Exploration of Calligraphy Education among University Students in Shanxi Province of China

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Abstract: Calligraphy practice not only plays an important role in improving individual aesthetics, cultivating their mind, enriching their knowledge, improving their moral accomplishment, and tempering their will but also plays a significant role in improving national confidence, social harmony, and the rise and inheritance of national culture. Therefore, the researcher used the theory of Constructivism, multiple intelligences, and culture to explore the significance of calligraphy for university students and the current situation of calligraphy education for non-majored calligraphy in universities through questionnaires and interviews. Through the questionnaire and interview, the researcher knows that calligraphy education in universities is not widespread; few students have compulsory courses in calligraphy, and very few students can participate in elective courses in calligraphy. But the significance of learning calligraphy is considerable. The need for calligraphy learning for students in the university is strong. The absence of calligraphy education is the regret of quality education. Through this paper, the researcher puts forward some suggestions for referencing university education departments.

Keywords: Chinese Calligraphy education, University student, Shanxi province

1. Introduction

Chinese calligraphy is unique Chinese culture that has been 5000 years. It contains the evolution of Chinese characters, which have five styles: seal script, official script, regular script, running script, and cursive script. It also contains the emotion, morals, cultural context of that time, aesthetics, and writing skill of the writers. Calligraphy learning has a positive influence on contemporary people, and it also plays a vital role in the inheritance of Chinese culture [1]. China's Ministry of Education has also given relevant guidance about calligraphy education at different levels of education. Calligraphy education also has significance for university students because they are in a period of ideological maturity which can help them improve themselves and build their confidence in the culture.

1.1 Literature Review

Chinese calligraphy education should face all over the world; from this level, Dai Yingya believed that calligraphy could not only develop in China but needed an international aesthetic sentiment and humanistic spirit, as well as the nourishment of foreign cultures, to develop in discipline construction and art system in 2020 [2].

From the national level, Yu Jie and Chen Xueli believe that calligraphy, as a cultural soft power, is crucial to the development of a country, and it is essential to build a cultural system with a prominent national character in 2020 [3]. In 2015, The State Council document required schools at all levels and of all types to carry out aesthetic education activities close to campus life and students' characteristics, focusing on traditional Chinese culture and arts such as opera, calligraphy, seal cutting, and paper cutting, to form the characteristics and traditions of local schools.

This thesis mainly focuses on the significance of calligraphy as a traditional culture in the university. Many papers about calligraphy, such as Zhang, mentioned that calligraphy art refers to the practice of calligraphy techniques, including writing style, word, composition, and so on [4]. To analyze the content of the training, the way of calligraphy is the writing of the writing status, aesthetic taste, temperament, accomplishment, and learning knowledge of humanistic connotation. Calligraphy, and so overall, has the thick national cultural connotation and value of multidisciplinary. Many of these are challenging to analyze and train, but they can be perceived.

Many articles have also been written about the benefits of learning calligraphy. He mentioned that

each student, through practicing calligraphy in their spare time, can cultivate unique aesthetic concepts, observe and discover the beauty, and develop a high level of self-cultivation that can sublimate personality [5]. Shen & Li mentioned that calligraphy education emphasizes the cultivation of aesthetic taste and artistic innovation consciousness and the tempering of people's will through the subtle observation of classic works and repeated tempering of writing skills [6]. Considering calligraphy from this standpoint, traditional calligraphy has the natural attributes of education, emotional education, and personality education, which can also help improve the cultural literacy of contemporary people.

Calligraphy is an integral part of aesthetic education. As for aesthetic education, Schiller, a famous German aesthetician, has many opinions in his Book Aesthetic Education [7]. He believes the perfect person is only a combination of sensibility and rationality. In contrast, the incomplete person, in reality, is divided into the incompatible natural person and rational person by formal impulse and rational impulse, and aesthetic education is the bridge of their integration. He emphasized morality and had the freedom to emphasize individuality. He respected and protected nature and expected to achieve harmonious development between man and nature. This ideal height is consistent with the Chinese traditional aesthetic view of nature, which emphasizes the harmonious unity of man and nature. The key to traditional Chinese aesthetics is the embodiment of truth, goodness, and beauty.

In 2020, Chen Zhenlian pointed out why China's aesthetic education had always adopted Western teaching content [8]. This is because China's modern education was mostly introduced from the West, so modern art education advocates Westernized modeling consciousness based on Western paintings. China itself did not have such a set of methods in the past. Still, once it has calligraphy aesthetic education, it can create a basic modeling training system with "Chinese characteristics," full of traditional cultural genes, use new thinking and new methods, and be universally applicable. He also mentioned that even a college student who has received higher education, or even a professor of liberal arts, a leading cadre, a science and technology expert, or a management of a company. However, they have their own cultural accomplishment and professional accumulation, and calligraphy "beauty blindness" is almost common. Based on this judgment and cognition, we cry out that the top priority is to vigorously advocate the aesthetic education of calligraphy and make up for the most lacking shortcomings in the distribution of contemporary calligraphy education at all levels.

Why researcher focuses on university students because, as Qiu mentioned that compared with other groups in society, university students show unique group characteristics in politics, thought, behavior, life, emotion, study, and other aspects, which has its particularity due to their different time background, family environment, educational experience, and age structure [9]. University students are the future and hope of the Chinese nation and the main force of cultural inheritance and construction. And have some benefits of learning calligraphy for students in universities, as Xu & Chen said:

1) Learn one more skill. As calligraphy has been popularized in primary and secondary schools, it has driven many markets, such as the demand for calligraphy teachers and training institutions. Mastering writing skills will undoubtedly increase the way college students make a living.

2) Good writing skills can present a good personal image and even increase your chances of getting a job.

3) Enhance literacy, inherit culture, and enhance patriotism.

4) Temper your character and improve your character.

5) You can expand your circle of friends, find peace of mind and reduce mental health problems [10].

