

A Narrative Review of Children's Erhu Education

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Abstract

This research synthesizes contemporary research on children's erhu education to clarify its developmental trajectory, major thematic orientations, and enduring challenges. Using a Narrative Literature Review (NR) approach, 40 studies were examined across three domains, namely teaching content and tools, pedagogical approaches, and the current status of instructional practice. The research followed NR steps, including literature search, selection based on relevance and quality, and thematic synthesis, which allowed for flexible integration of diverse studies and identification of key patterns and research gaps. Findings indicate that although recent scholarship increasingly embraces child-centered principles, the field remains limited by adult-oriented learning objectives, uneven teacher preparation, fragmented instructional materials, and insufficient methodological diversity. At the same time, emerging innovations such as modularized curricula, child-adapted instrument modifications, game-based and experiential teaching strategies, and the integration of digital learning tools illustrate a gradual shift toward developmentally appropriate and more engaging learning environments. Overall, current research reflects a field in transition: conceptually expanding yet empirically weak, with a continued reliance on descriptive accounts rather than systematic evaluation. This review highlights the need for more rigorous, child-focused, and evidence-driven studies to support the long-term advancement of erhu education for young learners.

Keywords: Erhu Education, Child-Centered Pedagogy, Instructional Innovation, Narrative Review

Introduction

As a representative member of the family of traditional Chinese musical instruments, the erhu has continued to attract learners of all ages since gaining widespread recognition as a solo instrument. Over time, it has evolved into a large-scale educational market involving tens of millions of participants and generating several billion RMB in economic value (Tao, 2021). Against this backdrop, erhu education, particularly children's erhu instruction, has increasingly become a focal area among music education researchers, erhu performers, and scholars in related disciplines. However, despite its cultural prominence and rapid expansion,

systematic research on children's erhu learning remains limited, leaving a significant gap in understanding how pedagogical practices can effectively support young learners.

Compared with adults, children exhibit not only distinct differences in technical skill acquisition and material comprehension when learning the erhu, but their physiological development, cognitive abilities, and limited self-regulation capacities also make the learning process more challenging and complex. According to cognitive development theory (Piaget, 1970), children's thinking and understanding vary significantly across developmental stages, directly influencing their grasp of musical notation, rhythmic accuracy, and technical execution. As most beginner erhu learners are children aged 6–11 (Chen, 2023), they fall primarily within Piaget's pre-operational and concrete operational stages, making it essential to examine their developmental characteristics in relation to cognitive theory. Understanding these characteristics is crucial for designing instruction that not only fosters skill acquisition but also reduces frustration and dropout rates.

Children in the pre-operational stage (approximately 2–7 years old) rely mainly on concrete and intuitive thinking, with limited abstract reasoning and causal inference abilities (Piaget, 1970). In erhu learning, they often struggle to understand the abstract correspondence between musical symbols and sounds and find it difficult to construct mental representations of melodic structures. Consequently, they depend heavily on full demonstrations and direct imitation to acquire technical skills. Their short attention spans further increase the likelihood of distraction or frustration during repetitive practice, requiring teachers to provide careful scaffolding and motivational strategies.

Children in the concrete operational stage (approximately 7–11 years old) demonstrate improved cognitive abilities, including basic logical reasoning and causal understanding, yet still rely on concrete representations and have limited capacity for abstract thinking (Piaget, 1970). In erhu instruction, they are able to comprehend simple music theory, rhythmic patterns, and finger positioning under teacher guidance, but continue to face difficulties with multitasking, complex rhythms, and planning independent practice. For example, during position shifts, rapid scale exercises, or compound rhythmic tasks, they may struggle to coordinate finger movements, bowing techniques, and rhythmic precision simultaneously, necessitating step-by-step instruction and repeated practice.

These stage-dependent cognitive characteristics have clear implications for the design of erhu teaching materials, instructional strategies, and technical training approaches. Tailoring pedagogy to children's cognitive development is vital for reducing learning difficulties, enhancing efficiency, and sustaining engagement. Such developmental alignment is especially important for teachers, curriculum developers, music training institutions, and parents, all of whom play critical roles in children's learning progression and require evidence-based guidance to optimise practice.

Zimmerman's (2002) Self-Regulated Learning theory further emphasizes the importance of learners' proactive engagement in goal setting, strategy use, attention control, emotion regulation, and self-monitoring. The development of such abilities plays a crucial supporting role during both the initial and intermediate stages of erhu learning. In practice, children must gradually learn to engage in autonomous practice, monitor errors, and plan and adjust their

practice routines. However, due to developmental and cognitive constraints, children show considerable variability in these skills, posing challenges for lesson planning, practice design, and instructional guidance.

