



## A Study Model on the Importance of Chopin Etudes in Piano Training and Op. 10 No: 5

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### Abstract

Students who have piano training need to study on a regular basis using exercises and etudes at different levels in order to acquire and improve piano playing skills. The etudes, which are included in the piano literature and written by composers who are also piano trainers, aim to improve the physical capacity of the individual and thus reach the perfect musical presentation. In this research, an authentic and sample study model is used and it is aimed that the student acquires a perfect technique and outstanding performance when it is implemented correctly. The most effective materials to be used for achieving this target are the concert etudes. Frédéric Chopin is one of the most recognized composers with his concert etudes for the piano. Opus 10, No 5 G-flat Major etude, which is the subject of this article, is an etude which intermediate or higher level piano students can study and play. The main reason for selecting this etude is that many techniques which an advanced level piano student may need are used together. In the study model, focusing on the left and right hand separately, legato and staccato techniques, playing octaves, chords and arpeggios, using the black keys, finger and hand control, balance, using pedal, musical structure analysis and tempo control methods are used. It was observed that the students improve step by step when each technique is implemented correctly. In addition, the techniques learned and implemented in this etude are adapted by them to similar passages in other pieces that they study and it was determined that they received positive results. As a conclusion, studying this etude with the model suggested in this article will enable the piano students both to interpret this piece perfectly and make similar implementations in the pieces they will study in the future. It is also hoped that this research will cast light upon future studies on piano training and thus the success level of the piano students will be increased.

**Keywords:** Chopin etudes, piano training, piano study model, piano technique

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## Chopin Etütlerinin Piyano Eğitimindeki Önemi ve Op.10 No:5 Üzerine Bir Çalışma Modeli

### Öz

Piyano eğitimi alan öğrencilerin piyano çalma becerisini kazanmaları ve ilerletmeleri için değişik seviyelerde egzersiz ve etütler kullanılarak düzenli şekilde çalıştırılmaya ihtiyaçları vardır. Piyano literatüründe yer alan ve piyano eğitimcisi besteciler tarafından yazılmış çalışmalarda kişinin fiziki kapasitesinin geliştirilmesi ve bu sayede kusursuz müzikal sunuma ulaşmasının sağlanması amaçlanmıştır. Bu araştırmada özgün ve örnek bir çalışma modeli kullanılmış ve doğru şekilde uygulandığında öğrencinin kusursuz bir tekniğe ve üstün bir performansa ulaşması hedeflenmiştir. Bu hedefe ulaşmakta kullanılacak en verimli materyal konser etütleridir. Friederic Chopin piyano için yazdığı konser etütleri niteliğindeki çalışmalarıyla, dünyada en tanınan bestecilerin başında gelmektedir. Bu makaleye konu olan Opus 10, 5 numaralı sol bemol majör etüt, en az orta ve üstü piyano çalma becerisine erişmiş piyano öğrencilerinin çalışıp çalabileceği nitelikte bir etüttür. Bu etüdün seçilmesindeki ana sebep, ileri düzeye gelmiş bir piyano öğrencisinin ihtiyaç duyacağı pek çok tekniğin bir arada kullanılmış olmasıdır. Çalışma modelinde sağ ele ve sol ele ayrı ayrı odaklanma, legato, staccato teknikleri, oktav, akor ve arpej çalma, siyah tuşları kullanma, parmak ve el kontrolü, denge, pedal kullanma, müzikal yapı analizi ve tempo kontrolü yöntemleri kullanılmıştır. Her bir teknik doğru şekilde uygulandığında öğrencilerin adım adım ilerledikleri gözlenmiştir. Ayrıca bu etütte öğrenilip uygulanan teknikler, çalıştıkları başka eserlerdeki benzer pasajlara da kendileri tarafından uyarlanmış ve olumlu sonuç aldıkları belirlenmiştir. Sonuç olarak, piyano eğitimi alan tüm öğrencilerin bu etüdü bu makalede önerilen modelle çalışmalarını hem bu parçayı kusursuz düzeyde yorumlamalarına hem de gelecekte çalacakları diğer parçalarda benzer uygulamalar yapmalarına imkân verecektir. Bu çalışmanın piyano eğitimi için yapılacak yeni çalışmalara ışık tutacağı ve bu sayede gelecekte piyano eğitimi alan kişilerde başarıya ulaşma düzeyinin daha da artacağı umulmaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Chopin etütleri, piyano eğitimi, piyano çalışma modeli, piyano tekniği

