

# **The Applying of Jerry Bergonzi's Improvisation Method for Writing a Guitar Practice Book for Teaching the First Year Students at Sichuan Conservatory of Music**

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## **Abstract**

The objectives of this research were: 1) To study the improvisation method from Jerry Bergonzi's textbooks. 2) To create a guitar practice book based on Jerry Bergonzi's improvisation method. 3) To use the guitar practice book based on Jerry Bergonzi's method for teaching guitar students at Sichuan Conservatory of music, and 4) To evaluate the teaching effect of the guitar practice book based on Jerry Bergonzi's method. Using a mixed qualitative and quantitative research methodology. Qualitative research involved in-depth interviews with three key informants, while quantitative research involved teaching experiments using the developed guitar practice book. The research population consisted of 20 first-year guitar students from the Sichuan Conservatory of Music, with a purposive sample of 10 students selected for participation based on guitar student. Evaluation measures included both formative and summative assessments.

This research finding: The research explores Jerry Bergonzi's improvisation method, aiming to enhance beginner musicians' skills and promote a deeper understanding of his techniques. The guitar practice book is divided into four chapters, covering basic guitar knowledge, chord tones and scales, Bergonzi's method, and analyzing and applying the techniques. The lesson plan spans 15 weeks and includes six parts, with each week focusing on different aspects. A rubric for evaluating collegiate jazz improvisation performance was developed, combining academic research with industry insights. The experimental student results showed an average score of 2.79 for formative tastes, and an average score of 4.6 for summative tests, with the most significant improvement being for students 1, 4, and 6.

**Keywords:** Jerry Bergonzi; Improvisation Method; Guitar Practice Book; Sichuan Conservatory of Music

## **Introduction**

The Sichuan Conservatory of Music's Faculty of Popular Music fosters an environment that enables students to cultivate and investigate their musical abilities within the field of popular music. The faculty's purpose is to provide students with the fundamental skills necessary to thrive in the modern music industry, with a particular emphasis on practical education. The ability to improvise is a highly regarded talent in popular music genres, including jazz, and a critical component of musical proficiency. Over the past few years, there

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has been an increasing volume of research on the pedagogy of jazz guitar improvisation, with substantial contributions from scholars both domestic and international. Notably, the Jazz Guitar Improvisation Tutorial (Zhang, 2023) is a critical resource in China, as it caters to the pedagogical requirements of jazz guitar students. This work aims to fill a gap in the existing literature by specifically designing jazz improvisation techniques for the Chinese music education context. On a global scale, key texts like Mark Levine's *The Jazz Theory Book* (Levine, 2011) provide an exhaustive examination of jazz theory and improvisation techniques, rendering them indispensable resources for both educators and students. Baker's groundbreaking work, *Jazz Improvisation: A Comprehensive Method for All Musicians* (Baker, 1988), establishes the groundwork for comprehending improvisation in a variety of musical genres. Additionally, Kirby's *Jazz Guitar Improvisation Strategies* (Kirby, 2021) is a valuable resource for instructors, as it specifically pertains to jazz guitarists' strategies. Bowman's overview of doctoral research in jazz improvisation pedagogy (Bowman, 1988) highlights the innovative methodologies used in higher education for jazz education. Similarly, Chapman's *The Complete Guitarist* and Govan's *Creative Guitar: Advanced Techniques* (Govan, 2006) significantly enhance the body of knowledge on improvisation by offering hands-on exercises and valuable insights applicable in educational environments. 'Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction' (Monson, 2009) is a work that delves into the social and interactive aspects of jazz improvisation, emphasizing the significance of collaborative learning in music education. Furthermore, Biasutti's research on the teaching of improvisation processes (Biasutti, 2017) recommends a multifaceted approach that is consistent with general educational principles. However, despite the valuable insights gained, there remains a dearth of research specifically addressing the distinctive context of first-year guitar students at the Sichuan Conservatory of Music. The existing literature's discussion of instructional methods and improvisational frameworks fails to sufficiently consider the unique characteristics, learning conditions, and cultural backgrounds of students in this environment. Consequently, Sichuan Conservatory's unique educational infrastructure and musical landscape necessitate the urgent design of pedagogical strategies to enhance the learning experience of first-year jazz guitar students. Jerry Bergonzi, a renowned jazz musician and educator, has developed a comprehensive *Inside Improvisation* series of textbooks to present an improvisation method (Bergonzi, 1994, 1998, 2006). This series delves into a variety of facets of jazz improvisation, providing ambitious musicians with invaluable techniques and insights. Bergonzi's method is comprehensive and significant, widely recognized in the United States and promoted globally (Nichols, 2022). The current researcher's goal is to incorporate this approach into the curriculum to improve students' improvisational skills.