It is therefore evident that children's physiological development, cognitive levels, and self-regulation capacities exhibit stage-specific differences in erhu learning. These differences not only influence their mastery of erhu techniques, music theory, and practice strategies but also impose higher demands on instructional resource allocation, teaching approaches, and curriculum design. Although existing research has examined teaching methods, curriculum development, technical training, and instructional models, such studies remain largely fragmented, case-based, and experiential, making it difficult to construct a coherent and guiding pedagogical framework. Notably, there is a lack of systematic synthesis and theoretical development grounded in children's developmental characteristics. This absence of integration limits the field's ability to inform evidence-based teaching, innovate curriculum design, and enhance the overall quality of children's erhu education.

In this context, conducting a systematic narrative analysis of existing research is particularly necessary. Such an approach can clarify the core topics, research trends, and theoretical foundations in children's erhu education, while identifying gaps, limitations, and potential avenues for future inquiry. Through comprehensive review and integration of relevant studies, this paper seeks to construct an overarching picture of research on children's erhu education across multiple dimensions, including instructional materials, teaching methods, learner characteristics, and educational support systems. By strengthening the conceptual clarity and pedagogical implications of existing knowledge, this review aims to support teachers, curriculum designers, policymakers, and music institutions in improving instructional practice, enhancing learner outcomes, and guiding future developmental research.

Literature Review

In recent years, research on children's erhu education has expanded significantly, addressing a range of issues related to pedagogy, technique, and curriculum design. Despite this growth, the literature remains fragmented, with many studies concentrating on isolated aspects such as specific teaching methods, repertoire choices, or learner outcomes rather than offering integrated, systematic perspectives.

Entering the 21st century, children's erhu education has become a major area of development within erhu education research. According to data compiled by Ding Yiming (2025), between 2000 and 2024 there were 78 publications devoted to children's erhu education, accounting for 14.9% of the 524 erhu-related studies published during this period. This number contrasts sharply with the merely six publications (12%) from the late 20th century (1983–1999), which were largely fragmented experiential accounts. Keyword centrality analysis further shows that enlightenment education ranks first with a centrality value of 0.83, highlighting the increasing prominence of beginner- and early-childhood-focused research. Additionally, among 85 studies on community-based or extracurricular erhu education, 77 focus on children, confirming that they constitute the primary learner demographic and continue to drive the expansion of related scholarship (Ding, 2025).

Although research output has grown substantially, the thematic distribution of studies remains highly dispersed, experiential, and case based. Scholars have examined diverse topics such as interest cultivation (Wang Xinhui, 2019; Su Fei, 2010), including animated music and gamified instructional strategies to enhance motivation; the introduction of international pedagogical systems such as Orff, Dalcroze, and Suzuki into beginner instruction (Xie Ping, 2020; Hu Xiaoyu, 2017); textbook selection; psychological guidance; parent–child interaction; group-class organization; and psychological skills training (Tian Jinling, 2018). Other studies have explored the use of technological supports such as multimedia, micro-lesson formats, and intelligent tuning software (Ding, 2025). Despite this diversity, most studies draw primarily on individual teaching experience or localized practice. They tend to lack strong theoretical grounding and have yet to establish a coherent, developmentally informed beginner-level pedagogy suitable for Chinese children. As Bu Xiaomei (2008) notes, even influential early works such as Erhu Tutorials for Children displayed flexible and non-standardized structures, reflecting the early developmental stage of pedagogical thinking in this field.

From a methodological perspective, research on children’s erhu education remains dominated by qualitative approaches. Experiential summaries, case analyses, and literature reviews are the most common methods used. For example, the pedagogical suggestions proposed by Wei Peize (2004) and Su Fei (2010) rely heavily on personal teaching experience and demonstrate limited engagement with developmental psychology, music cognition, or broader educational theory. Empirical research is scarce, and studies that employ quantitative approaches such as surveys, quasi-experiments, or longitudinal observations are exceedingly rare. As a result, many findings remain subjective and lack generalizability.

At the same time, interdisciplinary integration is still insufficient. Some efforts have been made to incorporate insights from psychology (Zhao Xuefeng, 2017), music therapy (Li Yanlin, 2011), and biomechanics (Wei Wei, 2014), but these attempts are sporadic and have not developed into a cohesive cross-disciplinary instructional model. Ding Yiming (2025) observes that such explorations, while promising, remain isolated and have yet to build a robust theoretical foundation for children’s erhu education.

