



A Survey of Guitar Teaching Methods for First-Year Music Performance Students at Three Universities in Sichuan Province

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Abstract

This study systematically investigates the current status, characteristics, strengths, and challenges of guitar teaching for first-year music performance majors at three universities in Sichuan Province, China: Sichuan Conservatory of Music, Sichuan University of Culture and Arts, and Sichuan University of Science & Engineering. By examining curriculum design, teaching methods, instructional media, classroom environments, assessment systems, teaching activities, and student participation, the study aims to provide theoretical support and practical references for the reform and innovation of university-level guitar education. A qualitative research approach was employed. Data were collected between April and December 2025 through semi-structured interviews with six key informants' professors with extensive teaching experience and professional expertise and on-site classroom observations covering core guitar instruction for first-year students. The findings indicate that each institution has developed a distinctive guitar teaching system aligned with its educational orientation. Sichuan Conservatory of Music emphasizes professional depth and stylistic innovation; Sichuan University of Culture and Arts focuses on the standardization of fundamental skills and the integration of theory and practice; and Sichuan University of Science & Engineering highlights applied skills and collaborative learning. While all three universities have made progress in curriculum development, pedagogical innovation, and teaching resource integration, common challenges remain, including limited personalized instruction, uneven development of digital teaching resources, and insufficient incorporation of regional cultural elements. Overall, this study contributes empirical evidence to research on guitar pedagogy in regional Chinese universities and offers targeted recommendations for improving the quality of guitar talent cultivation in higher education.

Keywords: Guitar teaching methods, Music performance major, First-year students, Teaching innovation, Sichuan universities

1. Introduction

In the context of the rapid development of higher art education and the increasing diversification of social demand for artistic talents, the innovation of talent training models for music performance majors in colleges and universities has become an important task to promote the connotation development of higher education and adapt to international educational trends. As an important part of music performance majors, guitar teaching has gradually attracted widespread attention due to its strong practicality, diverse stylistic characteristics, and broad career development prospects. Universities are the core positions for cultivating professional guitar talents, and their teaching quality directly determines the professional level and comprehensive quality of future guitar performers, educators, and creators.

Sichuan Province, as an important base for art education in Southwest China, has gathered a number of well-known art institutions and comprehensive universities with strong music education strength. Among them, Sichuan Conservatory of Music, Sichuan University of Culture and Arts, and Sichuan University of Science & Engineering have formed their own characteristics in guitar teaching through long-term exploration and practice. Sichuan Conservatory of Music, as a top professional art institution, focuses on the integration of jazz harmony and popular music elements to cultivate students' improvisational and creative abilities; Sichuan University of Culture and Arts takes applied training as the core, combining practical performance skills with local cultural communication; Sichuan University of Science & Engineering gives full play to interdisciplinary advantages, integrating guitar teaching with music technology and digital art. However, under the new educational background, these universities still face many challenges in guitar teaching: whether the existing teaching methods can meet the needs of contemporary talent cultivation, how to optimize the compatibility between teaching methods and different guitar subfields, how to integrate regional cultural characteristics to enhance the localization and innovation of teaching, and how to make up for the deficiencies in digital teaching resources and modern repertoire reserves.

Existing research on guitar teaching has covered multiple dimensions such as the comparison of teaching method effectiveness, the innovation of teaching models, and the application of modern technology, but there is a lack of targeted empirical research on guitar teaching in specific regional universities. In view of this, this study takes the first-year music performance majors of the three aforementioned universities as the research objects, adopts qualitative research methods such as interviews and classroom observations, and systematically investigates the current status of guitar teaching methods. The research questions include: What relevant courses are offered for first-year guitar majors in the three universities? How to innovate the teaching methods for first-year guitar majors at the university level? How to effectively integrate modern teaching media into the classroom teaching of first-year guitar majors? How to optimize the classroom teaching environment for first-year guitar majors?

