



Towards Establishing an Erhu Ensemble at PWU School of Music: An Action Research

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Abstract: This study reports an action research study on the establishment of an erhu ensemble at the Philippine Women's University (PWU) School of Music. The study examined how Filipino university music students accepted, learned, and collaboratively performed a traditional Chinese bowed string instrument within a multicultural higher education setting. Using the action research cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, the teacher-researcher designed and implemented a six-session introductory erhu ensemble course for three volunteer undergraduate music students with different instrumental backgrounds. Data were drawn from classroom observations, reflective teaching notes, student feedback, video-supported performance review, and a final small-group performance. Thematic analysis identified five interrelated findings: initial curiosity developed into sustained cultural interest; technical learning required differentiated and embodied instruction; peer scaffolding supported ensemble coordination; cultural contextualization enabled students to interpret Chinese repertoire beyond note reproduction; and the teacher's role shifted from skills transmitter to facilitator, cultural mediator, and co-learner. The study suggests that an erhu ensemble can function not only as a performance activity but also as a culturally responsive pedagogical platform for intercultural understanding, collaborative musicianship, and localized curriculum development. Because the study involved a small sample and short instructional period, its findings should be read as context-bound and generative rather than generalizable. Nevertheless, the study offers a practical model for integrating non-Western instruments into university ensemble education through action research, cooperative learning, and culturally responsive teaching.

Keywords: Action research; culturally responsive teaching; erhu ensemble; intercultural music education; traditional Chinese instruments.

I. INTRODUCTION

Globalized higher music education increasingly requires institutions to move beyond the additive presentation of unfamiliar musical traditions and toward forms of teaching in which students perform, interpret, and negotiate cultural meaning. Multicultural education is not limited to adding isolated cultural facts to an existing curriculum; it requires content integration, attention to the construction of knowledge, equitable pedagogy, and an institutional culture that values plural identities [1]. Culturally responsive teaching similarly argues that students engage more deeply when their prior experiences and cultural frames are treated as resources for learning rather than as obstacles to be corrected [2]. In music education, these issues are especially significant because sound, bodily gesture, repertoire, notation, and ensemble behavior embody cultural assumptions that cannot be communicated by verbal description alone [3], [4].

The erhu provides a productive case for examining these issues. As a two-stringed Chinese bowed instrument, it is widely recognized for a vocal and emotionally flexible timbre. Its technique requires vertical instrument posture, bowing between the two strings, finger placement without a fingerboard, fine control of bow pressure, and attention to slides, phrasing, and timbral nuance. For students whose musical training has been shaped mainly by Western or Filipino musical contexts, the erhu is therefore not simply a new instrument. It is a new sensorimotor and aesthetic system. Introducing it in a Philippine university raises a concrete pedagogical problem: how can a traditional Chinese instrument be taught without reducing it to exotic sound, token diversity, or simplified technical imitation?

This study addresses that problem through the establishment of a small erhu ensemble at the PWU School of Music. At the time of the study, PWU did not have an established erhu ensemble, and no local model was available for teaching the instrument to Filipino university beginners. The research therefore focused on the design, implementation, observation, and refinement of an introductory erhu ensemble course. The contribution of the study is practical and conceptual. Practically, it offers a model for organizing beginner erhu instruction in a higher education ensemble setting. Conceptually, it shows how culturally responsive teaching and cooperative learning can be operationalized through repertoire choice, embodied demonstration, peer feedback, and reflective performance.

The study was guided by three research questions: 1) How did students' musical backgrounds and learning motivations shape their acceptance, engagement, and learning outcomes in erhu group instruction? 2) What pedagogical adjustments were required when erhu teaching moved from a Chinese instructional context to a Philippine university context? 3) How could teaching content and assessment be designed to support technical skill, cultural appreciation, and collaborative ensemble learning at the same time? The article treats the ensemble not as a personal teaching diary but as a small-scale action research intervention that generated context-bound evidence for intercultural instrumental pedagogy.



II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The literature informing this study falls into three areas: multicultural and culturally responsive music education, group-based instrumental instruction, and practitioner action research. Banks's framework positions multicultural education as a structural and pedagogical project rather than a decorative curricular supplement [1]. Gay's theory of culturally responsive teaching argues that learners' cultural experiences can support participation, motivation, and achievement [2]. In music education, Schippers emphasizes that culturally diverse musical practice involves questions of transmission, context, authenticity, and learner identity [3]. Campbell's work on global music teaching similarly suggests that students should encounter musical cultures through performance, listening, contextual knowledge, and reflection rather than through detached factual description [4].