The Faculty of Popular Music faces a challenge in adapting Jerry Bergonzi's improvisation method to meet the needs of first-year students. These students have a foundational understanding of music theory and performance skills but are still in their early stages. To cultivate talent in popular music, textbook development, as well as gradual learning and borrowing, are critical. We need a structured approach to tailor Bergonzi's method to these students' skill levels and learning objectives. We propose a guitar practice book that aligns with Bergonzi's improvisation method, offering focused exercises and guidance, strengthening

theoretical concepts and fostering their development as improvising musicians. Two questions form the research problem: how to effectively adapt Bergonzi's improvisation method to first-year students' needs and skill levels, and what structure and content should a guitar practice book include to support Bergonzi's method and foster students' improvisational skills? Addressing these questions will enhance the faculty of popular music's curriculum and contribute to a broader understanding of effective teaching methodologies in popular music education.

### Research Objectives

1. To study Jerry Bergonzi's improvisation method.
2. To create a guitar practice book based on Jerry Bergonzi's improvisation method.
3. To use the guitar practice book based on Jerry Bergonzi's method for teaching guitar students at Sichuan Conservatory of music.
4. To evaluate the teaching effect of the guitar practice book based on Jerry Bergonzi's method.

### Research Methodology

**Research Methodology:** This study employs a mixed method approach, which integrates qualitative and quantitative research approaches to guarantee thorough data gathering and analysis. Qualitative research methods include key informant interviews and literature review. Quantitative: Evaluation form, formative assessment, and summative examination under IOC standards.

**Population and Sampling:** Demographics, Representative Sample, and Primary Sources

**Study Population:** 20 first-year students majoring in guitar playing at Sichuan Conservatory of Music. **Sample size:** 10 freshman students majoring in guitar performance. The participant pool was chosen by purposive sampling from guitar students numbered 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, and 19.

Three specialists serving as key informants. Enrolment conditions for key informants: (1) Pursue guitar improvisation studies at an international institution and get a graduate degree or higher. (2) Have accumulated substantial expertise in guitar improvisation via performing and teaching over the last decade. (3) Must have accumulated a minimum of 10 years of experience working at a prestigious musical institution in China specialising in guitar improvisation, and remain actively involved in this field.

**Research Tools:** Key informant interviews, literature study, IOC evaluation form, formative and summative test assessment form, Guitar practice book, lesson curriculum

