

The Value and Practical Exploration of Aesthetic Education in Vocational Colleges

Peng Lili

School of Art and Design, Shenzhen Polytechnic, Shenzhen, Guangdong, 518055, China

Abstract: *Aesthetic education in vocational colleges is a necessity for improving students' character cultivation and meeting the demand for the development of well-rounded technical and skilled talents. However, the practice of aesthetic education has encountered issues such as a narrowing trend in curriculum design, an inadequate evaluation system, and a lack of practical opportunities. To address these problems, vocational colleges need to establish a reasonable and scientific aesthetic education curriculum system, develop an evaluation system for aesthetic education courses, promote a campus culture that values aesthetics, and emphasize the integration of industry and education.*

Keywords: *vocational colleges, aesthetic education, industry-education integration*

1. Introduction

In the course of Chinese civilization, the ideology of aesthetic education has a long history. It can be traced back to ancient times, from the ritual and music systems of the Western Zhou Dynasty to the diverse schools of thought during the Warring States period. Throughout the successive dynasties, there has been a consistent inheritance and development of aesthetic education. Various rich theories of aesthetic education have emerged, such as 'cultivating virtue through beauty,' 'flourishing in poetry, established in rituals, and accomplished in music,' 'those who understand find joy in water, those who are benevolent find joy in mountains,' 'theory of innate goodness,' and 'cultivating harmony for personal well-being.' According to the Modern Chinese Dictionary (2002 Supplementary Edition), aesthetic education is defined as 'education primarily focused on cultivating aesthetic abilities, aesthetic sentiment, and interest in art. Music and fine arts are the main contents of aesthetic education.' Nowadays, aesthetic education is defined as education that employs specific means to cultivate students' abilities in perceiving, appreciating, and creating beauty^[1].

In the Western context, aesthetic education can be traced back to ancient Greece with the concept of liberal education. Liberal education is a form of non-utilitarian and non-vocational education that aims to cultivate students' intellectual abilities^[2]. Its purpose is to nurture individuals with broad knowledge and refined character^[3]. The concept of aesthetic education was initially proposed by the German playwright and aesthetician Friedrich Schiller, who, in his work "Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man" published in 1795, explained that aesthetic education can harmonize sensibility and reason, thereby cultivating complete humanity and leading individuals into the realm of freedom. In modern understanding, aesthetic education, also known as aesthetic sense education or aesthetic education, refers to education that utilizes certain methods to cultivate students' abilities in perceiving, appreciating, and creating beauty^[4]. Artistic aesthetic education, under the guidance of correct aesthetic perspectives, aims to enhance learners' aesthetic sensitivity and appreciation through the cultivation of artistic experiences in various art forms, purify their emotions, cultivate their character, and uplift their moral cultivation^[5].

In Western educational ideology, aesthetic education is considered a comprehensive education that emphasizes the influence of aesthetic education on morality and thought. It integrates with other disciplines and places great emphasis on the practical application of aesthetic education in teaching (Kwame Anthony Appiah, Friedrich Schiller). Marx also proposed aesthetic requirements in the theory of comprehensive human development, asserting that aesthetic education and ideological education are closely intertwined. Furthermore, highlighting the significant role of aesthetic education, aesthetic education is regarded as the optimal approach to achieve moral education goals. It is suggested that aesthetic education should be integrated throughout the entire educational process, which can be achieved through various means such as appreciating the beauty of nature, appreciating literary and artistic works, and experiencing the beauty of social practices, thereby promoting students'

comprehensive development (Lev Vygotsky, Alexander Bogdanov).

In the traditional Confucian philosophy in China, the ultimate goal of the fusion of aesthetic education and moral education is to achieve the ideal of "inner sage, outer king" [6]. Based on the ideas of ritual and music education, Mencius integrated the moral beauty of character with "aesthetic joy" and emphasized the complementary nature of aesthetics and morality. As the development and maturation of aesthetic thoughts and the birth and continuous improvement of ideological and political education as a discipline, aesthetics and ideological and political education have shown compatibility. Especially, ideological and political education gradually incorporates aesthetic content to enrich and enhance itself. Guided by the Marxist consciousness of "aesthetics," aesthetic content is gradually integrated into educational activities. Some scholars propose the integration of aesthetic education with industry [7], while others discuss aesthetic education from a middle perspective [8]. Some scholars explore the implementation paths from the perspectives of society, schools, and individuals [9], while others seek feasible paths from the perspectives of educational principles, campus culture, and educational subjects [10].