## Introduction

The place of etudes in piano training has been equally important in every age and école. The etudes enable the pianist to fulfill his development in the most accurate and strongest sense and exhibit his skills in the best possible way as a result of these achievements. Étude is originally a French word (“Étude” in French, “Study” in English and “Studio” in Italian). It is the name of works which are written for an instrument and which aim to reveal the specifications of the instruments and exhibit the technical skills of the player. When writing etudes, mechanical factors are taken into consideration in order to increase the finger skills of the player. According to this definition, it might be concluded that etudes are exercises written for the piano. However, the most distinct feature of etudes which takes them one step further than exercises and differentiates them from exercises is that etudes have a musical form. In other words, etudes are composed as small pieces and they can be played in a few minutes.

Italian instrument maker Bartolomeo Cristofori laid the foundations of the modern piano in 1711 and manufactured the instrument which he named “piano e forte”. It took some time for piano to enter in our daily lives since it was new and expensive. The piano, which could be seen in major concert halls in the beginning, became more affordable and available as the time passes and the number of manufacturers increases. As the piano became popular, first examples of etudes have been written in late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Almost each composer who wrote etudes for the piano has put his stamp on the history as a great piano legend. Some of these people who explored the limits of the piano, developed methods for ensuring technical development and had their students study these methods with the exercises and etudes they have written, are Carl Czerny, Muzio Clementi, Johann Baptist Cramer, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, Ignaz Moscheles, Henri Bertini, Henri Herz, Friedrich Burgmüller and Stephen Heller. A great development was achieved in piano etudes by the help of the characteristics of the Romantic Era movement which occurred in early 19<sup>th</sup> century and the composers of the era and it took its new form named as “concert etudes”. Today, these etudes are preferred by the performers as essential elements of concert programs and they are enjoyed by the audience as well. Some of the most well-known composers of concert etudes are Frédéric Chopin, Franz Liszt, Johannes Brahms, Robert Schumann, Felix Mendelssohn, Camille Saint-Saëns, Moritz Moszkowski, Claude Debussy, Alexander Scriabin and Sergei Rachmaninoff.

Frédéric Chopin, who was born in Poland in 1810, composed many works in various musical forms in his short life of 39 years. Chopin’s works has taken piano music to a different dimension and he influenced the audience with the innovations he made in the music. Chopin’s works have been among the most popular works exercised and performed in professional piano training and performance. Chopin has written 27 etudes in 3 sets each of which is performed in concerts; Op. 10 No: 1-12, Op. 25 No: 1-12 and three more etudes entitled as "Trois nouvelles études" and which do not have Opus numbers. "Trois nouvelles études" were written as a contribution to a book written by Ignaz Moscheles and François-Joseph Fétis on teaching piano and presented as a gift. Although they are technically less elaborate

compared to other etudes, it is possible to see the harmonic and structural style of Chopin in these last three etudes.

### Study Model

In his slow and fast tempo etudes, Chopin used basic piano techniques such as arpeggio, chromatics, legato and staccato playing, outstanding voices, control on black keys, counterpoint, syncopé rhythms, broken chords, scales, reflex control in wide-ranged positions, thirds, acciaccatura, trills and octaves for both hands and turned these etudes into short pieces which are played in concerts and enjoyed by the audience. For that reason, Chopin's etudes are included in the curriculum of professional music school from all over the world as basic elements. Chopin composed the first 12 etudes in Op. 10 between 1829 and 1832 and published them in France, Germany and England in 1833 and composed the second group of 12 etudes in Op. 25 between 1832 and 1836 and published them in the same countries in 1837. Renowned French pianist and piano trainer Alfred Cortot has studied countless number of works of the piano literature and immortalized these studies in the books he published as editor. His study on the etudes of Chopin is one of his most important research and studies on this subject. In order to enable his students to play these etudes on an ideal level, Cortot created some authentic exercises based on the passages in the work. These exercises, which are based on increasing the finger strength, agility and speed skills, benefit the student not only in these etudes but also in all piano pieces with similar passages.

The etude selected as the subject of this article is Chopin's Opus 10, No 5 G-flat Major. When selecting this etude, abovementioned technical features were taken into consideration and this etude was selected as the etude in which most of these features can be exhibited. In the study model, etude will be discussed from 2 perspectives and both perspectives will need to be studied separately. First of these studies is technical study and the second one is musical study. After the technical and musical studies are done separately, the aimed playing level will be achieved with a final reinforcement study in which both studies are performed together.

