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PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR GUITAR TEACHERS: ADDRESSING CHALLENGES AND ENHANCING INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

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Abstract: The guitar is a highly versatile instrument and is commonly taught in diverse educational settings, such as private lessons, social projects, churches and advanced courses. The present study aims to offer pedagogical strategies that guitar teachers can use to enhance their instructional practices. Data were collected through a questionnaire answered by guitar teachers comprising 15 items addressing the methodologies employed in classes, difficulties encountered, and important features of teachers and students for effective learning. The findings show numerous types of strategies used during their classes which can facilitate the instrument learning process. Additionally, the teachers' responses showed the primary challenges encountered in their pedagogical practices and discussed strategies to overcome it. In summary, using effective teaching strategies can provide a significant impact on both teaching and learning outcomes.

Keywords: Teaching, Guitar, Music Education, Instructional Practices, Pedagogical Strategies

INTRODUCTION

Learning to play a musical instrument can considerably contribute to the development of cognitive processes in children, including short and long term memory, as well as executive processing skills that persist over time (Pérez-Eizaguirre et al., 2023). For instance, a previous study has shown that children aged 6-15 years who had been learning an instrument for 1 to 5 years were able to recall approximately 20% more words from a 16 word list compared to non-musically trained classmates (Ho et al., 2003). Positive correlations between listening to music and emotional competency, quality of life, and social connectivity has also been found (Hietolahti-Ansten & Mirja Kalliopuska, 1990; Gustavson et al., 2021). As well as improved pitch processing skills (Besson et al., 2007; Neves et al., 2022) and

temporal processing skills (Elangovan et al., 2016).

A widely popular instrument is the guitar, likely due to its affordability and accessibility, it is commonly taught in a variety of settings, including social projects, private classes, masterclasses, and undergraduate courses. The initial stages of learning the guitar is crucial, as it can influence a student's motivation to continue learning the instrument, and even when following a standardized method of teaching, it is common for guitar instructors to encounter challenges. Pedagogical strategies that can facilitate guitar teaching have already been described in the literature. For example, in collective guitar teaching classes, a relationship between the repertoire being studied and the technique learned can be established, so that an exercise worked in solo form results in a musical piece (Tourinho, 2016), which could be a more meaningful outcome for the student. During this approach, students can play in unison in a circle, with the teacher's interference; or in the form of a masterclass, in which the teacher works individually with a student while the others follow the explanations (Tourinho, 2016).

Other strategies may involve incorporating notated symbols in the score to enhance focus and understanding during practicing, as well as using colored music notation, which has been demonstrated to have a beneficial effect in the music reading (Rogers, 1991); The creation of accompaniment to facilitate understanding of melody and rhythm and the memorization of musical pieces through the organization of performance into smaller sections can also be used (Santos, 2007). Additionally, metacognitive strategies-based teaching has been demonstrated to have a beneficial impact on guitar learning (Yokucs, 2021). It was previously shown that both the control group students receiving traditional current-based education and the experimental

group students undergoing metacognitive strategies-based teaching showed progress in their guitar performance (Yokucs, 2021). Still, many challenges can appear during the teaching process, for example, having students in the same class who are at different ability levels. Nevertheless, the identification of a solution for a precise issue within the class may pose challenges. Here we aim to describe and discuss the strategies employed by teachers that promote student learning, as well as discuss the challenges encountered during the class.

METHODOLOGY

This research dealt with data collection and analysis of responses using a qualitative methodology, resulting from the sum of the responses obtained from a questionnaire prepared by the researchers. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board through the Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte's School of Music. The questionnaire (see Table 1) consisted of fifteen questions and was applied to teachers with undergraduate degrees in Music. Six guitar teachers from Mato Grosso, Brazil and two guitar teachers from Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil. The questionnaires were sent and answered via email to the questionnaire administrator. Questions were asked addressing the themes of the 'teaching process'; the 'strategies and methodologies that are used to facilitate their pedagogical practice' and the 'difficulties encountered'.