Overall, while current research demonstrates numerical growth, thematic diversification, and a variety of methodological approaches, significant structural deficiencies persist. The field lacks a scientific, standardized, and replicable pedagogical paradigm, as well as rigorous methodological frameworks that can support theory-building and generalizable findings. These gaps indicate an urgent need for systematic synthesis.

In response to this situation, the present study systematically collects, organizes, and analyzes research literature related to children’s erhu education. Through a comprehensive narrative synthesis, it aims to map the overall landscape of existing research, including key themes, methodological trends, and persistent challenges. This synthesis seeks to provide a clearer theoretical reference and a more coherent framework to guide future research, curriculum development, and instructional practice within the field of children’s erhu education.

Methodology

This study adopts the Narrative Literature Review (NR) as the primary approach for synthesizing knowledge in the field of children's erhu education research. NR is a form of non-systematic review suitable for areas where research topics are multidimensional, methodological approaches are diverse, and theoretical structures remain emergent. Given that research on children's erhu education is characterized by dispersed themes, methodological heterogeneity, and an underdeveloped theoretical foundation, the NR approach provides an effective means of mapping the landscape of existing scholarship. It facilitates the identification of patterns, contradictions, and trends within the literature, while also helping to reveal gaps that remain insufficiently explored (Ferrari, 2015). Drawing on Ferrari's (2015) procedural guidance and considering the characteristics of the available scholarship, this review was implemented in four stages.

The first stage involved clarifying the scope and purpose of the review, which aimed to investigate existing literature on children's erhu education to understand its developmental trajectory and central areas of scholarly focus. Particular attention was given to children's learning characteristics, instructional strategies, recurring pedagogical challenges, and methodological approaches within the literature. The review included publicly accessible domestic and international research on children's erhu learning and beginner-level erhu pedagogy, incorporating journal articles, master's and doctoral theses, and relevant conference papers. This stage provided the foundational background required for subsequent analysis.

In the second stage, a structured literature search strategy was developed to enhance comprehensiveness and reproducibility, even though NR does not mandate fully systematic retrieval procedures. Because the erhu is a traditional Chinese instrument and much of the scholarship exists in Chinese, both Chinese- and English-language search platforms were used. CNKI and Google Scholar served as the primary databases. Keywords focused on core concepts such as children's erhu education, erhu enlightenment, and erhu teaching methods. Boolean operators and combined keyword searches (e.g., "children AND erhu AND teaching") were utilised to improve retrieval accuracy.

The third stage established clear inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the relevance and quality of selected literature. Studies were included if they focused directly on children's erhu education, children's instrumental-learning characteristics, or instructional issues in beginner-level erhu teaching. Literature with weak thematic relevance, or those discussing general music education without reference to the erhu, were excluded. Only sources with accessible full texts were considered, and those available merely in abstract or incomplete form were omitted. Priority was given to studies offering substantive insights, such as discussions of children's learning features, identification of instructional challenges, or summaries of pedagogical strategies, whereas overly brief or redundant works were excluded.

The final stage involved synthesizing and organizing the literature according to themes that emerged naturally from the reviewed studies. Given the wide-ranging and often experience-based nature of research on children's erhu education, a flexible integration strategy was adopted rather than imposing a rigid conceptual framework. The literature was

grouped around central topics such as dominant research themes, typical instructional concerns, and recurrent pedagogical issues. The writing process emphasized content analysis and categorization, comparing studies with shared objectives or thematic orientations and presenting their commonalities and differences through coherent narrative synthesis. The structure of the synthesis varied according to the richness of the available evidence: topics with abundant literature allowed for more systematic comparisons, whereas areas with sparse or highly case-specific studies were addressed through general summarization and identification of key issues.

Findings

Following the established search strategy, a total of 86 publications were initially retrieved. After the application of screening criteria, 40 studies were deemed eligible for inclusion. Through in-depth reading and categorization, the reviewed literature was found to cluster around three major themes: (a) teaching conditions and challenges, (b) teaching content and tools, and (c) teaching approaches and methods. However, many publications spanned multiple thematic areas, making it inappropriate to impose a rigid three-category classification. Therefore, the analysis was organized according to the substantive content of each text segment to ensure that the review accurately represented the authentic structure and distribution of existing scholarship.

Teaching Conditions and Challenges

Research on teaching conditions and challenges primarily identifies the deficiencies and obstacles currently present in children's erhu education from a practical perspective. The literature frequently draws on field investigations conducted across various regions, offering surveys and analyses of beginner-level instruction with respect to teacher allocation, instructional methods, learning outcomes, and corresponding recommendations. Table 1 summarizes the core issues identified in the literature on teaching conditions and challenges.