Technical study begins with technical analysis. Harmonic framework is created with the chords on the bass voices in the left hand which generally follow octaves. Although both octaves and chords are written as staccato, they will be heard as legato when the marked pedals are applied. One example can be seen in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> bars in Figure 1 (See Figure 1).

2 (16)

Chopin's Werke. Op. 10. N<sup>o</sup> 5. Band II. N<sup>o</sup> 5.

*Vivace. ♩ = 116.  
Brillante.*

*legato*

**Etude V.**

Figure 1. The staccatos in the left hand of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> bars will be heard as legato when they are played with pedal. (Chopin's Werke Band II Etuden – Breitkopf Edition).

The octaves in the left hand beginning at the end of 24<sup>th</sup> bar and continues up to the end of 30<sup>th</sup> bar are played with legato technique in dual and triple groups (See Figure 2).

(17) 3

Figure 2. Between 24<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> bars, legato technique is used in the left hand in dual, triple groups (Chopin's Werke Band II Etuden – Breitkopf Edition).

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A-flat pedal voice which will be heard in the left hand for 8 bars beginning from the 33<sup>rd</sup> bar settles with the D-flat voice in the 41<sup>st</sup> bar. (See Figure 3).

The image shows three systems of musical notation for Chopin's Etude Op. 10 No. 5. The first system covers measures 32-34, the second covers measures 35-37, and the third covers measures 38-41. The notation includes treble and bass staves with various musical markings such as 'sempre legatissimo', 'dim.', and 'p'. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above notes. Pedal markings are shown as 'p' with a wavy line. Asterisks are placed below the bass staff in measures 34, 37, and 41. A double bar line is present at the end of measure 41.

Figure 3. A-flat pedal voice between the 33<sup>rd</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> bars settles with the D-flat voice in the 41<sup>st</sup> bar. (Chopin's Werke Band II Etuden – Breitkopf Edition).

Syncopé and legato chords in the left hand for 8 bars beginning from the 41<sup>st</sup> bar are a bridge to the first theme to be heard in the 49<sup>th</sup> bar. (See Figure 4).

4 (18)

The image shows two systems of musical notation for Chopin's Etude Op. 10 No. 5, starting from measure 41. The first system covers measures 41-44, and the second system covers measures 45-48. The notation includes treble and bass staves with various musical markings such as 'p', 'cresc.', and 'p'. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above notes. Pedal markings are shown as 'p' with a wavy line. Asterisks are placed below the bass staff in measures 42, 44, 47, and 48. A double bar line is present at the end of measure 48.

Figure 4. A bridge between the 41<sup>st</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> scales returning to the main theme to be heard again in the 49<sup>th</sup> bar. (Chopin's Werke Band II Etuden – Breitkopf Edition).

Legato chords are seen in the left hand from the 67<sup>th</sup> bar to the 78<sup>th</sup> bar, which is the beginning of the Coda (See Figure 5)

The image shows three systems of musical notation for Chopin's Etude Op. 10 No. 5, measures 66 through 78. The top system (measures 66-69) features a right hand with sixteenth-note runs and a left hand with chords. The middle system (measures 70-73) continues the right hand's pattern while the left hand maintains a steady chordal accompaniment. The bottom system (measures 74-78) shows the right hand's pattern becoming more complex with some triplets, while the left hand's chords remain prominent. Performance markings include 'a tempo' at the start, 'p' (piano) in the left hand, and 'poco cresc.' (poco crescendo) in the right hand.

Figure 5. Between the 67<sup>th</sup> and 78<sup>th</sup> bars, the chords which will be played as legato in the left hand are seen (Chopin's Werke Band II Etuden – Breitkopf Edition).

Sixteenth triplets which go parallel with the right hand between 79<sup>th</sup> and 82<sup>nd</sup> bars, sixteenth triplet octaves in 83<sup>rd</sup> bar which are parallel in both hands and the main tone (G-flat major) which is heard with octave and broken chords in the 84<sup>th</sup> and 85<sup>th</sup> bars, last two bars of the piece constitute the last step of Coda (See Figure 6).

The image shows two systems of musical notation for the Coda of Chopin's Etude Op. 10 No. 5, measures 78 through 88. The top system (measures 78-81) features a right hand with sixteenth-note triplets and a left hand with chords. The bottom system (measures 82-88) shows the right hand with sixteenth-note triplets and the left hand with chords. Performance markings include 'ff' (fortissimo) and 'cresc.' (crescendo).