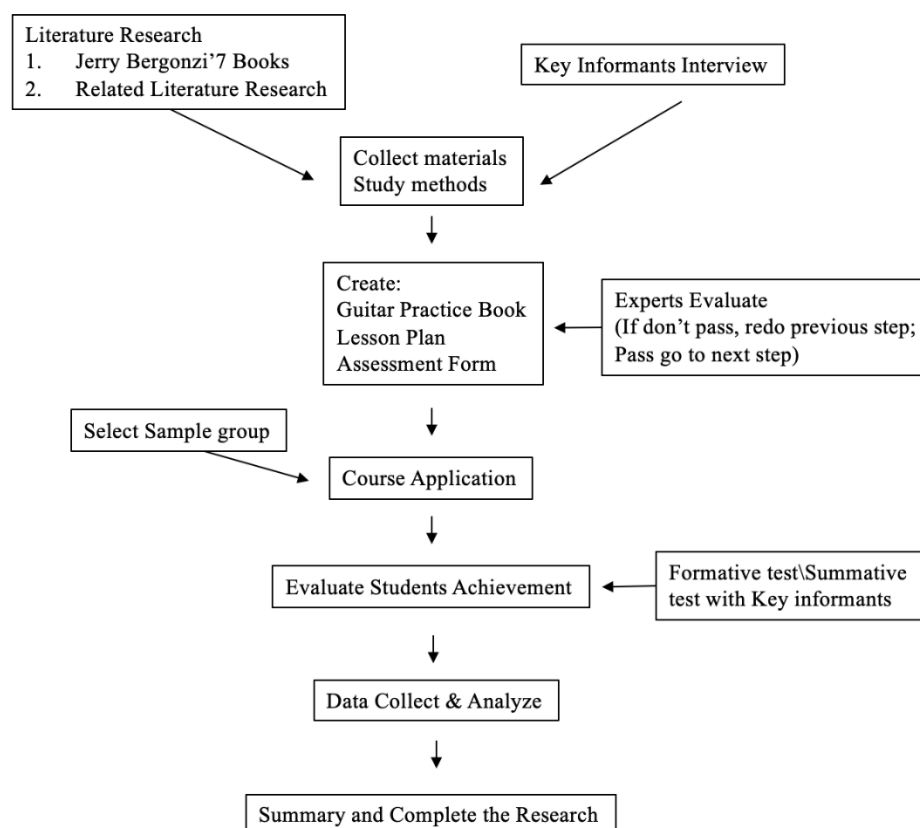
**Data Collecting:** Collection of qualitative research data will encompass: Analysis of literature sources, interviews with important informants. The gathering of quantitative research data will involve an assessment of the IOC. Examination forms, evaluation forms for both formative and summative assessments

**Data Analysis:** Exploration of qualitative research data using descriptive analysis. Descriptive analysis is a method used to provide a description of the information obtained from key informants. Application of statistical methods to quantitative research data. Applications of statistical analysis in the IOC assessment form and formative/summative tests. This study analyzes the scores of formative and summative assessments using the RUBIRC approach.

**Research Scope Location:** Faculty of Sichuan Conservatory of Music, PRC, China.  
**Time:** Jun.2023- Jul.2024

## Research Conceptual framework

**Conceptual framework:** From the study, it can be created into a conceptual framework as shown in the picture.



**Figure:** Research Conceptual framework

## Research Results

1) Jerry Bergonzi's improvisation method: This research focuses on four topics and 10 questions, examining the interpretations and evaluations of Jerry Bergonzi's improvisation method in his seven books. The experts emphasize Bergonzi's comprehensive, systematic, and creativity-stimulating approach, which breaks down complex concepts into accessible pieces, encouraging exploration and expression. It is crucial for providing a structured, technical, and creative framework for developing improvisational skills and deepening music theoretical understanding. Unlike traditional guitar teaching methods, Bergonzi's approach emphasizes integrity, creativity, jazz theory, and personal style development.

The study also explores the design and content of a first-year guitar practice book based on Bergonzi's improvisation method. The book aims to provide a structured, logical sequence with clear explanations, visual aids, practical exercises, and musical pieces for application. Suggestions for improvement include incorporating diagrams, gradual difficulty increase, real-world application examples, clear instructions, and supplementary materials.

The study also addresses challenges in using the practice book for teaching first-year guitar students at Sichuan Conservatory of Music, such as adapting to student levels, time constraints, student engagement, assessment, technical proficiency, and theoretical understanding. The experts provide valuable insights into designing, integrating, and evaluating the effectiveness of a practice book based on Bergonzi's improvisation method in teaching guitar.

