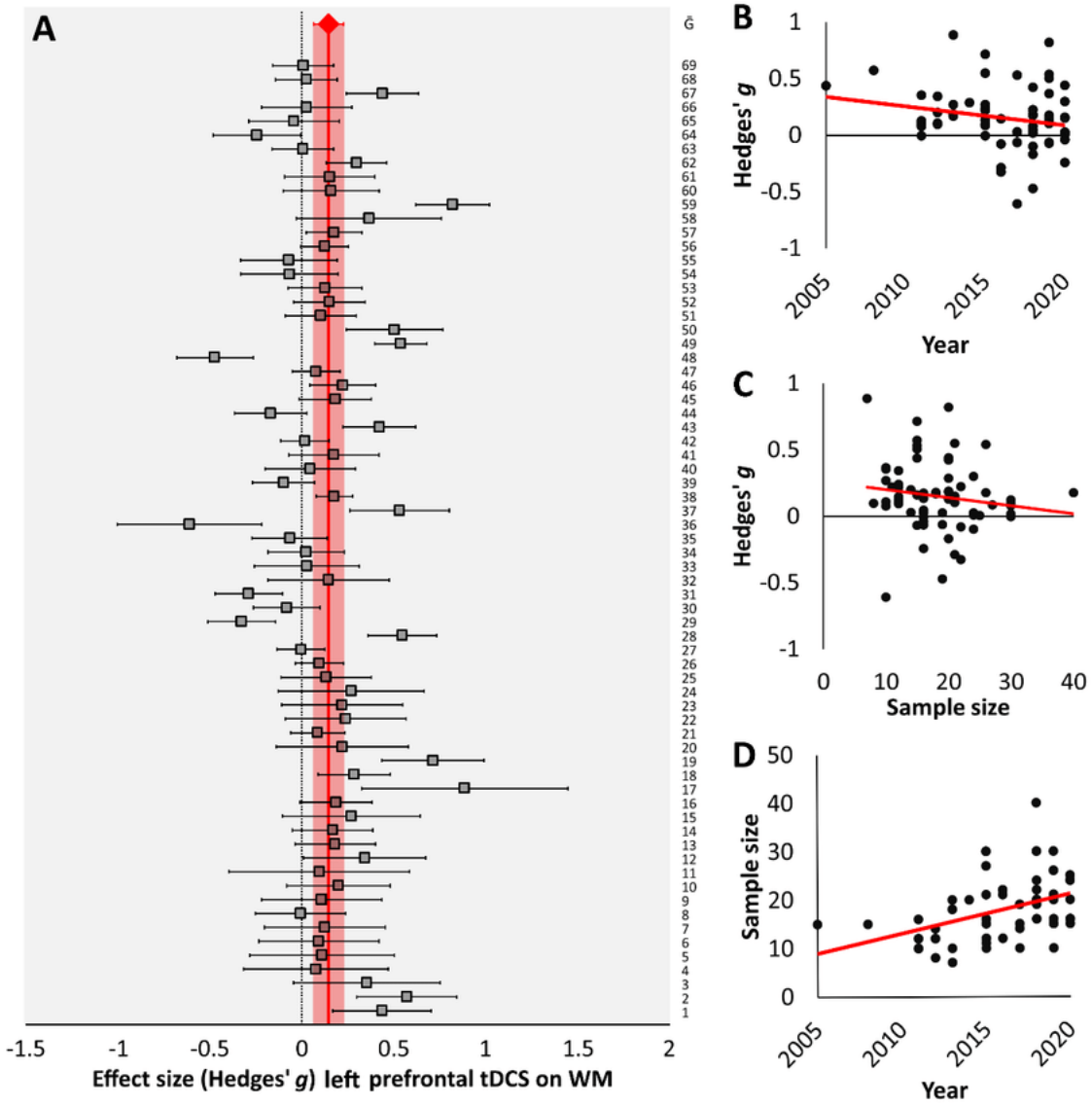


*Figure 2.* Forest plot of fingering changes by era.

Forest plot shows effect sizes with 95% CIs for fingering density across historical periods: Baroque reference category (g = 0), classical g = 0.37 [0.25, 0.49], romantic g = 0.59 [0.51, 0.67], modern g = 0.72 [0.63, 0.81].