- 1) How long have you been a guitar teacher?
- 2) What is the age range of your students?
- 3) Where do you teach? (school, private lessons, others)
- 4) Which genres (classical, popular guitar, both)?
- 5) Do you use strategies to make guitar lessons easier? Which? (Ex.: changing the tone to make it easier to play a song).
- 6) Do you use any teaching methods? If so, do you complement the method in any way (make adaptations, additions, for example)?
- 7) What are the main difficulties encountered in the teaching process?
- 8) Do you use exercises to improve left or right hand finger skills that are not included in the used method(s)? Which?
- 9) Please describe what you think is important for teaching guitar.
- 10) Please describe what should not happen in a guitar lesson in your opinion.
- 11) Describe the important characteristics for a guitar teacher in your opinion.
- 12) Describe the important characteristics for guitar students in your opinion.
- 13) What do you think of exercises to develop auditory memory?
- 14) What do you think of exercises to develop auditory perception?
- 15) What do you think of exercises to develop group practice?

Table 1: Questionnaire on teaching/learning the guitar

RESULTS

The participants' experience ranged from 1 to 12 years (4.88 ± 3.95 standard error - SD), and the age range of the students these teachers worked ranged from 4 to 60 years of age (7.75 ± 2.17 SD to 30.88 ± 14.79 SD). Among the places of activity were schools (62.5%), churches (25%) and private classes (62.5%). Of the teachers interviewed, 4/8 (50%) teach only popular music and 4/8 (50%) teach both popular and classical guitar (Table 2).

Three of eight (37.5%) teachers mentioned not using a formal method but rather starting from their own experience and adapting their approach to suit each student's needs and interests. The remaining 5/8 (62.5%) teachers reported using formal teaching methods, including The Suzuki Method for

	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5	Teacher 6	Teacher 7	Teacher 8
Years of experience	12	3	7	2	2	10	2	1
Age of students	5-30	8-16	10-30	10-40	10-20	7-60	8-40	4-11
Teaching environment	School, Church, Private Lessons	School	Private Lessons	Church	School	School, Private Lessons	Private Lessons	School, Private Lessons
Popular or Classic	Popular	Popular	Popular	Popular and classic	Popular and classic	Popular and classic	Popular	Popular and classic
Use Formal or informal method	Informal	Informal	Informal	Formal	Formal	Formal	Formal	Formal

Table 2: Description of teachers' experience, age range of students, workplace, musical genre and method used.

Guitar (Shinichi Suzuki, 1991), *The Six-String Tightrope Walker* (Silvana Mariani, 2009), *Initiation to the Guitar Vol I* (Henrique Pinto, 1978) for classical guitar, *Complete Method for Guitar Op. 59* (Mateo Carcassi, 1792-1853), *Guitar Workshop* (Cristina Tourinho and Robson Barreto, 2003) and *My First Notes on the Guitar* (Mário Mascarenhas, 1974).

All teachers use more than one strategy to facilitate musical performance, including exercises to improve finger skills on the left and right hand. One of the strategies cited was to write on the student's fingers the number of each respective finger (1, 2, 3 and 4 for the left hand and PIMA for the right hand), guiding which finger to use to play a given note (Figure 1A). Additionally, they use classic fingering exercises in the right hand alternating strings: PIMA, PMAI, PAIM (P: thumb, I: index, M: middle, A: ring finger; Figure 1B). For the left hand, some teachers claim to use the exercise of articulating the four fingers of the hand (fingers 1, 2, 3 and 4) playing one at a time, always starting on the first four frets of each guitar string (Figure 1C). The teachers also reported using chord adaptations as chord simplifications (Figure 1D) and started working with songs without the use of barre chords first (or using tone transposition to avoid them) and then introduced the barre chords when the student had acquired the necessary motor coordination.