Lu also gives the reason for university students to learn calligraphy is that university students in the face of academic and employment pressures, the need for exports to these annoying mania turned out, the meditation regimen of calligraphy is a good choice, vigorous calligraphy is "static," not only is more need inner quiet environment, let the students in the process of copying from passive to get into the habit of meditation, meditation to cool if the excellent state of mind to face life and learning [11]. University students are in their youth, lack patience and perseverance in dealing with the world, and lack self-control in the face of external temptation. By practicing calligraphy, they can calm their hearts, think and plan their lives in writing, and maintain a healthy and powerful psychological state. Their cultural confidence has a direct impact on the current and future cultural confidence of the Chinese nation.

In recent years, national leaders have attached great importance to cultural confidence. In terms of building cultural confidence, they emphasize the importance of exploring the value of traditional culture. Cheng stated that the establishment of cultural confidence is bound to go through the learning and

cognition of cultural knowledge, then generate feelings, emotions, and emotions, and finally, form the will and externalize it in the practice of the subject of behavior [12]. The curriculum is a carrier of the Chinese calligraphy education process, the calligraphy education "neural" in this life, set up compulsory courses is given priority to calligraphy, the diversification of general elective curriculum courses, ensuring the learning class, and make strict performance appraisal system, performance appraisal system in a certain extent will be university students learning exogenous calligraphy motivation.

For Shanxi's calligraphy education, Ren Yunting studied that the major of higher calligraphy education in Shanxi Province started earlier, the undergraduate course is relatively mature and has a long history, and it has accumulated a lot of education and teaching experience [13]. Continue to train talents for primary and higher calligraphy education teaching staff in all country provinces. But the overall level of teachers is relatively low.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study can show the current situation of calligraphy learning among university students and get some advice from college students about opening calligraphy courses. The research on the significance of learning calligraphy can also give some advice for students no matter which level they are at now. And can advise the universities and the Ministry of higher education to make a curriculum about calligraphy.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1) To research the background of calligraphy study of contemporary university students in Shanxi province.

2) To research the current situation of calligraphy learning in universities in Shanxi province.

3) To research the current situation of calligraphy learning in universities in Shanxi province.

4) How to open a calligraphy course is favorable for students.

5) The significance of learning calligraphy for students who are in universities.

2. Material and Method

2.1 Study Design

This study is qualitative and quantitative design. The researcher used the interview questionnaire to get information about calligraphy courses in university and the altitude of calligraphy learning for university students. It also combines a literature review to analyze the significance of learning calligraphy at university.

2.2 Population of the Study

For an interview, the researcher collected 19 students who majored in computer, chemical, education, Chinese, economics, math, English, ideology, and politics from Shanxi Normal University, Shanxi University, and Shanxi University of Finance and Economics. For the questionnaire, the population of study in different majors from Shanxi Normal University, Taiyuan Normal University, Shanxi University, Shanxi Vocational University of Engineering and Technology, and Shanxi Institute of Technology and Business.

2.3 Data Gathering Tools

The researcher used the Ten Cent Conference App to interview the 19 college students. The questionnaire uses the Questionnaire Star App to collect the data.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedures

The researcher asked a college student who is learning calligraphy with the researcher to help find some volunteers to interview at her university. And contacted friends in other universities in Shanxi to get volunteers. The volunteers interested in participating in the interview will contact me, and the

researcher will try to contact the volunteers in different majors. Then, the researcher will arrange the interview time with the volunteers, which will be 30 minutes on average. Secondly, interview questions include the volunteers' personal information, learning experience and understanding of calligraphy, the situation of calligraphy courses in their major, the college's calligraphy atmosphere, suggestions on calligraphy courses, thoughts on calligraphy inheritance, and suggestions on calligraphy education issues. Thirdly, the researcher used written and sound to record the interview information. The researcher also interviewed two staff at Shanxi province colleges through WeChat.

The researcher uses the Questionnaire Star information technology platform to make a questionnaire and send it to her friends teaching at colleges in Shanxi province. The teachers send the questionnaire to the students. The researcher can see the backstage management data when students finish the questionnaire.

2.5 Treatment of Data

Nineteen students be interviewed. And the videos of the entire interview are all saved on the computer. One hundred ninety-two questionnaires were collected and arranged in charts.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

All volunteers who participated in the interview, regardless of nationality, region, or gender, voluntarily participated, and the interview content did not involve the interviewees' privacy. The interviewee will be interviewed after receiving oral notification to voluntarily participate in the interview approval. The interviewee can quit the interview process at any time.

3. Results and Discussion

Researcher got 192 questionnaires in total. The researcher can get the study about the background of calligraphy study of contemporary university students in Shanxi province from question 1 to question 6. Ninety-six students had learned calligraphy before, as seen in Figure 1, and 56.25% (Figure 2) had to get calligraphy experience during primary school. 69.79% (Figure 3) of the 96 students had studied calligraphy for less than one year. And only five students have four years of experience in calligraphy. 94.79% (Figure 4) of students only have the learning experience of regular script. In universities, out of 192 students, 4 practiced calligraphy regularly, and 59 did it occasionally. 67.19% (Figure 5) of the students do not write calligraphy. 46.88% (Figure 6) of students with no calligraphy learning experience because they did not consider learning calligraphy before university.

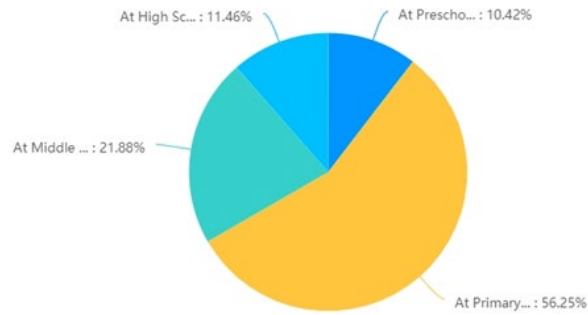*Figure 1: The percentage of students who have learned calligraphy*

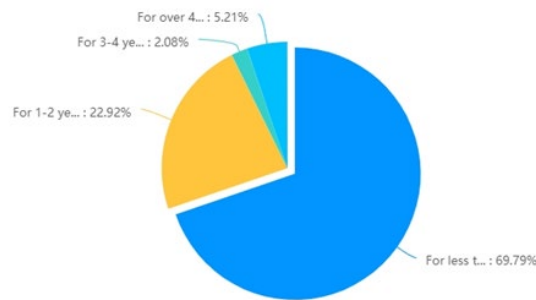*Figure 2: The period they received the calligraphy education.*