Table 1

Teaching Conditions and Challenges

Subtheme	Key Findings	Representative Issues / Evidence
Ambiguous & Over-Advanced Teaching Objectives	Polarization of goals: unclear objectives vs. excessive technical demands.	Lack of stage-based planning; premature introduction of advanced skills (vibrato, shifting, fast bowing); competition-driven compressed training cycles.
Teacher Competence Imbalance	Strong performance skills but weak child pedagogy; regional disparities.	Adult-centered instruction; insufficient understanding of child psychology; high-quality teachers concentrated in developed regions; non-professional or aging teachers in rural/township areas.
Textbook Misalignment	Adult textbooks used for children; lack of child-centered design.	Overly difficult content; low engagement; reliance on grading materials; localized child-appropriate materials successful in Jiangyin and Dongtai.
Monotonous Teaching Methods	Over-reliance on demonstration-imitation-repetition; low interaction.	Mechanical imitation; limited method diversity; whole-class instruction fails to differentiate; playful/life-based models effective but not widely adopted.
Weak Home-School Collaboration	Parental involvement inconsistent or misaligned with children's needs.	Excessive pressure, lack of musical knowledge, or neglect; Jiangyin's structured feedback systems effective but not common elsewhere.

Although children's erhu education has gained momentum nationwide, it remains largely in an exploratory phase. Persistent systemic issues appear across teaching philosophy, goal-setting, teacher composition, textbook selection, and home-school collaboration. A recurring theme across the literature is that instructional practice often fails to adopt a child-centered logic, privileging technical or grading-oriented objectives over children's physical, cognitive, and emotional needs.

Coexistence of Ambiguous and Over-Advanced Teaching Objectives

A pronounced polarization in teaching objectives is widely reported. Some instructors lack systematic planning and fail to establish stage-appropriate competency goals based on children's developmental characteristics, resulting in fragmented and arbitrary instructional content that undermines the establishment of a stable technical foundation (Wang, 2023; Chen, 2015). Conversely, many teachers adopt overly advanced teaching approaches, prioritizing difficult repertoire and techniques beyond level three—such as vibrato, shifting, or fast bowing—while neglecting fundamental skill consolidation. Wan (2018) argues that this premature advancement reflects adult-oriented value projections onto children, violating cognitive and physiological principles and often leading to frustration and disengagement.

Even in regions with stronger educational infrastructures, such as Dongtai and Jiangyin in Jiangsu Province, misalignment persists. Competition-driven and grading-oriented practices compress foundational training cycles and prioritize rapid technical acquisition over long-term musical development, deviating from the fundamental goals of music education (Wu, 2015; Lu, 2021).

Structural Imbalance in Teacher Professional Competence and Teaching Ability

Teacher quality imbalance is one of the most frequently discussed constraints. Many erhu instructors possess solid performance skills but lack training in child pedagogy and psychology, making it difficult to translate abstract musical concepts into child-comprehensible language and actions (Wang, 2023; Yang, 2016). Zhang (2023) highlights that high-quality teachers must balance performance ability, methodological knowledge, and research literacy, yet adult-oriented teaching discourse remains prevalent.

Large regional disparities compound the problem. Jiangyin, supported by local higher-education resources, has a high proportion of professionally trained teachers (89%) and a mature teaching-research system (Lu, 2021). In contrast, areas such as Gaoyou and Zhangjiakou rely heavily on aging teachers with outdated pedagogical concepts, and county-level regions frequently depend on non-professional instructors lacking access to systematic training (Zhou, 2019; Wu, 2015).

Fixed Textbook Use and Content Detached from Children's Experience

Textbook-related challenges primarily reflect adult-centered and grading-oriented approaches. Many teachers continue to rely on adult erhu textbooks such as the National Erhu Grading Tutorial without regard for developmental mismatches in difficulty and cognitive load (Wang, 2023; Chen, 2015). These materials often lack engaging content, contextualization, and child-appropriate pacing. Yang's (2016) survey indicates that while 43% of teachers use grading textbooks, only 18% adopt introductory materials specifically designed for children.

However, localized innovations present promising alternatives. Jiangyin's self-developed syllabus integrates revolutionary songs, children's music, and local operatic material, fostering familiarity and cultural identity (Lu, 2021). In Dongtai, teachers created pieces such as Water Town Duckling, effectively balancing technique and cultural relevance (Wu, 2015). These examples demonstrate that high-quality children's textbooks should integrate scientific structure, age-appropriate content, and cultural resonance.