Figure 6. In the Coda between the 79<sup>th</sup> and 88<sup>th</sup> bars, there is a left hand which is different than the rest of the piece (Chopin's Werke Band II Etuden – Breitkopf Edition).

After the technical analysis of the left hand, technical analysis of the right hand is made. The most distinct and characteristic feature of the right hand is that it is played on the black keys. For that reason, the etude is known as “Black Key Étude”. Except for the quarter F note in the second beat of the 66<sup>th</sup> bar, the right hand is played on the black keys throughout the etude. It is written as sixteenth triplet notes and arpeggios within one octave at the most. Although it is heard within the tone, (G-flat Major) is a pentatonic scale.

It is possible to see the most distinct form of this in the descending octaves starting in the 83<sup>rd</sup> bar and ending in the first beat of the 84<sup>th</sup> bar. Technically, the subject to be reviewed is musical terminology. Generally, we see ordinary terms and nuances. “Delicato smorz”, which is written only in the 65<sup>th</sup> bar, emphasizes that the sound should fade out. “Vivace Brillante”, which is written at the beginning of the etude, gives us an idea about the overall speed and character. When the etude reaches the ideal level, it will be played very fast and brilliantly.

After the technical analysis is completed, technical study starts. First thing to do at this point is to determine and learn the fingerings of both hands separately. Fingering written above the notes in exercises and etudes are written for certain purposes. The basic approach is to improve the piano playing skills. For that reason, not to make changes in the fingerings would be right and more useful. However, considering concert etudes in general and Chopin’s etudes especially, it would be a more accurate approach for the pianist to find the most ergonomic fingering according to his hand’s physical structure. It should not be forgotten that these etudes do not only aim to study but also that the pianist makes a repertoire and exhibits this repertoire on the stage.

After necessary arrangements are made in the fingerings, it is time for studies specific to the right hand and the left hand. Our brain controls and coordinates the organs in our body. One of the most basic problems encountered while playing a piece is that the speed of our brain and hand are not parallel and compliant. If one of these is faster or slower, the ideal playing does not take place. The most practical way to ensure this is to slow down the faster one (Usually it is unintentionally the fingers). In other words, studies should be carried out in a slow tempo. After necessary studies are completed and the compliance between the brain and the fingers is achieved, acceleration study will be made. Studying the left hand with the right pedal is necessary for both learning the harmonic structure and reinforcing the staccato and legato passages.

Another study to be made with the left hand aims to strengthen reflexes. First, single and octave voices in the basses of the entire etude are studied separately. Then the chords between those basses are studied separately. As the final stage of this reflex study, moving from basses to chords and return to basses from chords are reinforced bar by bar. Thus, the left hand acquires the automatic motion skill required for this etude. Root position and inversions of the main tone chord in the left hand between 79<sup>th</sup> and 82<sup>th</sup> bars is seen as ascending arpeggio in the wide-ranged position. When studying this passage which consists of sixteenth triplets in each eighth beat, it would be useful to study by waiting at the first notes of the triplets at first, then waiting at the second notes and finally waiting at the third notes longer than necessary. This study should be made by keeping in tempo.

Before the technical study on the right hand, it would be good to take a fact into consideration. Our fingers do not have the same strength and skills due to their physical features. The fact that a person's hand structure is small or large plays an important role in the occurrence of this problem. The best way to overcome this problem is to practice the etudes and exercises. The most disadvantageous finger in this etude is the first finger of the right hand, because it plays the black keys in the inner part of the keyboard as the shortest finger of the hand. For that reason, when playing the etude in the real tempo, missed or misplayed keys may be encountered. While there are three joints in each of other four fingers, the thumb has two joints. As only the tip of the thumb touches the key, it must be ensured that the entire joint touches the key in order to solve these problems. In order to implement this technique completely, enough weight should be given to this finger (to the left side) where this finger is used. Next study for the right hand is learning and implementing patterns.

This etude can be divided into groups in double bars in accordance with this study. In each group, all voices which fit in five fingers are played together. "Fit in five fingers" refers to the situations in which the hand remains motionless in the same position. Sometimes 1 or 2 voices/fingers or sometimes 3 or 4 voices/fingers will be involved in this position. Each double bar group will need to be studied by repeating multiple times. First few times are for learning. Both the sounds, harmonic structure, fingerings and hand position is learned and perception of the ear is increased. At this point, it is not obligatory to implement the time values of the notes. Not being in tempo would provide more useful results. It must be studied in the slowest possible tempo.