Figure 3: The total time they received the calligraphy education.
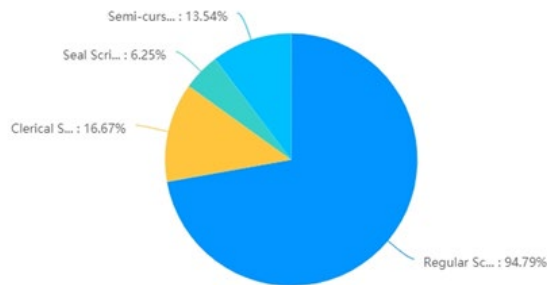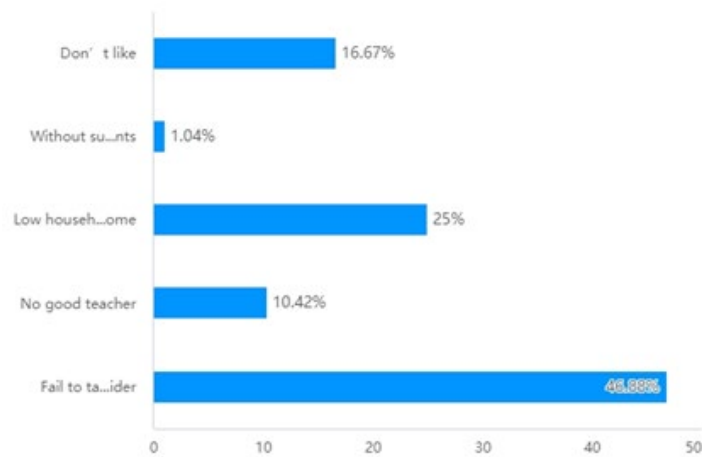

Figure 4: Different calligraphy styles

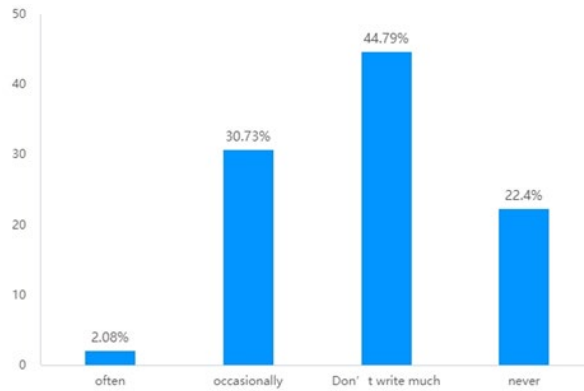*Figure 5: The degree students enjoy practicing calligraphy.*

Figure 6: The frequency of students practicing calligraphy

Questions 7 to 23 of the questionnaire are about calligraphy classes and university calligraphy activities. Only 10.42% (Figure 7) of students have the calligraphy course. And the form of calligraphy, mainly in the elective course, has 75% (Figure 8). 85% (Figure 9) of the duration of the course is in one semester. Figure 10 shows that all students are satisfied with the calligraphy course. They are highly satisfied with the capacity of teachers, learning environment, learning content, and course schedule from Figure 11. Of the 192 students, 79.69% said the school had a calligraphy club, and 19 joined it, as seen in Figure 12 and Figure 13. The main reason for joining the club is that they are interested in calligraphy, and calligraphy can cultivate one's character, according to Figure 14. The main reasons why 134 students did not join the calligraphy club were that 41.79% (Figure 15) of the students were not interested in calligraphy, 30.6% did not have time, and 20.15% did not have confidence in themselves. According to the research, 63.02% (Figure 16) of universities have calligraphy-related activities, 70.25% (Figure 17) of which are calligraphy competitions and exhibitions. Only 18.18% (Figure 18) of students have participated in university calligraphy activities, but 47.1% (Figure 19) want to participate. They think the calligraphy activities are rich in content, but the lack of calligraphy knowledge is the main reason for the absence of calligraphy activities, according to Figure 20. Why they want to participate in calligraphy activities is a multiple-choice question. 66.67% (Figure 21) of the students want to improve themselves by participating in calligraphy activities, and 49.12% want to improve their self-confidence, as seen in Figure 22. It can be seen from the students' choices that students think learning calligraphy is helpful for them.

Figure 7: The situation of students having a calligraphy class
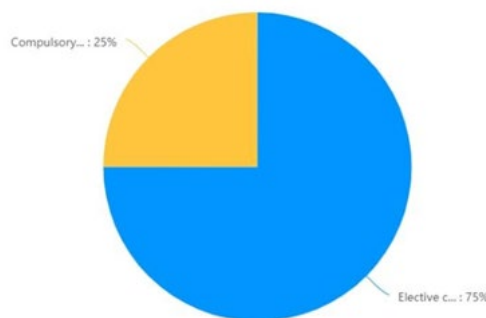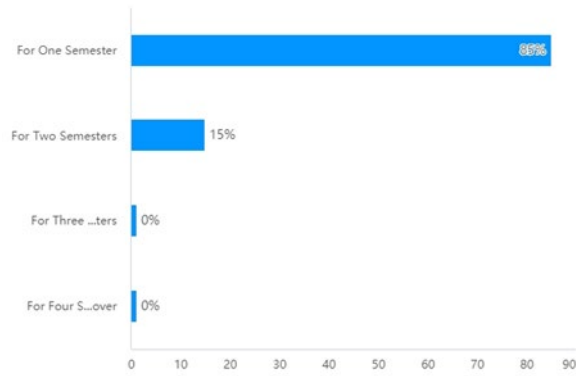

Figure 8: The type of calligraphy class

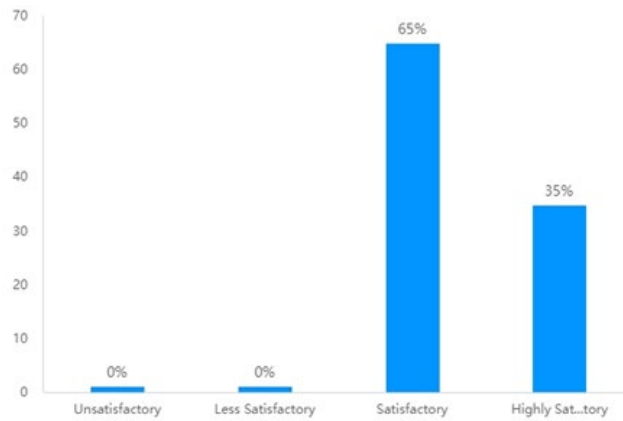*Figure 9: The duration of the calligraphy class*