The significance of this study is reflected in three aspects: First, at the theoretical level, it enriches the research system of guitar teaching in Chinese universities, especially the empirical research on regional guitar teaching, and provides a new perspective for the construction of guitar teaching theory. Second, at the practical level, it clarifies the advantages and existing problems of guitar teaching in the three universities, and puts forward targeted optimization strategies, which can directly guide the teaching reform of the three universities and provide reference for other similar institutions. Third, at the talent cultivation level, it helps to improve the teaching quality of guitar majors, cultivate more innovative, applied, and compound high-level guitar talents, and meet the diversified needs of the music industry for guitar professionals.

In recent years, empirical research in music pedagogy has increasingly focused on instructional innovation, learner-centered teaching models, and the application of digital technologies in instrumental education. Studies have examined issues such as the effectiveness

of blended learning, performance-based assessment, and technology-assisted practice in higher music education. However, existing literature largely concentrates on general instrumental pedagogy or conservatory-level training models, with limited empirical attention given to guitar teaching practices in specific regional contexts. In particular, systematic qualitative investigations into first-year guitar instruction at regional universities, where students' foundational skills, learning habits, and professional orientations are first established remain insufficient. This gap restricts a nuanced understanding of how institutional orientation, regional culture, and resource conditions shape guitar pedagogy at the entry level of higher music education.

Against this background, the present study adopts a qualitative research design, using interviews and classroom observations to examine guitar teaching practices for first-year music performance majors at the three aforementioned universities. The study addresses the following research questions: (1) What guitar-related courses are offered for first-year students in these institutions? (2) How are teaching methods designed and implemented for first-year guitar majors at the university level? (3) How can modern instructional media be effectively integrated into guitar classrooms? and (4) How can the classroom teaching environment for first-year guitar instruction be optimized?

The significance of this study is threefold. At the theoretical level, it enriches empirical research on guitar pedagogy in Chinese higher education by providing region-specific evidence and extending existing music education theories to vocational and comprehensive university contexts. At the practical level, it identifies institutional strengths and pedagogical challenges and proposes targeted optimization strategies that can directly inform teaching reform in the three universities and offer reference value for similar institutions. At the level of talent cultivation, the study contributes to improving the quality of guitar instruction, supporting the development of innovative, applied, and interdisciplinary guitar professionals, and responding to the evolving demands of the contemporary music industry.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research on the Development of Guitar Teaching at Home and Abroad

The standardization of guitar teaching originated from the establishment of European conservatories in the 19th century, initially focusing on classical guitar teaching, with the curriculum centered on technical training, music theory, and the performance of classical works (Yang & Yang, 2025). With the popularization of the guitar, foreign guitar teaching has gradually developed in a diversified direction, covering folk guitar, pop guitar, and other fields, and forming a teaching model characterized by thematic concentration, systematicity, and scientific rigor (Gao, 2011). For example, European guitar teaching pays attention to the inheritance of classical music traditions while encouraging students' artistic individuality; American guitar teaching emphasizes practical skills and creativity, combining performance training with commercial awareness to meet industry needs (Qian, 2018).

In China, guitar teaching emerged in the late 20th century and developed rapidly after the reform and opening-up. Key universities such as the Central Conservatory of Music and Sichuan Conservatory of Music took the lead in setting up guitar performance majors, laying the foundation for the development of guitar education (Wang, 2015). In recent decades, with the development of the cultural industry, domestic guitar teaching has gradually expanded from a single classical direction to a diversified pattern covering electric guitar, fingerstyle guitar, and other fields, and the curriculum system has been continuously improved (Li, 2018). However, compared with foreign research, domestic research on guitar teaching is more characterized by comprehensiveness and descriptive analysis, and there is still a gap in the

depth and systematicity of research, especially in the targeted research on regional university guitar teaching (Gao, 2011).