2. The Value and Significance of Aesthetic Education in Vocational Colleges

2.1. The Need to Enhance the Character Cultivation of Vocational College Students

Vocational education emphasizes artistic practice, cultivating highly skilled talents with aesthetic cultivation, guiding students to improve their character cultivation, and enhancing cultural innovation awareness." From the perspective of holistic development, universities need to carry out aesthetic education. Modern college students are influenced by political, economic, and cultural globalization. They need comprehensive development in terms of ideology, physical fitness, life ideals, and mental health. However, many college students face problems such as distorted ideologies, lack of social responsibility, and indulgence in materialism. They also face psychological pressure and obstacles in academics, relationships, and employment. Therefore, conducting aesthetic education in universities can provide a perspective of beauty to clarify students' life ideals, enhance their ideological realm, and guide them to establish correct values and outlook on life. At the same time, aesthetic education can promote the development of students' physical fitness, improve their aesthetic level and aesthetic ability, enhance their cultural literacy and artistic cultivation, and make them more capable and competitive in the face of increasing global challenges.

Furthermore, aesthetic education can play a positive role in mental and physical health education. Through forms such as artistic creation and appreciation, it can help college students reduce psychological stress, alleviate mental illnesses, and enhance their mental well-being. This is of great significance for education administrators such as college counselors to carry out educational management work smoothly. In vocational college aesthetic education, it is beneficial to mobilize the elements of ideological education in aesthetics, achieve moral education objectives, improve the effectiveness of moral education, and enhance the character cultivation of vocational college students.

2.2. The Requirement to Cultivate Technical and Skilled Talents

Vocational education aims to cultivate versatile, innovative high-tech skilled talents, who need not only systematic knowledge of modern science and technology but also high humanistic quality, artistic cultivation, aesthetic ability, and aesthetic realm. The difference between vocational college education and general school education lies in the fact that vocational college education cultivates applied talents who not only possess certain professional skills but also possess aesthetic literacy. Aesthetic literacy refers to the understanding and appreciation of art and aesthetics, as well as the cognition of human culture, history, and values. This literacy helps people better understand and appreciate different cultures and art forms, fosters creative thinking and innovation ability, and enables them to better adapt to a diverse social environment.

During the practical process of cultivating vocational skills in high vocational students, guidance by aesthetic principles and the application of general aesthetic rules are necessary to create products with beautiful designs. This not only brings aesthetic pleasure and a sense of accomplishment to the majority of high vocational students but also enhances their employability while they dedicate themselves to the creation of beauty. Conducting practical work under the guidance of aesthetics can stimulate the creative thinking and imagination of high vocational students, improve their aesthetic ability and artistic appreciation level, and cultivate more innovative and skilled talents. This not only creates

higher-quality and more creative products and services for society but also provides more opportunities and competitive advantages for the future career development of high vocational students.

Moreover, the application of aesthetics can also improve the vocational ethics and professional qualities of vocational college students, enabling them to pay more attention to details and quality in practice, as well as better understand and respect the needs and requirements of clients. Aesthetic literacy can also help people better understand their emotions and improve communication and expression abilities, enhancing their interpersonal skills. These aspects are also important content in vocational skills development and hold great significance for the future career development of high vocational students.

3. Challenges in Aesthetic Education in Vocational Colleges

3.1. Narrowing Trend in Aesthetic Education Curriculum Design

In vocational colleges, there is a general trend in aesthetic education regarding curriculum design narrowing. The actual curriculum design tends to diminish the comprehensiveness and practical requirements of aesthetic education, which is mainly manifested in the sole perception of aesthetic education as art education, a bias towards independent curriculum design, a lack of aesthetic education content, and a superficial occurrence in curriculum design. There is a shortage of a thorough understanding of aesthetic education theory or a heavy influence of Western aesthetic thoughts and theories among colleges. They mistake aesthetic education for art education and view it as some superficial artistic activity or the popularization of aesthetic knowledge. As a result, aesthetic education fails to shape personalities, elevate spiritual realms, beautify individuals' physical and mental well-being, and cultivate comprehensive and harmonious development. Higher education institutions often categorize aesthetic education courses as general education courses. However, the need for broad coverage makes the course content over-generalized, and students fail to acquire a solid knowledge foundation for aesthetic education ^[11].

