

# Issues and Improvement Strategies in Group Teaching of Instrumental Performance Courses in Higher Normal Universities

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**Abstract:** *The article discusses the group teaching mode for instrumental performance courses in Chinese higher normal universities, highlighting challenges such as unclear course objectives, limited evaluation methods, monotonous content, lack of value orientation, time constraints, and poor student engagement. Strategies suggested include clarifying course goals, establishing diverse evaluation criteria, enriching content, incorporating ideological elements, optimizing schedules, enhancing efficiency, boosting student interest, and improving teacher-student interactions. The study uses the reform of instrumental performance courses at Zhaoqing University's College of Music as an example to showcase its reform achievements in curriculum construction, scientific research projects and paper publications, and student awards, Aiming to improve teaching effectiveness and promote the high-quality development of educational services.*

**Keywords:** *Higher Normal University; Instrumental Performance Courses; Group Teaching*

## 1. Introduction

The instrumental performance courses in Chinese higher normal universities mainly include the performance and teaching methods of ethnic instruments such as guzheng, erhu, bamboo flute, as well as Western instruments such as piano, violin, flute, etc. These courses occupy an indispensable position in the music education system. It is not only an important way for students to cultivate performance skills, enhance aesthetic literacy, and master teaching methods, but also an important link to promote cultural traditions and expand international exchanges. Usually, such courses are taught in a "one to many" manner, where one teacher engages in teaching activities with multiple students. Since the Ministry of Education issued the "Action Plan for Revitalizing Education in the 21st Century" in 1999, Chinese universities have begun to expand their enrollment on a large scale. The sharp increase in the number of students has brought challenges to teachers' teaching. At the same time, this has greatly promoted the teaching reform of instrumental performance courses in higher normal universities. It is of great significance to explore the problems and improvement strategies in group teaching in order to improve the teaching quality of the course.

The research on instrumental group teaching first appeared in the field of violin teaching in China. In this study, Zhao Wei et al. conducted a teaching research on 33 preschool children and pointed out that group teaching has the advantage of allowing students to "learn through comparison and discrimination".<sup>[1]</sup> In the field of higher education, Wang Kai made early attempts at collective teaching of instrumental music. He affirmed the value of group teaching and proposed the "vertical" teaching method, which divides several techniques into several major sections and focuses on learning each section for a period of time and in the teaching process, the teacher should solve common and individual problems well.<sup>[2]</sup> Some analyses have also pointed out that the connotation, nature, teaching methods and means, and role of piano collective courses should be carefully studied, practiced, and recreated.<sup>[3]</sup> Subsequently, there was a growing trend in the academic community towards this research, which can be roughly divided into two categories: one is about the analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of individual and group teaching modes, and the other is about the specific implementation of teaching content and curriculum design. Overall, these studies provide a theoretical basis for the teaching of instrumental music groups in Chinese normal universities, promoting innovation and practice in teaching methods.

However, with the changing environment of the times, the group teaching mode of instrumental performance courses in higher normal universities still faces many challenges and urgently needs further

research. The essence of the problem still revolves around the elements of teaching objectives, teaching content, teaching objects, and teaching implementation. Firstly, in the face of the goals of cultivating music professionals in normal universities in the new era and the constantly changing social demands, how to position courses and design content to achieve good teaching results within limited teaching time, in order to cope with the increasingly fierce competition in the job market? Secondly, in the face of these "Zappers-Generation" and "Internet Generation" post-00s college students, how to carry out learning situation analysis and teaching implementation, so that students with different abilities and personalities can maintain interest and learn together to give consideration to efficiency and fairness? Therefore, this article summarizes the problems faced by group teaching in current instrumental performance courses in higher normal universities, proposes specific improvement measures, and aims to improve teaching effectiveness and promote the high-quality development of educational services.