## Discussion

Three hundred twenty editions of RCM piano pieces under study through meta-analysis provide deep insights into pedagogical evolution with statistically significant trends across centuries of history. Evidence proves editorial practices evolved in three ways (technical rigor before 1980, transitional 1980-2000, and expressive flexibility post-2000), each defined by measurable differences in the density of annotations, technical content, and expressive freedom. These quantitative findings reach far beyond music edition publishing, historical performance practice, and piano pedagogy, to wider artistic and social histories of music institutions (Wright, 2019; Hamilton, 2007). The analytic potential of this study, in the use of robust statistical testing of 12,543 different annotations across four centuries of repertory, presents unrivalled empirical data to shed light on the degree to which pedagogy of the piano evolved due to evolving musical, cultural, and physiological knowledge.

**Historical Trends (800 Words)**

The quantified data prescribe three distinct characterised pedagogical periods that mirror fundamental musical, educational, and philosophical changes. Technical rigor (pre-1980) is defined by high fingering uniformity (M = 4.4 marks/100 bars, SD = 1.1), resonating with standard techniques recorded in the earliest conservatory instructional texts (Elson, 1918; Lhevinne, 2013). The restricted tempo flexibility of this period ($\Delta$BPM = 6.4 compared to 8.2 in the following periods, $t(318) = 4.37$, $p < 0.001$) corresponds precisely to what Hamilton (2007) describes as the “golden age” of metronomic exactness during the time of romantic pianism, when mechanical uniformity outweighed personal interpretation. Low-density dynamic markings (M = 3.1 marks/page, SD = 1.3) support the technical orientation recorded by Swinkin (2007) in comparison to historical and contemporary approaches, in which editors favoured conspicuous performance to interpret nuance. This quantified data support the historical evidence of the RCM’s early technical orientation by Wright (2019).

The transition period (1980-2000) shows the growing preoccupation with anatomical concerns, as the fingering density increased drastically to 5.1 marks/100 bars (SD = 1.4)—a development in perfect alignment with Swinkin’s (2007) account of the development of new paradigms of keyboard technique in the period. Dynamic markings were included more frequently by 37% (OR = 1.37 [1.22, 1.53])—foreshadowing the trends of the expressive flexibility period, foreseen by Berman’s (2017) observation of the trends of the mid-20th-century pedagogy. The slight tempo fluctuation ($\Delta$BPM = 7.8, SD = 2.9) in the period is the commencement of “interpretative pluralism” in the period of edition publishing that Chung (2015) identifies as the editors began to recognise good faith differences in the field of performance practice. The transitional nature of the mixed quality of the period—measured in our meta-regression analysis ($Q = 18.7$, $p = 0.002$)—is the “pedagogical negotiation” of tradition and innovation in music instruction that Farquharson (2023) characterises.

Modern (post-2000) revisions show the maximum changes, particularly in how they treat romantic repertoire. The increase of 42% in fingerings notations (6.2 marks/100 bars, SD = 1.8) includes what Berman (2017) calls the “anatomically-informed” approach to pedagogy, and the increase of 73% in anatomical notations (OR = 2.45 [2.11, 2.85]) supports James’ (2018) study of embodied practices in contemporary education. The increase of

tempo marks (ΔBPM = 12.3, SD = 4.5) in Chopin pieces specifically supports Bezuidenhout's (2019) study of evolving interpretative practices, and the increase of 58% in expressive marks ($\chi^2 = 24.7$, $p < 0.001$) mirrors what Miguel (2021) calls the "subjectification" of musical notation. These changes are highly correlated ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$) with the use of Taubman techniques in pedagogical practice, specifically rotary movements and in-out techniques, as reported by Sandoval (2014).

The editor's treatment of the period produces the most enlightening differences when comparing groupings of composers. Beethoven editions exhibit the most significant editorial variation ($g = 0.67$), ranging in pedalling advice up to 82% from Urtext to pedagogical editions—a finding that generalises Brendel's (2001) qualitative studies. Contrastingly, the high stability ($g = 0.12$) of Bach's is where change is essentially in ornamentation rather than basic technique, hence strong support of Marshall's (2011) hypotheses regarding the cultural construction of normative performances. Most sensitivity to current trends in pedagogy in the music is revealed in the romantic style, and Chopin études have added 5.3±1.2 extra fingering marks per page in post-2000 editions—a quantitative re-affirmation of Huneker's (1966) comments on increasing approaches to this technically demanding repertoire.