Figure 10: Students' attitude toward the calligraphy class
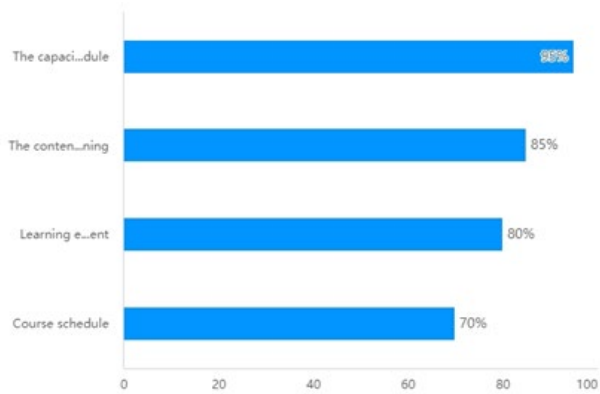

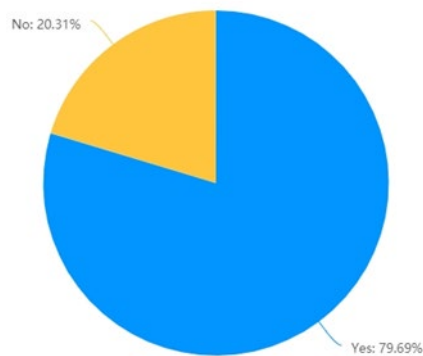*Figure 11: The contents of the calligraphy class*

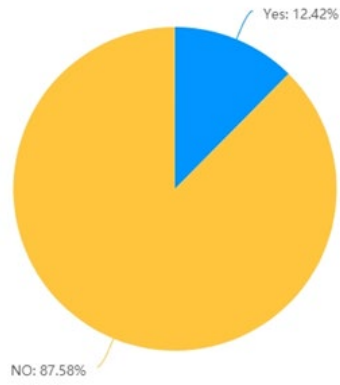*Figure 12: Whether students aware of the calligraphy club*

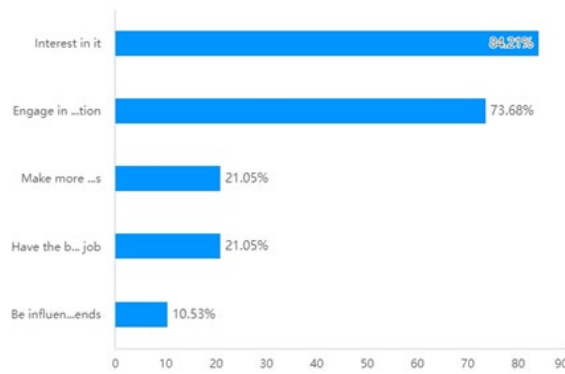*Figure 13: The percentage of students joining the calligraphy club*
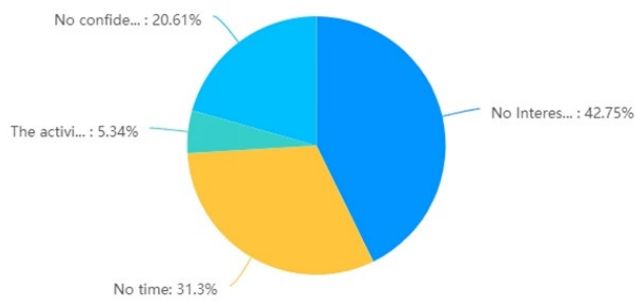

Figure 14: The reasons students want to learn calligraphy

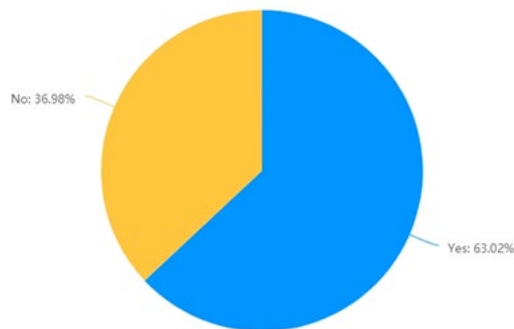*Figure 15: The reasons why students don't want to learn calligraphy*