Recent scholarship cautions against treating multicultural repertoire as a token sign of diversity. Bartolome argues that culturally responsive instrumental music education requires authenticity, community relevance, and student-centered meaning-making rather than superficial repertoire substitution [5]. Hess and Lum likewise critique approaches that preserve a Western-centered curriculum while placing non-Western music at the margins [6], [7]. These arguments are relevant to the erhu ensemble because the goal was not merely to make Filipino students play a Chinese melody. The instructional challenge was to help them experience how erhu sound production, bodily technique, melodic phrasing, and repertoire histories carry cultural meaning.

Group teaching and cooperative learning provided the second conceptual foundation. Johnson and Johnson's social interdependence theory explains how positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, and group processing can strengthen learning in small groups [8]. Ensemble education naturally contains these elements because rhythm, balance, entrance timing, and expressive coordination depend on mutual listening. However, group erhu instruction also creates specific challenges. Beginners may display unstable bow grip, inconsistent bow direction, inaccurate finger placement, intonation insecurity, and limited understanding of Chinese musical aesthetics. The teacher must therefore balance collective rehearsal with differentiated feedback. The flipped classroom approach proposed by Bergmann and Sams [9] and the informal-learning orientation discussed by Green [10] are useful because video demonstrations, self-practice, peer correction, and student-led discovery can extend learning beyond direct teacher correction.

The third foundation is action research. Kemmis and McTaggart conceptualize action research as a cyclical process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting [11]. Burns and Sagor emphasize that teacher-researchers investigate problems of practice while modifying instruction in response to evidence gathered in the classroom [12], [13]. This approach was appropriate because the teacher could not simply import a fixed erhu curriculum from a Chinese setting. Instead, the teacher had to identify students' initial responses, observe technical and cultural barriers, adjust explanation and practice tasks, and redesign subsequent sessions. The conceptual framework of this study therefore links culturally responsive teaching, cooperative group instruction, and action research. The erhu ensemble is understood as an evolving pedagogical space in which technical skill, cultural interpretation, and group collaboration are developed through iterative cycles of practice and reflection.

III. METHOD

A. Research Design and Context

This study used a qualitative-dominant action research design. The teacher-researcher developed an introductory erhu ensemble course, implemented it with volunteer students, documented the process, analyzed classroom evidence, and revised pedagogical decisions across the instructional cycle. The central purpose was not to test a universal causal hypothesis but to improve and understand the process of establishing an erhu ensemble in a Philippine university environment. Action research was selected because the research problem was situated in a specific teaching context and required practical intervention rather than detached observation.

The study was conducted at the PWU School of Music. Although five erhu instruments were available, three undergraduate students volunteered and completed the six-session course. This clarification is important because the project was limited by instrument availability but the actual analytic sample consisted of three participants. For publication-oriented ethical practice, participants are identified by pseudonymous labels rather than personal names.

TABLE I Participant Profile

Participant	Program status	Prior instruments	Prior bowed-string experience	Pedagogical relevance
P1	Undergraduate music student	Bass and guitar	None reported	Contributed rhythmic and ensemble awareness but needed support for fine intonation and bow distribution.
P2	Undergraduate music student	Drums and bass	None reported	Had strong rhythmic energy but initially struggled with quiet bow control and pitch security.
P3	Undergraduate music student	Violin and piano	Yes	Transferred some bowed-string knowledge but had to adjust to the erhu bowing system and absence of a fingerboard.

B. Course Structure

The intervention consisted of six sessions. The first session introduced the history, structure, sound production principles, and expressive status of the erhu. The second session focused on sitting posture, instrument holding, bow holding, and open strings. The third session introduced first-position fingering, D-major scale work, numbered notation, rests, and the piece *The Doll and the Little Bear Dance*. The fourth session used *Fengyang Flower Drum* to develop folk-rhythm awareness, bow changes, staccato articulation, and cultural understanding of Anhui folk style. The fifth session used *Jingle Bells* to explore the cross-cultural revoicing of a familiar Western song on the erhu. The sixth session integrated the three pieces in rehearsal and a small ensemble presentation.

