

CONSTRUCTING THE ADVANCED GUZHENG GUIDEBOOK FOR TEACHING 4TH-YEAR
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Article History

Received 06-12-2023; Revised: 20-09-2025; Accepted: 21-09-2025

<https://doi.org/10.14456/issc.2025.54>

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Guzheng is an ancient Chinese string instrument with over 2,500 years of history. Known for its soft and melodious sound, it is played by plucking strings and remains a symbol of Chinese music with growing global recognition. **Objective:** (1) To study the technique of playing advanced Guzheng. (2) To construct the advanced Guzheng Guidebook. (3) To experiment teaching by using advanced Guzheng Guidebook. (4) To find out the advanced Guzheng Guidebook. **Method:** This mixed-methods study involved interviews with experts and a teaching experiment using an advanced Guzheng guidebook with 16 fourth-year music students. Learning outcomes were assessed through formative and summative tests. **Results:** The use of the advanced Guzheng guidebook with 16 fourth-year students proved effective in enhancing both technical skills and musical expression. Post-test scores increased by an average of 24.8% compared to pre-test scores, indicating the guidebook's suitability for instructional use. **Conclusion:** The study indicates that fourth-year students showed significant improvement in Guzheng performance skills after instruction using the Advanced Guzheng Guidebook, which is specifically designed for their level. The guidebook effectively enhanced both technical proficiency and musical expressiveness. These findings suggest the potential for adopting the Advanced Guzheng Guidebook in other educational institutions or individual learning contexts.

Keywords: Fourth-year students; Guzheng; Advanced technique; Music; Conservatory of Music; Hubei University of Engineering.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The guzheng is an ancient Chinese plucked instrument with a history spanning over 2,000 years. It has evolved significantly in both structure and performance style—from the original 12-string design to the modern 21-string version—enhancing its range, volume, and expressive capacity (Yao Ningxin, 2014). The guzheng is widely performed as a solo instrument, in ensembles, and within orchestras, and has become a prominent musical symbol of Chinese culture, especially since its formal introduction into music colleges and universities in the late 20th century (Shaofen Tang, 2020).

The continuous development of Guzheng music, driven by collaboration between folk and professional musicians, has led to many new works. However, disparities still exist across regions, institutions, and teaching methods (Lang Juanjuan, 2018). For example, the Conservatory of Music at Hubei University of Engineering focuses on training versatile music teachers, offering Guzheng as an elective in early years and a major course later. Despite students' rapid technical progress, teaching materials have not kept up; pieces like "Fishing Boat Sings Evening," once advanced in the 1980s, are now commonly played by beginners. This highlights the need for more progressive compositions, targeted etudes, and a well-structured guidebook system aligned with different educational levels (Qiyao, 2017).

Since the guzheng was introduced into higher education in the 1950s, teaching methods have shifted from the traditional master-apprentice model to more formal and structured approaches, including one-on-one and group lessons supported by guidebooks (Mahui, 2008). However, current guidebooks mainly consist of music collections, with a scarcity of technical etudes and advanced performance materials, reflecting a lack of systematization, clear grading, and alignment with learners' evolving needs. To address these challenges, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China issued guidelines promoting the development of higher education guidebooks that integrate information technology, align with national talent development strategies, and produce high-quality, logically structured, and innovative materials tailored to each discipline (The Chinese Ministry of Education, 2019). High-quality guidebooks are essential for enhancing university teaching standards, as without timely updates and originality, the overall quality of education may decline (Dong Qi, 2020). Therefore, this research underscores the urgent need to develop a modern, systematic, and level-appropriate guidebook system for advanced guzheng education in universities to support both technical advancement and the sustainable development of Chinese ethnic music education.

2. OBJECTIVES

1. To study the technique of playing advanced Guzheng.
2. To construct the advanced Guzheng Guidebook.
3. To experiment teaching by using advanced Guzheng Guidebook.
4. To find out the advanced Guzheng Guidebook.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Overview of the Guzheng and Its Role in Chinese Music

The guzheng is a traditional Chinese plucked zither with a history of over 2,000 years, originating during the Qin dynasty (Li, 2018). It has evolved from a 13-string instrument to the modern 21-string version, enhancing its tonal range and technical capabilities (Zhang, 2020). Historically used in royal courts, the guzheng later became central in folk music and solo performance (Wong, 2017).

In traditional music, the guzheng is known for expressive techniques that mimic natural sounds, seen in pieces like “Gaoshan Liushui” and “Hanya Xishui” (Cheng, 2015). In contemporary contexts, it is integrated into jazz, pop, and electronic music, with modern performers using digital effects and collaborating with Western ensembles (Liu, 2021). This versatility has sustained its relevance among younger musicians and on international stages (Sun & Yang, 2020).