2) Creating a guitar practice book based on Jerry Bergonzi's: The guitar practice book is a comprehensive guide for students to develop their musical skills. It is divided into four chapters: Chapter 1 Basic Knowledge of Guitar Fretboard, which introduces students to the guitar fretboard, Chapter 2 Practice Chord Tones and Scales, which focuses on chord tones and scales, and Chapter 3 Practice Jerry Bergonzi's method, which focuses on applying Jerry Bergonzi's improvisation method to guitar playing. Chapter 4 Analysis and Application of Bergonzi's Methods, Etude 1-2 (F Blues 1): provides an introduction to the guitar fretboard, including its layout and structure, and exercises to familiarize students with the positioning and fingerings of three notes per string across the fretboard. Etude 3-4 (Autumn Leaves 1): delves into the essential elements of harmony and scale construction, including triads, seventh chords, and chord scales. And focuses on applying Bergonzi's method to guitar playing, focusing on developing melodic and harmonic fluency.

The Lesson plan, students apply the techniques learned in the book to practical musical situations, engaging with a musical composition designed to incorporate elements of Bergonzi's improvisation method. Weeks 1-3 focus on Basic Knowledge of Guitar Fretboard, while Weeks 4-6 focus on Practice Chord Tones and Scales, Weeks 7-9 focus on Bergonzi's method, Weeks 10-13 focus on Analysis and Application of Bergonzi's methods, Week 14 is Comprehensive Review, and Week 15 is Summative Concert Exam. The guitar practice book is structured into 15 weeks, with one 45-minute lesson per week.

This research developed a rubric for evaluating collegiate jazz improvisation performance, based on Moore's (2009) work at the University of Miami. To ensure comprehensiveness, the researcher interviewed three industry experts to provide valuable advice. The grading scale was adopted, with points ranging from 1 to 5 (Does Not Meet Expectations, Below Expectations, Near Expectations, Meets Expectations, Exceeds Expectations). This comprehensive approach combined academic research with industry insights to assess the performance quality of collegiate jazz improvisation.

3) To use the teaching effect the guitar practice book based on Jerry Bergonzi's method for teaching guitar students at Sichuan Conservatory of music.: The study aimed to evaluate Jerry Bergonzi's improvisation method by creating a guitar practice book for first-year students at the Faculty of Popular Music. A mixed-method approach, including qualitative interviews and quantitative teaching experiments, was used to assess its effectiveness in enhancing students' improvisational skills. The findings showed that the structured curriculum helped students understand fundamental concepts of fretboard navigation, chord theory, and Bergonzi's improvisational techniques.

4) To evaluate the teaching effect of the guitar practice book based on Jerry Bergonzi's method. The research demonstrates the effectiveness of Bergonzi's improvisation method in enhancing the improvisational skills of novice musicians. The guitar practice book's structured curriculum helped students understand fundamental concepts like fretboard navigation and chord theory. The experimental group underwent a 15-lesson program, each lasting 45 minutes, to gradually develop their improvisational skills. The final lesson resulted in a summative test to evaluate proficiency. The 15-lesson plan led to significant improvements in students' improvisational abilities.

**Table1.** Compare the formative testing and summative testing scores.

Students	Formative Mean	Summative Mean	Comparing	Result
1	2.57	4.66	+2.09	Improved
2	2.85	4.66	+1.81	Improved
3	2.29	4	+1.71	Improved
4	2.57	4.33	+2.09	Improved
5	3.57	5	+1.43	Improved
6	2.57	4.33	+2.09	Improved
7	3	5	+2	Improved
8	2.71	4.66	+1.95	Improved
9	3.14	5	+1.86	Improved
10	2.57	4.33	+1.76	Improved
Mean	2.79	4.6	+1.81	Improved

The most improvement are students 1, 4 and 6, improved by 2.09 points. Secondly is student 7, improved by 2 points. Thirdly is student 8, improved by 1.95 points. Fourth is student 9, improved by 1.86 points. Fifth is student 2, improved by 1.81 points. Sixth is student 10, improved by 1.76 points. Seventh is students 3, improved by 1.71 points. The least is student 6, improved by 1.43 points.