3.2. Incomplete Evaluation System

Aesthetic education should attach great importance to aesthetic sensibilities, creative thinking, and artistic expression. However, it is known that vocational colleges' current aesthetic education evaluation relies heavily on the traditional evaluation method like examination and artwork displays, which mainly focus on knowledge recall and skill presentation without a comprehensive assessment of students' aesthetic abilities. Since it only emphasizes a few indicators, there is a narrow understanding of students' aesthetic development. Comprehensive evaluation criteria are essential to prevent one-sided and inaccurate evaluation. Furthermore, there is a lack of practical assessment of aesthetic education in the existing evaluation system. Aesthetic education focuses on the integration of theory and practice and the application of aesthetic knowledge and skills in practical projects. However, too much reliance on written exams and artwork displays makes it difficult to accurately assess students' abilities and application skills in practice ^[12].

3.3. Lack of Practical Opportunities in Vocational College Aesthetic Education

The cooperation between vocational colleges' aesthetic education and the industry is at a low level, and so are the connections with relevant businesses, art institutions, and other collaborative partners. As a result, there are limited chances for students to participate in real projects or work with industry professionals in a practical setting, which prevents them from a comprehensive understanding of actual work requirements and responses to them (Jiang Quanliang, 2009). Worse still, there are inadequate teaching facilities and resources in some vocational colleges for aesthetic education, including specialized studios, laboratories, exhibition spaces, and modern art equipment and tools. These limitations restrict students' opportunities for practical learning and creative engagement. Additionally, a common problem is inadequate time allocation for practical teaching. Vocational colleges' curriculum and study plans often prioritize theory without enough time and space for practical teaching. However, students require much time for practical projects, internships, or field visits to acquire richer practical experience ^[13].

4. Practical Pathways for Vocational College Aesthetic Education

4.1. Constructing a Rational and Scientific Aesthetic Education Curriculum System

For aesthetic education to fulfill its value and effectiveness in vocational settings, the primary focus should be on constructing a scientific and systematic curriculum system for aesthetic education to ensure the normal implementation of aesthetic education teaching. According to the "Opinions on Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education in the New Era," school aesthetic courses should primarily consist of art courses, including music, fine arts, calligraphy, dance, drama, traditional Chinese opera, film, and other subjects. Furthermore, there is a need to "explore and establish a university public art curriculum textbook system primarily based on aesthetics, art history and theory, art appreciation, and artistic practice."

Undoubtedly, art education serves as a significant carrier and an important foundation for enhancing the quality and level of aesthetic education. Art courses represent the main curriculum and primary channel for aesthetic education. Art is the most typical and concentrated form among various aesthetic expressions, serving as the primary carrier of human aesthetic culture. Through the appreciation of artworks, individuals can directly engage with an infinite range of beautiful objects, leading to inspiration and enlightenment. In addition to art education, aesthetic education also includes natural aesthetics, everyday aesthetics, social aesthetics, and more. Particularly, the various disciplines contain abundant aesthetic resources that reflect the Chinese aesthetic spirit and national aesthetic characteristics, such as spiritual beauty, ritual and music beauty, language beauty, behavioral beauty, scientific beauty, order beauty, health beauty, diligence beauty, artistic beauty, and more. These resources serve as important carriers of aesthetic education.

Vocational colleges should establish general aesthetic education textbooks for vocational education. The content can include theoretical knowledge of aesthetic education, etiquette beauty, behavioral beauty, language beauty, and other topics closely related to students' lives. Additionally, it is essential to explore the aesthetic knowledge of various disciplines based on the characteristics of vocational colleges. For example, materials science colleges can focus on the beauty of materials, electromechanical colleges on the beauty of technology, art and design colleges on the beauty of design, and construction colleges on the beauty of landscaping. These series of appreciation-based aesthetic education textbooks aim to cultivate students' aesthetic abilities in professional aesthetics such as technological beauty, design beauty, architectural beauty, environmental beauty, garden beauty, intangible cultural heritage beauty, and tea art beauty.

4.2. Establishing an Aesthetic Education Curriculum Evaluation System

Establishing a comprehensive aesthetic education evaluation system in vocational colleges is crucial for improving the quality of aesthetic education and cultivating students' comprehensive abilities.