3.2 Technical and Artistic Development of Advanced Guzheng Performance

Advanced Guzheng Techniques

Advanced guzheng performance requires continuous and intensive training focusing on refined technical skills. These include speed, accuracy, dynamic control, and coordination between the left and right hands. The essential advanced techniques can be categorized into three main groups:

Right-Hand Techniques

The right hand is primarily responsible for plucking the strings to produce sound. Common complex techniques at an advanced level include rapid alternating plucking with the fingers, continuous circular plucking using multiple fingers, and quick, sharp plucking motions to produce precise rhythmic effects (Liu, 2019).

Left-Hand Techniques

The left-hand controls pitch, volume, and creates special sound effects. Advanced left-hand techniques include pressing the strings to alter pitch, sliding between notes to produce smooth glissandos, and vibrating the strings to generate vibrato effects, enriching the tonal quality and expressiveness of the performance (Zhao, 2021).

3.3 Pedagogical Approaches in Guzheng Instruction

Guzheng Instruction in Chinese Conservatories

The instruction of guzheng in Chinese conservatories is recognized as one of the most structured and rigorous systems in traditional Chinese music education. It is designed to cultivate professional performers, scholars, and experts in traditional music, who possess both practical performance skills and theoretical understanding (Li & Chen, 2019). At leading institutions such as the China Conservatory of Music, the Central Conservatory of Music, and Hubei Engineering University, the guzheng curriculum includes solo and ensemble performance, music analysis, music history, and relevant theoretical subjects. Students undergo both individual and group instruction, with emphasis on technical mastery, interpretative development, and critical self-reflection (Zhang, 2020).

Another core aspect of this system is the emphasis on close teacher-student relationships. These relationships are based on a mentorship model that prioritizes individualized guidance, long-term mentorship, and the transmission of professional experience from master to student (Wang, 2018).

Learner-Centered Pedagogy

Over the past two decades, music institutions in China have increasingly shifted from teacher-centered to learner-centered approaches. This change reflects broader global educational reforms that emphasize active learning and student autonomy (Luo, 2021).

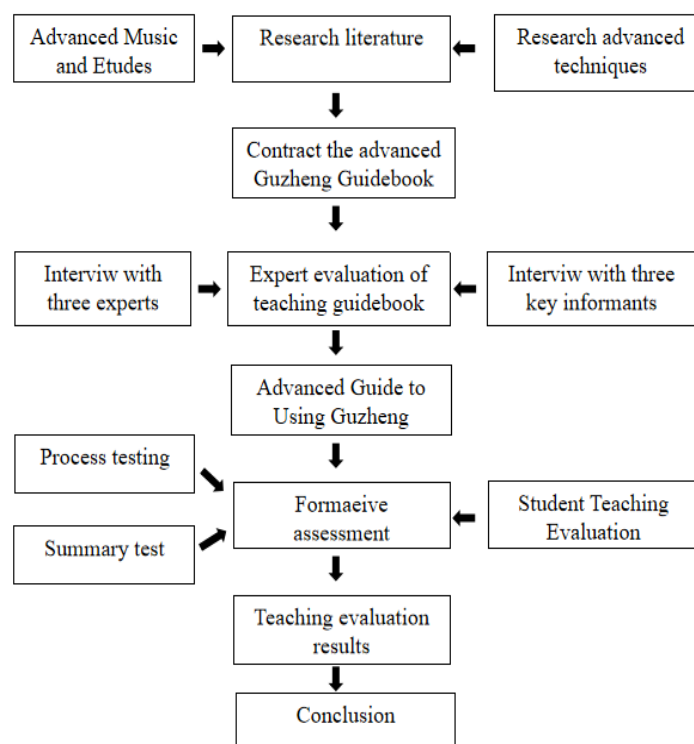
In guzheng instruction, learner-centered pedagogy encourages students to participate in setting their learning goals, planning their practice routines, and identifying areas for improvement. Teachers serve as facilitators rather than authoritative sources of knowledge, guiding students in their self-directed musical development (Sun & Huang, 2022).

This approach fosters intrinsic motivation, critical thinking, and creativity. It also enhances students' ability to connect their musical learning with broader cultural and artistic contexts, preparing them not only as performers but as culturally literate artists.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



5. METHODOLOGY

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to develop and evaluate the advanced guzheng guidebook tailored for fourth-year students at the conservatory of music, hubei engineering university.