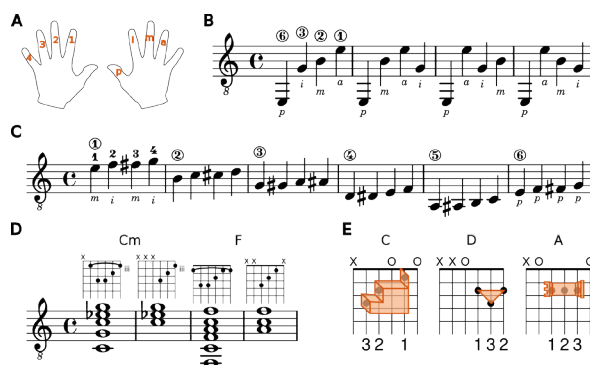


Figure 1: Exercises for improving hand independence and chord execution. A) Drawing the numbers and letters in the student's hands for guidance in exercises. B) Exercise practicing the independence of the right hand by alternating the fingers (p = thumb, i = index finger, m = middle finger, a = ring finger). C) Exercise practicing the independence of fingers of the left hand. D) Chord simplification E) Chords association to objects to improve memorization.

A strategy described was to associate the shapes of the chords with geometric shapes and objects, for example: (D = "triangle", A = "tower", C = "ladder; Figure 1E) in order to facilitate the memorization of chord sequences. Also, the use of the stopwatch to measure the time of a given sequence of chords, encouraging the student to reduce the time of the change between chords can also be used as a strategy for improving motor coordination of both hands. Furthermore, the simplification of rhythms (Figure 2A) was

also reported as a strategy to facilitate playing of a song in a short period of time by working on the right hand coordination. In addition, reading the rhythm before reading the notes of a melody was pointed out as a good strategy to improve the rhythm execution.

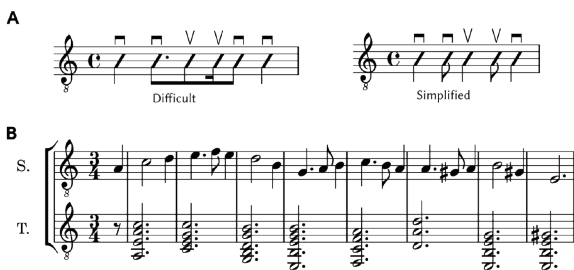


Figure 2: **Rhythm simplification and example of group practice.** A) A complex rhythm (left) simplified for easier execution (right). B) First bars of the song “Greensleeves”, as example of song where the student (S.) plays the melody while accompanied by the teacher (T.).

For improving perception and encouraging collective practice and socialization, one strategy is to have the teacher perform complementary melodies to those performed by the students and when possible stimulate the students to play together (Figure 2B). Another important resource is the use of digital technologies as a collaborative tool, using mobile apps that have a tuner, reading the score, helping with the time and value of each musical note.

Next, we asked about the obstacles faced in classes. The difficulties listed in relation to the teacher were: maintaining the student’s interest and dedication and obtaining materials that encompass the context of the schools or the environment where they are working, often requiring adaptations to the methods. As for the students, the teachers reported that it takes time for them to achieve muscular adaptation to changing chords and that the lack of practice at home seems to influence the quality of the class, causing the class to become stagnant on a certain topic.

Other complications would be that students generally start studying with a poor quality instrument, have pain in their fingertips when pressing/striking the strings, have difficulties in executing and reading chords, fingerings, musical theory and adapting to the posture with the instrument. Regarding classes with children, a teacher reported that the class becomes unproductive when the student is not in the mood, as some of them often arrive tired, due to other extra-curricular activities in which they participate, such as sports activities. One teacher reported that one of the obstacles faced was maintaining the flow of the class when parents also wanted to participate. Often, even if well-intentioned, they end up interfering in the process, which could potentially disrupt concentration of both the student and the teacher.

To overcome those problems, the teachers mentioned that it is very important to adapt the methods and to consider the students musical preferences. Additionally, the teacher can also suggest the student to use a more suitable instrument, or in case it’s not possible, to make adaptations such as trying to use nylon string instead of steel string in the beginning, bring the instrument to a luthier to make necessary repairs, use an instrument with decreased space between the string and the wood, so it will require less strength to press the notes. Also, some teachers highlighted the importance of talking with the parents about how they can help to stimulate the learning process and consider the children’s complaints, adjusting the schedules of other extracurricular activities if necessary to prevent overloading of activities for the child.