TABLE II Six-Session Instructional Design

Session	Instructional focus	Pedagogical purpose
1	Erhu history, structure, sound production, listening examples	Build curiosity and cultural orientation before technical training.
2	Sitting posture, instrument holding, bow grip, open strings	Establish embodied foundations for tone, relaxation, and sound production.
3	First-position fingering, D-major scale, numbered notation, <i>The Doll and the Little Bear Dance</i>	Connect pitch, rhythm, notation, and simple melodic performance.
4	<i>Fengyang Flower Drum</i> , folk rhythm, staccato, bow changes	Link technique with Chinese folk style, bodily movement, and collective rhythm.
5	<i>Jingle Bells</i> on erhu, legato, repeated rhythm, ensemble listening	Use familiar repertoire to support cross-cultural transfer and tonal comparison.
6	Integrated rehearsal and small performance	Consolidate technical, cultural, and collaborative learning.

C. Data Sources, Analysis, and Trustworthiness

Data were gathered through classroom observation notes, reflective teaching logs, informal student comments, written student reflections, video-supported review of posture and ensemble coordination, and performance-based assessment of pitch, rhythm, bow control, tonal stability, listening, and expressive intention. Student feedback was not treated as statistically representative data. Instead, it was treated as situated evidence of meaning-making, engagement, and perceived difficulty within the action research setting.

Analysis followed thematic analysis procedures: familiarization with records, initial coding, clustering of repeated patterns, theme development, and review of themes against classroom evidence [14]. Codes included curiosity, timbral response, posture anxiety, bowing stiffness, pitch insecurity, peer correction, rhythmic coordination, cultural comparison, emotional expression, and teacher-role adjustment. Themes were refined in relation to the three research questions and the conceptual framework. The study also used a trustworthiness procedure appropriate for practitioner inquiry. Claims were checked across more than one form of evidence whenever possible; for example, a reported difficulty with bow relaxation was compared with video evidence of wrist stiffness and later observation of improved bow continuity. Reflexivity was necessary because the teacher-researcher was also an experienced erhu performer. Rather than treating this insider position as neutral, the analysis examined how the teacher's assumptions about Chinese erhu pedagogy had to be revised in the Philippine context.

D. Ethics and Positionality

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before data collection. The revised manuscript uses pseudonymous labels to protect student confidentiality. No internet-sourced images are included in this journal version because figures without verifiable copyright permission are not suitable for submission. The teacher-researcher's positionality is relevant: as an erhu performer and instructor, she possessed insider expertise in technique and repertoire, but she also had to confront the limitations of transferring Chinese teaching assumptions into a Philippine university. This dual position became a source of both pedagogical insight and possible bias, and it is therefore addressed explicitly in the discussion and limitations.

TABLE III Data Sources and Analytic Use

Data source	Analytic focus	Use in triangulation
Observation notes	Student engagement, posture, ensemble behavior, and classroom interaction	Compared with student comments and video evidence.
Reflective teaching logs	Instructional decisions, problems noticed, and changes made between sessions	Linked action research reflection to revised pedagogy.
Student comments and reflections	Motivation, perceived difficulty, cultural interpretation, and emotional response	Used as situated evidence rather than broad survey data.
Video-supported review	Bow direction, wrist relaxation, tone continuity, coordination, and ensemble timing	Checked whether stated progress was visible in performance behavior.
Performance-based assessment	Pitch, rhythm, bow control, tone, listening, and expressive intention	Provided descriptive evidence of technical and ensemble development.

IV. FINDINGS

The findings are organized around five themes that synthesize the classroom records rather than reproduce the original chronological lesson diary. Together, they show how erhu learning became a process of technical adaptation, intercultural interpretation, and ensemble formation.

A. From curiosity to sustained cultural engagement

At the beginning of the course, students' response was dominated by curiosity. One participant described the instrument as looking like a "tiny violin," while another commented after hearing a live performance of Horse Racing that it sounded "sad but beautiful." These comments indicate that the first pedagogical entry point was timbral fascination. The erhu's unfamiliar structure and vocal sound created an immediate affective opening. However, curiosity alone would not have sustained learning. The teacher therefore combined live demonstration, English-supported videos, tactile exploration of the instrument, and discussion of repertoire background.

By the end of the course, students' responses had shifted from novelty to cultural interpretation. One participant reflected that the erhu helped her understand "the voice of another culture." Another observed that trying the Filipino song Bahay Kubo on the erhu made the melody sound softer and gave it "a new flavor." This movement from curiosity to cultural engagement shows that acceptance of an unfamiliar instrument must be pedagogically cultivated through listening, physical encounter, contextual explanation, and achievable performance tasks. The finding supports culturally responsive theories that link engagement with meaningful bridges between learners' existing experiences and new cultural knowledge [1], [2], [5].