2.2 Research on Guitar Teaching Methods

Research on guitar teaching methods has always been a key topic in the field of music education. Existing studies have confirmed that scientifically and rationally designed teaching methods can effectively promote the improvement of students' professional skills (Chen, W. J., 2024). Traditional guitar teaching methods mainly include one-on-one teaching, group teaching, masterclasses, and practical workshops. One-on-one teaching can tailor teaching content and progress according to students' individual characteristics, which is conducive to the precise correction of technical problems; group teaching can cultivate students' collaborative awareness and communication skills through peer interaction; masterclasses can broaden students' artistic horizons through the guidance of industry experts; practical workshops can focus on specific themes to carry out intensive training and improve students' targeted skills (Park, 2020).

With the development of educational technology, modern teaching methods such as project-based learning, situational teaching, and flipped classrooms have been gradually applied to guitar teaching. Project-based learning guides students to complete musical projects such as organizing concerts and arranging ensemble works, integrating theoretical knowledge and practical skills; situational teaching creates real performance scenarios to improve students' adaptability and on-stage expression; the flipped classroom model allows students to learn basic knowledge through online resources before class, and uses in-class time for skill training and interactive discussion (Bu & Zhang, 2025). In addition, the integration of modern technologies such as audio-visual analysis software, VR/AR, and intelligent teaching systems has enriched the forms of guitar teaching, improved teaching efficiency, and provided new paths for the innovation of teaching methods (Ma, 2025).

2.3 Research on the Integration of Technology and Guitar Teaching

The integration of technology and guitar teaching has become an important trend in the development of modern guitar education. Audio and video analysis software can record and analyze students' performances in detail, helping teachers and students identify problems in pitch, rhythm, and expression (Liu, Y. T., & Sun, Y., 2024). For example, through waveform and spectrum analysis, students can intuitively understand their own performance flaws and carry out targeted correction. VR/AR technology can simulate different performance environments, such as famous concert halls, allowing students to adapt their performance methods according to the acoustic characteristics of different venues (Rodríguez-Quiles & Bassi Arce, 2025). Online teaching platforms break the limitations of time and space, enabling students to access masterclass videos, participate in virtual workshops, and carry out cross-institutional peer exchanges (Wang, X. Y., 2019).

However, there are still some problems in the application of technology in guitar teaching: first, the lack of personalized adaptation of teaching resources, most of which are standardized content and cannot meet the individual learning needs of students; second, the uneven development of digital resources, with insufficient reserves of resources for niche styles and advanced techniques; third, the high learning threshold of some advanced technical tools, which limits their popularization and application. Therefore, how to effectively integrate technology into guitar teaching, give play to the advantages of technology while avoiding its shortcomings, has become an important issue in current guitar teaching research.

2.4 Research on the Evaluation System of Guitar Teaching

The evaluation system of guitar teaching is an important part of ensuring teaching quality. Existing research shows that a scientific and reasonable evaluation system should cover multiple dimensions such as technical skills, musical expression, stage performance, teamwork, and creativity (Zhang, J. G., 2016). From the perspective of evaluation methods, it should combine formative evaluation and summative evaluation. Formative evaluation tracks students' learning progress through daily practice records, weekly quizzes, and peer feedback, providing timely guidance for students' learning; summative evaluation comprehensively assesses students' learning outcomes through final performances, repertoire analysis, and creative works (He, Y. Z., 2024).

In foreign guitar teaching evaluation, more attention is paid to the development of students' artistic individuality and creative ability, and the evaluation methods are more diversified, including portfolio evaluation, on-site performance evaluation, and industry expert evaluation (Qian, 2018). In domestic evaluation, there is a tendency to pay more attention to technical accuracy while ignoring artistic expression and creative ability. In addition, the evaluation subject is relatively single, mostly dominated by teachers, and the participation of students and industry experts is insufficient (Wang, 2019). Therefore, optimizing the guitar teaching evaluation system, improving the comprehensiveness and diversity of evaluation, and better playing the guiding role of evaluation in teaching have become important contents of current guitar teaching reform.

3. Research Methodology

This paper employs qualitative research methods, using semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to collect in-depth data on guitar teaching for first-year music performance majors in three universities. The research adheres to the principle of "purposeful sampling" to select key informants and observation objects, ensuring the authenticity and representativeness of the data.