Firstly, a comprehensive aesthetic education evaluation system should include multiple evaluation dimensions. The goal of aesthetic education is to cultivate students' aesthetic ability, creativity, expressive ability, and comprehensive qualities. Therefore, the evaluation system should cover students' learning outcomes in art fields such as fine arts, music, dance, and drama, while also considering their innovation, teamwork, and practical abilities. Secondly, the evaluation criteria should be scientific and objective. The inclusion of clear evaluation standards and indicators can ensure comparability and accuracy. An expert team is required to develop evaluation standards, draw up related domestic and international experiences, consider the realities of vocational colleges and formulate scientific and objective evaluation criteria. Thirdly, a comprehensive aesthetic education evaluation system should adopt various evaluation methods. Traditional examination and testing methods are insufficient to comprehensively assess students' aesthetic abilities and comprehensive qualities. Therefore, the evaluation system should include evaluation methods such as project work evaluation, practical performance evaluation, personal statements, and interviews, to gain a more comprehensive and diverse understanding of students' learning outcomes and ability development. Furthermore, emphasis should be placed on evaluation feedback. Evaluation results should come with targeted feedback and guidance. Prompt communication of evaluation results to students and teachers is of great importance to recognize strengths and weaknesses and provide personalized development suggestions and guidance.

4.3. Constructing Campus Aesthetic Education Culture

Campus culture is one of the main aspects of students' extracurricular life in vocational colleges. It is an inherent need for students to seek personal development and serves as an effective medium for aesthetic education in vocational colleges. Artistic and aesthetic education in vocational colleges can effectively integrate campus cultural resources and cultivate students' sense of social responsibility, innovation spirit, and practical abilities.

Diverse campus cultural activities should be organized, following the principles of professionalism, artistic expression, openness, and practicality. Based on students' vocational needs and interests, cultural activities should combine aesthetic education with campus culture to create multi-level and multi-type cultural events. Regular events such as campus singer competitions, dance competitions, instrumental competitions, calligraphy competitions, and art design competitions should be organized. Theme-based educational activities, such as "Class Singing and Dancing Competition" during Youth Day and "Graduation Photography Contest" during the graduation season, can be conducted to showcase students' personalities and talents, create a favorable artistic atmosphere, strengthen ideological guidance, and enhance the cohesion of young students. Additionally, students should be encouraged to participate in social practices during winter and summer vacations. By integrating aesthetic education with social practices, activities such as family labor projects focusing on gratitude towards parents, life skills, and home art design can be organized. Students can also be involved in cultural activities in rural areas, allowing them to experience the beauty of labor and dedication. Encouraging students to visit famous historical sites, and high-tech enterprises, and gain a deeper understanding of human geography, national history, cultural heritage, and current affairs can help them experience the beauty of historical culture, scientific and technological innovation, and labor creativity. This will enhance their sense of historical belonging, national pride, and a sense of responsibility in the current era.^[14]

4.4. Vocational Education Should Emphasize the Integration of Industry and Education in Aesthetic Education

Promote the integration of industry and education in aesthetic education. In the process of deepening the connotation of education and fulfilling social responsibilities, vocational colleges should actively connect with industry enterprises, striving to integrate corporate culture into the construction of aesthetic education, and create a cultural environment that fosters students' vocational values and professional spirit. Firstly, it is important to build a material culture with a vocational atmosphere. Vocational colleges should focus on reflecting their educational philosophy and school characteristics in hardware and software construction, exerting a subtle influence on students and shaping a positive vocational value system. Secondly, it is essential to construct a distinct professional culture. By focusing on the development of characteristic majors, vocational colleges should optimize the layout of professional structures to adapt to regional industrial restructuring, deepen the integration of industry and education, and promote school-enterprise cooperation. Efforts should be made to cultivate first-class majors and professional groups, strengthen strategic cooperation with enterprises, explore unique development paths, and create distinctive features for the school. Thirdly, vocational colleges should strengthen cooperation with the industry and establish partnerships with relevant enterprises and art institutions to provide students with practical opportunities. Through collaborative projects with the industry, students can participate in real work projects, and enhance their practical and applied abilities. Teachers play a crucial role in aesthetic education, and they should possess rich practical experience and professional knowledge. Vocational colleges should enhance the construction of the teaching staff by recruiting professional teachers with practical experience and cultivating their teaching and practical guidance abilities. Teachers can provide more opportunities for practical teaching by organizing practical projects, guiding students to participate in competitions, and hosting art exhibitions^[15].

Conduct aesthetic education activities related to professional arts. Vocational colleges, to cultivate technical and skilled talents, should integrate artistic aesthetic education with professional learning. Activities such as art exhibitions and art appreciation should be organized to actively guide students to explore the historical context, basic forms, thinking methods, expressive techniques, and modeling principles of art. Through visual arts, ideological and political education can be subtly conducted, enhancing the depth and breadth of education dissemination. Based on their characteristics, vocational colleges can organize campus cultural activities related to the beauty of science and technology, architecture, design, and gardens.