Monotonous Teaching Methods and Lack of Interest-Stimulating Mechanisms

The literature overwhelmingly reports that children's erhu instruction continues to rely heavily on the traditional demonstration–imitation–repetition model, with limited interaction or methodological diversity. In Zhangjiakou, 46% of students remained in mechanical imitation, inhibiting autonomous learning (Yang, 2016). Whole-class teaching formats in districts such as Jiangyin further struggle to accommodate individual differences (Lu, 2021; Zhou, 2019).

Although child-friendly approaches such as contextualized instruction (Zhang, 2023) and life-based metaphors (Chen, 2015) demonstrate strong potential for improving understanding and engagement, their adoption remains limited. Wider professional dissemination of such practices is essential for enhancing children's motivation and alleviating the monotony of technical training.

Weak Home–School Collaboration and Lack of Support Systems

Parental involvement plays a crucial role in children's erhu learning, yet participation quality varies widely. Some parents impose excessive pressure due to grading expectations (Wan, 2018; Wang, 2023), while others lack the musical knowledge needed to provide effective support (Yang, 2016). In certain cases, parental neglect further impedes learning (Zhou, 2019). Jiangyin's structured mechanisms such as practice check-ins, teacher feedback loops, and WeChat-based communication have improved collaboration, but such systems have not been widely implemented elsewhere (Lu, 2021).

Overall, current children's erhu education faces persistent challenges including unscientific goal-setting, imbalanced teacher composition, non-child-centered textbooks, monotonous teaching methods, and weak home–school collaboration. These issues stem fundamentally from instructional practices that do not fully align with children's developmental needs, and instead continue to be shaped by grading utilitarianism and adult-oriented educational values.

Teaching Content and Tools

Research on teaching content and tools primarily focuses on the materials and instrumental resources used in children's erhu learning. Existing studies highlight four major areas: textbook construction, basic technical training design, repertoire selection, and adaptations of the erhu instrument to suit children's physiological characteristics. Collectively, this body of work emphasizes that instructional content must be targeted, systematic, and developmentally appropriate. The difficulty level of learning materials, the sequencing of technical skills, and the usability of child-friendly instruments all directly influence the effectiveness of beginner-level instruction. Table 2 presents a summary of the major subthemes identified in the literature.

Table 2

Teaching Content and Tools

Subtheme	Key Findings	Representative Issues / Evidence
Textbook Structure & Content Design	Movement toward systematic, modular, child-appropriate content.	Adult-style miniaturized textbooks problematic; progressive modules (skills–techniques–repertoire) recommended; engaging, expressive content enhances motivation.
Child-Aligned Repertoire Selection	Use of nursery rhymes, folk songs, and popular tunes increases interest.	Age-level adaptation needed; child psychology and experience central to content design.
Instrument Adaptation for Children	Traditional erhu unsuitable for children’s physiology; modified children’s erhu emerging.	Issues with finger span, bow length, posture; scientific redesign improves comfort and intonation stability.
Digital and Multimedia Tools	Technology increasingly supports practice and engagement.	Audiovisual materials, interactive apps, rhythm and trainers, pitch detection tools enhance imitation, feedback, and motivation.
Cultural and Stylistic Training	Integration of cultural content strengthens expressiveness and identity.	Use of local operas, folk styles, Henan-style techniques; diversified repertoire promotes holistic musicality.

For many years, children’s erhu textbooks have exhibited significant limitations, often resembling scaled-down versions of adult materials. These resources tend to feature fragmented content, large gaps in difficulty, and insufficiently engaging materials, resulting in challenges for children in both technical mastery and sustained motivation (Fu, 2014; Yang, 2024). Accordingly, recent research increasingly emphasizes that children’s erhu textbooks must adopt content systems that are both systematic and developmentally appropriate.

In terms of structural design, scholarly attention has shifted from repertoire accumulation toward modular, progressive frameworks. Tang (2014) and Yuan (2006) propose organizing children’s textbooks into three core modules, namely basic skills, specialized techniques, and musically expressive repertoire, creating a progressive learning ladder. Zhao’s textbook series exemplifies this structure by combining short technical exercises with appealing pieces, enabling the joint development of technique and musical expression (Li, 2014). Complementing this, Zhang’s Erhu Scale Exercises provides micro-level reinforcement of scales and finger positioning, offering a structurally coherent foundation for systematic learning (Sun, 2024).

Regarding content selection, research stresses the importance of aligning instructional materials with children’s psychological characteristics and life experiences. Fu (2014) demonstrates that incorporating nursery rhymes, folk tunes, and melodies from film and television significantly enhances learning interest. Yang (2024) further argues that age-appropriate graded pieces should be matched to learners’ developmental levels, striking a balance between long-term technical training and immediate musical enjoyment. Such child-centered approaches strengthen the reciprocal development of technical and aesthetic skills.