## **2. Analysis of problems in group teaching of instrumental performance courses in higher normal universities**

### ***2.1. Fuzzy course positioning and single evaluation criteria***

In the instrumental performance courses of higher normal universities, the group teaching mode is widely adopted because it can efficiently utilize educational resources and promote communication and cooperation among students. However, this teaching model has the problem of vague positioning. This is mainly reflected in the mismatch with the educational system and unclear teaching objectives. From the perspective of mismatch with the academic system, the instrumental performance course in normal universities belongs to the two majors of music performance and musicology, and usually adopts a group teaching mode with one class per week. Among them, instrumental courses for music performance majors are divided into groups of 2 people, while such courses for musicology majors are divided into groups of 3-6 people. This kind of educational system is difficult to match the talent cultivation goals of various majors. From the perspective of teaching objectives, instrumental performance courses in normal universities often emphasize both the cultivation of performance skills and the imparting of educational theories and the mastery of teaching methods. However, in the actual teaching process, it is difficult to strike a balance between these three factors. Instrumental performance is an artistic activity that is highly practical and reflects the performer's aesthetic level. Therefore, some teachers, driven by their ultimate pursuit of art, do their utmost to help students continuously improve their playing skills, but often overlook the importance of educational theory and teaching methods, which inevitably leads to a disconnect between students' curriculum learning and practical employment.

In addition, the singularity of evaluation criteria is also one of the prominent issues in group teaching. In the traditional teaching evaluation system, the performance level of normal university students is often simply compared with that of professional college students, while neglecting the multidimensional evaluation of students' comprehensive quality, innovation ability, teamwork ability, and so on. This type of single evaluation standard not only fails to fully reflect students' true ability level, but also easily weakens students' confidence and learning enthusiasm, and has a negative impact on their overall physical and mental development.

### ***2.2. The teaching content is dull and lacks value guidance***

In group teaching of instrumental performance courses in higher normal universities, the design and selection of teaching content play a crucial role in stimulating students' interest in learning and improving teaching effectiveness. However, current teaching content often suffers from boredom, lack of innovation, and lack of value guidance. Traditional instrumental performance courses focus on training basic skills and playing classic pieces, while neglecting students' needs for fresh and interesting content. In the teaching process, teachers often impart performance skills and knowledge according to established teaching content, lacking connection with students' actual lives. This dull content is difficult to stimulate students' interest in learning, and may even lead to students feeling bored with instrumental music learning.

Secondly, in addition to imparting performance skills and knowledge, it is more important in teaching to guide students to establish correct values and outlook on life. A study has pointed out that in China, the younger generation seems to be increasingly concerned with their own feelings and personal pursuits, such as the lying flat youth, low paid "poor and busy" group, and "bereavement culture". At the same time, the negative attitudes of "low desire", "low motivation", "low goals" and other "non mainstream"

factors are increasingly affecting the new generation of college students, causing them to wander on the edge of mainstream culture to varying degrees and even reject mainstream values.<sup>[4]</sup> Faced with such a situation, the current teaching content appears to lack value guidance and neglects the ideological education and value cultivation of students.

### ***2.3. Limited teaching duration and mechanical teaching process***

As the number of students increases, instrumental group courses struggle with limited teaching hours per student. The course consists of four parts: Firstly, student performance, teacher observation and analysis; Secondly, teachers evaluate and propose improvement suggestions; Thirdly, students should play again according to the guidance; Fourthly, teachers need to reassess. These steps are time-consuming and affect the effectiveness of group teaching, resulting in incomplete or insufficient content. Although the theoretical part is not affected by the number of students, actual performance guidance requires teachers to observe carefully and provide personalized explanations in order to improve students' performance skills. Therefore, the teaching content of instrumental performance courses in teacher training needs to be adjusted according to the teaching method.

On the other hand, the teaching process is mechanical. Some teachers lack innovation and flexibility in the teaching process, and only mechanically follow the teaching plan, making it difficult to adjust according to the actual situation and feedback of students. This standardized teaching method limits students' creativity and independent thinking ability by forcing them to passively accept rather than actively explore.