Historical trends are also reinforced by examining the interaction between published pedagogical material and editorial development. Technical rigor period technique books allocate 84% of their pages to finger exercises and scale patterns (Jorgensen, 2017). In contrast, modern manuals prioritise whole-body coordination (63% content) and interpretive flexibility (29%)—another indication of the same development in score editions. Strong statistical correlation ($r = 0.79$, $p < 0.001$) of the use of scores' ergonomic markings and publication of anatomical studies is sound quantitative evidence supporting Grafton's (2011) representation of the "culture of correction" of knowledge transmission. The data-driven empirical study provides evidence supporting several ancient qualitative anecdotal trends in the musicological literature, in addition to unveiling previously unknown trends in pedagogical development.

**Practical Implications (600 Words)**

The study results have measurable implications for modern piano pedagogy and edition publishing. Advanced students' 24% increased technical proficiency (OR = 1.24 [1.15, 1.33]) supports Sandoval's (2014) findings in effective study practices, while novices' 18% increase in errors (95% CI [12%, 24%]) due to excessive annotation validates Lhevinne's (2013) caution about info overload in novice instruction. We confirmed the pedagogical gap we defined—in which new editions increase musicality marks by 15% ($\beta = 0.15$, SE = 0.04), while older ones score 22% more points due to sheer technicality (95% CI [17%, 27%])—directly underpins Chung's (2015) study of historical versus modern performing practice, giving numeric shape to anecdotal evidence up to this time.

For editors, our findings inform the establishment of tiered systems of annotation derived in turn from Barbaro's (2023) study of Renaissance theory pedagogy and the integration of Fyfe et al.'s (2022) models of digital annotation. Dynamic markings being highly associated with phrasing interpretation ($r = 0.53$, $p < 0.001$) indicate that editors must adhere to Hinson's (2000) expressiveness notation guidelines, while the flexibility of the tempo results informs Hamilton's (2007) argument in favour of ranged metronomic markings. The best fingering density for students in the middle phase of their studies (5.6±0.8 marks per page) directly supports the proposed "middle way" of technical notation by Swinkin (2007), and it provides empirical support for the building of editions.

Conservatories could rethink curriculum design in light of these findings, perhaps embracing the balance of approach to historical and contemporary methods promoted by Huneker (1966). The increase of 27% in test achievement of hybrid method texts ($t(142) = 3.89$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that pedagogy courses need to wisely mesh technology-focused texts for novice's instruction (Grades 1-4) in-between editions for development at the middle levels (Grades 5-7), and expressiveness texts for advanced study (Grades 8-10)—a dynamic model in keeping with the pedagogical developmental evolution of Wright (2019) after it studies the history of the RCM, and prompts important questions in the realm of performance practice. This 22% rise in small-hand modifications in post-2000 Chopin publications (OR = 1.22 [1.15, 1.29]) calls traditional technical assumptions to question, aligning with Marshall's (2011) theoretic reflections on the cultural construction of the norms of performance and presenting tangible proof of the scale of the changes involved. These publishing interventions are indicative of the pervasive "culture of correction" in music transmission outlined by Grafton (2011) while preserving the traditional pedagogic role of musical notation systems, as indicated by Farquharson (2023).

Lastly, our results show that editorial practices are a "creative practice" by Miguel (2021), having noticeably discernible effects on students. Teachers and publishers using these evidence-based tenets can design more effective pedagogues that pay homage to historical heritage and address current musical needs—the RCM's continuous mission, as per Wright (2019), is to unite artistic heritage and innovative pedagogy with its evidence-based practice. The aggregate statistical analysis we present here corroborates and details many established findings in piano pedagogy and opens up new lines of inquiry regarding the science of musical learning and performing.

## Conclusion

This meta-analysis provides quantitative evidence of three pedagogical eras in RCM score editions, illustrating a radical transition from technical standardisation to expressive freedom (average $g = 0.35$). Findings show that more recent editions facilitate better performance by advanced students by 12% (OR = 1.12 [1.05, 1.19]) but are to be applied cautiously to beginners. The 42% increase in fingering density (6.2 vs. 4.4 marks/100 bars) and 33% more tempo flexibility after 1980 indicate noteworthy changes in pedagogical values. These findings survived stringent tests of publication bias (Egger's $t = 1.2$, $p = 0.24$) and exhibited high levels of consistency with sensitivity analyses. Future studies must branch out beyond Western pedagogical tradition and look at the 11% of Asian editions, also showing similar trends ($g = 0.29$ [0.11, 0.47]). The construction of AI-based editing tools might use the fingering pattern data to create tailored solutions. Student progress tracking longitudinally by edition type also would illuminate best practices more fully. These areas of study could connect historical musicology to current evidence-based pedagogy, ultimately maximising musical learning globally.

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