The next step was to ask what teachers think is important for teaching guitar. The most common response was to awaken a true interest in learning the guitar, as, in this way, the content taught will be better absorbed regardless of the method applied. They

also described that it is important that the methodologies and repertoires are appropriate for the age group, and that the student has their own instrument so they can get used to it and dedicate time to practice.

The music teachers also highlighted that the teacher must adapt classes to the student's interest and make them feel comfortable with the instrument, taking into account that an adequate posture is necessary to prevent future physical pain. They also mentioned that it is important for the student to know the possibilities that the instrument can offer, both as a solo instrument and as an accompaniment instrument. One of the participants reported that two very important things must be taken into account: the achievable challenge and the choice of a stimulating repertoire for the student. The achievable challenge would be to propose challenging activities to the student that are possible for them to practice since bringing very difficult activities could discourage the student; On the other hand, bringing activities that are too easy can cause the student to lose interest, therefore, it is important to find a balance: working on exercises that are not so difficult, which the student cannot perform, and not so easy, discouraging the student to develop their abilities.

Next, the teachers were asked what should not happen in a guitar class. For some of the teachers, there should be no imposition of musical preference on the part of the teacher, as this obligation could lead to the abandonment of the instrument, highlighting that it would be extremely important if we started from the student's musical experience. Other teachers mentioned that absences, lack of planning, and an out-of-tune instrument could worsen classes. A teacher emphasized that student's lack of motivation should not occur, whether due to excessive exercise or even inappropriate comments. Furthermore, guitar lessons,

for one teacher, should not be focused only on practice or theory since it can become tedious, it is important to find a balance and know how to introduce a certain topic. Also, it would be better not to skip a certain topic if the student has difficulties with it, just as it is not recommended that the student do the activities without understanding their objectives, or even continue the class with the student complaining of pain on the body. The guitar class, for some teachers, cannot be a class without connection with the student's learning desires, if so, it can be a boring obligation with very complex and unrealizable activities.

Since the motivation of the student is important for the class, the next question was about what important characteristics the guitar teacher should present. For the participants, one of the important characteristics is to be open and accessible to the student, and proximity to the student's musical universe without prejudice is the best way for a good dialogue between teacher and student. Other characteristics for a good teacher were mentioned, such as: dedication; good planning; patience; content autonomy; the ability to motivate students; and having excellent technique on the instrument. Characteristics such as being willing and observant, having an "open mind", having mastery of the content, being creative bringing musical games to classes, specially when dealing with children, and being committed to what is being taught were also mentioned.

The teacher, in turn, also hopes to achieve results and observe the student's progress. In this way, we asked what are the important characteristics of a guitar student for effective learning in the teachers' opinion. The characteristics mentioned were: interest in learning; be a hard-working, dedicated student who seeks growth through study; have discipline and assiduity; have a study

routine; be interested in both practice and theory; be patient, willing, observant and have an open mind to the content received. One of the teachers reported that it is necessary for the student to realize that the pain of pressing the strings will be temporary, and that the reward of having learned to play the instrument will be gratifying. Another teacher reported that it is necessary for the student to really be interested, since there are several cases of students who take guitar lessons due to parental imposition, making learning very difficult.

In pedagogical practice, the aim is generally for the student to be able to perform the repertoires autonomously, often requiring the student to memorize the notes, chords, and to be able to detect and correct their errors. In this way, teachers were also asked about the importance of working on exercises that develop students' memory and perception. Teachers reported that exercises to develop memory are important, because it will help with musical perception, such as identifying notes and intervals. Furthermore, it was mentioned that exercises to develop memory could facilitate the execution of pieces without the need to see the score constantly and facilitate the act of repeating and improving performance, preventing the student from playing just by reading the score or chord. One of the teachers reported that a strategy for memorizing the music is to first perform just two bars of the song repeatedly, then four bars, then six bars, eight bars and so on. Whenever two new bars were studied, the music should be played from the beginning up to that point. This way, the entire song will be studied and memorized.