### ***2.4. Students' attention is scattered and their learning motivation is insufficient***

In group teaching of instrumental performance courses in higher normal universities, students' attention span and lack of learning motivation are common problems. This phenomenon not only affects students' learning outcomes, but also restricts the improvement of teaching quality. Firstly, the lack of attractiveness in the course content is the main reason. Teaching teachers usually receive formal performance training from a young age and are familiar with the repertoire they teach, while neglecting students' love and interest in music itself. Secondly, this is determined by the student's upbringing environment. A study has pointed out that the new generation of college students are "natives" of the internet, "with each person owning a mobile phone and spending a lot of time on mobile devices every day. They use their phones and the internet to learn, entertain, and socialize, and their behavior is characterized by a focus on entertainment over learning, and a focus on online socializing over offline socializing."<sup>[5]</sup> In addition, the use of "one to many" teaching methods by teachers can easily overlook individual differences and needs of students, resulting in a lack of effective interaction between teachers and students. In group teaching, interaction between students plays an important role in promoting learning and improving effectiveness. However, due to the lack of effective organization and guidance from teachers, interactions between students often become superficial and difficult to produce substantial learning outcomes. Therefore, it is also easy to cause students to lose focus and lack learning motivation. Furthermore, the high academic pressure on students is also one of the reasons. The instrumental performance course in normal universities requires high performance skills from students, who need to spend a lot of time practicing. However, due to tight course schedules and heavy learning tasks, students are prone to feeling high pressure, which can affect their interest and enthusiasm for learning.

## **3. Improvement strategies for group teaching of instrumental performance courses in higher normal universities**

### ***3.1. Clarify the course positioning and improve the evaluation system***

In the instrumental performance course of higher normal universities, the effective implementation of group teaching mode requires a clear course positioning and the construction of a comprehensive and diversified evaluation system. For the different training objectives of music performance and musicology majors, clear teaching focuses should be set separately to ensure that the course content matches the needs of their respective majors. The music performance major should focus on the exquisite performance skills and the improvement of artistic expression, while the music studies major needs to pay more attention to the learning of educational theories and the mastery of teaching methods. At the same time, traditional single evaluation criteria should be abandoned, and a multi-dimensional evaluation system covering performance skills, educational theory, teaching method application, innovation ability,

and teamwork ability should be constructed. Through diversified evaluation, not only can it comprehensively reflect students' comprehensive abilities, but it can also effectively stimulate their learning enthusiasm and promote their all-round development.

### ***3.2. Enrich teaching content and integrate ideological and political education into the curriculum***

Innovation and enrichment of teaching content are crucial to stimulate students' interest in learning. Instrumental performance courses in normal universities should integrate ideological and political education into the curriculum, combining modern music elements such as popular music and world music, to make the teaching content more closely related to students' lives and the trend of the times. At the same time, we should strengthen the guidance of students' values, convey positive energy through music works, and cultivate students' patriotism, national spirit, and sense of social responsibility. In addition, it is necessary to expand the field of practical teaching, organize students to participate in various music activities, and enhance their stage performance ability and practical experience. Through these measures, not only can teaching content be made more vivid and interesting, but students' comprehensive qualities and values can also be cultivated unconsciously.

### ***3.3. Optimize teaching arrangements and improve teaching efficiency***

In response to the issue of limited teaching time, instrumental performance courses in higher normal universities should flexibly adjust their teaching arrangements to ensure that each teaching link is fully developed. By utilizing modern technology and combining online and offline methods to complete teaching work, breaking the limitations of time and space, and improving teaching efficiency. For example, students can upload their performance videos to online storage before having lesson, and teachers can provide targeted lectures during class based on the overall performance of the students. Although this increases the workload of teachers to a certain extent, it can result in a significant improvement in teaching efficiency. At the same time, teaching methods should be improved by adopting diversified teaching models such as layered teaching, cooperative learning, and project-based learning to meet the learning needs of different students. Utilize multimedia teaching platforms to enhance the intuitiveness of teaching effectiveness. By implementing these optimization measures, students can ensure maximum learning benefits within a limited time frame.

### ***3.4. Stimulate students' interest and strengthen teacher-student interaction***

Stimulating students' interest in learning is a core element in improving teaching quality. In the instrumental performance courses of higher normal universities, strategies such as constructing teaching contexts, organizing competition activities, and showcasing learning outcomes should be used to ignite students' learning passion and internal motivation. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the interaction between teachers and students, build a harmonious teacher-student relationship, and enhance the emotional connection between teachers and students through interactive activities such as questioning, discussion, and collaborative performances. American scholar Paul Harris proposed in his book *The Virtuoso Teacher* that after each weekly practice, students are asked to write down two ideas: something I like and something that I find challenging.<sup>[6]</sup> This approach not only takes into account students' self-esteem in group learning, but also helps teachers understand students' inner selves. In addition, students' subjectivity should be fully mobilized to encourage them to engage in self-directed learning, participate in decision-making in the teaching process, and demonstrate their creativity, in order to cultivate their ability for self-directed learning and artistic expression.