Instrument suitability constitutes another important dimension. Traditional erhus, due to their finger span requirements, string length, and bow length, are not designed for

children's smaller hands and often lead to tense hand posture or unstable intonation (Jing, 2021). To address this mismatch, recent years have seen the emergence of scientifically redesigned children's erhu. Jing (2021) proposes innovations not limited to simple scaling; instead, adjustments in string vibration, resonance, and excitation systems make the instrument more compatible with children's physiology while preserving traditional timbre quality. These hardware improvements increase technical accessibility and reduce physical strain, facilitating more effective practice.

Parallel to instrument design, digital and multimedia tools have become increasingly prominent in erhu instruction. Fu (2014) notes that audiovisual materials enhance children's imitation abilities. With the rise of digital learning ecosystems, interactive apps, rhythm-training tools, and pitch-visualization technologies now offer immediate feedback, gamified practice, and greater learning efficiency. These tools help create a positive feedback cycle across technique, content, and student engagement.

Finally, some studies highlight the value of integrating cultural and stylistic elements early in instruction. Sun's (2016) analysis of Erhu Technical Exercises featuring Henan-style practice pieces focusing on techniques such as zhuihu and Yu opera banhu demonstrates how stylistic training can strengthen tone production and expressive nuance. Although such materials are designed for intermediate learners, their pedagogical logic offers insights for embedding cultural content into beginner curricula. In this vein, Tang (2025) advocates for the inclusion of traditional, modern, folk, and popular repertoire to cultivate expressive musicianship from multiple cultural perspectives.

Taken together, the literature clearly indicates a paradigm shift from traditional technique-centered instruction toward a child-centered educational model. In terms of content, this shift moves instruction away from technique-heavy imitation toward integrated materials that balance cognitive, aesthetic, and cultural dimensions. In terms of tools, the shift involves transitioning from requiring children to adapt to adult instruments toward designing developmentally appropriate educational instruments that better support children's learning needs.

Teaching Approaches and Methods

Research on teaching approaches and methods encompasses the instructional strategies, classroom models, and procedural techniques employed by teachers to support children's erhu learning. Existing scholarship addresses a wide range of pedagogical directions, including innovative and child-friendly teaching strategies, targeted methods for technically challenging skills, gamified and playful instruction, situational and contextual design, aesthetic guidance, and classroom organization tailored to children's attentional patterns. Taken together, this body of work highlights the central importance of aligning teaching strategies with the cognitive, emotional, and motivational characteristics of young learners. Table 3 provides an overview of the major subthemes identified in the literature.

Table 3

Teaching Approaches and Methods

Subtheme	Key Findings	Representative Issues / Evidence
Interest-Driven Learning	Interest forms foundation for sustained engagement; joyful teaching effective.	Finger games, metaphors, playful contexts reduce abstraction and increase motivation.
Localization of International Pedagogies	Orff, Dalcroze, Kodály adapted for erhu instruction.	Improve rhythm, inner hearing, multisensory participation; applications still superficial and lack systematic frameworks.
Group Class Models	Group classes enhance interaction, cooperation, peer learning.	Performance relays, competitions, mini-judge tasks boost engagement; challenges in pacing and individualized support.
Scientific & Enjoyable Basic Skill Training	Balanced strategies for pitch, rhythm, bowing essential.	Use of solfège, body movement, rhythm chants, short-phrase bowing exercises to avoid frustration.
Aesthetic Creative Development	Instruction should move beyond technique to expression and creativity.	Integration of aesthetic experiences from early stages encourages expressive learning.

Traditional children's erhu instruction has long relied on a demonstration-based, one-on-one skill transmission model. Although effective for technical refinement, this model increasingly shows limitations when applied to children, whose cognitive development, psychological pace, and learning motivation differ substantially from adults. Lessons often prioritize linear skill acquisition, resulting in monotonous routines with limited attention to interest cultivation, conditions that contribute to learning fatigue and early dropout (Yan, 2010; Zhao, 2019). Consequently, recent research strongly advocates for pedagogical approaches that are more compatible with children's learning patterns, while still maintaining the essential characteristics of erhu technique.

Interest-Driven Learning as the Starting Point

Across the literature, interest is widely acknowledged as the foundational prerequisite for children's sustained engagement in erhu learning (Zhang, 2011; Lin, 2021). The erhu's technical demands, particularly its lack of frets and the need for coordinated left- and right-hand movements, make persistent practice difficult without intrinsic motivation. To address this, many scholars advocate the creation of joyful learning environments where technique is embedded in playful, concrete, and life-related activities (Xi, 2012; Xu, 2016). Strategies such as finger games, narrative-based metaphors, or action-oriented analogies help reduce abstraction and make technical movements more intuitively perceptible (Zhao, 2000; Xiao, 2013). These methods promote a positive cycle between external stimulation and internal achievement motivation. Although simple, they remain among the most practical and effective approaches currently available.