Figure 16: The percentage of universities having calligraphy-related activities
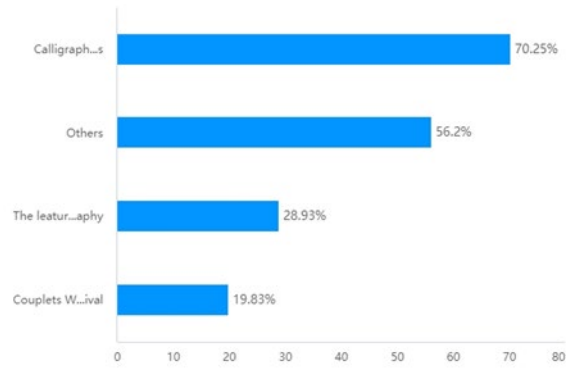
Figure 17: The types of calligraphy-related activities
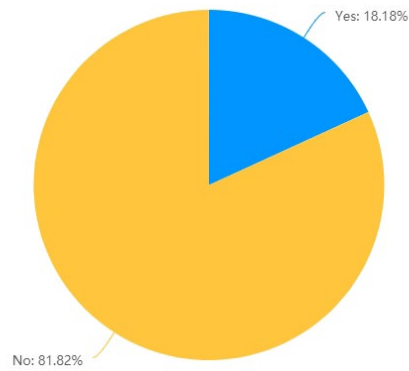
Figure 18: The percentage of students attending calligraphy-related activities
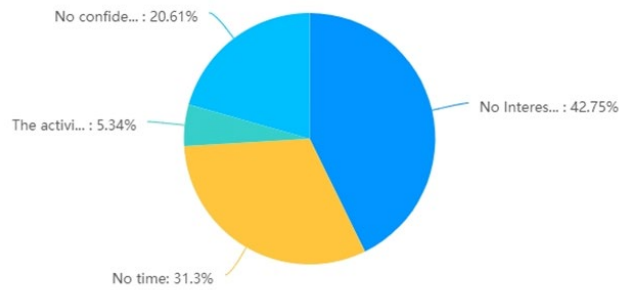
Figure 19: The attitude of students attending calligraphy-related activities
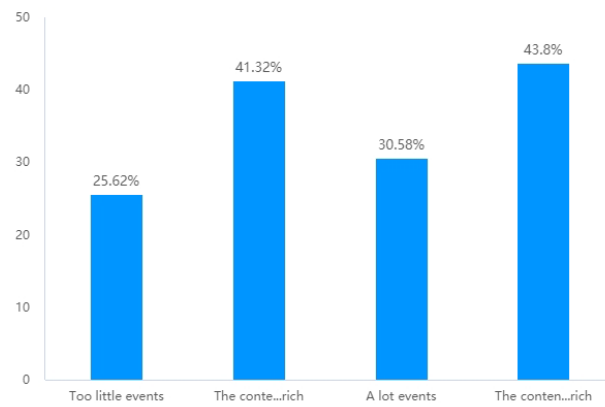
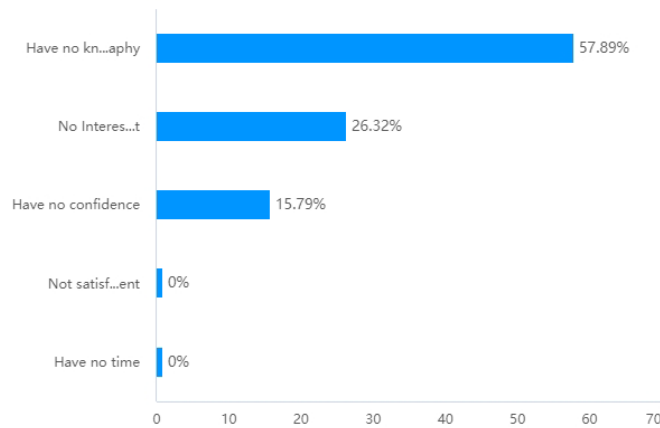*Figure 20: The problems that existed in calligraphy-related activities*

Figure 21: Reasons why students don't want to participate in calligraphy activities
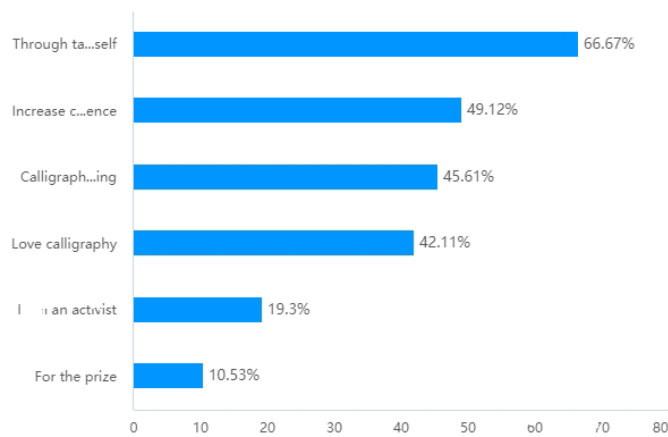

Figure 22: Reasons why they want to participate in calligraphy activities

Questions 24 to 29 of the questionnaire are about offering calligraphy classes in schools. Of 192 students, 75.52% (Figure 23) think universities should offer calligraphy classes. And 151 (Figure 24) students thought calligraphy classes should be arranged in all majors. The form of elective courses is the most popular at 66.67% (Figure 25). And 50% (Figure 26) of the students want the calligraphy class to last two semesters. Regarding teaching content, 67.2 % (Figure 27) of students preferred combining theory with practice. Writing more beautiful, rich calligraphy knowledge and self-cultivation become what students want from calligraphy learning, according to Figure 28.
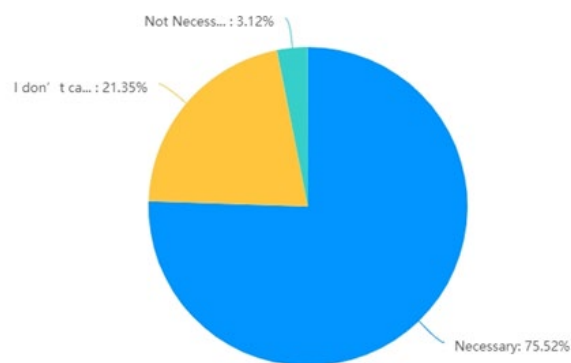

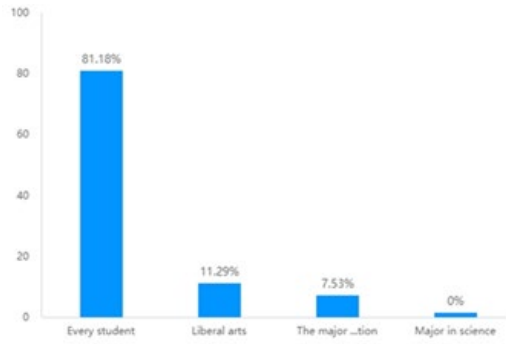*Figure 23: The attitude of students about whether they should have a calligraphy class*

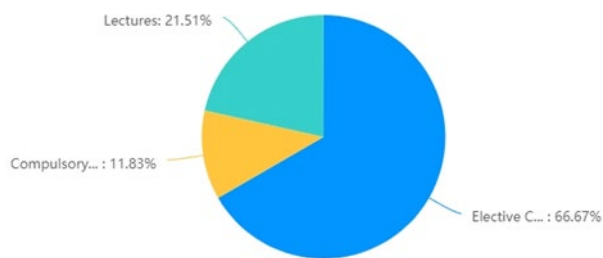*Figure 24: The types of students they believe should have a calligraphy class.*