B. Technical learning required embodied and differentiated instruction

The erhu posed several technical challenges. In early sessions, students raised the left arm too high, squeezed the instrument neck, inserted fingers incorrectly into the bow, held the bow too far from the soundbox, struck both strings unintentionally, or produced unstable open-string tone. Abstract verbal explanation was insufficient, especially when Chinese technical terms did not translate smoothly into English. More effective strategies included metaphor, visual demonstration, slow-motion imitation, video review, and short corrective phrases such as "relax the wrist," "let the arm travel," and "hold something light."

Differentiation was necessary because prior musical training shaped the students' difficulties. The violin-trained participant initially used a short bow range and had to unlearn habits associated with violin posture. The percussion-trained participant possessed strong rhythmic awareness but needed support for fine left-hand intonation and quiet bow control. The bass/guitar-trained participant contributed stable ensemble awareness but required guidance in bow distribution and sustained legato. During scale learning, the teacher used finger markers for the participant with weaker pitch security while asking others to rely more on ear judgment. This decision illustrates that equality in group instruction did not require identical treatment; it required equivalent access to challenge and success.

The absence of a fingerboard was particularly revealing. Students accustomed to fixed visual or tactile references initially searched for an external marker, but erhu playing required them to coordinate hearing, fingertip pressure, and left-hand stability. Slow scale practice, octave checking with a piano, humming before playing, and comparison between open and stopped strings became essential instructional supports. Technical learning therefore involved not only correct placement but the development of an internal auditory map.

C. Peer scaffolding strengthened ensemble coordination

As the sessions progressed, students began to correct one another and distribute informal roles. One student counted beats or tapped the pulse, another demonstrated bow direction or finger placement, and another helped maintain rhythmic energy through body movement. This peer support became especially visible during the learning of The Doll and the Little Bear Dance, Fengyang Flower Drum, and Jingle Bells. Early ensemble attempts were rhythmically uneven because students concentrated on their individual parts. With repeated practice, they learned to coordinate through eye contact, breathing, slight nods, foot tapping, and verbal reminders such as "together" and "slowly, let's try again."

The ensemble therefore became a site of social interdependence. Students no longer depended solely on teacher correction. They compared sounds, negotiated starts, and adjusted bow strength after listening to one another. Their dialogue gradually moved from the technical level to the expressive level. During rehearsal of The Doll and the Little Bear Dance, students discussed whether the performance sounded too mechanical and how to make the rhythm feel more like dancing. This supports cooperative learning theory, which stresses positive interdependence, promotive

interaction, and shared responsibility [8]. It also confirms the value of ensemble learning as a space where musicianship is built through mutual listening rather than isolated practice alone [16], [17].

D. Cultural contextualization enabled expression beyond note reproduction

The most successful lessons connected technique to cultural image, function, or affect. In Fengyang Flower Drum, the teacher introduced folk images and videos and explained the music's relation to collective movement, festive expression, and everyday labor. After this contextualization, students handled accents, bow changes, and bodily movement with greater purpose. In Jingle Bells, students already knew the melody, so the focus shifted to how a familiar Western song changed when played through erhu tone, slides, and bow transitions. This enabled comparison rather than one-directional cultural transmission.

The study also revealed differences between teaching Chinese children and teaching Filipino university students. In the teacher's previous experience with Chinese elementary pupils, instruction could assume some familiarity with Chinese musical sound and repertoire imagery. In the PWU context, those assumptions were not valid. The course required more cultural explanation, more comparison with students' existing musical knowledge, and more discussion of expressive concepts such as musical breath, mood, and imagery. The core shift was from skill training and standardization alone toward cultural understanding and artistic experience, without abandoning technical accuracy.

E. The teacher's role shifted from transmitter to facilitator and cultural mediator

The action research cycle made the teacher's changing role visible. At first, the teacher planned to transmit knowledge about erhu history, structure, and technique. Classroom evidence showed, however, that successful instruction required mediation across language, body technique, notation, musical aesthetics, and learner motivation. The teacher reduced abstract explanation, increased demonstration and imitation, used videos and images, invited students to compare erhu music with Filipino and Western musical experiences, and encouraged peer correction.