Localization of International Music Pedagogies

Building on interest-driven foundations, several studies attempt to integrate international pedagogical systems such as Orff, Dalcroze, and Kodály into children's erhu instruction. The Orff approach, which emphasizes the interplay of music, language, and movement, has been applied to rhythm and melody learning through recitation and kinaesthetic activities (Wang

& Wang, 2020). Dalcroze eurhythmics reinforces rhythm comprehension through body movement, improving rhythmic stability and cooperative learning (Wang, 2019). Kodály-based approaches employ singing, solfège, and ear training to strengthen inner hearing, forming an important basis for pitch accuracy (Ma, 2017). These systems share an emphasis on multisensory participation and active learning, aligning well with children's developmental characteristics. However, current applications in erhu teaching remain limited. Most studies describe single cases or demonstrations rather than systematic frameworks, and empirical evaluation is scarce. As a result, localization and integration remain exploratory, with broader implementation and model refinement still required.

Expansion of Group Class Models and Innovation in Classroom Ecology

To address constraints inherent in one-on-one instruction such as limited interaction and resource inefficiency, group class models have gained growing attention (Jin, 2013). Research indicates that group instruction fosters peer influence, collective motivation, and diversified interaction structures. Activities such as performance relays strengthen attention and listening skills; small-group competitions stimulate practice enthusiasm; and "mini-judge" mechanisms encourage student reflection and aesthetic judgment (Xu, 2013; Xu, 2016; Jiang, 2016). These practices help transform the classroom from a unidirectional teaching space into a dynamic, open, and interactive learning environment.

Nonetheless, the literature also notes challenges associated with group instruction, particularly in managing classroom pacing and providing individualized support. These areas require further systematic research and professional development for teachers.

Scientific and Enjoyable Basic Skill Training

Pitch, rhythm, and bowing are core elements of erhu technique and thus central topics in pedagogical research. The consensus across studies is that children's technical training should simultaneously emphasize scientific rigor and enjoyable forms, minimizing frustration and maintaining engagement. For pitch development, scholars recommend strengthening inner hearing through solfège-based exercises and structured hand-position training (Ying, 2016). Rhythm training often incorporates body movement, rhythm chants, or everyday analogies to improve stability and memorability (Zhao, 2019). Bowing practice is shifting away from repetitive open-string exercises toward short-phrase practice, competitive activities, and contextualized tasks (Li, 2016). Collectively, these approaches reflect a transition from mechanical repetition to meaningful, experience-oriented learning.

Aesthetics and Creativity: From Skill to Expression

Beyond technique acquisition, a smaller but significant body of literature emphasizes the importance of aesthetic education and creativity in children's erhu learning. Zhang (2008) proposes an interest–appreciation–creativity progression model, advocating that aesthetic experiences be integrated early in instruction to support students' transition from mechanical imitation to expressive performance. Although research in this area remains limited, its conceptual contributions underscore the need for erhu pedagogy to develop not only technical proficiency but also artistic sensibility and creative capacity.

Discussion

The findings of this narrative review indicate that research on children's erhu education remains in a transitional stage, evolving from fragmented, experience-based teaching practices toward more systematic and child-centered approaches. Although existing studies collectively examine a wide array of topics, from teaching objectives and instructional content to teacher capacity, classroom organization, and basic skill training, these components are often treated independently rather than as parts of a unified pedagogical system. This structural fragmentation aligns with Sukhera's (2022) observation that narrative reviews are necessary in fields where conceptual maturity is still developing. The prevalence of experiential and descriptive studies suggests that children's erhu education is still negotiating the shift from practitioner-driven intuition to theoretically informed educational design.

Across the three synthesized themes, which are teaching conditions and challenges, teaching content and tools, and teaching approaches and methods, several deep-seated structural difficulties become evident. Problems such as ambiguous or over-advanced instructional objectives, imbalanced teacher competence, and reliance on adult-centered textbooks reflect a broader disconnect between pedagogical practice and children's cognitive, psychological, and physiological characteristics (Wang et al., 2024; Vossoughi et al., 2021). These findings resonate with Piaget's (1970) developmental theory, which emphasizes that instructional design must align with learners' cognitive stages, and with Zimmerman's (2002) self-regulated learning theory, which highlights the importance of supporting children's emerging autonomy. However, much of the existing literature demonstrates a persistent gap between developmental theory and applied instructional practice.