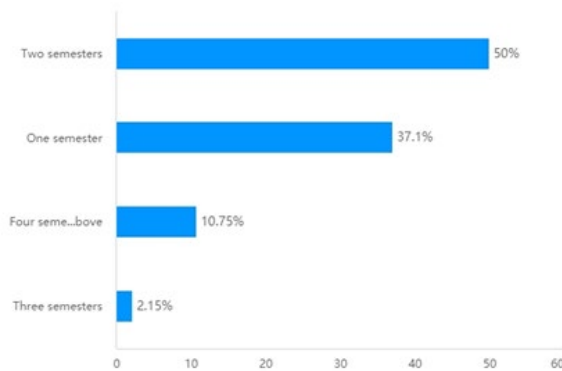*Figure 25: The styles of calligraphy classes students like*

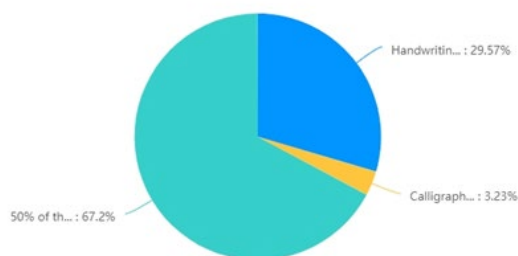*Figure 26: The duration students believe the calligraphy class should be*

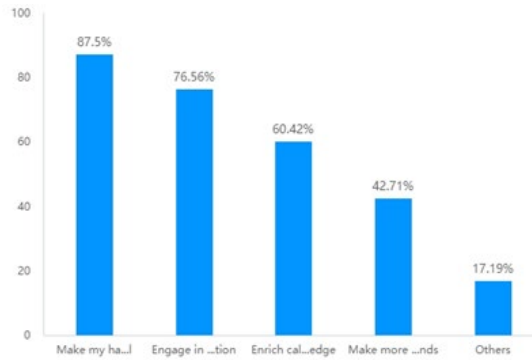*Figure 27: The class content students prefer*

Figure 28: The benefits students hope to gain from the calligraphy class

Questions 31 to 39 of the questionnaire are about the significance of learning calligraphy for students who are in universities. 77.08% (Figure 29) of the students think that learning calligraphy is very helpful in building confidence in Chinese culture. 89.06% (Figure 30) of the students think learning calligraphy in one's lifetime is necessary. 58.95% (Figure 31) of the students think learning calligraphy from primary school is best. For the current study, 34.9% (Figure 32) of the students want to learn calligraphy, and 57.29% have some intention to learn calligraphy. Only 8.81 percent of students wanted to avoid learning calligraphy. And 32.77% (Figure 33) of the students are willing to learn calligraphy between college and retirement. 44.27% (Figure 34) of the students think that learning calligraphy is very helpful to work, and 44.79% think that it is a little helpful. As for the benefits of calligraphy to the future life, 54.17% (Figure 35) of the students think it is perfect. 45.83% (Figure 36) of the students think learning calligraphy is meaningful to their life. Enriching life, calming down, inheriting Chinese culture, and improving their comprehensive quality have become the primary significance of learning calligraphy. Figure 37 shows the significance of learning calligraphy.
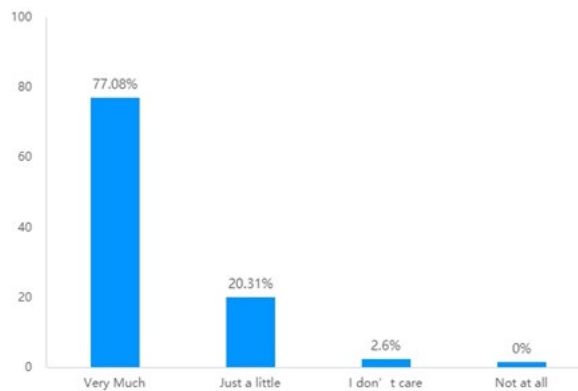

Figure 29: The degree students believe learning calligraphy helps build confidence.
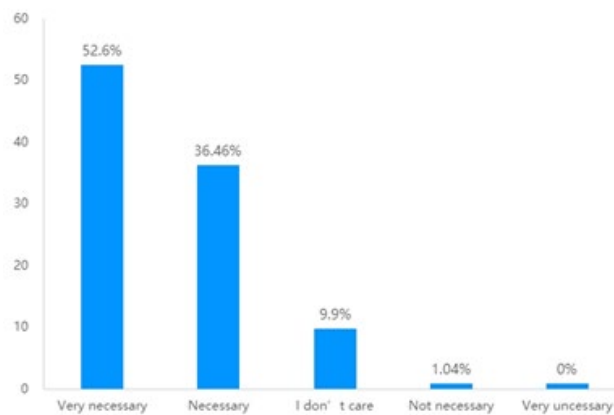

Figure 30: How important students think calligraphy is
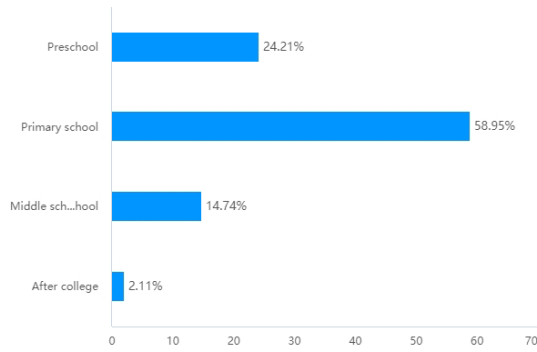
Figure 31: Which period do students believe is the best time for calligraphy education.

Figure 32: The intention of students wanting to learn calligraphy

Figure 33: The period students want to start to learn calligraphy

Figure 34: The degree students believe learning calligraphy helps work.