3.1 Key Informant Characteristics and Data Collection

3.1.1 Inclusion Criteria

- (1) Over 10 years of professional stage performance experience
- (2) Over 10 years of teaching experience in Music Performance
- (3) Holds a doctoral degree in Music Performance or a professional title of associate professor or above

3.1.2 Key Informants

- (1) Shi Huiwen, Sichuan University of Science & Engineering
- (2) Tian Xinke, Sichuan University of Culture and Arts
- (3) Hu kun, Sichuan University of Culture and Arts
- (4) Wang Lei, Sichuan Conservatory of Music
- (5) Xie Dewang, Sichuan Conservatory of Music
- (6) Jiang Tao, Sichuan University of Science & Engineering

Data collection was conducted from April to December 2025, including interviews with key informants (covering curriculum design, teaching methods, media application, etc.) and classroom observations (recording teaching processes, student participation, and classroom environments). Additionally, teaching plans, lesson plans, and assessment materials from the three universities were collected for supplementary analysis.

3.2 Measurements

This study adopts the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) method to evaluate the validity of interview questions. Three music education experts scored the interview items (1=congruent, 0=questionable, -1=incongruent), with items scoring ≥ 0.5 retained and those < 0.5 revised. Formative assessments were conducted during classroom observations to record students' daily

practice performance (such as technical standardization, rhythm stability, and participation), while summative assessments included analysis of final performance results and project presentations.

3.3 Analytical Method

This study adopts a thematic analysis approach to process qualitative data. First, interview recordings and observation notes were transcribed into text, and then coded around core themes such as curriculum design, teaching methods, teaching media, classroom environment, evaluation systems, teaching activities, and student engagement. Through constant comparison and categorization, the characteristics, effectiveness, and challenges of guitar teaching in the three universities were summarized. Triangulation was adopted by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documents to verify the consistency of research findings.

4. Results

4.1 Curriculum Structure of the Guitar Major in Music Performance

4.1.1 Music Performance Program Curriculum

The curriculum system for the Music Performance major, specifically Guitar Performance, plays a vital role in meeting educational goals by integrating related courses to strengthen students' professional skills. Leading institutions have developed practice-focused curricula that blend foundational knowledge with specialized training, aligning with academic standards and industry needs.

4.2 Curriculum Structure: Foundation and Core

The curriculum consists of four interconnected components: foundational courses, core professional courses, practical courses, and elective courses.

4.2.1 Foundational Courses

These provide essential musical knowledge and skills for guitar study, including Guitar Music Theory, Guitar Sight-Singing and Ear Training, Guitar History and Literature, and Plucked Instrument Music Aesthetics.

4.3 Core Professional Courses: Guitar Specialization

4.3.1 Guitar Sight-Reading Course

Core Objectives of Sight-Reading Training:

Rapid Sheet Music Reading: Accurately identify note positions, rhythms, key signatures, time signatures, and performance markings (such as slurs and staccatos) within a short time frame using corresponding scores staff notation for classical guitar and tablature for electric or fingerstyle guitar to prevent performance interruptions.

Musical Information Integration: Simultaneously interpret melodic lines, harmonic structures, dynamics (e.g., p, f, mp), and expressive markings (e.g., ritardando, crescendo) to achieve a deep understanding of the musical meaning while reading, rather than performing mechanically.

Rhythmic Stability: Maintain a consistent tempo and strong sense of beat, accurately navigate complex rhythms like syncopations and triplets, and quickly adapt to unfamiliar rhythmic patterns.

Error Correction and Adjustment: Swiftly correct mistakes without breaking fluency, and adjust techniques such as string articulation and tone production to suit different musical styles.



Figure 1. Carcassi's etudes and plucking/strumming
Source: Yang Jingtao

4.3.2 Basic Skills

Guitar basic skills are the core foundation for students' performance, dictating their technical progress, musical expression, and stylistic development, with tailored training for different guitar types.