The research advances popular music education by offering a structured improvisation teaching method based on Bergonzi's methodology, enabling students to navigate contemporary music complexities with confidence and proficiency through tailored resources and instructional strategies.

## Research Findings

Research object 1) This research examines Jerry Bergonzi's improvisation method in his seven books, focusing on its comprehensive, systematic, and creativity-stimulating approach. It explores the design and content of a first-year guitar practice book based on Bergonzi's method, addressing challenges such as adapting to student levels, time constraints, and technical proficiency. The study also provides insights into the effectiveness of a practice book based on Bergonzi's improvisation method in teaching guitar.

Research object 2) The guitar practice book is a comprehensive guide for students to develop their musical skills, focusing on Jerry Bergonzi's improvisation method. It is divided into four chapters: Basic Knowledge of Guitar Fretboard, Practice Chord Tones and Scales, and Practice Jerry Bergonzi's method. The lesson plan involves applying the techniques learned in the book to practical musical situations, with each week focusing on different aspects. The book is structured into 15 weeks, with one 45-minute lesson per week. Additionally, a rubric for evaluating collegiate jazz improvisation performance was developed, combining academic research with industry insights.

Research object 3) The research shows that Bergonzi's improvisation method effectively develops the improvisational abilities of novice musicians. Students learn fundamental concepts like fretboard navigation and chord theory through a structured 15-lesson program. The guitar practice book's structured curriculum helps students understand fundamental concepts like fretboard navigation and chord theory. A 15-lesson program, each lasting 45 minutes, gradually develops improvisational skills. A summative test evaluates proficiency. The final lesson evaluates their proficiency in guitar improvisation, demonstrating significant improvements in their skills through formative and summative assessment scores.

Research object 4) The study evaluates the effectiveness of Jerry Bergonzi's improvisation method on novice musicians. The study shows significant improvements in students' improvisational abilities, with the most significant improvement being for students 1, 4, and 6, with a score of 2.09 points. This research advances popular music education by offering a structured improvisation teaching method, enabling students to navigate contemporary music complexities with confidence and proficiency.

## Discussion

The results of this study emphasize numerous critical insights into the teaching and learning of improvisation in the context of popular music education. Initially, the curriculum's incorporation of Bergonzi's improvisation method was effective in improving students' improvisational abilities. The guitar practice book's structured approach facilitated a more profound comprehension of improvisational concepts and techniques, thereby establishing a strong foundation for the musical growth of the student. Secondly, the 15-lesson plan established a structure for the incremental development of skills, enabling students to enhance their knowledge and proficiency in improvisation. Students were able to implement Bergonzi's method in a systematic and organized manner by utilizing a combination of theoretical instruction, practical exercises, and performance assessments, which led to demonstrable enhancements in their improvisational abilities. Additionally, the research process's formative and summative assessments offered valuable feedback on students' performance and progress.

The summative test scores have significantly increased in comparison to the formative test scores, as evidenced by the consistent development in scores, with each student exhibiting a positive difference ranging from +1.43 to +2.09. This affirms the advantages of Bergonzi's improvisation method in promoting musical growth and development, demonstrating the efficacy of the teaching methodology. The data underscores the successful impact of this approach on the development of students' musical abilities, with an average improvement of +1.81. This research is notably relevant to the improvisation of first-year guitar student instruction at the Sichuan Conservatory of Music. A comparative analysis of this research with the existing literature reveals a number of significant advantages and distinctions. Furthermore, it is worthwhile to examine certain literature and research that are pertinent to this investigation.

1. The Merger of Teaching Methodologies. David Baker's "Jazz Improvisation: A Comprehensive Method for All Musicians" delves into a variety of teaching methods for improvisation, catering to musicians of all levels and instruments (Baker, 1988). This study implements Bergonzi's improvisation method within a specific curriculum for first-year guitar students, while Baker provides a foundational comprehension of improvisation concepts. The 15-lesson plan that has been developed in this study provides a systematic integration of theoretical knowledge and practical application, allowing students to develop a progressive understanding of improvisational techniques. (Bergonzi, 1994, 1998, 2006).