Qualitative research:

qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with three key informants, including experienced guzheng instructors and experts in music education. These interviews aimed to gather insights on current teaching practices, challenges, and essential components required in an advanced guidebook. Additionally, expert feedback was solicited to refine the guidebook content and structure.

Quantitative research:

The quantitative phase involved a teaching experiment conducted with a sample of 16 fourth-year music students enrolled in the conservatory of music. The newly developed advanced guzheng guidebook was implemented over a 16-week semester. Students underwent formative assessments, including pre-tests and mid-term evaluations, and a summative final test to measure improvements in technical proficiency and musical expressiveness.

Data analysis:

Qualitative data were analyzed thematically to identify key themes and recommendations for guidebook development. Quantitative data were statistically analyzed to evaluate the effectiveness of the guidebook in improving students' performance skills.

This mixed-methods design allowed for a comprehensive understanding of both the theoretical requirements and practical outcomes of the guidebook, ensuring its relevance and effectiveness in advanced guzheng education.

6. RESULTS

The evaluation in this research employed a 5-point Likert rating scale, a widely used tool for assessing quality or satisfaction levels. The scoring criteria are as follows:

5 (Excellent) indicates outstanding quality or results, exceeding expectations.

4 (Good) indicates that the quality meets expectations.

3 (Fair) indicates acceptable quality, but there are aspects that need improvement.

2 (Poor) indicates performance below expectations and requires improvement.

1 (Very Poor) indicates that the result does not meet the set standards or goals and requires significant development.

Experiment

The developed guidebook was tested with 16 students at a music conservatory. Data from the experiment were collected, analyzed, and summarized.

The experimental results found that:

1. Advanced Guzheng Techniques

Playing the guzheng at an advanced level requires precise control and refined skills with both hands.

Key techniques include:

Tremolo: Rapid finger plucking to produce continuous sound

Scraping: One-direction plucking that creates a flowing, water-like sound

Pitch Bending: Pressing the string to bend the pitch and add emotion

Sliding: Gliding the finger on the string for a smooth, expressive tone

Hand Coordination: Complex interplay between both hands

Multi-Finger Techniques: Using multiple fingers to create rich rhythms and textures.

These techniques allow the guzheng to express deeper emotions and a wider range of musical expression.

2. Teaching Methods of Guzheng for Fourth-Year Conservatory Students

Teaching Guzheng to fourth-year students at a conservatory should focus on refining advanced techniques, musical interpretation, and professional performance preparation.

Development of Advanced Techniques

At this level, students should already have a strong technical foundation. Instruction should emphasize advanced skills such as left-hand techniques (e.g., sliding and pitch bending), rapid plucking (tremolo), complex finger coordination, and tuning/key modulation during performance.

Musical Analysis and Interpretation

Teachers should encourage students to study both classical and contemporary Chinese pieces. Emphasis should be placed on emotional interpretation, understanding historical and cultural context, and analyzing musical structure.

Performance and Research Preparation

Students should be guided in preparing for solo recitals and final exams with a professional standard. They should also be encouraged to conduct academic research, such as exploring the evolution of Guzheng techniques or comparing styles of prominent performers.

Effective teaching at the fourth-year conservatory level combines technical mastery, academic inquiry, and performance readiness—preparing students for careers as professional musicians or educators with deep musical insight.

3. The development of an Advanced Guzheng Guidebook for fourth-year music students

Involves compiling in-depth content on advanced performance techniques, musical analysis, performance preparation, and academic knowledge. This guidebook serves as a reference for higher education teaching, helping students progress toward professional-level skills and a deep understanding of Chinese music.

It includes the following content: The content of the guidebook includes: Guzheng advanced guidebooks for fourth students 6 Unit and 3 songs

4. The experimental results from the pre-test and post-test

Researchers have developed a systematic advanced teaching material for guzheng performance, consisting of an overview of advanced performance techniques for guzheng, the performance techniques and musical expression of the music piece “Lin’an Regret”, the performance techniques and musical expression of the music piece “Love Spring Wind”, and the performance techniques and musical expression of the music piece “Dusk Mountain”.

Table 1

Comparison of the results of the Pre-test and final test

	Pre-test (5)	Final test(5)
S1	3	4
S2	2	4
S3	4	5
S4	3	4
S5	3	4
S6	4	5
S7	3	4
S8	3	3
S9	2	4
S10	4	4
S11	3	4
S12	2	3
S13	3	4
S14	4	5
S15	3	4
S16	3	4
Assessment results	3.06	4.3
Percentage	61.2%	86%

The experiment results shown in the table indicate that the average score for the Pre-test was 61.2%, while the average score for the Final test was 86%. The Final test score was 24.8% higher than the Pre-test. These results demonstrate that the advanced Guzheng Guidebook is a significantly effective teaching material.