5. Conclusion

The implementation of aesthetic education in vocational colleges can enhance students' personal development and cultivate comprehensive technical and skilled professionals. However, challenges arise in the practical implementation of aesthetic education, including a tendency to narrow the curriculum design, incomplete evaluation systems, and limited opportunities for practical engagement in aesthetic education within vocational colleges.

Therefore, aesthetic education in vocational colleges needs to establish a scientific and systematic curriculum system to cultivate students' aesthetic ability, creativity, and vocational skills. It is essential to develop general education materials for aesthetic education in vocational colleges, while also exploring the aesthetic knowledge in various disciplines based on the characteristics of the school, in order to enhance students' professional aesthetic abilities. In order to improve the quality of aesthetic education and students' comprehensive abilities, a comprehensive evaluation system for aesthetic education is also crucial. Additionally, campus culture serves as an important platform to showcase students' individuality and talents, strengthen ideological guidance, and enhance student cohesion through diverse cultural activities. Lastly, vocational colleges should emphasize the integration of industry and education in aesthetic education, establishing partnerships with relevant businesses and art institutions to provide students with practical opportunities. It is also important to strengthen the professional development of teachers and provide more opportunities for practical teaching. These efforts aim to construct a comprehensive aesthetic education system and promote students' holistic development.

Acknowledgement

1) Shenzhen Education Science "14th Five-Year Plan" 2022 Project: Research on the Integration of Artistic Aesthetic Education into Daily Ideological and Political Education in Higher Vocational Colleges (ybzz22021).

2) A Co-building Project by Guangdong Provincial Communist Youth League and Youth Researchers: Research on the Transformation Mechanism and Practical Path of New Era Aesthetic Education Thoughts in Universities (2022GJ56).

References

- [1] Qiu, W. (2010). *Vocational College Aesthetic Education: Background, Scope, and Value Goals*. *Modern Educational Science*, (07), 99+100.
- [2] Joseph C. Hermanowicz. (2021). *The fate and potential future of liberal education: Experiences in American higher education*. *Peking University Education Review*, (1), 2+12.
- [3] Yang, L. (2021). *Exploration of New Approaches to Online Teaching of Guqin General Education Courses under the Concept of Liberal Education*. *China Ethnic Exposition*, (9), 92-93.
- [4] Qiu, W. (2010). *Vocational College Aesthetic Education: Background, Scope, and Value Goals*. *Modern Educational Science*, (07), 99+100.
- [5] Wang, H. (2020). *Research on the Integration of Art Aesthetic Education into Ideological and Political Education in Universities*. Master's thesis, Wuhan University of Science and Technology.
- [6] Zu, G. (2009). *Ancient Music Education Theory and Its Enlightenment on Modern Moral Education*. *Research on Ideological Education*, (9), 80-81.
- [7] Lu, T., & Wang, H. (2015). *Exploration of the Reform of Art and Design Curriculum in Higher Vocational Colleges from the Perspective of Industry-Education Integration*. *Journal of Educational Science of Hunan Normal University*, (35), 55-58.
- [8] Zu, G. (2009). *Ancient Music Education Theory and Its Enlightenment on Modern Moral Education*. *Research on Ideological Education*, (9), 80-81.
- [9] Jiang, L. (2009). *The Status of Aesthetic Education in Vocational College Quality Education*. *Journal of Xiangfan Vocational and Technical College*, (09), 77-79
- [10] Zhang, K. (2022). *Construction of Art Education in Art Colleges Based on Educational Resources of Fine Arts Majors*. *Journal of Shijiazhuang Railway Institute*, 116+118.
- [11] Sun, R. (2009). *On the Status and Role of Aesthetic Education in Vocational Colleges*. *Education and Occupation*, (11), 21.
- [12] Xian Guojun. (2021). *Analysis on the Construction of Aesthetic Education Evaluation System in Higher Education in the New Era*. *Shanghai Educational Assessment Research*, (10), 4.

- [13] Chen, J. (2013). *On the Intrinsic Relationship between Basic Education, Quality Education, and Liberal Education*. *Nanjing Sociological Review*, (09), 116.
- [14] Wang, H. (2020). *Research on the Integration of Art Aesthetic Education into Ideological and Political Education in Universities*. Master's thesis, Wuhan University of Science and Technology.
- [15] Lu, T., & Wang, H. (2015). *Exploration of the Reform of Art and Design Curriculum in Higher Vocational Colleges from the Perspective of Industry-Education Integration*. *Journal of Educational Science of Hunan Normal University*, (35), 55-58.