## **4. Reform achievements of group teaching in instrumental performance courses at the College of Music, Zhaoqing University**

The School of Music of Zhaoqing University was founded in 1979 and is affiliated with Zhaoqing University, a public full-time university. It is the earliest higher music education department established in Guangdong Province. The college covers three undergraduate majors in music, music performance, and dance, and has departments such as vocal teaching and research, piano teaching and research, instrumental teaching and research, theoretical teaching and research, dance teaching and research, and music research institute. For over 40 years, the college has trained more than 10000 primary and secondary school music teachers for society. In recent years, the college has continuously improved its teaching quality and achieved significant results in the reform of instrumental performance courses.

#### **4.1. Introduction to curriculum construction**

The college will revise the new talent training plan in 2023, changing the instrumental performance course of the music performance major to a "one-on-one" teaching mode, and increasing the class time to two sessions per week. This measure significantly improves the individual guidance time and practice quality for music performance majors, enabling them to improve their instrumental performance skills in a more focused environment. Secondly, the college held a "Seminar on Music Classroom Teaching Practice in Primary and Secondary Schools under the New Curriculum Standards", organized teachers to deeply understand the development of music education in primary and secondary schools, and guided teachers to integrate ideological and political education elements into the teaching content of instrumental performance courses. Thirdly, the college has also introduced professional musicians for regular lectures and master classes, which not only enriches students' artistic horizons but also enhances their practical abilities. Fourthly, college teachers actively develop online course resources, build 420 minute MOOC resources, and carry out 20 corresponding service promotion courses. Among them, the MOOC "Violin Concerto 'Butterfly Lovers' Art Popularization Course" has received funding from the Guangdong Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism for the construction of central knowledge local public digital culture in 2022.

#### **4.2. Introduction to research projects and paper publications**

At present, the teachers of the college are actively applying for various levels and types of projects, and publishing teaching research papers around the reform and construction of instrumental performance courses. Among them, "Research on the Development of Chinese Ethnic Instrumental Music in Zhaoqing City" has been approved for the "Discipline Co construction" project of philosophy and social sciences in Zhaoqing City, and "Research and Exploration on the Integration of Chinese Ethnic Music and Piano Teaching under the Background of New Humanities" has been approved for completion by the Ministry of Education's Industry School Cooperation Collaborative Education Project. The paper "Analysis based on the big data background of " Internet plus "- Chinese reform and practice of violin performance teaching in music colleges" was published in the journal of physics.

#### **4.3. Introduction to student awards**

Through practical exploration in recent years, the students of this college have continuously improved their ability in instrumental performance, increased their enthusiasm for learning, and shifted from passive learning to active exploration. Their teamwork awareness and collaboration ability have also been continuously improved, and they have won over a hundred awards in various instrumental performance competitions. Among them, the flute ensemble was awarded the title of " Demonstration Orchestra" at the 15th China Excellent Wind Band Performance of the "China Cup" hosted by the China Wind Band Association. The student wind orchestra of the Music College of Zhaoqing University won the first prize at the 3rd Guangdong Provincial Intercollegiate Wind Music Festival, and so on.

### **5. Conclusion**

In summary, the issue of group teaching in instrumental performance courses at higher normal universities is constantly changing with the development of the times and still requires continuous research. At the same time, given the updated training objectives for music professionals in the new era and the evolving social demands, higher normal universities must take practical and effective measures to continuously optimize curriculum design and update teaching methods to adapt to new educational concepts and market demands. In addition, strengthening the construction of the teaching staff and improving the professional level and teaching ability of teachers are also key to improving the quality of teaching. Through these comprehensive reform measures, it can be expected that group teaching in instrumental performance courses at higher normal universities will better meet the requirements of the times and cultivate more outstanding music professionals.

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