Classical Guitar:

Posture & Hand Shapes: Maintain an upright sitting posture; left hand uses a hollow-fist shape for vertical fretting, while right hand plucks strings at a 45° angle with designated finger-string assignments, combining *apoyando* (rest stroke) and *tirando* (free stroke) for tone variation.



Figure 2. Classical Guitar Performance Standards
Source: Yang Jingtao

Core Training: Practice major scales, broken-chord arpeggios (focusing on voice layering), and Baroque chord progressions; emphasize smooth chord transitions to boost practice motivation.

Electric Guitar:

Posture & Equipment: Adjust the strap for waist-level standing performance; hold the

pick with moderate tightness to control tone.



Figure 3. Standing Performance of the Electric Guitar

Source: Yang Jingtao

Core Training: Master *hammer-on*, *pull-off*, and alternate picking techniques; practice chromatic scales within 12 frets and transition between open chords and barre chords, retaining common tones for fluency.

Fingerstyle Guitar:

Polyphonic Coordination: Assign the thumb to bass strings (rhythm) and other fingers to treble strings (melody/harmony); use dynamic control to separate voice layers.

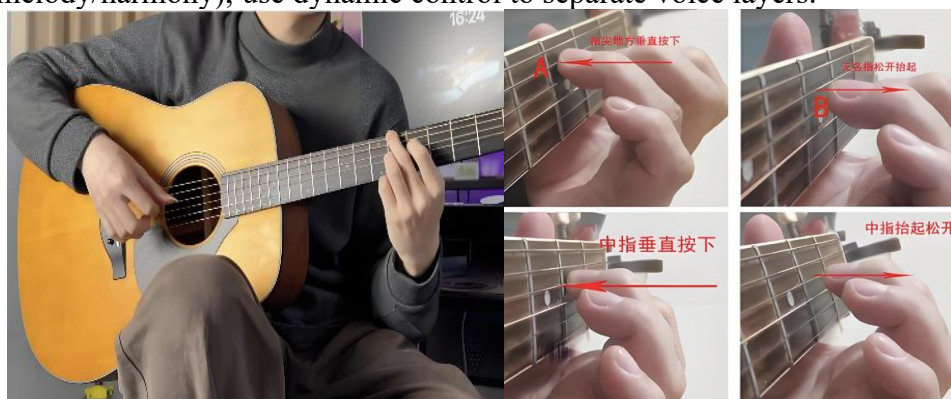


Figure 4. Fingerstyle Guitar Playing Posture

Source: Yang Jingtao

Core Training: Practice *i-m* alternate picking on single strings; learn basic percussion and natural harmonics; train quick tuning and fingering adaptation for alternate tunings.

4.3.3 Style Teaching

Style teaching includes style perception, specialized technique training, classic repertoire practice, style fusion exploration, and artistic expression enhancement, with individualized plans based on student needs.

4.4 Practical Training and Teaching Models in the Guitar Major

Practical teaching is core to the guitar major, with diverse models adopted by major institutions:

4.4.1 Key Teaching Models

1. One-on-One Instruction: Focuses on personalized technical and musical guidance.



Figure 5. One-on-One Instruction
Source: Yang Jingtao

2. Group Classes: Suitable for foundational training, with peer learning and collaborative practice.



Figure 6. Guitar Group Class
Source: Yang Jingtao

3. Masterclasses: Led by experts, providing in-depth feedback on repertoire interpretation and artistic expression.



Figure 7. Zhao Wei, a renowned Chinese guitar master
Source: Yang Jingtao

4. Practical Workshops: Thematic intensive training addressing specific skills or challenges.



Figure 8. Teaching Symposium
Source: Yang Jingtao

5. Ensemble Training: Cultivates collaboration and tone balance through ensemble or band rehearsals.



Figure 9. Band Ensemble Class
Source: Yang Jingtao

6. Performance Internships/Solo Recitals: Offers formal stage opportunities to showcase learning outcomes.



Figure 10. Classical Guitar Quartet
Source: Yang Jingtao

7. Technology-Enhanced Teaching: Integrates audio/video analysis, VR/AR, and online platforms to improve teaching effectiveness.