This transformation is one of the strongest findings. Establishing an erhu ensemble in another country cannot depend only on the teacher's expertise as an erhu performer. It also requires intercultural sensitivity, flexible communication, and willingness to treat students' interpretations as part of the learning process. When students suggested using body movement to feel Fengyang Flower Drum or tried Filipino melodies such as Bahay Kubo on the erhu, they were not simply deviating from the curriculum. They were localizing the instrument and exploring its relevance to their own musical environment. The teacher's task was therefore to protect the cultural integrity of the erhu while allowing students to create meaningful local connections.

TABLE IV Emergent Themes, Evidence, and Implications

Theme	Representative evidence	Implication
Curiosity to engagement	Comments such as "tiny violin," "sad but beautiful," and "voice of another culture."	Acceptance depends on affective entry points and cultural bridges, not novelty alone.
Differentiated technique	Different needs emerged for bass/guitar, percussion, and violin/piano backgrounds.	Group teaching requires flexible individual scaffolding within collective rehearsal.
Peer scaffolding	Students counted, corrected, demonstrated, and coordinated through eye contact and breathing.	The ensemble itself can function as a cooperative learning system.
Cultural contextualization	Folk images, videos, stories, and familiar repertoire changed expressiveness.	Cultural meaning must be integrated with technical instruction.
Teacher role transformation	The teacher moved from explanation to facilitation, mediation, and co-learning.	Intercultural instrumental teaching requires adaptive professional identity.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings answer the research questions in three ways. First, students' musical backgrounds and motivations shaped both acceptance and learning outcomes. Their prior training gave them resources for erhu learning, such as rhythmic energy, ensemble awareness, pitch sensitivity, or bowed-string familiarity, but it also created habits requiring adjustment. Their motivation was not examination-driven professional erhu training. It was rooted in curiosity, cultural exploration, and the pleasure of making a new sound. Consequently, the most effective instructional strategies were those that connected technical tasks to expressive and cultural meanings. This supports the claim that culturally responsive music teaching should begin from learners' existing musical identities while expanding their musical imagination [2], [5].

Second, the study clarifies key differences between erhu group teaching in Chinese settings and in a Philippine university. In Chinese children's erhu instruction, teachers can often assume some familiarity with Chinese musical sound, repertoire imagery, and cultural references. In the PWU context, these assumptions were not valid. The teacher had to make tacit cultural knowledge explicit and translate technique into embodied, visible language. Concepts such as relaxed bowing, breath-like phrasing, or the emotional function of slides had to be demonstrated through sound and gesture rather than explained only through Chinese technical vocabulary. This does not mean simplifying the erhu; it means designing an entry route through which non-Chinese learners can access its aesthetic logic.

Third, the study suggests that assessment in intercultural erhu education should be multidimensional. Technical proficiency remains necessary: students must develop posture, bow control, intonation, rhythm, fingering, and ensemble balance. Yet a purely technical assessment would fail to capture the educational value of the course. Meaningful outcomes also included students' ability to describe the emotional quality of the erhu, compare Chinese and Western musical expression, cooperate in small-group rehearsal, and interpret cultural background through sound.

This broader evaluation is consistent with praxial and musical-understanding perspectives, which regard music learning as situated, embodied, and socially meaningful [16], [17].

The study also contributes to the debate over authenticity and localization in intercultural music education. Teaching non-Western instruments outside their original contexts can risk cultural dilution when repertoire is decontextualized or used as decoration. However, the present case shows that localization can be pedagogically productive when it is reflective and respectful. Performing Jingle Bells on the erhu did not replace Chinese repertoire; instead, it gave students a familiar musical structure through which they could hear how erhu timbre changes a melody's expressive character. Similarly, student interest in Filipino melodies suggested the potential for future Chinese-Philippine fusion repertoire. Such work should be framed not as erasing cultural difference but as creating dialogue between musical systems [18], [19].

From an action research perspective, the study demonstrates the value of iterative responsiveness. The original plan included historical explanation, technique instruction, repertoire learning, cultural discussion, and final performance. Observation revealed which elements required adjustment: more cross-genre examples in the first lesson, video-supported feedback for posture, differentiated pitch support during scale work, and explicit ensemble-listening strategies before performance. These adjustments did not weaken the curriculum; they made it more responsive. The article's contribution is therefore not a claim that one small ensemble proves erhu instruction effective everywhere. Its contribution lies in specifying the mechanisms through which acceptance and learning became possible: affective timbral encounter, embodied technical translation, differentiated scaffolding, peer interdependence, contextualized repertoire, and reflective teacher adaptation.