The review also reveals promising developments in teaching content, tools, and pedagogical innovation, although these remain unevenly implemented. The move toward modular, progressive textbook design (Ferguson, 2024), age-appropriate repertoire selection (Shengjergji, 2025), and child-focused instrument redesign (Jansen van Rensburg, 2024) signals a gradual shift toward scientific and developmentally responsive instructional design. Similarly, the incorporation of digital tools such as audiovisual teaching materials, interactive applications, and pitch-detection technologies reflects broader trends in technology-enhanced music learning (Cheng, 2024). Yet, despite these advances, the literature indicates that such innovations are often isolated, lack empirical evaluation, and have not coalesced into an integrated pedagogical model capable of guiding widespread instructional practice.

In terms of teaching approaches, the increasing emphasis on interest-driven learning, localized use of international pedagogies, group class models, and contextualized skill training demonstrates a growing awareness of children's diverse learning needs (Luo, 2021; Zeng et al., 2025). These findings support contemporary music education paradigms that advocate multisensory, experiential, and aesthetically rich learning environments. However, as scholars note (Burden, 2025; Clark, 2024), challenges remain in ensuring methodological consistency, classroom manageability, and individualized support within these approaches. The limited exploration of aesthetic and creativity-oriented instruction further suggests that children's erhu education remains heavily technique-centered, with insufficient emphasis on higher-order musical development.

In summary, the findings reveal a field that is expanding in scope but still lacks theoretical consolidation, rigorous empirical validation, and cross-regional comparability. To advance children's erhu education into a more systematic and sustainable discipline, future research should prioritize three directions: (1) constructing theoretically grounded pedagogical frameworks that integrate developmental psychology, music education theory, and instrumental pedagogy; (2) adopting mixed-methods and experimental designs to verify the effectiveness of instructional strategies and textbook systems; and (3) establishing multi-site, cross-regional collaborations to examine ecological variations in teaching conditions, teacher training, and cultural resources. Only through the combined advancement of theory, empirical inquiry, and contextual adaptation can children's erhu education evolve from an experience-based tradition into a scientifically informed and pedagogically robust field.

Conclusion

This narrative review demonstrates that children's erhu education remains at an important developmental crossroads, gradually moving from fragmented, experience-based teaching practices toward a more child-centered and systematically structured field. While existing research spans a wide spectrum, including teaching conditions, instructional content, instrumental adaptation, and classroom methodology, it has yet to form a cohesive theoretical or pedagogical framework. The review highlights that many instructional challenges stem from a persistent misalignment between teaching practices and children's cognitive, physiological, and self-regulatory characteristics, resulting in learning difficulties, motivation decline, and weak instructional outcomes. Collectively, the evidence shows that the field is transitioning but still lacks the coherence and empirical foundation required for long-term advancement.

The implications of these findings are multifaceted. First, the review underscores the urgent need to reposition children at the center of erhu pedagogy, aligning teaching objectives, repertoire design, and technique sequencing with developmental principles. Second, the growing emergence of modular textbooks, child-specific instruments, and playful or multisensory learning models signals a shift toward professionalization, indicating the potential for more inclusive and developmentally supportive learning environments. Third, the review suggests that technology, particularly digital tools for imitation, feedback, and engagement, offers promising opportunities for enhancing practice efficacy and learner autonomy. As children's erhu education continues to expand nationwide, these implications underscore the necessity of integrating pedagogical theory with instructional innovation.

The significance of this study lies in its systematic synthesis of a scattered and under-theorized body of research, providing the first consolidated analytical map of children's erhu education across teaching content, classroom approaches, and structural conditions. By highlighting thematic patterns, developmental gaps, and methodological limitations, the review establishes a clearer conceptual foundation for both researchers and practitioners. It also contributes to the broader discourse in instrumental and music education by showing how the unique demands of erhu learning interact with children's developmental trajectories, thereby informing practice not only within erhu education but also across other forms of early instrumental training.

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed. First, future research should adopt mixed-methods and longitudinal designs to empirically test the effectiveness of instructional strategies, instrument adaptations, and textbook systems. Second, teacher education programs should integrate developmental psychology, child-centered pedagogy, and research literacy to strengthen teaching competence, particularly in regions with insufficient professional training. Third, national or regional collaborations should be established to develop standardized, tiered curriculum frameworks and child-appropriate instructional materials. Finally, future pedagogical models should integrate cognitive, affective, cultural, and technological dimensions to construct a holistic and sustainable system of children's erhu education. Through these directions, the field may progress toward a more scientific, equitable, and developmentally meaningful future.

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