2. Concentrate on techniques that are specific to the guitar. Steven Kirby's "Jazz Guitar Improvisation Strategies" is an exhaustive resource for guitar pupils, particularly those at intermediate levels (Kirby, 2021). Conversely, the present investigation is tailored to the requirements of first-year guitar students, prioritizing the acquisition of fundamental skills while guaranteeing that lessons are both accessible and consistent with the students' developmental stages. (Cao, 2008). The research is distinguished from Koss's broader focus by the inclusion of targeted exercises that are specifically designed for novices.

3. Feedback and Assessment in a Systematic Manner. Diverse instructional methodologies for jazz improvisation are investigated in the article "Doctoral Research in Jazz Improvisation Pedagogy" (Bowman, 1988). Nevertheless, this research improves upon these strategies by integrating both formative and summative assessments at various stages of the



learning process. This dual-level feedback mechanism not only monitors student progress but also informs instructional modifications in real-time, thereby increasing overall student performance and reinforcing learning outcomes.

4. Integration of Theory and Practice. Richard Chapman's "The Complete Guitarist" provides a comprehensive examination of fundamental improvisational knowledge and performance techniques (Chapman, 1994). Conversely, this investigation prioritizes the practical application of theoretical concepts through live performance evaluations even more. This research emphasizes the significance of applying theoretical knowledge to practical situations by providing students with opportunities to actively participate in improvisation within performance contexts.

5. Inspiration for Creativity. Advanced improvisational techniques are introduced in "Creative Guitar: Advanced Techniques" by Guthrie Govan, with a primary focus on intermediate and advanced performers (Govan, 2006). Nevertheless, the present investigation is explicitly intended to encourage creativity in first-year students from the outset. This research endeavors to cultivate a sense of self-expression and confidence in initial improvisational experiences by incorporating creative exercises into the curriculum, thereby establishing the foundation for future musical development.

6. Cultural and Contextual Aspects. Ingrid Monson's "Saying Something: Jazz improvisation and interaction" offers an exhaustive framework for comprehending improvisation in a variety of musical genres (Monson, 2009). Conversely, the current investigation is situated within the context of popular music education in China. This research provides students at Sichuan Conservatory of Music with insights that are particularly applicable by concentrating on contemporary pedagogical practices that are pertinent to the local context.

7. Creation of Targeted Teaching Models. Lastly, the article "Teaching Improvisation through Processes." "Implications for General Education and Applications in Music Education" provides a variety of models and frameworks to comprehend the significance of improvisation in music education (Biasutti, 2017). By creating a concrete, actionable curriculum that is designed to achieve specific educational objectives for first-year guitar students in a systematic manner, this study expands upon these foundational concepts. This research not only corresponds with the broader dialogue within music education literature but also provides a unique approach to teaching improvisation specifically for guitar students. The incorporation of Bergonzi's improvisation method into a structured curriculum provides a valuable contribution to the theoretical and practical aspects of music education, particularly in the context of contemporary Chinese music instruction.

## Recommendations

The research suggests several recommendations to improve improvisation in popular music education.

1. Theoretical Recommendation: These include integrating Jerry Bergonzi's improvisation method into the guitar curriculum for students from sophomores to seniors, using specialized practice books, and integrating it into other instrument curriculums in popular instrumental music majors.

2. Practical Recommendations: Researchers should continue to explore other improvisation methods and conduct relevant education research. Progressive skill development should be prioritized through structured lesson plans and systematic instruction, with formative and summative assessments to monitor progress and provide feedback.

3. Policy Recommendations: Ongoing professional development opportunities for educators should be provided to stay updated on trends and best practices in improvisation pedagogy. These recommendations aim to create a supportive environment for students to explore and develop their improvisational skills, empowering them to thrive in the dynamic and ever-evolving music landscape.

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