7. DISCUSSIONS

Although the Advanced Guzheng Guidebook developed in this study presents a certain level of difficulty due to its focus on advanced techniques and complex repertoire requiring both technical mastery and emotional expression, having clear learning objectives plays a crucial role in aligning student interest with the learning content.

When students clearly understand the goals of studying Guzheng—such as improving performance techniques, expanding their musical repertoire, and gaining insight into the historical and cultural context of Guzheng music—they tend to show greater motivation and engagement in the learning process. This finding aligns with Deci and Ryan’s (2000) self-determination theory, which posits that clearly defined goals are positively correlated with intrinsic motivation and sustained academic interest.

Moreover, it has been shown that instructional design which integrates well-defined objectives with appropriately challenging content encourages meaningful learning and deeper emotional involvement, ultimately enhancing students’ skill development (Biggs & Tang, 2011).

In the context of advanced Guzheng study, mastering the balance between technical proficiency, emotional depth, and stylistic interpretation is essential to high-quality musical expression. This is consistent with the views of Qiyao (2017), who emphasized that advanced Guzheng education should address not only performance skills but also emotional articulation and cultural understanding.

The structure of the guidebook in this research was purposefully designed to reflect these pedagogical needs. The effectiveness of this approach is demonstrated by the experimental results, in which the students’ final test scores were 24.8% higher than their pre-test scores, indicating a significant improvement in their performance ability and validating the guidebook as a useful and effective instructional tool.

8. ORIGINALITY AND BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

Originality

Development of a previously lacking advanced Guzheng guidebook:

This research presents an advanced Guzheng instructional guide specifically designed for fourth-year university students. Such a systematic and level-appropriate guidebook has not previously existed, particularly in the context of local universities in China.

Integration of advanced techniques with practical training:

The guidebook systematically compiles exercises, techniques, and contemporary repertoire, effectively linking technical skill development with musical expression.

Application of the “Autonomy Theory”:

The instructional design emphasizes self-directed learning, aligning with modern educational trends that encourage independent study and critical thinking.

Field-based classroom experimentation:

The guidebook was tested in real classroom settings with 16 students, with structured assessment and analysis, thereby enhancing the credibility and practical value of the research.

Body of Knowledge

A new approach to developing advanced Guzheng guidebooks:

This research presents a conceptual framework and guidebook structure that can be adapted or further developed by other institutions.

Criteria for selecting exercises and repertoire:

The study provides practical guidelines for choosing advanced-level exercises and musical pieces, which can also be applied to the curriculum of other traditional Chinese string instruments.

Framework for assessing advanced performance:

The research proposes a four-dimensional assessment model covering technique, etudes, musical completeness, and expressive performance—an effective evaluation tool for higher education music programs.

Guidebook development through expert collaboration:

The study highlights the importance of involving subject matter experts in guidebook development, offering a model that can be applied to curriculum design in other areas of music education.

9. RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Future Research

Expansion to Other Traditional Instruments

Future research could apply a similar framework to develop advanced instructional materials for other traditional Chinese musical instruments, such as the erhu, pipa, or dizi. This would help establish a more comprehensive and systematic body of knowledge in Chinese traditional music education.

Longitudinal Studies on Learning Outcomes

Further studies may explore the long-term impact of using advanced guzheng guidebooks on students' performance, creativity, and career development. Tracking students' progress beyond the classroom could provide deeper insights into the guidebook's effectiveness and sustainability.

Integration of Technology in Guzheng Instruction

Researchers should consider incorporating digital platforms, virtual simulations, and interactive media in guzheng education. Comparative studies could be conducted to assess the effectiveness of traditional versus digital or hybrid learning environments.

Cross-Cultural Comparative Studies

Future research may compare guzheng pedagogy across different regions or countries where Chinese traditional music is taught. This could provide a global perspective on teaching practices and help tailor instructional materials to diverse learner needs.

Student-Centered Feedback and Learning Styles

Further investigations could focus on how individual learning styles and preferences affect the effectiveness of advanced guzheng instruction. Gathering qualitative feedback from students may help refine teaching strategies and materials.

Development of Graded Curricula and Etudes

Research can also be directed toward creating a fully graded guzheng curriculum that progresses from beginner to advanced levels, supported by a series of etudes and repertoire designed to match each stage of technical and expressive development.

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