About auditory perception exercises, the teachers reported that those are important and they must be developed in class mainly for developing the identification of sounds, chords and rhythms. One of the teachers

reported that sometimes forgetting one or more notes in the music is compensated by perception, and this is important as it helps to find the note that was missing.

Group practice is also pivotal for development of auditory perception, and it is often the ultimate goal of a student, who may prefer to play in bands, groups and/or orchestras. Therefore, teachers were asked about the importance of working on exercises that develop group practice. In general the teachers reported that they are important, and recommended exercises such as playing together with a recorded song. One of the teachers reported that these exercises are necessary because both in classical and popular guitar, instrumental group practice is not easy if you lack experience. Therefore, the sooner the student develops practicing together, the better they will be able to develop the auditory perception to accompany and be accompanied by other instrumentalists. Other points about the importance of exercises that develop group practice were reported, such as: promoting group interaction, exchange of advice and experiences, and encouragement in solo parts.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we observed that most of the teachers used strategies to improve their classes and those could be important for keeping the students interested in learning new skills in the instrument.

The choice of the repertoire was pointed out as important to keep the student motivated. It was previously described that the teacher should value the phase prior to reading, aiming for a better adaptation of the repertoire and the creation of activities so that teaching the instrument can be enjoyable and comfortable according to each stage of the student's motor and cognitive development (Ramos & Marino, 2002).

Approaches to an inclusive repertoire selection should be taken into consideration. It has been demonstrated that when students are interested in an activity and have the freedom to decide the repertoire, they are more inclined to engage in advanced cognitive processes, making it easy to focus, persist, and enjoy their learning experience. For example, when a teacher-assigned repertoire was compared with the student's self-selected repertoire, the student spent more time practicing the self-selected repertoire (Renwick & McPherson, 2002).

One limitation of this study is that it was not discussed how to proceed when students of different technical levels are in the same class. In this sense, it was proposed that multiple versions of each part of the music taught should be written for multiple skill levels so all students can participate playing the same part according to his/her skill (Hinsley, 2011). Additionally, pedagogical strategies involving non-verbal techniques could also be considered. It was previously observed that the effectiveness of the class was correlated with non-verbal teaching strategies (Zorzal & Lorenzo, 2019).

A daily study program designed for guitar students is effective on student's performances (can2016effects). It was highlighted that the student should be comfortable and free of situations that can disrupt classes such as poor posture, an instrument out of tune, etc. By initially eliminating those factors, the class can be more productive and satisfactory for both teacher and student. It is crucial for teachers to take a holistic approach to students, enabling them to make progress tailored to their individual goals. An interesting approach to improve motivation and engagement would be to include the "Gamification" in the classes. This term refers to adding game-like elements into an activity that is not traditionally considered a game (Gamarra et al., 2022). This approach can improve concentration

and motivation for the student making the learning process more enjoyable.

Finally, the feedback is crucial for assessing students and ensuring that exercises are practiced correctly. The teacher has the responsibility to give the feedback in a proper way using a precise vocabulary since the inexperienced student requires clear and accurate spoken feedback in order to advance in accordance with the teacher's expectations (Tourinho, 2001).

Here we aimed to bring nontraditional tools that can improve the ability to abstract, and improve the levels of engagement in the guitar classes. We hope those strategies can be useful for guitar teachers to overcome the problems faced in their pedagogical practices.

CONCLUSION

This article can help teachers who are starting their pedagogical practice to understand the barriers encountered in the guitar teaching process and thus assist them when carrying out their own pedagogical planning. By prioritizing student motivation, teachers can choose the most effective strategies for individual students, ultimately helping them achieve their musical goals.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: BC and EL; Data collection: BC; Data analysis: BC and TM; Writing: BC, TM and EL

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Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated and/or analyzed in the current study are available on request.

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