VI. IMPLICATIONS

The study suggests a five-part model for establishing an erhu ensemble in an international university context. The first component is affective entry: instruction should begin with listening, live demonstration, tactile exploration, and student impressions before moving to technical correction. The second is embodied translation: teachers should convert specialized erhu concepts into visible, repeatable actions and accessible metaphors. The third is differentiated technical scaffolding: students with different musical backgrounds should receive different entry supports, such as finger markers, slow-bow exercises, peer demonstration, or video feedback. The fourth is cultural contextualization: repertoire should be accompanied by stories, images, social function, and comparison with learners' musical cultures. The fifth is ensemble-based reflection: students should be asked not only to perform but also to discuss how listening, balance, emotion, and cultural meaning changed through group practice.

For curriculum development at PWU and comparable institutions, an introductory erhu ensemble should ideally extend beyond six sessions. A 12- to 15-week semester would allow students to progress from open strings and first-position fingering to more stable intonation, varied bowing, simple part writing, and a public performance. Bilingual Chinese-English materials would be useful, especially if they include both numbered notation and Western staff notation. Short instructional videos could support flipped preparation, allowing in-person sessions to focus on sound quality, ensemble balance, and expressive refinement [9]. Assessment should combine technical rubrics, peer assessment, reflective writing, and performance commentary so that skill, culture, collaboration, and expression are evaluated together.

The study also has implications for teacher training. Erhu instructors working abroad need more than performance expertise. They need knowledge of intercultural communication, second-language explanation, adult learning, group facilitation, and culturally responsive assessment. They also need to understand when to preserve traditional technique and when to adapt the sequence of instruction. In this study, the teacher maintained core erhu fundamentals such as posture, bow control, intonation, and sound production while adapting examples, language, and peer-learning structures. At the institutional level, sustainability also depends on practical resources: instrument availability, rehearsal space, maintenance knowledge, tuning support, repertoire arrangements, and opportunities for informal performance.

VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations require caution. The study involved only three participants at one institution, and the six-session period limited the depth of technical development that could be observed. The students were music majors, so their responses may differ from those of non-music majors, younger learners, or community participants. The teacher-researcher also served as instructor and analyst, which is appropriate in action research but introduces interpretive bias. Although observations, reflections, student comments, and video review were triangulated, the study did not include independent external assessment of performance quality or standardized pre- and post-measures of musical development. Student reflections may also contain social desirability bias because participants knew the instructor was conducting the study.

Future research should extend the instructional period, increase participant diversity, and include mixed methods. Possible measures include performance rubrics rated by independent erhu experts, student motivation scales, intercultural sensitivity surveys, and longitudinal interviews. Comparative studies could examine erhu ensembles in different Southeast Asian institutions or compare erhu instruction with other non-Western instrumental ensembles. Future curriculum experiments could also develop Chinese-Philippine fusion repertoire, such as arrangements of Filipino folk songs for erhu ensemble, and investigate how such repertoire affects cultural belonging, motivation, and musical expression. Finally, research should examine how digital tools, including bilingual video libraries and online

practice submissions, can support intercultural instrumental learning without replacing the embodied and relational dimensions of ensemble teaching.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This action research study demonstrates that establishing an erhu ensemble at the PWU School of Music was both a musical and intercultural pedagogical process. Students did not simply acquire beginner techniques. They encountered a new sound world, negotiated technical and cultural unfamiliarity, supported one another through cooperative rehearsal, and began to interpret the erhu as a medium of emotional and cultural communication. The teacher likewise moved from a transmission-oriented model toward a more adaptive role as facilitator, cultural mediator, and co-learner. The core conclusion is restrained but significant: an erhu ensemble can be a viable and meaningful component of Philippine higher music education when it is designed through culturally responsive, cooperative, and reflective principles. Technical instruction must be rigorous but not isolated from cultural meaning. Cultural explanation must be rich but not detached from performance practice. Ensemble coordination must be treated not only as musical timing but as social learning. Under these conditions, the erhu can function as more than a Chinese instrument placed inside a foreign curriculum. It can become a shared space where students learn to listen across cultural boundaries, transform unfamiliar sound into embodied knowledge, and build intercultural understanding through collective music-making.

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