Figure 35: The benefits of learning calligraphy to students' future life
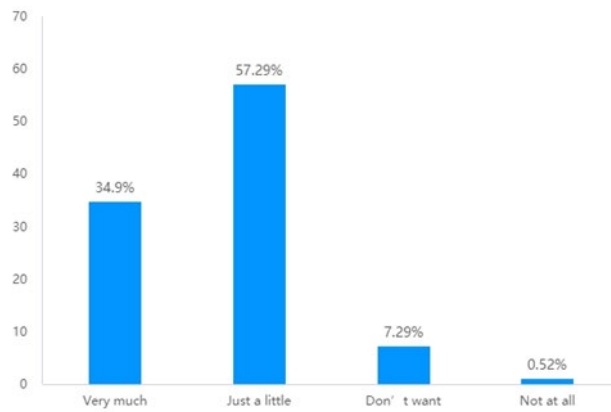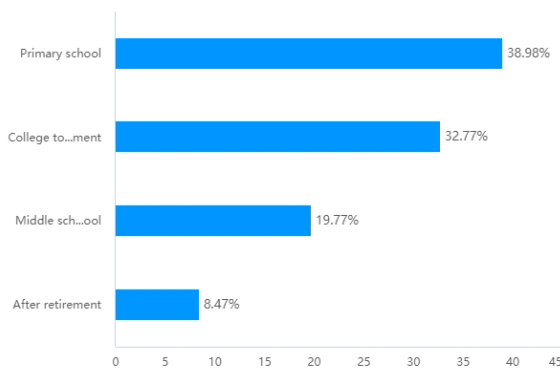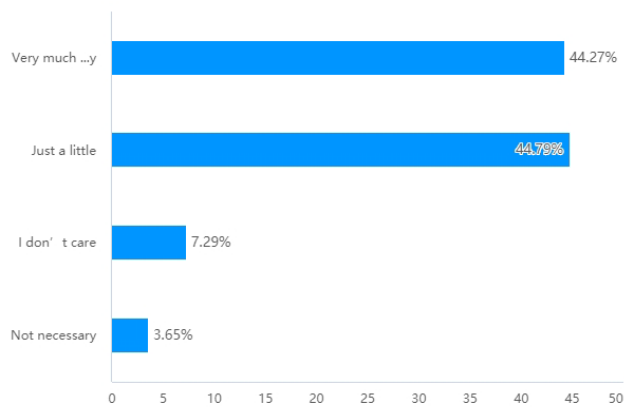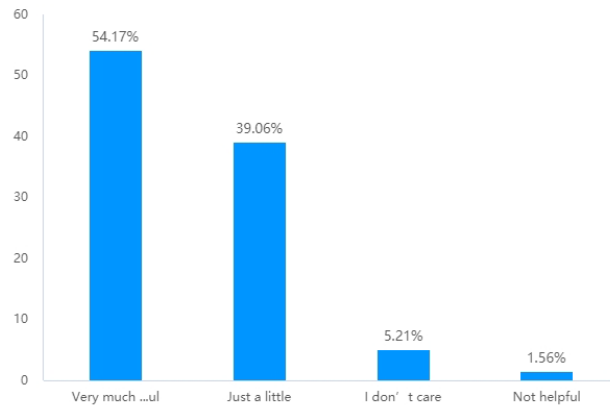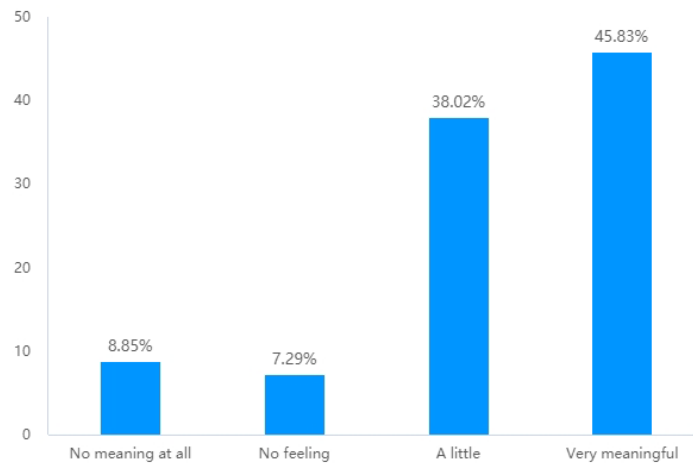

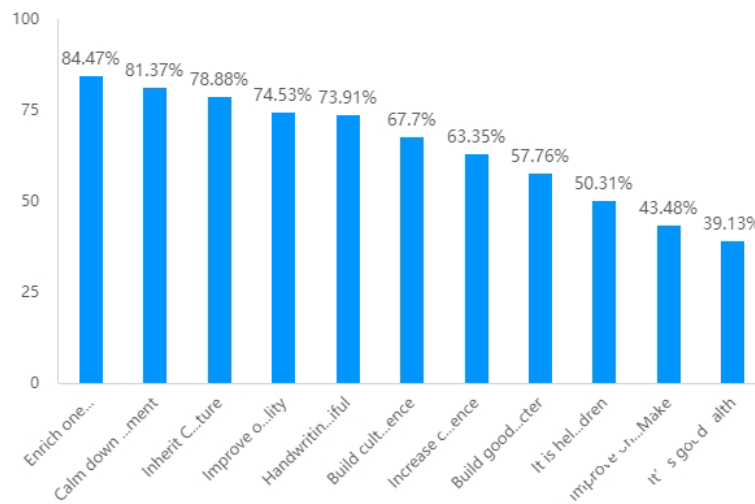*Figure 36: How meaningful students believe calligraphy is*

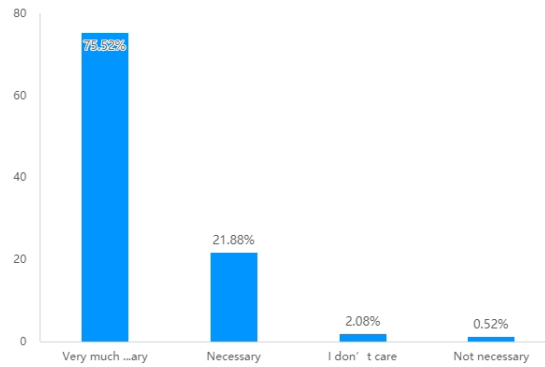*Figure 37: The significance of learning calligraphy*

Figure 38: The attitude of students toward whether it is necessary to inherit calligraphy
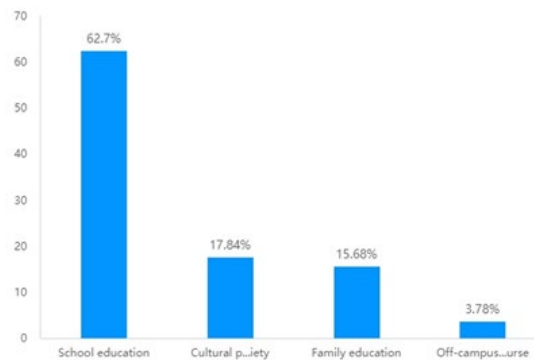

Figure 39: The parties that benefited from calligraphy inheritance

The last two questions are about calligraphy inheritance; 75.52% (Figure 38) of the students think it is necessary to inherit and develop calligraphy. And 62.03% (Figure 39) of the students think that school education benefits the inheritance and development of calligraphy.