Figure 11. Guitar Recording Course
Source: Yang Jingtao

4.5 Assessment of Practical Teaching

Assessment encompasses technical skills, performance, teamwork, creativity, and stage presence, employing a multi-dimensional system that includes teacher evaluation, self-assessment, peer review, and audience feedback to guide teaching adjustments and foster student growth.

The guitar education programs at Sichuan Conservatory of Music (SCM), Sichuan University of Culture and Arts (SUCA), and Sichuan University of Science & Engineering (SUSE) form a comprehensive pedagogical framework that balances traditional heritage with modern innovation. SCM emphasizes technical precision and hierarchical skill progression through diverse demonstrations and intensive stage performances. SUCA focuses on integrating theory and practice via seminar-based instruction and field research to enhance cultural understanding and improvisational creativity. SUSE prioritizes accessibility for beginners, using interactive media and collaborative, gamified learning to build interest and foundational knowledge.

Each institution tailors its classroom environments from acoustically optimized theory rooms to dedicated performance studios to support its specific goals. Their assessment systems have evolved from simple outcome testing to comprehensive, process-oriented evaluations. Together, these varied approaches create a strong foundation for preserving guitar artistry while motivating students through structured discipline, research-driven inquiry, and experiential learning.

5. Conclusion

This thesis presents a qualitative study of guitar teaching methods for first-year Music Performance majors at three Sichuan-based universities: Sichuan Conservatory of Music, Sichuan University of Culture and Arts, and Sichuan University of Science & Engineering, based on interviews with six key informants and classroom observations conducted from April to December 2025.

The study focuses on curriculum design, teaching methods, instructional media, classroom environments, evaluation and assessment, teaching activities, and student engagement and motivation. Findings indicate that all three institutions have developed structured curricula that integrate theoretical knowledge with practical skills, each with distinct emphases: Sichuan Conservatory of Music prioritizes professional depth and stylistic innovation; Sichuan University of Culture and Arts emphasizes foundational standardization and practical application; and Sichuan University of Science & Engineering concentrates on

applied skills and collaborative practice.

Common teaching approaches include demonstrations, lectures, group learning, and workshops, supported by diverse media such as textbooks, videos, apps, and audio resources. Classrooms are functionally designed to facilitate both technical training and artistic expression. Evaluation systems combine formative and summative assessments, while teaching activities range from daily practice and masterclasses to ensemble performances and cultural exploration. Students exhibit high levels of engagement, motivated by curriculum relevance, creative autonomy, and performance opportunities.

6. Discussion

The differentiated teaching characteristics of the three universities reflect the adaptation of higher music education to school-running positioning and regional needs. The emphasis on multi-style integration and interdisciplinary collaboration is in line with the development trend of the modern music industry. However, the insufficient integration of digital media and personalized teaching resources indicates that universities need to strengthen the construction of smart teaching platforms and optimize the student-centered teaching model. The challenge of balancing traditional and modern repertoire reflects the need to inherit classical music traditions while adapting to contemporary artistic trends. In addition, the high participation of students in interactive and creative activities suggests that teaching methods such as group collaboration and project-based learning can effectively stimulate learning motivation, which is consistent with the conclusions of existing educational psychology research.

7. Suggestions

To optimize guitar teaching for first-year music performance majors, the following suggestions are proposed: First, strengthen the integration of digital teaching resources, develop personalized online courses and VR simulation training systems, and improve the application of audio-visual analysis software. Second, optimize the curriculum structure, increase interdisciplinary courses, and enhance the compatibility between teaching methods and subfields. Third, improve the personalized teaching mechanism, adopt stratified teaching based on students' technical foundations and learning styles, and establish a "teacher-student co-construction" teaching model. Fourth, strengthen regional cultural integration, incorporate Sichuan folk music elements into teaching, and build a localized guitar teaching resource library. Fifth, improve the evaluation system, increase the weight of creative performance and practical application in assessment, and promote the comprehensive development of students' technical skills and artistic literacy.

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