The aim in the next stage is to learn and implement the finger transitions among changing positions. When doing this, time values of the notes should be considered and the tempo should be remained provided that it is slow. By the help of this study, control over the reflexes and the passage will be achieved and abovementioned parallelism and compliance between the brain and the fingers would be approximated. Repeating this study which is performed in double bars by doubling the number of bars each time is important in terms of providing integrity (2+2, 4+4, 8+8, etc.). When the player reaches the level of playing the entire etude by doing this study, the parallelism and compliance between the brain and the finger would be achieved. At that point, it is recommended to repeat adequately from slow tempo to the ideal fast tempo in order that the brain and the fingers keep up with the speed of the piece at the same time.

Another problem which may occur in the right hand study due to physical structure of the hand and technical incapability is the lack of strength in the 4<sup>th</sup> finger and the shortness of the 5<sup>th</sup> finger. In order to overcome this problem, it would be useful to keep the four fingers other than the thumb in line on the keys as much as possible. In addition, the keys which coincide with these fingers should be studied by playing with great articulation. The technical control and reinforcement stage follows the technical study carried on both hands separately. At this stage, both hands are studied together but in a slow tempo.

When gaining control on both hands, there is a risk that the parallelism between the brain and the fingers may be disturbed. For that reason, it is necessary to study at

the slowest possible tempo. The brain coordinates all the studies implemented previously for both hands. If previous studies were carried out accurately and completely, everything would be alright. If a fault is noticed at any point, it is necessary to stop and the study related to this fault should be repeated. In the technical studies carried out with hands separate and together, nuances should be taken into consideration. It should be played as mezzo-forte or a bit more loudness.

Musical study will start with musical analysis. Breitkopf edition score which is taken as an example in this article is an Urtext score. As is known, Urtext scores are the notes which are copied from the original handwriting of the composer as much as possible and on which no changes and additions are made. Therefore, using Urtext score when studying is quite important in terms of conceiving the thoughts and expectations of the composer.

As the interpretation skills will be involved in the final stage, first the piece should be conceived accurately and then it should be interpreted. It is possible to approach to the piece as a story and divide it into three as introduction, body and conclusion. First 16 bars are the introduction. The body which consists of 32 bars follows the introduction which reveals itself slowly and with small fluctuations (Bars: 17-48). With “poco e poco cresc.” (little louder gradually) in the 25<sup>th</sup> bar, the story reaches its peak in 33<sup>rd</sup> bar. Descending from the peak will take 16 bars. First theme is reached in the 49<sup>th</sup> bar again.

Between the 49<sup>th</sup> and 66<sup>th</sup> bars, the conclusion goes as an overall summary of the story and relatively slower. Between 67<sup>th</sup> and 82<sup>nd</sup> bars, the part is seen which is called as “Coda” and in which final words are spoken. As we think that the story is finished, in the last three bars (83, 84 and 85) the piece is concluded with an unexpected surprise finale (with a loud and brilliant playing).

After the musical analysis is completed, it is time for musical study. The primary aim is to connect the sentences in the natural flow. It is necessary to prepare the transition between the introduction, body and conclusion without any disconnections.

These studies should be in ideal tempo or close to the ideal tempo in order to internalize the philosophy of the piece and reveal its character. After the integrity is achieved in the overall expression, a few small touches might be added. For example, by making the legato chords and legato octaves in the left hand in the body more prominent compared to the right hand, it is possible to enrich the interpretation.

After all necessary studies are completed; all targeted behaviors would be automatized. Next stage is providing and sustaining the playing condition. At this point, the etude should be played in the ideal tempo and form and if any problem is encountered during performance, it must be understood that this subject was not studied adequately and necessary study should be repeated. In the final stage, the etude should be repeated for a few times and both physical strength should be increased and sustaining the ideal level should be aimed. It should not be forgotten that the more the piece is played the better it becomes.

### **Conclusion**

Due to the way it is written, Chopin's piano etude Op. 10 No. 5 allows exhibiting most of the technical skills in the piano. This etude, which has been studied since the date it was written and will be studied in the future, has a great importance in piano training. It has the characteristics of the Romantic Era and it is frequently included in concert programs due to its nature as a concert etude. The fact that it is among the most played pieces throughout the history can be mentioned as an indicator that it gets attention of the audience.

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