Through the interview, the researcher got some suggestions from the university students, including 1. The interpretation of calligraphy works should use more traditional Chinese aesthetic methods rather than just Western aesthetic ideas. 2. Since 1986, Chinese characters have been formally simplified, and the meaningful parts of many characters have been symbolized, making it more difficult to understand the meaning of Chinese characters. The simplification of Chinese characters also hinders the development of calligraphy. Calligraphy works generally require the writing of ancient characters before simplification, and modern people have already adapted to simplified characters so that the recognition of calligraphy works is reduced. So, studying ancient characters is also very beneficial to the development and inheritance of calligraphy. 3. Focus on the protection of ancient calligraphy relics; many calligraphy relics have been eroded by wind and rain or artificial destruction; these reasons make calligraphy works cannot be preserved for future generations to observe and learn, and to increase the publicity of these calligraphy relics, so that more people to pay attention to the art of calligraphy. Only when more people pay attention to calligraphy can it maintain its longevity.

Among them, students without calligraphy learning experience also needed help learning calligraphy. First, the tools of calligraphy practice are very inconvenient to prepare. The improvement of the calligraphy tool can give more chances to practice. Second, the calligraphy examination became a barrier for the students to choose the class to learn. Thirdly, the limited number of students taking elective courses also reduces the chances of students attending calligraphy classes.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Through data collection, the researchers found that one-half of college students have yet to gain experience in learning calligraphy. Only 10% of students in college have calligraphy courses. And 85% of the study time is one semester. 80% of schools have calligraphy clubs, but 87% of students do not participate. Therefore, it can be understood that the calligraphy experience of students during college is minimal. Less calligraphy learning experience leads to only 18% of students participating in school calligraphy activities. However, compared with 47% of students who are willing to participate in

calligraphy activities, there is still a big gap. And the reason for not being able to participate in calligraphy activities is mainly because students lack an understanding of calligraphy knowledge. And through the survey, 75.5% of the students believe calligraphy classes should be offered during college, and 81.1% believe calligraphy classes should be universally accessible to students regardless of professional restrictions. Regarding the type of courses, 66.67% of the students prefer elective courses. 50% of students prefer to study for two semesters. Regarding the learning content, 67.2% of the students prefer the combination of calligraphy practice and calligraphy theory. Most students agree that calligraphy learning is significant for personality development, value establishment, and cultural inheritance. However, the current calligraphy courses at universities cannot meet the learning needs of students.

Therefore, based on the current situation of calligraphy education learned from the interview, the researcher would like to recommend the following suggestions to universities and higher education departments for reference.

1) Calligraphy is a compulsory course for teachers and education majors. The teaching content should include systematic training in calligraphy techniques, calligraphy appreciation, and the development history of Chinese calligraphy. The required course lasts for at least two semesters.

2) There should be enough elective courses for non-normal education majors from freshman to senior year. Since calligraphy mainly focuses on learning techniques, the number of courses should be limited to 50, and students should not be unable to choose courses. Combining the theory and practice of calligraphy in the curriculum, students have the opportunity to understand the cultural connotation of calligraphy fully.

3) Actively play the role of campus calligraphy societies, and the school supports the societies to carry out calligraphy culture publicity activities. Schools should also actively organize calligraphy majors to hold calligraphy lectures, carry out campus calligraphy arts festivals, and actively encourage and organize teachers and students to participate in calligraphy competitions and exhibitions. The school propaganda department should actively promote calligraphy activities on campus through the network, display boards, radio, news, and other publicity channels, let every student know the basic principles, and improve the status of calligraphy in students' hearts.

4) The number of calligraphy teachers in schools needs to be increased. If a large number of calligraphy courses are offered, the introduction of teachers is critical. We can also introduce excellent calligraphy teachers from the society to the school for lectures and exchanges.

5) Calligraphy learning needs a quiet and spacious environment and complete writing tools. In the school, a large classroom can be specially set up as a calligraphy self-study room for students to practice. Students can bring their brushes and paper according to their needs. In this way, students can eliminate the trouble of preparing tedious calligraphy tools, which is conducive to students' active participation in the study of calligraphy.

6) More study and popularization of ancient can be in the school magazine, newsletter constructs, and notice to use the ancient propaganda tools that cause the student's interest. Through independent study or lecture methods such as philology, to gradually acknowledge the cultural connotation of Chinese characters because knowing more ancient lays the foundation for calligraphy learning and enjoying.

7) Encourage students to experience calligraphy without giving them too many restrictions on learning calligraphy. Calligraphy is an art, and art has no right or wrong. More attention should be paid to the degree of participation of students in the grading of calligraphy classes. It should be the goal of calligraphy education to raise students' enthusiasm for learning calligraphy and lead them to enthusiasm for further exploration of calligraphy.

8) Calligraphy education should not only stay on campus. Teachers should lead students out of campus, such as visiting museums, exhibition halls, parks, and other places where classical tablet stickers are stored. So that students can appreciate the charm of calligraphy in the natural environment with the fragrance of flowers and grass and gentle breeze instead of just staying in the boring textbooks and slides. This can also arouse students' enthusiasm for calligraphy learning.

9) Increase university calligraphy professional enrollment; the number of calligraphy professionals expands faculty shortage of calligraphy is not only beneficial to the primary and secondary schools' teachers but also for this school calligraphy culture have a perfect supporting role, they can get involved in the school popularization work of calligraphy culture, also contribute to the country to train a large number of calligraphy specialists.

10) Learning calligraphy is time-consuming and costly, so schools can encourage students to participate in exhibition contests by opening calligraphy scholarships. A bonus system can be set up for non-calligraphy primary students' competitions organized by the school. Major calligraphy students are encouraged to participate in national competitions, and prizes will be given to successful students.

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